

WAWU Contract Proposal Fact Sheet

Last Updated: 5/5/2024

The current outstanding issues in bargaining include **economic** and **non-economic** demands. The economic demands include **wages, and tuition and fee waivers**. The non-economic demands include probation, bereavement leave, ADEI training, and parking.

Economic Issues:

Wages for Hourly Employees:

Wage Proposals for AY 2024-2025		
Current Campus Minimum	WWU Proposal	WAWU Proposal
\$17.28	\$17.28 (0%)	\$22.12 (28%)

- In the past 6 months, the minimum wage in Washington State and Bellingham has gone up due to policies reflecting the rising cost of living in these areas. The current minimum wage in Bellingham is \$17.28 per hour.
- The minimum wage increases don't reflect the true increases in the cost of living in Bellingham. In the past 2 years, rents in Bellingham have risen nearly 30%. Housing nonprofits calculate that to afford a studio apartment in Bellingham without being "rent burdened" (paying more than 1/3 of your income in rent), you would need to earn \$24.12 per hour. Our proposal would still leave ESEs being rent-burdened.
- Western has proposed keeping the minimum hourly wage at the legal minimum.
- WAWU believes that minimum wage for ESE positions is unsustainable. The union has received many reports of people leaving or turning down on-campus work due to higher wages off campus.
- **The median hourly student employee works ~7 hours per week. The cost to an employer would be \$33.38 more than status quo per employee per week, or \$372.68 over an entire quarter.**
- WAWU has emphasized willingness to negotiate, and WWU continues to insist on the legal minimum.

Tuition Waivers for Hourly Employees:

- The Union has proposed partial tuition waivers for hourly student employees, based on how many hours that person works. Per the formula, a hypothetical employee working

19 hours per week (the maximum) would get a 20% tuition waiver in 2024-2025. In our current proposal that would rise to 50% the following year.

- **The vast majority of hourly workers work close to the median of 7 hours per week. For these employees, the 7% tuition waiver for a resident would cost \$169.61 per quarter.**
- The WAWU Bargaining Committee has made it very clear that we see tuition reduction as a shared project, and want to work with the University in the medium term to get adequate state funding to phase this program toward 100% tuition reduction.
- WAWU has indicated that we are open to adjusting the amounts, but the beginning of such a waiver program is critically important for the future affordability of higher education.
- The WWU Administration continues to reject any tuition waiver for hourly workers, whatsoever.

WAWU Tuition Waiver Proposals for Undergraduates					
		19 hours (extremely rare)	10 hours	7 hours (median worker)	4 hours
AY 2024-2025	% Waived	20%	10.5%	7%	4%
	Cost per quarter	\$484.60	\$254.42	\$169.61	\$96.92
AY 2025-2026	% Waived	50%	26%	21%	11%
	Cost per quarter	\$1,211.50	\$637.63	\$510.11	\$255.05

Fee Waivers:

- To cover a falling share of state funding for Higher Education, colleges and universities have been steadily increasing “fees” which are separate from tuition, paid by both graduate and undergraduate students.
- Annual fees cost student employees a maximum of \$672.09 per quarter. These fees often come as a surprise to graduate students who are offered tuition waivers with admission.
- **The first ~40 hours of an hourly workers’ wages each year go to paying these fees.** That means the typical hourly worker can work a month and a half just to pay these fees.
- This system of fee waivers is already (partially) in use at UW and WSU, where some fees are waived for student workers.
- WAWU has proposed waiving all fees, and has indicated a willingness to waive only some fees, or have partial waivers.
- The WWU Administration is still rejecting any concept of a fee waiver.

Fee Waiver Proposals

	WWU Proposal	Current WAWU Proposal
Cost per quarter	\$0	\$224.03

Graduate Stipends

	Current	WWU Proposal	Current WAWU Proposal
Cost per month	\$1700	\$1900 (11%)	\$2665 (56%)

- Graduate stipends at WWU are considerably lower than at other universities in Washington, particularly the two largest employers of graduate student employees.
 - At the UW, they range from \$2664 - \$3,750.
 - At WSU, they range from \$2,318.50 to \$3,284.50.
- WAWU's proposal for graduate stipends matches the minimum at both UW and WSU Mount Vernon.
- Competitive stipends are massively helpful for recruitment and retention of a diverse and talented graduate workforce.
- Graduate students (as well as undergraduate students) frequently are forced to work
- Research shows¹ that funding for graduate student positions plays an important role in recruiting a diverse body of students and retaining them.

Non-Economic Issues

Probation

- The WWU Administration is attempting to introduce a 30-day probationary period, during which employees lack protections against being terminated for arbitrary reasons. This period would last nearly 1/3 of the typical ESE appointment. No other student workers in the country have such a probationary period. WAWU rejects the idea of introducing a period designed to keep student workers feeling precarious and vulnerable.
- Western has stated that they are worried about hiring people for their first jobs, without establishing that they are fit for the position, and need the ability to let them go without just cause. However, student employees are hired after being accepted to Western,

¹ See Ecton, W. G., Bennett, C. T., Nienhusser, H. K., Castillo-Montoya, M., & Dougherty, S. M. (2021). If You Fund Them, Will They Come? Implications From a PhD Fellowship Program on Racial/Ethnic Student Diversity. AERA Open, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211040485>; and additional research cited therein.

maintaining their GPA and course load requirements, and often establishing relationships with their supervisors prior to hiring.

- Standard union contract protections do not prevent the University from terminating ESEs; they ensure that when the University terminates an ESE it is for a good reason and through a fair process.

Leaves

WAWU proposed up to 3 days of bereavement leave, and WWU has repeatedly denied any amount of paid bereavement leave.

ADEI Trainings

WAWU is calling for student employees to have a voice in peer-led trainings that build inclusive and healthy workplaces. The Union proposes joint planning and implementation of these trainings, to ensure that they are relevant to the current day and to real conditions in ESE workplaces. Similar, successful peer-led programs exist at both UW and WSU and have produced well-documented, proven results.² Such programs have been shown to be much more effective than programs not run by student employee training facilitators. The WWU Administration insists on unilateral control.

Parking

Most other Union employees on campus are provided Whatcom Transportation Authority and Skagit Transit bus passes at no cost. WAWU is proposing that ESEs receive the same benefit for each quarter they are working.

² See <https://www.washington.edu/safecampus/epic-program/reports/> for in-depth research and data.