



The Associated Students
of Western Washington University
2013 Federal Priorities Agenda

Letter to the Washington Congressional Delegation:

~~February-May~~ 2013

As Congress moves forward into this new session, it faces both new opportunities and challenges in providing the opportunity for higher education for all students.

~~While the Pell Grant is exempted from the sequestration cuts delayed until March (at the time of this writing), other programs critical to student success are affected, including the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, federal work study, TRIO, and GEAR UP. If these cuts are realized, students of all backgrounds will find it harder to succeed in obtaining a college degree because of either decreased financial support or less preparedness before entering college.~~

Twelve years after first being introduced, the principles of the DREAM Act have still not been passed as legislation. The Associated Students of Western Washington University (ASWWU) firmly believe that higher education must be made accessible for everyone, regardless of their documentation status, and believe that action is overdue by Congress on this issue. Residents that are undocumented are vital to our country's success, and contribute to our economy and tax base the same as any other resident of our nation.

Additionally, the Associated Students believe that there needs to be basic protections for our fellow students at for-profit institutions, most especially student veterans. Subject to intense recruiting by for-profit colleges, student veterans attend these institutions where the quality of education is unclear, drop-out rates are higher, and prospects for employment after graduation are more uncertain.

As student debt has topped more than one trillion dollars nationwide, Congress must pass legislation to restructure our student loan system in order to make student debt more manageable as debt burdens grow.

There are many opportunities ~~to~~ Congress can take to improve the success of students, and we look forward to working with you to making sure they are realized.

Sincerely,

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Federal Priorities: Current Bills

S.114, the Fairness for Struggling Students Act

We believe that student loans should not be a special type of financial bondage, and that private loans should be able to be discharged in bankruptcy the same as other forms of debt.

H.R. 340, Protecting Financial Aid for Students and Taxpayers Act

Students should choose a school based on the quality of the institution, not the quality of its advertising. In this spirit, we support protections preventing the use of federal funds for marketing or advertising.

H.R. 357, GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act

Too many veterans see college as the wrong option, or are recruited by for-profit colleges because their benefits allow these colleges to enroll more students. We support reducing as many barriers as possible in order to ease the ability of student veterans to earn high quality degrees at our public universities.

H.R. 1330, The Student Loan Forgiveness Act

It is critical that students do not become overwhelmed with debt because of the uncertain job market. We support students being able to pay off their loan based on their income, and the spirit of community building which is fostered when recent graduates are not blocked from taking public service jobs because of financial obstacles. Additionally, we believe that the desire of recent graduates to engage in public service should not be hindered because of financial obstacles.

H.R. 320, the Student Support Act

As college-adults are especially vulnerable to mental illness, we advocate for increased resources for mental health care programs, including amending H.R. 320 to include universities alongside other levels of education.

H.R. 482, S. 216 the Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act

Bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation is an occurrence which happens far too often on college campuses, and we believe that Congress must ensure that all college students have access to a safe learning environment.



Federal Priorities: Policy to be introduced in Legislation

The ASWWU supports the efforts of the United States Student Association when they advocate for Congress to pass the Student New Deal, which would, among others:

- Support the adoption of the DREAM Act to extend financial aid and a pathway to citizenship to students who are undocumented.
- Make Pell Grant spending a mandatory budget item.

Additionally, in order to increase access and protect students, the ASWWU advocates that Congress:

- Place the "automatic zero" for Expected Family Contribution for the maximum Pell Grant award back to annual parental incomes of \$32,000 instead of \$23,000.
- Increase Pell Grant funding levels.
- ~~Reintroduce the Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Bill as a means to ensure that all college students have access to a safe learning environment.~~
- Include financial aid received through the GI Bill as part of the 90/10 rule.
- Reintroduce the grace period on Stafford Loans from the William D. Ford Direct Loan Program and expand the period to 12 months after graduation instead of automatic repayment.

