
Higher Education Committee

SSB 5183

Brief Description: Regarding cost savings on course materials for students at community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Hatfield, Roach, Pridemore, Poulsen, Holmquist, Sheldon, Fairley, Keiser, Kline, Kilmer, Hobbs, Kauffman, Rasmussen and Kohl-Welles).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires bookstores affiliated with community and technical colleges to: (1) provide students the option of purchasing unbundled materials; (2) disclose the difference between new and previous editions; (3) promote and publicize book buy-back programs; and (4) disclose retail costs of materials.
- Requires community and technical college faculty and staff to consider the least costly practices in assigning course materials.
- Subjects rules impacting faculty to collective bargaining provisions.

Hearing Date: 3/21/07

Staff: Jennifer Thornton (786-7111).

Background:

Textbook pricing

A 2005 study by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that since 1986, textbook prices have nearly tripled, increasing by 186 percent. The GAO reports that the price of textbooks has increased in recent years largely due to increases in costs associated with new features, such as web sites and other instructional supplements. Publishers told the GAO they have increased their investments in the development of supplements to meet the demands of a changing post-secondary market. For example, publishers surveyed cited increases in part-time

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faculty who need additional teaching support as a key factor that has increased demand for instructional supplements. Publishers also said instructors are requesting more supplements, such as web-based tutorials and self-assessment tools, to enhance student learning. However, wholesalers, retailers, and others suggest that while supplements may be of value to students, the increasing practice of packaging them with textbooks effectively limits the students' ability to purchase less expensive used books.

Other factors that affect pricing include production costs, availability of used books, and the demand for textbooks. Publishers may also be revising textbooks more frequently. More frequent revisions limit students' opportunity to reduce their costs by purchasing used textbooks and selling their textbooks back to bookstores at the end of the term. According to the GAO study, while publishers generally agreed that the revision cycle for many books is three to four years, compared with four to five years as was standard 10 to 20 years ago, the publishers said that revisions were necessary to keep the materials current for faculty and to recoup their investments.

Textbook cost savings at four-year public institutions

In 2006, the Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 3087 to give students more choices when purchasing educational materials and to encourage faculty and staff to work with bookstores and publishers to implement the least costly option to students without sacrificing educational content.

The 2006 legislation applies only to four-year public institutions and requires the Boards of Regents of state universities and the Boards of Trustees of regional universities and The Evergreen State College to adopt rules requiring affiliated bookstores to: (1) provide students the option of purchasing unbundled materials when possible; (2) disclose the costs of the materials; (3) disclose how new editions vary from previous editions; and (4) actively promote and publicize book buy-back programs. Rules must also be adopted that require faculty and staff members to consider least costly practices in assigning course materials when educational content is comparable, and to work closely with publishers and local bookstores to create bundles and packages if they deliver cost savings to students.

Summary of Bill:

Community and technical colleges are added to the institutions that must adopt rules for their affiliated bookstores. The rules adopted must require that bookstores affiliated with a community or technical college:

- provide students with the option of buying unbundled course materials when possible;
- promote and publicize book buy-back programs;
- provide for the disclosure of changes between a new edition of a book and the previous edition; and
- disclose the retail costs of course materials on a per course basis to faculty, staff and the public.

Community and technical college faculty and staff must consider the least costly practices in assigning course materials when educational content is comparable.

Rules adopted that affect faculty terms and conditions of employment are subject to collective bargaining.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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