

Public Testimony – Wednesday, March 27, 2013
by Alex Edwards

Co-chair Komp, Co-chair Monroe, and members of the committee – my name is Alex Edwards. I am a graduate of West Linn High School class of 2007 and Oregon State University class of 2012. I am currently a software engineer developing retrofit avionics at Garmin AT here in Salem. I'd like to talk about how the opportunities I had in my education helped prepare and guide me to be where I am today.

Specifically I'd like to talk about an outstanding program from my undergraduate education that excels at both helping students learn and preparing them for real world opportunities after graduation: the Tekbots program. Tekbots is the name of a hands-on, lab based curriculum in the school of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at OSU that was started over 10 years ago thanks to seed funding from Tektronix up in Beaverton, hence the name *Tekbots*.

At OSU they like to call the Tekbots program a “platform for learning” because the Tekbot is something that you build in only your second term of school during your freshman year and then spend four years improving and expanding. Throughout my time at OSU, I learned, developed and implemented dozens of improvements to my Tekbot.

The benefit of the Tekbots program is that students are given something tangible from day one that they can actively play with and upgrade to do almost whatever they can imagine. The Tekbot is a real world application of theories learned in classroom lectures with obvious connections to industry. And at the end of the program, students are encouraged to take their Tekbot to job interviews as a work sample and to help explain their experiences both in and out of the classroom. A recruiter at Tektronix had this to say about the Tekbots program at OSU:

“As a recruiter, I believe it’s real-world stuff and it would be very impressive to hear how they developed, designed, and actually implemented all the things through the 4 years.”

In fact, a friend of mine who was also a partner on my senior design team (and one of the groomsmen in my upcoming wedding) did just that when interviewing for a software engineering job in Portland before graduation. He took the time to outline exactly how we had developed and implemented the latest adjustments to our Tekbots in order to create an internet enabled version of robot freeze tag. He was offered the job the next day and he’s been working there for nearly a year now.

I credit the Tekbots program for a large part of my educational involvement and interest as an engineering student at OSU, and as one of the main reasons I have been able to succeed in my post-graduation industry career. Funding for programs like these will ensure that the next generation of Oregon students has the same opportunities I was given, and ensure that local engineering companies continue to fill positions with graduates of the Oregon University System. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.