

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5173

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Higher Education

**Title:** An act relating to honorary doctorate degrees.

**Brief Description:** Authorizing the regional universities to confer honorary doctorate degrees.

**Sponsors:** Senators Shin, Fairley, Kastama, Sheldon, McAuliffe, Brown, Pridemore, Delvin, Hobbs, McDermott, Jarrett, Kilmer, Jacobsen and Kohl-Welles.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Higher Education: 3/18/09, 3/20/09 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Bill  
(As Amended by House)**

- Authorizes the regional universities to confer honorary doctorate degrees.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Schmick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Carlyle, Driscoll, Grant-Herriot, Haler and White.

**Staff:** Andi Smith (786-7304)

**Background:**

Central Washington University (CWU), Eastern Washington University (EWU), Western Washington University (WWU), and The Evergreen State College are authorized to confer honorary bachelor's and master's degrees upon persons other than graduates of their universities in recognition of the person's learning or devotion to education, literature, art, or science. Washington State University and the University of Washington may also confer honorary degrees without restriction as to level. Community and technical colleges are authorized to confer honorary associate of arts degrees.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

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**Summary of Amended Bill:**

Western Washington University, Central Washington University, and Eastern Washington University are authorized to confer honorary doctoral degrees in recognition of the person's learning or devotion to education, literature, art, or science.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The requirement that honorary degrees must be conferred upon persons other than graduates of their universities was removed.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Honorary doctorates are already offered by many institutions across the country and are conferred to people who make substantive impacts on education and business. Universities are rewarding and recognizing their contributions to humanity and the regional universities in Washington want to participate in that process. Yale University has a large endowment, made possible in part by alumni who are recognized by the Institution. Having the ability to bestow this honor can help attract resources to our regional institutions.

Western Washington University would use this authority to attract people to Bellingham who may not have otherwise come. It would allow us to build relationships with these people and make them an asset to our community. Whether they gave lectures or helped in fundraising, this ability would help us provide a long term benefit to our students with no fiscal impact to the state. Central Washington University just completed its first fundraising campaign and we found that this tool is already available to many other institutions and that it would be very useful for us to have as well. Central has recently started a global wine program, the closest similar program is located in Sydney, Australia, so ours is quite unique. We are reaching out to businesses in a new way and this tool would help us make connections. Eastern Washington University recognizes that the budget has taken the center stage but encourages the committee to not forget about these little bills that help institutions and students. Eastern anticipates using this mostly to help engage speakers for the presidential speaker series. We will use the authority judiciously as to preserve the value of the degree.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Shin, prime sponsor; Sherry Burkey, Western Washington University; Ann Anderson, Central Washington University; and David Buri, Eastern Washington University.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.