

**WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**TO:** Members of the Board of Trustees

**FROM:** President Sabah Randhawa on behalf of the Associated Students

**DATE:** December 8, 2023

**SUBJECT:** **Associated Students**

**PURPOSE:** Associated Students Report

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**Purpose of Submittal:**

AS President Keara Ryan will brief the Board of Trustees on recent activities of the Associated Students.

## **ASWWU Report to WWU Board of Trustees**

**December 8th, 2023**

**Presented by Keara Ryan, AS President**

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Dear Trustees,

I trust this update finds you well. I appreciate the opportunity to report on the progress and initiatives of the Associated Students of Western Washington University (ASWWU) Student Government over the past two months. Below, I have outlined several key areas of focus:

### **Amending the Student Government Charter**

Currently, four student government representatives are collaborating with the Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, Melynda Huskey, to amend the ASWWU Student Government Charter. The anticipated timeline suggests a completed and passed Charter to be presented at the February Board of Trustees meeting. The direction of the Charter is promising, providing clarity on the roles and duties of the student government.

### **Engagement**

I am delighted to announce that the Vice President for Activities position has been successfully appointed. Sebastian Mayotte, chosen from a competitive pool of candidates, will serve in this role until the end of the academic year. The Student Senate has filled the vacancy for the College of Business and Economics and is working on filling the vacancies in the Graduate School and the College of Science and Engineering.

The Vice President for Activities had nine applicants for the position, the highest volume of candidates for any position in student government for appointment or election since 2019. Hopefully, this level of engagement continues throughout the year and in the upcoming Spring Election. We are actively pursuing strategies to sustain and enhance this level of engagement, both in the current academic year and leading up to the Spring Election.

### **Communication**

Our communication strategy involves active in-person engagement, class visits, and participation in on-campus groups, clubs, and events. Since the last Board of Trustees meeting, the ASWWU student government has sent several targeted emails to the student body, addressing crucial issues and disseminating important information.

- *2023 ASWWU Resolution in favor of continued Fossil Fuel Divestment*
- *Supporting Students in Light of the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza*
- *File to apply for the ASWWU Vice President for Activities!*

- *What do you want state legislators to know?*
  - A survey to collect student's opinions on issues to help create the 2024 Student Legislative Agenda
- *Calling for Your Tech Initiative Abstracts*
  - The Tech Initiatives portion of the STF pays for technology projects—proposed by students and employees—that support the STF mission\*. Some projects supported by Tech Initiatives in previous years include the Engineering and Art Annex makerspaces, camera and video recording equipment, digital textbooks, and geological survey drones.

While the student government has lots to communicate to the student body, this level of emails sent to the student body in a few weeks can be burdensome for students. Moving forward, we plan to utilize the ASWWU bi-weekly newsletter to streamline information and engagement opportunities, reserving individual emails for official communication, such as statements or resolutions passed by the Student Government.

### **Student Issues**

The student government hears dozens of concerns from students, but I would like to highlight several areas of student concerns that student government has been working on.

#### *Violence in Gaza*

The campus climate has been deeply impacted by the violence happening in Gaza. Students continue to feel unsupported, even while Western administration has taken strides to support the safety and academic environment for students. As a student government, we have grappled with how we can best support students and ensure their concerns are heard. At the beginning of this month, we sent out an email to all students with the intention of supporting students and creating an open space for dialogue. It is unclear currently what the next steps we will take, but we will continue to listen to the concerns of students on campus and ensure the actions we take are done with the intention of addressing student needs.

#### *Fairhaven and Outback Farm*

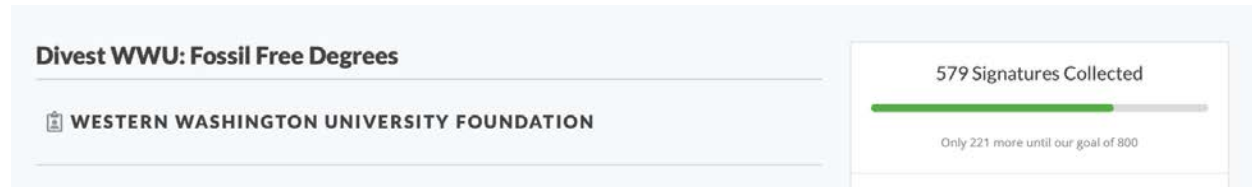
The Outback Farm is a central aspect of our campus and plays a pivotal role in bringing together our campus community through educational and social events, including work parties and harvest festivals. Student Senators have been working diligently to ensure that the Outback Farm has funding to guarantee that the next generation of students can enjoy this beautiful part of campus.

