

State Legislative Update: Higher Education

Steve Bollens

WSU Faculty Representative to the State Legislature
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“Council of Faculty” (COF) = Faculty Legislative Reps from the state’s six, 4-year public institutions

- Dr. Matt Altman (Philosophy), CWU
- Dr. Bidisha Biswas (Political Science), WWU
- Dr. Steve Bollens (School of the Environment), WSU
- Dr. Mike Crow (Public Administration), TESC
- Dr. Beth Ebel (Medicine), UW
- Mr. Sam Ligon (English), EWU



Partnerships and Communication

- Faculty Senates of the six, 4-year public universities
- Council of Presidents (COP)
- Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)
- College Promise Coalition (CPC)
- House and Senate “Higher Education” Committees;
House Appropriations and Senate Ways & Means
Committees
- District legislators (49 senators and 98 representatives)



Odd-Year vs Even-Year Legislative Sessions

- ▶ Odd numbered years (e.g., 2025) are 105-day sessions to consider the biennial budget (e.g., 2025-27) and major policy legislation (avg = 2,400 bills; 460 passed)
- ▶ Even numbered years (e.g., 2026) are 60-day sessions to consider adjustments to the biennial budget (the “supplemental budget”) and “minor” policy legislation (avg = 1,500 bills; 312 passed)



Governor Ferguson's proposed 2026-27 supplemental budget

- Released in late December, it included two significant budget cuts for WSU:
 - 3.2% “across the board” cut (\$11.1M)
 - Huge increase in our “self-insurance” premiums to the state (\$7M)

2026 legislative session began on January 12

– Bills particularly relevant to faculty

- ▶ Budget – The House and Senate will release their proposed budgets in late February, and the legislature will pass a final budget in late March. This may or may not be similar to the Governor’s earlier proposed budget.
- ▶ Policy Bills (three examples)
 - ▶ **SB 5909** – “Reviewing and discontinuing low-enrollment undergraduate programs at public baccalaureate institutions” (passed Higher Ed committee, referred to Ways & Means, with an uncertain future).
 - ▶ **SB 6321** – “Sustaining life-saving and prosperity-building scientific research in Washington by establishing the Washington institute for scientific advancement” (referred to Higher Ed committee [for hearing next week?], with an uncertain future)
 - ▶ **SB 6325/HB 2617** – “Enhancing higher education procedures” [aka eliminating the funding split] (heard in Senate Higher Ed committee earlier this afternoon, with an uncertain future)



Going Forward ...

- COF is the voice of all faculty of the six, 4-yr public institutions
- Timely and effective communication is crucial! (Things happen very fast in Olympia! I am in email correspondence with Faculty Senate Steering Committee on daily-weekly basis.)
- Faculty are welcome to attend public Senate and House hearings (TVW) and visit/tour the Capitol
- Legislative bill tracking (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/>)
- Feel free to email (sbollens@wsu.edu) or call me (360-608-6893) anytime



Thank You!
Questions?