

Testimony of Travis Jennings

"Education Regulations: Roadblocks to Student Choice in Higher Education,"

Before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Thursday, March 17, 2011

Good morning. My name is Travis Jennings. I am the Electrical Test Department Supervisor at Orbital Sciences Corporation, Launch Systems Group, in Chandler, Arizona. My responsibilities involve managing electrical test technicians engaged in the process of validating the acceptability of flight and ground support hardware for complex multi-stage missile systems.

I am representative of the typical line manager, within a manufacturing organization, frequently tasked with the responsibility of locating and hiring qualified employees.

Employing graduates from both public and private sector postsecondary technical programs, I find their technical capabilities to be indiscernible. I have however; found it difficult to recruit from the three community colleges in the Phoenix metropolitan area offering technical degrees programs.

Several barriers seem to impede our recruitment of public school students. Typically, public schools operate within a traditional sixteen week semester, two semesters per year, with limited summer attendance and staff. Recruitment is only possible during regular semesters. Additionally, career placement duties are assigned as a collateral responsibility to existing staff rather than a dedicated department as seen

in the private sector. My last attempt to recruit from a local community college required an extraordinary amount of time away from work presenting the employment opportunities. These tasks are normally performed by placement specialists in the private sector, who take the job information from the hiring manager and, in turn, provide a pool of qualified candidates.

The career placement services, in private sector schools, are certainly a valued commodity offered to employers in search of qualified technical candidates. It has been my experience that within these private postsecondary educational institutions there is a genuine customer-supplier relationship between the students, faculty and staff. The students understand from the beginning of their enrollment that the tuition he or she pays is compensation for contributions far beyond classroom instruction. There is an understanding by both students and staff that the service provided doesn't end with a diploma. It is clearly evident that career placement for graduating students is a high priority for the private postsecondary education sector. Employers, like Orbital Sciences Corporation, need only reap these ancillary benefits.

In addition, the private sector strives to understand the needs of their end customers; potential employers. As I've witnessed, private postsecondary educational institutions actively practice continuous improvement through the use of industry advisory committees. I am currently a standing member of ITT Technical Institute, Tempe, Arizona, School of Electronics Technology, Industry Advisory Committee, and have recently received an invitation to participate on the advisory committee for DeVry University, Phoenix, Arizona. These advisory committees allow industry leaders the opportunity to provide constructive feedback and recommendations for curriculum

enhancement based on graduate performance in the industry. This approach has an immediate benefit for employers as new graduates enter the industry armed with the skills and knowledge to solve real issues in the workplace.

In Orbital's Manufacturing Electrical Test Department, the ideal candidate for an entry level position is a recent graduate of a two year technical program. Orbital strongly encourages advancement and growth through continued formal education coupled with on-the-job-training. The rate of return for continuing education is immeasurable, as each team member will return to the workplace with increased knowledge, skills and expertise, fostering innovation and driving the organization to the next level. Private postsecondary schools accommodate working adults with flexible schedules, frequently offering evening, weekend and compressed classes. This is mutually beneficial to employees and employers, allowing employers to retain a skilled workforce while the employee is increasing their potential for growth in their respective technical disciplines.

As our work force expands, I find myself instinctively contacting one of the private sector technical schools in the area, first. I typically get an immediate response from a career services professional that provides me with an applicant pool meeting the job specifications. This allows me to fill positions quickly and maintain production schedules and ultimately customer commitments. Additionally, my employees are encouraged to pursue greater opportunities within the company and know that this is only achievable with increased formal education. Many of these employees know this can be accomplished with the flexible schedules offers by the private sector postsecondary institutions. Thank you for this opportunity to provide these comments.