

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6357

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education
Education Appropriations

Title: An act relating to policies for the academic recognition of prior learning.

Brief Description: Requiring policies for academic recognition of certain formal and informal learning experiences.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Kilmer, Becker, Shin, Rockefeller, McAuliffe and Roach).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/17/10, 2/23/10 [DP];

Education Appropriations: 2/25/10 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Tasks the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), in consultation with numerous other persons and entities, with developing policies for awarding academic credit for learning from work and military experience, military and law enforcement training, career college training, internships and externships, and apprenticeships.
- Requires the SBCTC to submit these policies, along with recommendations, to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 31, 2010.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Schmick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Carlyle, Driscoll, Haler, Hasegawa and White.

Staff: Cece Clynch (786-7195).

Background:

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.

According to *State Policies to Bring Adult Learning into Focus: A Companion Guide*, prepared by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), in partnership with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), the United States cannot reach necessary educational attainment levels by focusing solely upon strategies related to traditional-aged students. Educating adults must be part of the solution. The 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington specifically identifies working adults and non-traditional students as demographic groups whose engagement in higher education opportunities should be encouraged.

In their guide, CAEL and NCHEMS provide a range of policy recommendations for improving adult learning: (1) address affordability: reduce the cost of postsecondary learning for adults; (2) address accessibility: put postsecondary learning within reach of adults; (3) raise awareness about the need for adult learning; (4) make the right connections: career pathways, education pathways, articulation and credentialing; and (5) let data drive the process.

Promoting the assessment of prior learning for college credit is one way of addressing the second recommendation with respect to accessibility and putting postsecondary learning within reach for adults. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or the Assessment of Prior Learning are two terms used by institutions of higher education to describe the process of earning college credit from learning obtained from past work, training, volunteer, and personal life experiences. The CAEL and NCHEMS guide suggests that, "States can promote the use of PLA by surveying institutions to determine the state of the practice in offering PLA, and through training, conferences and other initiatives that support this practice."

Summary of Bill:

Findings are made that students at higher education institutions frequently bring with them a wealth of formal and informal learning experiences, many of which may represent learning outcomes equivalent or superior to those achieved by students in more traditional academic settings. Intent is expressed that Washington institutions of higher education develop reliable, transparent, and consistent policies regarding academic recognition for prior significant life and learning experiences.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), in consultation with others, must develop policies for awarding academic credit for learning from work and military experience, military and law enforcement training, career college training, internships and externships, and apprenticeships. In so doing, the SBCTC must consult with:

- the Higher Education Coordinating Board;
- the Council of Presidents;
- representatives from Washington's institutions of higher education;
- representatives from two- and four-year faculty;
- representatives from private career schools; and
- representatives from business and labor.

These policies must address, but are not limited to, issues regarding verification, accreditation, transfer of academic credit, licensing and professional recognition, and financial aid. To the extent possible, the policies must be consistently applied by all institutions of higher education and provide accurate and complete academic counseling.

By December 31, 2010, the SBCTC must submit these policies, along with recommendations, to the appropriate committees of the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) *High Skills, High Wages* recommended that credit be given for prior learning. This is being done today and colleges in the community and technical college system are trying to ease transitions and provide credit for prior learning, education, and experience but there are limitations on doing so that are beyond the control of the colleges. For instance, there are financial aid and accreditation issues that impose barriers. Also, frequently, the complaint is not that the credits won't transfer but that the credits do not apply to the particular major that the student is pursuing. As an example, credit for prior learning or waiver of certain requirements may work for a military medic who now wants to pursue a degree in nursing. It does not work so well when a student has worked in one technical field and is now pursuing an entirely new field. Credit is being given for prior learning but there is no systemic process. The Governor has encouraged granting credit for prior learning. This is an important piece of reducing time to degree. There have been some major complications with the new federal laws regarding military and veteran benefits that have caused some processing delays. This bill brings all of the sectors together to work on this important issue. It can be a win-win for everyone.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Kilmer, prime sponsor; Scott Copeland, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Maddy Thompson, Workforce Education Training and Coordinating Board; Steve Lindstrom, Northwest Career Colleges Federation; and Gail McGaffick, Corinthian Colleges, Inc.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Probst, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Hope, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Carlyle, Haler, Hunter, Kagi, Maxwell, Nealey, Quall, Rolfes and Wallace.

Staff: Serah Stetson (786-7109).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Education Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Higher Education:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The goal of this bill is to reward knowledge rather than "seat time." There isn't currently a systemic way of addressing prior experience of students who come out of the military, or for students who have earned credits that don't transfer into other institutions. It's a shame to re-educate people on things that they've already learned. Students put money and time into their learning and the state subsidizes a student's education, so the current system is not good for the tax payer either. If this bill is passed it will save students and taxpayers money.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Kilmer, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.