

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5544

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, February 21, 2013

Title: An act relating to an online higher education transfer and student advising system.

Brief Description: Requiring an online higher education transfer and student advising system.

Sponsors: Senators Ranker, Litzow, Fain, Hasegawa, Schlicher, Kline, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/14/13, 2/19/13, 2/21/13 [DPS-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5544 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chair; Becker, Vice Chair; Kohl-Welles, Ranking Member; Baumgartner, Frockt, McAuliffe and Tom.

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: The development of statewide articulation agreements are designed to improve transfer and to reduce the number of excess credits. According to a report of the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), more than 19,000 students transferred credits from community and technical colleges to public and private baccalaureate programs in Washington in the 2011-2012 academic year. Approximately 13,000 students representing 68 percent, transferred to one of the six public baccalaureate institutions. Nearly 5700 students representing 30 percent, transferred to private four-year institutions. Transfers from community colleges to the Bachelor of Applied Science degree programs offered at the community and technical colleges have grown to over 300 transfers in the 2011-12 academic year.

In 2012, the Legislature directed the Office of Student Financial Assistance to provide an online financial aid counseling curriculum to all higher education institutions participating in the State Need Grant (SNG) program by July 1, 2013. The curriculum must include specific elements, such as an explanation of SNG program rules, an overview of student loan options and consequences, an overview of financial literacy, and student perspectives. By the

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2013-14 academic year, higher education institutions must take reasonable steps to ensure that each SNG recipient receives the financial aid counseling curriculum by referencing or linking to a website on the SNG Conditions of Award statement.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): WSAC, in conjunction with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board), the public baccalaureate institutions, and nonprofit and for-profit institutions of higher education, must establish and maintain a statewide Online Transfer and Student Advising System (System) by September 1, 2014. The purpose of the System is to help students access higher education programs and speed completion of their educational programs by clarifying and simplifying the process for researching programs, resources, and transferability of courses, and to improve the service delivery of higher education institutions.

The System must integrate programs, advising, registration, admissions, and transfer information. The System must be easily accessible to all Washington high school students and their parents or guardians, higher education students, faculty, counselors, advisors, and other professional staff.

The System must provide the following:

- integrated websites of the higher education agencies and institutions to provide an inventory of postsecondary degrees and certificates available in the state, including online options;
- educational requirements for various occupations, including labor market information;
- educational requirements and prerequisites for all postsecondary programs;
- identification of course options or pathways that meet the requirements of a degree or certificate;
- registration and admissions information for higher education institutions;
- a method to assess courses and programs that are transferrable from one institution to another and will transfer with credit toward completion of their degree or certificate;
- information regarding student financial aid and other services that assist students to complete degrees and certificates; and
- data gathered from existing institutional data systems, to minimize new technical requirements, costs, and staffing impacts at institutions of higher education.

WSAC, SBCTC, the Workforce Board, the four-year public baccalaureate institutions, and nonprofit and for-profit institutions must sign a memorandum of understanding that specifies roles and responsibilities regarding the design, implementation, promotion, development, maintenance, and analysis of the effectiveness of the System.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Permits institutions to specify course options or pathways that meet the requirements of a degree or certificate. Requires specific accommodations to be made for students transferring both to and from The Evergreen State College (TESC), which may include providing transfer policy information specific to the college. Adds that the System must build on and use data gathered from existing institutional data systems, to

minimize new technical requirements, costs, and staffing impacts at institutions of higher education.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: TESC offers a different approach to developing curriculum. Thus, if students transfer to another institution, they will have to do a lot of work to align programs. The amendment being offered will allow TESC to fully participate. The bill will help with transfers and navigating the system to get Running Start credits transferred. Transfers may lead to additional classes and increase degree completion times; this bill will centralize the transfer process. The System provides support to advisors, counselors, and advisors in financial aid as well. The concept of enhanced career guidance would help students plan out next steps. It would be good to integrate the Career Bridge into a more comprehensive statewide portal.

OTHER: While there is value in the concept, we are concerned there might be a lot of work and expense for the universities. Today, students can plug in any course or credit online to find out if it will qualify for credit at Washington State University (WSU) as well as find courses required for each major at WSU. While the current system is not perfect, because it differs by institution, it is paid for and could support the bill if we build on what exists and confine the majority of work to WSAC. The fiscal note assumes a vendor would use existing data sources to pull information into a new system; if that's the case, the work and cost to the universities decreases substantially. We will offer an amendment to make sure this is true.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Julie Garver, TESC; Edward Esparza, SBCTC; Angie Weiss, Associated Students of the University of WA (UW); Tristan Hanon, Associated Students of WSU; Nova Gattman, Workforce Board.

OTHER: Chris Mulick, WSU; Margaret Shepherd, UW.