

Exempting certain semester credit hours from excess undergraduate credit-hour cap

SB 1343 by Hinojosa (Gonzales)

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DIGEST: SB 1343 would have exempted credit-hours earned toward an associate degree or in dual-credit courses from the excess undergraduate credit-hour cap that subjects institutions to limits on state funding.

GOVERNOR'S REASON FOR VETO:

“Currently, higher education institutions may not receive formula funds for excess credit hours taken by students beyond the established cap, and they may charge students higher tuition rates for those hours. The cap is 30 hours above those required for the degree.

“Senate Bill No. 1343 would exclude all dual-credit courses and all credit hours earned by students prior to receiving an associate degree from counting toward the excess credit hour cap, and would increase the cap to 90 or more hours above those required for a degree.

“I have signed House Bill No. 101, which passed this session, because I agree with its provisions to exclude dual-credit courses from the excess credit hour cap.

“A provision in Senate Bill No. 1343 that would exclude all community college hours from the cap would not effectively address the real problem that many transfer students face: the fact that some credits do not count toward their baccalaureate degrees. This wastes students’ time and money, and taxpayer dollars.

“The best solution is to improve articulation agreements and student advising so that students are able to transfer more hours to count toward their degrees. Instead, House Bill No. 1343 increases the cap to 90 or more hours above those required for a degree, removing important incentives for students and community colleges to focus on degree completion. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is currently studying this issue, and I encourage the board members to continue looking for ways to ensure that more hours transfer. I am confident that they will find solutions that will benefit students and institutions.”

RESPONSE: **Sen. Juan Hinojosa**, the bill’s author, said: “The Governor’s veto of SB 1343 will be felt in the lives of Texans with associate degrees seeking to enrich their lives and capacity to the Texas economy who must continue to struggle with transferability of their course work.

“Texas law currently caps elective credits that may be taken at in-state tuition rates at 30 — the so-called ‘30-hour rule.’ The rule is designed to keep students from taking elective courses rather than degree requirements to finish college.

“Texans who have earned a baccalaureate degree and are pursuing a second baccalaureate degree are exempt from the 30-hour rule. Texas encourages the pursuit of academic degrees. However, the exemption does not apply to Texans with associate degrees pursuing baccalaureate degrees. SB 1343 would have changed that, helping Texans pursue their academic goals.

“In reading the governor’s veto statement, the governor’s reading of the bill is inaccurate. Governor Perry claims that SB 1343 would have exempted all community college hours from the cap. That claim is wholly inconsistent with the plain language of SB 1343. SB 1343 would have applied only to Texans with associate degrees in hand who were pursuing baccalaureate degrees. SB 1343 precisely addressed the transferability of credit hours completed as part of associate degree programs.

“The governor cites his own alternative for fixing this inconsistency in the law after the session has ended. It should be noted that the Senate and the House of Representatives approved SB 1343 overwhelmingly.”

Rep. Veronica Gonzales, the House sponsor, said: “I am disappointed that SB 1343 was vetoed because it would have eliminated a disincentive for certain individuals to pursue a higher education.

“The State currently exempts all hours earned before receiving a baccalaureate degree from the ‘30-hour rule’ so as not to penalize a student who decides to continue his/her education by seeking a second baccalaureate degree. However, this exemption does not exist for those who have earned an associate degree from a community college and decide to pursue a more advanced baccalaureate degree. There is no policy reason for this discrepancy in law and SB 1343 would have evened the playing field.

“The Governor’s veto statement asserts that SB 1343 ‘would exclude all community college hours from the cap’ and ‘would not effectively address the real problem that many transfer students face.’ I believe this statement is false and misleading. This bill sought to eliminate the disincentive that exists specifically for transfer students who have acquired an associate degree and decide to further advance their education; it does not apply to every community college student that transfers to a university. Furthermore, the only hours that SB 1343 would have excluded are those hours earned towards an associate degree, not all hours taken at a community college.

“While, as the Governor noted, another possible solution may be to increase the number of hours that may be transferred from an associate degree to a baccalaureate degree, this may result in compromising the integrity of many baccalaureate programs.

“SB 1343 was agreed to by both community colleges and universities while resulting in no significant fiscal implication to the State and it received overwhelming support in the House and Senate. With all of these points in mind, I fully intend to continue to work with Senator Hinojosa on legislation to address this issue.”

NOTES:

SB 1343 passed the House on the Local, Consent, and Resolutions Calendar and was not analyzed in a *Daily Floor Report*.