

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Committee on Academic and Workforce Success

### AGENDA ITEM V-Q (2)

Consideration of adopting the Commissioner's recommendation to the Committee relating to amendments to Chapter 9, Program Development in Two-Year Public Colleges, Subchapter J, Academic Associate Degree and Certificate Programs, Sections 9.182, 9.183, and 9.184 of Board rules, concerning the number of semester credit hours required to earn an associate's degree at public institutions of higher education (S.B. 497, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session)

RECOMMENDATION:           Approval

#### Background Information:

The intent of the amendment is to incorporate into existing rules a provision that requires public institutions of higher education to limit the number of semester credit hours required for students to complete in order to be awarded an academic associate's degree to the minimum number of semester credit hours required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, unless the institution determines there is a compelling academic reason for requiring additional semester credit hours in order to award the degree.

Reference to Texas Education Code 61.051(e)(f) was eliminated from Section 9.182 in defining where in statute the Board is given authority to adopt policies, enact regulations, and establish rules for the coordination of postsecondary career technical/workforce certificate and associate degree programs eligible for state appropriations. Language has been added to Section 9.183 that requires an institution of higher education to provide written documentation describing the compelling academic reason, such as programmatic accreditation requirements, statutory requirements, or licensure/certification for a proposed academic associate's degree program that exceeds 60 semester credit hours. Language requiring the Coordinating Board to review the documentation submitted by the public institutions of higher education on academic associate degree programs exceeding the 60-hour limit for determination of approval or denial has also been included. Language has been added to Section 9.184 that requires an institution proposing a new academic degree program to notify institutions within a 50 mile radius of the proposed teaching site of their intention to offer the program 30 days prior to submitting their request to the Coordinating Board. Language was also added stating that the proposing institution may request the assistance of the Assistant Commissioner of Workforce, Academic Affairs, and Research to mediate objections and determine whether the proposing institution may implement the proposed program in cases where an objections cannot be resolved. The amended rules will affect entering students enrolling in public or institutions of higher education on or after the 2015 fall semester.

Date approved by the Commissioner for Publication in the *Texas Register*: October 18, 2013

Date published in the *Texas Register*: November 1, 2013

The 30-day comment period with the Texas Register ended on: December 1, 2013

One comment was received.

**Comment:**

A comment was received from Tyler Junior College.

The SACS requirement concerning the number of hours in a degree is: "The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level...." My comment is that the SACS requirement [is] for a minimal number of hours not a maximum. In the technical and professional program areas more time is needed on learning tasks to accomplish required learning outcomes. In addition, more time is needed to practice or encounter sufficient divergent experiences to gain the critical thinking skills required to be successful in the targeted job/career area. I suggest that we do have a reasonable limit when we set the maximum number of semester hours at 72.

The colleges and the THECB expended time and money to identify both "Field of Studies" and "Statewide transfer compacts" the with "specific curriculum" that transfers to senior institutions, to now bring them back to 60 hours does not promote articulation and economy in completing hours at the community college before moving on a four year school.

**Staff Response:**

SB 497 was passed during the 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session and requires that public institutions of higher education limit the number of semester credit hours required to complete an associate degree to the minimum required for the degree by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' official publication, Principles of Accreditation, states that the minimum number of semester credit hours required for the completion of an associate degree is 60. SB 497 states institutions can identify reasons for completing additional semester credit hours if the institution determines there is a compelling academic reason. The Coordinating Board had previously defined a compelling academic reason as programmatic accreditation requirements, statutory requirements, and requirements for licensure/certification. During the October 2013 Board Meeting, the Coordinating Board reworded the description of acceptable justifications for a compelling academic reason to state that they may include, but are not limited to, programmatic accreditation requirements, statutory requirements, and requirements for licensure/certification of graduates.

No changes were made to the rules as a result of this comment.