



2021 Legislative Agenda

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Centering Equity at WWU

The ASWWU intends to center equity in each topic area of the 2021 ASWWU Legislative Agenda by calling for legislators to take action on community driven initiatives and demonstrate equity through funding. The ASWWU recognizes the rights of students to feel safe and supported in higher education, and that our campus must do more to create a campus climate that is safe and inclusive for all students. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the responsibility of centering equity in academia does not fall solely on the shoulders of students, but rather on the university, state, and wider community. The ASWWU asks the Legislature to focus on barriers to access, completion, and security among underrepresented and BIPOC students due to their different experience in higher education. Western supports the Washington Roundtable's goal of 70% of Washington high school graduates earning a post-secondary credential by 2030. To support the well-being of students underrepresented in higher education, the ASWWU asks for the Legislature's support in addressing barriers to access and completion rates.

Meeting Basic Needs

The ASWWU appreciates the investment into higher education through HB 2158, however in order for this investment to create successful outcomes we believe it is crucial to support students as individuals. Students face unprecedented difficulty to meet their basic needs on a day to day basis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Western has seen a drastic increase in the use of programs and resources that help students secure food and clothing like Western Hub of Living Essentials, grocery assistance programs, and WWU Career Closet. Additionally, housing insecurity is a persistent issue for students at Western and across the state. Not only does every human being have the right to have their basic needs met, but it is important to recognize that in doing so, Washington can better ensure the success of students throughout their time in college and beyond.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Ensure **SB 5800** a permanent program to provide housing assistance to foster care and houseless students.
- Create a grant program that can be accessed by all Washington State universities to disperse funding to assist with meal pop-up and clothing assistance programs that are vital in helping students meet their basic needs.
- Create a state-wide survey, similar to the #RealCollege survey by the [Hope Center](#), on student basic needs.
- Expand **HB 1893** to include state universities.
- Support **SB 5012** to provide a local government option for the funding of essential affordable housing programs.
- Support **SB 5027** to mandate closed captioning on televisions in public places.

College Affordability and Student Loan Forgiveness

The ASWWU recognizes that the increasing cost of education is a barrier for students from low and middle income families. With universities raising tuition and post-graduation plans being in flux because of COVID-19, the ASWWU highlights the increased burden of the cost of higher education and advocates for an expansion in financial assistance. Western appreciates the funding allocated to students in the Washington College Grant through [HB 2158](#), and believes all students who qualify for the grant deserve the funds promised to complete their higher education. Additionally, Western is concerned about the 770,000+ student loan borrowers in the state who collectively owe over \$27 billion in student loan debt. [The EdTPA is a barrier](#) not only for candidates impacted by COVID to get employed post-graduation, but also the barriers presented in the EdTPA disproportionately harms vulnerable communities which furthers inequity in the workforce.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Ensure that the Washington College Grant stays fully funded.
- Expand student loan forgiveness programs.
- Support [HB 1028](#) and [SB 5057](#) to remove the EdTPA requirement for residency teacher certification.

Facilitating Comprehensive Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Trainings

The ASWWU implores institutions of higher education to commit to systemic equity development by authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and groups into processes, activities, and decision making in a way that shares power and ensures equal access to opportunities and resources. The ASWWU believes that a comprehensive DEI training will give students the preparation they need to be informed and to be an active member of an anti-discrimination campus community. The ASWWU recognizes that every student comes to campus with a different level of knowledge and experiences, and that our community has a responsibility to facilitate challenging conversations. Additionally, ASWWU firmly believes that faculty and staff also need to engage in further equity training in order to create inclusive policies, programming, and environments conducive to the academic success of all students. Western implemented its first DEI training this Fall Quarter but nothing ensures the continuation of the training nor requires student feedback to be collected.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Mandate all higher education institutions to provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training to students with an anti-racism component; with student co-production and feedback components to continually improve the training.
- Mandate all higher education institutions provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training to faculty and staff that would include topics surrounding LGBTQ+, disability, and racial discrimination.
- Implement reoccurring LGBTQ+/ Trans-inclusivity training and procedures in campus wellness services (ex. Counseling Center, Disability Access Center, and Student Health Center) across Washington state.

