

SUBJECT: Common core curricula for colleges and universities

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna

0 nays

1 absent — Rodriguez

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, February 11 — 30-0

WITNESSES: For — Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Robert Goad, American Association of University Professors

Against — None

DIGEST: SB 148 would require the Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop a recommended core curriculum for Texas colleges and universities. The curriculum would have to provide for at least 42 semester credit hours. The board also would have to develop a statement of the content, component areas, and objectives of the core curriculum. Any advisory committee named to assist in this process would have to contain a majority of faculty members.

Each institution of higher education would have to adopt the board's recommended curriculum or obtain board approval not to do so.

Students successfully completing the core curriculum could transfer that block of courses to any other institution for credit. These students could not be required to take additional core courses unless the board had approved a larger core curriculum for that institution. Transfer students would receive credit for those core courses already completed.

The board also would develop curricula for various fields of study, with the assistance of advisory committees equally composed of representatives from each university system or institution offering a degree program in a given

field. If a student successfully completed such a curricula, the block of courses would be transferred to another institution and substituted for that institution's lower-division requirements for that field of study. Transfer students would receive credit for those core courses already completed.

SB 148 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership in each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 148 would save money for college students, as well as for Texas taxpayers, by increasing the transferability of a core college curriculum among public institutions of higher education. Currently, 20 percent of students who begin their post secondary education at public community or junior colleges transfer to four-year institutions to complete their education. In many cases, these students have difficulty transferring their junior college credits to their new schools and must retake a substantial number of credits they have already completed.

This duplication results in unnecessary expenditure of time and resources by students and of valuable state dollars used to fund students' instruction in these courses. Since state dollars fund about 80 percent of the cost of undergraduate courses, taxpayers essentially pay twice to teach the same courses to the same students. By fiscal 2000 to 2001, the reduction in duplicative courses taught could save the state over \$50 million per year.

Every public institution is required to identify its core curriculum; SB 148 would simply allow the coordinating board to identify the common ground among these curricula and inform students on the best use of their credit hours. The coordinating board already publishes a transfer guide, with a common course numbering system that identifies comparable courses offered at various universities. This information would be instrumental in developing the core curriculum, and would be supplemented by input from faculty members and other curriculum experts.

The proposed fields of study curricula also would assist students just beginning their college careers in selecting courses that would best prepare them for their degree plans. The advisory boards required by the bill would not be burdensome to the institutions or the coordinating board, but rather

would allow all stakeholders to participate in the development process and ensure a fair and balanced result.

Institutional identity would not be threatened by SB 148. The core curriculum would simply be a set of guidelines for lower-division course work. Each institution would adopt its own individual courses and content and would retain complete autonomy in developing degree plans and upper-division course requirements counting toward a degree.

There is no evidence that transfer students receiving credit for core curricula would be in any way inferior to “indigenous” students. Coordinating board studies have shown that transfer students graduate at the same rate as other students; University of Texas and Texas A&M studies similarly show that their transfer students perform no differently than others.

The coordinating board estimates that the majority of new students pursuing higher education will start at the community college level. SB 148 would be an important step in ensuring that they could efficiently transfer to any state institution to complete their degree.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Neither the Legislature nor the Higher Education Coordinating Board should micro-manage the curricula of its public universities. These decisions should be left up to the school administrators and educators who are most familiar with the needs of their respective institutions. SB 148 would impose upon Texas institutions of higher education an arbitrary standard curriculum, threatening their quality and individuality and endangering the level of education provided to the students they aim to serve.

Furthermore, the bill would hinder the ability of schools to control the quality of students receiving their degrees. Core courses offered at the myriad public institutions around the state would inevitably vary widely in content and academic rigor. Students whose lower-division core courses differed too much in content or had less rigorous academic standards could be inadequately prepared for upper-division courses at their new institution. Schools should retain the authority to decide whether to admit courses for credit toward degrees that bear their name and reflect upon their reputation.

The requirement for advisory committees composed of representatives from institutions offering a given field of study curricula is a recipe for bureaucracy. It would be extremely difficult for all stakeholders to agree on common curricula in specific disciplines, and could result in turf wars among institutions over particular courses of study.

The financial benefits of decreased duplication would be offset by a greater number of students entering Texas community and junior colleges, at an estimated cost to the state of approximately \$17.3 million per year.