



ASWWU Legislative Agenda

Proposals

Issue: Support for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Presenter(s): Nora Selander, Bridget Williams, Leanna Sauerlander, Sarah Gallagher, Sofia Perry

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?
 - o (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?

Sexual and domestic violence on our college campuses is a real issue for all students. These acts of aggression range from unwanted stalking or touching, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and rape. An estimate of **one in every five womxn** are sexually assaulted while they are in college and only around 13% are able to report due to personal or institutional barriers. The ASWWU recognizes that this issue is not one that exclusively impacts women and female identified folks, and that male identified and gender nonconforming folks also experience sexual and domestic violence. On top of the barriers that exist for female identified folks who wish to report, there are unique barriers that often go unrecognized for male identified and gender nonconforming people. On top of this, campuses often perpetuate victim-blaming, a huge part of rape culture, which has manifested itself in our universities. Multiple campuses in the state of Washington have been part of a federal investigation into how our campuses are handling these issues. Some beginnings of a solution include funding for counseling services, which are currently underfunded and too understaffed to support students who are survivors of sexual violence. The difficulty in trying to navigate through the information that is available can be an additional barrier to a person who is thinking about getting help/wanting to report an incident. Additionally, faculty and staff need to be trained on supporting survivors and coordinating campus resources.



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Sexual assault prevention campaigns are highly supported on college campuses because there is little opposition to the concept of preventing sexual assault. However, taking up this issue from the side of support for survivors acknowledges that this is a problem on campuses and that people are not being adequately taken care of when they experience violence and seek support. Advocating for funding for more supportive services is important because sexual and domestic violence is so pervasive. Shedding light on this issue will help to pressure legislators into taking action.

Historically, national legislative acts such as Title IX and the Clery Act were created to make higher education safer and more accessible for marginalized communities, especially womxn. Though they have had some positive impact, these legislative acts haven't been enough. 106 schools across the nation are currently under investigation by the Dept. of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

This has increased the attention being given to sexual violence on college campuses per the national investigation of many institutions on their sexual assault policies. Last year the Office of Civil Rights from the U.S. Department of Education was on multiple campuses looking into allegations of the mishandling of students' reports of sexual assault. A federal investigation of ineffective policies for supporting survivors of sexual violence pushes the State of Washington into the spotlight around this issue. This issue is currently receiving a lot of widespread support and from many different local, state, and federal organizations, which helps to leverage our pressure and increasing the likelihood that specific legislators will be motivated to take a stand with us.

There are many campus groups, community organizations, and individual students who will want to get behind working on this issue because sexual and domestic violence 1) is an issue that is experienced across the identity spectrum and 2) drastically affects a survivor's ability to be an active and healthy member of the campus community. Because of how strongly this issue impacts people on our campus and because of how deeply it is felt, there are going to be many people that relate to or care about this issue. This issue has the potential to build a broad coalition because there are many organizations and movements at the state and local level lobbying on the issues of sexual and domestic violence. Many of the campuses involved in the WS A have already been independently working on this issue and the report compiled by the WS A shows that this issue urgently needs to be addressed. Addressing this issue not from a prevention standpoint but from supporting survivors is a very powerful angle. From this angle there is no minimizing the issue or ignoring the fact that instances of sexual and domestic violence are taking place, impacting students, and our universities are not doing enough to provide support. Also, many campuses have been lobbying on student success packages that include more funding for counseling services. However, separating this issue into its own agenda item is also a testament to the extreme and undeniable need for these services.



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The following legislators have control over the budget and policies regarding higher education, depending on what part of the issue on which we focus (funding v. policy.)

House Higher Education Chair

Senate Higher Education Leadership

House Appropriations Members

Senate Ways and Means Members

Tactics to consider while organizing around this issue:

- Carry that weight style awareness actions
- Send legislators small cut-outs of people (gingerbread style) representing how many people on campus are affected by this issue (reference the 1 in 5 statistic)
- On campus educational tactic- clip cut outs to a string and wrap around the light posts on red square to represent the number of survivors
- Potentially send letters to legislators with an account (anonymous or not, up to individual) of a survivor's experience and explain how many people on campus are affected by this issue.
- Look for avenues to provide testimony from survivors as much as possible in order to empower voices and **not** *speaking for* survivors

Issue: Student Success



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The success of Western students depends not only on the resources and support they receive inside the classroom, but also is very much dependent on the resources and support made available to them outside the classroom. In order for students to be successful on our campus, we need to look at them holistically and ensure that we're providing them with ample resources to aid in their progress while at Western. Unfortunately, as funding at our institution is limited, we do not have the resources available to fully ensure student success from a holistic standpoint. First-generation, low-income, and students of color need more academic advising and tutoring support to guarantee their success and graduation from Western needs the resources to recruit and retain a more diverse group of students to our campus. Students with disabilities, whether they be physical, mental, or emotional, need to be provided more counseling, professional health services, and other disability resources.

