

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 497
By: Seliger
Higher Education
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Recently enacted legislation placed a cap on the minimum number of semester credit hours a general academic teaching institution may require for a bachelor's degree offered by the institution. However, interested parties have raised concerns regarding the absence of such a cap on the minimum number of semester credit hours required for an associate degree. S.B. 497 seeks to address this concern by establishing such a cap.

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

S.B. 497 amends the Education Code to prohibit a student from being required by an institution of higher education, in order to earn an associate degree, to complete more than the minimum number of semester credit hours required for the degree by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or its successor unless the institution determines that there is a compelling academic reason for requiring completion of additional semester credit hours for the degree. The bill exempts from this prohibition an associate degree awarded by an institution to a student enrolled in the institution before the 2015 fall semester and specifies that the exemption does not prohibit the institution from reducing the number of semester credit hours the student must complete to receive the degree. The bill authorizes the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to review one or more of an institution's associate degree programs to ensure compliance with the bill's provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2013.