

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5475

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Higher Education*

Title: An act relating to higher education.

Brief Description: Authorizing honorary degrees.

Sponsor(s): Senators Bauer, Saling, Rinehart, Bailey and Murray.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Higher Education, April 5, 1991, DPA.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
HIGHER EDUCATION**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 12 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Chair; Ogden, Vice Chair; Wood, Ranking Minority Member; May, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Dellwo; Fraser; Ludwig; Miller; Prince; Sheldon; and Spanel.

Staff: Susan Hosch (786-7120).

Background: Under state and federal laws, students with disabilities are protected against discrimination at institutions of higher education. The primary source of institutional responsibility to these students is Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

For any college or university that receives any federal aid, the provisions of Section 504 apply to academic programs, housing, financial aid, athletics, facility access, and other programs and activities.

There are two major state laws affecting students with disabilities. These include the law against discrimination in public accommodations, and the state building code. Under these laws, public colleges and universities must provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities.

Currently, faculty members and other designated employees of colleges and universities must retire from institutions of

higher education at the end of the academic year following their 70th birthday.

In 1967, Congress passed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. The act was amended in 1986 to provide that age-based mandatory retirement policies in institutions of higher education must be eliminated by December 31, 1993.

Current law limits the types of institutions of higher education that needy students may attend and still receive state funded student financial aid. Students must attend an institution accredited by an organization recognized by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Students at the Northwest Indian College are not eligible to receive state aid because their college is not accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The college has candidate status with the association. The students are therefore eligible to receive federal financial aid.

Summary of Amended Bill: By October 31, 1991, each state supported college and university will use an existing committee or convene a committee to identify physical barriers to access on each campus. Among others, the committee will include one or more students, faculty and staff with disabilities. The committee will present its findings and recommendations to the institution's administration. Beginning with its 1993-95 capital budget request, each college and university will incorporate into its capital budget process, efforts to substantially reduce and eventually eliminate physical barriers to access.

The mandatory retirement age for professors and designated employees at state universities, regional universities, The Evergreen State College, and the State Board for Community College Education is eliminated beginning July 1, 1991.

Needy students attending certain tribally controlled colleges may be eligible to participate in various state funded financial aid programs. These programs include the State Need Grant, State Work Study, Future Teachers Conditional Scholarship, Nurses Conditional Scholarship, and American Indian Endowed Scholarship programs. The tribally controlled college attended by the student must meet the requirements of Public Law 95-471. The college must also be established by a Washington state Indian tribe, and must be approved to administer federal Title IV financial aid.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: References to honorary degrees are removed. Institutions of higher education are directed to study barriers to physical access,

and to begin to eliminate those barriers. Beginning on July 1, 1991, mandatory retirement is eliminated at the state's universities and colleges. Students attending certain tribal colleges are eligible to participate in state financial aid programs.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: A few members of local communities provide countless hours of service to local community colleges. A special and appropriate way to honor them would be to grant them an honorary associate of arts degree. This method of recognition would be a way of showing a college's appreciation of the benefit they have provided to the college and the community it serves.

Some of the regional universities and colleges would also like to use honorary degrees to recognize outstanding service.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Ron Crossland, Community College State Board (pro original bill); Carol Berg Christianson, Edmonds Community College (pro original bill); Janice Miller, W.S.U. (pro original bill); and Daniel P. Steele, Washington Student Lobby.