

**WASHINGTON STATE OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP BOARD MEETING  
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2020, 1-3 PM, MICROSOFT TEAMS OR DIAL IN  
MEETING MINUTES**

The Board of Directors of the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship (WSOS) convened on September 17, 2020 via Microsoft Teams and dial in only in alignment with the Governor's suspension of the Public Meetings Act due to COVID-19 precautions. As such, the meeting was publicized as available to the public on the WSOS website though no physical location was hosted.

Board members: Miller Adams, Diane Cecchettini, Joelle Denney, Jane Park, Gary Rubens, Julie Sandler, Brad Smith and Mike Wilson

Additional attendees: Lianda Abraham, Erin Ashley, Michelle Barreto, Jane Broom, Gina Breukelman, Meg Chambers, Kimber Connors, Karyl Gregory, Mesa Herman, Angela Jones, Grace Lilje, Jessica Monger, Joanna Moznette, Brittny Nielsen, Hannah Olson, Sydney Parms, Cristal Rangel Peña, Jvania Cross Polenska, Jeric Quiliza, Vanesa Contreras Rodriguez, Patrick Smith, Aileen Tubo, Steve Walker and Victor Zamora

**Meeting Called to Order**

Brad Smith, the Board chair, called the Board meeting to order at 1:04 pm.

**Approval of Minutes**

Diane Cecchettini moved that the minutes of the June 2, 2020, Board meeting be approved. Miller Adams seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

**Mission Moment: Scholar Opportunity Story**

Joanna Moznette, WSOS Baccalaureate Program Manager, introduced WSOS Scholar Grace Lilje, a junior at Gonzaga University (GU). In January, WSOS was excited to learn that Lilje was one of four Gonzaga University students to become a certified manufacturing technologist. The CMfgT is an entry-level certification that some employers recognize when hiring. It also makes Lilje eligible to take the Society of Manufacturing Engineers' Certified Manufacturing Engineer exam after two years of engineering employment. Last year, Lilje provided strong support to her fellow Scholars as a Scholar Lead, so we were eager to welcome her back to the program again this year.

Lilje shared that she grew up on a farm in Davenport, a small farming community about an hour from Spokane. Always interested in math and science as a child and having a history of Alzheimer's in her family, she decided to pursue a career helping to improve the lives of others confronting a health concern. With those aspirations in mind, she is studying mechanical engineering with an applied math minor at GU.

Serving as a WSOS Scholar Lead for the second year has been a rewarding experience to give back to other Scholars, especially with helping them adjust to a new normal with COVID and forming a community with them and other Scholar Leads. This program has been instrumental in developing her own leadership skills.

Lilje is considering three options for post-graduation: graduate school for biomedical engineering, a service program such as the Peace Corps or the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, or directly entering the workforce. She acknowledged the tremendous impact that WSOS has had on her educational and leadership experience. She shared her sincere appreciation for all the financial support, support services, network of connections and resources she has received through WSOS.

Smith expressed his gratitude for all that Lilje has accomplished as a Scholar Lead. He emphasized that these peer-to-peer relationships Lilje and others like her are creating are even more important than the financial support WSOS provides. Her example is inspiring to all of us.

### **2020-21 Scholars Services Update**

Kimber Connors, WSOS Executive Director, announced that Javana Cross Polenska, WSOS Deputy Director, is approaching her one-year anniversary. During this year, Polenska has been pivotal in helping WSOS use data to drive our decisions. Connors invited Polenska to present the 2020-21 Scholar Services update.

Polenska reported highlights of the newest cohort of Career & Technical Scholarship (CTS) Scholars. Cohort 2 (fall) reflects 72% first-generation students, their median family income is \$19,409 and they attend 33 of 34 community & technical colleges. Also selected were 20 recipients for the Rural Jobs Initiative (RJI). In general, these students live more than 35 miles from any campus, and they represent each of the eight eligible regions.