#### *Fossil Fuel Investment*

For over the last 10 years, students and faculty at Western Washington University have worked with the Foundation to divest 55% of the endowment from fossil fuels. ASWWU has passed two previous resolutions on this topic, one in 2015 and an additional resolution in 2017 that was endorsed by the Faculty Senate. Additionally, in a 2013 student election, 86% of students approved a resolution asking the Foundation to divest.

Several student groups approached their student representatives earlier this quarter expressing the need for student and faculty representation in the Request for Proposal process that the Foundation & Alumni Association will soon be undertaking, along with the long-standing request for transparency

regarding investments. In response to these student requests and a letter of support with over 570 student and alumni signatures, the ASWWU passed the "2023 ASWWU Resolution in favor of continued Fossil Fuel Divestment" which has been endorsed by the Faculty Senate with edits. While we understand that the Foundation may be unable to fully divest the portfolio, ensuring student representation and transparency in this process is essential. ASWWU looks forward to working with the Foundation & Alumni Association to ensure that the requests outlined in the Resolution which has been attached to this report.



Quotes collected from the letter of support:

"I'm an alumni who believes WWU should commit to more transparency and students representation. The student body and student government has shockingly little power. That should change. Adding both a faculty representative and student representative is a step in the right direction to remedy this issue."

"As a WWU Alumni, I would love to see Western invest financially in so many of the ideas that it teaches and encourages with the goal of sustainability. Small student projects mean less when the school is putting money towards organizations and companies that make money in the production and use of fossil fuels, that run counter to the priorities of sustainability."

"Divest, if I am to have a future I don't want it to be destroyed by climate change. Divesting from fossil fuels is imperative to saving our communities from so many disasters to come."

**A Resolution of the  
Associated Students of Western Washington University**

**“2023 ASWWU Resolution in favor of continued Fossil Fuel Divestment”**

**WHEREAS**, Western Washington University has a commitment to sustainability, equity and justice, shared governance, and accountability as a core part of the institution’s mission (1); and

**WHEREAS**, Western is already taking crucial steps to achieve sustainability, it must be acknowledged that unless there are immediate, rapid, and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the “atmosphere will warm up by as much as 2.7-degree Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels by 2040, inundating coastlines and intensifying droughts and poverty” (2); and

**WHEREAS**, a rise in atmospheric temperatures would cause unavoidable increases in numerous climate hazards and present risks to ecosystems and humans with an estimated loss of around 10% of total economic value from climate change (3); and

**WHEREAS**, United Nations Chief António Guterres says fossil fuels are “incompatible with human survival” (4); and

**WHEREAS**, climate change is in large part caused by burning fossil fuels as fixed carbon is released into the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas; and

**WHEREAS**, climate change has been driving the downfall of biodiversity, which is central to the production of new knowledge, and the fossil fuel industry has repeatedly encouraged the suppression of information and warnings about climate change (5); and

**WHEREAS**, many Western Washington University students are already facing the effects of climate change and live in communities where the effects of climate change will pose an increasing threat; and

**WHEREAS**, Western prides itself on being a leader in sustainability among Institutions of Higher Education; and

**WHEREAS**, the WWU Foundation is committed to advancing the mission and values of Western Washington University; and

**WHEREAS**, many of the Western Washington University’s peer and regional institutions have pledged to or have already fully divested from fossil fuels, including California State University-Chico, Humboldt State University, Univ. of Colorado - Colorado Springs, Seattle University, University of Washington, University of Oregon, University of British Columbia, Lewis and Clark University, Portland Community College, Oregon State University, and the entire University of California and California State school system (6); and

**WHEREAS**, the Sustainability values of the University drive the investment strategy; and

**WHEREAS**, we recognize that actions by the WWU Foundation regarding investments impact the Western Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) score; and

