

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

House Bill 1151  
Appropriations

(Delegate Boteler, *et al.*)

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Higher Education - Undergraduate Degree Requirement - United States History  
Course

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This bill requires each public institution of higher education to require each undergraduate student enrolled in the institution to pass a U.S. history course in order to earn an undergraduate degree. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2020.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** Higher education expenditures increase, potentially significantly, particularly in FY 2021 and 2022, as described below. In future years, once systemic changes are fully implemented, the overall fiscal impact is minimal. The fiscal impact may vary significantly between institutions. Revenues are not materially affected.

**Local Effect:** Local community college expenditures increase, potentially significantly, particularly in FY 2021 and 2022, as described below. In future years, once systemic changes are fully implemented, the overall fiscal impact is minimal. The fiscal impact may vary significantly between institutions. Revenues are not materially affected. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Current Law:** U.S. history is not a graduation requirement to earn an undergraduate degree.

### *Credits Hours for Degrees*

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) must establish minimum requirements for issuing certificates, diplomas, and degrees by institutions of postsecondary education. The standard number of credits for a baccalaureate degree from a public four-year higher education institution is 120 credit hours. There are specified exceptions to these standards.

### *Requirements for General Education – Public Institutions of Higher Education*

According to Maryland regulations (COMAR 13B.06.01.03), while public institutions of higher education have autonomy to design their general education program to meet their unique needs and mission, that program must conform to the definitions and common standards set in the regulations. Further, the program must incorporate the general education knowledge and skills required by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards for Accreditation.

A public institution of higher education must satisfy the general education requirement by requiring each program leading to the associate of arts or associate of science degree to include at least 28 and no more than 36 semester hours, and each baccalaureate degree program to include at least 38 and no more than 46 semester hours of required *core* courses, more specifically, at a minimum, course work in each of the following five areas: (1) arts and humanities; (2) social and behavioral sciences; (3) biological and physical sciences; (4) mathematics; and (5) English composition.

Each core course used to satisfy the distribution requirements must carry at least three semester hours. General education programs of public instruction must require at least (1) two courses in arts and humanities; (2) two courses in social and behavioral sciences; (3) two science courses, at least one of which must be a laboratory course; (4) one course in mathematics, having performance expectations demonstrating a level of mathematical maturity beyond the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards in mathematics; and (5) one course in English composition completed with a grade of C- or better.

In addition to the five required areas, a public institution may include up to eight semester hours in course work outside the five areas, which may be integrated into other general education courses or may be presented as separate courses. Examples include, but are not limited to, health, diversity, and computer literacy.

Public institutions of higher education may not include a course in a general education program unless they provide academic content and rigor equivalent to the five specified areas.

General education programs leading to the associate of applied science degree must include at least 18 semester hours from the same course list designated by the sending institution for the associate of arts and associate of sciences degrees. The associate of applied science degree must include at least one three-semester-hour course from each of the five areas.

A course in a discipline listed in more than one of the areas of general education may be applied to only one area of general education.

General education courses must reflect current scholarship in the discipline and provide reference to theoretical frameworks and methods of inquiry appropriate to academic disciplines. Courses that are theoretical may include applications, but all applications courses must include theoretical components if they are to be included as meeting general education requirements.

### *Middle States Commission on Higher Education – General Education Requirements*

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education requires the following for accreditation of institutions in the United States. At institutions that offer undergraduate education, a general education program, either freestanding or integrated into academic disciplines, that:

- offers a sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity, and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field; and
- offers a curriculum designed so that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy.

Further, consistent with mission, the general education program also includes the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives.

### *Undergraduate Degrees*

Associate's degrees of all types and bachelor's degrees of all types are considered undergraduate degrees.

**Background:** Unlike most other countries, American colleges and universities require students to complete “general education requirements” in addition to courses in their major. Institutions choose what courses to offer as part of their general education program based on the requirements set by MHEC and their accreditor. Students then choose courses that

meet the requirements set by their institution and meet their own interests. Some institutions have set core courses that a student must take, while others offer their students a variety of options to meet their general education requirements.

