

# **2022-2023 WESTERN LOBBY DAY DRAFT AGENDA.**

## **Centering Equity at WWU**

The ASWWU intends to center equity in each area of our ASWWU 2023 Legislative Agenda. This Agenda strives to advocate on behalf of student-identified issues and will promote community-driven initiatives by calling on legislators to take action. The ASWWU recognizes the right of all students to feel safe and supported throughout their higher education journey, and our campus must increase its efforts to create a college environment that is accessible, safe, and inclusive for all students. We must also acknowledge that students have led these efforts and discussions in the advancement of students' rights and needs. These efforts should not fall solely on the students, but rather on the University, State, and wider community to ensure equitable funding and resources. The ASWWU asks the legislature to address the many barriers to access, completion, and security that students face, especially BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, undocumented students, and other historically marginalized students in higher education. The ASWWU supports the Washington Roundtable's goal of Washington high school graduates earning a post-secondary credential by 2030. In order to meet this goal, the legislature, university, and wider community must address barriers that hinder access and completion rates.

## **Ensuring Basic Needs**

The ASWWU recognizes the need to address food and housing insecurity amongst students at Western and throughout the state. According to a fall 2021 [survey](#), nearly 1 in 3 students at Western experienced some degree of housing insecurity and almost half of the students at Western experienced some degree of food insecurity in the past 12 months. Having one's basic needs met is a stepping stone for success in every area of life; especially as a student, access to housing and food is necessary to living the fullest, healthiest life possible. In addition to ASWWU, this is a priority to universities across the state as well as other higher-ed organizations like the WSA. The ASWWU also recognized the importance of financial aid in assisting students monetarily and helping secure a college education. Securing these basic needs for students will allow them to efficiently and effectively achieve their educational goals.

**The ASWWU strongly advocates for the Homeless Student Support Pilot Program to become a permanent program to help support houseless students throughout the state**

- The ASWWU believes that all students should have access to basic needs as well as safe and permanent housing to help them in their efforts towards their educational goals.
- The Homeless Student Support Pilot Program was first established in 2019 as [SB5800](#) and supported 4 institutions, Western being one of them. This was later expanded to two more institutions through [HB1166](#) (2021). This pilot program has helped many students throughout the state

- The program is set to expire on July 1st, 2024. With this program expiring, this leaves uncertainty on the support students will receive in assisting them with housing and food assistance, access to laundry and shower facilities, transportation, access to technology, secure storage and mailstop, and case management services.
- This pilot program has helped many students throughout the state. The ASWWU asks that you support making this program permanent which will ensure that the assistance offered by this program will be fully implemented by participating universities so students who need assistance will be able to receive it.
- When students have access to the basic needs like the ones offered by this program, they are better prepared to pursue and complete their education.

**The ASWWU strongly advocates that [RCW 35.21.830](#) be repealed**

- RCW 35.21.830 preempts rent control in the state of Washington.
- The housing crisis is having a massive impact on students and their ability to afford rent. With this law, private rental companies have no restriction on how much they decide to charge for housing units.
- The unrestricted on housing unit pricing creates an imbalance on what these private rental companies charge and what renters can afford.
- Western Students have been increasingly affected by rising cost of living in Bellingham and struggle to find affordable housing. This is particularly detrimental to low-income students who have limited financial support to meet these rising costs.
- The existing income disparity between first-generation and low-income students and the broader student body is exacerbated by the cost of living crisis.
- The ASWWU believes that repealing this will help create a more affordable pricing system for these private rental companies that will help students achieve and maintain housing.

**The ASWWU strongly advocates for the increase in state funding for student financial aid**

- The COVID-19 pandemic along with increased economic distress have caused a growing burden for low-income families, especially those dealing with the financial costs of pursuing higher education.
- Financial aid programs should be supported and expanded. Ensuring funding for the [Washington College Grant](#) is essential and should continuously be funded for years to come to help support low-income student education.
- The ASWWU supports any and all efforts to increase access to education through financial assistance.

## **Making Campus Resources Accessible**

The ASWWU recognizes the need for adequate and accessible student services on campus as a necessity for students to achieve their educational goals. Approximately two-thirds of college students report that they need counseling services. All students should have access to adequate mental health resources. Access to these resources are essential during difficult parts of their educational journey. On the Western campus, student service spaces are scattered throughout campus, are not fully ADA accessible, provide too few private offices for counseling,

and are limited in spaces for cultural interaction and informal student support. Additionally, these services lack visibility, decreasing the likelihood that students will know of or seek out the services they may need. These limitations create challenges to retention and recruitment.

