

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1580

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, MARCH 30, 1993

Brief Description: Requiring strategies to shorten time to degree and improve graduation rates.

SPONSORS: House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Quall, Brumsickle, Jacobsen, Bray, Rayburn, Finkbeiner, Kessler, J. Kohl, Shin, G. Fisher, Springer, Romero, R. Johnson, Linville and Basich)

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Bauer, Chairman; Drew, Vice Chairman; Cantu, Prince, Quigley, Sheldon, von Reichbauer, and West.

Staff: Scott Huntley (786-7421)

Hearing Dates: March 26, 1993; March 30, 1993

BACKGROUND:

As part of its effort to assess student outcomes in public higher education, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) has undertaken two studies of student graduation rates. One study has already been completed. In that study, the board worked with the state institutions of higher education to track the graduation rates of students who entered a Washington public community college, college or university in the fall of 1984. The board found that by the end of a six-year period, 51 percent of the 1984 entering class had graduated. Only 4 percent were still enrolled after that period. This meant that the graduation rate was not likely to increase very much in subsequent years. The board found that these rates compared favorably with rates in other states, where graduation rates after six years were generally below 50 percent at public colleges and universities.

In its study, the board found that graduation rates varied for students from different ethnic backgrounds. At the end of six years, 58.5 percent of Asian-Americans, and 56.6 percent of Caucasian students had graduated. By the end of those six years, 37.3 percent of Hispanic students, 28.1 percent of African-Americans, and 27.5 percent of American Indian students had graduated.

A 1989 study by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities had somewhat similar findings. Only 15 percent of students at four-year colleges graduated within four years, and fewer than 50 percent completed a bachelor's

degree after six years. The study found that the six-year completion rate for students at private colleges was 54 percent; the rate for students attending public colleges was 43 percent.

The research director for that study identified several reasons for high dropout rates and the extended amounts of time students were taking to obtain degrees. He stated that some students were attending part-time because they had to work to pay their bills. Others take fewer classes in order to earn the good grades necessary to enter graduate and professional schools. His study found that students who received federal grants were much less likely to have dropped out of school after their first year than students who received no grant money.

SUMMARY:

The Legislature finds that public colleges and universities should offer classes in a way that will permit full-time students to complete a degree or certificate in about the amount of time described in the institution's catalog as necessary to complete that degree or certificate program.

By May 15, 1994, each public college and university, as part of its strategic plan shall adopt strategies designed to improve graduation rates and shorten the time required for students to complete degree or certificate programs. The strategies will include some form of student progression contract or alternative strategy designed to accomplish the same goal.

By May 30, 1994, each four-year institution will forward their strategies to the Higher Education Coordinating Board for its review and comment. Community and technical colleges will forward their strategies to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges for the same purpose. By September 30, 1994, the state Board for Community and Technical Colleges will forward a report on strategies adopted by its colleges to the HECB.

The HECB will report to the Legislature on strategies adopted by the public system of higher education to improve graduation rates and shorten the time needed to complete a degree or certificate. The report will include recommendations for any legislation needed to assist institutions with their implementation efforts. Beginning with the fall 1995-96 academic term, each institution shall begin implementing its strategies.

An institution of higher education may enter into a student progression contract with an interested student. The terms of the contract will permit a student to obtain a degree or certificate within the standard period of time assumed for a full-time student pursuing that degree or certificate. Usually, the standard period of time will be about two years for an associate of arts degree and about four years for a baccalaureate degree.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED SENATE AMENDMENT:

"Student progression contracts" are renamed "student progression understandings." Institutions are not subject to legal action if they are not able to fulfill the obligations of the progression understandings. The mandatory requirement that progression strategies include some form of student progression contract, or an alternative approach, is eliminated. The two-step planning process for community and technical colleges is eliminated. The state board will forward the report on strategies adopted by the community and technical colleges to the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available

TESTIMONY FOR:

Due to situations beyond their control, students are not able to finish their programs in the amount of time which is generally accepted and advertised for completion. The institutions should assist the students in completing their educational programs in a timely manner by improving student advising, offering required classes and sequenced classes often enough for smooth progression. Institutions should also offer more night classes and increasing course offerings for heavily demanded classes. Passage of this legislation will assist institutional efforts to improve time to complete a degree. This bill only requires institutions to make this a part of their strategic planning process. Any use of progression contracts is voluntary.

TESTIMONY AGAINST:

The reasons that students do not complete degrees in a timely manner are diverse and complex. Many students attend part-time, some pursue double majors, and some change majors. Student progression contracts are unworkable, potentially adversarial, and ineffective. The institutions are concerned with this issue and are working on improvements.

TESTIFIED: Representative Quall, sponsor; Keith Boyd, WSL (pro); Parag Gheewala, WSL (pro); Ron Crossland, SBCTC; Lewie Lawless, WWU (con)