**State Fiscal Effect:** The bill takes effect July 1, 2020; thus, to graduate from a public institution of higher education on or after July 1, 2020, a student must pass a U.S. history course. Accordingly, many seniors and juniors, who have otherwise completed their general education requirements, need to pass a U.S. history course in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years (fiscal 2021 and 2022) in order to graduate. At the same time, new freshmen and sophomores need to take these courses. This puts a burden on the students and the institutions both operationally and fiscally.

Institutions of higher education need to add enough seats in U.S. history courses for students to graduate on time. The capacity of institutions to do so varies considerably based on current institution conditions; however, the costs are likely significant, at least for some institutions, particularly in fiscal 2021 and 2022. The costs are largely due to lack of surge capacity for particular courses. As detailed below, some institutions may be able to handle the requirement with minimal costs (or in the case of one institution, possibly with existing resources), while at least one institution estimated a total cost of more than \$15 million annually in the initial years of implementation. The Department of Legislative Services cannot independently verify these costs but advises that higher education expenditures in the first two years of implementation are likely significant. Some of the costs may be partially offset by tuition charged students; however, any such offset cannot be reliably estimated.

It is assumed that, in future years, once systemic changes are fully implemented, the overall fiscal impact is minimal, as the overall number of credits to graduate is assumed to remain the same. The process and timeframe for full implementation likely vary by institution and cannot be reliably estimated. Institution expenditures and implementation timeframes depend on current course offerings, current faculty qualified to teach U.S. history, current faculty contracts and agreements regarding teaching assignments, courses determined to meet the U.S. history requirement, availability of technological solutions, and other institution-specific factors. In addition to faculty costs, there are also student information system costs.

#### *University of Maryland, College Park Campus*

The University of Maryland, College Park Campus (UMCP) reports about 40% of UMCP undergraduates who come in as freshmen either take a U.S. history course while at UMCP or have satisfied the course requirement through scoring a 4 or 5 on the U.S. Advanced Placement exam. UMCP advises that adding a specific course requirement to its existing general education requirements requires adding approximately 3,000 seats per year for

incoming freshmen and an unknown amount for transfer students who may not have completed such a course prior to transfer. Further, in the initial years of implementation, all students beyond the general education stage of their studies also need to take a U.S. history course to graduate.

UMCP advises that, assuming a historically derived cost estimate of \$1,500 per seat, instructional costs increase by approximately \$4.5 million in fiscal 2021 for native freshmen students. In fiscal 2021 and 2022, expenditures exceed \$15 million due to also providing courses for upper classmen.

UMCP advises that there are also costs to recode the student information system to track that students meet the graduation requirement. In the most recent update to its general education program, UMCP advises that a concurrent updating of the student information system required several full-time staff to make modifications to that system and establish the appropriate codes for use on student transcripts. UMCP advises that a smaller, but significant, effort is required to add a U.S. history course requirement.

#### *University of Maryland, Baltimore County*

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) advises that it needs to hire additional faculty members or adjunct faculty to teach the additional sections of U.S. history. UMBC also reports it needs to modify all graduation requirement materials and systems.

#### *Towson University*

Towson University (TU) advises it does not require a U.S. history course for graduation, but TU has a required category (one course required) called United States as a Nation. This category includes courses in American studies, anthropology, cultural studies, criminal justice, dance, English, family studies history, health, kinesiology, music, political science, religious studies, sociology, theatre, and women's studies.

#### *University of Maryland Global Campus*

The University of Maryland Global Campus advises that the additional cost to offer additional sections of U.S. history is \$262,000 in fiscal 2021.

#### *Morgan State University*

Morgan State University advises that the requirement can be met using existing resources.

*Maryland Higher Education Commission*

MHEC can make any changes to regulations using existing resources. This estimate assumes that MHEC's changes to regulations incorporate the required U.S. history course into the existing general education requirements of 28 to 46 semester hours, depending on the type of degree program.

**Local Expenditures:** Since associate's degrees are undergraduate degrees, local community college expenditures increase potentially significantly, particularly in fiscal 2021 and 2022. As with the State-operated institutions, it is assumed that, in future years once systemic changes are fully implemented, the overall fiscal impact is minimal.

Further, transfer agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions may need to be rewritten. Some local community colleges close to State boundaries have transfer agreements with out-of-state four-year institutions.

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**Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Higher Education Commission; University System of Maryland; Morgan State University; Department of Legislative Services

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