



**NEUTRAL Testimony on HB 2101
For the Senate Ways & Means Committee
March 23, 2021
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Chair Billinger and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on House Bill 2101 on behalf of Kansas' independent colleges.

Kansas' Independent Colleges:

KICA represents the twenty independent colleges of Kansas, all of which are not-for-profit institutions of higher education, all of which offer undergraduate degrees, all of which have their principal campus in Kansas, all of whom are regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, and all of whom maintain an open enrollment policy consistent with Kansas statutes.

The state of Kansas, via the Kansas Board of Regents, has specific obligations governing "private and out-of-state" educational institutions, per the Private and Out-of-State Post-Secondary Educational Institutions Act. All twenty KICA institutions are exempt from that statute. Thus, for the independent members of KICA, KBOR has no governing role (as it does for the six 4-year Regents universities), coordinating role (as it does for the community colleges, technical colleges, and Washburn University) nor regulatory role (as it does for any for-profit college or college based outside of Kansas that wishes to operate here).

KICA institutions serve nearly 24,000 students and employ more than 5,100 Kansans in 18 separate Kansas communities.

Existing Engineering Initiative Ignores Private College to its Detriment:

When the University Engineering Initiative (K.S.A. 76-71,37 and subseq.) was created in 2012, the text of the law clearly the purpose for the program. It says the needs to "ensure engineering industry partners find the new talent, designs and techniques needed to fuel economic growth and business success in Kansas" because "the needs of the citizens of the state of Kansas will be best served" by doing so.

Yet, if the purpose is to increase the number of engineers being educated in Kansas AND to keep them here, in Kansas, as productive contributors to Kansas' social and economic growth, then Kansas' private non-profit colleges should be included in that effort. Unfortunately, we are not.

The proponents of the Engineering Initiative emphasize the importance of ABET accreditation and an in-state control of the program. There are not merely three universities in the state that meet these two conditions. There are four: KU, K-State, WSU, and Benedictine College.

Benedictine College has ABET accreditation for mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, and civil engineering.

In fact, Benedictine's program is the fastest growing ABET engineering program in the country, and the fast in history to grow from scratch to accreditation, investing \$24 million in private dollars to

support their new program. 75% of their students come from out-of-state, and 50% stay in Kansas for their first job after completing their degree.

Benedictine's success is in some ways an outlier for non-profit colleges in Kansas. Benedictine is perhaps KICA's most well-funded institution. For the other nineteen KICA institutions, the existing law's exclusion of funding for private non-profit colleges provides a powerful disincentive for them to create and grow engineering programs of their own. This undercuts the goal of the initiative.

Other KICA institutions have explored creating engineering programs of their own. But each time, they have discovered that the uneven playing field upon which they would be competing greatly diminishes the sustainability of any such programs. If we are on our own to recruit and retain faculty or build next generation facilities, but the "big three" are given additional funding, we will always be at a disadvantage. That disadvantage is enough to dissuade us from building engineering programs. In some cases, our schools are deciding instead to partner with private colleges in other states to have our students complete their degree elsewhere. These students do not come back to Kansas.

Thus, while the existing engineering initiative's is driving growth in engineering at the three public universities, the exclusion of private colleges simultaneously decreases growth at non-profit colleges, thereby blunting the initiative's overall impact.

Finally, because of the distinct mission of smaller non-profit colleges like those in KICA, we attract students who may find greater academic success in smaller, more tightly knit campus communities. Not every student thrives at a university the size of KU, K-State or WSU. Moreover, Kansas' private colleges have a strong track record of graduating students on-time who choose to stay in Kansas, even those who come from out-of-state. Last year, more than one-third of our out-of-state students stayed in Kansas after graduating. The state's policy goal of increasing the number of engineers is limited even further because it does not support those engineering-inclined students who would thrive at a smaller private college.

Amendment Request:

These facts lead us to testify on HB 2101 as a neutral party with a strong recommendation that the underlying University Engineering Initiative (K.S.A. 76-71,37 and subseq.) be amended to include support for non-profit colleges, and appropriations be made in accordance with that change.

That said, we do not expect that funding for each non-profit college would be equivalent to the share given to each of the three public universities. KICA institutions are indeed smaller, and our engineering programs are likewise smaller.

We would thus request that the program be amended, and the non-profit colleges *as a whole* be awarded a portion of the funds provided. From that aggregate pool, individual non-profit colleges would draw funds as they grow their individual programs and be bound by the same statutory obligations as the public universities.

Conclusion

KICA and its member institutions request you amend HB 2101 to include non-profit colleges in the University Engineering Initiative and fund our contributions to this critical workforce need as befits our role in the overall educational and economic development work of Kansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you on this issue. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional data as you request, as well as work with any member who would like to remedy this concern through an appropriate amendment.