
Higher Education Committee

HB 2352

Brief Description: Establishing an online alternative credit degree program.

Sponsors: Representatives Sawyer, Warnick, Seaquist, Walsh, Johnson, Manweller, Sells, Riccelli, Reykdal, Ryu, Morrell, Zeiger, Tarleton and Freeman.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes an online degree program at Central Washington University (CWU) that awards degrees based on an alternative credit model.
- Outlines the intention to position the state to meet baccalaureate degree production goals and to serve nontraditional students who may already hold some postsecondary academic credits or life experience that can count towards a degree.
- Requires an annual report on progress in implementing the program and recommendations for improvement or expansion.

Hearing Date: 1/21/14

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

The traditional model for higher education delivery includes progression toward a degree by accumulating a prescribed number of time-based units, often referred to as "credit-hours." Some innovations in higher education delivery are now basing their model on measuring what a student knows and is able to do, instead of how long a student is in class or where the learning takes place. This alternative approach is often termed "competency-based education."

Some forms of competency-based assessments to award credit have been employed for over a decade at institutions of higher education in Washington, including assessments of prior learning, challenge exams, and national tests such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP).

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.

State law enacted in 2011 directs the Washington Student Achievement Council to:

- recognize and endorse online, competency-based education as an important component of Washington's higher education system;
- eliminate unnecessary barriers to the delivery of online competency-based education; and
- work with Western Governors University - Washington to integrate its academic programs and services into Washington's higher education policy and strategy.

Summary of Bill:

An online, alternative credit degree program at Central Washington University (CWU) that awards degrees based on an alternative credit model is established. The intention is declared to position the state to meet baccalaureate degree production goals and to serve nontraditional students who may already hold some postsecondary academic credits or life experience that can count towards a degree.

Students targeted for enrollment in this program include:

- students who are early learning providers, to help expand professional degree holders in the field;
- veterans returning to civilian life with education, knowledge, and skills acquired during military service;
- students transferring from another college or university;
- high school students who are college bound;
- students who come to a university or college with academic credits earned through dual credit programs such as running start, IB, AP, college in the high school, and other programs;
- individuals who have completed education and training programs provided by an employer;
- individuals who have acquired knowledge and work experience on the job or through an internship; and
- individuals who have acquired some postsecondary academic credit, but whose commitments to work or family prohibit degree completion in a traditional baccalaureate setting.

The CWU, in developing the program, is directed to:

- communicate with community and business leaders to identify and deliver needed programs;
- develop and launch curricula and programs in response to the needs of business and students;
- evaluate and offer credit for student learning already acquired outside of academic settings;
- develop a delivery model that provides flexibility for working students in place of a traditional instructional model and pace;
- coordinate with other K-20 education providers; and
- identify strategies to enhance baccalaureate aspirations in underserved communities.

The CWU is required to report annually, by December 1, to the higher education committees of the Legislature on progress in implementing the program and recommendations for improvement or expansion.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 17, 2014.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.