
Higher Education Committee

HB 1954

Brief Description: Concerning public interest degrees.

Sponsors: Representatives Zeiger, Carlyle, Warnick, Haler and Fagan.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Defines public interest degrees in statute as associate, baccalaureate or graduates degrees in biological science, computer engineering, computer science, electrical engineering, information technology, mathematics, mechanical engineering, and physical science.
- Requires public higher education institutions to limit tuition increases to no greater than five percent per year for full-time resident undergraduates students who enroll in public interest degrees.
- Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board to identify which programs qualify as a public interest degree.
- Establishes a legislative task force on public interest degrees.

Hearing Date: 3/24/11

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

National Recommendations to Increase Postsecondary Enrollments in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

A 2007 report of the Academic Competitiveness Council (Council) of the U. S. Department of Education identified a national goal "to increase the number of undergraduates who enroll in and complete science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs and are prepared to enter STEM or STEM-related careers or advanced education." The Council also recommended supporting advancement and development of STEM personnel, programs, and infrastructure in education institutions.

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.

This report followed a joint report of the National Academy of Science, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*, that recommended strengthening the STEM pipeline from primary through postsecondary education (National Academy of Science 2005). These recommendations were based on the idea that a skilled workforce in these fields is vital to the nation's ability to maintain its position in the global economy.

The Need for Certain Types of Higher Education Credentials.

State statute directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTB) conduct a joint assessment "of the number and type of higher education and training credentials required to match employer demand for a skilled and educated workforce." This assessment, is to be conducted every two years, and identifies the gap between the number of forecasted net job openings at each level of higher education and the number of credentials needed to close that gap (RCW 28B.76.230).

Between 1999 and 2008, several state biennial and supplemental budgets appropriated funds for the specific purpose of expanding "high demand" programs. In 2009, the legislature enacted HB1395 that created definitions in statute related to high demand as follows:

- a "High Employer Demand Program of Study" is defined as an undergraduate or graduate certificate, apprenticeship, or degree program in which the number of students prepared for employment per year (from in-state institutions) is substantially less than the number of projected job openings per year in that field statewide, or in a sub-state region (RCW 28B.50.030 and RCW 28A.700.020); and
- a "High Demand Occupation" is defined as an occupation with a substantial number of current or projected employment opportunities (RCW 50.22.155 and RCW 28C.18.160).

Summary of Bill:

Public interest degrees are defined in statute as associate, baccalaureate, or graduate degrees in biological science, computer engineering, computer science, electrical engineering, information technology, mathematics, mechanical engineering, and physical science.

Public higher education institutions must limit tuition increases to no greater than five percent per year for full-time resident undergraduate students who enroll in public interest degrees. The HECB must identify which programs qualify as public interest degrees for which a student may enroll at reduced tuition rates.

A one-year legislative task force is established to further define what constitutes a public interest degrees. The task force consists of two members from each of the caucuses in the House and Senate, four members representing the HECB, the SBCTC, the Employment Security Department, and the WTB as appointed by the Governor. The task force is to consider policies that increase the ability of public and private institutions of higher education to prepare the state's citizens with higher education qualifications that are in the public interest and report its finding to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by November 30, 2011.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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