

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 2122
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Higher Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Virtually all courses for which a student receives a "C" or better will transfer from one institution to another. However, these courses may not apply to a student's declared major. Therefore, students accumulate course credits that do not apply, also known as "stray credits," increasing their time to degree, costing the student unnecessary tuition and fees, and costing the state excess formula funding and financial aid. While students bear responsibility for the choices they make, higher education bears responsibility for making the choices transparent, easily comprehensible, and to align courses with common curriculum and outcomes as much as possible.

The initiatives of S.B. 2122 will reduce the number of stray course hours through course alignment, increase the transparency of those choices, and help students identify courses that will help them earn their preferred degree.

S.B. 2122 authorizes the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to create a database of required lower division courses for specific majors, strengthen advising and require earlier advising, continue the development of fields of study, promote meta majors and guided pathways, reduce the courses in the core curriculum, and give THECB explicit authority to develop and implement transfer policies.

As proposed, S.B. 2122 amends current law relating to authorization by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop and implement transfer policy for lower division courses among Texas 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 Section 61.822, Education Code, by amending Subsections (a), (a-1), (b), and (c) and adding Subsections (a-2), (f), and (g), as follows:

(a) Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to develop and implement policy regarding, rather than requiring THECB to encourage, the transferability of lower division course credit among institutions of higher education (IHEs).

(a-1) Requires THECB, with the assistance of certain advisory committees, to develop a recommended core curriculum of at least 39 semester credit hours, rather than of at least 42 semester credit hours, including a statement containing certain information.

(a-2) Provides that the 39 semester credit hour core curriculum provides the knowledge and academic competencies foundational for all future learning. Requires that the courses in the core curriculum be general education courses, broad in scope, and prohibits the courses from narrowly focusing on knowledge and competencies specific to a particular occupation or profession.

(b) Requires each IHE to adopt a core curriculum of no less than 39 semester hours, including specific courses comprising the curriculum. Makes a nonsubstantive change and deletes existing text authorizing an IHE to have a core curriculum of other than semester credit hours only if approved by THECB.

(c) Authorizes a block of courses, if a student successfully completes the 42-hour core curriculum at an IHE, rather than if a student successfully completes the 39-hour core curriculum at an IHE, to be transferred to any other IHE and requires them to be substituted for the receiving IHE's core curriculum.

(f) Provides that THECB will annually identify in a database determined by THECB the state's top 25 majors among transfer students. Provides that general academic teaching institutions (GATIs) will identify for each of the described majors certain required courses.

(g) Requires that identified courses be applied to the appropriate major for a time period equal to the period students are authorized to utilize any given catalog to graduate at a receiving GATI and provides that, for this purpose, the time period would start when a student first entered college, but no more than three years after first entering college.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 61.823, Education Code, by adding Subsection (g), to require a public junior college and a technical institute as described in Section 61.003 (Definitions) to adopt THECB approved fields of study for any disciplines where they have similar programs.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 51.9685, Education Code, by amending Subsections (b) and (c), as follows:

(b) Requires each student enrolled at an IHE, except as otherwise provided by Subsection (c), to file a degree plan with the IHE not later than the end of the first regular semester after initially enrolling, or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student has accumulated a total of 15 semester credit hours and immediately following the term in which a student has accumulated 30 semester credit hours for coursework attempted by the student, including certain courses. Deletes existing text requiring each student enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program at an IHE, except as otherwise provided by Subsection (c), to file a degree plan with the IHE not later than the end of the second regular semester after initially enrolling, or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student earned a cumulative total of 45 or more coursework successfully completed by the student, including certain courses.

(c) Requires a student to whom this section (Required Filing of Degree Plan) applies who begins the student's first semester or term at an IHE with 30 or more, rather than with 45 or more, semester credit hours of course credit for courses described by Subsection (b) to file a degree plan with the IHE not later than the end of a certain period. Makes a conforming change.

SECTION 4. Amends Section 61.059, Education Code, by amending Subsection (p), to prohibit THECB, in its instruction and operations formula applicable to an IHE, from including certain credit hours unless those credit hours are earned, among certain other courses, through a course from a THECB approved field of study or programs of study offered by the IHE providing course credit.

SECTION 5. Amends Section 61.832, Education Code, by adding Subsection (e), to authorize THECB to monitor the use of the Texas Common Course Numbering System by GATIs to ascertain benefits and problems and provide a report for implementation and a timeline for full compliance with statute.

SECTION 6. Effective date: September 1, 2017.