



Legislative Update

As of March 30, 2011

HECB-Request Legislation

Doctoral Programs at Branch Campuses

House Bill 1586 would authorize the branch campuses of the University of Washington and Washington State University to offer programs at the doctoral level. Current law limits the branch campuses to baccalaureate and master's level degree programs. The bill passed the House 97-0, has passed the Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee and the Senate Rules Committee. The bill is now on the Senate consent floor calendar.

Financial Aid Administrative Consistency

House Bill 1424 would make a series of changes to the Future Teacher and the Health Professionals financial aid programs. The bill would authorize the HECB to set interest rates when recipients are in default of their service obligations and have to re-pay their scholarship or loan re-payment benefits. It also provides for an appeals process, clarifies how much of the scholarship/loan repayment assistance must be re-paid in the Health Professionals program, and makes other technical changes to allow for consistency and streamlined administration of the programs. This measure has passed the Legislature.

Health Sciences and Services Authority Reporting

The HECB is charged under current law with identifying local areas for designation as a Health Sciences and Services Authority (HSSA), establishing evaluation criteria, and issuing a biennial report on the activities of the HSSA. House Bill 1425 and Senate Bill 5484 would remove the HECB reporting requirement, saving an estimated \$33,000 per year. The House measure is on the Senate consent floor calendar. The Senate bill is in the House Rules Committee.

Member Confirmation

The appointment of Charley Bingham was approved by the Senate 47-0 on March 7. The appointment of Addison Jacobs was approved by the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee and placed on the Senate's confirmation calendar. The appointment of Samuel H. Shaddox was approved by the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee and is now in the Rules Committee.

Higher Education Governance

Department of Education

Gov. Chris Gregoire has proposed creation of a Department of Education which would involve consolidation of several state-level agencies dealing with early learning, K-12 education and higher education into a single cabinet-level department under the governor's authority (Senate Bill 5639). The bill passed the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee in mid-February and was heard in Senate Ways and Means Committee soon after, but not passed. Another public hearing in Ways and Means was held March 30. Under a proposed new version of this bill, administration of financial aid would be transferred from the HECB to the Department of Education by July 1, 2012. Additional work would be done by a transition workgroup appointed by the Governor to develop a plan specifying the technical and practical steps required to bring current state-level higher education agencies into the new Department. The plan is due December 1, 2011 and full implementation is envisioned by July 1, 2013.

Education Council

The Washington State Education Council would be established under a bill approved by the House on a vote of 64-32. This bill (Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1849) creates a 23-member council charged with recommending policies, strategies and a governance structure to make public education student-focused and seamless from early learning through higher education. The council membership is broadly representative of stakeholders. A preliminary report would be due January 5, 2012 and a final report December 5, 2012. The council would expire June 30, 2013. A public hearing in the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee was held – not on ESHB 1849 but on the proposal described above for Substitute Senate Bill 5639.

Council for Higher Education

Under the most recent version of legislation (Second Substitute Senate Bill 5182) sponsored by Sen. Scott White eliminating the HECB, a Council for Higher Education is created and another new state agency, the Office of Student Financial Assistance, would be created to administer financial aid programs and the GET program. The Council would be composed of the six baccalaureate institutions' presidents, a president of a non-profit institution, the executive director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and a representative of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. The purpose of the Council is to develop performance measures and goals for the public baccalaureate institutions, identify the level of resources necessary to meet the performance goals, and outline a system of consequences for exceeding or failing to meet the performance goals. The Council would also assume some authority currently assigned to the HECB such as new degree program approval and system design processes. The Council would form temporary task forces every two years to develop a projected 10-year master plan for higher education. This bill passed the Senate Ways and Means Committee March 15, and now is in Senate Rules Committee.

Financial Aid

Less Than Half-Time State Need Grant

For the past six years the State Need Grant has been available on a pilot basis to students enrolled on a less-than half-time basis (three to five quarter credits). The HECB has recommended making service to students in this enrollment status a permanent, regular feature of the SNG program. Substitute House Bill 1650, as it passed the House 77-20, would make less-than half-time students permanently eligible for the program. The bill was amended by the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee to simply extend the pilot status of the program two additional years, while also requiring a report from the HECB on the academic outcomes achieved by these students. The Senate Ways and Means Committee approved some technical amendments and passed the bill March 29.

Aerospace Training Loan Program

The Higher Education Coordinating Board will establish a program to provide low-interest loans to students enrolled in aerospace training or education programs offered by either the Washington Aerospace Training and Research Center (operated at Paine Field by Edmonds Community College) or the Spokane Aerospace Technology Center (scheduled to open in 2011). The annual loan limit will be the cost of attendance minus other financial aid received and cannot exceed the cost of tuition and fees. The HECB is required to submit an annual report describing the number of applicants, the number of program participants, and the employment outcomes for participants, along with additional information. The measure (Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1846) has been signed into law.

