

Washington Student Association DRAFT 2016 Legislative Agenda

College Affordability

The affordability of post-secondary education is the most crucial issue facing students. We support low tuition, full funding of state financial aid, and funding of institutions of higher education at maintenance level or above. We support increased funding for higher education, including from new and dedicated revenue sources.

We propose that a minimum standard of affordability be established for Washington higher education institutions. Some potential benchmarks include: tuition being tied to 10% of the median family income; identifying a minimum percentage of state funding to higher education institutions; and defining a maximum amount that a student would be expected to cover from loans and work.

Voter Registration and Accessibility

We propose allowing more time for voter registration and updating voter information by extending the voter registration deadline until 11 days prior to the election, and in-person on the day of the election.

16-17 year olds should be allowed to pre-register to improve overall voter accessibility in Washington State. These actions will provide a much-needed increase in student and youth voting turnouts in elections that impact them directly.

We support the Washington Voting Rights Act, which would allow local jurisdictions to restructure their voting systems so that every community is represented in local government. Many local jurisdictions in Washington State operate under outdated voting systems that allow a slim majority of constituents to suppress the voice of the minority. Often, this leads to a lack of representation for people of color, the poor, and students.

Graduate and Professional Student Education

We support funding to maintain graduate and professional program competitiveness and prevent dramatic increases in graduate and professional tuition. Graduate and professional students are reliant on the reputation of their program in order to compete in the job market, and quality must be maintained so that the graduate and professional students of Washington's public universities may find relevant employment in their chosen field.

As state cuts necessity tuition increases, many graduate and professional programs are nearing a point in which it no longer pencils out to attend graduate and professional programs. By funding the universities, we hope to prevent graduate and professional school opportunities becoming reserved only for the privileged.

EBT on College Campuses

Currently, college campuses cannot accept EBT in their dining halls and other food vendors. This means that students who rely on EBT have to travel off campus in order to buy food, sometimes having to pay for gas or public transportation. That is why we support legislation allowing students to use EBT to purchase food on campus.

Expansions of TANF Benefits

Currently, the federal government allows recipients of TANF benefits can use them to pay for up to one year of professional training or other forms of higher education. Washington State should provide additional funding to assist students who use TANF to pay for school for an additional year, allowing them to finish their AA degrees or to take advantage of a wider variety of educational opportunities.

Open Source Textbooks

Every term, college students are required to spend exorbitant amounts of money on required course textbooks, greatly increasing the financial burden of higher education. We support a pilot program at one of Washington's public universities that would encourage access to open source textbooks, which can be accessed online for free.

Enhancing public safety and reducing recidivism through postsecondary education

(Pending more information from Bellevue College)