

Legislature 101:
A Guide to the Washington State Legislature



Photo from www.leg.wa.gov

**The Evergreen State College
President's Office/Government Relations**

January 2009

Introduction

This Legislature 101 is offered as a resource to the Evergreen State College community of faculty, staff, students and others interested in a clear and simple overview of how the Washington state legislature works. The majority of the sources used to compile this guide can be found at the Washington State Legislature website: www.leg.wa.gov.

This guide was prepared by the Office of the President. Questions regarding the guide or requests for further information should be directed to:

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How Does the Legislature Work?

Washington has 49 legislative districts. A senator from each of these districts is elected to the Senate. Two representatives from each of these districts are elected to the House. The senators serve four-year terms, and the representatives serve two-year terms.

Evergreen's Olympia campus is in the 22nd District. Senator Karen Fraser and Representatives Brendan Williams and Sam Hunt represent the 22nd District. Evergreen's Tacoma campus is in the 27th District. Senator Debbie Regala and Representatives Jeannie Darneille and Dennis Flannigan represent the 27th District. To locate a Washington State Representative or Senator in a different district go to: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/Default.aspx>.

The Senate and House of Representatives meet in regular session each year beginning the second Monday in January to adopt operating, capital, and transportation budgets, create new laws, and change existing laws. In the odd-numbered years, the session lasts for a maximum of 105 days. In even-numbered years (2010) the session lasts a maximum of 60 days. If the Legislature needs to go beyond the time allotted for a regular session, the governor may call for an extraordinary session (there is no limit to these). Extraordinary sessions last no more than 30 days. The 2009 session begins on January 12 and will end on April 27. For details on the 2009 legislative schedule see: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/legislature/calendar/>

Each session the members of the House and Senate introduce laws, which are drafted as bills for consideration. The ideas for a bill may originate from policy (i.e. financial aid, transfer), a constituent need, or an idea/concept. The member then introduces the bill in the chamber they belong to. Once introduced, the bill goes through a number of steps (i.e. the legislative process) which includes review by a committee in the chamber in which the bill is introduced and floor action.

The majority of policy bills that Evergreen follows are heard in the House Higher Education Committee and the Senate Higher Education Committee. The budget bills are heard in the House Capital Committee, the House Appropriation Committee, and the Senate Ways and Means Committee. If a bill passes review by a committee, the bill is moved to the floor for action. All legislation requires a majority in the House or Senate to pass. If the bill passes in one chamber, it must pass the other chamber through the same process – committee hearing and floor action. If the bill passes both the Senate and the House, it goes to the governor for her/his signature. The governor can choose to approve the bill or veto the entire bill or a section of the bill.

For information on how a bill becomes a law go to: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/WorkingwithLeg/bill2law.htm>.

To track a bill as it moves through the legislative process go to: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/>

Who Represents Evergreen's Positions to the Legislature?

The Evergreen State College is represented by multiple individuals working together at the Legislature including the President, Vice Presidents, Director of Government Relations, Executive Director of Budget and Planning, Institutional Research, faculty, staff and students. The President and the Vice Presidents generally present the college's operating budget and capital budget to the Legislature. The Director of Government Relations, Julie Suchanek, works with representatives from Evergreen (i.e. students, staff, faculty) to present the College's position on

general issues in the Legislature. Details regarding Evergreen's budget requests and legislative actions can be found at: <http://www.evergreen.edu/president/legislative>

Liza Rognas and Sarah Ryan are the Evergreen faculty representative to the Council of Faculty Representatives (CFR) for the six baccalaureate public higher education institutions in Washington. The CFR provides a forum where faculty representatives deal with matters of mutual interest about the quality and delivery of higher education in Washington State. Members communicate directly with the Legislature, the Governor's Office, the Council of Presidents, the legislative officers, and the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Evergreen's students recently joined the Washington Student Lobby (WSL). Evergreen's representatives to WSL are Geoduck Union members Josie Jarvis and Victor Sanders. The WSL is made up of students from the student governments of the six public baccalaureate schools in Washington. The WSL develops positions on bills and advocates for them throughout the legislative session.

What are the Hot Topics During the 2009 Legislative Session?

The operating and capital budgets, which are adopted in the odd number years for the biennium, will be the primary focus of the 2009 session.

Other important issues this session will likely include:

- Teacher preparation
- Accountability and performance
- Access: Tuition policy, textbook costs, financial aid, etc.
- Personnel issues: Approval of classified bargaining agreement, benefits, etc.
- Sustainability

The key higher education issues are highlighted in the weekly Legislative Updates during session. These updates can be found at: <http://www.evergreen.edu/president/legislative>

The Budget Process

Washington State operates on a two-year or biennial basis, beginning July 1 of every odd-numbered year. The current budget is for the period of July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2009.

College Requests to the Governor and Legislature

To accomplish the task of assembling a state budget request, OFM requires Evergreen to submit its biennial budget request within the guidelines and forms that it prescribes. To comply with this requirement, the Office of Operational Planning and Budget coordinates the college's budget request development process through an analysis of requests from each of the four major units (Academics, Student Affairs, Finance and Administration, and Advancement) and through use of inter-institutional formulas. Internal budget recommendations are developed by each division, reviewed or revised by the vice presidents, and finally reviewed and revised by the president. The president's recommendation is forwarded to the Board of Trustees for its review, revision and final approval before forwarding to OFM. The OFM then coordinates the development of the Governor's statewide budget recommendation to the legislature.

The Governor's Budget

By law, the governor, as the state's chief executive officer, must submit her/his recommended operating, capital and transportation biennial budgets to the Legislature in December of even-numbered years. This recommendation proposes a spending plan for the Legislature to consider.

The Legislative Budget Process

During the legislative session, the chairs of the Senate Ways and Means and House Appropriations Committees work with their respective members and staffs to analyze agency requests and the governor's proposals. They then develop their own recommendations as alternatives to the governor's budgets. During this process, each chamber may develop several proposals until its members are fully satisfied and adopt a final recommendation that is sent to the other chamber.

After each chamber has passed its version of the budget, differences between the two must be reconciled in a budget conference committee. Six leaders from both chambers (and both political parties) meet to resolve differences and to develop a conference committee recommendation. This recommendation is submitted to the full Legislature for final passage. Upon final passage, the budget is delivered to the governor for signature.

The governor may veto all or part of the budget, thereby eliminating funding or various requirements. However, the governor cannot add new resources or requirements to the budget adopted by the Legislature. Only after the Legislature passes a budget and the governor signs it has the state created the state budget.

How is Evergreen's Final Spending Plan Created?

Evergreen's final spending plan is dependent on the operating and capital budgets passed by the Legislature. The College's final budget process follows the same two-year state budget cycle. Evergreen strives for a campus-wide participatory process in determining the final budget recommendation to the president.

This creates a particular challenge for the college given that the calendar for the academic year doesn't coincide with the externally driven legislative schedule. For example, the governor more often than not signs the final legislative budget into law. This means that the college begins its preparation for an internal allocation process in winter quarter well before the final outcome of the Legislature is known. This requires the college process to take tentative information from the various legislative budget proposals into consideration when developing various budgetary options (scenarios) that are then explored and refined based on campus community input.

While we do not have the final legislative budget when we begin, the college process helps to ensure that we gain as much community advice on the various "possibilities" before most of our faculty and students leave for the summer break.