



"2021-2022 POLICY AGENDA"

The Graduate and Professional Student Senate

envisioning a thriving and diverse population of graduate and professional students. GPSS supports policies at every level and branch of government that will result in broader access to graduate and professional student experiences regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, documentation, veteran, or disability status. GPSS recognizes its obligation to advocate for the well-being of all students in pursuit of a more equitable and just educational landscape.

Therefore, GPSS is committed to pursuing the following policies which broaden who has access to graduate school, experiences authentic inclusion as a student, and thrives in the workforce.

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PIPELINES

Cultivating more equitable avenues to graduate and professional education

Exclusionary practices prevent equitable educational attainment at all levels. In order to achieve greater diversity in graduate programs, racial disparities must be addressed at all levels of education.

Washington state will benefit from having a more equitable and diverse population of individuals with postgraduate degrees. To increase diversity in the workforce, access and affordability must be ensured at all levels of education. Thus, GPSS supports :

- Reducing disparities in FAFSA and WASFA completion rates
- Expanding Washington College Grant eligibility and award levels for students of public institutions
- Forming a statewide admissions taskforce that can provide guidance on best practices to increase diversity
- Repealing the statewide ban on affirmative action
- Improving undocumented student loan programs



Only 24.8%

of all first-time U.S. citizens and permanent residents enrollees in graduate school identified as underrepresented minority students in fall 2019

REPRESENTATION

Incorporating graduate student narratives into policy discussions

Graduate and professional students play an increasingly important role in society, but the value of their contributions and the necessity of broader access to graduate school is often underrecognized.

Elevating graduate student voices will shine light on disparities and inequities within graduate schools. By not focusing on graduate student experiences, there is a risk of deepening broader societal inequities. Thus, GPSS supports:

- Expanding representation of graduate student achievement statistics in state-funded higher education research
- Increasing graduate student representation on state higher education boards and councils
- Forming a statewide admissions taskforce that can provide guidance on best practices to increase diversity
- Incorporating graduate student issues into the scope of relevant state agencies



Including more graduate and professional students in university decision-making processes will create new opportunities to drive institutional change.

AFFORDABILITY

Alleviating the financial burdens of a postgraduate education

Program enrollment, access to development opportunities, and career outcomes can all be limited by the toll of student debt, which significantly contributes to the racial wealth gap.

The full diversity of talent our society needs to develop can only be attained by reducing the financial burden of graduate school. Improving the availability of academic funding will improve accessibility for Washington's future students and increase freedom for graduates currently burdened by debt. Thus, GPSS supports:

- Expanding low-interest loan, grant, and work-study options for all graduate students
- Guaranteeing recurring funding for state grant programs meant to promote racial diversity within fee-based programs
- Broadening access to loan forgiveness programs
- Exploring means-testing options for financial aid based on wealth rather than income



The average graduate student loan debt balance is **\$91,148** among federal borrowers

WELLNESS

Expanding access to affordable mental and physical health care

COVID-19 has demonstrated that affordable and accessible healthcare is vital to protecting our community health. Graduate students face unique barriers to full health insurance coverage, have a heightened need for mental health care, and are at high risk for avoiding care if there are out-of-pocket costs.

The stressors graduate students face are compounded by lack of access to the care we need. Thus, GPSS supports:

- Tracking rates of uninsured and underinsured graduate students
- Reinstating an opt-out, university-based, affordable health insurance plan open to all students and their dependents
- Increasing the University of Washington's mental health counselor-to-student ratio
- Expanding public funding for basic health services



In May 2017, a survey of more than 4,000 students at the University of Washington revealed that

40% skipped necessary medical services due to cost and 15% had medical debt

BARRIERS

Obstacles that disproportionately impede minoritized students

Many students face unique systemic barriers to equitable learning access. Students with disabilities, students with dependents, students experiencing homelessness, and international students are facing unjust barriers to full participation. Thus, GPSS supports:

- Lowering barriers to disability accommodations
- Expanding funding for disability services
- Funding capital projects at the University that improve physical accessibility infrastructure
- Easing travel restrictions affecting international students
- Expanding childcare access to students with dependents
- Incentivizing instructors to improve remote and asynchronous participation options
- Expanding the pilot program focused on supporting housing insecure students



In 2018, just **15.2%** of non-institutionalized people aged 21-64 years with a disability in the U.S. had received a bachelor's degree or higher