

**ASWWU Legislative Agenda Draft  
2021-2022**

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## **Centering Equity at WWU**

The ASWWU intends to center equity in each issue area of our 2022 ASWWU Legislative Agenda. Our agenda seeks to promote student-identified and community-driven initiatives to guide our advocacy efforts when speaking with Washington state legislators and other state leaders. The ASWWU recognizes that all students deserve to feel safe and supported throughout their higher education journeys. Our campus must do more to create environments that are safe, accepting, and inclusive for all students. In order to meet these goals, it is instrumental that we work to center equity in each of our issue areas. The ASWWU recognizes that students have often championed and led discussions in the advancement of students' needs and rights; however, this work should not rely entirely on the labor of students. Our university, state, and the wider community must also work to ensure that students are supported through equitable funding and resources. The ASWWU requests that the Legislature address the many barriers that prevent students from completing their education and achieving their goals. This must include support for BIPOC students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, undocumented students, and other underrepresented students.

Western Washington University is in support of [Washington Roundtable's goal of 70%](#) 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 commit to centering equity

on our campus. ASWWU commits to centering equity, and this commitment is reflected in the following issue areas and legislative priorities.

## **Meeting Basic Needs**

The ASWWU acknowledges the need to address basic needs insecurity amongst students at Western and other public higher education institutions in the state. Ensuring that students are able to access basic needs, including quality housing and healthy food options, will help assist students in achieving their educational goals. Securing students' basic needs is also consistent with the [Washington Roundtable's goal](#) of 70% of Washington high school graduates pursuing additional education and training. Meeting students' basic needs is the first step in assisting students in meeting their goals.

- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature establish the homeless student support pilot program [originally established as [SB 5800 \(2019\)](#)] as a permanent program to serve and assist students experiencing houselessness.**
  - The ASWWU believes that all students should have access to safe, permanent housing when pursuing their educational goals. The Homeless Student Support pilot program established in SB 5800 (2019) has aimed to connect students experiencing houselessness with their basic necessities. More recently, [HB 1166 \(2021\)](#) worked to expand the pilot program.
  - When students have access to their basic needs, including access to laundry facilities, housing, technology, and food, they are better equipped to pursue and complete their education. We ask that this pilot program be expanded statewide to assist and support students in colleges and universities across the state.
  
- **We ask that the Washington Legislature establish a biennial Basic Needs Survey modeled after [HB 1893 \(2019\)](#) that collects data regarding food and housing insecurity and other financial insecurities, and provides students with need-based and emergency assistance funds on a grant basis.**
  - Food and housing insecurity is prevalent amongst Western students and students across the state; however, the specific extent to which basic needs insecurity impacts students is unknown. Similarly to HB 1893 (2019), which initially targeted Washington's community and technical colleges, this assistance program would help to provide four-year university students with the resources they need to succeed and achieve their educational goals.
  - To apply for funding for their students, institutions would be required to collect and provide specific, up-to-date data regarding how many of their students experience food and housing insecurity.
  - In efforts to increase transparency and strengthen student advocacy, we ask that collected data be made accessible to students. Access to this data will also allow the legislature and other leaders in higher education to make targeted investments in student success in the future.
  
- **We ask that the Washington Legislature pass a \$200,000 budget proviso that will allow for a student health insurance study of community and technical colleges and universities.**

- Students need access to preventative healthcare and affordable healthcare options. This is necessary for students' academic success and physical well-being; however, lack of insurance coverage is a barrier that prevents students from receiving the care they need.
- This study will gather information regarding how many students are uninsured in Washington state. This study will aid in the development of targeted programs to ensure that all students have access to adequate healthcare coverage in the future.

- Dorms- only serve dinner in dining hall- accessibility on campus (meals) -> outside of WWU, holding universities accountable for providing basic needs

## **College Affordability and Student Loan Forgiveness**

The rate of tuition and fee increases across Washington state are barriers to students seeking to obtain a higher education degree or credential. The ASWWU is committed to ensuring college affordability in efforts to increase college completion rates and retention, while also reducing debt imposed on college graduates. Working to ensure that college aid is distributed in an equitable way is key to increasing higher education enrollment and completion. Students should also have access to reasonable financing plans to cover their college tuition and fees.

- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature pass \_\_\_ to establish an equity grant scholarship fund for low-income students within the Washington College Grant.**
  - [The Washington College Grant](#) is one of the most generous college financial assistance programs in the country. The WCG assists many Western students in the pursuit of their educational goals. Still, many low-income students at Western, and throughout the state, continue to experience financial insecurities.
  - These equity grants would help support students in covering non-tuition expenses, such as food, housing, books, and other materials. The [Seattle Promise Equity Scholarship](#) serves as an example that has been successful in the past. Establishing equity grants would help empower and assist low-income students in completing their education.
  
- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature raise the eligibility for the Washington College Grant to a Median Family Income of 55-70%.**
  - The ASWWU requests that the Washington Legislature expand support for low-income students in the state.
  
- **We ask that the Legislature work to ensure that student financial aid supports and structures are easily navigable for students.**
  - Washington state offers a variety of financial support to students in the state; however, navigating these financial aid offers and programs is difficult, especially for low-income and first-generation college students. The ASWWU wants to ensure that all students are given the resources and information necessary to navigate their financial aid options.
  - The ASWWU asks that the legislature pass... This would help ensure that current and prospective students are given financial aid notices and information that will help them plan for their futures. Students should also be directed to [SNAP benefits](#), [TANF](#), [Apple Health Care Coverage](#), [Working Connections Child Care](#), [WAFSA](#), and other, relevant aid resources. By simplifying student aid awards, students will be better equipped to navigate the financial aid process and develop plans for their futures.

- Student Loan Buy Down

- WCG Equity Grants for students w MFI of 50%

- Simplify Student Aid Awards
- Graduate Student Aid awards

## **Environmental Justice and 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. Environmental justice work is directly tied to equity work, the success of students, and the long term sustainability of our campus. By taking steps to decarbonize Western's built environments and invest in clean energy solutions, the state would be taking steps to meet the [goal of carbon neutrality](#) by 2050.

- **We ask that the Legislature expand HB 1139 (2021) to extend to public higher education institutions, including community colleges, technical colleges, and universities.**
  - There is no federal law requiring public universities to test their drinking water for lead concentration. Recently, Western Washington University has established plans to [test for lead concentration](#) in drinking sources; however, this process has been on hold due to the pandemic. According to the university, any water sources equal or over the action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb) will be put out of service. Last year, [HB 1139 \(2021\)](#) was passed that establishes standards for public schools to take action to address lead in their drinking water.
  - [The Bill](#) encourages districts to take action and apply for grants when the “lead test reveals elevated lead levels, which are lead levels above five parts per billion”. This is a more stringent requirement that Western is currently pursuing. By expanding HB 1139 (2021) to cover higher education institutions, the legislature would be taking action to ensure that students are ...
- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature support investments in Western Washington University's transition to a clean energy heating system.**
  - Currently, most of Western Washington University's are heated by an on-site boiler system. These.... More recently, the campus' engineering building has transitioned to...
  - The Bellingham Port is working to establish a heating district on the waterfront to... If Western is...
- **We ask that the Legislature prioritize investments in sustainable farming practices to incentivize local food partnerships with public schools.**
  - Western students have expressed an interest in transitioning to a [self-operated dining system](#). Currently... Additionally, Washington state farmers and agriculturists have experienced financial losses due to the pandemic. The ASWWU is interested in establishing stronger partnerships with...
  - We ask that the Legislature support investments and...

- Reducing waste- zero-waste

- Sustainable farming initiative





## **Behavioral Health and Student Wellness**

Mental health services at Western, and other Washington public universities, lack the funding and resources to support the needs of all students. Limited mental health resources work as a barrier that prevents students from securing the support they need. The lack of funding for support has led to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide amongst students. The ASWWU commits to working to secure increased funding for mental health services. This will help ensure that students are healthier and better equipped to focus on their education and future.

- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature support investments in secondary emergency response services for university students, consistent with the new 988 number.**
  - Washington's [HB 1477 \(2021\)](#) takes great measures to ensure that residents are connected to the appropriate resources in the event of an emergency. HB 1477 (2021) established the [Crisis Response Improvement Strategy Committee](#) which will oversee the implementation of the [988 number](#) as a part of the nationwide system. This number is set to launch mid-2022 and will help connect individuals with the appropriate responders, whether police, behavioral health providers, or other services. The strategy committee includes one member representing “a university-based suicide prevention center of excellence”. The ASWWU recognizes the need for expanded emergency mental-health support for students.
  - The ASWWU asks that the Legislature support secondary-emergency crisis response programs on university campuses. Currently, campus police are not equipped to address behavioral health crises. In order to ensure that students have access to emergency behavioral health supports...

- Expanded support for mental health and wellness
- BIPOC mental health support
- Look into the cost of on-campus resources
- Sustainable Drug Policy
- K-12 Behavioral Health- bill passed in Oregon- requiring that schools give 3 mental health days a quarter (excused absences)

## **Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence and Title IX Compliance**

All students deserve a safe educational experience free of harassment and assault; however, many individuals, including women and LGBTQ+ students, experience disproportionate rates of sexual harassment and violence on college campuses. The ASWWU seeks to increase access to specialists that are well-equipped to handle sexual assault cases in a sensitive and trauma-informed manner. We recognize the need for stronger accountability on our campus against perpetrators of assault and harassment. More broadly, we also seek to increase awareness of Title IX policies and procedures, mandatory reporting, and resources on our campus. Clearer paths to reporting, increased understanding of on-campus resources, and stronger accountability measures is instrumental in working to address the threat of sexual assault at Western and at other campuses in Washington.

