

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.S.B. 945
By: Patrick
Higher Education
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

One element of Texas' *Closing the Gaps by 2015* plan involves creating seamless transitions among high schools, community and technical colleges, universities, and health-related institutions. As of 2008, there were almost 3.5 million Texas adults who had some college credit, but no degree. Only 951,090 Texans have an associate degree. Unfortunately, many students transfer from a community college to a four-year institution before earning an associate degree, and then leave college altogether before earning a bachelor's degree. For these students who gain enough credits to earn their associate degree, they end up leaving college without any degree at all.

Current law enables students to earn their associate degree through reverse transfer. However, the student has to request the university and lower-division institution to provide each with the necessary information and permission. Many students are simply unaware of when they have earned enough credits to receive their associate degree and never follow through with the reverse transfer process.

This legislation would require four-year institutions to alert transfer students when they have successfully completed a cumulative total of at least 90 credit hours to earn their associate degree. The institution will then request authorization from the student to release the student's transcript to the lower-division institution to determine whether the student has earned the appropriate credits for an associate degree. If the lower-division institution determines that the student has earned enough credits, it may award the student with the degree.

This legislation will promote degree completion for students transferring from a lower-division institution of higher education and help ensure that more students achieve a degree.

As proposed, C.S.S.B. 945 amends current law relating to authorizing a lower-division institution of higher education to award an associate degree to a student enrolled in a four-year public institution of higher education who previously attended the lower-division college.

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 Subchapter S, Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Section 61.833, as follows:

Sec. 61.833. CREDIT TRANSFER FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREE. (a) Defines "lower-division institution of higher education."

(b) Provides that this section applies to a student enrolled in a general academic teaching institution (institution) who:

(1) transferred to the institution from or previously attended a lower-division institution of higher education;

(2) earned at least 30 credit hours for course work successfully completed at the lower-division institution of higher education; and

(3) has earned a cumulative total of at least 90 credit hours for course work successfully completed.

(c) Requires the institution by e-mail or other reasonable method, as soon as practicable after a student who is enrolled in an institution has met the criteria established by Subsection (a)(3), to request authorization from the student for the institution to release the student's transcript to the lower-division institution of higher education that the student previously attended for the purpose of determining whether the student has earned the credits required for an associate degree awarded by the lower-division institution of higher education. Requires the institution on receipt of a student's authorization under this subsection to release the student's transcript to the lower-division institution of higher education.

(d) Requires a lower-division institution of higher education, after receiving a student transcript from an institution under Subsection (b) to review the transcript and, if the lower-division institution of higher education determines the student has earned the credits required to receive an associate degree awarded by the lower-division institution of higher education, may award the student the degree.

SECTION 2. Provides that the change in law made by this Act applies to a student who not earlier than the 2011 fall semester transfers to or otherwise initially enrolls in a general academic teaching institution after attending a lower-division institution of higher education.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2011.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon passage, or, if the Act does not receive the necessary vote, the Act takes effect September 1, 2011.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL TO SUBSTITUTE

The substitute contains a provision not found in the original which defines the term "lower-division institution of higher education" as a public junior college, public state college, or public technical institute. The substitute replaces references to "public junior college," as found in the original bill, with "lower-division institution of higher education" throughout the bill.