

SUBJECT: Downward expansion of the University of Texas at Tyler

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 5 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Kamel

3 nays — Dunnam, Rabuck, E. Reyna

1 absent — Rodriguez

WITNESSES: For — David Cain; Bob Glaze; Thomas G. Mullins, Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce and Tyler Economic Development Council; A.W. Ritter, Jr.

Against — Ron Adkinson; Jim Plummer, Smith County Association of Taxpayers

On — Ron Adkinson and Dan Angel, Stephen F. Austin State University; Debbie Beck, Legislative Budget Board; Don Brown, Higher Education Coordinating Board; William Cunningham; Charles Florio, Northeast Texas Community College

BACKGROUND : The University of Texas at Tyler is authorized to offer upper-division courses for junior, senior, and graduate-level students. The 74th Legislature enacted CSHB 2187 by Kamel, et al., allowing the school to offer lower-division courses to certain freshman and sophomore engineering students.

DIGEST: CSHB 1795 would remove the prohibition against freshman and sophomore level courses at the University of Texas at Tyler. By January 1, 2000, the school would have to adopt standards for admitting first-time freshman students that were at least as stringent as the fall 1997 admission standards of the University of Texas at Arlington. The school could not adopt or use an open enrollment policy.

The bill would set enrollment limits for full-time freshman and sophomore students. The university could enroll a maximum of 50 lower division students for the school year beginning with the summer term of 1998, 100 for 1999, 150 for 2000, and 200 for 2001. The enrollment cap would expire

January 1, 2003. The school could not offer courses off campus until the fall of 2001.

CSHB 1795 would repeal provisions relating to limitations of lower division courses at the university.

The bill would require the coordinating board to prepare a nonbinding impact statement, not later than May 31, 1998, examining the initial effects of the expansion. A copy would be delivered to the board of regents of the University of Texas System, the board of trustees of Tyler Junior College District, and to the chair of the standing committee of each house of the legislature with primary jurisdiction over higher education.

CSHB 1795 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership in each house.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

CSHB 1795 would continue an important trend in the delivery of higher education in Texas: the downward expansion of upper-level institutions. The Legislature has already approved such action last session for the University of Texas-Permian Basin. CSHB 1795 would simply extend these same benefits to UT Tyler, a move that would ultimately help all citizens of East Texas.

Furthermore, last session the Legislature demonstrated its confidence in UT Tyler's ability to provide lower-division courses by authorizing a new engineering program to serve freshmen and sophomores. The program is currently being developed; CSHB 1795 would allow all areas of the university similar freedom to serve all levels of students.

As a four-year institution, UT Tyler would provide an improved quality of education to students from East Texas and throughout the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 1990 to 1996 the area served by UT Tyler has experienced population growth of over 10 percent. This growth substantiates the need for a four-year institution in the area.

The expansion of UT Tyler would provide greater continuity in course selection, counseling, scholarship and financial aid for students spending their entire undergraduate career at the university. Such continuity is needed

in the area. East Texas exceeds the state average for students receiving two-year degrees, but falls significantly below the average for four-year degrees awarded. CSHB 1795 would address this deficiency by expanding opportunities for students to receive four-year degrees.

Many schools have discovered that students want to receive their degree from a four-year institution instead of switching schools midstream. Several other states have begun converting their upper-level-only institutions to integrated four-year universities. By expanding, UT Tyler would be able to compete for students who leave the area to attend a four-year university or who transfer to one after their sophomore year.

As a four-year institution, UT Tyler could lend additional prestige to its students and to the community at large, increasing civic pride and contributing to economic development. Individuals and corporations could be encouraged to relocate to the area by the presence of a four-year institution and the academic and cultural resources such an institution provides.

Without expansion, UT Tyler would continue to receive largely students sent its way by area junior colleges. UT Tyler is one of the most outstanding underutilized resources in the state; CSHB 1795 would help the school reach its full potential. With it, UT Tyler could evolve as an institution, bringing in new programs and faculty and becoming a unique and invaluable part of the East Texas community.

UT Tyler should not have to clear additional lower-division courses with the coordinating board before offering them. This would be unduly burdensome to the university and waste the time of all parties involved. The coordinating board already approves all curriculum offered by the institutions: extra approval is completely unnecessary.

The competition provided by this expansion would not harm the area's outstanding junior colleges. Each serves a specific need and would continue to do so regardless of UT Tyler's status. The lower tuition and open enrollment policies at these institutions would ensure that they always had sufficient numbers of students. UT Tyler, in fact, has had a close working relationship with its neighbor, Tyler Junior College. The institutions share a

number of partnerships, some of which could continue after the downward expansion. Collaboration between institutions could prevent duplication of courses at these schools.

