2016 Legislative Agenda

As the most robust and largest graduate and professional student body in the state of Washington actively advocating for graduate students, GPSS recognizes the importance of leading the charge for higher education access and affordability for all graduate and professional students, especially those at the University of Washington.

GPSS will advocate in partnership with the following state and member organizations: Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW) and the Washington Student Association (WSA), when appropriate and not in conflict with the goals of the GPSS legislative agenda.

The GPSS Legislative Agenda for the 2016 session will focus on the following priorities:

**GPSS 2016 Priorities:**

**State Support for Academic Excellence and Predictable Tuition:** GPSS applauds the investment the State Legislature made in 2015 by reducing undergraduate tuition and committing to provide the necessary backfill. We advocate for no cuts to be made to the University of Washington in order to keep UW a top public university that provides opportunity to the people of Washington and serves as an important economic driver. State support is also essential to prevent drastic graduate tuition and fee increases.

**Commission a New Study on a Graduate Version of the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP):** Graduate and professional students have very few options when it comes to financial aid from State and Federal governments. The maximum amount of aid in unsubsidized Stafford loans barely covers tuition for many programs. Students and their parents’ next best option are PLUS Loans that have an interest rate that fluctuates yearly. GPSS believes that there is an opportunity and a need for the State to provide loans at a low interest rate through the Washington Achievement Council (WSAC).

**Ensure Student Representation on State Task Forces:** In keeping with the spirit of shared governance at all levels of higher education, GPSS advocates for students to be represented on all state task forces, committees and commissions. We would like this representation to be in the form of 1 undergraduate and 1 graduate student from the public universities.

**Keep the Pipeline Open by Funding the State Need Grant:** To increase the reach and impact of the Legislature’s historic tuition cuts, we must move towards fully-funding the State Need Grant. With over 27,000 eligible students not being served due to lack of funds, we advocate that in light of improved revenue forecasts, the State should increase the number of eligible students currently being served. Every Washington student should have the opportunity to come to college and move on to graduate school regardless of their parent’s economic background. Many Washington graduate students were recipients of the State Need Grant, and are able to attend graduate school in part by not having even larger undergraduate student debt.
Additional GPSS Position Statements

Quality of Education. GPSS supports:
- Policies that attract, retain and develop diverse, globally competitive students and faculty who are prepared to contribute to the growth of Washington State.

Fee-Based Programs. GPSS supports:
- Student input in shaping any University policies on fee-based programs.
- Moving programs back to being state supported.

Student Voice and Shared Governance in University Decisions. GPSS supports:
- Direct student involvement in University policymaking to ensure students are fairly represented in decisions that affect them.

Programs that Aid Underserved Populations. GPSS supports:
- Continued funding and expansion of programs that help aid Washington’s underserved populations, such as the RIDE program and UW Medicine’s Spokane campus.

Student Wellness. GPSS supports:
- Policies that ensure equitable and comprehensive access to mental and physical health and safety resources for members of the University community.

Textbooks. GPSS supports:
- Easing the cost burden of students on required class materials.

Sustainability. GPSS supports:
- Efforts to increase environmental stewardship and sustainability on campus.

Transportation. GPSS supports:
- Policies that ensure affordable, environmentally sustainable, and accessible transportation services for all students.

Financial Aid. GPSS supports:
- Restoration and expansion of financial aid programs that have been cut or eliminated in recent years, including the Washington State Work Study Program, Child Care Matching Grant, Future Teachers Conditional Scholarship and Loan Repayment, and Graduate Fellowship Trust Account.

Voting Accessibility. GPSS supports:
- Increased student voting accessibility, including ballot drop boxes on or near college campuses, and extending the deadline for online voter registration.

We, the State Legislative Steering Committee of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate at the University of Washington, submit these items for the approval of the Senate to authorize our work on these important issues. Any additional items are at the discretion of the Vice President of External Affairs with the approval of the GPSS Executive Committee.