

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 25
By: West
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

There are concerns that public institutions of higher education have different policies regarding the transfer of course credit, which may lead to students attending school for a longer period than they intended. C.S.S.B. 25 seeks to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in public higher education.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 5 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 25 amends the Education Code to require each general academic teaching institution, not later than March 1 of each year and in the form prescribed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, to provide to the coordinating board and the legislature a report describing any courses in the coordinating board's Lower-Division Academic Course Guide Manual for which a student who transfers to the institution from another public institution of higher education is not granted academic credit at the receiving institution or for which such a student who has declared a major and has not changed majors is not granted academic credit toward the student's major at the receiving institution. The bill requires the report to indicate certain details regarding each such course, including the reason why the receiving institution did not grant academic credit for the course. The first report must be submitted not later than March 1, 2021.

C.S.S.B. 25 requires each public junior college, not later than March 1 of each year and in the form prescribed by the coordinating board, to provide to the coordinating board and the legislature a report on courses taken by students who, during the preceding academic year, transferred to a general academic teaching institution or earned an associate degree at the college. The bill requires the report to include certain data regarding courses attempted and completed at the college, including dual credit courses. The first report must be submitted not later than March 1, 2021.

C.S.S.B. 25 requires the coordinating board, in adopting a common admission application form, to ensure that an applicant may indicate on the form the applicant's consent to a public institution of higher education to which the applicant submits an application for admission to a particular degree program using the form to provide the applicant's application to other institutions that offer the degree program if the institution to which the application was originally submitted denies the applicant admission to that degree program.

C.S.S.B. 25 decreases the minimum semester credit hours earned by a student enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program at a public institution of higher education that triggers the requirement to file a degree plan with the institution from 45 credit hours to 30 credit hours. The bill changes the deadline by which the degree plan must be filed as follows:

- for a student who begins the student's first semester or term with the applicable minimum number of credit hours, from the end of the student's second regular semester or term at the institution to after the 12th class day but before the end of that first semester or term; and
- for other students, from the end of the second regular semester or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student earned the applicable minimum number of credit hours to after the 12th class day but before the end of the semester or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student earned such credit hours.

C.S.S.B. 25 requires a student who is enrolled in a dual credit course at a public institution of higher education but is not enrolled in a degree program to file a degree plan with the institution not later than:

- the end of the second regular semester or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student earned a cumulative total of 15 or more semester credit hours of course credit for dual credit courses successfully completed by the student; or
- if the student begins the student's first semester or term at the institution with 15 or more semester credit hours of course credit for dual credit courses successfully completed by the student, the end of the student's second regular semester or term at the institution.

The bill replaces the authorization for the coordinating board to adopt rules as necessary for the administration of provisions relating to the required filing of a degree plan with a requirement to do so and requires the inclusion of rules to ensure compliance with those provisions. The bill requires the coordinating board to use the negotiated rulemaking procedures under the Negotiated Rulemaking Act in adopting those rules.

C.S.S.B. 25 requires each public institution of higher education to develop at least one recommended course sequence for each undergraduate certificate or degree program offered by the institution and requires each recommended course sequence to meet specified criteria. The bill requires each institution to include the recommended course sequences in the institution's course catalog and on the institution's website and to submit the recommended course sequences to the coordinating board as provided by coordinating board rule. The bill requires the coordinating board, in consultation with the institutions, to adopt rules as necessary for the administration of these provisions and requires the coordinating board to use the negotiated rulemaking procedures under the Negotiated Rulemaking Act in adopting those rules.

C.S.S.B. 25 authorizes each general academic teaching institution to enter into an articulation agreement with a lower-division institution of higher education, defined by the bill as a public junior college, public state college, or public technical institute, for a certificate or degree program for which students transferring from the lower-division institution to the general academic teaching institution receive transfer credit. The bill authorizes such an agreement entered into on or after September 1, 2019, to use field of study curricula developed by the coordinating board and authorizes a general academic teaching institution to extend an existing articulation agreement to another lower-division institution on request by that lower-division institution. The bill authorizes an articulation agreement established under these provisions to enable a transfer student to receive up to 60 semester credit hours for courses completed at the lower-division institution. The bill establishes that a general academic teaching institution's participation in such an articulation agreement does not affect the institution's admissions policies.

C.S.S.B. 25 authorizes an institution of higher education, or a public school district that offers international baccalaureate courses, dual credit courses, or any other course for which an institution of higher education may award college course credit to students enrolled at the district, to release student information to an institution for purposes of transferring course credit to that institution or enabling the awarding of course credit by that institution, in accordance with federal law regarding the confidentiality of student information and any state law relating to the privacy of student information.

