
Higher Education Committee

HB 2707

Brief Description: Reaffirming the mission of the higher education branch campuses.

Sponsors: Representatives Kenney, Priest, Sommers, Jarrett, McCoy, Chase and Hudgins.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Declares the primary mission of the five higher education branch campuses to be providing access to upper division and graduate education and defines graduate education at branch campuses as master's level.
- Directs branch campuses to collaborate with community colleges to create innovative two plus two education programs.
- Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) to recommend a transition to funding branch campuses at a similar level to comprehensive universities.

Hearing Date: 1/27/04

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

When the HECB published its first master plan for higher education in 1987, it concluded that existing upper division and graduate higher education programs did not fully meet the needs of the state. Affirming these findings, the 1989 Legislature established five branch campuses in growing urban areas, to be operated by the state's two public research universities. The University of Washington (UW) campuses are located in Tacoma and Bothell; the Washington State University (WSU) campuses are located in Vancouver, the Tri-Cities, and Spokane.

In 2002 and 2003, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) was directed to examine the current and future role and mission of the branch campuses. The Institute's interim report concluded that branch campuses have been responding to their original missions to expand access to higher education and contribute to regional economic development. However, the Institute's final report pointed out that branch campuses are influenced by significant internal and external factors that may be moving them away from their original missions.

The final report identified several opportunities for future legislative direction regarding branch campuses. Topics included:

1. *The designation of each branch campus as a research institution.* The Institute found that, although the level of research at each branch varies widely, the research activity of most branch campuses falls somewhere between the state's research and comprehensive institutions. Nevertheless the State funds each branch campus as a research university.
2. *Improvement of collaboration among branch campuses and community and technical colleges.* The Institute found that collaboration occurs among branch campuses and community and technical colleges, but is inconsistent. Research institutions and community colleges have markedly distinct academic programs, cultures, and students. Although current statute references a two plus two model of education, it does not specifically require the institutions to work together.
3. *Role of each branch campus in offering doctoral programs.* Current statute refers to graduate education being offered at branch campuses, but does not specify the level of graduate education. The HECB policy originally prohibited branch campuses from offering doctoral degrees because of their costs, but this policy has been relaxed over time. The WSU Spokane campus received HECB approval for a Doctorate in Pharmacy in 1992. Other proposals have been discussed, but some legislators question adding this activity to the branches' portfolio.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that branch campuses are responding to their original mission, but that internal and external pressures are beginning to move them away from their original mission. The Legislature intends to reaffirm the mission of the branch campuses and set the course for their continued future expansion and development.

The primary mission of branch campuses is stated: to expand access to baccalaureate and master's level graduate education in under-served urban areas. Branch campuses must place a priority on providing instruction and related activities to support degree and certificate programs. Branch campuses are directed to collaborate with community colleges to develop articulation agreements, dual admissions policies, and other partnerships. Other possible collaboration includes joint development of curricula and degree programs; collocation of instruction, and faculty-sharing. The HECB must adopt rules, guidelines, and performance measures to ensure a collaborative partnership between community colleges and branch campuses.

Legislative intent is stated that branch campuses be funded commensurate with upper division and master's level graduate education at comprehensive universities. The HECB must evaluate faculty workload and research to identify an appropriate funding level for each campus. By December 1, 2005, the HECB will recommend a strategy to transition overall funding to implement legislative intent. The HECB will also recommend a growth plan for each campus to achieve economies of scale and coordinate expansion of enrollment and facilities.

Current laws are amended to state that branch campuses may offer master's level graduate education. The current doctoral program at the WSU Spokane is permitted to continue.

Three sections of law pertaining to the original creation of branch campuses in 1989 are repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 2004.

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