

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2933

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to assessment of prior learning at institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Creating a work group to assess prior learning at institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Wallace, Kenney, Anderson, Darneille, Roberts, Kelley, Hankins, Hasegawa and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/21/08, 1/24/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Convenes a workgroup to: (1) assess current institutional practices in accepting prior learning credits; and (2) make recommendations on implementation of the workgroup's findings.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts, Schmick and Sommers.

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

A prior learning assessment (PLA) is defined as an assessment by some valid and reliable means, by a qualified specialist, of what has been learned through non-formal education, training or experience that is worthy of credit in a course or program offered by an institution providing credit.

Institutional policies vary regarding the assessment and acceptance of prior learning. According to a 2006 study by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, awarding

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credit for successful completion of exams like Advanced Placement (AP), College-level Examination Program (CLEP), Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) is the most common practice for awarding credit for prior learning.

The same 2006 study indicated that "portfolio" assessments are growing in acceptance. To complete this assessment, a student assembles a physical packet of information that validates his or her prior learning experiences. The packet typically includes an autobiography of learning with appropriate documentation, letters of reference, degree plan and educational goals. The student submits that plan to the appropriate faculty who reviews the materials and makes a determination of credit.

In Washington, there is variation among institutions regarding prior learning assessment policy and practice:

- The Evergreen State College and St. Martin's University conduct portfolio assessments of prior learning, as does Eastern Washington University within the specific degree of "Interdisciplinary Arts." Other baccalaureate institutions award credit by exam (AP, DANTES, challenge exams).
- Four community and technical colleges conduct portfolio assessments though most community and technical colleges in the system award credit by exam.
- Up to 15 credits of PLA can be transferred to public baccalaureate institutions within the Direct Transfer Agreement (these credits are counted as general electives and do not apply to general education requirements or pre-major requirements).
- The Instruction Commission of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges has made a request to move Washington's standards to those of the regional accrediting body, Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

The NWCCU states in its accreditation rules that no more than 25 percent of a degree can come from PLA. If the public two- and four-year colleges were to adopt this guideline, it would represent an increase from the current 15 credit maximum to 45 credits at the baccalaureate level, and community and technical colleges would move from 15 credits to 21 credits.

Summary of Bill:

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) convenes a workgroup to examine current institutional policies and practices for awarding credit for prior learning. The group must make recommendations on the applicability of prior learning credits toward general education requirements and the proportion of academic and workforce degrees that can be comprised of prior learning credit. The work group is directed to consider guidelines from the CAEL and the NWCCU in their analysis.

The HECB must report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill helps to move more students through the higher education system by allowing them to earn credit for their past work experience. This bill creates a work group to decide how best to do that.

Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Wallace, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.