

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT SENATE



2020-2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

GPSS seeks legislative change that will result in equitable graduate and professional student experiences regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, documentation, veteran, or disability status. We have a duty to advocate for the benefit of all students which requires a dedication to equity and social justice.

Therefore, we are committed to pursuing legislative change in the following areas:

ENSURE ACCESS TO STATE FUNDING AND PREDICTABLE TUITION FOR GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Graduate students, especially BIPOC students, typically face an enormous debt burden which affects retention rates, post-graduation success, and even accepting program offers in the first place. Opening up current funding options to graduate students will support Washington State students by ensuring that their education will not be negatively impacted by COVID-19 related budget cuts. Thus, GPSS supports:

- Maintaining all funding sources for higher education institutions
- Requiring “locked-in” tuition rates for both fee-based and tuition-based programs
- Providing and expanding low-interest state loan, grant, and work study options specifically aimed at graduate and professional students

IMPROVE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT PREVENTION AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

GPSS recognizes that existing sexual assault prevention and response measures are insufficient and resources, including campus-affiliated advocates for survivors, need to be expanded. In particular, students of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately impacted by sexual misconduct. Therefore, GPSS supports:

- Funding and implementing mandatory training programs for all students, faculty, and staff to provide necessary skills and resources to prevent and respond to sexual assault
- Mandating transparent reporting in an effort to create a survivor-centered culture
- Providing all victims of sexual misconduct with an on-campus confidential victim advocate and a trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner that are distinct from police departments

REINSTATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS

COVID-19 has demonstrated that affordable and accessible healthcare is vital to protecting our community health. Graduate and professional students have consistently maintained that affordable and accessible health insurance is a top priority. Because of this, GPSS supports:

- Implementing a statewide task force to study the health insurance usage of all Washington State Universities in order to inform the expansion of healthcare options
- Reinstating an opt-out, university-based, affordable health insurance plan open to all students and their dependents

PROMOTE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Mental health problems are increasing for graduate and professional students as they face stressors including those that are unique to graduate life. COVID-19 has highlighted the urgency to address this issue. In order to adequately deal with the breadth of mental health needs, GPSS supports:

- Requiring Washington State Universities to have campus-wide mental health campaigns and initiatives to build psychological resilience
- Expanding and maintaining the use of virtual mental health resources and requiring that insurance companies cover them at the same rate as in-person visits
- Increasing the University of Washington mental health counselor-to-student ratio

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GPSS ADVOCATES FOR:

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students bring value, talent, and creative ideas to the University of Washington. Washington State should work to ensure that international students are able to remain in the US until completion of their degree and are able to access social support programs to assist with financial, medical, and personal needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Accessible physical, technological, and support infrastructures required for students with disabilities to succeed academically and professionally. This year has led to accessibility accommodations such as asynchronous learning, which allows students to use closed captioning, and remote learning, which benefits students with physical and mental disabilities. These forms of accessible learning must last beyond COVID-19.

STUDENT CAREGIVERS

Many UW graduate students have caregiving responsibilities, particularly child rearing. With COVID-19 limiting access to typical childcare options more parents have taken on responsibilities above and beyond their regular caretaking duties. Initiatives that increase availability and lower costs of student resources will contribute to more equitable support for student caregivers and their dependents and GPSS supports any legislative actions toward that end.

GRADUATE STUDENT REPRESENTATION

All state task forces, committees, commissions, and other advisory boards or councils related to higher education should include at least one graduate student to ensure that graduate students are included in the decision making process.

ENDING THE BAN ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

GPSS acknowledges that affirmative action can provide opportunities for the student population to reflect the population at large. BIPOC are historically underrepresented in higher education and repealing the ban on affirmative action will promote a diverse and inclusive student body at the UW.

GPSS SUPPORTS INCREASED STATE INVESTMENT IN:

CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS

Climate change and the impacts on health, wellbeing, and environment are a concern for graduate students. GPSS recognizes the success of green initiatives within the UW College of the Environment and the Clean Energy Institute in preparing Washington State for the challenge of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Therefore, GPSS supports increased state funding and resources for sustainability-related endeavors.

FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES FOR FEE-BASED PROGRAM STUDENTS

Approximately one third of all graduate students and half of all master's students at the UW are enrolled in fee-based programs. At least half of graduates from fee-based program leave with debt greater than \$20,000, and some graduate with debt as high as \$200,000. Resources should be established to ease this debt burden on fee-based program students and provide long-term financial stability.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO BROADBAND FOR ALL STUDENTS

Expanded access to broadband and wireless internet infrastructure in rural areas across the state is essential in maintaining education opportunities during periods of remote learning. GPSS supports access to fast and reliable internet for all students in Washington state.

UW SCHOOL OF MEDICINE RURAL PROGRAMS

Medical programs such as the Rural Underserved Opportunities Program (RUOP) and the WWAMI Area Health Education Centers (build regional healthcare networks by ensuring equal distribution of healthcare resources and providers across the state. These programs serve as important recruitment and retention tools for the UW Medical School. GPSS supports the continued funding of these and other rural health programs.