

**SUBJECT:** College courses via computer networks

**COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna  
0 nays  
1 absent — Rodriguez

**WITNESSES:** For — None  
Against — None  
On — Don Brown, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

**BACKGROUND :** Under the Education Code public technical institutes, community colleges, colleges or universities cannot offer off-campus courses without specific prior approval of the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 1404 would allow public institutions of higher education to offer courses via computer or computer network to students residing anywhere in the state. The courses offered by distance learning would have to be approved by the coordinating board and be within the approved curriculum of the institution.  
  
The bill also would require the coordinating board to encourage collaborative efforts to improve computer access to educational opportunities throughout the state and facilitate delivery of courses by distance learning.  
  
CSHB 1404 would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership in each house.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** CSHB 1404 would provide an important next step to ongoing efforts to expand the educational opportunities of all students in Texas. Distance learning, currently delivered mainly through television and audio

transmissions, has proven to be a vital tool in bringing new subjects and information to classrooms in rural and isolated communities. CSHB 1404 would augment the toolkit of emerging information technologies by encouraging state institutions of higher education to use computer networks to reach an even greater number of students.

Distance learning is an economical, practical and effective means of providing learning opportunities. Providing greater flexibility in the distance learning program would allow more students to participate in courses of higher education and benefit both them and the state.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

While enhancing the flexibility of higher education institutions to use distance learning may be laudable, these institutions should be required to carefully monitor students taking courses using a computer or computer network and report their progress to the coordinating board so it can better evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning.