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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #681

Core General Education Courses Transfer Agreement (UW System & Wisconsin Technical College System)

[LFB 2013-15 Budget Summary: Page 481, #10 and Page 509, #8]

CURRENT LAW

The Board of Regents has the authority to establish policies for the appropriate transfer of credits between institutions within the UW System, including the designation of those courses which are transferable between and within institutions without loss of credit toward graduation or toward completion of a specific course of study. The Board may also establish policies for the appropriate transfer of credits with other educational institutions outside the system. The Board is required to maintain a computer-based credit transfer system that must include, but not be limited to, the following: (1) all transfers of credit between institutions within the system; (2) program-specific course requirements in the system; (3) technical college collegiate transfer program offerings; and (4) other courses for which the transfer of credits is accepted.

The Wisconsin Technical College System Board, in agreement with the Board of Regents, may designate courses as transferable between the two systems.

GOVERNOR

Require the Board of Regents and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Board to enter into and implement an agreement that identifies core general education courses totaling not fewer than 30 credits that will be transferable between and within each institution participating in the agreement. Define core general education courses as those courses generally required for an undergraduate degree in a specific course of study. The agreement shall establish policies ensuring that, beginning in the 2014-15 academic year, credits for completing the courses identified by the agreement will be transferable without loss of credit towards graduation

or toward completion of a specific course of study. Provide that the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), on behalf of its constituent institutions, and the governing boards of the tribally controlled colleges have the opportunity to participate in the agreement. Specify that the courses identified in the agreement be included in the computer-based credit transfer system maintained by the Board of Regents. Require the Board of Regents to include a description of the agreements and a summary of the Board's implementation of the agreement in the annual accountability report submitted by the Board to the Governor and the Legislature beginning with the report for the 2014-15 academic year. Require the WTCS Board to submit an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature that describes the agreement and provides a summary of the Board's implementation of the agreement.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The number of students who transfer into or within the UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) has increased substantially over the past decade. The number of students who transferred into and within the UW System increased by 14.4% from 2002-03 to 2011-12 (14,962 to 17,110) while the number of students transferring into and within the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) increased by 46.4% from 2001-02 to 2010-11 (6,964 to 10,193). Transfer students now make up a significant proportion of the UW's total student population. In 2011-12, one-third of all UW bachelor's degree recipients had entered the institution from which they graduated as a transfer student.

2. The majority of students who transfer into or within the UW System transfer either from one UW institution to another or from a technical college to a UW institution. In 2011-12, 39% of all students who transferred into or within the UW System transferred from one UW institution to another and 25% transferred from a technical college to a UW institution. The same is true for WTCS institutions. In 2010-11, the most recent year for which data is available, 28% of all students who transferred into or within WTCS transferred from one technical college to another and 43% transferred from a UW institution to a technical college.

3. Table 1 shows the number of students who transferred within and between the UW System and WTCS in 2010-11. As shown in the table, the largest number of transfers occurred within the UW System. The table also shows that nearly as many students transferred from a UW institution to a technical college as transferred from a technical college to a UW institution.

TABLE 1

Number of Students Transferring Within and Between the UW System and WTCS, 2010-11

Within the UW System	6,068
From a technical college to a UW institution	4,717
From a UW institution to a technical college	4,459
Within WTCS	<u>3,180</u>
Total	18,424

4. Earlier this year, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) released a policy brief on state policies to improve student transfer. Among the policies identified was the creation of a general education core that is accepted by all institutions in a given state. According to NCSL, the legislatures in 23 states have required by law that colleges and universities in those states adopt a general education core curriculum and an additional 17 states have implemented a transferable general education core through either governing board or state agency policy or voluntary agreements amongst institutions. Among Wisconsin's peer states, Indiana, Ohio, and Minnesota have statutes requiring a general education core curriculum while Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan have created a general education core curriculum through either board or state agency policy or institutional agreements. The general education transfer curriculums adopted by other states range from 27 credits to 64 credits.

5. In general, the goal of state policies to improve student transfer is to reduce the overall cost of, and the time taken to earn, a degree by increasing the number of credits students can transfer. When a student transfers, it is often left to the receiving institution to determine whether credits earned by the student at the sending institution will be accepted for credit towards a degree or satisfy particular degree requirements at the receiving institution. When the receiving institution does not accept credits the student earned at the sending institution, the student may be required to repeat coursework. This can increase both the overall cost of the degree to the student and the time it takes the student to complete a degree. In addition, a student whose credits do not transfer may become frustrated and may be deterred from pursuing a degree at an institution where his or her credits are not accepted.

6. General education requirements refer to courses that students are required to take in addition to their major requirements in order to earn a bachelor's degree, a liberal arts associate's degree, or an applied associate's degree. Although these courses must be taken in addition to the courses required for a student's major, some courses may fulfill both general education requirements and major requirements. General education requirements for bachelor's and liberal arts associate's degrees (offered by the UW Colleges and five technical colleges -- Chippewa Valley, Madison Area, Milwaukee Area, Nicolet, and Western) generally include: one or two English courses emphasizing written communication skills; a college mathematics course; some number of natural science courses, including at least one course with a laboratory component; some number of courses

in the social sciences; some number of courses in the arts and humanities; an oral communication course; and an ethnic studies or diversity course. Applied associate's degrees (offered by the 16 technical colleges) generally require a lesser number of general education credits than bachelor's degrees and liberal arts associate's degrees. Like liberal arts associate's degrees, applied associate's degrees can be completed in two years; however, these degrees include a significant amount of coursework in a particular course of study and therefore require fewer general education credits.

