



March 6, 2020

LEGISLATORS HEAR BILL ON TRANSFER CREDIT DENIAL

Yesterday the House Appropriations Committee heard testimony on House Bill 1082. The proposed legislation requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to establish notification procedures regarding the denial of transfer credits; report the denial to the institution from which the transfer student originates; and mandates public institutions to submit an annual report listing the denials and the reasons for the denials.

The University System of Maryland (USM) strives to ensure that the credit transfer process works as smoothly as possible. House Bill 1082, as written, is challenging to a process that is dynamic. Of the 2019 cohort of comparable baccalaureate degree recipients, the 9,214 that began as first-time freshmen averaged 132.1 credit hours. Of the 7,671 transfers from Maryland Community Colleges, the average number of credits was 127.8. While there are several reasons for each of these cohorts to have more than the basic requirement of 120 credits required for most bachelor's degrees, these average numbers do not tell the stories of individual students that have met challenges.

The reporting requirements in House Bill 1082 require extensive communication between the sending and receiving institution. Our institutions work diligently to create articulated pathways for students so that the transfer may be as seamless as possible. If students follow these recommended transfer pathways, they should not “lose” any credits in the transfer process.

The language in the bill, including “denial of transfer credit,” should refer to courses wholly ineligible for transfer. However, this will not reflect the most common of the issues for the student. It is not that the credit is “denied.” The most common situation is that the courses taken do not apply to the major as selected at the receiving institution. And therefore, the student must take additional prerequisite courses to complete the major and earn the degree. In other words, the courses are transferrable for credit, but not applicable to the degree. No transfer platform will amend this issue.

ARTSYS is a computerized information system created to facilitate the transfer of students from Maryland community colleges to the USM institutions and other participating institutions. We are now seeking mechanisms to support the upgrading of the ARTSYS system of transfer for the state

of Maryland but understand that there are many challenges remaining. House Bill 1082 does not fix these problems outright. However, it is important to recognize that the recording and transcription of transfer credits differs from institution to institution and is decentralized at some campuses.

USM is working with the leaders of Maryland community colleges to focus on improving the transfer system. In addition to hosting a meeting of presidents from USM and community colleges, a work group of chief academic officers will be convened to work out more details and gaps in the transfer process. The USM has proposed amendments that would make the mandate feasible and would define appropriately the responsibility as a shared responsibility of both the sending and receiving institution.

HOUSE BILL WOULD MANDATE COURSE IN UNITED STATES HISTORY

This week the House Appropriations Committee heard testimony on House Bill 1151. The bill mandates that each public institution of higher education require an undergraduate student to pass a United States history course to earn a degree. The university system opposed the bill.

All college graduates should not only have a working knowledge of history, but they should be well-prepared to be responsible and civically engaged citizens. However, a single required history course will not accomplish this goal. In Maryland, a U.S. History course is a requirement for high school graduation. Approximately 80% of students in USM institutions would have already had such a course. Many out-of-state students would have had a U.S. History course as well. USM institutions provide students several options in civic and community engagement, participation in advocacy processes, and voter registration and education efforts. The institutions that comprise the USM are national leaders in civics education and civic engagement

That initiative includes faculty development opportunities for faculty across all subjects to help them bring civic and community engagement into their classroom. Three USM institutions have achieved the prestigious Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. Fewer than 10% of all universities and colleges in the country have earned this honor. Towson University, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and Salisbury University have all earned the classification. Other USM institutions, including the University of Maryland, College Park have wide-ranging and substantive opportunities for students to participate civic engagement activity.

According to the National Study on Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) at Yale University, the USM has among the highest rates of student voter registration and voting in the country. 81% of USM students were registered for the 2018 election, and over 44% voted, which is 5% higher than all other public four-year universities.

In addition, USM institutions would incur additional costs. These would include costs to hire additional faculty, advisors and infrastructure to assure that every student take (and pass) a U.S. History course. All curricula for every major, general education requirement, and transfer pathways would have to be adjusted [and all catalogues revised] to reflect this new requirement. High school, community college, and university advisors would have to be appropriately trained to assure that each student could take a specific course in a sequence that would not disrupt their schedules.

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH PROPOSED IN HOUSE COMMITTEE

House Bill 1504 establishes the Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Care in Higher Education. System officials offered an informational letter to House Appropriations committee detailing current and active measures to address student mental health.

As background, upon the conclusion of the 2019 legislative session, the USM, Morgan State University (MSU), and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) were required to complete a JCR Report on Mental Health Services, which was submitted on October 1, 2019

http://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2019/2019_201a.pdf

Our institutions were able to handle this legislative request with few challenges because for the three years prior, USM, MSU, and St. Mary's vice presidents for student affairs (VPSA), in close partnership with campus health center directors, counseling center directors, and the USM Office of Academic and Student Affairs, embraced the challenges surrounding mental health services in higher education. These in-depth conversations include the sharing of best practices and the evaluation of efforts deemed less successful.

One of the group's most recent organized efforts to study access to mental health care in higher education was the creation of a survey. In the spring 2018, the VPSAs developed the survey, which included questions about: staffing for on-campus centers; the profile of counseling centers and services including accreditations; trends in demand for services; strategies being used/considered to meet escalating demand; counseling center staff to student ratio; scope of services; expenditures; appointment management; outreach and education; best practices; evaluation of mental health services over time; availability of off-campus resources; reasons students seek support; and services to off-campus student populations.

Select results of this survey were shared with the USM Board of Regents in June 2018, when the Board received a presentation on Trends in Campus Mental Health Services. The presentation featured Liz Brown, Senior Consultant at the Education Advisory Board (www.eab.com), who offered a national view of how institutions are meeting escalating demand, and Dr. Nancy Young, Vice President for Student Affairs at UMBC, who offered perspective into how campus-based experts are shifting their thinking and practices to best meet the mental health needs of students. Since that time, the vice presidents have continued to address these issues monthly and in more depth at their annual retreats. The hope is that members of the General Assembly remain aware of the significant work that is being done by the institutions of higher education in Maryland.

The next step, within the next few months, is to initiate a regular convening of USM/MSU/SMCM mental health professionals to ensure they have opportunities to talk and collaborate directly with their peers within the public institutions of higher education. Since the first presentation to the Board of Regents in 2018, they have been informed of the work described above through updates. The vice presidents and the regents will have another formal mental health services update before the end of 2020.

UPCOMING BILL HEARINGS

HB 1428

Environment - Higher Education Facilities - Mold Hazards and Mold or Moisture Problems

Delegate Solomon

In the House - Hearing 3/10 at 1:00 p.m.

Appropriations

HB 1052

University System of Maryland - Contaminants in Campus Buildings - Review, Monitoring, and Remediation

Delegate Lehman

In the House - Hearing 3/10 at 1:00 p.m.

Appropriations

HB 1113

State Finance and Procurement - Procurement Improvement Council - Required Use of eMaryland Marketplace

Delegate Charles

In the House - Hearing 3/10 at 1:00 p.m.

Health and Government Operations

HB 796

Higher Education - Freedom of Speech on Campus - Protection (Forming Open and Robust University Minds (FORUM) Act

Delegate Grammer

In the House - Hearing 3/10 at 1:00 p.m.

Appropriations

HB 814

Higher Education - Transfer of Credits

Washington County Delegation

In the House - Hearing 3/10 at 1:00 p.m.

Appropriations