

Testimony of
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Chairman Webster and distinguished members of the Higher Education Funding Study Council. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak for a few minutes about Shawnee State University and the role we play in serving Southern Ohio as a high quality regional university.

As you consider higher education's role in preparing Ohioans for the challenges that lay before us, I ask you to remember: one size does not fit all. Different universities fill different roles and serve different types of students. Young people and non-traditional students need an array of options to enable them to meet their educational goals.

Shawnee State is the newest state university, established in 1986 with a clear and singular mandate: Make a difference in the lives of those who live in Southern Ohio. We have been and will continue to strive to be a high quality regional university.

In achieving that mission we are constantly mindful of the Appalachian Ohio and first-generation college student populations we serve. Fully two-thirds of our students are the first in their family to attend college. These are students who are more likely to attend college if they can do so near to home and family. Were it not for Shawnee State University these students might not have the opportunity to pursue a college degree – and the need for more college graduates is acute in the region.

As you can see on the front page of the pamphlet I have handed out, the median household income in the counties from which Shawnee State primarily draws its students is over \$10,000 less than that of Ohio and the United States. It is no coincidence that while the percentage of Ohioans with a bachelor's degree is about 22 percent, only about 10 percent of residents in the Shawnee State counties have achieved that level. As the CHEE report notes, there is nearly a \$20,000 difference between the average annual income of a high school graduate and an individual who possesses a bachelor's degree. We will not improve the level of income and the quality of life in Appalachian Ohio without increasing the number of individuals with a bachelor's degree.

Since 2001 Shawnee State has expanded access to a college education by increasing enrollment 13 percent. We are one of several institutions that are open-access. But we play many roles. We are an important part of the array of postsecondary options for Ohio citizens.

To provide the access that is central to our mission, it is vitally important we keep tuition low. Research indicates our students are keenly sensitive to cost as they consider whether or not they should attend college.

Let me say that again – our students are not choosing what college to attend, but whether they should attend college *at all*. That is how important keeping tuition low is to our mission of providing the opportunity of a college education to those who live in our region.

I also ask the council to keep in mind that many students from Appalachian Ohio are academically at-risk. They need special attention from a university that can meet their needs. Shawnee State provides a small student-to-teacher ratio (about 14 to one) and services designed to help students unfamiliar with campus life to adjust to the demands of a college education. We assess our students' ability to meet their academic goals, and help in developing a plan to meet them. If they are not sufficiently prepared, they take basic courses, typically in math and English. Thereafter, they are like any other students and are expected to achieve the same level of performance as someone who came to Shawnee State with an ACT score of 28.

We take our access mission very seriously, but we are committed to being a **high quality** regional university. We provide the opportunity to attend college *and* challenge every student to achieve excellence. We offer faculty and staff dedicated to bringing out the best in our students. Our promise of a brighter future through a university education must not ring hollow.

In demanding the best of our students, we expect the same level of performance as at any other university. In the new knowledge economy, the coin of the realm in both higher education and business is a bachelor's degree. Shawnee State offers a number of associate degree programs which are typically fully enrolled and provide very marketable skills. However, we encourage students to look upon an A.A. degree as the beginning of their college education, not the end. This standard is supported by business leaders looking for highly trained employees.

At Shawnee State, students can earn bachelor's degrees in such fields as: fine, digital and performing arts, social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, teacher education, business, pre-law and pre-med. We have a thriving undergraduate research program. This program is a Center of Excellence and links our students to Third Frontier projects.

As of this date 100 percent of our current students graduating in pre-med who applied for admission to medical or dental school have been accepted. In recent years our acceptance rate has been in the neighborhood of 90 percent.

In the past 20 years we have graduate nearly 9,000 students. Beyond our impact on individual students, Shawnee State has played and will continue to play a major role in the region.

In two weeks this council will be considering economic development. Shawnee State plays an important role in regional economic development as a major employer in

Southern Ohio. Based on a conservative 1.5 multiplier, an economic analysis placed the impact of our student and staff spending at over \$54 million last year.

Our professional faculty and staff serve the community in leadership and volunteer roles. Through our Office of Outreach Services, Shawnee State provided training to more than 160 local companies and about 50 government offices and agencies during the last school year. Shawnee State partners with OSU's Endeavor Center to provide training to the regional business community. We also have entered partnerships with higher education institutions throughout the tri-state region.

Shawnee State is also host to a number of postsecondary options. We offer an on-campus GED program, and a full array of federal TRIO programs. We are working with schools in three counties on Tech Prep, and are working with local schools and hospitals to develop a literacy council. Our students are in the community teaching adults to read, we extend our health care education programming to the community, and in partnership with local schools and the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education (OACHE) raise student awareness of the possibilities created by a college education.

As I have mentioned, the vast majority of our students are from Southern Ohio. They earn a degree at Shawnee State and use it to begin promising careers in the region. Our programs are absolutely essential to the communities in Southern Ohio who depend on our graduates. Shawnee State graduates are found in every niche of the local economy, and are particularly prominent in education and the allied health professions.

At Southern Ohio Medical Center, 100 percent of the current certified occupational therapists and physical therapy assistants are Shawnee State graduates. About 80 percent of the staff at Pike Community Hospital call Shawnee State their alma mater.