**WHEREAS**, our current investment practices, specifically lacking disclosure regarding investments and the WWU Foundation having no Investor Responsibility Committee or similar body, resulted in scores of 0% in two out of three categories of the STARS rating system; and

**WHEREAS**, due to a ~6-point difference, Western was unable to receive a “Gold” rating in sustainability from the STARS program; and

**WHEREAS**, every five years, a Request for Proposals (RFP) is sent out to update contracts with a primary investment firm; and

**WHEREAS**, the WWU Foundation is currently undergoing the RFP process; and

**WHEREAS**, our global climate crisis represents a significant risk to financial return; and

**WHEREAS**, the WWU Foundation currently has 55% of assets invested in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) options, which allow for the selective screening of companies and funds but currently lack transparency regarding the remaining ~45% of investments; and

**WHEREAS**, the Sustainability Action Plan (SAP), published in 2017, is Western’s ten-year plan and was co-created with a committee comprised of students, faculty, and Foundation Staff (7); and

**WHEREAS**, the Investments Section of the SAP specifically outlines transparency requirements; and

**WHEREAS**, the Investments Section also heavily suggests the integration of ESG screening into the WWU Foundation’s endowment fund; and

**WHEREAS**, ESG funds have returns equal to regular investments, and studies have found that returns on ESG funds are increasing over time (8); and

**WHEREAS**, students, faculty, and staff have led efforts to increase transparent and sustainable investments since 2012; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2013, 86% of voting WWU students approved a resolution asking that the University divest from fossil fuels; and

**WHEREAS**, the Associated Students passed an additional resolution in 2015 (9); and

**WHEREAS**, the Associated Students and Faculty Senate passed an additional resolution in 2017 (10); and

**WHEREAS**, it cannot be assumed that the Foundation Board can accurately represent student voices; and

**WHEREAS**, it cannot be assumed that the Foundation Board can accurately represent faculty voices; and

**WHEREAS**, The Western Washington University Foundation & Alumni is a non-profit, public 501(c)(3) organization that is “closely aligned with the University’s mission and strategic goals, and focuses the organization's energy on ensuring the financial health of Western” (11); and

**WHEREAS**, the WWU Foundation has multi-generational commitments to benefactors and supports student success through scholarships and other opportunities, so maintaining viable returns of its endowment fund is vital; and

**WHEREAS**, the UC Chief Investment Officer stated in an op-ed that the University of California decided to no longer invest in fossil fuels because maintaining them posed a significant financial risk (12).

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**

**THAT**, the Associated Students of Western Washington University find that, by ignoring its commitment to open discourse and transparent decision-making, the WWU Foundation is not advancing the full mission of the University.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests the WWU Foundation increase the transparency and accessibility of our portfolio.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests that there be a publicly available annual report of the firm's performance relevant to sustainability performance in addition to financial performance.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests the Foundation prioritize the environmental implications of their investment decisions in selecting a firm and consider the ethics and morals of the investment firm before making their decision.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests a standing student representative on the WWU Foundation Board for the AS, elected by the AS Executive Board, to be included in the Foundation’s investment performance review process.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests a standing faculty representative on the WWU Foundation Board, elected by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, be present in the Foundation’s investment performance review process.

**THAT**, one student and one faculty representative are included in the WWU Foundation Investment Review Committee.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests the WWU Foundation to include ESG as a priority within its upcoming Request for Proposals from different investment firms and to continue to do so until our portfolio is free from fossil fuel assets.

**THAT**, the ASWWU requests the WWU Foundation to expand its portfolio, managed by Russel Investments, to solely include fossil fuel free options or explore alternative investment firms which may provide a portfolio that does.

**THAT**, the WWU Foundation continues to demonstrate a dedication to Western's values by signing onto current and future University-wide sustainability initiatives.

**PASSED AND APPROVED** by the Associated Students of Western Washington University Student Senate at their regular meeting on 11/6/2023.

**PASSED AND APPROVED** by the Associated Students of Western Washington University Executive Board at their regular meeting on 11/9/2023.

**PASSED WITH AMENDMENTS\* AND APPROVED** by the Western Washington University Faculty Senate at their regular meeting on 11/27/2023.

*\*improving transparency, a student and faculty voice on the WWU Foundation Board, and the Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) focus.*



## **References:**

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