GPSS’s Advocacy during Washington State’s 2020 Legislative Session

Overview:

Working from the 2019-2020 Legislative Agenda; GPSS advocated for student issues in Washington state to improve student experience and access to education for our current and future graduate students. The four major areas of concern for our student population are:

1. Access to funding and financial aid for graduate and professional students.
2. Access to health insurance for our graduate and professional students.
3. Prevention of sexual misconduct and resources for survivors
4. Improving resources to support mental health and wellness on campus

During the 2020 session, there were 46 bills found to impact students that GPSS engaged with. Of these bills, GPSS actively tracked 25 specific bills and advocated in favor of 13 of them. The 13 bills are listed below by topic area, with brief descriptions and final outcome. The legislator in parenthesis is the prime sponsor of the bill that proceeded furthest through the legislative process.

On February 11th, GPSS worked with the other public universities across Washington to organize the first all-state Graduate and Professional Student Lobby Day. There were 48 students from three universities (UW, WWU, and WSU Spokane) who met with 65+ legislative offices in Olympia. The collective voice and participation from these students contributed to the results below, and has laid the groundwork for further advocacy for our student population:

Issue Areas:

1. Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response

   Faculty Sexual Misconduct at Post-Secondary Institutions - House Bill 2327 (Representative Pollet)
   - Passed Legislature; signed by Governor Inslee
   - Requires campuses who are hiring new faculty to screen them for previous instances of sexual misconduct

   Comprehensive Sex-Education - Senate Bill 5395 (Senator Wilson)
   - Passed Legislature; signed by Governor Inslee
   - Created comprehensive and age appropriate sex education for public schools in WA
   - College students have been involved in this bill in past sessions, with the overarching hope that comprehensive sex ed through all grades will help reduce sexual assault and misconduct on college campuses

2. Financial Aid and Funding

   Funding support for WA College Grant; SB 6495 (Senator Pederson)
   - Passed Legislature; signed by Governor Inslee
- 2158 passed in 2019; this created a large B&O tax change to fund the WA College Grant. WCG makes public university tuition free for families making 50k and under; and reduces tuition for families making up to 90k annually
- This bill addressed a funding gap in 2158’s B&O tax structure.
- Does not include any consideration of graduate or professional student funding but will help resident undergraduate students in Washington.

**Undocumented Student Support Loan Program** SB 6561(Senator Liias)
- Passed Legislature; signed by Governor Inslee
- Creates a loan program for undocumented students who are WA residents to provide them with financial aid during school equivalent to federal student loans
- WSAC will oversee creation and implantation of the loan program, and oversee the private donations to this loan account which the state will match
- DACA and non-DACA students will be eligible as long as they meet state residency requirements (3 years in Washington and graduated from a high school in WA)
- Applies to graduate and undergraduate students

**Loan forgiveness for social workers; HB 2002** (Representative Ortiz-Self)
- Died in House appropriations
- Adds social workers who work for state or federal government for more than 3 years into a loan forgiveness system to incentivize social worker retention

3. **Mental Health and Wellness**

**Suicide Hotline Number on ID’s; HB 2589** (Representative Callan)
- Passed Legislature; signed by Governor Inslee
- Adding a suicide crisis hotline number to the back of student ID cards to help increase awareness of suicide prevention resources

4. **Access to Student Health Insurance**

Taskforce: Creating a study regarding student health insurance and coverage
- Cut from the supplemental budget due to COVID 19 response
- $100,000 in the 2020 Supplemental Operating Budget
- 16-month study across all 6 public universities to look at insurance coverage, rates, and types of services accessible to students

**Addition of Maternity and Abortion access to student health insurance; HB 2252** (Representative Thai)
- Died Legislature in Senate rules
- Adds the clause “student health insurance” into RCW RCW 48.43.073 and 2018 c 119 s 3; making student health insurance plans compliant with existing law that mandates access to maternity and abortion access
5. **Misc. Student-related legislation**

**Graduate Student Representative on WASAC: SB 6127 (Senator Randall)**
- Dead at end of 2020 session
- Made it through Senate process; died in the House Rules committee
- Bipartisan support, but due to timing deadlines this was not pulled to floor vote
- Added a graduate student specific seat to the Washington Student Achievement Council; to address lack of graduate and professional student representation in higher education conversations
- Interest in re-introducing during 2021 legislative session.

**Campus VOTE Act Senate Bill 6313**
- Passed Legislature; Signed by Governor Inslee
- Established student engagement centers on college campuses
- Students will be able to same-day register to vote and print out their ballots

Lieutenant Governor Request Bills:
**Prohibiting Withholding Transcripts - House Bill 2513**
- Passed Legislature; Signed by Governor Inslee
- Prohibiting the practice of transcript withholding and limiting the practice of registration holds at institutions of higher education as debt collection practices.
- Reduced barriers for students to access their official transcripts for job or further school applications

**FAFSA completion rate; SB 6141**
- Passed Legislature; Signed by Governor Inslee
- Created financial aid advising day in Washington high schools to address low FAFSA completion rates

**Washington Common App: SB 6142**
- Passed Legislature; Vetoed by Governor Inslee
- Would have required all public institutions in WA to use the common application or coalition application for undergraduate admission processes

GPSS’ Legislative Advisory Board meets weekly (during 2019-2020 academic year meetings held Fridays at 12:30) to discuss advocacy for graduate and professional students. Please join these meetings or email for more information on how to get involved.

If you have any questions, or would like further information, please email GPSS’s Vice President of External Affairs at gpssvpex@uw.edu.