As the 2020-21 academic year begins, two things are known to be true for our Scholars. First, there is no such thing as a typical college experience with housing uncertainty, internet connectivity issues and uncertainty with jobs and internships. And second, their adaptability is critical and, in turn, so is our support for them. Despite the uncertainties, Scholars have signaled their intention to opt in this academic year. Fall 2019 vs. 2020 saw a 2% increase in our Baccalaureate Scholarship (BaS) accepts from 96% to 98%. There is no comparison yet for the CTS Scholars because this scholarship is just starting its second year, but these Scholars were still clear on their intent to enroll with a 90% acceptance rate. BaS Scholars who completed and renewed their scholarship shifted from 79% last year to 78% this year. The top two reasons for non-renewal this year were consistent with last year: they have graduated or they changed to a non-STEM or non-health care major.

Scholars may initiate a leave of absence request as a pause for one term. In 2019, there were 50 such BaS requests and 61 this year. This is a good early indicator, but we will not know the full impact of COVID-19 until November when refunds are issued.

Our goal is to support our Baccalaureate Scholars in accessing information and staying connected with activities and resources on their campus, within their community with social outlets and other resources, as well as with providing information to them regarding internships, mentorships and jobs. The good news is that we are starting from a place of strength. The 2020 BaS Impact & Satisfaction survey results indicate that 94% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they were more likely to graduate from college because of their WSOS scholarship. 96% said they agreed or strongly agreed that their financial assistance from WSOS made it possible for them to attend college full time. Data also proves the impact of year 1 to year 2 Scholar persistence as a direct result of the Scholar Lead program. From the 2017-18 to the 2018-19 academic year, BaS persistence rose from 78% to 84% and then to 87% this year. Since actual enrollment has not yet been finalized, this may increase even further. 89% of third-year BaS recipients felt prepared to seek relevant work experience after participating in our Skills that Shine (StS) program. Both Scholar Leads and StS industry mentors alike expressed similar positive experiences in working with their Scholar mentees.

Comparable outcomes were seen with our Career & Technical Scholars. The 2020 CTS Impact & Satisfaction Survey results indicate that 95% agreed or strongly agreed that they were more likely to complete their program because of their Career & Technical Scholarship. The first CTS cohort last year did not receive the comparable programmatic support which the BaS cohort received, but this year's CTS cohort will. To support that goal, we have made some operational changes which are intended to improve how we support our CTS Scholars utilizing new roles and revising some processes/systems. We have created and hired a Programs Director role who will oversee strategy, supervise all our Scholar programs and share information across all departments at WSOS. We have also extended an offer for a CTS Program Manager who will design programmatic supports. In addition, we have aligned our teams to better support our Scholars' college experience. For revised processes/systems, we have launched the Caspio student database with no disruption to our Scholars or collegiate partners. We are also granting scholarship deferments vs. a standard leave of absence for our Scholars who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 while keeping Scholars connected with their Scholar Leads and StS mentors. We are codifying our

Scholar Services key performance indicators and measurement tools to ensure our programmatic goals are achieving their intended impact.

Smith suggested we think about ways that WSOS can partner with companies to open even more doors for our Scholars and expand our mutual benefit. Beyond the well-received mentorship program, perhaps site visits could be co-designed with industry partners, and let Board members know how we can help. Joelle Denney suggested that we increase the number of mentors and target their representation to match our Scholars. Connors reported that Hannah Olson, WSOS Industry Engagement Manager, has been actively recruiting one-off mentors historically but is now utilizing Human Resources departments as a megaphone to recruit more mentors at an organization level. Connors expressed appreciation to Mike Wilson for being a mentor again this year.

Julie Sandler asked how our Scholars are doing facing so many COVID-related uncertainties and the isolation of not being on campus. Polenska reported that our Scholar Leads are doing regular pulse checks with their Scholar mentees. Our website provides detailed information on helpful resources available to all Scholars as well as support services which are specific to each campus. Connors invited Board members to send her additional resources that we can share with Scholars. Denney asked how WSOS is helping Scholars handle their internet connectivity issues. Polenska indicated these issues continue to be a challenge, especially in rural areas across the state, and further conversation is needed.

Lastly, Polenska reported that Scholar-facing supports are being guided by three tenets – accessible, relevant and intentional. Accessibility to our scholarships and programs is achieved through our implementing universal design strategies which remove barriers. In addition, content is delivered in a mobile-responsive learning platform to support asynchronous learning. Relevancy is gained in three ways: bite-size content which is in the Scholar voice; just-in-time modules so information is there when the Scholar needs it; and supports which represent Scholars' backgrounds and interests. Intentionality is seen through our clear expectations and measurements for success. We are more intentional than ever with providing tools and supports to maximize Scholar success. Additionally, we are directing Scholars to existing resources where they can get help.

