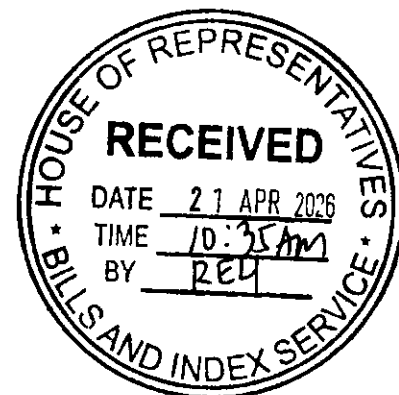


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **8913**



Introduced by HON. PHILIP CONRAD "DOK BONG" M. ACOP

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

The proposed Academic Freedom Act institutionalizes a standardized General Education (GE) Diploma Program within State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). The bill addresses long-standing systemic barriers that hinder student mobility, financial efficiency, and academic exploration. This act is a vital mechanism to modernize the tertiary education system, making it more responsive to the needs of the 21st-century learner.

The proposed Academic Freedom Act aligns with the global shift toward flexible learning pathways. Currently, many Filipino students find themselves constrained within degree programs they chose at age 16 or 17 which they might not necessarily want in the long-run, often due to the prohibitive cost of shifting – not just in terms of money, but in lost time and uncredited units.

By mandating that GE courses be concentrated in the first two years and awarding a formal diploma upon completion, the bill recognizes that foundational knowledge is a distinct and valuable academic milestone. It acknowledges that a student's educational journey is rarely linear. In an era where cross-disciplinary skills are highly valued by employers, the right to enroll in subjects outside one's major and the formal recognition of GE completion provide students with a versatile credential that enhances employability even before they finish a full four-year degree.

The necessity of the Academic Freedom Act is rooted in the current lack of inter-institutional harmony. While the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) sets standards, the actual transfer of credits between SUCs is often mired in bureaucracy. Students transferring institutions frequently face "undue repetition" as they are forced to retake nearly identical subjects simply because of institutional gatekeeping.

Section 7 of the Act directly addresses the abovementioned problem by prohibiting the denial of transfer based on “origin or prior enrollment.” This is essential for social equity; students should not be penalized for moving due to family relocation, financial changes, or shifting career goals. The Act creates a seamless credit-transfer ecosystem, ensuring that the government’s investment in a student’s education is not wasted through redundant coursework.

If passed, the Academic Freedom Act will yield several high-impact benefits for the Philippine education system, as follows:

1. **Increased Academic Persistence:** By allowing a “reasonable period of time to explore” (Sec. 3d), students are less likely to drop out due to a lack of interest in their initially chosen major. They can find their true calling without the fear of “starting from zero.”
2. **Enhanced Student Mobility:** The portability of the GE Diploma ensures that a student’s academic progress is a recognized currency across all SUCs. This fosters a more dynamic and integrated national university system.
3. **Economic Efficiency:** For the State, this Act maximizes the utility of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act. By reducing the repetition of subjects, the government saves on tuition subsidies that would otherwise be spent on re-teaching the same material to the same student in a different institution.
4. **Incentivized Lifelong Learning:** The provision allowing students to pursue minors or second degrees—while maintaining clear boundaries on free tuition coverage—encourages specialized expertise and a more competitive workforce without overextending public funds.
5. **Psychological Well-being:** Reducing the bureaucratic red tape and academic dead end” alleviates the significant stress often felt by transferring or shifting students, promoting a more supportive learning environment.

The Academic Freedom Act is a progressive step toward a truly learner-centered education system. It treats the student not as a passive recipient of a fixed curriculum, but as an active agent in their own intellectual development. By institutionalizing the General Education Diploma and guaranteeing the right to credit transfer, the State upholds its constitutional mandate to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is earnestly sought.


HON. PHILIP CONRAD “DOK BONG” M. ACOP

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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,