

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1369 (Delegate Heller)
Appropriations and Ways and Means

**Task Force to Study Standardizing and Accountability of Introductory Courses in
Higher Education in Maryland**

This bill establishes the Task Force to Study Standardizing and Accountability of Introductory Courses in Higher Education in Maryland. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) must provide staff support for the task force. A final report with findings and recommendations is due by September 30, 2012.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2010, and terminates November 1, 2012.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Given the State's fiscal difficulties, agency budgets have been constrained. Thus, the requirement to staff the task force and develop the report may not be absorbable within the existing budgeted resources of MHEC. Instead, general fund expenditures may increase for contractual staff to support the task force and complete the required report as well as for expense reimbursements for task force members.

Local Effect: Community college personnel appointed to the task force could participate without materially affecting community college budgets.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force is charged with:

- studying the teaching standards, testing, and accountability of credited courses that are assigned a 101, 102, 201, or 202 level number or equivalent introductory level

designation in public institutions of higher education and community colleges in the State; and

- making recommendations on the feasibility of standardizing the curriculum of basic freshman and sophomore higher education courses in order to (1) improve the transferability of credits between institutions of higher education and community colleges; (2) evaluate learning outcomes based on specified course conditions; and (3) lower the cost of textbooks.

Task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the standard State travel regulations, as provided in the State budget.

Background: The MHEC web site offers a “Student Guide to Transfer” that provides information about transfers among Maryland institutions and recommendations to ensure that earned credits are not lost as a result of transfers. The guide notes that Maryland’s public colleges and universities follow statewide policies that make transfers among the institutions easier. For example, courses designated as meeting general education requirements at any public institution of higher education in Maryland are likewise applicable to the general education requirements at any other public institution in Maryland. In addition, ARTSYS, an information system developed and maintained by the University System of Maryland, informs students and advisors at community colleges about the transferability of each community college course. ARTSYS is available at community college campuses and on the Internet. The MHEC transfer guide also suggests that students seek advice from academic advisors and campus transfer coordinators at their schools in order to make transfers as smooth as possible.

Several states have some degree of a common course numbering system or a common core curriculum to ease transferring between institutions of higher education within each state.

Florida established its common course numbering system in the mid 1970s, and it is now used at all public institutions of higher education. The system guarantees the transfer of any successfully completed course from one participating institution to another when the course to be transferred is offered by the receiving institution and shares the same standardized course number. Each participating institution controls the title, credit, and content of its own courses; the standardized number is assigned by a committee. In addition, system equivalencies have been determined for certain scores on the following standardized exams: the Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Association of International Credential Evaluators, and the College Level Examination Program.

In Texas, every public institution of higher education has a common core curriculum that ranges from 42 to 48 credit hours. The common core credit hours are divided into eight or nine categories that are common across the state. If a student takes a course from

an approved course in a particular category at one institution, any other Texas public institution must accept that course as fulfilling credit hours for that category. In addition, if a student completes the core curriculum at one institution, it substitutes for the core curriculum at any other public institution in Texas. However, there are exceptions for some of the more rigorous majors, such as science or math.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 1451 of 2008 received a hearing in the House Appropriations Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City Community College, Maryland Higher Education Commission, Morgan State University, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Florida Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 28, 2010
ncs/rhh

Analysis by: Caroline L. Boice

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