To: APAC

From: APAC Ad Hoc Tuition Waiver Committee

Jana Kay Lunstad, Campus Registrar & Director of Financial Aid, Tri-Cities (Chair)
Deb Bartlett, Director, Policies, Records, and Forms, and University Records Officer
Melissa Carolus, Student Financial Aid Manager, Spokane
Karla Ealy-Marroquin, Multimedia Services Coordinator, Academic Scheduling, Spokane
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Jenny Kincaid, Program Coordinator, Vancouver
Christie Kittle, Assistant Director of Learning Innovations, Global
Cathy Lentz, Campus Registrar, Global
Vicki McCracken, Associate Dean and Director of Extension
Jennifer Miller, Faculty Senator
Eric Shelden, Faculty Senate Chair
Tania Swanger, Associate Registrar, Pullman Representative

CC: Greg Crouch, Associate Vice Provost for Graduate Academic Programs
Sharon Games, Human Resources Strategic Partner
Chris Jones, Assistant Vice President for Budget & Planning

Date: April 23, 2024

Re: Employee Tuition Waiver Recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to review how WSU employees use the Employee Tuition Waiver (ETW), as established by RCW 28B.15.558. After collecting and reviewing information, and much discussion about the details of the waiver, the committee has six recommendations for APAC to consider. Our recommendations take into consideration the goal of leveraging the ETW to hire and retain WSU employees while being mindful of existing resources and the current budget environment.

Please note that based on guidance from the President’s Office and the Office of the Attorney General, we are not recommending that WSU expand the ETW to cover courses offered through the Global Campus. This remains a strong interest, but we understand this is not an option unless the State Legislature revises the RCW. If a revision were to happen and Global tuition could be waived, then we hope this topic will be revisited to determine what resources Global would need to accommodate increased enrollment. In the meantime, we recommend that the BPPM and relevant websites be updated to clearly explain why WSU is unable to waive tuition for Global courses.

Recommendations

1. Increase the fee for non-WSU employees.
   The RCW stipulates that “Persons registering on a space available basis shall be charged a registration fee of not less than five dollars” (Attachment 1). WSU is the only public baccalaureate that charges the minimum fee (Attachment 2). The other institutions assess
an enrollment fee each quarter of $15 to $100 for non-university employees. Increasing the fee for non-WSU employees would add revenue to support employee retention strategies.

2. **Survey current employees for feedback about the waiver.**

Between AY19 and AY23 WSU has seen a 58.6% decrease in the number of employees who participate in the waiver program (Attachment 3). The most recent Employee Engagement Survey included numerous comments about a desire for access to Global classes, a tuition benefit for dependents, and supervisor support to take classes. For example, one employee said “I wish there was tuition assistance for employees and dependents. That would be more valuable than an actual pay increase.” (See 2023 Detailed Overall Results from the Employee Engagement Survey).

While employees are clearly interested in the ETW, it is unclear what led to the decreased use of the waiver. The subcommittee recommends that all employees are surveyed about their awareness of the benefit and why they do/do not use it. This could be administered as a stand-alone survey or embedded in Human Resource Services employee engagement survey (Attachment 4).

3. **Establish a partial tuition exemption for WSU employees that is distinct from the ETW and includes Global courses.**

While the existing ETW is a generous benefit, it does not meet the needs of many WSU employees. Those who do not live near a physical campus, or who wish to pursue a degree that is not available at a WSU campus or local community college, cannot use the ETW. A new tuition exemption program for WSU courses on all the campuses would increase the cost of taking courses for employees, but it would provide more access for employees to take courses and/or earn a credential. Although WSU would still waive a portion of tuition (e.g., 50%), it would also receive tuition revenue it does not currently receive from the portion the employee would pay.

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### ETW processed AY 2018-19 to 2022-23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>$1,076,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>$916,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>$879,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>$621,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>$492,539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The number represents distinct students who used the ETW. The value of the waiver varies by their academic career, residency status, and number of enrolled credits. Some employees may have used the ETW for a full academic year, while others may have used it for one semester only.

