To: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

From: Interinstitutional Faculty Senate
Robert Kyr, President

RE: Written Testimony for Work Session on April 13, 2017

Thank you for the work that has been done in shaping HB2998, which seeks to address a variety of significant issues regarding transfer credits and degree pathways, which are significant and essential for both community colleges and universities. We have received the most recent amendments to HB2998, and after careful consideration, we offer the following summary points for the April 13th work session of the House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development:

1) ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Universities are accredited in large part based upon their missions and identified learning outcomes. Each institution builds its academic programs around its particular missions and outcomes. It hires faculty for their unique expertise in serving those missions and outcomes. As currently written, this bill will potentially undercut valuable faculty expertise and it will be detrimental to mission alignment by treating all institutions, programs, and students as homogenous.

The bill assumes that all students and academic programs are equivalent across a broad range of institutions, and they are not. It also does not completely address variation in academic preparation and standards offered by courses at different institutions. It sets up a scenario that will potentially exclude students who are not college ready or might lead to a "race to the bottom" by forcing institutions to accept coursework that can be completed by everyone, immediately, with minimal regard for appropriate institutional or program mission fit. Moreover, the bill sets unrealistically tight deadlines to accomplish its goals given the complexity of the issues involved and the considerable efforts required to achieve its challenging and extensive goals.

2) ADVISING: CRUCIAL TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Overall, the bill will only work if more effective and accessible advising is extensively and substantively provided, and this crucial matter is not adequately covered in the bill. From a faculty perspective, one of the major problems with transfer credits and degree pathways is inadequate advising at the high school and community college level. Moreover, we are concerned about the variability in the college readiness of students who self-select to begin at community college versus those that self-select to begin at four-year institutions.

A significant amount of funding needs to be devoted to improving advising at the community college level so that students will know what they need to do in order to transfer to the four-year institution of their choice. Due to the lack of effective and accessible advising, students often do not know the details of what pathway they are following, where it will lead, and whether it will enable them to achieve their primary goals.

At present, the bill does not put forward a plan for improving academic advising, which is essential for realizing the goals itemized in this bill. Moreover, it does not address the urgent need for substantial resources to accomplish these goals. Faculty members are seriously concerned about this issue both at community colleges and universities, because there must be far greater coordination of advising between institutions in order for the goals of this bill to be fully realized.

3) FISCAL IMPACT

HB2998 has specific fiscal ramifications for institutions, which are not considered in the bill. It appears that four-year institutions will be held responsible for the ability of two-year institutions to adequately prepare students to move forward into university degree programs. This will require a major shift in advising, transcript preparation (including tracking), and the staffing needed for all of this to succeed. It will also require substantial time and effort for faculty from two- and four-year institutions to meet in person in order to build pathways, however, there does not appear to be a fiscal framework in the bill, which provides resources for these crucial efforts. This will entail a substantial infrastructure investment, which has not yet been addressed.

It is important to note that the bill is based, in part, on the notion that our universities and community colleges have a long history of working together to develop and evaluate curriculum. Unfortunately, this is not the case. For many years, faculty across both systems have not worked together to set up curricula. In order for the bill to succeed, it must provide resources for a large number of dedicated faculty members to work across the boundaries of their institutions in order to develop a curriculum (or curricula) that can be transferred without difficulties or recurring problems.

In the current fiscal climate, can adequate funding be provided that will enable this bill to be fully realized, especially in regard to the urgent need to improve advising, and the crucial need to convene faculty to discuss curricula and build essential pathways? If not, we should proceed with caution in order to avoid making the current situation worse for lack of essential fiscal and infrastructure support.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert Kyr
President, IFS
Wednesday, April 12, 2017
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