
Higher Education Committee

HB 2783

Brief Description: Regarding transfer and articulation between institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Wallace, Chase, Anderson, Sells, Haigh, Roberts, Hasegawa, Morrell, Sullivan, Kenney and Hudgins.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to convene workgroups to:
 - create and implement a transfer student bill of rights;
 - develop a system of common course numbering for the baccalaureate institutions;
 - develop a system of identification for college courses that transfer;
 - monitor and report on the progress and success of transfer students; and
 - conduct an analysis of the development options and costs for a statewide web-based advising system.

- Requires the public two and four-year institutions to:
 - Publish a list of all courses that will be accepted in transfer from non-regionally accredited institutions.

Hearing Date: 1/21/08

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

Direct Transfer Agreement: The HECB is responsible for establishing a statewide transfer of credit policy and agreement, in cooperation with the public institutions of higher education and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). Together, these entities have created the Direct Transfer Agreement, or DTA. Any student who completes an approved DTA associate degree at a community college is considered to have satisfied the lower division general education requirements at a public four-year institution. These students are generally admitted as juniors when they transfer.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Course Equivalency: Outside of DTA associate degrees, each four-year institution determines how courses earned at another college or university meet general education requirements and apply toward requirements for a major, or count toward a baccalaureate degree. At some institutions this determination is made by faculty within each college or department. To assist students, each institution has created guides to illustrate course equivalency: which courses from which institutions are considered equivalent to which courses at the receiving institution. However, there is no statewide system of course equivalency in Washington.

Most students complete a DTA associate degree before they transfer, but about 30 percent transfer before completing a degree. For these students, unless the community college has a special articulation agreement, each four-year institution makes a separate determination regarding whether the students' courses meet its general education requirements.

Transfer Associate Degrees: In the late 1990s, analysis of students' credit accumulation and graduation patterns revealed that transfer students in science, math, and other highly structured majors did not graduate as efficiently as non-transfer students. When they arrived at a four-year institution, these students needed to take additional lower division course requirements to qualify for their major.

To address this problem, the (COP), the HECB, and the SBCTC convened a work group to develop a statewide Associate of Science Transfer Degree (AS-T), which was adopted in 2000. Under the AS-T, students take more math and science prerequisites while at the community college, with the objective of transferring directly into a major once they reach a four-year institution.

More recently, the HECB asked that the Joint Access Oversight Group (JAOG) develop Major Related Programs (MRPs). An MRP is based on the DTA or AS-T but specifies the prerequisite coursework that will provide the best preparation for entry into certain competitive majors. In 2005, the workgroups completed four MRPs: nursing, elementary education, pre-engineering, and engineering technology. In 2007, the group completed additional programs in secondary education, earth and space science, and construction management.

Regional and National Accreditation: There are many legitimate agencies that accredit schools across the United States and they can be broadly grouped into two categories: regional and national. Regional accreditors cover a section of the United States, for instance the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) covers a seven state region including Alaska, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, and Nevada. All public two and four-year institutions in Washington are regionally accredited by NWCCU. National accreditors cover schools across the United States and sometimes abroad. They started as associated schools with a common, relatively narrow theme and thus, nationally accredited schools have traditionally been for-profit trade schools and colleges of technology.

The main issue for students regarding accreditation is the transferability of credit. While nationally accredited institutions will usually accept transfer credits from regional institutions, regional institutions will not typically accept transfer credits from national institutions. This means that if a student earns an associate degree from a nationally accredited school, they may have to start over if they transfer to a regionally accredited school.

Web-based Advising and Academic Planning Systems: The HECB must design a statewide system of course equivalency as well as a strategy to communicate course equivalency to students, faculty, and staff. In 2004, the HECB convened a workgroup that jointly established a strategy to create a single website through which students could determine equivalent courses for any public two or four-year institution in the state. Roughly 30 other states have some level of web-based advising in place. In its most robust form, web-based advising sites help student audit progress toward a degree, explore program requirements for different majors at different schools, "chat" online with transfer advisors and apply for admission to institutions.

Summary of Bill:

The bill has several separate but related provisions.

Transfer Student Bill of Rights

The HECB must convene a workgroup to develop a list of rights guaranteed to students who have earned a transfer associate degree under the direct transfer agreement. The list must be easily accessible on each institution's website as well as in admissions, transfer, and recruiting offices. The list must include institutional policy regarding admission to an institution, the number of credits that will generally transfer, the academic requirements fulfilled by the transfer degree, the acceptance of credit earned in dual enrollment and accelerated programs, and the acceptance of credits from non-regionally accredited institutions. The list must also include advance knowledge of selection criteria for limited access programs.

Common Course Numbering

The HECB must convene a workgroup to develop a common set of course numbers for lower division courses that are generally accepted in transfer between two and four-year institutions and between four-year institutions. The system developed by the baccalaureate institutions should match common course numbers used in the community and technical college system, to the extent possible.

The HECB will collaborate with the work group and submit a progress report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 2009.

Flags for Transferable Courses

The HECB must convene a workgroup to develop a system of identification for generally transferrable courses. The identifier must clearly distinguish courses that transfer from two-year institutions to four-year institutions, regardless of whether the student has completed a transfer associate degree. These courses would typically be in subject areas like English Literature, Earth Science, Political Science, Mathematics, etc. The system of identification may also include a separate identifier for courses that transfer but aren't offered at a wide array of institutions.

Institutions must include the system of identification in course catalogs, in hard copy form and on the Web.

Monitor Progress and Success

The HECB must convene a workgroup to develop a plan to monitor the progress and success of transfer students over time. The plan must contain several indicators, listed below. The plan

must also include analysis recommendations regarding the barriers that transfer students face in attaining their degrees and recommendations to address those barriers.

- number of students who transfer within three years of enrollment;
- three-year educational outcomes for students who earn 15 college-level credits;
- percentage of students who earn a baccalaureate degree within three years of earning an associate degree;
- average time and number of credits to complete a transfer associate degree; and
- average GPA for students who earn a transfer associate degree, displayed by the student's intended transfer destination.

The HECB must collaborate with the workgroup and the SBCTC and report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by January 2009 and every two years thereafter.

Web-based Advising Development Group

The HECB must convene a workgroup to develop a detailed plan for developing and implementing a statewide web-based academic planning tool. The plan must include recommendations regarding the functions that should be included in the web site, options for development, i.e. the report should answer the "build it v. buy it" question, and costs associated with development options.

The HECB must report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 15, 2008.

List of Non-regionally Accredited Courses Accepted in Transfer

Public two and four-year institutions must publish a list of all courses that will be accepted in transfer from non-regionally accredited institutions. Non-regionally accredited institution is limited to those that are fully accredited by a national accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education.

The list must not only include the courses that will be accepted in transfer, but also a designation of the following conditions of transfer:

- whether the course transfers into an academic program and, if so, whether it needs to be taken as part of a transfer associate degree;
- whether the course transfers into a workforce program; and
- whether the course transfers into a bachelor's of applied science program.

If institutions do not accept credits from non-regionally accredited institutions, the college or university must explicitly state the policy in a way that students and their families can easily access.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2008.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.