

2022-2023 WESTERN LOBBY DAY 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 broader 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, the university, and the community at large 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 here at Western and throughout the state. According to a fall 2021 [survey](#), nearly 1 in 3 students at Western experienced 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 live 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 them 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 Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness Pilot Program to become a permanent program to help support homeless students throughout the state

- The ASWWU believes that all students should have their basic needs met. This would include safe and permanent housing to aid students in their efforts toward their educational goals.
- The Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness Program was first established in 2019 as [SB5800](#). The program supported six institutions total. Six Universities, Western

being one of them, and four Community Colleges. This was later expanded to six more institutions through [HB1166](#) (2021). This Pilot Program has helped students who are at risk for homelessness or are experiencing homelessness. Making the Program permanent will help support more students and will expand the Program to support more needs of homeless students.

- Funding for the Program is set to end on June 30th, 2023 with the Program fully ending on July 1st, 2024. With this Pilot Program expiring, this leaves uncertainty on the support students will receive in assisting them with housing and food insecurity, access to laundry, shower facilities, transportation, access to technology, secure storage, mail stop, and case management services.
- The cost of attendance has increased since 2019. For Bellingham, the average off-campus housing cost has increased by 35% in the last year. With rising tuition costs, living costs, and food insecurity students' educational success is at risk, and Pilot Programs such as these are needed to address the nationwide crisis of students experiencing homelessness.
- **The ASWWU asks to make this Program permanent.** This will ensure that the assistance offered by this program will be fully implemented by participating institutions so that students who need assistance will be able to receive it.
- When students have access to 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.
- Having housing unit pricing rates unrestricted creates a power imbalance and opens the door for potential exploitation of what these private rental companies can charge and what renters can realistically afford, especially students.
- Western Students have been increasingly affected by the rising cost of living in Bellingham and struggle to find affordable housing. In Bellingham, the average off-campus housing cost has increased by 35% in the last year and is unlikely to not keep rising. This is particularly detrimental to low-income students, first-generation students, and BIPOC who may 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. This could not only discourage students from attending University but also negates the chance of doing so for those who need it most.
- **The ASWWU believes asks to repeal RCW 35.21.830.** Putting a limit on how much can be charged for rent 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 has 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.

The ASWWU advocates for the passing of [HB 1094](#) which would create the “Washington Future Fund Program.”

- As of 2020 in Washington state, nearly half of newborns were born into families that qualified for Medicaid, a key poverty indicator. Creating this Program would not only make it easier for potential students to attend college but also aims at combating poverty and giving those less privileged a chance at success with an academic career.
- By creating the Washington Fund Program Washington State would reduce financial barriers students face when deciding whether or not to continue their education past High School.
- The Washington Future Fund Program would create a pool of money that every child born under the state’s Medicaid program can access once they reach adulthood, which could go towards housing or education.
- Roughly \$4,000 would be accessible for students going into college which would help them with housing, tuition, and other educational costs.

The ASWWU advocates for the passing of [SB 5079](#) which would make the tuition and the potential financial assistance students will receive from FAFSA informed to students earlier

- Informing students on the tuition they will have to pay as well as the assistance they will receive earlier would help remove the uncertainty students may face when dealing with tuition costs.

Making Campus Resources Accessible

The ASWWU recognizes the need for adequate student services on campus. These services should be accessible to all since they are necessary for students to achieve their educational goals. Approximately two-thirds of college students report that they need counseling services. After the Covid-19 Pandemic, students reported a decrease in mental health (72%,) a loss of motivation or focus (68%,) loneliness, or isolation (67%,) with 66% of students listing this as impacting their academic success. All students should have access to adequate mental health resources. Access to these resources is essential during difficult parts of their educational journey. At Western, student services are scattered throughout campus, most of Western’s buildings are not fully ADA accessible, provide 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 the retention and recruitment of students on campus.

The ASWWU strongly advocates for the full investment of the 53.75 million 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 are located next to classrooms, which could intrude on student privacy and discourage students from utilizing this resource.

Gun Control & 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 for 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 the students who took the legislative survey identified gun control & safety as one of their top priorities.

The ASWWU is in support of [SB 5078](#) to protect public safety by establishing duties for firearm industry members.