I am very proud to say that Shawnee State has already made significant changes to better serve our students and the region.

Our experience as a university is somewhat unique in that we have always provided educational opportunity to so-called "non-traditional students." Just a few years ago Shawnee State was almost exclusively a commuter university. Our Board of Trustees decided to expand the opportunities at our university by enhancing the on-campus living experience. In response we have formed a partnership with a local developer who has built residence halls without spending any taxpayer money. This year we had 500 beds, and this fall we will add another 100, with more on the drawing board.

We have seen in the last few years growth in the number of full-time traditional students. We are striking a very happy medium that brings together traditional and non-traditional students to create an exciting, dynamic learning environment in which students benefit from the experience of their fellow students as well as their professors.

We may have increased enrollment, but too many of our students do not graduate. Addressing that deficit is part of the reason we have undertaken a dramatic change in campus culture by switching from quarters to a semester calendar.

Many of our students come to Shawnee State entirely unsure if they can succeed at college. These students may be adequately prepared (many are not) but nothing in their culture tells them they can make it, or that they need to complete their education. In a 10-week course one bad quiz at week five, and these students are wondering if college is right for them. The 15-week semester will give students more time to adapt to college, more time to learn the course material, more time to succeed. The semester calendar will also allow them to enter the workplace sooner, something that prospective employers have strongly urged.

There are a number of students who go away for college, but decide they want to be closer to home. There are also students attracted to the academic programs at Shawnee State because of their high rate of placement upon graduation.

About 40 percent of our graduates transfer into Shawnee State with prior college credit. To facilitate the smoothest possible transition to our campus we are adding a new admissions officer with the specific responsibility of assisting transfer students. I should also point out that transfer students are not included in completion rates. In effect, Shawnee State must bear a lower apparent completion rate for providing safe harbor to transfer students.

Shawnee State will be offering its first master's degree this fall. The program was created in response to the Occupational Therapy field now requiring a master's degree for licensure. Shawnee State already participates in a number of cooperative programs with other campuses to give our students the chance to undertake graduate-level work. Nevertheless, we felt strongly that if we were to ensure a steady supply of licensed occupational therapists for our citizens and communities, we had to offer our own master's degree program.

At Shawnee State we are expanding the opportunity of individuals to attend college, we are offering new programs in fields that will help graduates secure bright futures, and we are adapting our campus to the needs of students. We believe we are proceeding in the same spirit of reform that has inspired this council.

Yet our efforts to keep this promise of a high quality regional university serving the needs of our students and the surrounding region are being eroded by fiscal pressures.

We have done what we can to squeeze the most out of every dollar received. In 2003 Shawnee State was the most efficiently run campus in Ohio. Our expenditure per FTE was \$7,996, more than \$1,100 less than the second lowest campus.

Because of our efficiency, we are able to offer an annual tuition of about \$5,500, second only to Central State as the lowest in Ohio.

As I have already noted, our students face the most challenges in earning a college degree, yet Shawnee State receives less support – in 2003 \$474 less per FTE than the average main university campus – to help our students overcome these challenges. As you can see on page three of the pamphlet, our state operating support per FTE has dropped from \$6,204 in 2001 to \$4,262 in 2004. We suffered a decrease of almost \$2,000 compared to the average drop for universities of \$959.

We are concerned that current funding discussions could lead to further reductions of resources.

To help us meet the promise of being a high quality regional university in Southern Ohio, Shawnee State has received a special Supplement, about 15 percent of our current state support. It has been whittled in recent years. In 1995 the Supplement was \$4.8 million, but this year it stands at \$1.8 million, \$200,000 below the \$2 million funding point recommended in the 1994 report of the Board of Regents, which was commissioned by the General Assembly.

Please consider the predicament we face. At Shawnee State we are expanding opportunity by enrolling more students, and giving them the top-flight education they deserve. Yet, at the same time that we are growing, our state funding has been diminishing and our tuition has been capped. We are very concerned that reduced funding is threatening our continued capacity to fulfill our mission. The money to run Shawnee State has got to come from somewhere.

I would ask the Higher Education Funding Study Council consider including in its report the following:

- Restore the five percent each year of the biennium in cuts to Shawnee State's Special Supplement through a funding model that recognizes the access mission of Shawnee State.
- Consider additional funding models that are based on factors other than average cost. Shawnee State's funding per FTE is less than the statewide average because we are open-access and almost exclusively undergraduate in our program offerings.
- Lift the tuition cap so we have the flexibility to gradually secure resources currently at risk because of dramatically reduced funding.
- Identify access to undergraduate degrees as a funding priority.
- Recognize that universities will be unable to fulfill their role in the development of Ohio's economy laid out in the CHEE report without sufficient investment by the state.

Shawnee State cannot continue to serve more while receiving less. Sooner or later something will have to give. We want to do more. We want to make a profound difference in Southern Ohio. But we need the tools to do it.

I know I speak for my colleagues in expressing our deep appreciation for the recognition regularly voiced by this council that Shawnee State and the other universities in Ohio are essential to the state's re-birth. I am at your disposal as you continue your work on behalf of the people of Ohio.

Thank you for giving me this time. I would be happy to answer any questions.