

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 3306

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to electronic learning at institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Regarding electronic learning at institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Representatives Wallace and Dunn.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/4/08 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to convene a workgroup to conduct analysis and make recommendations to increase student access to electronic learning, establish standards, and report their findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Hankins, Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts, Schmick and Sommers.

Staff: Andi Smith (786-7304).

Background:

National Context:

In the fall term of 2006, almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course; a nearly 10 percent increase over the number reported the previous year. That growth rate exceeds the 1.5 percent growth rate of the overall higher education student population.

Two-year, Associate degree granting institutions have the highest growth rates and account for over one-half of all online enrollments for the last five years nationally. Baccalaureate

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institutions began the period with the fewest online enrollments and have had the lowest rates of growth.

According to a recent survey of over 2,500 colleges and universities, improving student access is the most often cited objective for offering online courses and programs. The appeal of online instruction to non-traditional students is indicated by the high number of institutions which cite growth in continuing and profession education as an objective for their online offerings. Reducing or containing costs are among the least-cited objectives for online education.

Washington Enrollments in Electronic Learning:

In 1999 the Legislature adopted a budget proviso directing the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to develop a system for collecting consistent data on students enrolled in electronic learning courses. Enrollment reporting of electronic learning (eLearning) Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was defined by OFM as "an academic course where teachers and students are physically separate for a *predominant amount* (51 percent) of the instructional contact hours.

Since data started being collected in 2000, enrollments in eLearning courses have remained relatively flat at the public Baccalaureate institutions and have increased significantly in the community and technical college system. In the fall term of 2000, enrollments in Baccalaureate institutions accounted for 2 percent of total FTEs. In the community and technical colleges system, eLearning enrollments made up 3.5 percent of the total. In fall of 2006, eLearning enrollments comprised 2.4 percent of Baccalaureate enrollments, while the percentage had grown to 8.4 percent for the community and technical colleges. According to a report from the Sloan Consortium released in January 2007, 54 percent of national enrollments in eLearning are provided by community and technical colleges.

WashingtonOnline:

Started in 1997 by the community and technical college system, WashingtonOnline (WAOL) provides online courses that can be used by any college in the system. The WAOL serves about 40,000 students each year, roughly 4,100 annualized FTEs and allows colleges to pool enrollments so that smaller colleges can provide online course work to any enrolled student in an affordable way. The WAOL also provides professional development for faculty teaching in this milieu as well as around-the-clock technical support for faculty and staff.

OpenCourseWare:

Launched in 2001, OpenCourseWare (OCW) is a free publication of course materials from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Customers log on to a Web site and have access to a wide variety of MIT courses including notes, problem sets, labs, lectures, and video demonstrations. The OCW does not grant degrees or certificates and does not provide access to faculty. The OCW Web site had 52 million "hits" in 2007 and mostly serves self-learners and students who are complementing a course they are currently taking.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges must convene a workgroup that includes the Workforce Training and Coordinating Board, the Prosperity Partnership, the Technology Alliance, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), a private career or vocational school, a four-year public institution of higher education, the Council of Faculty Representatives, and a community or technical college student to conduct analysis regarding eLearning and report its findings to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

The workgroup's analysis must: (1) establish standards and best practices regarding eLearning and related support services; (2) recommend methods to increase student access to eLearning; (3) determine ways to increase the supply of open course materials; (4) recommend ways to increase the availability of digital textbooks; and (5) report demographic information on student enrollments, retention, and completion of eLearning courses and programs.

"eLearning" is defined as a program of study in which digital technologies are used to support learning in flexible, anytime, anywhere learning spaces. The "e" in "eLearning" stands variously for enhanced, electronic, or extended.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

All references to "electronic learning" have been removed in the substitute bill and replaced with the term "eLearning." The substitute bill also removes the definition of electronic learning and replaces it with a new definition for eLearning.

The substitute bill removes WashingtonOnline from the workgroup and adds the HECB and the United Faculty of Washington State.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 2008.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) eLearning is growing rapidly and people appreciate the effort to pull stakeholders together. Given technological advances, anyone can get connected to learning and it is the responsibility of institutions to not only educate the workforce of tomorrow but support lifelong learning with digital learning technology. If the postsecondary education system is to expand and serve more learners, then innovative and flexible approaches that include digital learning must be incorporated.

(Support with comments) The HECB and the University of Washington would like to be added to the list of workgroup participants.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Cable Green, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and Maddy Thompson, Workforce Board.

(Support with comments) Ann Daley, Higher Education Coordinating Board; and JW Harrington and Randy Hodgins, University of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.