



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
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By
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HB 1799 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Choy, Vice Chair Ichiyama, and members of the committee:

House Bill 1799 proposes a revision to Section 304A-402 by limiting a student to a maximum of one hundred forty credit hours at the resident tuition rate, provided that the Board of Regents may grant an exemption to a student if it is established that a course required for student to graduate is or has been unavailable while the student has been in the University of Hawai'i system.

While we appreciate the legislature's intent to encourage timely graduation, the University of Hawai'i opposes the bill as currently written because it poses a number of negative consequences.

One unintended consequence is when a student gets within a semester of graduation and finds themselves at the 140 credit limit but is unable to graduate because they cannot afford the higher tuition. Residents will be forced to higher tuition rates and this may lead to students withdrawing without graduating. Or, some students' programs may lead them to take more than 140 credits. For instance, students who plan to sit for the CPA exam need 150 hours, and they may have reasons to take these as part of their undergraduate education. The University has concerns about legislatively limiting the eligibility for a resident tuition rate based on a maximum number of credits, such as 140 credits taken by a student.

Second, the statutory change proposed by this measure may disadvantage transfer students from 2-year community colleges to a 4-year UH campus. The UH community colleges provide an entry point and opportunity to higher education access for much of Hawai'i's population, particularly those groups with historically low college-going rates. One of the University's strategic directions, to increase college participation and the number of degrees earned by students, specifically addresses Native Hawaiians, low-income students, and those from underserved regions and population groups. Preparing a diversity of students for success in the workforce and in their communities is critical for our State's economy and well-being.

UH points out that one unintended consequence of HB 1799 would be to penalize those very students who start their education at a UH or out of state community college, and then

transfer in to a UH campus to complete a bachelor's degree, a situation that may result in graduating with more than 140 credits.

Other examples of possible unintended consequences on students:

- a) Non-traditional students who left college in the past to raise families, get jobs, take care of kūpuna, and then return to complete their UH education at a later stage in life may find that their educational goals have changed and they need to take more credits to achieve their degree objective.
- b) A student who chooses to pursue a double major and/or earn a certificate or declare a minor as well as a major course of study toward a bachelor's degree, may be hampered by the consequences of HB1799;
- c) A student who switches majors and graduates with more than 140 credits;
- d) A student trying to boost their GPA (grade-point average) in order to qualify for admission to a program of their choice may take more than 140 credits;
- e) A student trying to boost their GPA to meet a graduation requirement may also be disadvantaged by the consequences of HB1799;
- f) Veterans who transfer in credits from other institutions.

In addition, HB 1799 may inhibit fresh approaches that support and encourage students to enroll in college and graduate. *Early College*, for example, awards credits upon high school graduation to students who earn credits before entering college. *Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)* may provide students college credit by identifying and documenting college level learning that has been acquired through life experiences such as military, and/or work experience, training, or professional certification.

The University also points out that as part of the effort to promote timely graduation for more students, the UH STAR/GPS system is being further developed as an increasingly robust tool to help students graduate on time. Campuses have created pathways for each of their programs to identify what classes and in what sequence students should take to graduate on time.

With the support of the legislature, the enhanced registration by STAR helps students as they register to make more informed choices and avoid inadvertent selection of classes that do not meet their program requirements. The system will also help campuses better schedule courses that will be needed by students. Other future initiatives such as a complete restructuring of remedial education will also support success and reduce credits taken by students. Our nationally acclaimed Fifteen-to-Finish program also encourages students to take the courses they need and graduate on time; a program that has a record of success over a number of years.

The University very much appreciates the legislature's support in enhancing the STAR/GPS system and recognizing its significance for students and the institution for on-time graduation.

The approach taken by HB1799, however, raises concerns, as cited above, that there will be negative impact or unintended consequences for students, including those students we aim to serve by increasing access and opportunity through innovative support mechanisms.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.