SENATE BILL REPORT
SSB 6697

As Passed Senate, February 14, 2006

Title: An act relating to establishing a state priority and state objectives for access, enrollment, delivery, and degree achievements in the fields of engineering, technology, biotechnology, science, computer science, and mathematics in higher education.

Brief Description: Establishing technology priorities for institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Berkey, Schmidt, Shin, Haugen, McAuliffe, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen).

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education: 2/1/06, 2/3/06 [DPS-WM]. Passed Senate: 2/14/06, 45-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING, K-12 & HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6697 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McAuliffe, Chair; Weinstein, Vice Chair, Early Learning & K-12; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Berkey, Delvin, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Shin.

Staff: Stephanie Yurcisin (786-7438)

Background: The Office of Financial Management (OFM) collects data on undergraduate enrollments and degrees produced in specific fields. Data published by OFM shows that, at the public four-year institutions in 2003-04, a total of 90,073 full-time equivalents (FTEs) were enrolled at the undergraduate level at public four year institutions. Four percent of all FTEs were enrolled in engineering and related technologies and two percent were enrolled in computer science studies at in-state public four-year institutions of higher education. Between the academic years of 1993-94 and 2003-04, there was a twelve percent decline in the number of FTEs enrolled in the fields of engineering and related technologies and nearly a nine percent decline in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in these fields at public four year higher education institutions in Washington.

A recent joint study conducted by the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges states that demand for workers trained at the baccalaureate level and higher in certain occupations is not met by supply. The study found that current degree production only meets 67 percent of the ultimate need in engineering and 56 percent of the need in computer science. The study concludes that demands would best be met through increased enrollments in these disciplines.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that a priority on enrollments and degrees in the fields of engineering, technology, biotechnology, science, computer science, and mathematics is important to the state's economic future. Therefore, the Legislature intends to promote and place a priority on increased access, delivery models, enrollment slots, and degree opportunities in these fields.

Public institutions must determine local student demand and report findings to the HECB and the Legislature by November 1, 2008 . The HECB will track and report progress, including:

- the number of students enrolled on an biennial basis;
- the number of associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees conferred on a biennial basis;
- the amount of expenditures for enrollment and degree programs; and
- the number and type of public-private partnerships established.

The institutions are provided flexibility in their operations designed to achieve the objectives of increasing enrollment. For instance, the institutions could increase enrollment and degrees through establishing new institutes of technology, new polytechnic-based institutions, or new divisions of existing institutions. The institutions could also use an array of delivery models including face-to-face learning, interactive courses, internet-based offerings, and instruction on main campuses, branch campuses, and other educational centers. Given the relationship between technology institutes and institutions of higher education, the colleges and universities are encouraged to consider program growth in areas of the state with an aerospace, biotechnology, and technology industrial presence.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Washington is a very trade-dependent state. Our aerospace, computers, and high tech industries are facing a shortage in qualified employees within the state of Washington. This bill places a priority on developing additional supply in these important high tech fields but allows the institutions flexibility so that they can determine how to best reach that goal. Adding more enrollment slots in these fields costs money so the extra funding will be very valuable. Industry evidence shows that there are is higher demand than seats available at some of the institutions of higher education; increasing the seat capacity will then provide additional supply of properly qualified graduates so that employers do not need to look to other states or overseas for employees. Having well-developed transfer and pathway agreements can reduce the time to graduation and, therefore, can result in having more seats available. Expanding access to these types of programs is essential; perhaps minor changes could be made to the bill to better align it with ongoing studies being performed by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Testimony Against: None.

Testimony Other: Schools should not be "establishing" demand but instead responding to and meeting demand.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Jean Berkey, prime sponsor; Paul Roberts, Everett City Council; Steve Smith, Office of Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon; Christine Kerlin, Everett Community College; Louise Masten, Greater Everett Area Chamber of Commerce; Crystal Donner, Perteet Engineering; Loretta Seppanen, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Chris Thompson, Higher Education Coordinating Board.

OTHER: Ann Anderson, Central Washington University.