Furthermore, competition in higher education is always a positive thing. It is wrong to assert that Texas junior colleges would suffer from competition with a four-year institution. Instead, competition would raise the educational standards for all institutions, with Texas students the ultimate beneficiaries.

CSHB 1795 would have no initial fiscal effects, and for several years afterward would save the state money. The transition from a two-year to four-year formula funding would result in decreased appropriations to the school. The Legislative Budget Board estimates that faculty salary and departmental operating costs would decrease 9 percent from FY 1998 to FY 2000, or roughly \$150,640. By fiscal 2001, the decline would amount to \$301,280 (18 percent) and by fiscal 2002 to \$468,657 (28 percent).

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

CSHB 1795 aims to address a need that does not exist. The population of East Texas, including its college-aged residents, is expected to remain relatively constant over the next 10 years. The projected growth for UT Tyler is small, demonstrating no real need for extra courses or classroom space. Students in East Texas currently have a variety of higher education options, and none desiring an education goes away uneducated. East Texas is home to a number of excellent junior colleges, and there is no reason to duplicate the work being performed at another institution.

CSHB 1795 would place increased pressure on the enrollments of nearby institutions, who would likely lose students to UT Tyler should it become a four-year institution. The advent of performance budgeting in Texas has made schools increasingly accountable to the Legislature for declining enrollment numbers. This is unfair to these institutions, who could lose state appropriations and be forced to lower the quality of education they provide their students. The Legislature should deal consistently with higher education issues, and decline to fund additional classroom space while demanding that other institutions maintain or increase enrollment.

CSHB 1795 could harm relations between UT Tyler and its surrounding junior colleges. Currently, the school enjoys successful educational partnerships with several institutions, most notably Tyler Junior College. The two work together as complementary institutions, offering students smooth transitions in areas from course work to financial aid and scholarships. If downward expansion is achieved, the junior colleges would come to view UT Tyler as a competitor rather than an ally, which could greatly harm the climate of higher education in the area and diminish educational opportunity for students.

Currently, some East Texas institutions advertise for students at the beginning of each year through such media as direct mail, newspaper, and radio. CSHB 1795 would set up a situation whereby increased amounts of taxpayer dollars are spent in a competition among schools that should be working together in the best interest of Texas students.

The downward expansion of UT Tyler would not provide new benefits to students. There is no evidence that the school would offer course work or programs not currently provided by another local institution. Furthermore, UT Tyler shares faculty with several other institutions. These faculty teach similar or identical classes at more than one school. Tuition at four-year schools can be 40 percent higher than that at junior colleges, and it would not make sense for students to pay higher rates for the same classes offered by the junior colleges.

The healthy junior college system in the East Texas area should ensure a growing student body for the area's only upper-division institution; however, UT Tyler's enrollment numbers are on the decline. This could indicate some problems within the institution, and the administration should seek to address these before pursuing downward expansion. UT Tyler should ensure that it is fit to compete before entering a market where the need for its services is debatable at best.

Despite the lack of immediate fiscal impact to the state, the continued support of UT Tyler as a four-year institution is likely to require state appropriations in future years. Authorizing the school's expansion is effectively committing the state to an undisclosed level of future financial support. This is unwise when all of higher education is currently under-

funded and state contributions to these institutions have long been on the decline.

The downward expansion of UT Tyler has been proposed by past legislation, and the Legislature has never seen fit to approve it. No additional evidence has emerged to indicate that such action is now warranted. If anything, increased scarcity of resources for higher education should prompt increased scrutiny. CSHB 1795 would immediately endanger the junior college system in East Texas, and in the future could stretch state resources ever thinner, undermining the quality of higher education for all Texas' students.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

The enrollment caps provided by CSHB 1795 are not necessary. If a compelling need for downward expansion exists, students should be allowed to enroll immediately and not phased in over a number of years. Absent a compelling reason for the caps, the school should wait to decide how many students to serve based on current population numbers.

The University of Texas at Tyler should have to submit courses for the coordinating board's approval to ensure that they are needed, not duplicitous, and would not harm the enrollment of other institutions.

NOTES:

The committee substitute prohibited UT Tyler from offering off-campus courses until 2001, set enrollment caps for lower division students, and prohibited the school from adopting an open enrollment policy.

The companion bill, SB 840 by Ratliff, was reported favorably as substituted by the Senate Finance Committee on April 18. Rep. Kamel plans to introduce two floor amendments conforming CSHB 1795 to the provisions of SB 840. Another floor amendment by the author would move the due date of the coordinating board's impact statement from May 31, 1998, to December 31, 1998.