

- SUBJECT:** Establishing statewide transfer compacts in higher education
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Branch, Castro, Alonzo, Bonnen, Brown, D. Howard, Johnson, Lewis, Patrick
- 0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Ted Melina Rabb, Texas American Federation of Teachers)
- Against — None
- On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Macgregor Stephenson, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- DIGEST:** CSHB 3025 would establish a statewide transfer compact to facilitate student transfers and timely graduation. The bill would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, in collaboration with higher education institutions, to develop transfer compacts that identified learning objectives for coursework in major degree fields — acceptable across institutions offering coursework or degrees in those fields — in an effort to facilitate universal articulation of specific courses completed at public junior colleges, public state colleges, public technical institutes, general academic teaching institutions, and qualified degree-granting institutions or colleges, and transferred to general academic teaching institutions.
- A higher education institution or qualified degree-granting career school or college that had adopted core curriculum and identified course number equivalency would be required to comply with any applicable compact entered into by the institution, school, or college and the coordinating board.
- A general academic teaching institution designated as a research institution that elected not to participate in an applicable transfer compact would be required to publish a detailed description developed by the institution's faculty of the learning objectives, content, and prior

knowledge requirements for at least 12 courses for which credit was frequently transferred to the institutions and establish honors articulation agreements with at least two public junior colleges designed to strengthen the lower-division course offerings of those public junior colleges and to improve the persistence and success rates of students who transferred to the institution from public junior colleges.

Semester credit hours required. The bill would stipulate that to earn a baccalaureate degree, a student could not be required by a general academic teaching institution to complete more than the minimum number of semester credit hours required for the degree as determined by the institution's board-recognized accrediting agency unless academic accreditation or professional licensure requirements required the completion of additional hours for the baccalaureate degree.

The bill also would stipulate that to earn an associate degree, a student could not be required by a higher education institution to complete more than the minimum number of semester credit hours required for the degree as determined by the institution's board-recognized accrediting agency unless academic accreditation or professional licensure requirements required the completion of additional semester credit hours for the degree. This would not apply to a student enrolled before the 2013 fall semester.

The coordinating board would be authorized to review one or more of an institution's associate degree programs to ensure compliance.

When submitting to the coordinating board the comprehensive list of courses to be offered the following academic year, each institution governing board would have to specifically identify any course included in the common course numbering system that had been added or removed from the institution's list for the current academic year. When updating the course list as required by current law, the governing board would have to include any changes related to offering a course included in the common course system.

Each governing board, when submitting its annual required list of courses, would be required to certify that the institution did not prohibit the acceptance of transfer credit based solely on the accreditation of the sending institution or include any language that suggested so in any material it published.

The bill would require administrators to be added to the advisory committees that develop a recommended core curriculum. The coordinating board, with the assistance of the advisory committees, would be required to develop a course-specific core curriculum for each broad academic discipline within the general core curriculum and identify those degree programs offered at institutions to which the course-specific core curriculum, if successfully completed by a student at another institution, was fully transferable.

A student who transferred would receive academic credit from the receiving institution for each course the student had successfully completed that served as an equivalent course under the common course numbering system.

Degree plans required. CSHB 3025 would require each student enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program to file a degree plan with the institution no later than the semester or term immediately following the semester or term in which the student earned a cumulative total of 30 or more semester credit hours for successfully completed course work, including transfer courses, international baccalaureate courses, dual credit courses, and any other course for which the student could be awarded college credit, including by exam. The degree plan would be a statement of the course or study requirements that an undergraduate student at a general academic teaching institution had to complete in order to graduate.

A student would be prohibited from registering for any courses at an institution unless the student had filed a degree plan required by the bill. Further, the student could not change the student's degree plan or enroll in a course that was not included in the degree plan unless the student consulted with an academic advisor and satisfied any applicable prerequisite or other requirement imposed by the institution regarding the plan change or course enrollment.

A student who began the first semester or term at an institution with 30 or more semester credit hours of course credit would have to file a degree plan with the institution during the student's first semester at the institution. The coordinating board, in consultation with higher education institutions, would be authorized to adopt necessary rules for the administration of provisions relating to filing degree plans.

The provision relating to the number of semester credit hours a student was required to take to earn a baccalaureate degree would apply beginning with the 2013 fall semester. The changes made by the bill regarding the comprehensive list of courses would apply to lists submitted for the 2012-2013 academic year. By May 31, 2013, the coordinating board would have to develop core curricula for broad academic disciplines included within the general core curriculum. Provisions relating to transfer students receiving credit for equivalent courses under the common course numbering system and the requirement for a degree plan to be filed would take effect with the 2011 fall semester.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2011.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 3025 would improve student transfer pathways and maximize student mobility by creating transfer compacts. Transfer compacts would ensure the transfer of courses and credits when a student was admitted to a university. Strengthening transfer pathways among all sectors of higher education is crucial to producing the number of degrees and certificates necessary to meet the state's *Closing the Gaps* goals. Texas must invest in creating a seamless transfer pathway that improves time-to-degree and simplifies the process for students who want to continue their education beyond a certificate or associate degree.

Community colleges currently enter into articulation agreements with four-year universities to provide a smooth transition. However, these agreements generally are on an institution-by-institution basis, resulting in hundreds of separate agreements.

The bill would direct the coordinating board to develop transfer compacts that identify learning outcomes for major degree fields for universities, community colleges, and degree-granting career schools. Consistent learning outcomes across all sectors of higher education would ease transferability of courses and improve transparency and predictability for students.

Since a growing number of students, especially non-traditional and minority students, are choosing to begin their education in the career school sector, it is important to include these schools in the compacts to

establish a clear pathway if the students decided to pursue a degree at a state university after they started their education at a career school.

Texas needs to ensure that students are retained and supported through degree attainment once they arrive on campus. Research has shown that students are more likely to succeed if they are properly guided with early and consistent advising and a clear degree plan to follow.

Transfer compacts would not affect admission policies because each college and university would be able to maintain their admission policies at the respective institution as they deemed appropriate.

Concerns about integrating career school coursework into transferable work are unfounded. Qualified career colleges intended to be included in the transfer agreements embrace not only the common course numbering system as set forth in the Academic Guide Manual but also the prescribed assumptions and defining characteristics applicable to higher education institutions.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The required face-to-face advising required by the bill could adversely affect the registration process. It could create a registration log-jam as institutions attempted to get hundreds or thousands of students registered each semester. For every student who decided to take a course that was not on his or her degree plan, or decided to change the degree plan, institutions would have to stop the registration process for those students until they could be personally advised.

The move to integrate career school coursework into transferable work could be problematic. There are a few courses that could transfer, but adopting a policy to allow more integration into the system of these courses, when there would be little way to ensure the learning outcomes and objectives of those career courses matched up with those of community colleges and general academic teaching institutions, may not produce the intended results.