Mental Health & Wellness

The ASWWU firmly believes that accessible mental health services on campus is a vital resource for students in higher education. There are still several barriers that hinder students from accessing healthcare on-campus including: a lack of diverse counseling staff, an outdated building that is difficult to navigate, and overloaded counselors which has led to counselors only being able to see students of an average of 2-3 visits. [Recent studies](#) show that students at WWU, and other higher education institutions across the country have had significant increase in students psychological distress following the outbreak of COVID-19. ASWWU recognizes that the current social climate has specifically impacted BIPOC and other underrepresented students and we value having staff that share those identities. Additionally, ASWWU wants to highlight that undocumented students are unable to access the same mental health and wellness resources due to their exclusion from social programs and are therefore a high-need population.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Fully fund the \$225,000 capital budget request to complete the pre-design work for a new Student Development and Success Center, as well as the Minor Works Program request, which would support increased access to mental health services. The new space would co-locate Counseling and Wellness Services with student success services such as Financial Aid and Academic Advising. This would move the Counseling Center from its current highly inaccessible location on the 5th floor of our oldest administrative building without direct elevator access to a space that all students could easily find and navigate, which is especially important for students experiencing crisis or distress.
- Expand Washington State's health insurance to include undocumented individuals just like individuals in [California](#).
- Support [HB 1009](#) to expand types of medical access for students.

Environmental Justice

The ASWWU believes Washington State residents, including children and young people, deserve healthy and safe futures and acknowledges Washington State goes beyond national standards in environmental law. To continue as a national leader and to lead in mitigating the effects of climate change, the ASWWU believes the state of Washington should legislate environmental protections that encompass all pillars of social and environmental sustainability.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support a new version of [SB 5489](#), the HEAL Act, which would establish a healthy environment for all by creating a definition of environmental justice, directing agencies to address environmental health disparities, and creating a task force.
- Support a new version of [SB 5322](#) to ensure compliance with the federal clean water act by prohibiting certain discharges from motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining activities into waters of the state.
- Support [SB 5000](#) to create a hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicle pilot sales and use tax exemption program.

Coast Salish Longhouse

The ASWWU knows that the creation of a Coast Salish longhouse will be a meaningful and valuable space on campus for students, something that has been tirelessly advocated for by the Native American Student Union (NASU). WWU seeks to build a traditional Coast Salish style longhouse in honor of the historic importance of the place that it occupies. Indigenous students currently do not have a space for cultural expression at Western and the retention rate of first-year Indigenous students was the second-lowest among all ethnic groups at 70.9% in 2018 while the retention rate of their first-year white counterparts was 83.2%. The Coast Salish longhouse at Western will support Indigenous students in academics by providing a sense of place through a dedicated space on the university campus for students to gather, build community and support each other.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Allocate \$4.95 million dollars to build a Coast Salish Longhouse on Western's campus.

Support and Resources for Undocumented Students and DACA Recipients

The ASWWU appreciates the legislature for passing legislation in support of underrepresented and undocumented students, such as the Undocumented Student Loan Program (SB 6561) during the 2020 session. Although this program will make higher education more accessible for people across the state, undocumented students still remain one of the most vulnerable populations. Western further acknowledges that supporting undocumented students also encompasses supporting the entire undocumented community, and we are therefore concerned about the lack of stimulus relief, accessible student financial aid, and the treatment of those in the Northwest ICE Processing Center.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Ensure [SB 6561](#), the Undocumented Student Loan Program, stays funded.
- Support the budget provision that would provide COVID-19 relief to undocumented students that have filed for the WASFA.
- Amend [HB 1079](#) and [RCW 28B.15.012](#) to lower the residency requirement for in-state financial aid and tuition from three years to one year so more undocumented students can access higher education.
- Require in-depth protocols for universities to prioritize undocumented students' safety, modeled off of [AB-21 in California](#).
- Close the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma by revoking its business license due to the number of severe health, safety, and [human rights violations that have occurred before COVID-19 and during](#), under the ownership of the for-profit GEO Group. The blatant profiteering of GEO Group has caused poor living conditions, gross human rights violations, and numerous incidents of hunger strikes, suicides, and deaths.
- Expand the Washington Immigrant Relief Fund to \$60 million to ensure that undocumented students and DACA recipients receive financial support during COVID-19.

Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

The ASWWU is concerned about the frequency of sexual violence on college campuses and how often these instances go unreported due to a history of universities not taking action. We believe that collectively, Western has the responsibility to do more to provide resources that support survivors of sexual assault. Additionally, Western wants to emphasize that there has been an increase in domestic violence, [disproportionately affecting BIPOC and underrepresented communities](#), during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in heightened need to support survivors of domestic violence. In the United States, 1 in 4 women and nearly [1 in 2 trans people will experience IPV](#) during their lifetime. In King County, the largest populated county in Washington, [homicides due to Domestic Violence has nearly doubled in 2020](#). The ASWWU asks the Legislature to strengthen Title IX regulations and integrate interpersonal violence training state-wide.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Strengthen Title IX regulations at the state level to ensure trauma informed and LGBTQA+ inclusive handling of sex discrimination cases that aligns with pre-May 2020 federal Title IX regulation, as recommended by [Know Your IX](#).
- SUPPORT THOSE EXPERIENCING INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE BY
 - Integrating interpersonal violence (IPV) trainings in medical fields.
 - Hire personnel that specialize in IPV.
 - Create a screening system for IPV to connect people to local organizations or shelters for support.

WWU, CWU, EWU, and Evergreen's \$10 Million Dollar Equity Funding Ask

The ASWWU distinguishes equity funding as a vital part of creating meaningful change on our campus. The lack of diverse staff and faculty within higher education institutions parallels the achievement gaps in higher education whether in academics or in student support. Furthermore, ASWWU is committed to holding WWU administrators accountable to implementing tangible change using state funding for equity initiatives.

The ASWWU values initiatives that diversify Western's campus by creating more opportunities for BIPOC to access higher education. However, we also fundamentally believe that the recruitment and outreach of underserved Washington students must be preceded by active change in the campus community to ensure that these students are set up for success at Western. Thus, ASWWU asks legislators to engage in critical conversations on the efficacy of measuring inclusive success through retention and recruitment.

Lastly, the ASWWU fully believes that Western's institutions and its offerings of academic programs must represent the historically marginalized communities of Washington State. The academic programs of Western demonstrate consistent gaps in perspectives from populations that endure systemic and social marginalization, particularly communities of color. Underrepresented students do not see their histories and experiences reflected in their school system, nor do they have faculty and mentors who share similar backgrounds and experiences. Drawing from UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies is the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity, with a focus on the narratives by and from people of color within and beyond the United States. With the recent passage of [SB 5023](#), concerning K-12 public school Ethnic Studies curriculum, recent education graduates are now required to teach Ethnic Studies, yet have no contact with the specific curriculum in higher education.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- SUPPORT THE \$10 MILLION FUNDING REQUEST FROM WWU, CWU, EWU, AND EVERGREEN THAT WILL:
 - Address urgent needs in mental health counseling, sexual violence survivor support, multicultural student support, veterans' services and disability access.
 - Create an Ethnic Studies curriculum to ensure WWU students have a foundational understanding of power, privilege and social justice issues as they relate to race and ethnicity.
 - Support the future creation of a College of Ethnic Studies at WWU.
 - Create an endowment scholarship of at least \$50,000 that will go towards scholarships for BIPOC students.

Dedicated Revenue

The ASWWU recommends implementing progressive, reasonable sources of revenue. Decreasing tuition in fully funding financial aid are critical to the success of college and university students. The chronic lack of funding for higher education disproportionately affects marginalized communities including black and indigenous people of color, first generation students, and nontraditional students. These measures will propel Washington State towards equity in both tax policy and higher education.

THE ASWWU STRONGLY ADVOCATES THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO

- Support a new version of [HB 2521](#) and [SB 6557](#) to expand the Working Families Tax Credit to include individual Taxpayer identification number (ITIN) to fill in the gaps of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Support [SB 5096](#) to enact a state excise tax on capital gains.
- Removing some exemptions from the Real Estate Excise Tax, including untaxed, multi-million-dollar inheritances.
- Tax Washington State Lottery Winnings.