Key take-aways encompass understanding that there is very little about this academic year that is typical for our Scholars. Our programming is intended to strengthen Scholars' connections to their campus and their community to promote persistence and job attainment. We are increasing our focus on impact and measurement of Scholar-facing programming and initiatives. We must stay committed and adaptable so we can continue to open doors for them.

### **OpportunityTalks 2020 Virtual Breakfast**

Erin Ashley, WSOS Development Director, reported we are pivoting our usual in-person OpportunityTalks (OTalks) breakfast to be an interactive, engaging virtual event on November 12. The host is our own Jane Park, and this year's theme is "Are You Game?" The event will mostly be pre-recorded but there will also be a chat section and some play at home interaction, thanks to Gary Rubens, intended to make the recording feel live to the audience. Additionally, many participants will be mailed a copy of Smith's book entitled **Tools and Weapons: The Promise and Peril of the Digital Age**,

WSOS is committed to being a win-win-win solution for students, employers and Washington taxpayers. We will hear from key partners at Boeing, a key legislative partner and our featured speaker Opportunity Scholar Edgar Santos Aguilar. Smith will interview Trevor Noah, host of *The Daily Show*, and then they will play "Are You Smarter than an Opportunity Scholar?", a STEM trivia game, hosted by Opportunity Scholar Michelle To.

Ashley asked for ideas for Smith's interview questions. Smith recommended that the interview questions be timeless or related to challenges of the year, though not related to making predictions regarding the upcoming election. Park suggested that Noah share his own personal history of persistence which would be encouraging to our Scholars. Smith stated that Noah has a great history with a mentor, his mother, who was passionate about education. Noah's foundation is doing work in Johannesburg which connects directly to

education. Cecchetti corroborated this approach because it highlights the power of an individual who can make a difference.

Ashley offered suggestions for what each Board member can do to support OTalks. Our total fundraising goal is to \$800K by the end of the year. Perhaps more than any other year, the Challenge Fund goal of \$100K will be an important incentive to support donations. Board members should have received an email from Jane Park about supporting the Challenge Fund. By securing a Challenge Fund, we're able to advertise that the first \$100K donated will be quadrupled (initially doubled by the Challenge Fund and doubled again by the state). Last year, we had 100 percent Board participation in the Challenge Fund, and we hope to repeat that again this year. Thank you to those Board members who have already made their commitment!

Seats for this virtual event are unlimited. Ashley is asking everyone to become a virtual table host and invite their network to join their table. Those who hosted a table in the past are encouraged to expand viewer participation by inviting people to participate who, due to geographic restrictions, could never attend in person. Now with a virtual event, they can join us. You may have friends who have large capacity to give but may not customarily attend fundraisers. With our virtual event, these individuals can participate incognito. This is a strategic way to build important champions.

Registration and donations will be handled by MobileCause. People may alternatively make their donation on the WSOS homepage. An email is coming soon from Connors with easy step-by-step instructions on building your table. Board members are invited to help us amplify our message about mentorship. This support service is vital to our Scholars, and we are in the final two weeks of recruiting up to 100 more mentors. Park asked if there is a mentor segment in the event program. Ashley indicated that this message will be prominent, however, the deadline for mentor registration occurs before OTalks.

Wilson indicated he will be making phone calls and requested an email attachment which highlights OTalks and our Scholar successes. Connors readily agreed to provide links with that information.

Park asked if a prize could be offered to those people who donate and watch the live-stream event. Perhaps it could be an autographed copy of Noah's book, **Born a Crime**, a ticket to Noah's show, or an autographed copy of Smith's book. Ashley indicated this excellent idea will be explored.

### **Legislative Session & Priorities**

Jessica Monger reported that she and Connors have taken advantage of this unique time to schedule online meetings with dozens of legislators, budget staff and legislative staff from across the aisle and across the state. Connors and Monger have highlighted the changes in our programming and reported notable demonstrated impacts with our BaS flagship program, CTS program which encompasses apprenticeships, associate degrees or certificates (new in 2019) and the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. This program needs a statutory fix before it can be launched, hopefully in 2021.

