

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1572

As of March 20, 2025

Title: An act relating to modifying higher education accreditation standards.

Brief Description: Modifying higher education accreditation standards.

Sponsors: House Committee on Postsecondary Education & Workforce (originally sponsored by Representatives Pollet, Entenman, Reed and Nance).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/12/25, 95-2.

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 3/20/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council to recognize certain accrediting agencies.
- Exempts certain nonprofit institutions operating in Washington State from the Degree-Granting Institutions Act if certain conditions are met.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

Background: Minimum Standards for Degree-Granting Institutions. Since 1986, with passage of the Degree-Granting Institutions Act, the agency now known as the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) has been given certain authority to ensure protection of student records, investigate complaints, and ensure minimum standards are met by degree-granting institutions. Under the Degree-Granting Institutions Act, WSAC may adopt rules concerning:

- granting of degrees;
- quality of education;

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- unfair business practices;
- financial stability; and
- other necessary measures to protect citizens of Washington State against substandard, fraudulent, or deceptive practices.

The rules must require an institution operating in Washington:

- be accredited;
- have applied for accreditation and such application is pending before the accrediting agency;
- have been granted a waiver by WSAC waiving the requirement of accreditation; or
- have been granted an exemption by WSAC from the requirements.

Prohibited Actions of Institutions. An institution or person shall not advertise, offer, sell, or award a degree or any other type of educational credential unless the student has enrolled in and successfully completed a prescribed program of study, as outlined in the institution's publications. The prohibition does not apply to honorary credentials.

WSAC must periodically review exempted degree-granting institutions and degree-granting institutions granted a waiver and continue exemptions or waivers only if an institution meets requirements by law or set forth by WSAC.

Exempt from the Degree-Granting Institutions Act. Certain entities are exempt from the laws and rules adopted under the Degree-Granting Institutions Act. These include:

- public institutions of higher education;
- institutions that have been accredited by an accrediting association recognized by WSAC and have met minimum requirements adopted by WSAC and is affiliated with an institution operating in another state that is accredited to qualify for an exemption;
- certain institutions of a religious character;
- honorary credentials; or
- seminars or institutions offering only credit-bearing workshops or seminars lasting no longer than three calendar days.

Summary of Bill: Minimum Standards for Degree-Granting Institutions. WSAC's requirements for institutions operating in Washington must recognize accrediting agencies that maintain rigorous standards for institutional eligibility, including requirements related to institutional effectiveness, student learning, assessment, governance, academic independence, administrative and fiscal responsibility, and transparency.

Exemption from the Degree-Granting Institutions Act. A nonprofit institution operating in another state may qualify for exemption from the Degree Granting Institutions Act if it:

- has continuously offered degree programs in the state for ten years or more;
- has been continuously authorized to offer degree programs in its home state for 20 years or more;
- has been continuously accredited as a degree-granting institution for ten years or

more by an accrediting association recognized by WSAC and maintains such accreditation status;

- maintains eligibility to participate in Title IV financial aid programs;
- is recognized for its extensive academic research and innovation, doctoral programs, and advanced facilities and resources; and
- maintains ongoing compliance with the requirements for authorization specified in law.

If an institution fails to maintain compliance with such requirements, WSAC may:

- deny an application for exemption; or
- suspend or withdraw an existing exemption.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on December 1, 2026.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Northeastern University which has been offering graduate programs in Seattle for several years, is caught in a Catch-22. You can't get authorized to get exempt from the requirements for authorization unless you have already been authorized. Accreditors provide accreditation to entire universities, not necessarily branch campuses or individual programs. The Degree Authorization Act requires a separate entity to receive an accreditation. Current law requires branch campuses to be separately accredited if they are from an out-of-state university. This will allow high quality institutions to be able to meet workforce demands in key industries. Northeastern operates in eight states. Washington's is the most restrictive and requires approval program by program. With this change, the campus would still be subject to a biennial review.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Gerry Pollet, Prime Sponsor; Dave Thurman, Northeastern University Seattle.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.