

Amend CSSB 215 (house committee printing) by adding the following appropriately numbered SECTIONS to the bill and renumbering subsequent SECTIONS of the bill accordingly:

SECTION _____. Subchapter A, Chapter 56, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 56.009 to read as follows:

Sec. 56.009. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED AT WGU TEXAS OR SIMILAR ONLINE COLLEGES OR UNIVERSITIES. (a) In this section, "general academic teaching institution" and "private or independent institution of higher education" have the meanings assigned by Section 61.003.

(b) The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board by rule shall:

(1) provide student financial assistance grants during the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years for students enrolled:

(A) at WGU Texas, or a similar nonprofit, tax-exempt, regionally accredited college or university operating in accordance with a memorandum of understanding with this state pursuant to an executive order issued by the governor and offering competency-based, exclusively online or other distance education; and

(B) in a degree program approved by the coordinating board for purposes of this section; and

(2) in consultation with representatives of the coordinating board's financial aid advisory committee, representatives of financial aid offices of institutions of higher education and private or independent institutions of higher education offering online or other distance education courses and programs similar to those offered by nonprofit colleges or universities described by Subdivision (1)(A), and representatives of financial aid offices of nonprofit colleges or universities described by Subdivision (1)(A):

(A) conduct a study regarding, and prepare proposed draft legislation for, the creation of a state-funded student financial assistance program:

(i) that is available only to students of nonprofit, tax-exempt, regionally accredited universities or

colleges domiciled in this state that offer competency-based, exclusively online or other distance education; and

(ii) under which the highest priority is given to awarding grants to those eligible students who demonstrate the greatest financial need; and

(B) not later than October 1, 2014, submit to each standing committee of the legislature with primary jurisdiction of higher education a report of the results of the study conducted under Paragraph (A), together with the proposed draft legislation prepared under that paragraph.

(c) The rules adopted under Subsection (b)(1) must prescribe eligibility requirements for an award of a grant under that subdivision, including:

(1) a requirement that a student:

(A) be a resident of this state; and

(B) demonstrate financial need; and

(2) any additional eligibility requirements, such as academic achievement, satisfactory academic progress, course load, or course completion requirements, that the coordinating board considers reasonable and appropriate for students enrolled in online or other distance education programs.

(d) The amount of a grant awarded to a student under Subsection (b)(1) for an academic year may not exceed the lesser of:

(1) the amount prescribed under Section 61.227(c) as the maximum annual amount of a tuition equalization grant paid to a student; or

(2) the amount of the difference between:

(A) the tuition charged to the student by the college or university in which the student is enrolled for that academic year; and

(B) the average tuition charged to a similarly situated student by a general academic teaching institution for that academic year, as determined by the coordinating board.

(e) This section expires January 1, 2016.

SECTION _____. (a) The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shall adopt any rules necessary under Section 56.009, Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after

this Act takes effect. For that purpose, the coordinating board may adopt the initial rules in the manner provided by law for emergency rules.

(b) The coordinating board shall begin awarding grants in accordance with Section 56.009(b)(1), Education Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after this Act takes effect.