C.S.S.B. 25 includes semester credit hours earned for dual course credit by a high school student at a public institution of higher education through a course offered by the institution providing course credit in a field of study curriculum or a program of study curriculum among the dual course credit hours the coordinating board may include in its instruction and operations funding formula applicable to the institution.

C.S.S.B. 25 requires the coordinating board to conduct a study and make recommendations to the legislature regarding the feasibility of implementing statewide meta majors for public institutions of higher education and to establish an advisory committee to assist the coordinating board in completing the board's duties relating to the study and provide the coordinating board with subject matter expertise and analysis. The bill sets out further provisions relating to the advisory committee, including provisions requiring the advisory committee to study and make recommendations to the coordinating board regarding the effectiveness of the requirements regarding the transfer of course credit between institutions of higher education for courses in the core curriculum in supporting more efficient undergraduate transfer between institutions of higher education. The bill requires the coordinating board, each quarter ending before November 1, 2020, to submit to the chairs of the standing legislative committees with primary jurisdiction over higher education a report on the board's progress on its study and recommendations. The bill requires the coordinating board, not later than November 1, 2020, to submit to the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and the standing legislative committees with primary jurisdiction over higher education a report on the results of the study and any recommendations for legislative or other action. These provisions expire September 1, 2021.

C.S.S.B. 25 requires the coordinating board to use the negotiated rulemaking procedures under the Negotiated Rulemaking Act in adopting rules regarding the recommended core curriculum developed by the coordinating board.

C.S.S.B. 25 applies beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year, except that the bill's provisions relating to recommended course sequences and relating to an articulation agreement between a lower-division institution of higher education and a general academic teaching institution apply beginning with the 2021-2022 academic year.

C.S.S.B. 25 repeals Section 51.9685(c-1), Education Code.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2019.

COMPARISON OF SENATE ENGROSSED AND SUBSTITUTE

While C.S.S.B. 25 may differ from the engrossed in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the engrossed and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute changes the annual deadline for each general academic teaching institution to provide a certain report regarding nontransferable credit to the coordinating board, includes the legislature as a recipient of the report, and requires the inclusion of information regarding courses for which transfer credit toward a student's major is not granted.

The substitute includes provisions establishing an annual reporting requirement for each public junior college regarding courses taken by students who, during the preceding academic year, transferred to a general academic teaching institution or earned an associate degree at the college.

The substitute includes specifications that the deadline for each student enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program at a public institution of higher education to file a degree plan is after the 12th class day of the applicable semester or term.

The substitute includes a requirement for the coordinating board, in consultation with public institutions of higher education, to adopt rules as necessary for the administration of the bill's provisions relating to recommended course sequences and requires the use of negotiated rulemaking procedures for that purpose.

The substitute replaces the requirement for an articulation agreement entered into under the bill's provisions on or after September 1, 2019, to use field of study curricula to the greatest extent practicable with an authorization for such use.

The substitute does not include the following:

- provisions providing for a core curriculum that includes a general core curriculum and, for each broad academic discipline, an academic discipline core curriculum;
- a requirement for each public institution of higher education to do the following:
 - identify in the institution's course catalog and on the institution's website each course offered by the institution that fulfills a course requirement in the institution's general core curriculum or academic discipline core curriculum and the specific course requirement that the course fulfills;
 - provide such information and the institution's general core curriculum and academic discipline core curriculum to the coordinating board; and
 - advise each student enrolled at the institution regarding the importance of taking coherent sequences of courses in the core curriculum that are aligned with the student's academic and career goals; and
- a requirement for the coordinating board to make certain information regarding curricula and the transferability of course credit available to certain entities for the purpose of assisting in advising a student regarding the selection of coherent sequences of courses in the core curriculum that are aligned with the student's academic and career goals.

The substitute does not include a requirement for a public junior college or public technical institute to adopt in whole or in part each field of study curriculum developed by the coordinating board for an academic area in which the college or institute offers courses.

The substitute includes temporary provisions requiring the coordinating board to conduct a study and make recommendations to the legislature regarding the feasibility of implementing statewide meta majors for public institutions of higher education and to prepare a related report, including provisions regarding the appointment and duties of an associated advisory committee.

The substitute changes the academic year in which the following bill provisions begin to apply from the 2021-2022 academic year to the 2019-2020 academic year:

- the requirement for the coordinating board to ensure that an applicant using a common admission application form may indicate consent for the application to be forwarded to other institutions under certain circumstances; and
- a provision relating to the authorized release of student information to an institution of higher education for purposes of transferring course credit or enabling the awarding of course credit.

The substitute retains the 2021-2022 academic year applicability for provisions relating to recommended course sequences and relating to an articulation agreement between a lower-division institution of higher education and a general academic teaching institution, but the substitute specifies that the other provisions of the bill apply beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year.

The substitute revises the bill's effective date.