**The ASWWU strongly advocates for the full investment of the \$49,500,000 capital budget request in the design & construction of the Student Development & Success Center on Western Washington University's campus.**

- Critical student services such as counseling and advising centers are currently located in secluded, hard to reach locations on campus. Currently, behavioral health services are located a mile away from the north part of campus, where a large number of students are located in five residence halls. Mental health and counseling services are located on the top floor of the oldest administrative building on campus. Both these services are very difficult for students to access.
- The Student Development & Success Center will be located near the middle of the university making these services equally accessible for students living on both sides of campus which is critical for students experiencing crisis or distress. The new building would co-locate counseling and wellness services with student success services such as academic advising and financial aid
- The Student Development & Success center would also resolve privacy concerns students and staff share with the current location on campus. The Counseling, Health and Wellness department is located next to classrooms, which could intrude on student privacy and discourage students from utilizing this resource.

**The ASWWU supports legislation similar to**

- **HB1434** from the 2021-2022 season, which sought to address farmworkers mental health issues proposing a hotline they could call. Many of Western's students come from farmworking families or do farm work themselves, [one of the most dangerous jobs in the US](#). With an increase need for mental health resources and barriers to insurance, the workers who put food on our tables have the right to mental health aid regardless of citizenship status.
- Adopting a similar bill like this targeted towards students is something the ASWWU would be in support of.

## **Gun Control & Gun Safety**

ASWWU recognizes the importance of safety in the classroom as a key component to fully engaging in one's community and learning process to ensure student success. The regulation of firearms is a priority to WWU students. With current cases of shootings rising it is a priority to ensure student safety in all public spaces but especially in Universities. Roughly half of students who took the legislative survey identified gun control & safety as one of their top priorities.

## **Sexual Assault Transparency and Education**

The ASWWU recognizes students' need to feel safe on campus. Part of that safety derives from the trust that the higher education institution they attend is a safe place when it comes to people who have committed sexual assault. Currently, higher education colleges and universities do not communicate a student's record if they have been found guilty of sexual assault. This creates a lack of transparency between institutions that may put students at risk. It is important for institutions to be aware if transfer students have committed a sexual offense at their previous institution. The ASWWU also recognizes the importance of early education to help prevent sexual violence at the college-level.

**The ASWWU strongly asks for this lack of transparency to be addressed on a legislative level**

- This would make it so Title IX offices would be able to inform sexual survivors if this is a second-time offense and aid Universities who may be considering taking in or expelling an assaulter from a higher education institution.
- The ASWWU is in support of any legislation that focuses more on transparency of the assault protecting the victim and less on protecting the assaulter.

**The ASWWU supports K-12 sexual assault and consent education programs to help prevent sexual assault**

- Sexual violence does not start in college, and education early on can prevent sexual assault from happening on the college-level
- The ASWWU supports the passage of [SB5395](#) that creates structured requirements for sexual assault education
- The ASWWU supports legislation that would support programs to help prevent sexual assault. The increase of funding in sexual assault education and consent programs in K-12 schooling would help prevent sexual violence on college campuses.

**Divesting from Prison Labor**

Students at Western Washington University have been advocating for the end of our university's contract with Aramark Dining due to their utilization of inmate labor. Western Washington University, along with many other public universities in the state, spend millions of dollars on goods, such as furniture and mattresses, that use exploitative prison labor. They have minimal protection under law and are subjected to dangerous labor conditions. Western students have expressed interest in divesting our university from prison labor all together. However, administrative objectives and other restrictions have prevented this from happening. Currently public institutions are required to give preference to goods and services associated with prison labor work programs. To many students, this is an ethical dilemma, as workers in prison labor programs are paid between \$0.65 and \$1.70 an hour. The ASWWU seeks to ensure that university goods and services do not rely on the unethical use of prison labor.

**The ASWWU strongly advocates the repeal of [RCW 39.26.250](#)**

- Currently, RCW 39.26.250 requires public institutions to give preference to goods and services associated with an inmate work program. This law currently incentivizes universities to choose goods and services that are affiliated with a prison labor program.
- The ASWWU believes repealing RCW 39.26.250 is the first step in working to ensure that higher education institutions divest from prison labor and opt for more ethical options.

## **Health Care Accessibility**

The ASWWU supports the demand from students to establish access to medicated abortion care on campus and to promote barrier-free access to medical assistance. Opening access for medicated abortion to students gets rid of the difficulties students may face if they were to seek care elsewhere. Since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, students have expressed concern that their ability to pursue alternative options for pregnancy is no longer guaranteed. ASWWU supports student's in their right to pursue their futures and make choices about their bodies without being afraid of not having access to all medical care. Allowing this kind of care, and assuring this access on campus will give students a safe, easy alternative for those who do not seek to pursue their pregnancy while continuing their education. Additionally, the ASWWU recognizes the struggle students may face when trying to access Western's health services.

