

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
83R6394 KSD-D

S.B. 497
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Higher Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In 2005, the 79th Legislature passed legislation which placed a cap on the minimum number of hours required for a baccalaureate degree. The legislation did not address placing a cap on the minimum number of semester credit hours required for an associate degree.

S.B. 497 places a cap on the number of semester credit hours required for an associate degree to no more than what is required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), unless the institution has a compelling academic reason for requiring additional hours such as in the case of professional licensure.

The associate degree language is substantially similar to the baccalaureate degree language in Section 61.0515 (Semester Credit Hours Required for Baccalaureate Degree), Education Code. This change in the associate degree cap would begin with the fall semester of 2015.

As proposed, S.B. 497 amends current law relating to the number of semester credit hours required to earn an associate degree at public institutions of higher education.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter C, Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Section 61.05151, as follows:

Sec. 61.05151. SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS REQUIRED FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREE. (a) Prohibits a student, to earn an associate degree, from being required by an institution of higher education 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.

(b) Authorizes the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to review one or more of an institution's associate degree programs to ensure compliance with this section.

(c) Provides that Subsection (a) does not apply to an associate degree awarded by an institution to a student enrolled in the institution before the 2015 fall semester. Provides that this subsection does not prohibit the institution from reducing the number of semester credit hours the student is required to complete to receive the degree.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2013.