

Department of Legislative Services
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FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 702 (Senator Nathan-Pulliam)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Public Institutions of Higher Education - General Education Programs -
Semester Hour Maximums

This bill requires that the general education program requirement for a baccalaureate program at a public institution of higher education be 40 to 46 semester hours. An institution may also require an additional 3-semester-hour course above the maximum of 46 semester hours in social justice or cultural competency. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) must adopt regulations to carry out the requirements of the bill.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2016.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. Institutions of the University System of Maryland (USM) and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) can comply with the requirements of the bill using existing resources. Morgan State University (MSU) is already in compliance with the bill; thus, its finances are not affected. MHEC can adopt the required regulations using existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Except as discussed below, the standard number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree from a public four-year higher education institution is 120 credit

hours; the standard number of credits for an associate's degree from a public community college is 60 credit hours.

The standard number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree (*i.e.*, 120) does not apply if (1) the degree program is defined as a five-year baccalaureate degree program; (2) professional accreditation requires a higher number of credit hours or requires course work that cannot be completed in 120 credit hours; or (3) certification requirements result in a need for credit hours in excess of 120.

The governing board of a public institution of higher education, in consultation with MHEC, may approve additional exceptions to the credit hour requirements.

Background: Overall, attainment rates are greatly influenced by time – the longer it takes to graduate, the more likely that a student will drop out as finances, work, and family responsibilities compete with classes. The added costs related to the additional time to obtain a degree not only impact the students but the state and institution, as both have invested funds in the education of students. This trend is particularly important as the student mix changes from the traditional first-time college students to nontraditional students who postpone college after graduating from high school, attend part time, and/or have full-time jobs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only a quarter of college students attend a residential campus full time, with most of the bills being paid by their parents. Maryland's graduation and retention rates are high compared to other states, and the State's six-year graduation rate for public four-year institutions of higher education was 63.7% for the 2008 cohort, the most recent actual data available.

State Fiscal Effect: USM did not provide any information regarding the number of credits required for the general education programs at each of its institutions to receive a baccalaureate degree. However, USM indicated that its institutions can follow the requirements of the bill using existing resources.

MSU advises that it requires 40 general education credit hours for graduation.

SMCM advises that 36 credit hours are assigned to its core curriculum. In addition, each SMCM graduate completes a senior capstone experience, which is at least 4 credit hours but is not currently counted as part of the core. If the SMCM capstone experience were considered part of the core, SMCM's core curriculum would be 40 credit hours, in compliance with the bill. Otherwise, SMCM can comply with the bill's requirements using existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 804 (Delegate P. Young, *et al.*) - Appropriations.

Information Source(s): Maryland Higher Education Commission, University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, St. Mary's College of Maryland, U.S. Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510