

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board



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120 Hour Statute

Statutory Limitation on Semester Credit Hours Required for a Baccalaureate Degree

The Coordinating Board does not have rules for this statute (Texas Education Code, § 61.0515). The statute is directed at institutional implementation.

According to the statute: *For any student entering from Fall 2008 on, the SACS minimum required credit hours for a degree (currently 120 hours) will be the maximum allowed required credit hours for a baccalaureate-level degree program.*

However, each institution can *determine whether there is a "compelling academic reason"* to allow a degree program to require additional credit hours, beyond the 120 credit hours provided for in the statute.

The Coordinating Board is authorized in the statute to review individual degree programs for compliance, but is not required to do so (the statute is permissive rather than prescriptive on this point). The current policy is that the Board (or Board staff) would certainly do so: a) during the evaluation of a new degree program request; b) if a Board-level evaluation for existing degree programs is initiated, and a degree program is found to require excessive credit hours when compared with other similar programs; or c) if the Board receives a direct complaint.

Other state entities like the Legislative Budget Board or the Comptroller's Office conduct periodic audits that could potentially require an explanation of the process for determining "compelling academic reasons" to allow particular degree programs more latitude in the number of credit hours required for the degree than mandated by the statute.

The Texas core curriculum is set at a minimum of 42 hours and institutions can get automatic permission for an increase in core curriculum hours up to 48 hours. The number of credit hours in an institution's core curriculum should be counted into the total required for the bachelor's degree program under consideration.

State appropriated formula funding stops the semester after a student reached the allowed maximum credit hours the institution determines are required for the completion of the degree *plus 30 hours* (Texas Education Code, § 54.014). For these credit hours all attempted credit hours, including those from dropped or failed classes, are counted.

TEXAS EDUCATION CODE, Chapter 61, SUBCHAPTER C.

§ 61.0515. SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS REQUIRED FOR BACCALAUREATE DEGREE.

1. To earn a baccalaureate degree, **a student may not be required** by a general academic teaching

institution to complete more than the minimum number of semester credit hours required for the degree by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or its successor **unless the institution determines that there is a compelling academic reason for requiring completion of additional semester credit hours for the degree.**

2. The board may review one or more of an institution's baccalaureate degree programs to ensure compliance with this section.
3. Subsection (a) does not apply to a baccalaureate degree awarded by an institution to a student enrolled in the institution before the 2008 fall semester. This subsection does not prohibit the institution from reducing the number of semester credit hours the student must complete to receive the degree.

Added by Acts 2005, 79th Leg., ch. 1230, § 12, eff. June 18, 2005. (HB 1172, 79R-2005).

TEXAS EDUCATION CODE, Chapter 54, SUBCHAPTER A.

§ 54.014. TUITION FOR REPEATED OR EXCESSIVE UNDERGRADUATE HOURS.

1. An institution of higher education may charge a resident undergraduate student tuition at a higher rate than the rate charged to other resident undergraduate students, not to exceed the rate charged to nonresident undergraduate students, if before the semester or other academic session begins the student has previously attempted a number of semester credit hours for courses taken at any institution of higher education while classified as a resident student for tuition purposes **that exceeds by at least 30 hours the number of semester credit hours required for completion of the degree program in which the student is enrolled.** For purposes of this subsection, an undergraduate student who is not enrolled in a degree program is considered to be enrolled in a degree program or programs requiring a minimum of 120 semester credit hours, including minors and double majors, and for completion of any certificate or other special program in which the student is also enrolled, including a program with a study-abroad component. An institution of higher education that charges students tuition at a higher rate under this subsection may adopt a policy under which the institution exempts from the payment of that higher rate a student that is subject to the payment of the higher rate solely as a result of hardship as determined by the institution under the policy.

Added by Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 1073, § 1.08, eff. Aug. 1, 1997. Amended by Acts 1999, 76th Leg., ch. 6, § 2, eff. April 8, 1999.

Transferred from Education Code, Section 54.068 by Acts 2005, 79th Leg., Ch. 888, § 8, eff. September 1, 2005.

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