

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Session 120

Date *December 10, 2020*

*Submitted by Mustapha Samateh,
Senate Vice Speaker.*



ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

BOARD BILL 5.03: Directive to adopt the ASUW Legislative Agenda 2020-2021

Sponsor: ASUW Legislative Steering

Outcome: 52-0-6

Whereas, the ASUW Legislative Steering Committee has drafted and approved the following student priorities to be considered as the official legislative agenda for the association.

Whereas, the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW) urges the legislature to:

Improve Campus and Online Academic Accessibility

The shift to remote learning has highlighted issues of accessibility that have long burdened students from marginalized communities. To ensure equitable access to learning, we support policies that promote accessibility for students. We urge the legislature to mandate that class lectures be recorded and made asynchronously available to students and that accessible course materials be made available prior to the beginning of the academic term at all public institutions of higher education in Washington. We also seek funding for accessibility improvements to campus infrastructure.

Increase Access to Healthcare through Student Health Insurance

The overlay between access to healthcare and academic success has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure the health and prosperity of our community, we support policies and programs that increase access to affordable healthcare for students. We seek to implement a statewide, opt-out health insurance plan that is open to all students, as well as establish a statewide task force to research long-term solutions for improving access to affordable healthcare for students. We also urge the legislature to mandate that reproductive health services be covered in student health plans.

Promote Student Mental Health and Wellness

The past several years have seen a steady increase in students seeking mental health services, which has spiked with the ongoing pandemic. In a recent survey of the mental health of UW students since the beginning of the pandemic, 75% of students reported that their mental health had worsened, and 40% were experiencing depressive symptoms. To better support the emotional wellbeing of Washington students, we support increased funding for student mental health services. We seek funding for additional counseling positions to bring the counselor-to-student ratio from 1:1,755 to the recommended 1:1,000, as well as funding for quality of life raises for counseling staff to prevent high turnover rates. We also advocate for policies that increase diversity among counseling staff to better reflect the needs of BIPOC students.

Reallocate Resources around Campus Safety

In solidarity with the movement for Black lives, we urge the legislature to remove current campus policing systems to promote more transparent and equitable campus safety. Current campus law enforcement is expensive and ineffectual, wasting taxpayer money and hindering social services. We call for the reallocation of campus law enforcement appropriations into other areas, such as mental health services, food and housing access, and addiction treatment. We also seek to end laws that allow for the destruction of employee conduct records, mandate that mental health professionals respond to crisis calls, and create other policies that promote an overall reduction in the use of deadly force in campus policing.

Increase State Funding for Student Financial Aid

The legislature has taken historic steps to support Washington students and families by passing the Workforce Education Investment Act in 2019 and affirming that commitment in 2020. These investments will be more important than ever as we emerge from our current crisis, which has highlighted critical work shortages that must be addressed through education and training programs. We ask for the legislature's continued support in maintaining and expanding state financial aid programs for students. We seek to protect the investments made to guarantee funding for the Washington College Grant, as well as expand access to in-state tuition programs and adopt an innovative model that supports academic completion for students.

Increase State Funding for UW

Inadequate state funding has long placed the burden of funding higher education on our students and their families. As we recover from economic losses of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education will be a critical part of our state's recovery strategy. To preserve and advance the University of Washington's excellence in education, we oppose any increase to the cost of tuition and urge the legislature to maintain and expand its investments in higher education institutions.

Reduce Barriers to Sexual Assault Prevention and Care

While high rates of sexual misconduct continue to pervade academic communities, recent changes in federal law impose further barriers to sexual assault prevention and care. To create a safe learning environment for all students, we urge the legislature to maintain pre-August 2020 Title IX guidelines at all public institutions of higher education, as well as expand funding for and access to support for sexual assault survivors and programs for prevention and awareness.

Promote Campus Sustainability

To continue our commitment to sustainability and secure the futures of our students, we support policies and programs that address climate change and its impacts on our health and environment. We advocate for divestment from the fossil fuel industry and increased funding for programs that promote sustainability at public institutions of higher education across the state, as well as a sustainability curriculum to teach students how to understand and find solutions to broad environmental problems and implement positive change. We also call for broader statewide measures around sustainability, such as a statewide Green New Deal.

Support Student Parents and Caregivers

To allow students to focus on their education while successfully caring for their family, we support increased access to subsidized child care and other support for student parents and caregivers. We seek to expand the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) work requirement exemption to students seeking a bachelor's or postgraduate degree.

Support Undocumented Students

Undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid, and available alternatives are often not communicated effectively, imposing additional barriers on undocumented students. To fulfill Washington's promise of guaranteeing education to all students regardless of documentation status, we support the expansion of state financial aid opportunities for undocumented students, as well as policies and programs that raise awareness of opportunities.

Ensure Equity and Access

We advocate for policies that address racial, socioeconomic, tribal affiliation, and other inequities in higher education. A campus that is safe, inclusive, and accessible for all students is vital to a quality education. To ensure that no student feels excluded on our campus, we call for the removal of state-funded displays that enshrine figures and symbols of harmful histories, most notably, the George Washington statue located near Red Square. We advocate for policies that improve the quality of life for the Middle Eastern and North African community in Washington State. We urge the legislature to mandate the addition of the Middle Eastern/North African ethnicity category to official documents that include surveys and studies conducted by individual public departments and institutions. Due to the unique experiences that Middle Eastern and North African students have, we believe that this option should be available for students to have when filling out official documents related to race and ethnicity to ensure equity and accessibility to various resources.

Remedy Food and Housing Insecurity

High living expenses in the Puget Sound region have led to increased housing and food insecurity among students, presenting a significant barrier to learning, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this issue. We support policies that increase access to affordable housing and benefits programs for students, as well as provide services to students experiencing homelessness. We seek to establish a statewide study to develop best practices around campus food pantries and an electronic debit system for statewide adoption to streamline efforts to combat food insecurity.

Ensure Access to Public Transportation

We believe that public transportation is a fundamental need for students to access higher education and that lack of access presents a significant barrier to learning. We support policies that promote access to and the preservation and expansion of existing regional public transit, especially programs offered through public institutions of higher education.

THEREFORE, BE IT ENACTED BY THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

THAT the 2020-2021 Legislative Agenda as amended by the ASUW Student Senate be adopted; and

THAT the 2020-2021 Legislative Agenda be forwarded to the Office of Communications and the Office of Government Relations for grammatical and stylistic edits.

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