



March 19, 2021

MODIFICATIONS FOR LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM – STUDENT DATA

On Thursday in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee members heard testimony on House Bill 320. The bill transfers the responsibility for providing specified professional and occupational license and industry and vocational certificate data to the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) Center from the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). The USM urged a favorable report.

House Bill 320 would allow the MLDS Center to collect information for professional and occupational licenses from Department of Labor and Department of Health; vocational certificates from Maryland Community Colleges; and industry certifications from a national certifier that receives state funds. Specifically, the bill allows for additional representatives to be added to the MLDS Governing board, to accommodate the Health Occupation Boards, which are independent of the Secretary of the Department of Health.

USM SEEKS MORE REPRESENTATION FOR PRIOR LEARNING CREDIT TASK FORCE

On Tuesday in House Appropriation Committee, members discussed House Bill 1208 which creates a task force to study the awarding of academic credit for prior learning in higher education. As written, the community colleges would have 17 representatives and the 12 institutions and three regional centers of the USM, representing over 170,000 students, would have only one representative. The USM sought an amendment to include one representative of the USM (central office), and three (3) additional appointees from University System of Maryland institutions - one from a research institution, one from a comprehensive institution, and one from an HBCU.

The testimony noted also that UMGC has a great deal of expertise in the area of assessment of prior learning, so either a representative from UMGC or the inclusion of experts from UMGC in the agendas of the Task Force would be helpful.

BILL SEEKS ADDITIONAL LEAVE TIME IN PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

On Wednesday in the Senate Finance Committee, the USM weighed-in on Senate Bill 727. The bill expands the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act to require employers to provide additional leave to covered employees during a declared public health emergency. Full-time employees would be granted 112 hours, or almost 4 weeks, of additional leave. The leave could be used if the employee or their family member is ill, needs to isolate, needs to seek preventive medical care or treatment, or the employee needs to care for dependents when schools or childcare providers are closed. USM supported the bill with an amendment that would exempt employees of the twelve USM constituent institutions.

These purposes closely track the various reasons employees from all sectors have needed to be absent from work during the covid pandemic. Providing sufficient sick leave to protect employees from loss of pay during a public health emergency is important. Such protections are already in place for USM institution employees. Those employees currently have access to multiple forms of leave that have allowed them to be absent, with pay, as necessary during the covid pandemic for the same reasons mentioned in Senate Bill 727. The categories of leave available to USM employees include sick and safe leave, advanced sick leave, extended sick leave, family and parental leave, collegial leave, and reserve fund leave. Also, following formal guidance from the USM Chancellor's Office, USM institutions have permitted employees to use leave like that required by the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act through June 30, even though the deadline for using the federally mandated leave expired December 30th. As a result, USM institution employees are protected from loss of pay when they need to be absent to care for themselves or family members during the pandemic.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE CREDIT ACCEPTANCE TOPIC OF BILL HEARING

On Tuesday in House Appropriations Committee, members received USM testimony on House Bill 1159. The bill requires that *all general education credits* that a student earns at any community college in the State toward an associate of arts or associate of science degree be transferable to any public four-year institution for credit toward a bachelor's degree without further review or a testing requirement.

USM institutions already accept credits toward a bachelor's degree. However, it must be noted that there are situations in which a course does not transfer as credit toward the major, but instead will be applied as elective credit. These instances occur when a course is in a major that is accredited by its discipline at the 4-year institution, but not at the community college. An example is a basic social science course may not be accepted toward a major in Social Work if the accrediting agency states that all courses in the major must be taken in an accredited program. No legislation can overrule the regulations imposed by an accrediting body.

For those students who start their education in a community college, completion of the AA degree is important. USM institutions provide special financial aid packages to students who transfer. However, to require four-year institutions to incentivize the completion of an associate's degree before enrolling in a four-year institution will have detrimental effects on the four-year institutions, since there are still many students who do and will continue to choose to attend a four-year institution first. The recommend a portion of the bill language be amended to read:

“The Commission and each public institution of higher education shall develop and implement incentives for students WHO BEGIN AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES to obtain an associate’s degree before enrolling in a public senior institution of higher education.”

The USM is working to improve the articulation system platform (ARTSYS) that provides students, staff, and faculty information about recommended articulation pathways, course transfer equivalency, and automates many of the current data management processes for transfer students in Maryland.

UPCOMING BILL HEARING(S)

SB0283 (HB0156)

Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act

Senator Elfreth

In the House - Hearing 3/23 at 1:30 p.m.

Ways and Means