



North Dakota House of Representatives

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Good afternoon Chairman Heinert and committee members. For the record, Mike Motschenbacher from District 47 representing Northwest Bismarck.

Today you have before you HB 1220. I just want to make it known that the first draft I received back on this bill was on June 25th of 2024, so this is not something I just threw together. I've been working on this bill for quite some time. The second thing I want to make you aware of is that this bill still may need some amendments. I believe there will be people testifying behind me that like the concept but may have some suggestions for amendments, so please know I am willing to negotiate some of those to help get this bill passed.

What HB 1220 does is actually pretty simple. It creates the possibility for North Dakota institutions of Higher Education to offer degrees to students that will help solve three issues. First it will graduate students with less debt, will help address North Dakota's workforce issues, and will help keep North Dakota students in the state.

I'd like to walk through the bill with you to help explain exactly what it does.

Line 7 mentions the name as an "accelerated degree". This actually may be better names as a "compressed degree". Accelerated degrees are degrees that concentrate more on getting the student to graduate faster by offering additional courses, taking additional credits and such to graduate at a faster pace but still get the full degree. Compressed degrees offer the ability to get a degree with less credits required. It may be irrelevant, but if the committee would like to change this to better reflect the accuracy of what this truly does, that would be acceptable.

Line 8 ends with the word "may", so I just wanted to stress this to show that it is not mandatory that institutions offer this. It is completely optional.

Section 1a mentions the word "optional" so once again, just stressing that it is not mandatory. It also mentions "high demand occupation". High demand occupations are nothing new and are already provided and updated by ND Job Service. You will see a copy of this in your packet.

Section 1c simply states that institutions of higher ed will relay to the licensing boards a list of "accelerated" or "compressed" degrees that the institution will offer

Section 1d and section 2 are kind of the meat and potatoes of the bill. This states that they can offer degrees that eliminate general education classes that are currently required to graduate with a degree and become licensed in the state.

So now the question is probably why do we need this bill? It's my opinion after looking at general education requirements needed to graduate, that most are unnecessary. I believe higher education should be looking at more focused and specialized approaches to educating students for their desired careers. It turns out that many studies that have been done also agree. The **National Bureau of Economic Research** in a study found that prolonged degree completion due to non-essential courses contributes to increased dropout rates and delays workforce entry. The **Association of American Colleges & Universities** found that employers are more interested in *field-specific expertise, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills* than in broad general knowledge. Although general education credits are mostly aimed at creating "well rounded" students, research in the **Journal of College Science Teaching** highlighted concerns about the traditional university curriculum's ability to enhance critical thinking and scientific literacy. The study suggested that Gen Ed courses often fail to effectively develop these essential skills, calling into question their overall efficacy. In studying these questions, I founded endless resources backing up the arguments that they are unnecessary, have a negative overall impression on the students, and are mostly not important to the organizations that are looking to hire these students.

If we pass this bill and colleges start offering these degrees, this would likely reduce the average student loan debt per student by 25%. This would also get students out of college earlier and into the workforce faster where we so desperately need them right now. And the best part, it doesn't cost us any money!

Furthermore, and maybe one of the most beneficial things about this bill, is that it is likely that other states may not recognize these degrees and thus, many of the students would likely stay in ND to work where they are accepted rather than transfer to another state. Some may look at this as too restrictive, but I would ask "Who's workforce problem are we trying to solve? North Dakota's? Or Minnesota, South Dakota, and Montana?"

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee and with that I would stand for any questions.