

***2019 Legislative Seminar Position Paper***

**Background**

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.

WTCS has led the charge for providing Wisconsin with an 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 2017 graduate survey, 94% of our students remain within the State of Wisconsin and 62% stay within their own college district. 94% are employed within six months of graduation, providing rapid economic boosts for their local communities. Of the 6% who were not employed within six months, the majority (84%) were continuing with their education. According to the survey, the median annual income of 2017 WTCS graduates six months after graduation is $38,529. Supporting WTCS students is a good economic investment for Wisconsin. WSG supports more funding into WTCS students in the ways listed below.

**WSG Positions**

1. WSG is in support of Wisconsin Technical College System budget request of 46 million dollars to student aid and 36 million dollars as a direct investment into campuses.
2. WSG supports the Tools of the Trade Apprenticeship Program Expansion Bill which can give grant funding to students in apprenticeship programs that need them to purchase expensive tools.
3. WSG supports open educational resources (OER) funding to allow adoption and creation of OER throughout the system
4. WSG opposes a Tuition Freeze to the WTCS.

**Support of WTCS Budget Request**

The WSG supports the Wisconsin Technical College System’s budget request for 2019-2021 of 36 million dollars for direct investment into the schools and 46 million to students in financial aid. Throughout every college, students need more financial aid eligibility and campuses need more individualized dollars to work with the needs of each college specifically. This budget request is not only looking at the needs of each school individually but also looking at the student population as a whole and advocating for more funds necessary for Wisconsin residents to continue their education.

46 million dollars going into student aid is more important than ever. Affordability of the technical system is why many find their way into the system. It is a pillar of the system as a whole. It keeps not only students coming to their local technical colleges for education, but it also helps them finish their education and leave the system with a degree. The 46 million dollars to students will allow more to stay in the system and allow students to not be in fear of student loan debt, and to help lessen the dropout rate due to affordability.

Also, the 36 million dollars going to the institutions as direct investments allows each college to utilize their portion of the funds for what they need most. The reason it is essential for each school to be able to allocate the funds themselves is because each school has different needs that need funding due to the diverse population on each campus.

WSG supports the WTCS budget request for 2019-2021.

**Tools of the Trade Apprenticeship Program Expansion**

WSG legislation that advocates: to create a grant program under which the Technical College System Board may award grants of up to $1,000 to technical college students who have undertaken an apprenticeship training program in conjunction with their course of instruction at the technical college.

A bill with similar verbage, from 2017 (Assembly Bill 808), passed with 95 votes in the House on February 20, 2018 and then failed to concur in the Senate on March 28, 2018. This is legislation that WSG adamantly supports and wants to see put in place. These grants would be utilized by many students and would help strengthen financial stability for many while completing their education.

WSG supports increased funding directed to help offset the high cost of an apprenticeship for many students.

**Open Education Resources**

Open educational resources are teaching and learning resources (e.g., textbooks, PowerPoints, activities, assessments, etc.) that are openly licensed and free to use. These resources can be adopted and used in the classroom as is or modified as needed to best fit the learning outcomes of a course.

67% of post-secondary students did not purchase the required textbook for at least one of their courses, and students withdrew from and decided not to register for courses due to textbook costs. The cost for incorporating OER resources into current curriculum will be primarily based on faculty time in reviewing and selecting texts, and in adapting content into existing Blackboard modules.

WSG supports legislation that would fund 1 million dollars to create a grant program under the Wisconsin Technical College System Board. Grant funding would largely fund the additional faculty time and research needed to create content that meet WTCS standards for quality and instructional design for both the WTCS curriculum areas as well as general education. This funding would also enable enhanced collaboration with education partners both within WTCS and the four-year public college system.

WSG supports funding for Open Education Resources.

**Opposition of Tuition Freeze**

WSG believes that a tuition freeze to the Wisconsin Technical College System would have an adverse effect on students. With the colleges not receiving an increase in state funding, education of students as a whole could become stunted and fewer students would be secure that they are getting the best education possible with instability in the idea of programs continuing to be available. The risks to the proper education of students is too great for WSG to support.

WSG opposes a tuition freeze.

**Conclusion**

WSG supports legislation and programs that continue support of the Wisconsin Technical College System and its students in hopes for continued economic prosperity for Wisconsin and its citizens. The listed positions are top concerns WSG found to be the most necessary to achieve support from Legislators. WTCS graduates continue to contribute highly to Wisconsin’s economy and want that growth to continue as well as for all in Wisconsin to thrive.

**Sources**

Griffiths, R., Gardner, S., Lundh, P., Shear, L., Ball, A., Mislevy, J., Wang, S., Desrochers, D., Staisloff, R. (2018). Participant Experiences and Financial Impacts: Findings from Year 2 of Achieving the Dream’s OER Degree Initiative. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Wisconsin Legislature 2017 Assembly Bill 808, 2017.

Wisconsin Technical College System. 2019-21 Budget Request, The Tech College Effect. 2019-21 Budget Request, The Tech College Effect, 2018.

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