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May 12, 2011

Bruce Shepard
PresidentWestern Washington University
Old Main 440
516 High Street
Bellingham, WA 98225-9000

Dear President Shepard,

On behalf of our state's technology business and research leaders of the Technology Alliance board, we are writing to express our grave concern over recent reports that Western Washington University is considering the closure of its computer science program. While we appreciate the significant ongoing budget challenge the university is facing, we cannot agree with this proposal at a time when demand for computer science graduates is growing. This is one of the degrees in *highest* demand of any in our state and is critical to our future economic well-being.

In reviewing Provost Riordan's statements to the media, we appreciate WWU's commitment to quality and your desire to carefully review the university's strengths and weaknesses. We completely agree that strategic cuts make more sense than continued across-the-board cuts, which erode quality. However, the major with some of the highest demand in our state economy should be provided with the additional resources it needs to maintain standards of quality, not face the threat of elimination.

As a public university, maintaining computer science clearly aligns with your mission "to serve the people of the State of Washington, the nation, and the world by bringing together individuals of diverse backgrounds and perspectives in an inclusive, student-centered university that develops the potential of learners and the well-being of communities." Closing down a well-respected computer science program that prepares students for high-impact, rewarding careers and that supplies our innovative industries with high-caliber talent that enables them to grow and thrive does not serve the people of Washington or the students of WWU. It clearly will harm our communities by eroding access to high-demand programs for our students and further depriving our fast-growing technology industries of a locally educated workforce.

Just five years ago, the Higher Education Coordinating Board directed our higher education institutions to produce more computer science graduates. At that time, Washington ranked 38th in the nation in the production of STEM degrees but first for importing graduates in these fields. According to data from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Washington ranks 45th in the production of computer science bachelor's degrees per 1,000 computer science occupations in the state, and demand for computer science graduates continues to grow. Every recent study by the U.S. Department of Labor shows computer science graduates in very high demand for the foreseeable future.

More recently, the Governor's Higher Education Funding Task Force issued a proposal to grant our public universities, including WWU, with more flexibility to set undergraduate tuition in the face of declining state investment while setting

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targets to increase STEM degree production – a proposal for which we, along with many other partners in the business and labor communities, fought hard during the legislative session. Now that the Governor is poised to sign this legislation into law, it would be disappointing and short-sighted to consider the closure of WWU's computer science program. In fact, it seems to us that this discussion could not have surfaced at a worse time.

As industry leaders representing companies that include Microsoft, Boeing, and Google, among others, we would be happy to provide whatever guidance or feedback you seek on how to improve the major and make it more relevant to potential employers. In closing, we sincerely hope you make a wise and forward-looking decision in what we know and appreciate are extremely trying times for WWU. Thank you for your kind attention on this extremely important issue.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Jaech
Board Chair

Susannah Malarkey
Executive Director

cc Catherine Riordan, Provost, Western Washington University
cc Steve Swan, Vice President for University Relations, Western Washington University
cc Technology Alliance Board
cc Don Bennett, Executive Director, Higher Education Coordinating Board