

- SUBJECT:** Requiring students to file a degree plan at public junior colleges
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Lozano, Raney, Alonzo, Button, Clardy, Howard, Morrison, Turner
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Alvarado
- WITNESSES:** For — Charles Cook, Austin Community College; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Stephanie Reyes, San Antonio Chamber of Commerce; Miranda Goodsheller, Texas Association of Business; Stephanie Simpson, Texas Association of Manufacturers; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council; Michael White, Texas Construction Association; James Thurston, United Ways of Texas)
- Against — None
- On — Melissa Henderson, Educate Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Rex Peebles, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 51.9685 requires a student enrolled in a bachelor's or associate's degree program at an institution of higher education to file a degree plan no later than the end of the second semester immediately following the semester in which the student has earned a cumulative total of 45 or more semester credit hours.
- DIGEST:** HB 655 would require a public junior college student pursuing either a bachelor's or an associate's degree to file a degree plan no later than the end of the second regular semester immediately following the semester in which the student earned a cumulative total of 30 or more semester credit hours. A student who began his or her first semester at the college with 30 or more credit hours would have to file by the end of the student's second semester at the college.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2017, and would apply to students enrolling in a public junior college for the 2018 fall semester.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 655 would help junior college students choose their path to graduation by having them declare a degree plan earlier than currently required by law. At present, students at higher education institutions must file their degree plan after earning 45 total semester credit hours, but reducing this threshold to 30 total semester credit hours would help prevent credit loss, which occurs when students earn extraneous credits that do not count toward earning their degree or cannot be transferred to another institution. This can extend amount of time it takes to earn a degree or certificate, lower the chances of obtaining a bachelor's degree, and increase expenses and debt for the student.

The bill would cut down on waste by encouraging college students to select a path early in their college career. Texas has the highest percentage of students who complete their degree at a four-year university after transferring from a junior college, but many of these students lose credits when they transfer, costing students, families, and taxpayers an estimated \$120 million per year in tuition and financial aid. Requiring a student to declare a degree plan earlier would help ensure a smooth transition with fewer lost credits, and would help the state achieve its graduation rate goal of having 60 percent of its 25 to 34 year olds hold a degree or certificate by 2030.

Most junior college students in Texas are part-time students, which means obtaining a degree can take a considerable amount of time. The bill would help keep these part-time students on track to receive their degree. The bill would not prevent junior college students from declaring a degree plan sooner than was required by the bill, and some public junior college may have requirements for declaring a degree plan that are more stringent than state law.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Although the bill would be a positive step by having students declare their degree plans earlier than is currently required, those pursuing an associate's degree of 60 semester credit hours might find that waiting as long as two semesters after receiving 30 credits could be too late to avoid earning and paying for excess credits that might not count toward their degree. Requiring students to declare a degree plan even earlier could help avoid unnecessary waste.