

Connor Ferguson | Student Body President
Connor.ferguson@und.edu

House Bill 1220
Workforce Development Committee
March 21, 2025

Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Workforce Development Committee,

My name is Connor Ferguson, and I serve as the Student Body President at the University of North Dakota (UND). I am submitting testimony in opposition to HB 1220, relating to the creation of a North Dakota accelerated degree for high-demand occupations.

In your deliberations, I want to make sure that the student perspective is represented. This bill would allow institutions of higher education to offer accelerated bachelor's degrees by removing required general education credits. These general education requirements include courses focused on written and oral communication and digital information literacy, both of which are high-demand skills sought after by employers. Even if students are competent in their major area of study, employers may be wary of hiring students that cannot illustrate competence in these areas. This puts students with an accelerated degree at a competitive disadvantage and supplies the state with a less educated and less prepared workforce.

The primary reason for the introduction of this bill was to offer workforce relief for North Dakota's high demand occupations. Unfortunately, this piece of legislation will not resolve the issues that North Dakota industries face as it would not increase the throughput of a particular degree field. For example, after the initial adjustment to 3-year degree programs, a program that graduated 50 graduates every year with a 4-year bachelor's degree will still graduate 50 graduates every year with an accelerated degree. Overall, in this situation, with or without the accelerated degrees, 50 graduates would enter the workforce each year. Some much more effective ways to increase throughput in high-demand fields would be investment in college preparation in K-12 education or investing in early career and technical education. North Dakota's 2-year institutions

are extremely valuable, and they are the key to offering quality education to students who don't want to spend 4 years on a degree.

While this bill would allow students to receive a bachelor's degree quicker, it would have significant costs for their career outlooks. Students would graduate without proven essential skills that North Dakota employers require. This puts North Dakota graduates at a disadvantage when applying for jobs in North Dakota, and this puts North Dakota employers at a disadvantage with a less skilled workforce. Our employers deserve to know that students graduating from any NDUS institution are critical thinkers, communicators, and problem solvers that can tackle the challenges North Dakota companies face every day. These skills are primarily taught in the general education courses that would not be required for an accelerated degree.

In addition, we are concerned about how this bill will affect student experience at universities in North Dakota. This bill can create problems with accreditation as many accrediting bodies have general education requirements alongside their technical requirements. Jeopardizing accreditation will harm the reputation of our programs and make North Dakota schools less desirable in comparison to our regional peers. Furthermore, the ability for an institution to accelerate a degree path annually will create confusion and instability for students as their programs can shift between 3 and 4 years without much warning based on North Dakota's needs. A bachelor's degree is designed to expand our students' worldviews and expose them to new ideas and studies outside their career field. That's the value of a bachelor's degree and is the reason that I chose to take a 4th year when I had the opportunity to finish in 3 years.

Chairman Wobbema and members of the Workforce Development Committee, I respectfully request a Do Not Pass recommendation on HB 1220. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Connor Ferguson