



Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education

Senate Higher Education Committee Testimony
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May 15th, 2025

Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of GRF 235508 Air Force Institute of Technology and a newly proposed budget item for the K-16 ODHE GRF - Ohio Intern Academy. I am Cassie B. Barlow, Colonel (retired), United States Air Force. I am also the President at the Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education. I'm speaking to you today from the perspective of a proud Veteran, who was the Installation Commander at WPAFB, who now calls Ohio home and who has the privilege each and every day to assist in building the next generation of workforce for Ohio as the President of SOCHE.

Based upon our long-term success in Ohio with a long-standing AFIT budget line, I'd like to propose a new initiative today that will have similar state-wide impacts. But first an update on our AFIT GRF.

The Air Force Institute of Technology budget line includes the Defense Associated Graduate Student Innovators (DAGSI) and Aerospace Professional Development Center (APDC) programs that provide a pipeline for critical high tech research, education, and workforce. DAGSI provides funding for over 70 graduate level, high-tech, research and education opportunities every year to students in Ohio research universities. These projects provide research requested by and in support of our military and defense partners. Through the DAGSI & APDC program, high-tech workforce are matched with high tech positions in Ohio to include Intel, Honda, and Sierra Nevada. APDC serves more than 6,000 high-tech job seekers with 5,550 placed into jobs annually. Together, they serve 300+ aerospace and defense companies and Ohio federal agencies. Through a collaboration between DAGSI, APDC, and the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) we have built the first and most successful joint research and workforce development program between Ohio and the United States Air Force (USAF), and every year, the Air Force adds dollars to its multi-million dollar commitment to this program.

Every year, DAGSI increases the pipeline of graduate research opportunities while preparing the next generation of high tech workforce by funding new defense research projects. APDC works with the aerospace and defense community in partnership with Ohio research universities to attract and connect high-tech job seekers to jobs across Ohio. Additionally, APDC educates college students on federal job opportunities here in Ohio. Both programs are highly sought out by well qualified applicants. Generally, there are five times more applicants than available funds for research projects. **70% of students whose research is funded through DAGSI choose to stay in Ohio as part of the science, technology, and defense workforce.** Funds for this program support the USAF through the DAGSI/APDC and significantly contribute to economic development in Ohio. Programs at WPAFB (\$16.75B) and NASA Glen Research Center (\$1.8B) alone have a statewide impact of \$18.55B.

Based on our long-term commitment, success, and proven ability to build capacity for the State of Ohio, we would like to build upon a very successful pilot project, the Miami Valley Intern Academy, funded by the Federal Government and the Ohio HS Tech Internship Grant. This Academy in three years time went from 70 applicants in year one, to over 780 in year three. In addition, we went from 30 paid internships in year one to over 700 in year three. The expanded initiative is called the Ohio Intern Academy that will build upon a phenomenally successful regional model to build the next generation of high-tech workforce by exposing Ohio high school students to in-demand occupations through a world-class internship program. Through the Ohio Intern Academy (OHIA), students (Career Tech and Traditional) across the State will receive first-hand experience in their choice industry, or multiple industries, while being paid as interns, through an Ohio budget line of \$1M/FY. Students will earn the OMJ Readiness Seal and College Credit for their work-based learning experience and will fill out the FAFSA as well as receive individual professional development.



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The research on engaging students in local industries and encouraging their interests is clear. The importance of experiential work in the development of young people is critical to the retention of students. In addition, practical job-related experience plays a vital role in the formation of young people's identity. Most importantly, careers have cultures, habits, practices, and ways of thinking and behaving that simply cannot be learned in an "unreal" setting. The research also states that the most successful initiatives have utilized a one-stop shop to work with industry to build jobs, to educate parents, to coordinate with schools, to prepare students, and to match them with their industry of interest.

The focus of OHIA is on Ohio's ten in-demand industries (Manufacturing, Aerospace and Aviation, Skilled Trades, Healthcare, Information Technology, Energy and Chemicals, Financial Services, Food and Agribusiness, Logistics & Transportation, and Military and Federal), that are showing significant job growth projections over the next ten years. SOCHE will connect interns with in-demand pathways that will guide them to immediate work opportunities after graduation, or to certifications or higher education opportunities in Ohio. Employers will pay 50% of the salary and the OHIA budget line will pay the other half, funding approximately 1100 internships for students across Ohio. Approximately 53% of Ohio high school students attend college and the vast majority stay in State. Studies have shown students with internships are more likely to stay in their State for college.

As a result of the Ohio Intern Academy, students will be prepared to fill the jobs in our State created by economic growth. In addition, companies will benefit by hiring our students after they have completed their experiential learning opportunities. Approximately 98% of OHIA students who enter the workforce immediately after graduating remain at the company where they worked as an intern.

Our request is to maintain the AFIT line item at \$2.0M/yr and to add new funding of \$1M/FY to the ODHE K-16 line, Amendment HC0640, for the Ohio Intern Academy.

"Of the foregoing appropriation item 235533, Program and Project Support, \$1,000,000 in each fiscal year shall be distributed to the Strategic Ohio Council on Higher Education to support the Ohio Intern Academy program."

This funding will allow us to build the next generation of in-demand workforce and to keep them in Ohio while fueling our very strong economic engine across the State. We recognize that there may be multiple different proposed initiatives in the budget focused on High School interns, and we want to offer our dedicated support to any of these initiatives and the funding so approved by the legislature.

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