- **We ask that the Legislature support**
- In order to address
  - Accountability on Profs
  - UW Tacoma Proposal

## **Establishing a Statewide Student Association**

Student-led representation and advocacy on the campus, community, and state levels is incredibly valuable, and the ASWWU seeks to continually bolster student power. Administrators at Western, and at other institutions, have created complex fee approval systems and processes that stand in the way of student fee autonomy. Therefore, we seek to establish a structure that will ensure student autonomy in fee usage, advocacy efforts, and political action. This will help secure stronger, more robust, student-led legislative advocacy at Western and our fellow Washington state public higher education institutions.

- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature pass SB... and HB... that would establish a Statewide Student Association to support student advocacy and promote fee autonomy.**
  - The Statewide Student Association would grant the [Washington Student Achievement Council](#) the authority to levy fees from public higher education institutions. WSAC would be empowered to charge membership fees directly to students. The proposed fee would not exceed more than 0.5% of undergraduate tuition per year, and would be paid on an opt-out basis.
  - This will empower students to make their own decisions through increased fee autonomy. By removing the need to work through complex administrative fee structures, students will have the ability to navigate and decide whether to pay the fee for themselves.
  - The ASWWU anticipates that this will bolster student engagement and awareness of WSAC and other routes to student advocacy. Currently, complex fee structures prevent students from understanding where their funds are being spent. This fee will be more apparent to students, and because of this, there will be increased awareness of the Washington Student Achievement Council and other organizing bodies that engage in student advocacy efforts.

## **Civic Engagement and Voting Rights**

The ASWWU recognizes the value of student engagement in the civic and political processes in our communities, state, and beyond. Providing and maintaining clear paths to engagement with local and state officials have never been more important for students. Therefore, we seek to establish and expand paths to civic engagement, while also expanding voting rights and processes. Accessibility to our leaders helps ensure that students' voices are heard, and this is instrumental when discussing student-centered policy issues. The ASWWU also acknowledges that expanding voting rights and improving electoral processes will help ensure that student voices, and other historically marginalized groups, are well represented in our communities and state.

- **The ASWWU asks that the Legislature reintroduce [HB 1453 \(2021\)](#) to establish reasonable guidelines and requirements for candidate statements within official Washington State Voter Pamphlets.**
  - Empowering and motivating student voters is a central goal of the ASWWU. In order to boost voter turnout statewide, it is important that accurate and transparent information is made available to all voters. Voter education is key to increasing turnout, and the ASWWU believes that the legislature can take reasonable steps to help ensure that certain voter education materials are transparent and accurate.
  - This Bill would prohibit the inclusion of graphs, charts, pictographs, cartoons, or caricatures in candidate profile statements. Additionally, this would limit candidate statements to “plans and goals for the future” and “direction on where to find more information about the candidate”. This would prevent candidates from “asking for contributions”, making “commercial solicitations”, and making “obscene or otherwise inappropriate comments”.
  - The ASWWU recognizes that candidates would have the ability to make certain comments via other routes of communication; however, in the interest of accuracy and voter education, the legislature should take steps to limit the scope of Voter Pamphlets to the candidates' goals and objectives. ...
  
- **We ask that the Legislature support the establishment and expansion of ranked-choice voting systems throughout the state.**
  - [HB 1156 \(2021\)](#) sought to expand and increase the capacity for ranked-choice voting in Washington State. [This Bill](#) aimed to increase representation and voter participation in local elections. Ranked-choice voting allows individuals to select and rank candidates that align with their values and preferences. Ranked-choice voting is associated with increased voter turnout, as each individual is able to make more informed, thoughtful choices when they vote.
  - Ranked-choice voting is associated with a [decrease in campaign costs](#). From an equity perspective, this will allow a more wide array of individuals to run for elected office regardless of socioeconomic status or other potential barriers. This makes running a campaign more financially feasible and accessible for a broader range of individuals.

- Additionally, ranked-choice voting promotes [issue-centered campaigns](#) and incentivizes candidates to discuss key topics and policies. This civility leads to more productive campaigns. This also provides voters with a stronger understanding of each candidates' positions and priorities.

- Ranked-choice voting- Reference Bill they tried to pass last year

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## **Divesting From Prison Labor**

Many students at Western are interested in establishing a sustainable, self-operated dining system on campus; however, administrative objectives and other restrictions have prevented this from happening. More broadly, Western students and students across the state have lobbied university administration to divest campuses from prison labor. Currently, [RCW 39.26.250](#) requires public institutions to give preference to goods and services associated with a prison labor work program.

- **We ask that the Washington Legislature repeal RCW 39.26.250.**
  - This will allow our universities to select goods and services based on other criteria.

## **Additional Topics?**

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