

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE  
BILL ANALYSIS**

**Bill Number:** SB 153

**52nd Legislature, 2nd Session, 2016**

**Tracking Number:** .202624.2

**Short Title:** College Credit for Military Service

**Sponsor(s):** Senator Craig W. Brandt

**Analyst:** Heidi L. Macdonald

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**FOR THE LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE**

**Bill Summary:**

SB 153 directs the secretary of the Higher Education Department (HED) to establish a consistent policy and articulation agreement regarding the evaluation and award of college credit based on military training.

**Fiscal Impact:**

The bill does not contain an appropriation.

According to HED, there will be significant administrative costs to the department associated with developing the policies and articulation agreements.

**At a Glance:**

- Military service credit programs are a costs savings to the veteran student, federal government, and the postsecondary institution.
- Military veteran students, who receive these credit transfers, will positively contribute to each postsecondary institution's graduation rates.
- This bill will enable a uniform and consistent policy and articulation agreement across all of New Mexico's public postsecondary institutions.

**Detailed Bill Provisions:**

HED is required to work in coordination with the institutions of higher education to study, create, and implement a policy and single articulation agreement regarding the award of academic college credit based on military training and experience. Specifically, the award can be applied to the active duty member's or veteran's completion of an associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. HED will present a report on the policy, its implementation, and the articulation agreement to the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee and to the Legislative Education Study Committee by November 1, 2016.

## **Substantive Issues:**

In its analysis, HED states 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 United States Department of Defense's Joint Services Transcript (JST). The American Council on Education (ACE) is a nonprofit organization, working under a contract from the United States Department of Defense, that reviews the JST and develops recommendations for college-level coursework equivalencies for transfer. Allowing prior military experience to count as postsecondary 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 outside the college classroom, such as national exams and certifications. Actual credit transferred is solely at the discretion of the college or university.

However, HED notes complications may arise when these credits are transferred. In particular, a 2015 report from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) stated 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, which can result in a large number of ACE recommended credits that may not all count toward the degree the student is pursuing. The report also stated that, because of financial aid eligibility requirements, the practice of transferring all ACE-recommended credits can lead to financial aid ineligibility for student veterans due to the fact of having too many credits on their transcripts.

In New Mexico, transfer and acceptance of military service credits are not uniform across the postsecondary institutions; HED states credits can potentially be applied to a student degree plan, including requirements of electives, general education, program, or major. According to 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, many of the credits transferred from the JST will apply as elective credits but not toward a student's degree, even if the credits are closely aligned with coursework the degree requires.

Currently, HED is working to implement a statewide common course numbering system, which will create a statewide system that will ease credit transfer and articulation between the postsecondary institutions. The system will include the identification of equivalent courses, alignment of student learning outcomes, and assignment of a common course number. HED believes the development of a comprehensive, statewide transfer policy for military credit reflected on the JST could be developed in parallel with the department's existing work on articulation, transfer, and common course numbering.

In its analysis on a similar bill, the Department of Veterans' Services notes that several states have military service college credit transfer programs, which is a cost savings to the postsecondary institution, federal government, and the student veteran. At a minimum, most service members have taken basic college courses as part of their military training, which is the equivalent of an associate's degree. However, when the student veteran enrolls in a postsecondary institution, they are required to retake many of the same basic college courses.

## **Background:**

During the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee interim meeting in August, Suzanne Hultin, policy specialist with the Education Program from National Conference of State

Legislatures presented policies from other states providing veterans with college credits for their military experience and training. In particular, 20 states have passed legislation mandating that either their higher education systems or their postsecondary institutions adopt policies to accept prior learning assessments, such as those developed by ACE, that might be used in assigning credit for military service. ACE has developed a partial database of military training and suggested correlations to college credit, though each state or institute has final discretion in what credit, if any, is assigned to a veteran student. While New Mexico does not have a statewide policy for accepting prior learning assessments, six of the state's postsecondary institutions assign credits for "life experiences," including military service.

ACE prior learning assessments and transcript evaluations are currently inconsistent, not only across New Mexico's postsecondary institutions, but also within each institution. Transcripts must be evaluated individually, and the process is hampered in part by the sudden increase in recent years of veterans leaving the service and enrolling in college. CAEL shows that students who are given prior learning assessments are 2.5 times more likely to graduate, yet many New Mexico veteran students are not getting these assessments and are at increased risk of dropping out.

### ***Articulation Trends***

According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS), trends related to transfer and articulation of course credits have shifted from institutional agreements to statewide policies. Many states, however, still have fragmented policies that apply to one system of higher education and not another. ECS's analysis shows that:

- 36 states have a transferable core of lower-division courses;
- 16 states use a common course-numbering system;
- 36 states have a guaranteed transfer of associate degrees; and
- 16 states have a standard credit-by-assessment policy.

In 1995, legislation was enacted that charged the then-Commission on Higher Education (now HED) to "establish and maintain a comprehensive statewide plan to provide for the articulation of educational programs and facilitate the transfer of students between institutions." It further required the creation of "transfer modules [that] shall include a common general education core component of not less than [35] semester hours."

During the 2003 and 2004 interims, LESC heard testimony that articulation problems:

- occur both for courses in the general education core and those in particular degree programs;
- cause additional expense for students and the state Lottery Tuition Fund; and
- lengthen the time required to complete a degree and discourage some students from doing so.

### **Related Bills:**

SB 29 *College Credit for Military Training*