

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 54



Introduced by **Representative RAYMOND ADRIAN SALCEDA**

**AN ACT
INSTITUTING THE GENERAL EDUCATION DIPLOMA PROGRAM IN
STATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES, AND TO FACILITATE
COURSE EXPLORATION, ACADEMIC MOBILITY, AND
INTER-INSTITUTIONAL CREDIT TRANSFER**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In the Philippine higher education system, students are required to choose a specific degree program upon admission to a State University or College (SUC) – often before they are fully prepared to make such a decision. Many make course choices based on external pressure or limited career guidance and later realize that their original program does not align with their interests or abilities. This leads to widespread course shifting, credit loss, and delayed graduation.

The fiscal consequences are significant. Based on conservative estimates, each additional year spent in college due to inefficient credit transfers, rigid curricular structures, or delayed major declaration costs the government between ₱30,000 to ₱60,000 per student annually in tuition subsidy alone under Republic Act No. 10931, otherwise known as the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act*. When indirect costs such as delayed employment, foregone income tax contributions, and higher student dropout risk are added, the figure rises to ₱60,000 – ₱120,000 per student per year.

In 2023, there were over 1.5 million students enrolled in SUCs. Assuming even a conservative 15% incidence of course shifting or inter-institutional transfer disruptions, this means that at least **225,000 students are potentially incurring avoidable delays**. Multiplied by the public cost per student, this translates to an estimated **₱13.5 billion to ₱27 billion in annual inefficiencies** borne by the national government and the broader economy.

Worse, many qualified students forgo college altogether after failing to gain admission into their program of choice – despite meeting the general admission cut-off for their SUC. This rigid sorting mechanism wastes potential and institutional resources.

This bill addresses these inefficiencies by instituting a **General Education Diploma Program** in all SUCs. It enables students to complete CHED-prescribed general education courses – concentrated within the first two years – before declaring a major. It affirms students' rights to:

- Shift from one SUC to another, subject to reasonable admissions requirements;
- Have all CHED-compliant subjects credited without undue barriers;
- Explore subjects outside their primary program;
- Pursue minors and second degrees, with the understanding that such additional units will be self-funded.

By reducing duplication, enabling academic mobility, and affirming the learner's right to change direction, this bill promotes a more efficient, equitable, and fiscally responsible tertiary education system.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate approval of this measure is earnestly sought.



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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Academic Freedom Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to promote flexible, inclusive, and learner-centered higher education. The State recognizes the need to provide students enrolled in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) with opportunities to explore academic interests, transfer between degree programs or institutions with minimal disruption, and acquire credentials even prior to major specialization.

SEC. 3. *Rights of Students in State Universities and Colleges.* – To promote academic freedom and learner autonomy, the following rights shall be guaranteed to all students enrolled in any State University or College (SUC):

(a) The right to shift from one SUC to another, subject only to reasonable and proportionate admission requirements duly promulgated by the receiving institution;

(b) The right to have prior CHED-compliant courses credited in another SUC, without being subjected to undue repetition or burdensome requirements, provided that the receiving SUC may require validation through examinations or assessments;

(c) The right to enroll in subjects outside one's declared program of study, for the purpose of academic enrichment, cross-disciplinary learning, or eventual completion of a minor or second degree; and

(d) The right to a reasonable period of time to explore academic interests prior to final

declaration of a major or field of specialization.

SEC. 4. *Establishment of the General Education Diploma Program.* – All State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) shall offer a General Education Diploma Program consisting of the complete general education curriculum as prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The general education courses shall be primarily concentrated within the first two (2) years of college to ensure early completion and maximum portability of academic units. Completion of the required general education subjects shall entitle the student to a formal diploma issued by the SUC.

SEC. 5. *Objectives.* – The General Education Diploma Program shall:

- (a) Provide students with foundational academic knowledge applicable across disciplines;
- (b) Facilitate shifting between degree programs within and across SUCs;
- (c) Allow students time to explore academic interests before selecting a major field;
- (d) Enable students to pursue minors or second degrees using credited general education units; and
- (e) Promote seamless inter-institutional credit transfer of CHED-compliant subjects.

SEC. 6. *Free Tuition Coverage.* – Enrollment in the General Education Diploma Program and the primary major degree of study shall be covered under Republic Act No. 10931, otherwise known as the “*Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act.*” However, units taken for the purpose of acquiring a second degree or a declared minor shall not be covered by the free tuition provisions and shall be subject to tuition and other applicable fees.

SEC. 7. *Academic Mobility and Credit Transfer.* – No student shall be denied transfer from one SUC to another solely on the basis of origin or prior enrollment. All CHED-compliant subjects completed in one SUC shall be credited in another SUC, provided that the receiving institution may require examinations or assessments to validate subject mastery.

SEC. 8. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), in consultation with SUCs, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for its effective implementation.

SEC. 9. *Separability Clause.* – If any portion or provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, other provisions hereof shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 10. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, orders, rules, and regulations or other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 11. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,