
Higher Education Committee

HB 1822

Brief Description: Establishing the first nonprofit online university.

Sponsors: Representatives Kenney, Parker, Seaquist, Pettigrew, Dickerson and Zeiger.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board to recognize and endorse online, competency-based education, and integrate the academic programs of a regionally accredited not-for-profit online baccalaureate degree-granting institution of higher education into state policy and strategy.

Hearing Date: 2/10/11

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

Western Governors University (WGU) is a private, not-for-profit, online degree-granting university. WGU offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in business, teacher education, information technology, and health professions, including nursing. The university was founded in 1997 by a group of 19 western governors, including Governor Mike Lowry. WGU enrolled its first student in 1999. While the university receives grants from state and federal agencies as well as corporations and foundations, it does not rely on direct state or federal funding for its operations.

WGU is regionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. WGU is also nationally accredited by the Distance Education and Training Council, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, the Commission for Collegiate Nursing Education, and the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education.

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.

WGU degrees are competency-based rather than credit-based. Each student is assigned a mentor and graduation specialists are available to support student success.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature expresses its intent to partner with WGU to establish Western Governors University-Washington and provide enhanced access to postsecondary education for all Washington students, including dislocated workers and place bound students. WGU-Washington is recognized as a Washington baccalaureate degree-granting institution that is self-supporting.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) must recognize and endorse online, competency-based education, work to eliminate unnecessary barriers to the delivery of online, competency-based education and work with a regionally accredited not-for-profit online baccalaureate degree-granting institution of higher education to integrate its academic programs and services into state policy and strategy. The HECB must work with that institution to create data-sharing processes and performance assessments. Modifications in contractual terms or relationships, changes in not-for-profit status, or any internal restructuring of the institution will require consultation and approval by the HECB. The HECB shall adopt rules for this purpose.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 2/3/2011.

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