

SUBJECT: Establishing a multidisciplinary studies associate degree program

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Zerwas, Howard, Alonzo, Crownover, Martinez, Morrison,  
Raney, C. Turner

0 nays

1 absent — Clardy

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 16 — 31-0

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Garrett Groves, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Mike Meroney, Huntsman Corp., BASF Corp., Sherwin Alumina, Co.; Bill Hammond, Texas Association of Business; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council; Michael White, Texas Construction Association; Les Findeisen, Texas Trucking Association; Melody Chatelle, United Ways of Texas)

Against — None

On — (*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 develop a core curriculum of 42 semester credit hours that, if completed by students, can be fully transferred as a block for credit toward any other institution's core curriculum.

Sec. 51.762 requires the creation of a common admission application form

to be used by all persons seeking admission as freshmen to certain higher education institutions in the state, including general academic teaching institutions and other institutions admitting freshman-level students.

DIGEST:

CSSB 1189 would establish a new multidisciplinary studies associate degree program at each public junior college in the state. Each public junior college would be required to begin offering the multidisciplinary studies associate degree program by the 2016 fall semester.

Students working toward this degree would be required to successfully complete the 42-hour core curriculum adopted by the college under Education Code, sec. 61.822, as well as courses in a student's selected degree plan. Students would meet with an academic advisor to complete a degree plan at the beginning of the semester or term after a student earned 30 or more credit hours toward a multidisciplinary studies associate degree. This degree plan would account for all remaining credits a student needed to complete the degree. The degree plan also would emphasize the student's transfer to a particular four-year college or university of the student's choosing and preparation for the student's intended field of study or major at the chosen college or university.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board would be required to develop necessary rules as soon as practicable after the effective date of the bill to ensure that each public junior college created the new degree program and that the common application form used by higher education institutions under Education Code, sec. 51.762 contained a description of the degree program.

This 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, 2015.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

CSSB 1189 would help students more effectively transfer credits from community colleges to four-year institutions and earn baccalaureate degrees without earning extraneous credits.

Difficulty transferring credit from community colleges to four-year institutions remains one of the largest barriers to timely college completion. Many transfer students 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, which can waste student, family, and taxpayer money. These challenges are due in part to a lack of information and an overall degree strategy.

CSSB 1189 would address these issues by leveraging existing transfer policies to offer an associate-level credential geared toward efficient transfer to a four-year degree program. The bill would help inform students and assist them in charting a course to a four-year degree by requiring them to work with an academic advisor early in their academic progress. By developing a degree plan specifically tailored to specific schools' four-year degree programs, students could avoid earning credits that did not count toward their major or that were lost in transfer. The bill also would help students prepare for and earn course credit toward a specific degree under their degree plan in addition to the existing 42-hour core curriculum.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

CSSB 1189 could better help transferability of credits by narrowing the focus of the 42-hour core curriculum to only those courses that students truly need to transfer into a major at the baccalaureate program of their choice. For example, a student who does not wish to major in history should not be required to earn history credits. Such a reform could help ensure that students were investing their time and money, as well as taxpayer money, only in courses applicable to their majors. It also could focus students on courses that would prepare them to graduate more ready for the workforce.

NOTES:

CSSB 1189 differs from the Senate engrossed version of the bill in that the House substitute would change the name of the program required in the bill from the “transfer associate degree program” to the “multidisciplinary studies associate degree program.”