

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1051
By: Zaffirini
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Under current law, universities are not authorized to make exceptions to the state-mandated core curriculum, including the statutory history and government requirement. In keeping with its international mission and its statutory authority, Texas A&M International University (university) wishes to partner with foreign universities to plan and implement joint degree programs. To date, the university has not yet implemented such programs at the undergraduate level due to the statutory restrictions related to the core curriculum. Joint degrees which include these required courses would be unattractive to prospective partner institutions because of the extra time and expense necessitated by taking courses that students consider unrelated to their academic goals.

S.B. 1051 exempts foreign students enrolled in joint degree programs with Texas universities from the statutorily required 12 semester credit hours of Government/Political Science and Texas and American History, instead requiring such students to take a four-hour American Way course as set forth in the bill. This exemption would apply only to foreign students enrolled in joint degree programs conferred by both a Texas and a foreign university.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 51.301 of the Education Code by amending a subsection and adding Subsections. Makes conforming and nonsubstantive changes.

Authorizes the governing board of a general academic teaching institution (institution) that offers a joint baccalaureate degree program (program) under a contract with a foreign college or university may exempt a student enrolled in the joint degree program from the course requirement prescribed if the student enrolled in the foreign college or university before enrolling in the joint degree program or is otherwise considered to be primarily a student of the foreign college or university, and successfully completes the American Way course at the institution the student attends or, with the approval of that institution, at another general academic teaching institution that offers the course.

Requires the American Way course, authorized, to be designed to provide a foreign student with a familiarity and understanding of United States government and civic life and their sources, development, and character. Requires the course to concentrate on important texts, including the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, on the works and contributions of influential authors, political and cultural leaders, and other important figures, and on important events and developments in United States history. Requires the course to cover developments in human and civil rights, including the civil rights movement and history of women's rights, and the history and development of Texas and its place in United States history and culture. Requires the course to consist of four semester credit hours, with one semester credit hour in practicum activities intended to provide the student with experience in the three branches of government through participation at the federal, state, or local level. Prohibits the course from being taken for course credit by a student other than a student described. Defines "general academic teaching institution."

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SECTION 2. Amends Section 51.302 of the Education Code, relating to American or Texas History. Defines "general academic teaching institution." Creates a subsection from existing text and makes conforming and nonsubstantive changes.

Authorizes the governing board of a general academic institution that offers a joint baccalaureate degree program under a contract with a foreign college or university to exempt a student that enrolled in the joint degree program from the course requirement prescribed if the student enrolled in the foreign college or university before enrolling in the joint degree program or is otherwise considered to be primarily a student of the foreign college or university, and successfully completes the American Way course described, at the institution the students attends or, with the approval of the institution, at another institution that offers the course.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 61.822 of the Education Code by adding Subsection (e), to authorize the governing board of a general academic teaching institution that offers a joint baccalaureate degree program under a contract with a foreign college or university to, in consultation with the foreign college or university, identify and approve courses offered by the foreign college or university that are equivalent to courses in the core curriculum of a student enrolled in the joint degree program who is considered to be primarily a student of the general academic teaching institution. Authorizes such a course to be substituted for courses in the core curriculum of such a student.

SECTION 4. Authorizes the governing board of an institution to which Subsection (e), Section 61.822 of the Education Code, as added by this Act, applies to permit a student enrolled in a joint degree program to which that section applies to substitute another course for a course in the core curriculum as permitted by that section regardless of whether the student completed the course before the effective date of this Act.

SECTION 5. Effective date.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon passage, or, if the Act does not receive the necessary vote, the Act takes effect September 1, 2007.