

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Education

BILL: SB 372

INTRODUCER: Senator Lee

SUBJECT: Postsecondary Education for Certain Military Personnel

DATE: December 6, 2019

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Caldwell</u>	<u>MS</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>Bouck</u>	<u>Sikes</u>	<u>ED</u>	Pre-meeting
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 372 promotes uniformity in the application of military experience, training, and education toward postsecondary credit by public postsecondary educational institutions; and establishes a fee waiver for active duty members and honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Specifically, the bill requires:

- The Articulation Coordinating Committee of the Florida Department of Education to convene a workgroup to develop a uniform process for determining when military experience and credentials are appropriate for postsecondary credit. The committee must approve a list of postsecondary course equivalencies, including minimum credit, based on military experience and credentials.
- The Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida (BOG) and the State Board of Education (SBE), in consultation with the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs to adopt regulations and rules, respectively, which create a uniform system for the awarding of postsecondary credit based on military experience, training, and education. Public postsecondary institutions must award credit based on such rule and regulation beginning January 1, 2022.
- A state university, Florida College System institution, career center operated by a school district, or a charter technical career center to waive transcript fees for active duty servicemembers and honorably discharged veterans, and their spouses and dependents.

The bill would have a minimal fiscal impact on the BOG, SBE, state colleges, and universities.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2020.

II. Present Situation:

Florida provides active duty servicemembers and honorably discharged veterans with a number of educational benefits.

Academic College Credit for Training and Education Acquired in the Military

Florida law requires the Board of Governors of the State University System (BOG) and the State Board of Education (SBE) to enable, through regulation and rule, eligible servicemembers and veterans to earn academic college credit at public postsecondary educational institutions based on college-level training and education acquired in the military.¹

In adopting regulations and rules, the BOG and the SBE must include procedures to evaluate credentials and the award of academic college credit, including providing for the:

- Equivalency and alignment of military coursework with appropriate college courses;
- Course descriptions;
- Type and amount of college credit that may be awarded; and
- Transfer of credit.²

Tuition and Fee Waivers

Florida law provides tuition and fee waivers to students, in certain circumstances, including veterans and active duty members of the United States Armed Forces (Armed Forces) who meet specified criteria.³ Some waivers are mandatory,⁴ while others are permissive.⁵

The following fee waivers apply to current or former members of the Armed Forces or United States Reserve Forces:

- A person who resides in-state while enrolled in a program who is an honorably discharged veteran of the Armed Forces, the U.S. Reserve Forces, or the National Guard; or who uses the educational assistance provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs is eligible for, and must receive an out-of-state fee waiver from a state university, a Florida College System (FCS) institution, a career center operated by a school district, or a charter technical career center.⁶
- An active duty member of the Armed Forces residing or stationed out-of-state is eligible for, and must receive an out-of-state fee waiver from a state university, FCS institution, career center operated by a school district, or charter technical career center.⁷
- An active duty member of the Armed Forces using military tuition assistance provided by the United States Department of Defense is eligible for, and may receive a waiver of any portion of the student activity and service, fee, the financial aid fee, the technology fee, the capital improvement fee, and any other fees otherwise authorized in law from an FCS institution.⁸
- A recipient of a Purple Heart or another combat decoration superior in precedence who is currently or was at the time of the military action a resident of the state is eligible for, and must receive a tuition waiver for an undergraduate or career certificate program from a state

¹ Section 1004.096, F.S.; *see also* Board of Governors Regulation 6.013 and Rule 6A-14.0302, F.A.C.

² *Id.*

³ Section 1009.26, F.S.

⁴ Section 1009.26 (5), (7)-(8), (12)-(14), F.S.

⁵ Section 1009.26 (1)-(4), (6), (9)-(11), and (15), F.S.

⁶ Section 1009.26(13)(a), F.S.

⁷ Section 1009.26(14)(a), F.S.

⁸ Section 1009.26(15), F.S.

university, an FCS institution, a career center operated by a school district, or a charter technical career center.⁹

Articulation Coordinating Committee

The Commissioner of Education, in consult with the Chancellor of the State University System, establishes the Articulation Coordinating Committee (ACC), whose primary role is to recommend statewide articulation policies.¹⁰ Specifically, the ACC must monitor the alignment between the exit requirements of one education system and admission requirements of another education system into which students typically transfer. The ACC also proposes guidelines for interinstitutional agreements between institutions, including universities, career, and technical centers, and recommends to the BOG and the SBE dual enrollment courses for approval.¹¹ The Office of K-20 Articulation within the Florida Department of Education provides administrative support to the ACC.¹²

The American Council on Education's Military Guide

In 1945, the American Council on Education (ACE) established the Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences, renamed the Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials in 1979, to evaluate military educational programs and aid institutions in determining and granting academic credit. Credit recommendations and detailed summaries for formal courses and occupations offered by branches of the military are published in the ACE Military Guide. All recommendations are based on ACE reviews conducted by college and university faculty members who are actively teaching in the areas they review. Courses and occupations are evaluated for college credit based on appropriate content, scope, and rigor. New courses and occupations are continually considered and added to the Military Guide on a rolling basis. ACE only reviews courses and occupations selected by the military services.¹³

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Academic College Credit for Training and Education Acquired in the Military

SB 372 promotes uniformity in the application of military experience, training, and education toward postsecondary credit by public postsecondary educational institutions, and requires the Board of Governors of the State University System (BOG) and the State Board of Education (SBE), in consultation with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA), to adopt regulations and rules, respectively, to create a uniform system for the awarding of postsecondary credit based on military experience, training, and education.

