

How Did Washington Learns Fare During the 2007 Legislative Session?

Much of the University's success in the 2007 session was due to a very strong initial budget provided by Governor Gregoire in December 2006. What factors lead her to propose an operating and capital budget for the UW which was one of the best we have seen in many years?

Much of the credit goes to the hard work that many within the University put into the Governor's Washington Learns initiative — an 18-month top to bottom review of the entire state education system, from early learning to K-12 to higher education. The recommendations included in the November 2006 final report established the policy framework for the Governor's budget that was followed closely by the legislature during the 2007 session.

To set the record straight, let's take a look at a Washington Learns higher education "report card" for 2007. Below are the major recommendations contained in the report that dealt with higher education, particularly those related to the UW and other four-year institutions

We recommend that the 2007 Legislature establish a minimum system-wide goal to have all colleges and universities reach at least the 60th percentile of total per-student funding at comparable institutions in the Global Challenge States within ten years.

This goal is achieved by the passage of 2SSB 5806 (chapter 151, Laws of 2007).

We recommend that the 2007 Legislature set a cap on annual tuition increases of no more than seven percent.

This goal is achieved by the passage of 2SSB 5806 (chapter 151, Laws of 2007).

Beginning in January 2007, the Governor's budget will describe specific, measurable results expected of colleges and universities in exchange for institutional funding proposed.

This goal is achieved through the passage of the 2007-09 operating budget (Section 604 (1)).

We recommend that the state target enrollment funds and require colleges and universities to expand access in high-demand math and science certification and degree programs.

This goal is achieved for the UW in the 2007-09 biennial budget through the appropriation of \$6,975,000 for 500 new FTE enrollments in math, engineering and physical sciences (section 604 (2)).

We recommend beginning in the 2007-08 school year, OSPI identify low and middle-income students who show interest in math and science in middle school. Those students will be informed that if they do well on the math and science WASL in 10th grade, they will be eligible to apply for a four-year college scholarship for a high-demand math or science degree.

This recommendation was achieved through the passage of ESSHB 1779, the "GET ready for math and science scholarship program"

We recommend that the state provide scholarships and support for low-income students and students who would be the first in their family to graduate from college.

This recommendation was achieved through the passage of E2SSB 5098 which establishes the Washington College Bound Scholarship which guarantees payment of tuition and fees plus \$500 per year for books to low income students who will be identified as early as the 7th grade. They must complete high school with a C average, have no felony convictions and meet certain income requirements.

We recommend the state expand eligibility for the State Need Grant program to low-income working adults who are only able to take one college class per term.

This recommendation was achieved through the passage of ESHB 1179.

There were some recommendations that are still in progress such as a goal to have the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) amend its minimum college admissions standards to require three years of math and a proposal to develop ten-year enrollment projections. A recommendation to have the Governor appoint the executive director of the HECB was not adopted by the legislature.

In total, however, Washington Learns proved to be a big success for higher education as well as for the University.