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SENATE BILL NO. 460

Offered January 8, 2014

Prefiled January 7, 2014

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 23-276.4 of the Code of Virginia, relating to private institutions of higher education; certification.*

Patron—Norment

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 23-276.4 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 23-276.4. Council certification required for the conferring of certain degrees and other awards or the offering of certain programs.**

A. Without obtaining the certification of the Council or a determination that the activity or program is exempt from such certification requirements, no postsecondary school subject to the provisions of this chapter shall:

1. Use the term "college" or "university" or abbreviations or words of similar meaning in its name or in any manner in connection with its academic affairs or business;

2. Enroll students;

3. Offer degrees, courses for degree credit, programs of study leading to a degree, or nondegree credit courses, either at a site in Virginia or via telecommunications equipment located within Virginia; or

4. Initiate other programs for degree credit or award degrees, certificates, or diplomas at a new or additional level.

B. All institutions of higher education and academic-vocational noncollege degree schools subject to the provisions of this chapter shall be fully accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education. All out-of-state academic-vocational noncollege degree schools operating in good standing in the Commonwealth prior to July 1, 2006, that have not obtained accreditation by an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education shall secure accreditation candidacy status by July 1, 2009, and shall secure full accreditation by an accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education by July 1, 2012. Further, on and after July 1, 2006, all out-of-state academic-vocational noncollege degree schools, subject to the provisions of this chapter, shall disclose their accreditation status in all written materials advertising or describing the school that are distributed to prospective or enrolled students or the general public.

C. Institutions of higher education shall not be required to obtain another certification from the Council to operate in Virginia if they (i) were formed, chartered or established in the Commonwealth, or chartered by an Act of Congress; (ii) have maintained a main or branch campus continuously in the Commonwealth for at least 20 calendar years under their current ownership; (iii) were continuously approved or authorized to confer or grant academic or professional degrees by the Council, by the Board of Education or by an act of the General Assembly during those 20 years; and (iv) are fully accredited by an accrediting agency that is recognized by, and has met the criteria for Title IV eligibility of the United States Department of Education. If authorization to confer or grant academic or professional degrees is revoked, the institution must seek recertification and must do so annually until it meets the criteria of this subsection.

D. In addition to such other requirements as are established in this chapter or the regulations of the Council, any postsecondary school formed, chartered, or established outside of the Commonwealth shall provide verification that:

1. The institution is fully accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education;

2. All courses, degrees, certificates, or diploma programs offered at any Virginia site are also offered at the school's main out-of-state campus;

3. All credits earned at any Virginia site are transferable to an institution's main out-of-state campus; and

4. The school has complied with the requirements of either Article 17 (§ 13.1-757 et seq.) of Chapter 9 of Title 13.1 or Article 14 (§ 13.1-919 et seq.) of Chapter 10 of Title 13.1.

E. Any postsecondary school that seeks to conduct telecommunications activities from a Virginia site shall apply for Council approval to conduct such activity and shall comply with this chapter and the Council's regulations in the same manner as any other school subject to this chapter.

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SB460