

In 2017, state policy makers have an opportunity to build on recent investments in order to serve more students and strengthen the state's competitive advantage by increasing investment in Washington's college and university systems. Because higher education is a public good, everyone benefits when there are more college graduates.

Postsecondary education is essential to being competitive in today's global economy. Washington's economic vitality hinges on a strong and vibrant education system that includes early learning, K-12, and higher education. Increasing the number of individuals with a postsecondary credential reduces reliance on social support programs and ensures that Washington families are not left behind.

Current Challenges:

1. **Unmet Workforce Demands** – A skilled and educated workforce is the foundation of a prosperous economy. By 2017, Washington employers will have at least 50,000 unfilled jobs in high-demand fields due to a lack of qualified applicants. Our state's colleges and universities are key to creating a local pipeline for Washingtonians to fill these jobs.
2. **Degree Attainment** – Washingtonians ages 25 to 34 are projected to be the first generation in history with lower educational attainment than their parents. At the same time, a growing number of Washington students come from groups that have been historically underserved by higher education. Ensuring the academic success of these students requires strategies and investment in proven student success initiatives.
3. **Competing for Excellence** – Providing quality education requires access to talented and dedicated faculty and staff. Yet Washington's colleges and universities face an increasingly competitive national marketplace to attract and retain top-notch educators.

The Path Forward:

Addressing our educational and economic challenges requires increased state investment to improve student access and degree completion, preserve affordability, and maintain the high quality of our colleges and universities. Washington's colleges and universities request funding to bolster degree production, student success, and educational quality.

1. **Degrees to meet demand: Address state needs through targeted investments**
 - ▶ Expand capacity to support student degree completion in the areas they pursue. This includes enrollments that fill skill gaps in high-demand fields such as STEM, teacher preparation, health care, and priority workforce programs.
 - ▶ Reduce bottlenecks in high-demand and priority workforce courses and improve student time to degree or credential.
 - ▶ Ensure that graduates have the breadth of knowledge, aptitudes, and experiences enabling them to adapt to a changing economy and workforce.
2. **Student success: Ensure that students have the resources to graduate**
 - ▶ Invest in proven strategies that retain students and lead to degree completion.
 - ▶ Strengthen pathways for historically underserved populations, transfer students, veterans, and adult learners.
 - ▶ Fully fund the State Need Grant to permit more students to attend college and reduce student debt loads.
3. **High impact credentials: Ensure that all students excel in today's competitive labor market**
 - ▶ Provide a classroom experience that equips students with knowledge, skills, and experiences that translate from the classroom to the workplace.
 - ▶ Invest in competitive compensation for faculty and staff in order to attract and retain quality educators.

Each year, Washington's 50 public and private colleges and universities together award 71,000 degrees to students in all 39 counties. However, we need to produce more graduates to meet the state's growing economic needs and to ensure that Washingtonians are not left behind. We are ready to build on nationally-recognized degree programs to increase the multi-billion dollar economic impact that our colleges and universities have on the state's economy, as well as to enhance the economic well-being of all Washington residents.

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