

SUBJECT: Allowing certain public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Alonzo, Aycock, Giddings, D. Howard,
Patrick, Rose

0 nays

1 absent — McCall

WITNESSES: For — Millicent Valek, Brazosport College, Midland College, South
Texas College, Texas Association of Community Colleges

Against — None

On — Roger Auford, Higher Education Coordinating Board; (*Registered,
but did not testify*: Ali Esmaeili, Mario Reyna, Laura Boyer Talbot, South
Texas College)

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 130.0012 requires the Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish a pilot project at three public
junior colleges to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of authorizing
public junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in the fields
of applied science and applied technology. Junior colleges may not offer
more than five baccalaureate degree programs. The THECB authorized
Brazosport College, Midland College, and South Texas College to
implement the pilot project.

DIGEST: HB 2198 would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
(THECB) to authorize baccalaureate degree programs – by removing the
pilot project status – at each of the public junior colleges that now
participate in the Bachelor of Applied Technology degree pilot project.
The THECB also would be required to authorize baccalaureate degree
programs at an additional public junior college, if the THECB determined
it was in the best interest of the state.

A junior college that offered baccalaureate degree programs would have to
meet all applicable accreditation requirements of the Commission on

Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and would be subject to continuing approval of the THECB. In determining whether a junior college could offer such programs, the THECB would have to consider the established criteria, including the need for the degree program in the region and the ability of the junior college to support the program. The coordinating board would have to establish an application process to select additional junior colleges to be authorized to offer baccalaureate degree programs by January 1, 2009.

Current requirements for junior colleges offering such programs as part of the pilot project would remain in force, including:

- a biennial report to the THECB on the operation and effectiveness of the program, and
- an articulation agreement with one or more general academic institutions to ensure that students enrolled in the program had an opportunity to complete the degree if the junior college ceased to offer it.

State funding for junior colleges that offered the baccalaureate degree program would remain as established for junior colleges participating in the pilot project.

The bill would repeal several requirements, including that THECB report to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the House and the chair of each higher education committee on the progress of the pilot project, and the expiration date of the pilot project, which was January 2, 2020.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2007.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

In 2003, the 78th Legislature enacted HB 1544 to establish a pilot project to allow select public community colleges to offer limited baccalaureate degree programs in applied science and technology. The purpose was to study the feasibility and effectiveness of allowing more students to have access to higher education at higher levels. In a collaborative effort, Brazosport College, Midland College, and South Texas College put forth a major initiative that has proven a great success.

All three colleges went through extensive evaluations of curriculum and financial resources for their baccalaureate degree programs and have made significant long-term financial commitments, including an expansion of library resources and the hiring of doctorate-level faculty and of student services personnel. The colleges have met and exceeded the required accreditation standards and now are accredited as Level II baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Currently, between 350 and 400 students at the three colleges are preparing to graduate. Students receiving their baccalaureate degrees from these schools are getting a high-quality, affordable education.

The anticipated growth due to the overwhelming response from students and the communities makes it sensible permanently to establish the authority for junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in order to continue providing affordable and accessible higher education to an increasing number of students. This would be an important tool in attracting more Texans into higher education with the opportunity to graduate with a four-year degree.

In deciding if another junior college could offer such programs, the coordinating board would have to consider an extensive list of criteria and whether the decision would be in the best interest of the state, including if it would duplicate programs offered by other institutions. Any community college that offered the programs would be subject to intense accreditation standards, so the authority would not be given lightly.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Increasing access to affordable higher education for Texans is important in reaching the goals of Closing the Gaps, the higher education plan for Texas. However, allowing community colleges to offer baccalaureate programs has transpired very quickly in Texas. A more measured approach is required to ensure that community colleges do not lose sight of their original mission. While higher education is a good investment for the state, it takes money and time to grow these programs at the community college level, and four-year universities already have the infrastructure in place.

A better approach would be to require an ongoing study of the feasibility and benefits of increasing the number of community colleges allowed to offer these programs to ensure that community colleges stay committed to

their mission while not setting up a competitive environment for the community college districts.