### Cost/Revenue projection of 50% tuition reduction for employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projection</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>$246,270</td>
<td>$246,270</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Because the tuition exemption would be separate from the ETW, WSU could have more flexibility in setting eligibility requirements. For example, it could require that a WSU employee must be admitted as a degree-seeking student and/or that registration be limited to programs that have capacity to enroll more students. Both these options align with the RCW because it gives individual institutions the ability to limit enrollment to seat availability and to prioritize waivers for their own employees (see Attachment 1).

The existing ETW would still be an option for WSU and non-WSU employees who do not meet the criteria for the tuition exemption. But if an employee chooses to not use the exemption or the ETW, they could transfer the exemption to an eligible dependent.

If a dependent were to use the tuition exemption, then they would not be eligible for the WSU Faculty/Staff Dependent Scholarship of $1,000/year for two years (Attachment 5).

Dependent scholarships AY 2018-19 to 2022-24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aid Year</th>
<th># Dependents</th>
<th>$ Disbursed</th>
<th>Credits Enrolled</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>$19,000</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$17,500</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$19,000</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$21,000</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$23,000</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023-24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$17,000</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Terms and Conditions: https://financialaid.wsu.edu/2023-2024-terms-conditions/
Source: SFS Scholarship Office

Cost/Revenue projection of 50% tuition reduction for dependents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projection</th>
<th># Dependents</th>
<th>FT Tuition/Year</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$11,884</td>
<td>$101,014</td>
<td>$101,014</td>
</tr>
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</table>

If expanding to include dependents is cost prohibitive, then WSU could consider a phased approach to include dependents later. Another option would be to fundraise to provide real dollars to cover the tuition, rather than waiving it for either the employee or the dependent.

The implementation of this type of program would require further analysis by the Budget Office and another committee to set eligibility criteria. Similar programs at Central Washington University (https://www.cwu.edu/about/offices/human-resources/benefits-leave/dependent-tuition-waiver) and The Evergreen State College (https://www.evergreen.edu/registration) could be useful models.

4. Improve communication about the ETW benefit.
Whether any changes are made to the existing benefit, or a new program is implemented, there needs to be better communication to current employees and new hires. This could be done in several ways:

a. More clearly explaining the benefit on the total compensation package. It is currently listed as a bullet point:

Possible new language: “Washington State University values employees and invests in their education and professional development. Faculty and staff who meet the criteria, may qualify for an Employee Tuition Waiver that will allow them to take face-to-face courses at a rate of $5 for up to 6 credits in the fall and/or spring semesters (see https://policies.wsu.edu/prf/index/manuals/business-policies-and-procedures-manual/bppm-60-70/). Enrollment requires supervisor approval and courses can be taken to fill degree requirements or for personal enrichment.”

b. Identify a designated point of contact who can help WSU employees navigate the ETW process and identify potential courses either within WSU or other institutions that align with their course related goals. This would reduce the number of offices an employee would have to connect with to get their questions answered, as well as improve the experience of using the benefit.

c. Include an announcement in the WSU Insider and other all-campus communications when the ETW request form opens each semester. Each campus could also make announcements through their local communication channels.

d. Feature employees who earned a WSU credential while using the ETW in commencement stories and/or during staff appreciation weeks.

5. **Encourage supervisors to share information about the ETW benefit.**

WSU supports professional development for employees and provides release time for them to complete training (https://policies.wsu.edu/prf/index/manuals/business-policies-and-procedures-manual/bppm-60-72/). In some instances, it may be helpful for an employee to
enroll in a course that is directly related to their duties. There may also be instances when taking a course would be less expensive than the cost of attending a conference.

6. **Clearly define and identify self-sustaining courses.**
   The current BPPM states that the ETW cannot be used to waive tuition for self-sustaining courses, but it does not clearly define what that means or how to know if a course is self-sustaining. The Registrar’s website currently has a brief definition and an example, but it would be helpful if employees could access a comprehensive list of courses, or course subjects, before they submit the ETW request form.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve on this committee. We are confident that any one of the recommendations we have put forward would support employees, demonstrate how WSU leadership values its employees, and benefit WSU.

**Attachments**

1. RCW 28B.15.558 Waiver of tuition and fees for state employees and educational employees
2. Washington Public Baccalaureate report 2018-2023
3. ETW Institutional Comparison
4. Draft ETW Employee Survey
5. Employee Dependent Scholarships AY 2019-2024