

February 17, 2015

Dear Washington State Legislators and Higher Ed Advocates,

We represent the 6000+ higher education faculty in the public four-year institutions in Washington State. As educators, we encounter every day many low-income and middle-income students who are struggling to pay for college. The recession resulted in serious damage to several of the state's most successful student financial aid programs. We are particularly concerned with two: **college work study and the state need grant**. We believe that both of these programs urgently need to be expanded to avoid long-term, irretrievable harm to students, their families, and the state's overall health and economic prosperity. We urge you to **budget \$20 million toward State College Work Study and \$96 million toward the State Need Grant programs for the 2016-2017 biennium**.

### Work Study

We all know that college work-study programs benefit students by allowing them to work while attending college and thus reduce student debt. Employers also benefit in that they have access to intelligent, energetic workers at subsidized wages. And taxpayers benefit because public money is leveraged with private money. What we as educators see is that work study has a variety of other benefits---students learn to structure their time more effectively, which makes them better students; they experience working with other students from diverse backgrounds, which prepares them for their adult lives as workers and as citizens. Perhaps most importantly for first generation college students, they develop a sense of belonging and the confidence necessary for success in a new and unfamiliar environment. Research bears this out---students who work between 10-19 hours per week are more likely to complete their degrees and more likely to be employed six years after graduation. This is particularly true for low-income and low SAT students. [[Inside Higher Ed](#)]. As a first step, we urge you to commit \$20 million toward the state college work study program over the 2016-2017 biennium.

### State Need Grant

The state need grant is another highly successful program that was gutted during the recession. Currently more than 32,000 eligible students are left out in the cold because funds have run out before their applications are processed. For many students, this ends their dream of a college degree. For the state as a whole, this means that at the very time demographic changes necessitate enrolling more low-income and first generation students to ensure a healthy, prosperous future for all Washingtonians, we are creating additional barriers to college attainment with all of the negative consequences that are likely to follow with respect to economic prosperity, health, civic engagement, public safety, and other attributes we associate with a good society. We need to remember that at the time when many of us ---legislators and educators---attained our degrees, higher education was a major pathway to upward mobility and the realization of the American Dream. Increasingly, higher education no longer functions to that end; in many parts of the country it serves to exacerbate growing problems of inequality and a lack of upward mobility. By taking decisive action, the Legislature can reaffirm our state's commitment to creating opportunities for people from all backgrounds across the state. For these reasons, we urge you to support the students in the state by budgeting \$32 million for 2016 and \$64 million for 2017 (or \$96 million for the biennium) toward the State Need Grant program.

Sincerely,

[The Washington State Council of Faculty Representatives](#)

Cc: Chair Hansen, Chair Hunter, Chair Hill, Chair Bailey, Vice Chair Ormsby, Vice Chair Braun, Vice Chair Baumgartner, Vice Chair Pollet, Legislative Staff, WSA, COP, and WSAC members

