

*Wisconsin Student Government (WSG) is composed of the elected student representatives for over 286,000 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.*

***2021 Legislative Seminar Position Paper***

**WTCS Overview**

The Wisconsin Technical College System has been providing Wisconsin with an educated workforce and keeping the state moving forward for decades. With over 286,000 students, the WTCS is the largest higher education system in the state. According to the responses received from the WTCS 2019 graduate survey, 93% of our students were employed within six months of graduation. The vast majority (90%) of those who were not employed within six months of graduating were continuing their education. Furthermore, 93% of graduates remained within the State of Wisconsin and 70% stayed within their own college district. Supporting WTCS students is a strong economic investment for Wisconsin. Many of today’s most essential workers are educated in the technical college system, including police, EMTs, firefighters, nurses, and farmers.

**Wisconsin Student Government Positions:**

1. Invest in Open Educational Resources.
2. Allow technical colleges to offer Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees.
3. Improve Wisconsin Grants.
4. **Investment in Open Education Resources (OER):**

OER are teaching, learning, and research materials that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits sharing, accessing, repurposing, and collaborating with others.[[1]](#footnote-1) OER may include everything from a single video or lesson plan to a complete course or curriculum.[[2]](#footnote-2) These materials are exceedingly present in digital form, making them appropriate for any teaching situation, from the in-person classroom to a fully online learning environment.

The obvious beneficiaries of OER are students and instructors. A study recently commissioned by Achieving the Dream, a national leader in championing evidence-based institutional improvement, found that traditional textbooks create a financial barrier for students. Nationally, 53% of students said they had not purchased required materials for a course at least once and the most common reason was cost.[[3]](#footnote-3) Textbooks can account for up to 80% of the academic costs for Pell or other grant recipients, significantly impacting low-income students.[[4]](#footnote-4) Evidence also suggests that students who took OER-supported courses have benefited from acquiring more course credits over time[[5]](#footnote-5), supporting the argument that OER has a positive impact on retention and completion.

**WSG requests an investment of $160,000 over the next biennium to provide grants to each technical college to create OER that can be utilized across the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS).** This will reduce the cost of textbooks and support student success. While each OER course takes approximately 180 hours to develop at a cost of about $12,600[[6]](#footnote-6), this effort results in an average student savings of *at least* $65 per student, per OER course.[[7]](#footnote-7) Using this analysis, the state would recoup its investment at approximately 2,500 students using OER (2,500 students is only about 1.3% of all students enrolled in a program). There will also be lasting returns as instructors use the materials in subsequent classes and as the OER are shared across colleges in the WTCS.

1. **Allow WTCS Colleges to Offer Associate of Arts and Science Degrees:**

Currently, only 6 of the 16 WTCS colleges are allowed to offer these degrees because of Wis. Stat. 36.31, which became law in 1972. Removing this restriction on the other 10 colleges will expand educational opportunities for non-traditional students as well as persons of color throughout the state, and combat declining enrollments in higher education. As of 2020, the annual tuition and fees of attending a WTCS school was $4,167[[8]](#footnote-8), while the cost of tuition at a four-year UW was as high as $10,725.[[9]](#footnote-9) Permitting WTCS colleges to offer Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degrees, if they choose to, will allow many students to afford an education who otherwise would not be able to. It will also help to reduce future student loan debt and prepare students to succeed academically if and when they continue their educations at a four-year UW.

1. **Improvements to Wisconsin Grants:**

WSG supports the following three improvements to Wisconsin Grants:

1. **Increase Funding.** WSG supports an increase of $11.8 million GPR in each year of the biennium to increase the average WTCS Wisconsin Grant award to $1,100. The current average WTCS Wisconsin Grant award is less than $1,000. Nearly half of all WTCS students are eligible to receive the maximum Wisconsin Grant award, which is more than twice the number of UW students who are eligible. Despite this much greater need, the WTCS system annually receives less than half of the UW System’s Wisconsin Grant funding.[[10]](#footnote-10)
2. **Remove the 6 credit minimum requirement.** In 2019, there were 3,058 technical college students who were enrolled with 3 credits and had sufficient financial need to receive a Wisconsin Grant, but could not receive one due to the 6 credit minimum requirement.[[11]](#footnote-11) Many WTCS students can only take one course at a time and Wisconsin Grants should be open to all who need them. Opening Wisconsin Grants to students with only 3 credits would align them with the Federal Pell Grants.
3. **Replace the 10 semester and six-year caps.** Currently, students are only eligible for Wisconsin Grants for a maximum of 10 semesters or six years. WSG supports replacing these caps with a maximum credit limit of 128 hours. Many students of financial need have other life obligations which prevent them from attaining a credential within those time constraints. Switching to a credit limit of 128 hours would allow students of every background increased flexibility and would align with the Wisconsin GI Bill eligibility limit.
1. U.S. Department of Education. Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, *Open Educational Resources (OER): A Fact Sheet for Adult Education.* Accessed December 11, 2020. <https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/OER_Fact_Sheet_508.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sparks, Sarah Dockery. *Open Educational Resources (OER): Overview and Definition. Education Week*. Education Week, October 13, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/open-educational-resources-oer-overview-and-definition/2017/04>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Griffiths, Rebecca, Jessica Mislevy, Sam Wang, Linda Shear, Alexandra Ball, and Donna Desrochers. Rep*. OER at Scale: The Academic and Economic Outcomes of Achieving the Dream’s OER Degree Initiative*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 2020. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See previous citation [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Griffiths, et al. *OER at Scale.* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Griffiths, et al. *OER at Scale.* 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Griffiths, et al. *OER at Scale.* 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. WTCS Tuition Workgroup [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. UW HELP System Tuition Chart The College Board 2020, College Costs: Calculator [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. WTCS 2021-2023 Biennial Budget Initiative: WTCS Wisconsin Grants [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See previous citation [↑](#footnote-ref-11)