



ASWWU Legislative Agenda

Proposals

Issue: Vote

**Presenter(s): Bryce Hammer, AS Vice President for Governmental Affairs
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Rosa Rice-Pelepko, AS Voting and Outreach Coordinator**

Considerations for presenters:

- Describe the issue: What is the problem? What is the solution?
- How does it directly impact and improve students' lives?
- Please provide background information and the current context of the issue.
- Does it have a clear target? If yes, who?
 - (e.g. a specific legislator, committee, or other agency)
- How will it strengthen and expand efforts within Western?
- How could students build a diverse campus coalition around this issue?
- In what way does it have a local/state/federal organizing and lobbying angle?
- What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?

The current processes surrounding elections in Washington State, including voter registration and ballot submission, are inaccessible, especially to people that have been historically disenfranchised. Students and young people have often been provided with the least access to these processes, largely leaving the student voice out of democratic decisions. Voter turnout is low at both the state and federal levels and the lack of access to the voting process is largely to blame. These issues directly impact and improve students' lives by increasing the ability for their voices to be heard and represented in our government and reducing the costs associated with the process of voting. Since these costs disproportionately affect people with a lower income, like most students and people with marginalized identities, they decrease voter registration and turnout and therefore the representation of these groups. Making voter registration and ballot submission more open and accessible would provide more opportunity for students' voices to be heard and represented. WWU already has a powerful voter registration drive, these pieces of legislation could help us to do an even better job reaching out to students that we are not currently getting to. In addition to this, the increase in numbers of voters registered directly correlates to the amount of power that we have with legislators in Olympia. The following bills will increase access to voting for students and the population of Washington State.



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Motor Voter

This legislation would allow people to pre-register to vote at the department of licensing when they are 16 and 17 years old. Once the person turns 18 they would automatically be registered to vote and would start receiving ballots in the next election. California and Oregon have both implemented these systems in the few last years.

Automatic Voter Registration

This legislation would ensure that in departments that require proof of citizenship would also automatically register people to vote. Hopefully including institutions of higher education and the department of licensing when the licensing format is updated to include citizenship requirements.

Landlord Voter Registration

This legislation would require that landlords provide new tenants with a voter registration form. Considering that people between age 18-25, a predominantly student age group, move nearly every year this should help make sure that people can keep their registration up to date.

Voting Rights Act

The Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA) was created to address the systemic exclusion of people of color from the political process. This would provide support to ensure that local elections allow for accurate representation of the district they represent. Recently Yakima, which, prior to the adoption of district voting, had never elected a Latino council member, despite 40% of the district being Latino, spent ~\$1 million defending their election system against the ACLU and lost. The WVRA would help to create truly representative districts to prevent these problems, but also creates a different court channel than the federal process that will be more efficient in time and money.

Extend Deadline

This legislation would extend the allow for same-day voter registration through election day. The following states have same-day, in-person deadlines for voter registration: Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in the early-to-mid-1970s, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming and the District of Columbia. The arbitrary deadlines currently in place prematurely end voter registration so that only those who know and understand the deadlines are able to participate in elections. These deadlines severely disadvantaged students in Washington. As most of the public colleges and universities operate on quarter systems, the current systems only allow for student voter registration drives to happen in the first two weeks of school which drastically limits the effectiveness of these efforts. County auditors, who would be impacted the most by this change in legislation, have expressed their support for these bills. Extending voter registration deadlines would substantially increase student access to elections.

Access for Voters with Disabilities

This legislation would allow people who are unable to sign their ballot to do a voter registration affidavit once and then simply make their mark or use a signature stamp for their ballots in the future instead of



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requiring two signatories. Right now, two signatories are required each time someone who is unable to sign their ballot votes. Streamlining this process would greatly increase access to voting for people with disabilities.

Automatic Voter Registration for Institutions of Higher Education

This legislation would require each institution of higher education to automatically register eligible students to vote. This legislation would help to make voting accessible to all student across the state and make voting rights and turnout a priority to institutions. The Associated Students already runs an active voter registration drive, that has been increasingly successful, but legislation is important to support these efforts.

Prepaid postage

This legislation would require return envelopes for ballots to have prepaid postage, essentially abolishing the poll tax currently associated with voting. The people of Washington State should not have to pay for a stamp in order to have their voices heard, voting is a right that should be freely exercised. Requiring a stamps in order for a ballot to be mailed is a barrier to participating in the political process. Prepaid postage on ballots would help take down the obstacles associated with voting and provide better access for all people.

