

Vernier Software & Technology

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April 14, 2015

Senator Rod Monroe, Co-Chair
Representative Betty Komp, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
State Capitol Building, Rm. H-178
900 Court St., NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the importance of increasing funding for the seven Oregon public universities to \$755 million for the 2015-17 Biennium.

Christine has been a member of the Portland State University Board of Trustees since its inception in July 1, 2014, but our affiliation with PSU dates back long before that time. As the owners of Vernier Software & Technology, we have worked collaboratively with the Science Education Department at PSU to help ensure that students come to the university with a sound foundation in science. Along with the university, we have pushed for greater participation in science fairs—especially by students from low-income neighborhoods. We also have invited teacher candidates out to our office to learn about the latest in technology and to walk away with equipment to use in their classes. Additionally we have worked to support the Portland Metro STEM Partnership—which is a model for the other six STEM hubs around the state.

This is important work. Clearly, a majority of the best jobs in the future are going to be in the STEM area. It is essential that as many of these jobs as possible go to kids from Oregon, including students from diverse backgrounds. High-tech companies that need STEM-educated employees will always be able to fill their jobs. The open issue is whether they hire students from Oregon or hire students from other states or other countries. We must have STEM-educated graduates from our Oregon universities to fill these Oregon high-tech jobs.

Achieving that end is more easily said than done, however. All of our universities are woefully under-resourced. At PSU, for example, state funding has dropped to 12 percent of total operating budget. Students and their families cover 80 percent of the cost of their education through tuition and fees. Students who have to take out loans to cover that bill will graduate with an average \$26,000 in student debt. That is daunting for anyone, but especially for our first generation and economically disadvantaged students. Faced with the prospect of leaving college with that level of debt, an unfortunate number of prospective students will simply choose not to attend college at all.

Even worse, some of them will attend for a year or two, decide they cannot afford to go on, and will leave with debt to pay off and no degree to help get a family-wage job.

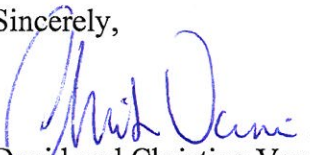
Because we care deeply about making college accessible for everyone, we recently made a large donation to PSU for student scholarships for underserved students in STEM and social work. But philanthropy alone cannot solve the funding problems. The State must do its fair share and properly fund higher education.

We appreciate the decision by the Ways and Means Co-Chairs Richard Devlin and Peter Buckley to allocate \$670 million in funding for the universities for 2017-19. This is a substantial increase over what the universities received for the current biennium, and what was proposed in Governor Kitzhaber's budget. But this level of funding would still leave our students wanting. During its last meeting, the PSU Board of Trustees voted to cut \$4 million from the budget **and** increase tuition by 4.5 percent for resident undergraduate students in order to live within our budget if the Legislature allocates only \$670 million for the public universities.

Given that stark reality, we would again urge you to approve the universities' request for \$755 million for the upcoming biennium. \$755 million is not a randomly chosen number; rather it is the amount of funding necessary to cover the cost of continuing the current biennium's tuition buy-down and get the universities back to the amount they received five years ago, in 2007-09. That amount does not account for inflation or additional student enrollment.

Please let us know if we can provide additional information, or answer any questions.

Sincerely,



David and Christine Vernier