

- SUBJECT:** Changing requirements for a reverse transfer associate’s degree
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Branch, Patrick, Alonzo, Clardy, Darby, Howard, Murphy, Raney
0 nays
1 absent — Martinez
- WITNESSES:** For — Wanda Garza, South Texas College; Mark Milliron, Western Governors University; Richard Rhodes, Austin Community College; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Dr. Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Leslie Helmcamp, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Gretchen Schmidt, Jobs for the Future)

Against — None

On — John Fitzpatrick, Educate Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Macgregor Stephenson, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 61.833, requires a four-year institution of higher education, such as a university, to forward the transcript of a student who transferred from a community college (or other lower-division institution) to the community college to see if the student is eligible for an associate’s degree.

A university sends the transcript with the student's permission once the student has earned a cumulative total of 90 credit hours, 30 of which were earned at the community college. If the student is eligible for an associate’s degree, the credits are “reverse transferred” from the university to the community college and the associate’s degree awarded by the community college.
- DIGEST:** HB 774 would decrease from 90 to 66 the required cumulative number of credit hours a student must have completed before the university forwarded the student's transcript to the student's community college.

This 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, 2013.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

HB 774 would increase the number of associate's degrees awarded in Texas. Since not all transfer students complete a bachelor's degree, it is vital that those who have met the requirements of an associate's degree be awarded that credential to make them more competitive in the job market.

While current law requires universities to forward a transfer student's transcript to the student's community college once the student has earned 90 credits, this is an unnecessary delay. Most associate's degrees in Texas require 60 credit hours. Lowering the requirement from 90 to 66 would mean the transcript was forwarded shortly after the student likely had earned enough credit to qualify for an associate's degree.

The current requirement of 90 hours is too high. A transfer student might not ever reach 90 hours and never request a transcript be sent to the original community college, not knowing that he or she qualified for an associate's degree.

By increasing the number of associate's degrees awarded in Texas, HB 774 would increase the number of students eligible for TEXAS (Toward Excellence, Access, and Success) Grants, the state's foremost financial aid program. A student with an associate's degree from a Texas community college also is eligible to receive a TEXAS grant if the student enrolls at a Texas public university within 12 months of receiving an associate's degree. Transfer students who are awarded an associate's degree are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree, according to some sociological studies.

HB 774 would help Texas meet its *Closing the Gaps* target of 55,000 associate's degrees awarded in 2015. Increasing the number of associate's degrees awarded also would help community colleges increase their number of academic completions — a critical institutional measure. According Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, roughly half of students who earn a bachelor's degree after transferring to a university from a community college fail to receive an associate's degree. While these students clearly should be counted as successes for the institutions they attended, they count as failures toward the community college's graduation rates.

HB 774 would not significantly increase the reporting requirements of universities. Current law already requires universities to send a transfer student's transcript to the student's community college when certain conditions are met. HB 774 only would require universities to forward a student's transcript an earlier stage of a student's academic career. The increase in associate's degrees benefits both individual students and the state economy enough to outweigh any possible burden.

HB 774 would not mandate how universities and community colleges should share student transcripts because it is better to let these institutions work out the most efficient system on their own.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The number of credit hours required before a university sends a transfer student's transcript to their community college should not be lowered from 90 to 66, as HB 774 would do, because a student has a better chance of actually having completed an associate's degree with 90 credit hours than with 66 credit hours. To earn an associate's degree, a student must have completed the core requirements of the degree, and 66 hours may include remedial classes or other credits that do not qualify as part of a degree program. This often happens if students do not take their classes in the correct sequence for whatever reason.

HB 774 would push another unfunded mandate from the state onto institutions of higher learning. By lowering the trigger to 66 hours from 90 hours, universities would have to send more transcripts to community colleges. While this might not be a large increase in a university's work load, HB 774 would impose another state required action that universities had to perform outside of their core function of teaching and research.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

Rather than having a student's transcript sent to a community college sooner, as HB 774 would do, it would be better to require universities to send the transcript more often. This would increase the likelihood that the student's earned associate's degree was detected and awarded by the student's community college. Current law does not require the transcript to be sent more than once.

HB 774 should require that transcript data be shared electronically and on a semester basis. A semester-based electronic format would be efficient and increase accuracy because eligibility could be easily detected by computer program. Currently, higher education institutions share

transcript information in different ways and on different schedules. Some send it only once. Others send every eligible student's data every semester starting at 60 credit hours. Some universities send the data in paper form, others electronically.

The bill also should require a community college to notify a university when a transfer student had been awarded an associate's degree so the university no longer would continue to send the student's transcript data. This would save the university some effort and prevent needless sharing of a student's academic record.

NOTES:

The Senate companion bill, SB 498 by Seliger, was unanimously passed by the Senate on March 21.