

SUBJECT: Allowing Texas A&M-Texarkana to offer lower-division courses

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Morrison, Chavez, Giddings, J. Jones, Smithee
0 nays
3 absent — F. Brown, Mercer, Nixon

WITNESSES: For — James Carlow, Bowie County Northeast Texas Committee for Higher Education; Shirley Finn
Against — Jack Smith, Texarkana Community College; Edward Miller; Cecil Phillips

BACKGROUND: Texas A&M University-Texarkana (TAMU-Texarkana, formerly East Texas State University-Texarkana), established in 1971 as an upper-level university, serves junior, senior, and graduate students. Texarkana College is a two-year community college.

The 77th Legislature in 2001 enacted HB 2840 by Telford, allowing TAMU-Texarkana to enter into a partnership agreement to allow students enrolled at Texarkana College to be enrolled simultaneously at the university, as long as they meet the university's enrollment requirements.

DIGEST: HB 1566 would authorize TAMU-Texarkana to offer lower-division courses. The university would not have to offer these courses in any academic year in which the Legislature did not appropriate funds specifically for that purpose. The bill would repeal the authorization for TAMU-Texarkana to enter into a partnership agreement with Texarkana College.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1566 would expand educational and economic opportunities in the Texarkana region by allowing TAMU-Texarkana to offer four-year programs in engineering and other subjects. While no state funds have been requested to

finance this expansion, the bill would lay the groundwork for private fundraising and future expansion by providing clear backing from the Legislature.

The bill would lay a foundation for creating economic opportunities in a part of the state that sorely needs an influx of intellectual and economic resources. The average income in the Texarkana region is significantly lower than in the rest of Texas, and students seeking educational and economic opportunities must leave the region. HB 1566 would help to expand opportunities for these students in the Texarkana region and neighboring areas.

Even though TAMU-Texarkana now offers upper-level courses in a facility on the Texarkana campus, lower-level courses likely would be taught in a new facility at another site. Faculty members teaching lower-level courses at this new site would not be teaching alongside community college faculty.

Allowing TAMU-Texarkana to offer lower-level courses would not create duplication between the university and Texarkana College. Universities and community colleges serve different student populations with different academic needs. Because fees for courses at TAMU-Texarkana are significantly higher, students choosing between comparable courses would be likely to select Texarkana rather than TAMU, creating a further disincentive for TAMU-Texarkana to duplicate course offerings.

HB 1566 would abolish provisions regarding partnerships between the institutions that were enacted to facilitate a particular partnership arrangement between the institutions that ultimately did not work out. Because the partnership arrangement specified in the law can create accounting problems for the institutions and the state, it would be prudent to repeal the statute that authorized that arrangement. Nothing in the law would prohibit other kinds of partnerships between the two institutions.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1566 would result in waste and duplication as TAMU-Texarkana and Texarkana College competed for a limited pool of students. The bill would not request a state appropriation for funds to cover the cost of expanding courses at TAMU-Texarkana, but it could lead to future competition between the university and the community college for state funds. The limited number of students who want to spend their college years in the Texarkana region are

served well by Texarkana College. Insufficient demand exists for TAMU-Texarkana to teach the same lower-division courses that the college offers.

Even though some discussion has occurred about TAMU-Texarkana moving to another site, the bill would not ensure that lower-division courses would not be taught in the university's current location on the Texarkana College campus. This would put the university in direct competition for students with the community college and would create morale problems among community college instructors, some of whom might be teaching the same courses for lower salaries.

By repealing the provision enacted last session to allow the two institutions to enter into a partnership, the bill would signal that TAMU-Texarkana is not interested in working with Texarkana College to avoid duplication and provide seamless educational opportunities for students.