

An open letter to members of the Arizona Legislature:

Our new strategic plan and funding model are designed to make Arizona higher education leaner and more student-focused. Every additional dollar allocated by the state will offset the cost of an Arizona resident student to attend one of our public universities, an innovative approach endorsed by Governor Ducey and every major business group in Arizona.

Now, the Legislature has an opportunity to make a real investment in resident students and the role our public universities play in shaping our state's future. An allocation of \$32 million in new, ongoing funding – less than one-third of the cuts sustained by universities last year alone – would demonstrate a real commitment both to Arizona students and our larger mission to make available to them a quality education at an affordable price. The benefits of that are immeasurable and shared by all of Arizona.

This is why:

Educated citizens live more self-sufficient lives

We represent Arizona's three public universities and the larger system of higher education in this state. In just weeks, more than 20,000 students will graduate from Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona. Part of what we enjoy most is meeting first-generation graduates – those pioneers who are the first members of their family to complete college.

Research tells us a university diploma can change life's entire trajectory for the graduate and their children. Not only does the holder of a bachelor's earn more (an estimated \$1 million over the course of a lifetime), but the fact they've graduated college becomes one of the strongest predictors their own children will someday do the same.

College graduates also have better access to health care and lower rates of incarceration, welfare and unemployment. We could go on.

Public universities help drive the Arizona economy

Few state investments generate a better return on investment than higher education. In fact, according to a just-completed, first-of-its-kind analysis, Arizona's public universities were responsible for 102,000 jobs and \$11.1 billion in total economic impact during fiscal 2015.

The analysis was not all-encompassing. For example, it did not account for the multiple spin-off businesses created by faculty, staff and students through their efforts or as a result of university research. Likewise, the economic impact report excludes the earnings of our Arizona graduates – last estimated at \$13.2 billion in 2012.

Regardless, this analysis illustrates the economic powerhouse that is Arizona's system of public universities.

We heard you

During the economic downturn, you asked that our institutions do more with less. So, over the course of eight years, we took dramatic steps to reduce our overhead and become more efficient. There was a lot of pain – Arizona’s public funding of higher education [now ranks 49th in the country](#), on a per capita basis – but the news isn’t all bad.

The taxpayer cost per degree awarded from one of our universities is actually lower now than it was in 2010. That’s remarkable.

Over time, we ask that the state commit to funding half of the cost to educate each Arizona resident student. Currently, the state pays just 34 percent – down markedly from the 88 percent the state paid as recently as 1998. The 50 percent split is more than symbolic. It says the state of Arizona is an equal partner in supporting higher education for the benefit of Arizona students and families.

We can only get there with your support. The \$32 million we respectfully request would flow through the new, university funding model – helping drive down the cost of an education for Arizona resident students and keep the cost of a university education within reach.

Thank you for your consideration.

Eileen Klein, President, Arizona Board of Regents
Michael Crow, President, Arizona State University
Rita Cheng, President, Northern Arizona University
Ann Weaver Hart, President, University of Arizona