

# Executive Summary

**DATE:**Finance Subcommittee Discussion DRAFT for January 19, 2022

**RE:**   Proposal for Master of Environmental Studies to join Western Regional Graduate Program

1. Administrative Recommendation:

Approve membership in the Western Regional Graduate Program for Evergreen’s Master of Environmental Studies program.

1. Explanation:
2. **Present policy comparison**

The College rejoined the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program effective fall quarter 2019 and currently enrolls 85 WUE undergraduate students. The College seeks to expand our engagement with Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) through participating in their graduate level consortium.

Under the authority of RCW 28B.70.050, the Board of Trustees may authorize entrance into a compact with the WICHE, which would then permit the college to exempt graduate students admitted under the parameters of the contract from payment of a portion of the nonresident tuition fee differential.

# Background:

Master of Environmental Studies (MES) student FTE has declined by 27% since five years ago; and in this timeframe, the program successfully recruited a full entering cohort of at least 45 students only once in fall quarter 2018. Enrollment recovery in this program would help the college’s overall enrollment challenges.

Table 1: MES Recent Enrollment History

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Academic Yr | Fall Qtr new students | Program Total Annual Ave FTE |
| 17-18 | 40 | 92.9 |
| 18-19 | 46 | 92.8 |
| 19-20 | 38 | 85.7 |
| 20-21 | 34 | 70.3 |
| 21-22 | 28 | 67.4 (projected) |

Among Evergreen’s graduate programs, MES has been the most successful at attracting non-resident students. In its peak non-resident enrollment period (2012-2016), MES was enrolling 19-24 non-residents annually. Non-resident enrollment declined after 2016 and is now less than 10 students. In the competitive recruitment market, a tuition-based strategy could help recover non-resident enrollment

Four of the six public four-year institutions in Washington already participate in WRGP with a selection of their graduate programs. Eligible non-resident graduate students from any of the 14 participating western states or the Pacific territories are offered a tuition waiver which makes their effective operating and building fee portions of tuition 150% of the resident graduate student rate. The WRGP tuition discount rate is approximately 35% less than regular non-resident tuition, and in comparison to published non-resident tuition, it represents savings of nearly $10,000 per year.

# Opportunity analysis:

MES staff analyzed data on recent applicant inquiries, completed applications for admission, and yield from offer of admission to enrollment to look for opportunities to leverage the Western Regional Graduate Program to increase enrollment. In doing so, we also needed to identify the number of additional enrolled students that would be needed to ensure we break even (or increase) net tuition revenue, given that some students that we would already enroll as non-resident tuition payers would become eligible for the substantial WRGP tuition discount.

The average net tuition, after waivers, for a non-resident graduate student is $17,575 per year. In the last five years, MES has successfully recruited and enrolled an average of 1 non-resident from WRGP-eligible states. If the WRGP program were in place, this 1 new recruit would have paid less tuition; net tuition for a WRGP student is $1,131 less than average net tuition for a regular non-resident. Thus, MES would need to recruit at least 2 total new students from WRGP-eligible states to pass the break-even point in terms of net revenue.

Three points of opportunity were identified based on this analysis. 1) Increase the number of inquiries from students in eligible WRGP states. 2) Increase the number of inquiries that result in completed applications. 3) Increase yield to enrollment after the offer of admission.

MES staff analysis has confirmed that the inquiry pool and the admitted pool of WRGP-eligible students is deep enough to glean that number or more, thus this policy change is, in part, a yield initiative from our existing applicant pool. Participation in the program also gives Evergreen’s MES program visibility through the WRGP website which could attract students who had not previously considered Evergreen, or those who opted not to apply to Evergreen in the past if the sticker price of non-resident tuition seemed out of reach. The MES staff have drafted a communication plan to inform prospective students of their potential eligibility for this significant tuition discount and to raise awareness among new prospective students.

As a further step to maximize the potential benefit of this new initiative, and in order to keep the college’s waiver portfolio in balance, MES would no longer award its existing merit waiver to incoming students. In recent history, program staff have found that the merit waiver has not been as effective a recruitment tool as we anticipate this more widely visible WRGP rate will be.

**Proposal:** Authorize entrance into a compact with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to join the Western Regional Graduate program for the Master of Environmental Studies degree program to encourage enrollment growth.

# Proposed by:

Eric Pedersen, Chief Enrollment Officer

# Scheduling:

This policy change would take effect for fall 2022 new Masters of Environmental Studies students. Targeted outreach to prospective students from eligible states who are already in the recruitment pipeline would begin as soon as possible to inform them of the increased affordability of Evergreen’s program. Given that this policy would be adopted mid-recruitment cycle, we would expect to see even more impact on enrollment in subsequent years.

# Staff Review:

Executive Associate to the President

Chief Financial Officer