

2021 Western Lobby Days Agenda

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 wellbeing of students underrepresented in higher education, the ASWWU asks for the legislatures support in addressing barriers to access and completion rates.

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 EdTPA is biased against underrepresented populations which furthers inequity in the workforce.

The ASWWU strongly advocates to:

- Ensure that the Washington College Grant stays fully funded.
- Expand student loan forgiveness programs, including _____ and _____, until _____.
- ~~Support the creation of a Native American Tuition Assistance program that would be attached to the Washington College Grant that would fully cover the cost of tuition for Native American students. Support HB 1028 to remove the EdTPA requirement for residency teacher certification.~~

Commented [NB1]: Expand them to include DACA recipients?

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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 to:

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- 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.](#)

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Mental Health and 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 not all students can access, and long wait periods. Counseling centers at WWU, and other higher education institutions across Washington, are facing an increased demand due to COVID-19 and remote learning. [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](#) want to highlight that undocumented students are unable to access the same mental health and wellness resources on campus and off campus due to their exclusion from social programs and are therefore a high need population.

The ASWWU strongly advocates for:

- Fully fund the [\\$15 million-dollar](#) Minor Works ask to [allocate \\$225,000 into expanding existing mental health counseling space at WWU to increase access to current mental health services.](#)
- Support a plan for a future integrated health and wellness center on Western's campus, including a new building to co-locate WWU wellness services such as ADCAS, CASAS, the Student Health Center, and the Counseling Center.
- Expand Washington State's health insurance to include undocumented individuals.
- [Support HB 1009 to expand types of medical access for students.](#)
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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

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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 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.
- Implementing LGBTQ+/ Trans-inclusivity training and procedures in campus wellness services (ex. Counseling Center, [Disability Access Center](#), and Student Health Center) across the state.

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 during COVID-19 resulting in heightened need to support survivors of domestic violence. The ASWWU asks the Legislature to strengthen Title IX regulations and integrate interpersonal violence training state-wide.

The ASWWU strongly advocates to:

- [Strengthening 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.](#)
- [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.](#)

[Coast Salish Longhouse](#)

The ASWWU knows that the creation of a Coast Salish [Longhouse](#) will be an impactful and valuable space on campus for [Indigenous](#) students [that has been tirelessly advocated for by the](#)

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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%. -and in acknowledgment of the University's responsibility to promote educational opportunities for Native students. The Coast Salish longhouse at Western will support American Indian/Alaska Native Indigenous and First Nation 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.

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The ASWWU strongly advocates to:

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

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 to:

- The passage of the \$10 million funding request from WWU, CWU, EWU, and Evergreen that will:

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- 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 create of a College of Ethnic Studies at WWU.](#)
- Create an endowment scholarship of at least \$30,000 that will go towards scholarships for BIPOC students.

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 are concerned with the lack of stimulus relief, accessible student financial aid, and treatment of those in the Northwest ICE Processing Center.

The ASWWU strongly advocates to:

- Fully funding the Undocumented Student Loan Program in line with SB 6561.
- Amend HB 2079 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 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.](#)
- [Support the budget provision that would provide COVID-19 relief to undocumented students that have filed for the WASFA.](#)

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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

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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 to:

- Ensure that SB 5800 becomes 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.
- Allocate funding to create a housing fee assistance pilot program at each Washington State university that would provide funds for students that are unable to pay these fees up front.
- Create a grant program that can be accessed by all Washington State universities to disperse/allocate funding to assist with ASWWU's WHOLE pantry, meal pop-up programs, and clothing assistance programs that are vital in helping students meet their basic needs.
- Create a state-wide survey, similar to the HOPE and WELs survey, 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.

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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.

ASSWWU strongly advocates to:

- Support HB 2521/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 a state excise tax on capital gains, or profits from the sale of corporate stocks and bonds, and other high-end financial assets.
- Removing some exemptions from the Real Estate Excise Tax, including untaxed, multi-million-dollar inheritances.
- Tax Washington State Lottery Winnings.

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- Closing the First Time Mortgage Lenders tax loophole.
- Closing the Extracted Fuel Exemptions.
- Tax Washington State Lottery Winnings.
 - Close Tax Loopholes for Food Processors.

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