

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6390

As of March 2, 2012

Title: An act relating to creating higher education student auditing committees.

Brief Description: Creating higher education student auditing committees.

Sponsors: Senators Pridemore, Hill, Harper, Litzow, Kastama, Baumgartner, Kohl-Welles, Shin, McAuliffe, Chase, Becker and Rolfes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/31/12.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: The State Auditor examines the financial and legal compliance of state agencies, including institutions of higher education. Additionally, the State Auditor conducts performance audits of state agencies, which are objective and systematic assessments of an agency or its programs, functions, or activities in order to help public officials improve efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) conducts performance audits, program evaluations, special studies, and sunset reviews for the Legislature and Washington citizens. JLARC makes recommendations to the Legislature and state agencies to improve the performance of state government and identify cost savings.

The University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU) each have one student member on their boards of regents. The regional universities and The Evergreen State College each have one student member on their boards of trustees.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature intends to enhance the affordability and efficiency of higher education programs and institutions by providing a mechanism for systematic review and consideration of cost-containment strategies.

A student auditing committee (committee) is created at each four-year institution of higher education. Not more than seven student members must be appointed by each institution's

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student government association. One of the members must be the student member on the university's or college's board of regents or board of trustees (boards).

Each year, each committee must examine at least one major project at their institution for the purpose of identifying programs, practices, and process that could benefit from improved efficiency. The committee must report findings and recommendations for reducing costs. The report is distributed to board members and made public on the institution's web site. The boards must provide at least one opportunity a year for their institution's committee to present its findings and recommendations at a public board meeting.

For guidance on choosing appropriate projects, methodology, and presentation of information, each committee must consult with the staff of JLARC and the successor agency of the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The provision creating the committees expires July 1, 2017.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 2012.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Students are increasingly sharing greater costs of education and the bill allows students to provide some direction and input on how funds are spent. Empowering employees in identifying cost savings has proven very effective. Students need to be engaged in dialogue of where tuition dollars are going. Students' limited access to information is a serious issue and the committee could implement sensible policies and channel information.

CON: The bill may increase additional learning opportunities and input, but operates outside the normal process. There is a long history of shared governance with students and Western Washington University (WWU). The committee bypasses faculty and administration. The bill has no criteria about what audits would entail. Who pays for an audit of major programs every year?

OTHER: With financial burdens, this bill creates greater accountability for institutions. WSU values student engagement, but activities in the bill could occur without adding specific language.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Pridemore, prime sponsor; Michelle Nance, William Dow, Associated Students of UW.

CON: Sherry Burkey, WWU.

OTHER: Jake Atwell-Scrivner, Washington Student Association; Chris Mulick, WSU.