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H.B. 9
133rd General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

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Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Jones and Sweeney

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

Edward M. Millane, Senior Budget Analyst

Highlights

- State universities may incur potentially significant costs to review student records every two years to identify students who have been disenrolled for four or more semesters and who have not completed a bachelor's degree, notify those students that are eligible for an associate degree or program certificate, and report findings to the Chancellor of Higher Education.
- State universities and community colleges that offer certain bachelor's degree programs may also forgo revenue from waiving, in certain circumstances, a student's tuition and general fees for a course that is necessary to complete a bachelor's degree.

Detailed Analysis

Overview

Generally, the bill's provisions address student degree completion at state institutions of higher education in various ways, including requirements for (1) each state university to review its student records every two years to determine if certain disenrolled students who did not complete a bachelor's degree are eligible for an associate degree or program certificate, (2) state institutions, under certain circumstances, to waive an eligible student's tuition and general fees for a course that is necessary to complete a bachelor's degree, and (3) the Chancellor of Higher Education to develop a standard for general education courses at state universities and state universities to comply with the standard and accept and grant credit for general education courses completed at another university. These provisions are discussed below in more detail.

University review of student records for associate degree or certificate eligibility

Each state university will likely incur increased administrative costs to review its student records every two years to identify students who have been disenrolled for four or more semesters and who have not completed a bachelor's degree, notify those students that are eligible for an associate degree or program certificate, and report its findings to the Chancellor. Such costs may be significant to identify students, complete degree audits, and, if eligible, locate them and provide notification. The administrative workload of the Department of Higher Education (DHE) will increase to develop and adopt rules to implement the program.

Several years ago, DHE piloted Project Win-Win, a program that appears to be similar to the one proposed above that operated in nine states and 61 two-year institutions. Project Win-Win identified students who were either eligible for an associate's degree or stopped their education when they were very close to earning the degree and assisted those students in completing the courses and credits needed to qualify for the degree. Seven university regional campuses and community colleges participated in the program in Ohio. The Lumina Foundation supported the program through grants passed through DHE to the participating institutions. Those institutions received a total of about \$111,000 from the Foundation to carry out the program. In October 2013, the Institute for Higher Education Policy published a report evaluating the national implementation of Project Win-Win.¹ Below are some notable findings that may be applicable to the program required by the bill:

“By far, the degree audit was the most difficult and time-consuming Win-Win task in determining . . . whether students . . . should be awarded an associate's degree . . .” There are various software programs available to automate the degree audit process, but, to maintain academic integrity, “nearly all institutions that employed these tools supplemented their findings with hand-and-eye readings; 11 schools used nothing but hand and eye.”

- The registrars' office is central in the degree auditing work, “but some Win-Win institutions hired temporary employees with the necessary background and knowledge of institutional protocols to handle the load. These included retired deans of students and former institutional research officers – all working part time.”
- Participating institutions used a variety of methods and services, including postal mail, email, social media, and the National Change of Address processing database maintained by the U.S. Postal Service, to locate students, though most location effort was focused on “potential completers” that did not quite meet the criteria to qualify for a degree.

Waiver of tuition and general fees for final course

State institutions of higher education may forgo revenue from waiving, in certain circumstances, an eligible student's tuition and general fees for a course that is necessary to

¹ Adelman, Ph.D., Cliff, “Searching for Our Lost Associate's Degrees: Project Win-Win at the Finish Line,” Institute for Higher Education Policy, October 2013. Available online at <http://www.ihep.org/research/publications/project-win-win-finish-line>.

complete a bachelor's degree. This provision mostly affects public universities since, with the exception of "applied bachelor's degree programs," two-year public colleges generally offer two-year degrees or shorter programs. The amount of foregone revenue will depend on the number of students eligible for a tuition waiver and each institution's tuition rates. LSC does not have data that suggests how many students may qualify, but the number may be somewhat limited due to the criteria specified by the bill. In order to be eligible, all of the following must apply to the student:

- The student was enrolled full time, as defined by the Chancellor, in the student's final year;
- The student was unable to enroll in the final course in the student's final year due to a lack of course availability or other circumstances beyond the student's control, as determined by the Chancellor;
- The student paid all tuition and general fees for the courses in which the student enrolled in the student's final year at the beginning of that year;
- The student registers for the final course in the academic year immediately following the student's final year.

As with the program discussed above, DHE's administrative workload will increase to develop and adopt rules to implement the program.

Standard for general education courses at universities

There appears to be little, if any, fiscal effect associated with the bill's requirements for DHE and state universities to develop a system establishing a standard for general education courses at state universities and for state universities to accept and grant credit for general education courses that comply with the standard and are successfully completed by a student who transfers from another state university. It appears that such a system that satisfies the bill's requirements may already be in operation through the Articulation and Transfer Policy and the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM) initiative. Since 1990, DHE has had a policy in place that has provided a coherent set of principles and guidelines that improve the transfer process. Over time, the policy has developed into the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Network (OATN), which includes specified courses that are guaranteed to transfer and apply directly to a major at any participating institution. Further, DHE's website indicates that under this policy, "students are guaranteed the transfer of applicable credits among Ohio's public colleges and universities and equitable treatment in the application of credits to admissions and degree requirements." Under the current system in place, "[s]tudents can complete specified general education courses anywhere in the public system." The OTM is a subset, or a complete set, of a college or university's general education requirements that represents a body of knowledge and academic skills common across Ohio's colleges and universities, containing 36 to 40 semester hours of courses in the fields of English, mathematics, arts/humanities, social and behavioral sciences, natural sciences, and interdisciplinary coursework.