

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY



Response to Request for Information
House Higher Education Committee
Interim Charge One

September 1, 2020

Below is Stephen F. Austin State University's (SFA) response to the House Higher Education Committee's request for information related to Interim Charge One:

Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- HB 1638 (85R), which relates to statewide goals for dual credit programs. Review best practices for providing opportunities to high school students to earn college credit while ensuring that courses taken reflect authentic, college-level rigor.
1. What challenges have institutions faced with dual credit prior to and as a result of the pandemic?

Prior to the pandemic, the biggest challenges were dealing with the intricacies of independent school district (ISD) requirements (the varying needs that schools have for specific courses in specific modalities and/or specific locations) and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation requirements (mostly associated with providing resources to students and also meeting faculty qualifications). Another challenge before the pandemic has been working in a complementary manner with community colleges, where the costs vary compared to SFA, and there are almost always issues associated with meeting the needs of the ISD, the community college(s), and the university. Another challenge preceding the pandemic is finding, offering, and communicating the best focus areas for a sub-region of the state, i.e., four-year degree programs and pathways that can be identified and pursued by high school students with the highest efficiency for graduation.

As a result of the pandemic, we have had a harder time communicating effectively with ISDs. That is, when meetings could be held face to face, we would have sub-regional meetings with ISD partners where we could "iron out" the offerings and the modalities that would meet their needs. Zoom meetings are a poor substitute for these interactions since a key part of dual credit success is building and cultivating relationships that maintain a strong focus on what is best for the students and their families.

2. How have institutions addressed these challenges?

We have addressed the challenges by trying to reach ISD partners by telephone, email, and Zoom conferences. We have also worked to re-establish strong relationships with community colleges in our region as well as beyond the East Texas region. Designing and communicating clear pathways to degree completion has been a major focus for our dual credit programs.

3. What changes, if any, are needed to ensure that students have opportunities to earn college credit which fulfills the criteria outlined above?

In an environment where many high school and college courses are taken remotely, there is an increased need to monitor quality and rigor, as well as to proctor performance. We need an increased emphasis on course design and delivery that is outcome-focused so that rigor is maintained, outside work is accomplished, and group skills and tasks are enhanced. This means course design, delivery, and engagement are intentional.

We may also need a way to structure the cost of dual credit courses, so that universities and community colleges are priced comparably in sub-regions of the state.

- SB 18, which relates to the protection of expressive activities at public institutions of higher education. Monitor the process by which institutions of higher education implement policies to protect the expressive rights of persons guaranteed by the constitutions of the United States and of this state.

1. What have institutions done to protect the expressive rights of persons while also maintaining an orderly and safe learning environment?

Due to the COVID-19 situation, students were provided training via email. Dr. Adam Peck, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, has emailed a notice concerning SB 18 (a bill designed to ensure expressive activities on college campuses) to all students. This notice included attached revisions of the policies on (a) Assemblies and Demonstrations (b) Petitions and Handbills (c) Signs and Exhibits, and (d) Use of Amplified Sound.

By December 1, 2020, the university shall prepare and post the implementation of SB 18 on the university website and send it to the governor and legislature as a part of the requirement.

No later than August 1, 2020, a policy shall be adopted pursuant to 51.9315(f) (Protected Expression on Campus).

- SB 25, which relates to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in public higher education. Monitor the process by which the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts rules via negotiated rulemaking. Monitor the progress of institutions developing recommended course sequences and the progress of the feasibility study to implement statewide meta majors.

1. In what ways can data collection and sharing between THECB and TEA improve and assist institutions with college credit transferability?

Data collection and sharing between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) can improve and assist institutions with college credit transferability in the following ways:

- *Dual credit – enhance the applicability of dual credit courses taken while in high school that can apply to bachelor degree plans. Analyze data to identify dual credit courses that tend to not get used toward bachelor's degree.*
- *Dual credit – data analysis on high school graduates that entered higher education with dual credit coursework to determine time to degree completion and major pathways.*
- *Dual Credit – data analysis on transferability and applicability of workforce courses versus academic core courses.*
- *Early College High School (ECHS) and Dual Credit – investigate full usage of associate degrees earned while in high school and fully applying to completed bachelor's degrees.*

The statewide implementation of the Texas Common Course Numbering System will assist college credit transferability. The Field of Study Curricula developed and approved by THECB also assists transfer students across the state.

2. What role can school counselors and advisors play in the success of transferable credits? Are there ways in which the state can utilize their expertise and student relationships more effectively?

Together High school counselors and college advisors can play a significant role in the success of transferability of college credits. High school counselors are aware of challenges, motivators, and subjective factors that impact a student's success with dual credit courses. Higher education academic advisors are aware of degree requirements, student frustrations and academic challenges/practices/policies that impact the use of dual credit courses. A dual credit advisory board made up of school counselors and academic advisors could develop best practices that lead to student success rather than just the accumulation of college credits.

School counselors and advisors can play a very significant role in the success of transferable credits. Since we have new requirements statewide on advising of dual credit students, our advisors could include the school counselors in their advising sessions, thereby training the counselors in real time while also enhancing their ability to deal with local issues that arise with specific students (the strength of having a strong relationship with individual students at the local level).