

ASWWU 2017 Legislative Agenda

Tuition & Revenue

Dedicated Revenue for Higher Education

ASWWU recognizes that decreasing tuition and fully funding financial aid are critical issues for students. The lack of funding for higher education disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including people of color, first generation students, and more. Therefore, we recommend these financially feasible, less regressive sources of revenue, which push Washington State towards equity, both in tax policy and in higher education.

- Our recommendations include closing the extracted fuel exemption, a capital gains tax, limiting the real estate excise tax exemptions, increasing the estate tax, closing the first time mortgage lenders tax loophole, increasing the tax on cannabis, and instituting a tax on lottery winnings.
- We are requesting that some revenue be dedicated to higher education to ensure the continuity of State funding for universities and to prevent cuts to higher education like those that happened during the last recession.

Tuition Policy

ASWWU believes that long term tuition policy needs to be implemented for the security and longevity of higher education in the state. We believe that education should be treated as a spectrum from early learning to higher education, and should be funded as such. We request that the revenue brought in by the sources listed above go towards ensuring students have continued access to education in Washington State.

- Long term tuition goals include: a tuition freeze to prevent any increases, with state funding to cover necessary backfills, restoring state investment in higher education to pre-recession levels this biennium with the eventual goal of free higher education by 2021.
- While reducing tuition does benefit the students of Washington State, it should not come at the expense of financial aid programs or be subsidized by graduate or out of state tuition. We advocate for fully funding for the State Need Grant, in order to offer direct support to the communities who need it most.
- Currently, student Services & Activities fees are tied to tuition. If tuition continues to decrease, or freeze, student accessibility-related services will be negatively impacted. In the past two bienniums, S&A fees were temporarily decoupled from tuition to prevent these negative impacts. We propose a permanent decoupling to maintain student autonomy and ensure funding for critical services.

Support & Success

Student Success

ASWWU recognizes that students need support beyond the classroom in order to succeed. Student services at WWU are overburdened; this lack of access affects all of campus but has a disproportionate effect on the recruitment and retention of marginalized communities. These services were among the first to be decreased during the recession and we are requesting they be restored to necessary levels.

- The WWU counseling center cannot meet the current demand; students are often pushed off campus, have to wait long periods of time to see a counselor, or face other barriers to receiving support. If students have their mental health needs met they will be

able to better focus on their academic success and graduation and retention rates will improve.

- The amount of students requesting disability resources has grown 77% since 2009. Without these accommodations students cannot learn, and the currently underfunded system causes many to go without accommodations for far too.
- Academic advising services are necessary to ensure success for students of color, first-generation students, and other marginalized communities. The demand for these services has increased significantly without adequate increases in resources, reducing the overall capacity and quality of the services.
- Demand for tutoring services has increased by nearly 200% in the past six years without adequate increases in resources to accommodate the need. We request state funding to alleviate this burden and allow students the resources they need to pass required classes, like math and english.
- Students' primary needs like housing and food should never be a barrier to accessing higher education. We support state funding for the university to expand no-cost services for students who are currently experiencing homelessness.

Support for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

ASWWU is concerned about the vastly under-reported instances of sexual violence on our campus. We strongly believe that with increased funding at the state level, more students will be able to access support and legal services with the confidence that their needs will be met. Increased support for survivors will create a healthier campus and community environment, and will help students who are survivors of sexual or domestic violence complete their education with fewer roadblocks. We advocate for:

- Legislation closing gaps between current protection and support services and the actual needs of survivors of sexual and domestic violence through dedicated funding to increase counseling services. This includes specialized personnel, resources, and staff training to better equip the university to respond to sexual violence and involved parties.
- The development and implementation of a mandatory training program for all university faculty, staff, and administration. This training program must include education on how to create a safe environment for students who have survived sexual violence and use inclusive language that does not make assumptions or place blame on survivors.
- Clarification of both the reporting process and available support services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence at the university level and beyond.
- Legislative direction to the Washington Student Achievement Council in regards to assessing the effectiveness of current codes of conduct at Washington State universities that deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault in accordance with RCW 28B.110.030.

