

Compelling Reasons for Exceeding the 60 SCH Maximum for Two-year Degrees

Undergraduate Education Advisory Committee, 28 February 2014

The Coordinating Board is implementing recent legislation (TAC Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 9, Subchapter J, Rule §9.183) limits the number of semester hours required to complete an academic associates degree to 60. This legislation further stipulates that “If the minimum number of semester hours required to complete a proposed academic associate's degree exceeds 60, the institution must provide detailed written documentation describing the compelling academic reason for the number of required hours, such as programmatic accreditation requirements, statutory requirements, or licensure/certification requirements that cannot be met without exceeding the 60-hour limit.” The Coordinating Board is charged with review and approval of requests to exceed the 60-hour limit.

The subcommittee recognizes the need for institutions to develop degree programs for undergraduate students that are comprehensive, academically rigorous, and efficient; and acknowledges the good intent of the legislation in establishing a maximum number of semester credit hours in Texas’ undergraduate degree programs. However, this rule, when implemented across all disciplines, may produce differential and potentially disadvantageous effects on some programs. This subcommittee was therefore charged to explore and describe the potential impact of the legislation; and to develop a platform for further discussion and possible recommendations by the Council.

The subcommittee recommends that the Coordinating Board consider justifications of documentation of compelling academic reasons for exceeding the 60-hour limit. Suggested justifications include:

- **Licensure Requirements**—The curriculum must satisfy student learning outcomes and/or competencies required for graduates to successfully attain professional licensure. Examples of programs with these requirements include nursing, allied health fields, cosmetology, among others.
- **Accreditation Requirement**—Accreditation of the program is dependent on curricular content and/or related licensure and job placement rates. Examples of programs with these requirements include engineering technology and nursing among others.
- **Local Industry Needs**—Local advisor boards and/or local industry expectations necessitate the inclusion of specialized competencies in workforce programs.
- **Clinical Practice, Internships, In-service Training**—The curriculum requires a practical experience such as clinical practice, an internship or apprenticeship, or in-service training. Examples of programs with these requirements include nursing and dental hygiene.
- **Use of ACGM/WECM Courses**—ACGM or WECM courses required in the curriculum do not total exactly 60 credit hours.
- **College Success Courses**—Inclusion of college success courses causes the curriculum to exceed the 60-hour limit.
- **Other**—Other compelling reasons that are defined by the institution.

The subcommittee recommends the Coordinating Board provide the following support strategies:

- Consider special needs courses to adjust the credit hours listed in the ACGM and WECM and facilitate regional consortia of 2- and 4-year institutions to consider appropriate special needs courses.
- Facilitate information sharing across institutions that offer common fields, disciplines, and programs.
- Facilitate collaborations between 2- and 4-year institutions to redefine articulation and transfer requirements.
- Work with 4-year institutions to automate reverse articulation.
- Coordinate meetings of discipline-specific content specialists to discuss and recommend strategies, recommendations, and joint approvals.
- Provide 2-year institutions information on how to strategically use contact-hour-based funding model.

Finally, the subcommittee requests that the Coordinating Board give special attention for exemptions or phased implementation of the 60-hour limit for the following fields:

- Nursing
- Allied Health
- Engineering and Engineering Technology
- Workforce Programs
- Veterinary Technology