

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5868

As of March 28, 2011

Title: An act relating to tuition fees for students with excess credits or prior degrees.

Brief Description: Regarding tuition fees for students with excess credits or prior degrees.

Sponsors: Senators Tom and Zarelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 3/15/11, 3/18/11 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 3/24/11.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Tom, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Hill, Ranking Minority Member; Erickson and Kastama.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Becker and White.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Maria Hovde (786-7710)

Background: Under current law, each four-year institution of higher education and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) must develop policies that ensure undergraduate students enrolled in degree or certificate programs complete their programs in a timely manner in order to efficiently use instructional resources and to provide capacity for additional students. The institutions of higher education must also develop polices which address, among other things, students who accumulate more than 125 percent of the credits required to complete their respective degree or certificate. Polices may include assessing a student a surcharge in addition to regular tuition and fees for continued enrollment.

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.

Instructional costs differ at public institutions. Factors include the impact of program start-up costs, the distribution of programs between main and branch campuses, the nature of the faculty, teaching loads, and the mix of courses. Resident students pay their share of the cost of instruction through tuition and fees and state support is provided through legislative appropriations.

A dislocated worker is defined as an individual who has been terminated or received a notice of termination from employment, is eligible for or has exhausted unemployment compensation benefits, and is unlikely to return to his or her principal occupation or previous industry because of a diminishing demand for skills in that occupation or industry.

The purpose of the Border County Higher Education Opportunity Project is to allow Washington institutions of higher education that are located in counties on the Oregon border to implement tuition policies that correspond to Oregon policies.

Summary of Bill: Tuition fees at a community or technical college for any student with a baccalaureate degree must equal a sum not less than the cost of instruction, unless (1) the student is a dislocated worker or (2) engaging in a job training program under the purview of the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board).

Tuition fees for resident undergraduate students who have accumulated more than 125 percent of the number of credits required to complete their respective baccalaureate degree must equal a sum not less than the cost of instruction at a state university, regional university, or The Evergreen State College. The tuition fees are presumed to apply to all resident undergraduate students, unless the student:

- is a dislocated worker or engaging in a job training program under the purview of the Workforce Board;
- participates in the Border County Higher Education Opportunity Project; or
- is a certificated teacher pursuing continuing education credits.

Students who believe they are under extraordinary or unforeseen academic or personal circumstances or were unable to complete their baccalaureate degree program due to institutional constraints may petition their institution for a waiver from the tuition fees for excess credits. The institution must create a process for student petitions to be heard and determined. The process must include a \$100 administrative fee, which will be refunded to the students with a successful petition.

The credits students earn from advanced placement programs must not be applied when totaling excess credits.

For the purposes of this section, the cost of instruction means the average instructional support in state funds plus tuition fees per full-time equivalent undergraduate at each respective institution of higher education for the prior academic year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 7, 2011.
[OFM requested ten-year cost projection pursuant to I-960.]

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education & Workforce Development):

OTHER: Colleges and universities encourage life-long learning while discouraging career students. We appreciate the intent to find inefficiencies and to sustain a high skill, high wage economy. Because of open admissions two-year colleges don't review transcripts and it will be an extra step to determine who already has a baccalaureate, thus an unfunded mandate though doable. International students; transfer students in credit heavy science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs; and military students have a slug of excess elective credits. Students possessing a baccalaureate and enrolling are not eligible for financial aid. They must fund programs out of pocket or with loans. Students may return to keep up with the revolving needs of their career, such as software technology, or to brush up on specific disciplines prior to graduate school. The return on investment for education is well documented. We want to keep workers nimble. There are circumstances of students going for a baccalaureate without a firm notion of a career path ahead of them. Critical thinking skills of baccalaureate in combination of AA propels students forward. The provision excluding certificated teachers is very positive and should be broadened to include other professions that need continuing education. It is unclear what under the purview of the Workforce Board means.

Institutions currently have ability to apply a surcharge for extra credits but don't because the administrative costs would exceed the surcharge. The University of Washington (UW) already monitors career students through the financial aid process and flags students based on time. Thus, a student in their fifth year must sit down with a counselor to develop a plan for completion and other circumstances. Under the bill, tracking by credits means having to look at each degree and its requirements. Consider syncing up the process to address the issue. It is to the advantage of a university to report high degree to completion numbers nationally. We are concerned the bill would be counterproductive because of the time consuming process for reviewing petitions without uncovering rampant abuses. Every student will believe they have suffered and the \$100 fee would not in any way cover the cost.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): OTHER: Scott Copeland, SBCTC; Dr. Gerald Pumphrey, South Puget Sound Community College; Carolyn McKinnon, Workforce Training Board; Chris Mulick, Washington State University (WSU); Margaret Shepherd, UW.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: During these difficult fiscal times, schools need tuition dollars available to help their systems. The state does have a role and a responsibility to help students but not on a forever basis.

CON: There are fiscal issues associated with this bill. The community and technical colleges have open admissions and currently do not track degrees. Although it could be done, the process will be slowed down as a result. Also, this bill will have negative consequences on those students who are changing careers. The costs of attendance will increase for these students which will discourage enrollment. This bill is counterproductive because it establishes a costly and time consuming process for not a lot of benefit. There are

currently only 350 students at WSU who would be required to pay their full cost of instruction. Many of these students are international students who bring a number of credits along with them that ultimately end up being extra electives. This bill will also negatively affect those who transfer from a community and technical college because that transition also results in extra electives. Military students will also be affected because these students often have a number of applied technology or foreign language credits that become excess electives and do not contribute to a degree. Schools currently have the authority in statute to charge a fee for those students who have excess credits. This bill will not result in enough funds being recovered to pay for the additional costs of billing and collecting. At UW, this affects 600 students or 0.01 percent of the total student population. Some students have legitimate reasons for having excess credits and there are already mechanisms and disincentives in place to address this issue. For example, at the UW, all students in their fifth year are required to develop a plan for completion and these students are at risk of losing their financial aid if they do not follow that process. At Western Washington University (WWU), 96.3 percent of all students graduate with less than 125 percent of the credits needed. This bill mostly affects first generation and underrepresented students. A better way to address this issue is to support services that improve success.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Tom, prime sponsor.

CON: Scott Copeland, SBCTC; Chris Mulick, WSU; Margaret Shepherd, UW; Sherry Burkey, WWU; Alex Clardy, Eastern Washington University, Washington Students Association.