Representation

Voter Rights and Access

ASWWU believes that voting is a right and recognizes that many communities do not have the access they need in order for this to be true. Current laws make it difficult for students to register to vote or update their mailing addresses. We believe the following recommendations will increase the amount of students and young people participating in elections.

- Implementing the Washington Voting Rights Act to address the systemic exclusion of marginalized identities, especially people of color, from the political process.
- Creating accessible educational programs for voters to learn more about what and who they are voting for.

- Extending the voter registration deadline to allow more time for students to register to vote, as well as allowing in-person registration on election day.
- Allowing 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to preregister to vote at the Department of Licensing as part of the Motor Voter system.
- Requiring landlords to provide a voter registration form to a new residential tenant when the lease is signed.
- Automatic voter registration for departments that require proof of citizenship. This would include institutes of higher education and, as students would be automatically registered to vote, it would empower students across the state.
- Increasing access for voters with disabilities by allowing people who are unable to sign their ballots to do a voter registration affidavit once and then allowing them to make their mark or use a signature stamp for their ballots in the future instead of the, currently required, two signatories.
- Eliminating the poll tax by including prepaid postage on ballot return envelopes. This barrier, while it may seem small, is large not only in impact but in implication.

Civic Education in Public K-12

ASWWU recognizes the integral role that the K-12 system in Washington state plays in preparing students not just for higher education but to be engaged in the state's economy and democracy. The overall lack of participation by young people in the political process is often characterized by access, not apathy. We believe the solution to this problem involves a deeper understanding of the function and process of the Washington State government. ASWWU is advocating for the following:

- Changes in programing, both within and outside the classroom, to include activities wherein students can: consider social issues in relation to the public good, use democratic decision making processes, and connect critical thinking content to current issues.
- Teachers should be able to: engage students in multiple perspectives and multiple kinds of knowledge, value and support students' cultural and linguistic identities as legitimate aspects of citizenship, and embed content in critical thinking to current issues.
- Students should be able to: identify the districts they live in and which elected officials represent them, understand which level of government handles various issues and resources, access the mechanisms of decision making that operate at each level of government, understand the impacts of grassroots organizing, and identify how to demand transparency from elected officials as well as hold elected officials accountable for their actions

Student Trustee Empowerment

ASWWU recognizes that student voices are often left out of critical conversations on campuses. Universities are designed to serve the students they educate and students should be represented in all areas of the university business. The Student Trustee is one of the most important roles a student can fill, as it operates at the highest level of university management. In order to ensure students are being represented we are requesting that the Student Trustee be:

- Given the full voting rights that are afforded to the other trustees, as they are currently barred from in RCW 28B.50.102
- Democratically elected by the student body they are meant to represent. Allowing students to tangibly engage with the appointments of student trustees will foster a stronger connection between the students and the Student Trustee.

Letter to Legislators

Dear Legislators,

It is with great pride and respect that we present our 2017 Legislative Agenda on behalf of the Associated Students of Western Washington University (ASWWU). This document has been drafted with great care to represent the experiences and needs of WWU students as inclusively and accurately as possible.

As students, we have experienced the barriers associated with success first hand and we have put an immense amount of work into crafting our agenda with overcoming those obstacles in mind. Our agenda represents student concerns that we live everyday while attending school. Whether it be increasing student support services, improving support for survivors of sexual and domestic violence, ensuring access to civic engagement and representation, or setting a long term tuition policy in favor of students, we know what we need on our campus to continue and excel in our educational journey at Western. We ask that you consider our success, and what we have determined we need to thrive, in your work this legislative session.

Thank you for reviewing our ASWWU Legislative Agenda. We appreciate the hard work you do for students and hope that you will join us in building a better future for Washington State. We appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely,

The Associated Students of Western Washington University Board of Directors