

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

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

Date: April 1, 1998 Revised: _____

Subject: Public Universities/Fine Arts Course/University GPA

	<u>Analyst</u>	<u>Staff Director</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Action</u>
1.	<u>White</u>	<u>O'Farrell</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Favorable/CS</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>WM</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

The proposed legislation requires fine arts courses to be included when grades are averaged for university admission or for eligibility for a Bright Futures Scholarship.

This bill creates two new sections of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Fine Arts Courses

Section 232.246, F.S., lists courses required for high school graduation. At least half a credit must be in performing fine arts, a term that includes music, drama, painting, sculpture, speech, debate, or any art form that "requires manual dexterity."

University Admission

In making admissions decisions for first-time-in-college freshmen, state universities require at least a "B" average (3.0 grade point average) in 19 courses identified by the Board of Regents as "required academic units." These courses are listed in rule 6C-6.002, F.A.C., as English, Math, Natural Science, and Foreign Language. Fifteen are required and four are electives, but all the electives must be in the academic categories listed above. Fine arts courses are not included in the calculation.

To be admitted with less than a 3.0 grade point average, a student must present a higher score on a scholastic achievement test or be admitted under an alternative provision. The alternative admission is for students who "may bring to a university other important attributes or special talents." Staff of the Board of Regents say that talent in performing arts frequently justifies an alternative admission.

Bright Futures Scholarship

The 1997 Legislature created the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship program, a merit-based program designed to reward students for their performance in high school. When the program is fully implemented, a student will be eligible for a scholarship based on high school grades and, in two of the three scholarships, a required score on a scholastic achievement test. Sections 240.40205 and 240.40206, F.S., govern the academic and merit scholarships and require the grade point averages to be calculated using only the courses identified by the Board of Regents as college-preparatory academic courses. These are the courses identified in rule 6C-6.002, F.A.C.

The Department of Education calculates eligibility for the scholarships. The department uses only 15 courses in the grade point average; if a student has earned more than 15 academic credits, the 15 courses with the highest grades are averaged. A course is never included unless it meets the requirements of the Board of Regents rule.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The committee substitute under consideration requires fine arts courses to be part of the calculation of grade point averages for university admission and for eligibility for a Bright Futures Scholarship. It directs the Board of Regents to add them to its rule about admissions requirements and directs the Department of Education to use them in Bright Futures decisions.

The bill does not limit the number of academic courses that the State University System could also require. If the university continued to require 19 academic courses, in most school districts a student could get credit for a maximum of five fine arts courses.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

According to staff of the Board of Regents, grades in fine arts courses are generally one grade point higher than grades in academic courses. Including these courses in the grade point average could make some students eligible for admission and for Bright Futures Scholarships, when they would not be eligible under current laws and rules. The numbers have not been estimated exactly. In most cases, the students who could benefit would be those with an academic grade point average of 2.7 or above.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Any increase in the number of students who qualified for Bright Futures Scholarships and in the number who used their scholarships to attend a state university would increase the cost of the scholarship program. The increase would depend on the number of students whose grade point average would increase to 3.0 because of including fine arts courses.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

Since the Department of Education depends on the Board of Regents rule to determine which courses to include, an amendment directing the Board of Regents to change its rule would achieve both of the bill's desired results.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.