Caseload Forecasting

The Caseload Forecast Council would be required to forecast the number of students who will be eligible for the State Need Grant and to forecast the number of students who will be eligible for the College Bound Scholarship program and will attend postsecondary education under Senate Bill 5304, which passed the Senate 34-13. The House Ways and Means Committee passed the bill March 30 following adoption of an amendment which eliminates the requirement to forecast the number of students eligible for the State Need Grant.

Guaranteed Education Tuition Program

The GET program would be re-structured after August 1, 2011 under the terms of Substitute Senate Bill 5749. As a result, the GET program would be closed in its current form and a new 'GET II' program would be opened after the changes are implemented.

One of the changes is that the value of GET II units would not keep pace with the cost of tuition at the most expensive public institution in the state. Rather, the future value of GET II units would rise based on the average increase in tuition at all state institutions of higher education, weighted by the enrollment levels in each sector of the public higher education system. In addition, student services and activities fees would be excluded from the calculation of tuition and fee increases for purposes of unit value. Beneficiaries would have only six years to use GET II units following the initial use of units. Citizen members of the GET committee would serve four year terms (current law establishes no term of office for these members). The bill passed the Senate 47-0 but ran into more opposition in the House Higher Education Committee where the bill initially failed to pass on a 7-6 vote but was approved 8-5 the following day. It is scheduled for public hearing in House Ways and Means Committee on March 31.

Higher Education System Configuration

University Center of North Puget Sound

The management and leadership of the University Center at Everett Community College would be transferred to Washington State University under legislation which has passed the Senate and is scheduled for action by the House Ways and Means Committee March 31. Under the bill, Second Substitute Senate Bill 5636, WSU assumes leadership of the Center after a series of steps are completed. A coordinating and planning council would be established to complete a strategic plan for meeting the academic needs of the region, to foster collaboration with the community and among institutions and to resolve disputes. Membership on the council includes WSU, Everett Community College, two other institutions offering baccalaureate or graduate programs at the University Center, a community leader appointed by Everett Community College and another community leader appointed by the mayor of Everett and the CEO of the Center (as a non-voting member).

The plan is to be completed by December 1, 2012 and submitted to the Legislature for review. If the Legislature does not take action on the strategic plan during the 2013 legislative session, the plan is considered approved. WSU must also successfully establish an engineering degree program. The transfer of management of the Center is to be completed by July 1, 2014. The entire bill is to take effect only after the HECB determines, through the system design process, whether a needs assessment and analysis is required and, if so, after the HECB conducts a needs assessment and a viability determination and recommends that the provisions of the bill should occur. The HECB must make such recommendations by July 1, 2012.

Western Governors University-Washington

The HECB is authorized to recognize online, competency-based education as an important element of Washington's higher education system and to eliminate unnecessary barriers to the delivery of online competency-based education by Western Governors University-Washington under Substitute House Bill 1822. The HECB is directed to work with WGU-Washington to create data-sharing processes to assess the institution's performance and the extent to which it helps the state achieve the goals of the strategic master plan for higher education. The HECB must be consulted and must approve before the relationship between the state and the institution is modified or before the nonprofit status of the institution can be modified. The senate version of the bill was amended in Senate Ways and Means Committee to require approval by the Legislature in the future in order for WGU-Washington to apply for participation in state financial aid programs. That amendment was not attached to the House version, which has now passed the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee and is currently in the Senate Rules Committee.

Other Measures**Community and Technical College Technology Plan Financing**

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges adopted a Strategic Technology Plan in 2008 which is aimed at using technology to improve student learning, student services and create greater administrative efficiencies. Second Substitute House Bill 1909 would authorize up to 3 percent of the operating fee portion of tuition revenue at the community and technical colleges to be deposited in a new Community and Technical College Innovation Account. Funds from the account could be used for paying off debt from financing contracts such as certificates of participation or for projects that implement the SBCTC's Strategic Technology Plan. The SBCTC must approve projects under the strategic technology plan before expenditures can be authorized by the director of SBCTC. The bill was approved 63-34 in the House and has passed both the policy and fiscal committees in the Senate.

Eastern Washington University Program Authorization

Eastern Washington University would be authorized to offer educational specialist degrees under House Bill 1477. The degrees are subject to review and approval by the HECB. Educational specialist degrees are described as being at a higher level than the master's degree and a lower level than the doctorate degree. The bill passed the House unanimously and was approved by the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee. It has cleared the first of two stages of approval in the Senate Rules Committee.

Accelerated Baccalaureate Degrees

The public baccalaureate institutions are authorized to develop baccalaureate degrees that academically qualified students can complete in three years without attending summer term or taking more than a full time load of coursework during the regular academic year. The intent section of Substitute Senate Bill 5442 provides a finding that the streamlined path does not represent a new three-year standard for all students and states the legislature's intent that the quality or value of a standard baccalaureate degree not be diminished. The institutions are required to report on their plans for these degree programs to the HECB for approval. The bill passed the Senate 46-3 and the House Higher Education Committee. It is now in House Rules Committee.