

SUBJECT: Allowing TSTC Harlingen to award an associate of science degree

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Branch, Alonzo, Cohen, D. Howard, McCall, Patrick, Rose
0 nays
2 absent — Castro, Berman

WITNESSES: For —Flor Lopez; Belinda Palomino; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Chris Boswell, City of Harlingen)

On — Cesar Maldonado, Texas State Technical College Harlingen; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Bill Segura, TSTC System)

BACKGROUND: Texas State Technical College (TSTC) Harlingen currently is limited, by law, to awarding associate of applied science (AAS) degrees, certificates, and diplomas appropriate to technical education.

DIGEST: HB 1325 would amend the Texas Education Code, sec. 135.51 to allow the Texas State Technical College board of regents to offer and award an Associate of Science (A.S.) degree in a field of study at TSTC Harlingen if the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) determined that the degree was appropriate to the role and mission of the system and met the educational or workforce needs of the region where the school was located.

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, 2009.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1325 would authorize TSTC Harlingen to award an Associate of Science (A.S.) degree, with the approval of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The THECB has interpreted Education Code, sec. 135. 51 as not allowing TSTC Harlingen to offer Associate of Science (A.S.) degrees without explicit statutory authority, which HB 1325 would grant.

The bill would apply only to the TSTC Harlingen campus. None of the other TSTC campuses would be affected.

The state's accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), has confirmed that TSTC Harlingen possesses the academic course inventory and the credentialed faculty to offer an A.S. degree. According to SACS, TSTC Harlingen may offer associate degrees, but needs the approval of the THECB.

TSTC Harlingen serves as a major provider of transfer students to surrounding higher education institutions, so the addition of the highly marketable A.S. degree would increase the college-going culture among Harlingen residents and increase the region's higher education accomplishments.

An A.S. degree has statewide standing for transfer, so it would reduce the need for articulation agreements. HB 1325 would allow a student to transfer 66 hours, rather than the current 40 transferable hours. This program would provide complete transfer of courses to four-year engineering programs.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 2189 by Lucio, was reported favorably, as substituted, by the Senate Higher Education Committee on April 20 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.