



University of Washington Board of Regents

Declaration of Concern for the Sustainability of Washington Public Higher Education

The Board of Regents is the public's steward of the state's largest institution of higher learning and is mindful of its obligation to the public to ensure the University's integrity, fiscal prudence, long-term viability, and programmatic quality. It is also the Board's duty to keep the public (and its leaders) apprised of its best assessment of the state of the University and of the public higher education system of which it is part. In accordance therewith, and upon careful deliberation, the Board has unanimously reached the following conclusions.

Conclusion 1. Public higher education is an essential ingredient of a functioning democracy and a healthy economy, but the state financial construct for its funding is broken and *not sustainable*. The downward trajectory of state support will produce increasingly unwanted and dire consequences for the institutions, their students and faculty, and the general public welfare in a globally competitive economy.

Conclusion 2. Contrary to the foundational notion of an educated citizenry being a benefit to society that is worthy of encouragement, the erosion of state funding over many years, and the recent precipitous decline, have *radically and unduly shifted the burden of financing the higher education system to students*, who increasingly accomplish this by incurring family and personal debt. This places a restraint on the ability of many Washingtonians to fully pursue life's opportunities.

Conclusion 3. If Washington is to maintain affordable access to quality higher education for its citizens, then something has to change. The state's *financial and revenue structures will need to be reformed* so as to create a funding mechanism that is sufficient to provide the opportunity for higher learning to a broad spectrum of Washingtonians. Without such reform, this opportunity will diminish.

The Board's rationale for these conclusions and plan of action is set forth below.

Rationale

Since the founding of our nation, an educated populace has been deemed necessary for a successful and prosperous democracy. A generation before Washington even became a state, the Territorial Legislature created a public university (to become the University of Washington), and in adopting the state constitution years later, the people specifically provided for the creation of a system of public education from common schools through the college and university levels. These were not casual inclusions within the state's founding charter but were intended as bold

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policy pronouncements of an enduring nature. An educated citizenry was deemed to be an asset to society, the fostering of which was worthy of public support.

Washington can be proud of its entire system of public higher education, including its community and technical colleges, comprehensive regional institutions and its two research universities, which often appear favorably measured in national rankings and evaluations. The state's well-established and respected private institutions are an important complement to the quality and diversity of educational offerings.

The University of Washington is commonly regarded as one of the top research universities in the world. It is a global leader in many fields of learning and research, and the residents of Washington are the beneficiaries of the educational opportunities that this provides, as well as the impacts which make the UW one of the region's most powerful economic engines.

Over the past two decades, the funds provided to the University each year from tuition and state appropriations actually declined from an average of \$17,000 per student to about \$16,000 per student, in inflation-adjusted dollars. During that same period, the state's funding share declined from 80 percent to 30 percent, while the student's share increased from 20 percent to 70 percent. The most precipitous drop in this downward trajectory has occurred in the last three years, when the UW has seen its state support cut by more than 50 percent.

We recognize and appreciate the recent efforts of the Governor and the Legislature to provide the University with additional tools to manage through the current financial crisis. This includes passage of legislation granting tuition setting authority to the Board as well as the recent passage of legislation granting additional administrative flexibility over internal business operations and the investment of our operating fund. We are also gratified that the most recently passed supplemental budget did not make any further reductions in our public support.

Despite these efforts, Washington's overall financial framework for supporting its public institutions of higher education is broken. The twenty year shift in who pays for public higher education in Washington has turned upside down the historic vision of our founders and threatens our ability to continue to provide the benefit of an affordable university education to our citizens. We are systematically disinvesting in our children's future. We view this trend with great disappointment and alarm.

As Regents, we view our role as "public stewards," to ensure that the University is prudently managed for the benefit of Washington's citizens and the various University constituencies, given the resources available. Through the President and our system of shared governance, we are dedicated to providing the optimum degree of access to a first rate research university education. But under the current fiscal trajectory, something has to give, and it should not be the quality of the University's faculty and staff, its offerings to students, or its contributions to the discovery of knowledge.

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Plan of Action

Given the current situation, one which we deem unlikely to change for the better on its own, we do and will continue to advocate for:

- reform of the state’s financial and revenue structures so as to provide a viable, dedicated stream of support for access to an affordable, quality public higher education for Washington’s residents;
- sustained commitment of federal and state financial aid so that education can remain a viable path for upward social mobility;
- the authority of the University to manage its assets, revenues, and institutional affairs in an efficient, flexible, and expeditious manner to insure we optimize their benefits and provide clear value for our students as well as transparency to the public;
- the prudent and cost-effective utilization of University resources.

President and founding father John Adams once wrote:

“Before any great things are accomplished, a memorable change must be made in the system of education and knowledge must become so general as to raise the lower ranks of society nearer to the higher. The education of a nation instead of being confined to a few schools and universities for the instruction of the few, must become the national care and expense for the formation of the many.”

We believe these words are still true today and describe the foundation for the University of Washington’s primary role on behalf of the state and its citizens. As Regents, we call upon the civic and political leaders of this state, as well as the public at large, to work in common to shape the change that is necessary to protect and nurture the realization of a well-educated and capable American populace.