

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

In its analysis of a related bill (SB 29), VSD reports that many states have military service credit programs as a way of cost savings to the student veteran as well as to higher education institutions and the federal government. VSD advises that most service members have taken at least basic college courses as part of their military training, and that most members who discharge after their first tour have at least the equivalent of an associate's degree. When these veterans enroll in post-secondary institutions, however, they are required to retake many of these basic college courses. According to VSD, current practice at most of these institutions is to give credit only for electives and not towards actual coursework for degree requirements for their majors. In its analysis of SB 29, NM Tech explains that while 12 of the 21 degrees it offers accept military courses as electives, the content and learning objectives of those courses are not equivalent to any of the courses required for a degree and do not meet the standard for "required" courses.

HED provides this explanation of military service as college credit generally:

Many veterans wish to leverage their military experience as they pursue postsecondary education following their service. Experience and training gained while serving in the military is documented in the U.S. Department of Defense's Joint Services Transcript (JST). The American Council on Education (ACE) is a non-profit organization under contract to DOD that reviews the JST and develops recommendations for college-level coursework equivalencies for transfer. Allowing prior military experience to count as post-secondary credit hours can facilitate the higher education of veterans and will contribute to more timely graduation rates.

An ACE credit recommendation represents college-level equivalencies based on a review of workforce training, military training or occupations, and other sources of learning outside the college classroom, such as national exams and certifications. Actual credit transferred is solely at the discretion of the college or university.

HED advises, however, that these transfers may lead to some difficulties:

According to a 2015 report from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, the transcription of certain types of credit from military training and occupations can be problematic. Some veteran students have an extensive training history reflected on the JST. This can result in a very large number of ACE recommended credits, many of which may not count toward the credential that a student is pursuing. Because of financial aid eligibility requirements, the practice of transferring all ACE recommended credits can lead to financial aid ineligibility for student veterans who have too many credits on their transcripts that do not ultimately count towards their intended degrees.

The acceptance of military service credits in New Mexico, however, is not uniform among institutions of higher education, HED reports:

Credits potentially can be applied to a student degree plan in a number of ways, including as credits that meet elective requirements, general education requirements, and program or major requirements. According to information provided by the New Mexico Association of College Registrars and Admission Officers, every public institution has

provisions for the acceptance of transfer credit on the JST. However there is no uniform policy or transfer matrix shared by the institutions regarding JST credit transfer. Many of the credits transferred from the JST will apply as elective credits but not towards a student's degree, even if the credits are closely aligned with coursework the degree requires.

HED advises it is already working to implement a statewide common course numbering system to ease credit transfer and articulation between New Mexico's higher education institutions. It believes it could develop a comprehensive, statewide transfer policy for JST military credit in parallel with the common course numbering system.

CONFLICT

While SB 153 charges HED with developing and implementing statewide military credit articulation and transfer policies, SB 29 requires the governing board of each state institution of higher education to develop its policies (which could result in inconsistent policies).

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

In its analysis of a related bill (SB 29), NM Tech notes that Chapter 21, Article 1, NMSA 1978, assigns the task of determining and fixing the standard of requirement for admission to the institution to the Board of Regents of New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.

Although SB 153 requires HED to report to LESC on the development and implementation of policies regarding military service credit, HED points out that LESC's statutory authority in studying higher education matters is limited to the training of certified teaching personnel in post-secondary institutions. See Section 2-10-3(B), NMSA 1978.

Additionally, HED advises that it and the state institutions of higher education have set long-term statewide goals to increase 4-year graduation rates, improve transfer and articulation, and improve remedial education outcomes. HED is pursuing these goals through these initiatives:

1. Statewide common course numbering and alignment of lower division coursework;
2. Developing meta-majors (a one to two semester map of coursework that will articulate to multiple degrees) and transfer modules;
3. Reforming the general education core curriculum;
4. Co-requisite remediation and Math pathways;
5. Decreasing the number of hours required for both associate's and bachelor's degrees;
6. Incentivizing 4-year graduation; and
7. Performance funding.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

DMA comments that the underlying issue of how state institutions of higher education recognize military service credit will remain unresolved, with some schools providing full recognition and others granting only partial or no credit for military service schools completed.