

If you have followed your daily newspaper and kept up with events in Olympia during the past year, you probably know that state-funded support for higher education continues to be pared back drastically. Whereas Eastern was receiving \$44 million just a year ago to support the enrollment of its students, it now receives just \$40.8 million to enroll those same students.

"Higher education is more impor-

tant than ever as a driver of the state's economy," says Dr. Stephen M. Jordan, president of Eastern. "It is vital that we have a strong voice in Olympia and in Washington D.C."

As a result, it is more important than ever for EWU to keep in contact with state legislators so they are aware of issues critical to Eastern's continued effectiveness as an institution of higher learning. To continue providing a level of excellence in the education we provide, EWU needs to receive as much financial support from the state as possible in these times of dwindling funds.

So, what better way could there be to maintain relations with Washington legislators than by tapping the wonderful resources of a state fairly bursting with EWU alumni?

That was the thinking behind the EWU Alumni Association's creation last year of a Legislative Alumni Network. Eastern's director of Alumni Relations, Angela Brown (MSC, '03), facilitates the program, which links EWU alumni with

their legislators on a district-by-district and purely voluntary basis.

"The premise was that we wanted at least a few advocates for EWU in each of the 49 legislative districts," says Brown. "As of now, we have placed people in the districts most sensitive to what happens at EWU."

Two other alums co-chair the program — Frank Klarich (BA, '98), and Tim Hatley (BA, '85).

"I became involved in this program through my affiliation with the Eastern Washington University Alumni Association Board, which I joined in early 2002," says Klarich, a regional sales manager for GE Capital in Redmond, Wash.

Klarich did an extensive amount of work related to legislative affairs while a student. He was the ASEWU

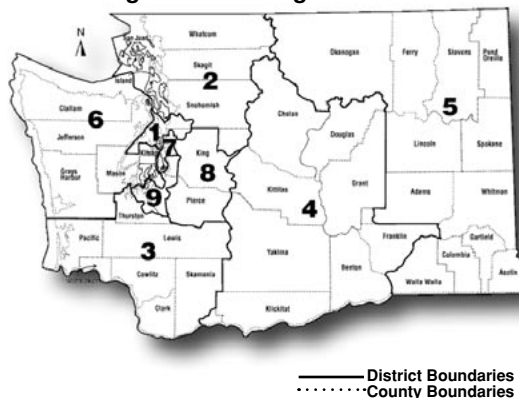
important dimension to the university's legislative effort," says Durrie. "In the spirit and reality of the adage, 'all politics is local,' alumni and friends of the university are effective advocates when working with their district legislators in support of the University's legislative agenda. As constituents, advocates are able to cultivate a personal relationship with their legislators in their communities, something that translates into more careful listening by legislators when legislation important to the university is being considered."

Gombosky, who will provide direction and leadership for this and other government relations activities, sees a lot of promise in the involvement of students through Eastern's Legislative Internship program, and alumni through the

A Network of Support

by John Soennichsen (MFA-'97)

Washington State Congressional Districts



Legislative Affairs Council member in 1997-1998 and ASEWU executive vice president, 1998-1999.

"Whenever you have a collective set of voices pushing a single set of issues," he says, "it makes it very difficult for legislators to ignore you. There is an obvious strength found in numbers, and collectively, a single message carries with it a great deal of weight."

The program officially kicked off Sept. 7, 2002, when Sen. Lisa Brown and Sen. Mark Schoesler came to Eastern to talk to more than 20 alumni who wanted to be involved with the Legislature in support of Eastern.

George Durrie, who has served as a director while still carrying out his teaching duties, will work with new incoming director, Jeff Gombosky, for the coming legislative session, then move back to his full-time faculty role in Eastern's Government Department, where he holds a tenured position and has taught for 33 years.

"An advocacy network can add an

Network.

"I think students and graduates are very effective for colleges and universities," he explains. "They have a personal story to tell about how their education benefited their life. I'm the first person in my family to graduate from college, and I think many other Eastern graduates came from the same background. I don't think there is any substitute for hearing how Eastern opened up opportunities for students and graduates."

Some of the alumni who signed up for the program were already friends with their legislators or otherwise knew and were known by their representatives. Others signed on knowing they would be approaching their legislators for the first time.