Monger presented details on how our Opportunity Scholarship protects and complements the state's investment in the Washington College Grant (WCG). This grant does not negate a student's need for a scholarship from WSOS, and everyone is entitled to receive the WCG. Students from families up to 55% of median family income are eligible for the full grant while students from families up to 100% of median family income are eligible for a partial grant. Grant amount is based on tuition and may be used to support degrees in any field. These are guaranteed state funds through the B&O tax which was passed in 2019. Smith was an important advocate for the B&O tax.

Monger stated that students receiving our scholarship can use WSOS funds for up to cost of their attendance, including for things like housing and transportation. Students from families up to 125% of median family income are eligible. Our scholarship targets investments in high-demand fields. Its state match is provided through the general fund.

Legislators are supportive of our 2021 priorities including the match for our three new programs. One priority is to address that the GRD Scholarship cannot launch until the fiscal year following its first state match

appropriation. Without a statutory fix or appropriation of funds in the supplemental budget, its launch would be delayed until fall of 2022, even if a private donor should contribute today.

The other legislative priorities are specific to CTS. This next session will likely be virtual, and we are seeking input from legislators regarding our best approach to securing these changes. The first CTS priority is to adjust the current requirement that all recipients receive a high school diploma/GED from Washington state. Stakeholders have expressed this is a hurdle for non-traditional students (which is a vast majority of CTS participants). Older adults who may be long-time Washington residents but arrived here after high school are currently ineligible. Given the average age for community college goers (27), this requirement excludes adults who would otherwise benefit from reskilling through the CTS program. This eligibility requirement especially impacts the veteran and military communities.

The second priority is to address the fact that currently only credit-bearing programs are eligible to receive CTS funding even when a non-credit-bearing program leads to a high-demand career and an industry-recognized credential. This is particularly challenging because for some programs, different campuses treat the same program differently (e.g., on one campus, a commercial driving license program is credit-bearing and at another campus, the same preparation program and industry-recognized credential is non-credit, simply due to administrative decisions). This falsely limits some students access to these high-demand programs based on the accessibility of a given campus's administrative decision.

Finally, recipients of our Rural Jobs Initiative (RJI) can only pursue an eligible program at a community college in a rural county. This effectively prevents rural residents from large swaths of the state from meaningfully accessing the program. For example, the nearest community college campus to a student from Ferry County is in Spokane County. However, Spokane County does not meet the rural county eligibility requirements. Additionally, the move to more online learning may reinforce the need for this change since more rural students could take part in an online program, even if the program is based in an urban setting.

Monger reported that our critical legislative partners are steadfast in their support for the WSOS program. We are hearing their enthusiasm for our strong program outcomes. They have expressed prioritized support for programs which serve students of color in 2021 budget conversations and for our legislative priorities.

### **Program Update & What's Next**

Connors announced that she just passed her one-year anniversary as the Executive Director at WSOS. She stated that this year's budget prioritized adequate staffing. We welcomed Vanesa (Vane) Contreras Rodriguez as Communications Coordinator to our External Affairs team. She will specialize in supporting our Scholar communications. With the addition of Rodriguez, we are increasing our social engagement, revamping our message platform and moving forward with strategic work. We have a fourth position posted for this team in a Communications Officer role.

The hiring for the Development team is now complete with two new additions. Jeric Quiliza joined the team as our Development Coordinator to support donor and gift data entry, donor reporting and acknowledgement. We also welcomed Sarah Szabo to the team as our new Philanthropy Advisor. Sarah will design and implement a major gifts program strategy for WSOS, managing a donor portfolio of champions with interest and capacity to make large-scale gifts to WSOS. We are now poised to engage in the feasibility study.

We realigned the Programs team by each scholarship: BaS, CTS and GRD. We welcomed Victor Zamora, Programs Director, to oversee the delivery and success of all our programs. Sue Ann Huang, our newly hired CTS Program Manager, will launch a support system for our CTS Scholars during this academic year.