In the last session:

- Motor Voter passed the House and made it to committee in the Senate.
- Automatic Voter Registration passed the House but failed to be voted out of committee in the Senate.
- Landlord voter registration did not make any progress but had bills introduced in both chambers.
- The Voting Rights Act passed the House and did not make progress in the Senate.
- Extending Voter Registration Deadline has made progress in the House, one piece passed, and is being held up in the Senate.
- Access for Voters with Disabilities had a bill introduced in the House, but that bill did not make progress. No companion bill in Senate
- A bill for Higher Education Institutions to have voter registration plans was introduced in the House and Senate and was referred to committee in the Senate but was not heard before the end of session.
- Prepaid Postage bills were introduced but did not make it out of committee in either chamber.

Targets for this issue include but are not limited to:

Chair of House State Government Committee

Chair of House Appropriations Committee

Chair of Senate Government Operations and Security

Chair of Senate Ways and Means

Chair of the House Higher Education Committee

Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee



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As students encounter these barriers and are made aware of how they disproportionately impact young people and people with marginalized identities, they are inspired to change these policies. Most of these bills gained traction in the last biennium and we should be able to quickly get legislation on these bills introduced and build support for these issues early on in session. Therefore, each of these issues are likely to be debated and acted upon in the upcoming session.

Some creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage students around this issue include:

- Doing a video series to let students and legislators know why voting is important to students
- A letter writing campaign to legislators from students about the difficulties of registering to vote and the barriers that prevent students from voting, and pressure from constituents
- Student testimony as to how these issues impact them and why increasing access matters
- Encouraging students to get out and vote this year by providing accessible voter guides about who represents their district in Olympia and their track record with voting on higher education/voter issues.



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Issue: Civic Participation

Students often do not have access to voter registration or civic engagement before they get to college, if they attend. The overall lack in youth voters is often characterized by access, not apathy. When given the tools to become civically engaged many young people do. Research has also proven that the younger someone is when they become engaged with the civic process, the more likely that they will be engaged for life. K-12 education currently has a bare minimum of civics requirement that does not fully equip people to understand the political systems they operate under. The legislature regulates what is taught in K-12 schools across the state, this is therefore the most effective place to push for this change right now. It also allows for more outreach to allies in public school programs across the spectrum of education. This could be a way to bring all of Washington State's education components together in support of legislation. Specifics around the goals of democratic/civic education should include:

- 1) students considering social issues in relationship to the public good,
- 2) students using democratic decision-making processes in the classroom,
- 3) teachers embedding content in critical thinking about real issues,
- 4) teachers engaging students in multiple perspectives and multiple funds of knowledge,
- 5) schools affording all students access to high-quality education, and
- 6) students' cultural and linguistic identities being supported and viewed as legitimate aspects of citizenship" (Christine E. Sleeter, 2008).

From these practices and the existing graduation requirements, schools ought to equip students with the ability to:

- 1) Identify the districts they live in and which elected officials represent them
- 2) Understand which level of government (city, county, state) handle various issues and resources
- 3) Access the mechanisms of decision making that operate at each local level of government
- 4) Understand impacts of grassroots organizing
- 5) Identify how to demand transparency from elected officials as well as hold elected officials accountable for their actions

More comprehensive civic education in public schools across the state can mitigate the access problem that is so prevalent among young voters and instead create a culture where civic participation is the norm. Cultivation of involvement with political systems can lay the tracks not only for more regular voters, but better informed voters. The importance of making the state legislative process more accessible is incredibly visible at the college level, college should not be the first time a student interacts with ways to make legislation and legislators more accessible. The conversation around millennial voter turnout is quick to put the blame on the young adult and not the system that actively disenfranchises them. This marginalization is perpetuated for people of color, queer identified individuals, people with disabilities, and others for whom the current system creates barriers or actively disenfranchises. In addition, increasing civic education ensures that this knowledge is available to students who may not have access to a college degree, by enfranchising voters at a younger age we allow their needs to be more accurately



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represented by the legislators they play a part in electing. Therefore an increase in young voters is intrinsically good for higher education because it means legislators will take students our age more seriously.

This is an issue that affects all students, and has the opportunity to educate students throughout the K-12 system in our state to better prepare them for civic involvement. We also have potential to ally with different state-wide teacher unions like American Federation of Teachers or the Washington Education Association, these coalitions can be very meaningful and help us to build collective power in Olympia.

In order to organize around this issue, students on our campus might collaborate with local high schools in order to find out what students are currently learning and how to be more effective when working with high schoolers on this issue. This will not only help to show our power but will also help to prove our argument of access over apathy.



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Issue: Student Trustee Empowerment

Each campus has a student representative on their board of trustees/board of regents. These students are appointed to represent the interests of Washington but also serve as a representative of the student body. Currently they are barred from "participation or voting on matters relating to the hiring, discipline, or tenure of faculty members and personnel or any other matters pertaining to collective bargaining agreements." Additionally, these students are selected by the office of the Governor. This proposal is a solution to the problem of student representation. This problem can be addressed by removing the second point under RCW 28B.50.102, and instituting a transition to elected student trustees. For reference see the full RCW on student trustees below.

