



Minot State University Faculty Senate

Testimony to the Senate Workforce Development Committees
State of North Dakota 69th Legislative Assembly

Re: House Bill 1220: A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15-10 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of a North Dakota accelerated degree for high-demand occupations.

Testimony by the Minot State University Faculty Senate
21 March 2025

Senator Mike Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee:

As faculty members at Minot State University, we are dedicated instructors and advisors of and advocates for our students. We want them to succeed in their lives as well as in our classrooms. Because of this, we urge you to give a **Do Not Pass** recommendation to House Bill 1220. Although its goals of reducing student debt and building a strong North Dakota workforce are ones we share, this bill as it stands cannot help meet those goals. This bill will not enable Minot State University or any NDUS institution to create and promote innovative academic programs to benefit the in-state, out-of-state, and international students we attract and serve by offering reduced-time degrees because the “accelerated degrees” it proposes would neither meet institutional and program accreditation nor permit students to become licensed in many occupational fields.

HB 1220 allows degrees that are “accelerated” by removing their general education course requirements, something that is claimed will enable students to graduate with less debt, will help address North Dakota's workforce issues, and will keep North Dakota students in the state. However, testimony already given on this bill in the House shows that such “accelerated” degrees could not be offered by North Dakota institutions of higher learning because they would not meet external standards for accreditation: neither by the Higher Learning Commission, which is the accreditor for all North Dakota University System institutions, nor by the individual accreditors of the professional and vocational programs that prepare our students for the workforce.

Lisa Johnson, Vice Chancellor for Student and Academic Affairs with the North Dakota University System, pointed out in her testimony to the House Education Committee that the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) requires, as part of its process of accepting reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs like these, that institutions must show they have “policies and processes for adequately incorporating general education, and the associated breadth and depth of student learning, into the reduced-credit bachelor's degree program[s]” for it to accredit those programs (https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/69-2025/testimony/HEDU-1220-20250120-30210-A-JOHNSON_LISA.pdf).

Vice Chancellor Johnson also points out that NDUS institutions and the State Board of Higher Education currently are working to develop robust reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs that will meet HLC and other accreditors' requirements while incorporating elements of general education that are critical for helping students develop the breadth of knowledge and critical thinking that will enable them to have not just jobs, but careers. It seems unproductive to try to steer the SBHE and NDUS institutions

away from developing accredited reduced-credit degrees that can meet students' and our workforce's needs and towards developing degrees without general education that *cannot* be offered without programs and institutions risking their accreditation.

Moreover, the provision in this bill that “an occupational or professional board shall approve a North Dakota accelerated degree and recognize the degree as an accredited program for licensing purposes,” proposes a practice that simply cannot be implemented. As Sandra DePountis with the North Dakota Board of Medicine pointed out in her testimony, accreditation of the programs under the Board of Medicine’s jurisdiction is done by national accreditation bodies. Students must graduate from an accredited degree program to be able to take licensing exams and be accepted into residency programs as physicians and physician assistants (https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/69-2025/testimony/HEDU-1220-20250120-30109-N-DEPOUNTIS_SANDRA.pdf). Likewise, dental hygienists in all fifty states must “pass the National Dental Hygiene Examination,” which “can only be taken by students who have completed” a program accredited by the national Commission on Dental Accreditation (https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/69-2025/testimony/HEDU-1220-20250120-30149-N-SCHAIBLEY_DAVID_J.pdf). Creating degrees that only offer “state accreditation” would do nothing to enable students to enter these professional fields and help North Dakota meet its workforce needs.

Finally, some claim that these university degree programs without general education would keep students in North Dakota because it is likely that other states will not recognize these degrees. Reasonably, the most likely result of creating “bachelor’s” degrees without fundamental general education at their core, even if such degrees *could* exist and be accredited, would be that North Dakota students and their parents who want good value for their educational dollars would choose to spend that money out of state. Moreover, the many students from outside North Dakota who currently attend our state’s institutions of higher learning almost surely would stay away if North Dakota’s institutions of higher learning were to gain a reputation for offering degrees that aren’t recognized elsewhere and fail to prepare them to be licensed in their chosen occupations.

We want the best for our students, including the best accelerated degrees that will meet national standards. We urge you to support the State Board of Higher Education and North Dakota University System institutions as we work to create degrees that are affordable, high-quality, and fully accredited, ones that will invite students to come to North Dakota (and maybe stay!) and will enable North Dakota students to gain the skills for work and for life that ensure their success within the state. To keep us all focused on the goals of achieving efficient degrees, less student debt, and a world-class workforce, we urge you to recommend **Do Not Pass** on HB 1220.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mark Singer
President, Minot State University Faculty Senate