7. The faculty of each UW institution determines the general education requirements of that institution. The number of general education courses required for a bachelor's degree varies by institution and, in some cases, degree program, and ranges from 19 to 55 credits. Currently, each UW institution determines whether and how credits earned at each of the 13 other UW institutions will apply to that institution's general education and degree requirements. Given that general education requirements vary by institution and that there is no systemwide course numbering system, this makes transferring a complex process that can be frustrating for students, as some UW institutions may accept certain courses for transfer and degree credit while others may not. By contrast, WTCS has adopted a systemwide course numbering system for general education courses to facilitate transfer between the technical colleges. There are currently 66 general education courses that are transferable among all 16 technical colleges.

8. Under the proposal, students would be able to transfer 30 credits taken at any technical college or UW institution to any other technical college or UW institution. As 30 credits is the equivalent of one academic year, this would allow students to complete one full year of coursework at any public institution in this state and then transfer to a four-year UW institution and complete a bachelor's degree in three additional years. Those students would similarly be able to transfer to a UW Colleges campus or a technical college that offers a liberal arts associate's degree and complete an associate's degree in one additional year.

9. WTCS staff have identified nine general education courses totaling 30 credits that could constitute a general education transfer curriculum. Those credits would include: (a) three credits of written communication; (b) three credits of speech; (c) nine credits of social sciences (three credits each from Introduction to Sociology, Economics, and Introduction to Psychology); (d) 12 credits of natural sciences (four credits each from General Biology, General Chemistry, and General Anatomy and Physiology); and (e) three credits of mathematics. Based on data provided by WTCS and the UW System, only three of the nine courses (Introduction to Sociology, Economics, and Introduction to Psychology) are currently accepted for general education credit by every UW institution. Another four courses (written communication, speech, General Biology, and General Chemistry) are accepted as fulfilling general education requirements by at least nine of the 14 UW institutions and General Anatomy and Physiology is currently accepted by seven of the 14 UW institutions. The mathematics course identified by WTCS is not currently accepted for general education credit at any UW institution; however, another WTCS mathematics course, Introductory Statistics, is accepted for general education credit by nine of the 14 UW institutions. Because technical colleges that do not offer liberal arts associate's degrees generally do not offer many courses in the arts and humanities, these courses would not be included in the general education transfer curriculum.

10. UW System staff has identified many of the same WTCS courses for possible inclusion in the general education transfer curriculum. However, UW System staff have suggested that it may be more reasonable for the general education transfer curriculum to include a lower number of credits, such as 15 or 21 credits. This may be appropriate for a number of reasons, including the low number of WTCS courses that are accepted for general education credit at all UW institutions, that some technical colleges may offer certain general education courses infrequently, and that some general education credits could not be applied to certain high-credit majors such as engineering. However, adopting a general education transfer curriculum that includes a lesser number of credits would generally be less beneficial to students seeking to transfer.

11. UW System staff are currently in the process of identifying courses at each UW institution that could be included in a general education transfer curriculum. Because each institution has its own course numbering system, identifying courses that would transfer within the UW System is more difficult than identifying individual courses that could transfer between UW institutions and the technical colleges.

12. An additional concern that has been raised by the UW System is how this provision would affect applied associate's degree programs offered by the technical colleges that may require as few as 21 general education credits. As currently drafted, the bill could require those programs to increase the number of general education credits required for a degree. If this is not the Committee's intention, the Committee could modify the bill to define "core general education courses" as courses generally required for a bachelor's degree or liberal arts associate's degree. The Committee could also specify that this does not include courses generally required for an applied associate's degree.

13. The bill would define "core general education courses" as courses generally required for an undergraduate degree that are prerequisites or otherwise in addition to the courses required for an undergraduate degree in a specific course of study. It is important to note that certain degree programs, especially those in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, require students to complete certain courses that both fulfill general education requirements and are prerequisites for courses required by the major. For example, nursing students at UW-Milwaukee are required to complete courses in chemistry, biochemistry, microbiology, and anatomy and physiology. These courses satisfy both UW-Milwaukee's natural sciences general education requirement as well as major requirements for the nursing degree. If a student who transfers to the nursing degree program has already fulfilled the natural sciences general education requirement with other courses, such as general biology or physics, he or she would still have to complete the natural science courses required for the nursing degree. This applies whether a student transfers from another program at UW-Milwaukee, from another UW institution, or from a technical college.

14. In some cases, additional general education courses can be counted towards graduation as elective credits. However, some majors, such as those in engineering, have a particularly high number of credits required for the major. Students in those majors complete most if not all of the credits required for graduation (generally 120 to 125) through the fulfillment of general education requirements and major requirements and may not take any elective credits. In recognition of these high credit majors, the Committee may wish to modify the bill to delete the

phrase "without loss of credit toward graduation or toward completion of a specific course of study" and replace it with "and would satisfy general education requirements at the receiving institution."

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation.
2. Modify the Governor's recommendation to specify that the general education transfer curriculum should include no fewer than 21 credits instead of 30 credits as under the bill.
3. Modify the Governor's recommendation to define "core general education courses" as courses generally required for a bachelor's degree in a specific course of study or a liberal arts associate's degree. Specify that this does not include courses generally required for an applied associate's degree.
4. Modify the Governor's recommendation to delete the phrase "without loss of credit toward graduation or toward completion of a specific course of study" and replace it with "and would satisfy general education requirements at the receiving institution."
5. Delete provision.

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