



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

**Senate Higher Education Committee
October 17, 2016
Senate Bill No. 2620**

The state colleges and universities support the goal of this legislation to help student save on the cost of their college education by accelerating their time to obtaining their degree. We oppose this specific proposal, however, because it would interfere with our boards of trustees' authority over academic programming. Moreover, the bill creates several mandates that would increase institutional costs.

The legislature granted our boards of trustees with the power and duty “to establish admission standards and requirements and standards for granting diplomas, certificates and degrees” (C. 18A:3B-6.d), and “to determine the educational curriculum and program of the college consistent with the programmatic mission of the institution” (C. 18A:64-6b). These provisions have been in place for decades, and they have allowed our institutions to flourish.

The requirement under Sec. 1.a.(4) – calling on the institution “to provide a student with free tuition and free housing during the summer” for the two summers envisioned under the program created under the bill – raises a serious concern that it will become an expensive unfunded mandate. While Section 2 would require the State to reimburse institutions “for the costs of tuition and housing for the summer terms for students who participate in a three-year baccalaureate degree program,” the provision is without effect if the funds are not provided each year in the State budget.

Institutions may need to expand their administrative and academic support staff under this bill. Section 1.b requires institutions to “offer support resources, such as advising and academic supports, to assist students in the successful completion of an accelerated three-year baccalaureate degree program.” This requirement could lead to higher institutional costs.

Three-year degrees may be the right path for some students. Students who begin college with significant academic credits through Advanced Placement tests or other means, and who are highly motivated and exceptionally well-prepared, would be the right fit for a three-year program, but that would include few students.

For populations that most need to increase college success—such as older adults, lower-income and minority students—the three-year degree can be a nonstarter due to financial realities, college preparation issues, and family obligations. These dynamics raise questions over the equity and efficiency of the three-year degree to increase student achievement and to lower costs.

Three-year degree programs raise issues of quality as well, including student learning, development of critical-thinking skills, personal growth, and civic engagement. Under a three-year model, students may participate in a sequence of courses without the time to make full meaning of their newly acquired knowledge, or to take part in on- and off-campus experiences.

We encourage the legislature to work with our institutions to find ways of helping full-time students complete their degrees in *four* years.

www.njascu.org

*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Rowan University*

*Stockton University
Thomas Edison State University
William Paterson University*