
Higher Education Committee

E2SSB 5135

Brief Description: Creating tuition surcharges.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Carlson, West, Horn, Schmidt and Rossi).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill

- Requires undergraduate students with more than 125 percent of the credits needed to complete a degree to pay increased tuition rates based on the full cost of instruction.
- Some exceptions are allowed and, for a \$100 fee, students may petition the Higher Education Coordinating Board for a hardship waiver.

Hearing Date: 3/28/03

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The length of time it takes students to complete a bachelor's degree has been an issue of concern for higher education policy makers. Some policies try to hold higher education institutions accountable for improving time-to-degree. Other policies attempt to influence the behavior of individual students and encourage timely degree completion.

Performance Measures: Since 1997 the Legislature has required all public four-year institutions to monitor their performance on several measures, including graduation efficiency and five-year freshman graduation. Under the oversight of the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), each institution must develop specific improvement goals and a biennial plan for how to achieve them. Progress reports are submitted to the Legislature on a biennial basis. The community and technical colleges use a different set of performance measures that do not address timelines for degree completion.

Financial Aid Limits: Students may not receive a State Need Grant for more than five years (pro-rated for part-time study). They are also ineligible for a State Need Grant after they have exceeded 125 percent of the published length of their degree program, which is calculated as credits needed for the degree. Students become ineligible for federal financial

aid if they exceed 150 percent of the credits needed for their degree.

Institution Policies: Several four-year institutions have adopted policies regarding students who accumulate credits beyond what is required for graduation. The University of Washington (UW) and Western Washington University do not permit students with more than 210 credits (approximately 117 percent of what is generally required for a degree) to register for a new quarter of classes unless they meet with an advisor and prepare a degree completion plan. At the UW, the plan must call for graduation within two additional quarters. At Washington State University, all students must meet with an advisor each semester prior to registration.

Part of the concern about timely degree completion is because the cost of instruction at a public institution is supported by both tuition revenue and taxpayer dollars (state general fund appropriations). Each year the HECB calculates a per-student amount of state support for instruction, which for resident undergraduate students varies from approximately \$3,700 at community and technical colleges to \$5,000 and more at the four-year institutions. There is no state support for nonresident students; tuition rates far exceed the total cost of instruction.

Summary of Bill:

Undergraduate students at a community or technical college or a four-year public institution of higher education who accumulate more than 125 percent of the credits required for their degree or certificate must pay higher tuition fees than other students. For a resident student the higher tuition fee is based on the average cost of instruction at the institution where he or she is enrolled, which is calculated annually by the HECB and includes both state general fund support and tuition fees. For a nonresident student, the higher tuition fee is twice the average cost of instruction.

In calculating excess credits, institutions would not count credits earned through advanced placement programs.

It is presumed that a student with excess credits must pay the increased tuition fees unless evidence is presented to the registrar that one of the following exemptions applies:

- The student is a dislocated worker or enrolled in a job training program under the purview of the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board;
- The student is enrolled under the Border County Pilot Project (where certain Oregon students pay in-state tuition at selected Washington institutions);
- The student is a certificated K-12 teacher pursuing continuing education credits according to certification requirements; or
- The student has not been enrolled in a public institution of higher education in the previous five years.

A waiver is allowed for students who believe they are under unforeseen academic or personal circumstances or were unable to complete their baccalaureate degree program due to

institutional constraints. For a \$100 administrative fee, these students may petition the HECB. The fee is refunded for students whose waiver petition is successful.

If a student is unable to enroll in a class required for the student's major due to the sequencing of courses by the institution, the institution must waive tuition and fees for that class if the student enrolls the next time it is offered.

State general fund support for institutions may not be reduced by the amount of additional operating fees collected as a result of the bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 14, 2003.

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