

Proponent Testimony on HB 2414

**Dr. Amy Bragg Carey
President, Friends University**

Chairman Tarwater and members of the House Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you information about the emerging engineering programs at Friends University.

Friends University, a Christian University of Quaker heritage, is a private non-profit institution was founded in 1898 and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Our primary campus is in Wichita, and we have a satellite campus in Overland Park as well as substantial online programs. In total, we enroll more than 1,700 students and annually award more than 465 college degrees.

History of Engineering at Friends University

Several years ago, Friends University began to consider adding Mechanical Engineering as a new program. This was a major that was often requested, but which we did not offer. We had significant interest from our Science and Math Department to establish an engineering program. We began by meeting with leaders of local companies that hire engineers and what we found was a pressing need for trained engineers. These company leaders indicated that they had little to no access to graduates from Wichita State and other large universities, as their graduates tended to leave Kansas after completing their programs. There was a sense among those in the room that Friends graduates would be likely to stay in the Wichita area after graduation, and thus be a resource for local companies. This group of leaders encouraged us to move ahead with developing an engineering program, in order to meet the pent-up demand for more engineers. A recent Wichita Business Journal (February 17, 2023) article titled "List analysis: Engineering firms fight familiar labor battle to start a promising 2023" indicates the need for engineers will continue to be an issue.

With the support of our Board of Trustees, we launched a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 2019. We have already graduated four students, with two more scheduled to graduate this spring. Fifty percent of our recent and upcoming graduates have accepted engineering positions in Wichita. We have exceeded the projections of our original enrollment and currently have 32 students in the major, with 50% of our students coming from Kansas. We also have two full-time faculty members with PhDs in Engineering, as well as access to a large pool of part-time faculty with significant amounts of industry experience.

Our Mechanical Engineering Advisory Board includes individuals from the following organizations: Spirit Aerosystems, KE Miller Engineering, Aerospace Systems and Components, Inc., GForce Engineering, Integrated Consulting Engineers, Weddle Consulting, and Aerospace Systems International. Additional corporate partners include: Airbus, Cessna Aircraft, Poet Biofuels, Textron Aviation, and the National Institute for Aviation Research. Our engineering program just received a grant from the Society of Automotive Engineers that will fund this year's senior design projects.

Our rigorous engineering curriculum, combined with robust corporate partnerships, small class sizes, and a missional emphasis on service to others, allows us to prepare mechanical engineers who are highly ethical, well versed in all engineering concepts, prepared for professional engineering licensure, adaptable to changing professional conditions, and committed to continuous improvement. This July we will receive final notification regarding full ABET accreditation, which will significantly help us in recruiting new students.

Just over 43% of our students at Friends receive Pell Grant funding so scholarship support is critical. Forty-six percent of our student population is ethnically diverse, and our engineering professors represent that diversity with Dr. Teresa Miller at the helm of the program, assistant professor Dr. Bhargav Koppolu, and Dr. Nora Strasser leading the Science and Math Division.

In the future, we plan to explore the possibility of developing additional engineering programs in fields such as Chemical and Civil Engineering. With thanks to donors and other support, including SPARK funding from the state of Kansas, last week we broke ground on a new Engineering Laboratory facility adjacent to the William Penn Science Facility. Once this facility is complete, Friends University will have the capacity to accept up to 90 students into our Mechanical Engineering program. We are grateful for the SPARK funding for this program that is critical to our workforce in Kansas.

At Friends University, we believe that our engineering program is poised to make a tremendous difference in the Wichita community and throughout Kansas by preparing ethical engineers who will contribute in truly significant ways to local and statewide economic growth. Because of that, we strongly encourage you to include Friends University and other Kansas private universities in the University Engineering Initiative, as proposed by HB 2414. Your support will enable Friends University to provide an excellent program, offer scholarships to deserving students and encourage graduates to continue to work in Kansas and support the growth of new companies that are locating to our great State.