"These are people who first care about EWU, and secondly are courageous enough to go out on a limb and try to make Eastern a better place," says Klarich. "They have diverse political opinions, but all care about EWU."

The Legislative Network has already

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made some inroads in cementing relationships between the University and the Legislature.

"Probably our biggest accomplishment so far was to have a major presence at Higher Education Day in Olympia," says Angela Brown.

Higher Education Day is a spring event where representatives and alumni of all universities come to mingle with their legislators and discuss education issues. Eastern was the most highly visible of all the schools represented at last year's event, and EWU alumni made appointments with legislators that same day.

This fall there will be a legislative reception scheduled for Nov. 7, 2003, immediately following the pep rally in Spokane for the Governor's Cup festivities. A series of legislative receptions throughout the eastern part of the state will follow.

"Legislative networking like this is unique to Washington and among the Big Sky schools as well," says Brown, "in that it is well organized, not just a loose network of advocates. It's a volunteer activity that allows many alumni to be involved with their alma mater. We support them by providing resources and direction through this program. We provide information, templates for letters, suggestions for talking with legislators and any other information or resources our alumni need. The whole point is to foster a relationship between legislators and EWU alumni to support Eastern's legislative priorities and concerns."

Eastern is still seeking representation in this program from alumni in many of the state's 49 districts. If you would like to volunteer your time, please call Angela Brown at (509) 235-5023 or Jeff Gombosky at (509) 359-4210.



Jeff Gombosky

Jeff Gombosky was the youngest member of the House in 1996 when, at age 25, he was elected to represent Spokane's 3rd legislative district, along with Lisa Brown and Alex Wood. As a legislator, he served on the Higher Education and Economic Development committees and spent a two-year stint as chair of the Finance Committee, which has oversight on all state taxation matters. He recently joined EWU as director of Government Relations. Gombosky will primarily work and reside in Olympia.

"Jeff brings the perspective of a seasoned legislator and is an alumnus who is vitally interested in his alma mater," says Steve Jordan, EWU president.

The outgoing director, George Durrie, has nothing but praise for Gombosky: "Jeff is very intelligent, politically savvy, with good, proven analytic skills - after all, he is a graduate of the Government Department at Eastern and served as one of my legislative interns in 1994. His leadership abilities were recognized this past session in his management of some highly charged revenue measures as chair of the House Finance Committee. He is recognized on both sides of the aisle for his no-nonsense professionalism and his ability to work across party lines to achieve good public policy."

Prior to his first day in his new position, we asked Jeff Gombosky a few questions about his role as a student at EWU, a state representative and now as Eastern's director of Government Relations.

Perspective: What was your education at Eastern like? Are there any faculty members or courses you particularly remember?

Gombosky: I graduated from the Government Department. Dr. Keith Quincy, who retired this year, was my advisor. He was a great teacher and I learned a lot from his classes. I got my start in Olympia through Eastern's Legislative Internship program. While I was an intern, I took classes

from George Durrie and Sen. Lisa Brown. That experience was critical to my decision to run for the State House in 1996.

Perspective: What legislative actions affecting higher education are you most proud of?

Gombosky: I think the best lesson learned from the economic boom that occurred in the late 1990s is that innovation is a key part of economic growth. And colleges and universities are critical to innovation. The Legislature created the Advanced Technology Initiative, which primarily benefits the research institutions in our state but has long-term implications for the state to support university research. Second, Eastern winning the authority to offer the Doctor in Physical Therapy was another innovative approach that the Legislature authorized during my service. And third, addressing pay equity issues for part-time community college faculty was another important issue the Legislature addressed but has yet to solve.

Perspective: What do you see as some of the rewards of working for Eastern as director of Government Relations?

Gombosky: I think issues related to higher education constitute the most important public policy area our state faces. I don't think those issues have received the attention they deserve and I look forward to getting the chance to work on those issues. Whether it's creating a long-term funding source, or how students access the system, or financial aid issues, it's important work.

Perspective: How will your past service as a legislator help you do a better job for EWU?

Gombosky: Success advocating public policy requires that people know you and trust you. I served seven sessions in the State House and had the opportunity to work with a lot of legislators - both Republicans and Democrats. I worked hard to earn the trust of other legislators and I think that will help when I work with them to advance Eastern's goals.