

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5350

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 26, 1991

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

**SPONSORS:** Senators Saling, Patterson, Thorsness, Bauer, Metcalf, Gaspard, Cantu, Amondson, Sellar, Hayner, Stratton, Craswell, Wojahn and Snyder.

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5350 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Saling, Chairman; Bluechel, Cantu, Stratton, and von Reichbauer.

**Minority Report:** That it not be substituted.

Signed by Senators Patterson, Vice Chairman, and Skratek.

**Staff:** Jean Six (786-7423)

**Hearing Dates:** February 4, 1991; February 26, 1991

**BACKGROUND:**

Legislators have heard from constituents over the years about a problem faced by some students in our institutions of higher education. Some students complain that they are unable to understand the English language as spoken by some of the graduate teaching assistants. The problem is not unique to Washington State: Ohio and Pennsylvania have recently required that instructors at institutions of higher education in their respective states must demonstrate their fluency in English. The state of Pennsylvania includes all instructional faculty under the English proficiency requirement.

**SUMMARY:**

Persons who receive faculty or graduate assistant appointments to provide classroom instruction, or to work with students in participatory and activity courses such as clinics, studios, seminars, and laboratories shall demonstrate proficiency in the English language prior to assignment.

Each state institution shall evaluate its instructional faculty and graduate teaching assistants for oral and written English fluency using varied criteria such as personal interviews; peer, alumni, and student observations and evaluations; publications; professional presentations; and tests.

For instructional faculty and graduate teaching assistants whose first or primary language is other than English, a score of 230 or above is required on the speaking proficiency English assessment kit test (SPEAK) prior to instructional assignment.

Assignments for classroom instruction designed to be predominately in a foreign language are exempt.

**EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:**

A person who has received a graduate assistant or faculty appointment to provide classroom instruction or work with students in participatory and activity courses such as clinics, studios, seminars, and laboratories is required to be fluent in both written and spoken English language.

Courses to be provided primarily in a foreign language are exempt from the fluency requirement.

Each institution shall provide for all international teaching assistants and faculty, orientation programs that include at least 20 hours of instruction emphasizing (1) pedagogical skills appropriate to a Washington State institution of higher education; (2) intercultural competency; and (3) English language proficiency for instructional purposes.

Graduate teaching assistants and faculty shall be evaluated for English fluency using varied and appropriate criteria including, but not limited to, personal interviews, student observations, evaluations, and tests.

Graduate teaching assistants and faculty whose first or primary language is other than English shall demonstrate oral and written English proficiency to a committee composed of faculty and students.

That same committee shall act as a resource for any student who is concerned about the proficiency of international teaching assistants and faculty.

By August 1, 1991, each state institution of higher education shall submit to the Higher Education Coordinating Board a plan for certifying the instructional proficiencies of international teaching assistants and faculty. The certification process shall provide for student participation.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** available

**TESTIMONY FOR:**

Students need an avenue for resolving problems with the English fluency of their instructors. Students and parents

need assurance that their courses will be taught by people who are fluent in the English language.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST:**

The institutions already have their own process in place. While there may be problems, they do not want any stumbling blocks to faculty hiring.

**TESTIFIED:** Scott La Framboise, WSL (pro); Gene Woodruff, UW (con);  
Dick Law, WSU (con)