

higher education in the State; and (4) focus on specified near completers. Specifically, the campaign must focus on near completers who earned a minimum grade point average of 2.0 on a scale of 4.0 while in college and earned either at least 45 credit hours at a community college or at least 90 credit hours at a four-year institution of higher education.

MHEC must develop and implement a plan that would provide an incentive to (1) a near completer to re-enroll and earn a degree and (2) a college to identify and graduate near completers. The incentive plan must use all available resources, including institutional funds, private-sector funds, and State funds. MHEC and institutions of higher education may implement other near completer initiatives in addition to the campaign and incentive plan required by the bill.

By December 1, 2013, MHEC must submit a report on the details of the statewide communication campaign and the incentive plan, including the expected timeline for implementation. MHEC must also report by December 1, 2013, on obstacles and barriers, if any, toward facilitating the sharing of student information among institutions of higher education in the State in furtherance of the near completers communication campaign established by the bill.

Degree Plan

A “degree plan” is defined as a statement of the course of study requirements that an undergraduate student enrolled in a public higher education institution must complete to graduate from the institution.

Each undergraduate student enrolled in a public four-year higher education institution must file a degree plan with the institution as soon as practicable but not later than by the completion of 45 credit hours of course work. Each degree-seeking undergraduate student enrolled at a community college must file a degree plan with the institution on entering the institution. Each undergraduate student who transfers to a public four-year institution with at least 45 credit hours of course work must file a degree plan with the institution during the student’s first semester at the institution. A degree plan must be developed in consultation with an academic advisor in the student’s degree program or, if an academic advisor is not available in the student’s degree program, any academic advisor at the institution. The degree plan must also follow a pathway to a degree as described below.

Pathways to a Degree

Each public institution of higher education in the State must:

- develop a pathway system whereby public institutions of higher education establish graduation progress benchmarks for each academic major and for the general education program for students who have not declared a major;
- require the pathway for each first-time, degree-seeking student to include credit-bearing mathematics and English courses in the first 24 credit hours; and
- require the pathway for each degree-seeking student enrolled in a developmental course in mathematics, reading, or English concurrent with or in the semester immediately following completion of the developmental course.

The benchmarks established must specify the credit and course criteria that indicate satisfactory progress toward a degree. Academic units must establish schedules for regular periodic review of student progress. Students who are in danger of falling behind the program benchmarks must be required to consult with an academic advisor before registration.

Financial Aid for Community College Transfer Students

Each public four-year institution of higher education must dedicate a portion of institutional financial aid to provide financial assistance to resident undergraduate students that transfer with an associate's degree from a community college in the State.

Standard Number of Credit Hours

Except as discussed below, the standard number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree from a public four-year higher education institution is 120 credit hours; beginning with fall 2015, the standard number of credits for an associate's degree from a public community college is 60 credit hours.

The standard number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree (*i.e.*, 120) does not apply if (1) the degree program is defined as a five-year baccalaureate degree program; (2) professional accreditation requires a higher number of credit hours or requires course work that cannot be completed in 120 credit hours; or (3) certification requirements result in a need for credit hours in excess of 120.

The standard number of credits required for an associate's degree (*i.e.*, 60) does not apply if (1) the degree program is defined as more than a two-year associate's degree; (2) professional accreditation requires a higher number of credit hours or requires course