

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1580

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to higher education.

Brief Description: Requiring strategies to shorten time to degree and improve graduation rates.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Quall, Brumsickle, Jacobsen, Bray, Rayburn, Finkbeiner, Kessler, J. Kohl, Shin, G. Fisher, Springer, Romero, R. Johnson, Linville and Basich.)

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Higher Education, March 3, 1993, DPS;
Passed House, March 11, 1993, 98-0;
Amended by Senate;
Passed Legislature, April 20, 1993, 97-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Chair; Quall, Vice Chair; Brumsickle, Ranking Minority Member; Sheahan, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Bray; Finkbeiner; Flemming; Kessler; J. Kohl; Mielke; Ogden; Orr; Rayburn; Shin; and Wood.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Carlson; and Casada.

Staff: Susan Hosch (786-7120).

Background: As part of its effort to assess student outcomes in public higher education, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) has undertaken two studies of student graduation rates. One study has already been completed. In that study, the board worked with the state institutions of higher education to track the graduation rates of students who entered a Washington public community college, college or university in the fall of 1984. The board found that by the end of a six year period, 51 percent of the 1984 entering class had graduated. Only 4 percent were still enrolled after that period. This meant that the

graduation rate was not likely to increase very much in subsequent years. The board found that these rates compared favorably with rates in other states, where graduation rates after six years were generally below 50 percent at public colleges and universities.

In its study, the board found that graduation rates varied for students from different ethnic backgrounds. At the end of six years, 58.5 percent of Asian-Americans, and 56.6 percent of Caucasian students had graduated. By the end of those six years, 37.3 percent of Hispanic students, 28.1 percent of African-Americans, and 27.5 percent of American Indian students had graduated.

A 1989 study by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities had somewhat similar findings. Only 15 percent of students at four-year colleges graduated within four years, and fewer than 50 percent completed a bachelor's degree after six years. The study found that the six year completion rate for students at private colleges was 54 percent; the rate for students attending public colleges was 43 percent.

The research director for that study identified several reasons for high dropout rates and the extended amounts of time students were taking to obtain degrees. He stated that some students were attending part-time because they had to work to pay their bills. Others take fewer classes in order to earn the good grades necessary to enter graduate and professional schools. His study found that students who received federal grants were much less likely to have dropped out of school after their first year than students who received no grant money.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that public colleges and universities should offer classes in a way that will permit full-time students to complete a degree or certificate in about the amount of time described in the institution's catalog as necessary to complete that degree or certificate.

By May 15, 1994, each public college and university, as part of its strategic plan, shall adopt strategies designed to improve graduation rates and shorten the time required for students to complete degree or certificate programs.

By May 30, 1994, each four-year institution will forward their strategies to the Higher Education Coordinating Board for its review and comment. Community and technical colleges will forward their strategies to the state Board for Community and Technical Colleges for the same purpose. By September 30, 1994, the state Board for Community and

Technical Colleges will forward to the HECB a report on strategies adopted by its colleges.

The HECB will report to the Legislature on strategies adopted by the public system of higher education to improve graduation rates and shorten the time needed to complete a degree or certificate. The report will include recommendations for any legislation needed to assist institutions with their implementation efforts. Beginning with the fall 1995-96 academic term, each institution shall begin implementing its strategies.

An institution of higher education may enter into a student progression understanding with an interested student. The terms of the understanding will permit a student to obtain a degree or certificate within the standard period of time assumed for a full-time student pursuing that degree or certificate. Usually, the standard period of time will be about two years for an associate of arts degree and about four years for a baccalaureate degree. The failure of an institution of higher education to fulfill its obligations under the understanding will not give rise to any cause of action on behalf of any student.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: (Original bill): Institutional catalogs lead students and their parents to believe that the students can finish programs in a given amount of time. At times, due to situations beyond a student's control, students are not able to finish their programs in the amount of time advertised in the institution's catalog. Institutions can assist students to complete their programs in a timely manner by improving student advising, offering required classes and sequenced classes often enough to permit students to progress smoothly, ensuring that course requirements are not changed in the middle of a student's program, changing admissions priorities, offering night classes, and increasing course offerings for heavily demanded classes. Students may be able to progress more quickly by talking to their advisors, planning their schedules in advance, carrying a full load, and structuring work schedules creatively. Passage of this legislation will assist institutional efforts to improve time to complete a degree and graduation rates.

Testimony Against: (Original bill): The reasons that students do not complete degrees in a timely fashion are diverse and complex. Many times students have to attend

part-time in order to earn enough money to complete their educations. Some students desire double majors; some change majors more than once. Institutions such as the University of Washington are working hard to identify and correct any institutional barriers that impede a student from graduating in a timely fashion. The institutions will address this issue as part of the strategic planning process required in the HECB's master plan. Therefore, passage of this bill is unnecessary. Adoption of a solution such as a student progression contract is unworkable, inequitable, potentially adversarial, and ineffective.

Witnesses: (Pro): Steve Lindstrom, Keith Boyd and Parag Gheewala, Washington Student Lobby. (Con): Jane Sherman, Higher Education Coordinating Board; Tana Hasart, Pierce College; Ron Crossland, state Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Tom Woodnut, South Puget Sound Community College; Dr. Fred Campbell, University of Washington; and Terry Teale, Council of Presidents.