

HB 1220

March 21, 2025

Senate Workforce Development

Rachelle Hunt, President

Council of College Faculties

Dear Chair Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, I am writing on behalf of the Council of College Faculties (CCF), representing the 11 public institutions of the North Dakota University System (NDUS). Faculty across all NDUS institutions have raised serious concerns regarding HB 1220, and we encourage a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation.

While we recognize the intent behind this bill to address workforce shortages in high-demand occupations, we believe that the proposed legislation could have significant negative consequences for higher education and the professional readiness of our graduates.

1. **Undermining Comprehensive Education:** House Bill 1220 proposes the creation of North Dakota accelerated degrees that do not require general education credits. General education courses are crucial not just for developing well-rounded individuals, but they are also *essential to teaching high demand skills* for any occupation—from trades to healthcare and beyond—including critical thinking skills, cultural awareness, and the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing. These courses provide a foundation that is indispensable for success in any profession. By eliminating this requirement, the bill risks producing graduates who are narrowly trained, less effective in the jobs they are trained for, and lack the broader skills necessary to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing job market.
2. **Quality and Accreditation Concerns:** The bill mandates that occupational and professional boards recognize North Dakota accelerated degrees as accredited programs for licensing purposes. This blanket approval could undermine the rigorous standards currently upheld by the Higher Learning Commission and specific programmatic accreditation bodies. A blanket recognition of degrees is not feasible for most professions. Each state, along with its respective licensure, registration, and certification boards, has distinct regulations, processes, and procedures for recognizing accredited degrees and issuing credentials necessary for professionals to practice within that state. These processes and procedures cannot be rushed, which would compromise the quality of education provided in North Dakota.

While some may question the need for accreditation and outside oversight, accreditation ensures that educational programs meet high standards of quality and rigor. Without these safeguards, there is a risk that accelerated degrees may not provide the depth and breadth of knowledge required for professional competence, potentially compromising public safety and trust in our educational institutions.

3. **Impact on Institutional Autonomy:** House Bill 1220 does not define “high-demand occupations,” thereby granting institutions the authority to determine which degrees meet that criterion and to offer accelerated degrees accordingly. This could lead to

inconsistencies and a lack of uniformity across institutions. Furthermore, it places undue pressure on institutions to prioritize short-term workforce needs over long-term educational goals and student success over their careers. Institutions should have the autonomy to design curricula that balance immediate job market demands with the broader mission of higher education.

4. **Long-Term Workforce Implications:** While the bill aims to address immediate workforce shortages, it fails to consider the long-term implications of producing graduates with limited educational experience. High-demand occupations are often dynamic and require professionals who can adapt to new challenges and technologies. A comprehensive education that includes general education courses equips graduates with the versatility needed to navigate these changes and contribute meaningfully to their fields over the course of their careers.
5. **Creates Uncertainty for Students:** According to the bill, Institutions may annually determine which programs are in high demand, leaving students without guarantees that their chosen program will remain accelerated. While this bill aims to make institutions agile and responsive to workforce needs, it inadvertently creates a logistical challenge. Some students will be on the North Dakota accelerated degree track, others on the regular degree track, and still others may be on the accelerated track that has since been discontinued. These students will either need to be taught out based on the requirements at the time they entered the program or retroactively fulfill general education requirements.
6. **Requires Waivers for Institutional Legal Protections:** To mitigate the risk of lawsuits related to misleading or misrepresenting employability, students opting for a “North Dakota accelerated track” degree must be fully informed that this degree may not be recognized outside the state. Consequently, they may need to complete additional coursework to work beyond North Dakota’s boundaries. Written waivers will likely be required to document this informed choice.

In conclusion, while we appreciate the efforts to address workforce needs, House Bill 1220 is not the solution. It undermines the quality and comprehensiveness of higher education, poses risks to accreditation standards, could lead to inequities and long-term workforce challenges, may negatively impact student completion rates, and could lead to lawsuits against NDUS institutions. We strongly urge a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation.

Sincerely,
Rachelle Hunt, President
Council of College Faculties