

**SUBJECT:** Expanding credit transfer policies for higher education institutions

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 7 ayes — Zerwas, Howard, Clardy, Martinez, Morrison, Raney,  
C. Turner

1 nay — Crownover

1 absent — Alonzo

**WITNESSES:** For — Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Dana Harris, Austin Chamber of Commerce; Dwight Harris, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Nelson Salinas, Texas Association of Business; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas)

Against — Roberto Zarate, Community College Association of Texas Trustees

On — John Fitzpatrick, Educate Texas; Aubrey Wynn Rosser, Greater Texas Foundation; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rex Peebles, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)

**BACKGROUND:** Education Code, ch. 61, subch. S governs transfer of credit between higher education institutions and requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to encourage the transferability of lower-division course credit among institutions.

Under sec. 61.822, institutions of higher education are required to work with advisory committees composed of representatives of higher education institutions to develop a 42-credit-hour core curriculum that, if completed by students, can be fully transferred as a block to any other institution. The receiving institution is required to give academic credit for each of the courses transferred. If a student does not complete the entire core curriculum at the student's initial institution, the receiving school

must award academic credit for each of the courses the student has successfully completed in the core curriculum.

DIGEST:

CSHB 298 would make various changes to Education Code provisions affecting the transferability of credits to the state's general academic teaching institutions from public junior colleges, public state colleges, and public technical institutes.

**Core curriculum advisory committees.** The coordinating board, with the assistance of advisory committees, would develop a course-specific core curriculum for each broad academic discipline within the general core curriculum and identify degree programs at higher education institutions to which the course-specific core curriculum, if successfully completed by a student at another institution, would be fully transferable.

CSHB 298 would change the composition of these advisory committees by allowing the coordinating board to appoint administrators of institutions of higher education.

**Articulation agreements.** CSHB 298 would require the state's general academic teaching institutions to establish articulation agreements for at least five degree plans with each public junior college from which the general academic teaching institution had received an average of at least 5 percent of the institution's transfer students during the three preceding years. The degree plans would be those for which credit was frequently transferred to the institution from the junior college. The bill would not affect admissions policies at general academic teaching institutions.

**Publication of requirements.** The bill also would require general academic teaching institutions to publish online for prospective students a detailed description of learning objectives, content, and prior knowledge requirements for at least 12 courses offered by the institution for which credit was frequently transferred to the institution from lower-division institutions of higher education.

**Accrediting agency for semester credit hours requirements.** To earn a

baccalaureate or associate's degree, a student could not be required by an institution of higher education to complete more than the minimum number of credit hours required for the degree by the institution's accrediting agency unless there were a compelling academic reason. The bill would substitute "the institution's board-recognized accrediting agency" for the current "Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or its successor."

**Effective dates.** By May 31, 2017, institutions would be required to establish articulation agreements and publish online information on credit transfer policies for the required 12 courses. The coordinating board would be required to develop the course-specific core curricula by the same date.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board would adopt rules to administer the provisions of the bill.

CSHB 298 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, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 298 would help students transfer more of their credits from community colleges to four-year institutions and earn baccalaureate degrees. Many Texas students begin their higher education at community colleges, highlighting their importance as the gateway to a four-year degree.

The current pathway for community college students into baccalaureate programs can be inefficient and unclear. While some studies indicate that most community college students intend to transfer to a four-year institution, only a small number actually do. Despite efforts to channel student learning, many transfer students still end up transferring few credits, accumulating more credits than they can effectively transfer, or transferring credits that do not count toward a degree. This can increase tuition costs, extend the time to degree completion, or encourage students to drop out. By making the transfer process between schools more

transparent and efficient, this bill could help increase the ability of students to transfer credits directly toward a major.

Providing information about the junior college course credits institutions would accept as credit would help students make informed choices about the school to which they should transfer. This would help address Texas' growing need for a college-educated workforce because the more credits a student is able to transfer from junior college, the more likely the student is to complete a four-year degree. With more Texans holding baccalaureate degrees, the state would be better able to compete economically without having to import talent and knowledge.

CSHB 298 would balance the interests of institutions of higher education and students needing a clear path to a baccalaureate degree. While the bill might require administrative work and faculty adjustment at institutions, the current system is costing families and students time and money and creating a barrier to college completion. Requiring institutions to form articulation agreements only with schools from which they receive at least 5 percent of their transfers would allow institutions to focus on accepting credits from those schools.

CSHB 298's move to include administrators on the curriculum advisory committees would not greatly alter their current composition, which often includes non-faculty members who have backgrounds in specific academic disciplines.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

CSHB 298 could result in an outsized solution that may not resolve the issues it seeks to address. Higher education institutions traditionally have had local control to determine which courses and course outcomes are appropriate for transfer into their degree programs. This has given these institutions a degree of quality control over the graduates who graduate from their institutions. The bill could undermine this discretion and control, directing institutions to accept courses they otherwise might not.

Many schools already have articulation agreements and accept transfer credits without issue. Requiring universities to establish articulation

agreements with junior colleges that send only 5 percent of total transfers could result in agreements that conflict with the schools that send the other 95 percent. It would be better to base credit transfer agreements on alignment between academic programs.

CSHB 298 could create a cost and administrative burden to four-year and junior colleges and cause confusion for students. It might be difficult for institutions to post information about frequently transferred courses on their websites in a manner that adequately and accurately reflected all the relevant information and variables.

Allowing the addition of college and university administrators to the core curriculum and course-specific core curricula advisory committees might mean fewer spots for faculty, who likely know the most about the academic disciplines in which students would have to meet learning expectations.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

CSHB 298, while allowing flexibility for institutions to communicate and craft unique solutions with their frequent feeder schools, could allow too much flexibility. Defining “broad academic disciplines” might not address existing confusion because of their expansive nature. The bill instead should require schools to state exactly which courses lower-division students should be taking to obtain certain degrees at higher education institutions.