

Testimony for HB 1220

March 20, 2025

The faculty of the Hamm School of Engineering at the University of Mary has a few points regarding the potential effects of passage of this bill which legislators may want to consider.

The bill assumes cutting general education accelerates employability, but it risks the opposite. High-demand occupations—like engineering or healthcare—rely on skills beyond technical know-how. Communication, critical thinking, and ethical judgment, built through humanities, are what employers in these fields consistently demand. Our industry advisor committee frequently places “soft skills” as a priority for them when hiring and a 2021 LinkedIn skills report flagged these as top priorities across industries. Graduates with only narrow training might struggle to collaborate or innovate, making North Dakota’s workforce less competitive, not more.

Accelerating degrees by eliminating liberal arts could weaken the state’s ability to attract and retain high-value industries. Companies choosing where to invest look at talent pools. A 2019 National Academies report emphasized that engineers with broader skills—like cultural awareness or creative problem-solving—excel in global markets. If North Dakota produces one-dimensional graduates, firms might bypass the state for places with more versatile talent, hurting long-term economic growth.

Section 2 forces occupational boards to recognize these accelerated degrees for licensing, but that doesn’t guarantee quality. Professional fields often implicitly expect well-rounded training. For example, engineers need to navigate ethical dilemmas (e.g., safety vs. cost), which humanities courses address. A flood of minimally educated licensees could lead to subpar performance, public safety issues, or even legal challenges—think infrastructure failures or medical errors—costing the state more than the bill saves.

By letting institutions drop general education (Section 1.d), the bill risks turning North Dakota degrees into glorified trade certificates. Top-tier universities—like those North Dakota might compete with—maintain rigorous, broad curricula, which bolster their prestige and alumni success. A 2022 Carnegie Classification analysis tied well-rounded education to higher institutional rankings. If accelerated degrees dilute quality, enrollment could drop as students find superior options out of state, and the state’s higher ed system might lose non-governmental funding and influence.

Students opting for these degrees (Section 1.a) might graduate faster but may languish in low level technical positions and be less prepared for career shifts or leadership roles, common in high-demand fields. Humanities teach civic awareness—vital for professionals shaping communities. Without it, you get a workforce that solves today’s problems but can’t anticipate tomorrow’s, sticking the state with future costs.

High-demand occupations thrive on breakthroughs, and humanities fuel that. Historical case studies or philosophical debates sharpen creative thinking—key for designing the next big thing. A 2017

American Society for Engineering Education study linked humanities exposure to better innovation in STEM grads. North Dakota's push to lead in high-demand sectors could stall if it sacrifices the intellectual breadth that drives progress.

HB 1220 trades speed for strength. It risks graduating a workforce that's less employable, less innovative, and less equipped to keep North Dakota competitive. The data shows employers and industries need more than tech skills—they need thinkers. This bill could cost us more in reputation and economic loss than it saves in time.

Sincerely,

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