The RJI is launched, and we are ready to learn. The biennium match is maxed with a \$1M investment. The goal of the RJI is to meet local industry demands which are specific to the region. Chemical dependency studies are addressing the opioid crisis in southwest Washington. Agriculture programs are focused in the Tri-cities regions. This scholarship provides additional support intended to offset hurdles for rural students. At least 400 Scholars will be supported over the next four years. Upcoming priorities include changing

legislation to maximize accessibility to online programs nearby colleges; seeking partners to reach the cap for the next biennium; and assessing impact of the scholarship award amounts.

Connors asked Board members for their thoughts on how we can best serve rural students. Smith stated that the biggest challenge for them is access to broadband, and he is excited that WSOS is focused on finding creative solutions. Park noted that we are unfamiliar with this space and she expressed appreciation for our taking on this challenge. Cecchetti suggested that we solicit input from affected rural students.

Connors thanked the Board for approving the program design for the advanced health care program (GRD). Approving the design has stimulated many valuable conversations. Connors expressed special thanks to Cecchetti and Wilson for establishing valuable connections. We are hopeful that the GRD can be launched in 2021. Reaching the biennium cap of \$1M would create an opportunity for a small pilot program. GRD is designed to address health care provider shortage gaps across the state with a physical and behavioral health focus and it targets rural and other medically underserved areas. Students would receive a scholarship and practicum remuneration to incentivize program completion and placement in medically underserved areas. Our goal is to support approximately 100 nurse practitioners over the five-year pilot. We are prioritizing a legislative fix to allow the program to launch in 2021. The first \$500K grant has been submitted, and we are advancing two other conversations. We are seeking \$2M to max the cap for two biennium and fund the pilot. We are also exploring which clinics we will utilize for the program base.

A feasibility study of our \$200M fundraising campaign has begun in earnest. The Ostara Group withdrew their proposal given internal changes within their team. We approached the runner-up from our competitive review, Breakthrough Northwest, and they provided a modified proposal within our budget. We have now officially launched the feasibility study in partnership with Breakthrough! We are engaging key partners in the Study Advisory Committee comprised of staff and community partners, including some Board members. In October, we will begin testing our case statement and soliciting feedback. The feasibility study interviews will be conducted through January 2021 with a preliminary report delivered to staff in early 2021 and a formal presentation to the Board at our March meeting.

At our January 2020 Board meeting, Connors shared her first exercise as Executive Director with a SWOT analysis of WSOS. Connors reported an update to that analysis. Through donor and legislator meetings, our strengths are widely known and recognized. Our weaknesses can be attributed to insufficient staffing, and we have made great strides with strengthening that this year. In terms of opportunities, CTS and RJI are off and running. The county and tribal matching are on hold. GRD has reinvigorated conversations with known partners. We are addressing our threats through legislative meetings and providing targeted resources to our Scholars so they can better navigate COVID impacts.

Our strategic priorities are well underway with Polenska's focus on delivering scalable, statewide programs. Building the brand is moving forward with the additional staff who have been hired. Funding to 2030 will now become possible with the feasibility study underway and Szabo's addition on staff as our Philanthropy Advisor.

Board members expressed their gratitude for Connors's hard work and vision.

#### **Finance & Program Administrator Update**

Connors announced that two excellent Board member candidates have been identified and both are being vetted by the Governor's office. She hopes to name them at our December Board meeting.

Connors presented a financial report through 7/31/20. Total assets increased 8% since April to \$120.9M, and investment returns also increased. The state match was recorded with the \$2.5M pledge statement from Gary Rubens. Total liabilities decreased by 1% to \$28.3M due to scholarship disbursements. Net assets of \$92.6M represent an 11% increase. The Brad Smith RJI pledge of \$1M covering four years was paid in full in August. That still shows as a receivable on the 7/31/20 financial statements. Avista Corp. made a \$30K pledge (\$10k paid in 2020 with the remainder paid over the next two years) and Boeing made a \$100K pledge. Costco doubled their commitment to sponsoring OTalks from \$50K to \$100K. The state had

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promised \$500K but we received \$250K as implementation funds, not as the state match. The balance will be received within the fiscal year.

Connors presented proposed substantive and non-substantive changes to the Finance & Investment Committee Charter.

**Board Action:** Cecchetti made a motion to approve the changes to the Finance & Investment Committee Charter. Miller Adams seconded it, and it carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Karyl Gregory