

*Wisconsin Student Government (WSG) is composed of the elected student representatives for over 326,000 students enrolled in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Our mission is to advocate for expanded access to affordable education for the students we serve.*

***2017 Legislative Seminar Position Paper***

**WSG Positions**

1. WSG supports having college be more affordable and supports legislation which accomplishes this goal. Such legislation includes state need-based grant programs like Wisconsin Grants and Emergency Grants.
2. WSG supports all 16 WTCS colleges establishing Promise programs, either individually or at a state level, similar to the Tennessee Promise.

**Introduction to the Wisconsin Technical College System**

WTCS has led the charge for providing Wisconsin with the educated workforce to keep the state moving forward for decades. With over 326,000 students attending annually, the WTCS is the largest higher education system in Wisconsin. This provides the workforce with well-trained individuals, propelling the economy forward. According to the responses received from the WTCS 2015 graduate survey, 81% of our students remain within the State of Wisconsin and 62% stayed within their own college district. 93% are employed within six months of graduation, providing rapid economic boosts for their local communities. Of the 7% who were not employed within six months, the majority (86%) were continuing with their education. According to the survey, the median annual income of 2015 WTCS graduates six months after graduation is $36,252. Supporting WTCS students is a good economic investment for Wisconsin. WSG supports an increase in financial aid to meet the growing workforce needs of our state.

**Increase in Needs-Based Financial Aid**

With the backbone of the economy running on a well-educated workforce, which the WTCS can provide, affordability for all who are willing to work for an education must be a necessity. Of WTCS students applying for financial aid in 2014-15, almost 55% had so few resources that their expected family contribution was $0. Recent figures show that in 2014-2015 the average annual unmet need for WTCS students was over $7,400. In 2014-2015 the average Wisconsin Grant award was $2,556 for private college students, $1,773 for the UW System students, and $802 for WTCS students.

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| **WTCS Wisconsin Grants Awarded and Unfunded** |
|  | **Individuals** | **Amount Unfunded** |
| **Year** | **Eligible**  | **Awarded** | **Unfunded** |
| 2011-12 | 74,284 | 19,472 | 54,812 | $63.8 million |
| 2012-13 | 63,797 | 22,470 | 41,327 | $35.5 million |
| 2013-14 | 61,625 | 23,890 | 37,285 | $37.4 million |
| 2014-15 | 68,275 | 24,275 | 34,000 |  $27.3 million  |
| 2015-16\* | 47,923 | 24,775 | 23,148 | $23.0 million |
| \* estimated, not yet finalized |

State funded emergency grants have been a great tool in helping low income WTCS students who find themselves in an unforeseen financial distress. The emergency grant legislation (2015 Wisconsin Act 282) has been a great step in the right direction for helping lower the risk of financial failure of students. This Act, which offers emergency funding to low income students who may not have money when an emergency comes up, helps students keep on the path of completing their program. Unexpected costs can be a great contributor to the student dropout rate, which only hurts the student and the state. WSG supports the funding of this program and would also support an increase in state emergency funding as well.

**Promise Programs**

WSG would like to applaud the nine WTCS colleges who have announced or begun Promise programs (Fox Valley, Gateway, Indianhead, Lakeshore, Madison, Milwaukee, Nicolet, Northeast and Northcentral). Funded with contributions from local businesses and foundations, these programs “fill the gap” between state and federal financial aid and the cost of tuition and fees at the college for eligible students. Eligibility varies by college and is based on local needs, but most require Promise students to achieve a minimum GPA while in high school, complete college readiness assessments, maintain a high attendance rate, and have a limited amount of family income. Program requirements also vary, but most require participants to maintain a minimum GPA and participate in community service. WSG supports all WTCS schools creating promise programs, either individually or at a state level similar to the Tennessee Promise. The Tennessee Promise provides full tuition coverage for two years of community or technical college in Tennessee (after state and federal funding has been applied) to Tennessee high school seniors who are willing to work for it. WSG believes that programs similar to these help students stay on the path of success which will help them ensure a prosperous future.

In conclusion, WSG supports all legislation and programs that will help ensure that all students who want to go on to get a secondary education can, leading to economic prosperity for the state, as well as our nation. Over the past century, America led the world with the most educated workforce, now, let us see Wisconsin lead America.

**Sources**

Wisconsin Technical College System. Graduate Outcomes: Job Placement and Employment Data for 2015 Graduates, <http://www.wtcsystem.edu/about-us/wtcs-overview>

Higher Education Aids Board, Board Report #16-14. Wisconsin State Student Financial Aid Data for 2014-15. <http://heab.state.wi.us/docs/board/1516/rep1614.pdf>

WTCS Promise Programs, <http://www.wistechcolleges.org/preparing-college/financial-aid/grants-loans-and-other-aid-programs/promise-programs>