- SB 5078 looks to ensure firearm public safety measures by prohibiting the manufacture, possession, distribution, importation, selling, offering for sale, purchasing, or transfer of large-capacity magazines.
- A magazine with 17 rounds or more is considered a large magazine
- Analysis of mass shootings from 1990 to 2017 has shown that large-capacity magazines have a 62% higher death toll.
- With the increase of college mass shootings across the country, it is vital we take the necessary steps towards gun control in the state to mitigate the fear and chance of it happening in Washington.

Sexual Assault Transparency and Education (TW!)

The ASWWU recognizes that women ages 18-24 are at an elevated risk for sexual violence. According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), 13% of all students in undergraduate and graduate programs experience rape or sexual assault of some form. In Undergraduate students, 26.4% of females and 6.8% of males experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation. The ASWWU understands the need for students to feel safe on campus. Part of that safety derives from knowing that the higher education institution they attend is a safe place when it comes to sexual predators. Currently, higher education colleges and universities do not transfer 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' safety at risk. It is important that institutions have knowledge about previous assault charges committed by an incoming student at a previous institution. The ASWWU also recognizes the importance of early education on consent to help prevent sexual violence at the college level.

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

- Recognizing the impact of this lack of communication in higher education establishments and the harm it could potentially expose students to is necessary in case of a second-time offense.
- Increasing campus' communication regarding previous offenses would aid Title IX offices in their investigative process with the background. With this information, Title IX offices could decide whether or not to encourage prospective new victims that this is a second-time offense.
- Campus-to-campus transparency in Washington state would aid in Universities making informed decisions. This would not negate anyone the right to education but would give the higher institution information on a student if they are found guilty of sexual assault at a previous institution.
- The ASWWU is in support of any legislation that focuses on protecting victims of assault over protecting the assaulter.

The ASWWU asks that we support the passing of [SB5081](#), an act of victim notification.

- This bill would amend RCW.72.09.712 and RCW.72.09.714 to send a victim of a sexual offense or other a notice of parole, release, community custody, work release placement, furlough, or escape about a specific inmate convicted of a violent offense. "Victim of sexual assault" is defined by RCW 9.94A.030 as any person who is a victim of a sexual assault offense, non-consensual sexual conduct, or nonconsensual sexual penetration and as a result suffers physical, emotional, financial, or psychological impacts.

- In the case of a victim being underage, the notice would be sent out to their legal guardian. Since the most at-risk age, the group is 18-24 and some college students may fall under the legal age bracket.

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

- Sexual violence does not start in college. Education on consent and sexual health early on can help prevent sexual assault from happening at the college-level
- **The ASWWU supports passing [SB5395](#)** which would create structured requirements for sexual assault education in K12 schools.
- The ASWWU supports legislation that would create support programs to help prevent future or current sexual assault.

Divesting from Prison Labor

The students at Western Washington University have been advocating for the end of our university's contract with Aramark Dining due to the corporation's utilization of inmate labor and financial reliance on the prison system. Western Washington University, along with many other public universities in the state, spends millions of dollars on goods, such as furniture and mattresses, that use exploitative prison labor. They have minimal protection under the law and are subject to dangerous labor conditions. Many Western students recognize the need for our university to divest from prison labor 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. 70% of those prisoners not being able to afford basic necessities, and 76% of prisoners reported being forced to work or facing punishment. **The ASWWU asks 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 students 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 and the passage of [SJR 8202](#) to address reproductive freedom.

- Currently, the Washington State constitution fails to provide protection for 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 passage of SJR 8202 would protect and codify access to abortion and contraception by amending the Washington State Constitution. SJR comes at the request of Governor Jay Inslee.

The ASWWU supports legislation to protect the privacy of patients and healthcare 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, and would allow 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 from 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 on 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 be 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 the 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 breaching 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.

The ASWWU advocates for the passing of [HB 1012](#) the extreme weather protection act

- The Extreme Weather Protection Act would create a grant program to help groups and federally recognized tribes during periods of extreme heat, extreme cold, and severely poor air quality due to wildfire smoke. This grant could be used for warming/cooling centers, transportation for people and pets during extreme weather, as well as provide emergency temporary housing and retrofit buildings to better prepare for climate change.

The ASWWU advocates for the passing of [HB 1085](#) which aims to reduce plastic pollution

- Plastic pollution can alter habitat and natural processes that can affect ecosystems in ways that include reducing their ability to adapt to climate change. This affects food production capabilities and people's livelihoods.
- HB 1085 strives to take necessary steps in reducing plastic pollution such as reducing single-use water bottles, plastic containers, wrappers for beauty and health products, and foam extruded or expanded plastic foam structures.