

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5350

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*As Reported By House Committee on:  
Higher Education*

**Title:** An act relating to requiring English proficiency for faculty and graduate assistants at state institutions of higher education.

**Brief Description:** Requiring English proficiency for faculty and graduate assistants involved in classroom teaching.

**Sponsor(s):** Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Saling, Patterson, Thorsness, Bauer, Metcalf, Gaspard, Cantu, Amondson, Sellar, Hayner, Stratton, Craswell, Wojahn and Snyder).

**Brief History:**

Reported by House Committee on:  
Higher Education, April 4, 1991, DPA.

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**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; Miller; Prince; Sheldon; Spanel; and Van Luven.

**Staff:** Susan Hosch (786-7120).

**Background:** Undergraduate students at Washington universities often receive instruction from graduate teaching assistants. Many students have complained that they are unable to understand the subject matter because of the teaching assistant's lack of English speaking skills.

Ohio and Pennsylvania have recently required instructors at higher education institutions to demonstrate fluency in the English language. In Pennsylvania, all instructional faculty must satisfy the English proficiency requirement.

**Summary of Amended Bill:** The Legislature affirms certain principles. Persons of all nationalities, races, religions, and ethnic backgrounds are welcome and valued in the state. Students, faculty and staff from other countries enrich the educational experience of Washington students. These

persons also enhance institutional scholarship, and provide cultural diversity. In addition, Washington's students are entitled to excellent instruction at the state's institutions of higher education. This instruction includes effective communication. Institutions of higher education are directed to implement these principles.

The Council of Presidents will convene a task force of representatives from the four-year universities and college. The task force will review institutional policies designed to ensure that faculty and teaching assistants are able to communicate effectively. The task force will review methods of improving communication and teaching skills, and will share the results of that research. Finally, the task force will work with each institution to assist it in its efforts to improve the communication and teaching skills of faculty and teaching assistants instructing undergraduate students.

**Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:** Methods of ensuring that faculty and graduate assistants can speak English are not prescribed. Instead, certain principles are affirmed, and institutions are directed to implement those principles. A task force to review institutional procedures and improve communication and teaching skills is created.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

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

**Testimony For:** None.

**Testimony Against:** (Original SSB 5350) The University of Washington has painstaking procedures to assure speaking and writing skills of teaching assistants and faculty. The legislation has the potential to eliminate great professors in the arts and sciences who are not perfectly fluent in English when they arrive at the university. The cost to implement the legislation could be expensive. The proficiency requirements could polarize faculty and international teaching assistants. Technically, the legislation will be difficult to implement because the term "international" could include Canadians and Australians. The problem, if any exists, can be worked out by the universities.

**Witnesses:** Terry Teale, COP (con on original bill); Ronald Dear, U.W. Faculty (con on original bill); Russ Lidman, T.E.S.C. (con on original bill); Sherry Burkey, U.W. (con on original bill); Larry Ganders, W.S.U. (con on original bill); Bob Wieking, C.W.U. (con on original bill); Sharol Evans and Terrance Forman, Highline Community College (con

on original bill); Sue Durrant, Council of Faculty Representatives (con on original bill); Brian Lock, Commission on Asian Affairs (con on original bill); Judy McNickle, W.W.U. (con on original bill); Andrew Rodriguez, Commission on Hispanic Affairs (con on original bill); and Kathy Friedt, Washington State Human Rights Commission (con on original bill).