

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 537
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Higher Education
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Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, textbook prices have risen nearly 80 percent over the last decade. Many courses now require students to purchase an access code. These access codes are used for supplemental textbook material, homework assignments, and quizzes, which often make up a percentage of the student's final grade. On average, the access codes cost around \$100. Students can purchase the access codes by themselves or in a book bundle, and while they may be able to resell the book, the access code is only to be used by one student for a set period of time. The high costs of these access codes and rising textbook prices place a burden on students, who at times have to make the choice between not purchasing the access code and receiving a lower grade or purchasing the access code and foregoing basic necessities.

Courses requiring a laboratory component include a laboratory fee ranging from no less than \$2 to no more than \$30 for a student in any one laboratory course. The course catalog often informs the student of a lab fee, but it does not say how much the fee for the lab will be.

This bill would require the disclosure of course fees in the course catalog by amending Chapter 54, Education Code, by adding Section 54.0051. Each institution of higher education would be required to include in its course catalog, for each course listed in the catalog, "a description and amount of any special course fee, including an online access fee or lab fee, to be charged specifically for the course." Disclosing this information to students can help them prepare for costs arising from the courses they take.

S.B. 537 amends current law relating to requiring the disclosure of special course fees at public institutions of higher education.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter A, Chapter 54, Education Code, by adding Section 54.0051, as follows:

Sec. 54.0051. DISCLOSURE OF COURSE FEES IN COURSE CATALOG. Requires each institution of higher education (IHE) to include in the IHE's online course catalog, for each course listed in the catalog, a description and the amount of any special course fee, including an online access fee or lab fee, to be charged specifically for the course. Authorizes the IHE, if the IHE publishes a paper course catalog, to publish any fees specifically charged for each course using the amounts charged in the most recent academic year.

SECTION 2. Provides that this Act applies beginning with the 2018-2019 academic year.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2017.