

Senate Bill 2003

Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Senate Appropriations Education & Environment Division, My name is Dr. Polly Peterson, President of the University of Jamestown. Today I'd like to offer support for Senate Bill 2003, but with one amendment request regarding the North Dakota challenge grant program. I would like to ask for your consideration in adding the foundations of private, North Dakota-based universities as eligible applicants for this program.

The reason is simple: At the University of Jamestown, we serve North Dakota students. They are North Dakota-educated. And they are needed to fill critical workforce needs across the state.

Leveraging Private Donations

The decision to include private, North Dakota-based universities in the challenge grant program would allow our foundation to further leverage contributions from individuals—just as the private foundations of public institutions do. Even when a donor desires to give to the University of Jamestown's foundation, ultimately, that same dollar given to a public university's private foundation is worth more. As we seek to raise funds from a highly overlapping and interconnected donor base, the University of Jamestown finds itself at a distinct disadvantage.

Scholarships for Students

The Matching Grants statute specifically supports “projects dedicated to the advancement of enhanced academics” which include investments in “research, scholarships, technology, endowed chairs, and educational infrastructure,” while excluding scholarships for the benefit of athletics, campus facility repair projects, and new capital construction.

We propose including the University of Jamestown for projects dedicated exclusively to student scholarships, thereby eliminating any question regarding the eligibility of private university participation in this program. We believe funding for higher education in North Dakota should focus on funding students who are residents of North Dakota, and who attend a North Dakota college. As you evaluate opportunities for state support to align with students' best interests and ideal learning environments, we hope the challenge grant discussions will reflect these same priorities.

Graduates for Workforce

The University of Jamestown has 1,372 students in 48 majors, 7 masters, and 3 doctoral programs. UJ has approximately 250 full-time employees and an economic impact of more than \$110m. Our students are an integral part of our communities as students and future residents. Our retention of students in the state after graduation exceeds 70%.

UJ students are graduating with degrees in nursing, elementary education, business administration, exercise science, secondary education, civil and mechanical engineering, biology, accounting, criminal justice, and computer science, to name a few of our top majors. These graduates are filling jobs in critical-need areas. When workforce challenges abound, we should be prioritizing every effort to retain our high school students at North Dakota institutions of higher ed.

Current Student Support

Matching grant funding would not be the first instance of public support benefiting students at the University of Jamestown. Jimmie students currently access four of North Dakota's seven scholarship offerings, demonstrating the state's commitment to supporting higher education for all North Dakota residents. These scholarships are just one way state funding empowers students. It is essential that funding follows the student—allowing those with a 25+ SAT score or demonstrated financial need to apply for state grants and academic awards. This approach ensures that students can use funding at the institution of their choice, whether public or private. State dollars are already making a difference for private college students through these programs—because they are North Dakota students first and foremost.

Leveraging Private Funds

With the executive budget proposals supporting a request for \$50 million to challenge grants, we would like to ask for the University of Jamestown (and University of Mary) to be included in this program moving forward. To be clear, we do not wish to negatively impact any final allocation to the institutions currently included but would ask that any appropriation be included within the final appropriation approved.

The University of Jamestown believes it could harness at least \$600,000 in challenge grant funding, to leverage an additional \$1.2 million in scholarships for its students.

A Note of Gratitude

In closing, I thank you for supporting this program for more than a decade. Challenge grants are a wonderful tool for higher education in North Dakota. We appreciate each opportunity the legislature has presented to support the state's students and meet our workforce challenges.

We would greatly appreciate your consideration to include private institutions in the matching challenge grant program for scholarships for North Dakota students.

Thank you for your time, and I would stand for any questions.

Dr. Polly Peterson, President
University of Jamestown