### **The ASWWU strongly advocates for Washington State public postsecondary educational institutions to provide medication abortion care at on-campus health clinics**

- States such as [New York](#) and [California](#) have already been discussing and implementing bills that help students access medicated abortion care on college campuses.
- When pregnant young people decide that abortion is the best option for them, having early, accessible care can help them stay on track to achieve their educational and other aspirational life plans.
- Abortion by medication techniques is both a recognized treatment for the medical condition of pregnancy and a health service every pregnant person in the state has the legal right to choose.
- Students seeking early pregnancy termination, especially those enrolled at institutions outside of major urban centers, face prohibitively expensive travel, often without reliable means of transportation, to a clinic that may require hours of travel from their campus, out of their city, county, or even geographic region. These financial and time burdens negatively impact academic performance and mental health.
- Students at Western specifically only have access to one abortion provider in Whatcom County, located 2 miles from campus which continues to have limited appointment availability as out of state travelers visit Washington State abortion providers after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* in June to overturn *Roe v. Wade*

### **The ASWWU supports the codification of abortion in the Washington State constitution**

- Currently the Washington State constitution fails to provide protection of the essential medical care of abortion

- Republican legislators in the state have introduced 40 bills to try to reduce or eliminate an individual's right to an abortion.

### **The ASWWU supports legislation to protect the privacy of patients and health care providers.**

- The ASWWU would support a proposal to protect Washingtonians' health data which includes sensitive information. This would include increased data privacy protections in the wake of the Dobbs Supreme Court decision. This would empower Washingtonians with more control over their health data and prevent second parties from buying information from fertility apps.
- There are instances in which police have used the private data of those seeking abortions. Nebraska police used Facebook messages to investigate an alleged illegal abortion ([NPR](#)). Instances like this raise concern and show the need for privacy protection.

### **The ASWWU asks to reduce transportation barriers for individuals seeking medical assistance**

- [Research has shown that lack of transportation in general can result in missed or delayed health care appointments, poorer health outcomes, and increased health expenditures.](#)
- Currently, Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services for individuals within Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan, and Island counties are restricted to individuals that utilize Medicaid (Washington Apple Health), which is limited to Washington residents and will not apply to out-of-state students seeking needs. Roughly 13% (nearly 2,000 students) of Western Washington University's student population are from out of state.
- Increasing funding would further expand access to transportation services, such as NEMT, would allow for individuals to reach providers more consistently to address critical health needs. Additionally, it would expand availability to more individuals in need of services.

## **Environmental Justice & Campus Sustainability**

The ASWWU acknowledges the need to promote and establish sustainable practices and processes on our campus. We recognize that the quality of our built and natural environments impacts student health and long-term well-being, and that certain communities experience disproportionate damages of an unsustainable landscape. Environmental justice legislation is directly tied to equity work, the success of students, and the long-term sustainability of our campus and community. Western students recognize that our natural resources are finite, and in the process of creating a liveable, equitable future and reaching our educational goals, it is essential that we focus our efforts towards sustainability. The ASWWU realizes the urgency of our climate crisis, and prioritizes clean energy and pro-environmental choices. Western also realizes that not all groups are impacted by climate change evenly, and as such, supports socially and environmentally just legislation. By taking steps to decarbonize Western's built



environment, invest in clean energy solutions, and promote sustainable land use practices, the state would be taking steps to meet the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.

**The ASWWU strongly advocates for the full investment of the \$10,000,000 capital budget request in the pre-design of a clean energy heating system on Western Washington University's campus.**

- Western Washington University currently relies on an aging, natural gas fired central steam plant and distribution system to provide heating and hot water to the main campus. The system accounts for nearly 97% of Western's annual greenhouse gas emission (GHG) and about 57% of Western's FY23 utility budget. [This is exacerbated by the fact that approximately 30% of all heat generated by the Steam Plant is unavoidably lost in distribution.](#)
- The transition from steam to hot water distribution and natural gas combustion to electric heat pumps would increase energy efficiency by over 300%. This would nearly eliminating fossil fuel burning for campus heating and hot water production, and dramatically reduce annual CO2 emissions.
- The existing steam system is a mid-20th century design that is older than its planned service life; its condition is deteriorating, and it requires substantial resources to operate. In addition to the poor physical condition of the plant, operators and vendors qualified to operate and repair the systems are increasingly less common. The entire campus is dependent on this heat source, and since the source is unreliable, the entire campus is threatened by failure of the steam plant. Additionally, system failure is not far away: Four of the six boilers are set to reach the end of their life by 2030, one as early as [2022](#).

**The ASWWU strongly advocates for the breachment of the Lower Snake River Dams**

- According to the [Lower Snake River Dams: Benefit Replacement Draft Report](#) (Published June 9th by Inslee and Murray's office), the energy produced from the LSRD is completely replaceable with other types of sustainable energy.
- The dams not only are a massive detriment to the Chinook Salmon populations of the Snake River, they also go against the explicit wishes of the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) peoples.
- Salmon are a keystone species in the Pacific Northwest. Our entire ecosystem would change drastically if the salmon population were to disappear. For example, damage to the [salmon](#) population, caused by the Lower Snake river dams, is directly connected to the decline of Southern Resident Orcas in our region. Both salmon and orcas have immense cultural value to local indigenous communities and are vital members of the ecosystem.
- Both Governor Inslee and Senator Patty Murray have stated they would be interested in seeing the dams breached, however it has been left up to congress. Now is the time to start working within the political system to restore Washingtonian, Idahoan, and Oregonian salmon populations to a healthy level.