
Higher Education Committee

HB 3306

Brief Description: Regarding electronic learning at institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Wallace and Dunn.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to convene a workgroup to conduct analysis and make recommendations to increase student access to electronic learning, establish standards, and report their findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

Hearing Date: 2/4/08

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

National Context:

In the fall term of 2006, almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course; a nearly 10 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. That growth rate exceeds the 1.5 percent growth rate of the overall higher education student population.

Two-year, Associate degree granting institutions have the highest growth rates and account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years nationally. Baccalaureate institutions began the period with the fewest online enrollments and have had the lowest rates of growth.

According to a recent survey of over 2,500 colleges and universities, improving student access is the most often cited objective for offering online courses and programs. The appeal of online instruction to non-traditional students is indicated by the high number of institutions which cite growth in continuing and profession education as an objective for their online offerings. Reducing or containing costs are among the least-cited objectives for online education.

Washington Enrollments in Electronic Learning:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In 1999, the Legislature adopted a budget proviso directing the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to develop a system for collecting consistent data on students enrolled in electronic learning courses. Enrollment reporting of electronic learning Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was defined by OFM as "an academic course where teachers and students are physically separate for a *predominant amount* (51 percent) of the instructional contact hours.

Since data started being collected in 2000, enrollments in e-learning courses have remained relatively flat at the public Baccalaureate institutions and have increased significantly in the community and technical college system. In the fall term of 2000, enrollments in Baccalaureate institutions accounted for two percent of total FTE. In the community and technical colleges system, e-learning enrollments made up three and a half percent of the total. In fall of 2006, e-learning enrollments comprised 2.4 percent of Baccalaureate enrollments, while the percentage had grown to 8.4 percent for the community and technical colleges. According to a report from the Sloan Consortium released in January 2007, 75 percent of enrollments in e-learning are provided in the community and technical colleges.

WashingtonOnline:

Started in 1997 by the community and technical college system, WashingtonOnline (WAOL) provides online courses that can be used by any college in the system. WAOL serves about 40,000 students each year, roughly 4,100 annualized FTE. allows colleges to pool enrollments so that smaller colleges can provide online course work to any enrolled student in an affordable way. WAOL also provides professional development for faculty teaching in this milieu as well as around the clock technical support for faculty and staff.

OpenCourseWare:

Launched in 2001, OpenCourseWare (OCW) is a free publication of course materials from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Customers log on to a Web site and have access to a wide variety of MIT courses including notes, problem sets, labs, lectures, and video demonstrations. The OCW does not grant degrees or certificates and does not provide access to faculty. The OCW Web site had 52 million "hits" in 2007 and mostly serves self-learners and students who are complementing a course they are currently taking.

Summary of Bill:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges must convene a workgroup that includes the Workforce Training and Coordinating Board, the Prosperity Partnership, the Technology Alliance, Washington Online, a private career or vocational school, a four-year public institution of higher education, the Council of Faculty Representatives, and a community or technical college student to conduct analysis regarding electronic learning and report its findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

The workgroup's analysis must: (1) establish standards and best practices regarding electronic learning and related support services; (2) recommend methods to increase student access and to electronic learning; (3) determine ways to increase the supply of open course materials; (4) recommend ways to increase the availability of digital textbooks; and (5) report demographic information on student enrollments, retention and completion of electronic learning courses and programs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 31, 2008.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.