In order to support students in these ways, Western needs increased funding to offer better services for Western students who face unique challenges while attending our university. It is important we set every student up for success by providing them with resources to support them both inside and outside of the classroom. As of now, Western has limited ability to provide all the services Western's diverse range of students need.

The Student Success package being lobbied on by the administration, with the addition of a few services, would help provide the various resources and services Western students need to ensure their success.

In order to demonstrate Western's needs for greater student resources We've included some statistics below.

Academic Advising Services:

Graduations Rates After Six Years: 2014 -

All students: 71.5 %

Black/African American: 50%

Latino/Latina: 62%

White: 73.7%

[Source](#)

70% of students who enter WWU as first year students are still undeclared at 90 credits WWU Academic Advising Center and Student Outreach Services will have to provide support for approximately 7, 000 Students

[Source](#)

WWU Tutoring Center

Demand for Tutoring Center (TC) services has increased by nearly 200% over the past six years without adequate increases in resources.

[Source](#)

Increased Recruitment and Retention of Students of Color:

Demographics:

Students of Color- 25.3%

Latino/Latina - 8.3%

Black/African American - 2.5%



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White - 72.4%

[Source](#)

Support for students who are experiencing homelessness

Because of the lack of data collected around this issue, the number of students this would affect is unknown. Regardless of the number of students it would serve, this service would still significantly increase access to WWU for students who cannot afford housing. The urgent need related to this issue is increased access to emergency housing, and emergency housing that allows for a minimum of a 1 month stay with students not owing any money for taking advantage of emergency housing services.

[HB 2024](#)

Mental Health and Counseling Services

Available data suggests that suicide occurs at a rate between 6.5 and 7.5 per 100,000 among college students. According to Western's Office of Survey Research, personal health/mental health is cited as one of the top 3 reasons students leave WWU.

Additionally, the WWU Counseling Center and Student Health Center have seen a continually growing trend in both the number of students seeking mental health services and in the severity of the mental health needs.

[Source](#)

This issue is winnable because student success is key to a university's reputation and degree-completion rate, both of which have significant influence on the future of the Western, funding included. Everyone goes to college to succeed, but if there are no resources for support services, students of color and other students who are underrepresented will drop out at higher rates. This makes this an incredibly winnable issue not only because the administration will align with most of this proposal, and the unified front we create down in Olympia is an incredible tactic to convince legislators of the importance of these issues, but also because it's an easily justifiable expense and has obvious and immediate impacts for students.

Many students need access to support services, whether it be veterans' services, disability resource services, or counseling services. Access to these resources is essential for students to be able to know they have a place to get help when they need it and to improve their quality of life. In order for students to be able to focus on school and their careers, they must first know that there are resources available to ensure their quality of life and mental health, which are prerequisites to other aspects of life like careers and grades and participating in extracurricular activities. Knowing these resources are available will impact and improve students' lives exponentially.

Targets are as follows:

Chair of the House Appropriations Committee

Ranking Minority Member, House Appropriations Committee

Speaker of the House



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Senate Majority Leader
Senate Ways and Means Chair
Ranking member Ways and Means

This issue gained a lot of traction in the house last biennium and was even included in the Senate's budget in 2016. This issue has a lot of support for being a reasonable increase in services request, it is incredibly well justified and most legislators support that. The specific time frame is difficult to map out at this time because it's unsure how the state legislature will deal with supplemental budgeting this year.

The deeply personal implications of some parts of this proposal lend it a lot of authority, and it will help us build power. It is easy to find a student on campus that has been negatively affected by this lack of resources, and numbers means power in student organizing.

The increase in funding can be easily marketed as a maintenance to campus services. Many legislators feel as though Western is already serving its students well because of our relative position in the state, however relative good is not absolute good, and WWU can always be doing more, especially to support marginalized communities on campus like students of color. While Western's current policies and funding level are better than some places in the state, they are still failing students of color, students with disabilities, queer students, and other marginalized communities. If you already have the societal pressure of systemic oppression like racism it is that much harder to overcome the barriers to success at institutions like WWU. The nature of the issue also lends itself to building a diverse coalition around it.

Since the great recession in 2008, higher education has taken serious cuts in state funding. While some of this was made up for by drastic increases in tuition, there were still departments that took large cuts in order for WWU to remain functional- many of these were student support offices. This means that not only were the worst of the tuition increases carried by already marginalized students but once those students got to campus they were also the hardest hit by the lack of resources available. This is perpetuating incredibly problematic systems of oppression that this proposal hopes to begin to address.

In advocating for increased funding for student services, we have the exciting opportunity to not only educate students about the resources that are available for them on campus, but also to highlight the important work that has already been done in those offices. A creative tactic might be to encourage students to, if they feel comfortable, talk about how those services have empowered them.

We also have the opportunity to talk realistically about student retention and struggles that students (particularly students of marginalized identities) currently face despite the presence of student services. Another thing too that might be able to excite new students around the issue would be to launch grassroots educational campaigns that talk about institutional marginalization and privilege in an accessible way- perhaps many folks who would think themselves removed from the issue of student services and student retention on-campus could realize the ways in which those issues impact them.



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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?