



WISCONSIN STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Wisconsin Technical College System Advocacy Group

Est. 1972

www.wsgtech.com

Wisconsin Student Government (WSG) comprises the elected student representatives for more than 278,000 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.

2023 LEGISLATIVE SEMINAR POSITION PAPER

WTCS has been providing Wisconsin with an educated workforce and keeping the state moving forward for decades. With over 278,000 students, WTCS is the largest higher education system in the state. According to the responses received from the WTCS 2021 graduate survey, 93% of our students were employed within six months of graduation. Furthermore, 93% of graduates remained in Wisconsin and 69% stayed in 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.

The positions selected this year by the student leaders of WSG are essential for fostering an academic environment which promotes stability and retention for current and future students of WTCS. They specifically target financial barriers WTCS students regularly face, such as the ability to secure academic funding through grants as well as non-tuition costs associated with higher education. Financial insecurity, experienced as the inability to cover the cost of tuition or textbooks, is a major obstacle which prevents the retention of student enrollment.

WISCONSIN STUDENT GOVERNMENT POSITIONS

- 1. Invest in Open Educational Resources**
- 2. Invest in Wisconsin Grants and amend state statutes to align with Federal Pell Grant**

Investment in Open Educational Resources (OER)

According to the US Department of Education, 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. OER may include everything from a textbook, single video, or lesson plan to a complete course or curriculum. 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. Textbooks can account for up to 80% of the academic costs for Pell or other grant recipients, significantly impacting low-income students. Evidence also shows that students who took OER-supported courses have benefited from acquiring more course credits over time, supporting the argument that OER has a positive impact on retention and completion.

Imagine having your class barely paid for with your grant and then having to pay \$600 for a book that you will use sparingly and not having any use for it after you've finished the class. In addition to this, you can't return your book unless the package is sealed, and its resale value is about half of its original cost.



Having Open Education Resources will not only help teachers with their lessons, it will also reduce the cost of textbooks, defray student debt and support student success. A 2017 New York State budget agreement allocated \$8 million toward OER with half going to the City University of NY and half to the State University of NY. As a result of this funding, more than 1.4 million students have been enrolled in courses with low or zero textbook costs. These students have saved a combined total of over \$123 million between the Fall 2017 and Fall 2020 semesters. This has led to an average savings of \$12.40 for every \$1 of NYS funding.

Therefore, WSG requests an increase of \$1 million GPR in 2023-2024 and \$2 million in 2024-25 and thereafter to provide grants to technical colleges to create OER textbooks and other materials that can be used by all colleges within WTCS.

Invest in Wisconsin Grants and amend state statutes to align with the Federal Pell Grant

As recipients of Wisconsin Grants (WG), many students who would otherwise be unable to afford school have enjoyed the opportunity to continue their education. Without financial aid, many adult learners would not have this opportunity as many WTCS students have dependents to take care of and other obligations which demand much of their time and financial resources. Many peers have told stories about their lives without financial aid; that they are unable to pursue their dreams and career goals simply because they cannot afford school. One student mentioned that without aid they wouldn't be able to afford the cost of textbooks, which exceeded \$600 per semester. Others mentioned that they grew up in poor families and they have obligations to provide and care for them.

The details of each person's situation are different. The common obstacle is financial burden perpetuated by the structure of the WG which marginalizes its accessibility to part-time students. Currently, under Wisconsin Statutes, the WG may only be awarded to students who are enrolled at least half-time, barring access to 40% of current students. Additionally, the lifetime grant eligibility for students is indiscriminate of enrollment rate. This means that a student who accepts the WG for a given semester expends the same percentage of their lifetime eligibility whether they are enrolled full-time or only half-time. With 76% of students at less than full-time enrollment, the accessibility of the WG is significantly diminished by this current statutory structure.

On December 27, 2020, congress passed, and the president signed, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Simplification Act of 2020, which was a bipartisan measure that made several changes to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA). Wisconsin Grants utilize the federal methodology to determine state grant awards. Therefore, the state must amend its statutes to align with the federal pell grant.

In order to achieve this, Wisconsin state statute should allow students who are enrolled at least quarter-time to receive the appropriate portion of the full grant. State statute should also be revised concerning students' lifetime grant eligibility based on enrollment rate. These changes are necessary as they will alleviate financial inequity and create a better future for many WTCS students who are unable to enroll full-time.

Our requests:

- a) An increase of \$4.4 million GPR in fiscal year 2024-25 to accommodate the federal methodology shift.**
- b) Amend Wisconsin State Statutes and Administrative Code to allow students enrolled less than half-time to receive a Wisconsin Grant.**
- c) Revise the lifetime student eligibility cap to be consistent with the Federal Pell Grant Program which would be based on the student's rate of enrollment. Under this change, the Higher Education Aids Board would award a grant to the same student for up to the equivalent of 12 full-time semesters or terms. If a student received a Wisconsin Grant for a semester or term but was enrolled at a fraction of full-time, only a fraction of such semester or equivalent shall count towards such duration limits.**