RCW 28B.50.102

Boards of trustees—Student trustee.

(1) Boards of trustees for each college district, by majority vote, may establish a sixth trustee that shall be filled by a student. The governor shall select each student member from a list of candidates, of at least three and not more than five, submitted by the associated student governments or their equivalent of the college district. The student member shall hold his or her office for a term of one year, beginning July 1st and ending June 30th, or until the student member's successor is appointed and qualified, whichever is later. The student member shall be a full-time student in good standing at a college within the college district at the time of appointment and throughout the student's term. If the student member fails to be enrolled at the college full-time or forfeits his or her academic standing, the student member is disqualified and a new student member must be appointed.

(2) A student appointed under this section shall excuse himself or herself from participation or voting on matters relating to the hiring, discipline, or tenure of faculty members and personnel or any other matters pertaining to collective bargaining agreements.

If Western starts now, this issue will likely be an uphill battle but one that is well worth it. Trustees and Regents have the final say on almost all issues affecting students at university. By limiting the participation of the student representative important decisions are being made with no student representation present. There is also precedent for elected student trustees in systems and states across the country. See Massachusetts General Laws (Part I. Title II. Chapter 15A. Section 21)

Each student member shall be elected by the student body annually, no later than May fifteenth. The term of office of each elected student member of the board shall be one year and shall commence on July first following their election and terminate on June thirtieth of the following year. The student member shall be eligible for re-election for as long as said student remains a full-time undergraduate student and maintains satisfactory academic progress as determined by the policy of the institution at which the student is enrolled. If at any time during



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the elected term of office said student member ceases to be a full-time undergraduate student or fails to maintain satisfactory academic progress, the membership of said student on the board shall be terminated and the office of the elected student member shall be deemed vacant, provided, however, that if the elected student member vacates his position upon graduation from the institution prior to July first, the elected successor may assume the position of student member on the board effective from the date of graduation of his predecessor, provided further that the statutory time limit of one year of the successor student trustee shall commence to run on July first notwithstanding any taking of office prior to the commencement of said term. A vacancy in the office of the elected student member prior to the expiration of a term shall be filled for the remainder of the term in the same manner as student elections to full terms.

The boards in charge of our universities are the final say on decisions that impact students. This is especially true because the decisions that students are barred from are personnel decisions about faculty, which students spend the most time with, and collective bargaining, which affects students' rights to unionize or to support faculty in that process.

If this goal is met, Western would have real student representative in all university decisions and ways to hold them accountable through student government elections. Making the student trustee an elected position will bring more student attention to the actions of the trustees and the issues they debate on, which is a form of accountability and encourages student involvement. The ASWU believes that students should have a say on the issues that impact them.

By creating a more transparent trustee process and by institutionalizing their authority students gain more measurable power on campuses across the state. Student power helps to show students that they have the authority to cause change and WSA is one of the main ways that change is coordinated at the state level.

From the WSA website: "Sometimes obtaining a seat at the table is half the battle. Student participation and input in a number of task forces, blue ribbon committees, and other work groups has also often been driven by the WSA.

- In 1998, after the WSA and its predecessors had been advocating for 17 years, the Legislature approved the creation of the governor-appointed "Student Regent/Trustee" position that is in place today.
- In the 2008 session the WSA began the next step in advocating for student representation for community and technical college students to have a voice and a vote on their Boards of Trustees.
- In the 2012 legislative session, the WSA then won legislation to place voting rights for students on the Board of Trustees for all Community and Technical Colleges. Now, there are no public colleges in Washington that can't have student representation on the largest governing boards.
- The WSA has also successfully advocated for a student member on the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) - appointed by the Governor. The WSA also ensured that the replacement of the HECB, The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), had a student representative/

<http://www.wastudents.org/victories/>



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By taking on this issue Western could create a pathway for each of the current student trustees to advocate for or support this issue to the legislature. Additionally there could be good visual campaign components attached to the fact that the student is essentially in many cases a token that is not actively listened to or respected in the same way or with the same power as their faculty, staff, and administrative peers.

This could be done through Higher Education in the House and Senate or through the House State Gov. Committee & Senate Gov. Ops and Security. The targets would be the chairs/ranking members on these committees. The main pushback we have gotten so far is from the Governor, John Aultman says that governors selecting trustees is "just how it had always been" and that "all the other governors pick trustees" so the main negotiation will be between students and the governor's office.

Considerations for the Legislative Affairs Council

This section is comprised of questions LAC should keep in mind while considering proposals

- Is it winnable?
- Does it have a clear and realistic time frame?
- Is it likely to be debated and acted upon by the Legislature in the next year?