The bill requires the Articulation Coordinating Committee (ACC) to convene a workgroup by July 15, 2020, to establish a process for developing a process for determining postsecondary course equivalencies and the minimum postsecondary credit that must be awarded for courses

⁹ Section 1009.26(8), F.S.

¹⁰ Section 1007.01(3), F.S.

¹¹ Section 1007.01(3)(a) and (b), F.S.

¹² Section 1007.01(3), F.S.; s. 20.15(3)(h), F.S.

¹³ American Council on Education, *The Military Guide*, <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx> (last visited Nov. 25, 2019).

taken and occupations held by individuals during their service in the military. To determine course equivalencies and credit, the workgroup must consult the American Council on Education Military Guide for courses and occupations listed since January 1, 2000.¹⁴

The workgroup must consist of the following 13 members:

- The chair of the ACC, or his or her designee, serving as chair;
- Four members representing academic affairs administrators and faculty from state universities, appointed by the chair of the BOG;
- Four members representing academic affairs administrators and faculty from FCS institutions, appointed by the chair of the SBE;
- Two members representing faculty from career centers, appointed by the chair of the SBE; and
- Two members representing veterans, appointed by the executive director of the FDVA.

The Office of K-20 Articulation must provide administrative support for the workgroup.

The bill requires the workgroup to submit to the ACC a recommended list of postsecondary course equivalencies and the minimum postsecondary credit that must be awarded for courses taken and occupations held by individuals while in the military. The ACC must review the list for approval by September 1, 2021.¹⁵ The approved list must then be adopted in regulation by the BOG and rule by the SBE by December 1, 2021. As of January 1, 2022, the bill requires state universities,¹⁶ FCS institutions, and career centers to award credit for approved courses and occupations included in the list, if the credit is applicable to the student's degree or certificate. Credit awarded on these bases is guaranteed to transfer to other public postsecondary institutions as if the credit were earned at the receiving institution.

Requiring the BOG and the SBE to adopt a uniform system and specified course equivalencies could lend greater consistency to the process of awarding academic credit based on military experience or occupations across all public postsecondary institutions.

Fee Waivers

The bill provides active duty servicemembers and honorably discharged veterans, and their spouses and dependents a fee waiver on a transcript from a state university, FCS institution, career center operated by a school district, or a charter technical career center. Each of these institutions must annually report to the BOG and the SBE the number and value of transcript fee

¹⁴ An analysis of the ACE Military Guide indicates that there are 4,952 courses and 967 occupations evaluated by ACE since January 1, 2000. American Council on Education, *The Military Guide*, <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx> (last visited Nov. 25, 2019).

¹⁵ According to BOG staff, the timeline required in the bill to establish a list of postsecondary course equivalencies, from July 15, 2020 to August 31, 2021, is insufficient to review the list of military training occupations provided by ACE as outlined in the bill. Board of Governors, *2020 Agency Analysis of SB 372* (Nov. 4, 2019), at 6.

¹⁶ It is unclear if such credit awarded would be included in the calculation of excess hours as required in s. 1009.286(4), F.S., and BOG Regulation 7.003(21). Board of Governors, *2020 Agency Analysis of SB 372* (Nov. 4, 2019), at 7. Credit hours earned through examinations (e.g., Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate) or courses taken by active-duty military personnel are not included in the calculation of excess hours at a state university. Section 1009.286(4)(a) and (e), F.S.

waivers granted. The BOG and the SBE are required to adopt regulations and rules, respectively, to administer the transcript fee waivers.

The transcript fee waiver may further assist with making higher education more affordable for active duty members and honorably discharged veterans of the Armed Forces.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2020.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Qualifying servicemembers and veterans may save money through the transcript fee waiver, which will also apply to spouses and dependents.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Board of Governors of the State University System (BOG) and the State Board of Education (SBE) may incur fiscal costs from the bill, based on the provisions that require the BOG and the SBE to amend or adopt new regulations and rules, and that require a workgroup to convene and draft recommendations.

Additionally, institutions will have to waive the transcript fee for active duty servicemembers and honorably discharged veterans, and their spouses and dependents, and annually report the number of waivers to the BOG and the SBE.

Based on data provided by the BOG, a total of approximately 8,000 veterans or active duty members enrolled during the 2017-18 academic year could generate between \$48,000 to \$80,000 in transcript fees.¹⁷

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 1004.096 and 1009.26.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

¹⁷ Board of Governors, *2020 Legislative Bill Analysis of SB 372* (Nov. 4, 2019), at 9.