

SUBJECT: Awarding college credit for Advanced Placement exams; requiring a study

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Zerwas, Howard, Alonzo, Crownover, Martinez, Morrison,
Raney, C. Turner

0 nays

1 absent — Clardy

WITNESSES: For — Jason Langdon, College Board; Coila Morrow; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of School Boards; Courtney Boswell, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Susan Everett; Linda Webb)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 51.968 outlines the procedure for public institutions of higher education to award college credit for postsecondary-level programs, including the Advanced Placement (AP) exam.

Each public institution is required to establish policies for awarding college credit to incoming freshmen based on their AP exam performance.

DIGEST: CSHB 1992 would require all public institutions of higher education to award college credit for lower-division courses if a student earned a score of 3 or higher on the corresponding Advanced Placement (AP) exam, unless the institution's chief academic officer determined, based on evidence, that a higher score was needed to indicate the student's sufficient preparation for related, more advanced courses for which the lower-division course was a prerequisite. This credit policy would apply to freshmen entering the state's public institutions beginning with the fall 2016 semester.

The bill also would require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to conduct a study comparing the academic performance, retention rates, and graduation rates of students who took lower-division courses with those of students who earned a 3 or higher on the AP exam and received credit for the course. Each of the state's higher education institutions would have to submit to the board any data requested for the study. The board would be required to adopt rules necessary to implement the study in a manner compliant with federal law on confidentiality of student educational information.

A report on the study containing recommendations for legislative or administrative action would be due to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the House, and the higher education committee in each chamber by January 1, 2017. The section requiring the study would expire September 1, 2017.

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, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1992 would increase access to college credit by requiring public higher education institutions to accept scores of 3 or higher on AP exams, allowing more students to earn a college degree more quickly and save on tuition costs. Students who earn college credit while still in high school would have to take fewer courses in college, which would save tuition money for families and financial aid costs for the state. More students would enter the workforce faster and better trained because they could bypass introductory courses and take more advanced coursework. The result would be better educated, higher earning taxpayers graduating at a faster rate.

Many institutions in Texas already award credit for scores of at least 3 on the AP exam, which is considered "qualified" on the AP exam's five-point scale. By making the policy uniform across the state, this bill would allow more students to leverage their hard work in high school into academic and economic rewards at the college level, which is a priority of the

governor's this legislative session.

CSHB 1992 would provide an excellent opportunity for higher education and K-12 education systems to collaborate and coordinate more effectively. Studies have shown that cohorts of students who achieved a 3 on their AP exams and placed out of courses perform just as well academically as cohorts who took the courses instead. The bill would incentivize more students to do well in high school AP courses and achieve a credit-earning AP exam score. Many colleges accept a "pass" in dual-credit courses for college credit. A score of 3 on the AP exam, which is considered a passing score, also should be accepted for credit. Furthermore, the bill would honor the hard work of AP teachers, who are tasked with preparing students not only for passing the AP exam but for completing college-level work in high school.

The bill also would remove barriers to disadvantaged students. Inconsistent score requirements can cause confusion for students navigating their college options. Although many schools will grant credit for lower AP scores earned by students who advocate for themselves, first-generation students or those without that knowledge are unlikely to do so. While Texas school districts often pay many low-income students' AP exam fees, that investment is lost if the student earns less than what is required at a certain college or university.

While increasing the uniformity of AP credit policies, CSHB 1992 also would allow universities to provide compelling reasons why certain lower-division courses should require higher AP scores for credit. This exception would help institutions maintain academic rigor and properly prepare their students for higher-level coursework. In addition, requiring schools to provide evidence to demonstrate why the scores need to be higher would develop more sound policies and could identify potential gaps between AP courses and college-level courses.

The bill's requirement for conducting a study on academic performance across institutions would yield essential information about accepting AP scores for college credit across academic disciplines. No such study in

Texas has been done, and it would be valuable in identifying how scores correspond to levels of academic mastery across different courses.

Concerns about the costs and administrative burden of data tracking are exaggerated. The College Board, which administers the AP exams, typically waives its fees to access the kind of score data that the coordinating board might request under CSHB 1992.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

CSHB 1992 would hurt students and academic rigor by requiring universities to accept a score of at least 3 on the AP exam for credit. Some schools have found that students who achieve a 3 in certain subject areas are not prepared for the corresponding college-level course, much less subsequent courses. Professors would have to “dumb down” their courses to accommodate students who took higher-level classes after skipping necessary prerequisites by virtue of meeting lower AP score requirements.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

The January 1, 2017 report date for the study required by the bill would not provide enough time in which to gather information and draw meaningful conclusions about the academic performance and outcomes of the student groups in question, particularly if state leaders seek data on the effects of introducing a uniform AP college credit policy beginning with the entering freshman class in fall 2016.

The bill would require multiple parties to track and share data they do not currently track, which would create an administrative burden and added costs. The College Board already seems to track and analyze all these data.

NOTES:

Unlike HB 1992 as introduced, CSHB 1992 would require institutions generally to accept a score of 3 only for college-level credit in lower-division courses, and only if a chief academic officer determined that a higher score was not necessary to indicate sufficient preparation for more advanced courses. HB 1992 as introduced would not have required the study in the committee substitute and would have taken effect September 1, 2015.