

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2283

As Reported by House Committee On:
College & Workforce Development

Title: An act relating to fairness, transparency, and accountability in the admission processes of state universities.

Brief Description: Increasing fairness, transparency, and accountability in the admission processes of state universities.

Sponsors: Representatives Stokesbary and Van Werven.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 1/14/20, 1/29/20 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the University of Washington and Washington State University to report on routine, special, and priority admissions, in addition to nonresident tuition fees differential exemptions.
- Requires state universities admitting students as special admissions to establish a three-person panel to review and approve special admissions students.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Van Werven, Ranking Minority Member; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Kraft, Mead, Paul, Ramos, Rude, Sells, Slatter, Sutherland and Young.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Pollet.

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

Background:

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.

General Admission Standards for Four-Year Public Institutions.

Minimum admissions standards for four-year public institutions of higher education are set by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). As of 2015 minimum admission standards for public institutions require that applicants:

- have a 2.0 high school grade point average (GPA);
- have taken the SAT or ACT and have had the scores sent to the institution (unless the institution has a test-optional policy); and
- have completed the College Academic Distribution Requirements, which are certain required high school classes.

The admission index number (AIN) is used to estimate the probability of an applicant's success at the institution. It is calculated based on high school GPA and the SAT or ACT score. Institutions may use an AIN to determine which students will be accepted to their institution.

The University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU) admit students who do not meet their admissions standards under certain circumstances known as priority or special admissions, such as if the applicant has extraordinary talent or athletic ability.

University of Washington's and Washington State University's Admissions.

Both the UW and the WSU admit students with AINs of 28 or above but who fail to meet other admissions criteria. The UW calls these students "priority admits." The institutions also admit students with AINs below 28 under certain circumstances, which the UW calls "special admits."

Students in the UW's "special admission" category are freshmen with an AIN below 28 or transfer students with a GPA below 2.3. The Director of Admissions decides, in consultation with the relevant academic and athletic personnel, which applicants will be admitted under the special admissions category.

The WSU admits students with an extraordinary talent and an AIN above 28 but who do not meet all admissions criteria when the chair or director of the academic department to which the student is applying writes a letter of recommendation. If the applicant is an athlete, the head coach of the athletic department, with the approval by the Vice President for Enrollment, writes the letter of recommendation, and the Faculty Athletic Representative must concur with the recommendation.

Applicants with an extraordinary talent and an AIN below 28 are reviewed by a three-person panel made up of the Chair of the Faculty Senate, the Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate, and the Vice President for Enrollment. Additionally, the relevant chair or head of the department, or head coach for a student athlete, must provide a written recommendation.

Nonresident Tuition Fees Differential Waiver.

The nonresident tuition fees differential is the difference between resident tuition fees and nonresident tuition fees. Public institutions of higher education may exempt the following nonresidents from paying the nonresident tuition fees differential:

- a person residing in Washington who holds a graduate service appointment or is employed for an academic department in support of the instructional research programs for at least 20 hours per week;
 - any person residing in Washington who is a faculty member, classified staff member, or an administratively exempt employee holding at least half-time appointment, and the person's spouse and dependent children;
 - qualified immigrant refugees and their spouses and dependent children; and
 - any dependent of a member of the United States Congress representing Washington.
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Summary of Bill:

Reporting Requirement.

The UW and the WSU must annually report to the higher education legislative committees beginning June 30, 2021, on the following related to admissions:

- the number of applicants for the fall term and the number of offers to those applicants, separated by residency status and by campus;
- the number of students enrolled for at least one credit for the term in which they were admitted, separated by residency status and campus;
- the number of routine, priority, and special admissions for each campus;
- data on the reasons for each priority and special admission, such as athletic, musical, or other talent, or a legacy admission based on the applicant's family relationship with a faculty member or donor of the university or other special relationship;
- the average and median AIN for students admitted by priority admission and special admission;
- the number of nonresidents receiving the nonresident tuition fees differential exemption;
- the number of nonresidents receiving the exemption due to their employment status;
- the number of nonresidents receiving the exemption based on their status as a spouse or dependent of an eligible nonresident; and
- the average salary of the faculty members, classified employees, and administratively exempt employees receiving an exemption of the nonresident tuition fees differential for themselves or a family member.

"Priority admission" means an applicant is granted admission to a state university despite not meeting requirements to be regularly admissible based on comprehensive review results but has an AIN of 28 or higher.

"Special admission" means an applicant is granted admission to a state university despite not meeting requirements to be regularly admissible based on comprehensive review results and has an AIN lower than 28.

Special Admission Process.

For special admission applicants, the UW and the WSU must ensure a three-person panel that reviews and approves the applicant. The panel must consist of at least two faculty members from different departments or schools at the university, and each member of the panel has an equal vote toward approval of the special admission applicant.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Reporting on special admissions would provide clarity on the special admissions process. Having a three-person panel to review special admissions is important for transparency. Having oversight and accountability in the special admissions process is intended to eliminate the temptation to admit students for wrong or unfair reasons. The bill is meant to ensure that students are competing on equal playing fields.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The UW conducted an audit of its special admissions process, and the institution's current practices sufficiently safeguard against improper admissions practices. The additional reporting and data gathering requirements of the bill will require additional resources to implement.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Stokesbary, prime sponsor.

(Other) Joe Dacca, University of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.