

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2352

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to an online alternative credit degree program.

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 History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/21/14, 1/29/14 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes an online degree program at Central Washington University 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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Seaquist, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Zeiger, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Hansen, Hargrove, Johnson, Magendanz, Muri, Reykdal, Sawyer, Scott, Sells, Smith, Tarleton, Walkinshaw, Walsh and Wylie.

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

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.

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).

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 Substitute 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.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill adds a requirement directing the CWU to consult with the Department of Early Learning for the purposes of targeting students who are early learning providers, and developing programs related to early learning.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: 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.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The proposal provides the opportunity to expand horizons and think differently about the delivery of higher education. These alternative credit programs give people an opportunity to succeed in their own lives. Washington is facing a challenge in respect to producing enough college educated individuals to meet the needs of the state, particularly with the growth in the number of students coming to higher education from high school declining. There is a need to increase the college attainment of nontraditional students. Outreach to high school students and nontraditional students, and relationships with community colleges are the strength of alternative credit programs. This proposal requires more creativity in determining whether students are meeting learning objectives based on competency rather than seat time. There are possibilities for partnering with the Army and industry to reduce the costs. These online courses would have faculty in charge.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Sawyer, prime sponsor; and Jim Gaudino, Matthew Pattie, and Jim Huckabay, Central Washington University.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Mark San Souci and Lani Todd.