

An open letter to the PSU Provost regarding the Systems Science Program

We, the undersigned, express our strong support for the continued existence of the Systems Science Program at PSU. Students in many departments take both graduate and undergraduate SySc classes as requirements or as electives for many non-SySc degrees and certificates. Undergraduate SySc courses are filled to capacity and generate revenue well beyond the cost of the program. Course enrollments have in fact doubled recently, paralleling the global market for researchers and professionals trained in systems/complexity science.

Systems Science has promoted interdisciplinary research at PSU for fifty years. SySc faculty and students lead or support a broad spectrum of collaborations across the campus, and the systems field continues to make valuable contributions to interdisciplinary research and societal problem-solving in

- data science
- biomedicine
- health, human services
- coupled natural-social systems
- sustainability
- energy
- disaster preparedness
- business analytics,

and other areas. The uniqueness of the program offers still untapped potential to contribute to PSU's national and international recognition. A recent external review characterized the program's achievements, given its miniscule resources, as "astonishing" and urged PSU to invest in the program.

Although we understand that a policy of not replacing retiring faculty helps balance the budget, the two tenured SySc faculty need to be replaced when they retire, since not doing so eliminates the program. Should it be advantageous for the program to move to another college, it should be allowed to do so with its tenure lines and a viable budget. **PSU's current budgetary crisis must not be allowed to result in the demise of this productive, innovative, and cost-effective program.**

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MS Student

Christopher Nicholas Embrey

MS student

Jordan Beary

Graduate Student

Catherine Moore

PhD student

Phino Fernandez

PhD student

Hsu-Feng Andy Shaw

M.S. Student

Shane Dicks

PhD student

Alma Frankenstein

MS student

Angie Fagg

Systems Science Student

Jenna Volcom

MS student

Alex York

Graduate Student

Michael Weisdorf

Ph.D Student

Sai Kiersarsky

Graduate Student

Victoria Wells

Strategy Director at dotdodtdash,
alumnus

Appendix: Unsolicited comments from signers of the open letter

COMMENTS BY PSU FACULTY

Sherril B. Gelmon	Professor of Public Health; Director, PhD in Health Systems and Policy Program, OHSU & PSU School of Public Health.	We in HSMP highly value the contributions of SysSci given their focus -- and ours -- on systems. Wayne in particular has done a lot of work in health services, and he and his colleagues have been very generous in giving our HS&P PhD students opportunities to take SysSci classes. We now list several of these classes in our recommended list of electives for our PhD students. Wayne has also been a guest speaker for our HS&P PhD seminar. Neal has served on several SysSci PhD committees.
Bill Feyerherm	prev. Grad. Dean & Vice Provost; now emer. Professor, Crim. Justice	I strongly support your request. The tools of Systems Science have proven absolutely valuable in my own research, and the program has added immeasurably to the cross disciplinary experiences and opportunities for PSU students. As Graduate Dean for over a dozen years I can also say that it has added to PSU's reputation for unique and multi disciplinary approaches.
Melissa Appleyard	Associate Dean, Graduate Programs, School of Business	It would be terrific if the University could convene faculty in departments teaching data science-related curricula (e.g., Business, Computer Science, Econ, ETM, Math/Stats, Systems Science, Center for Executive and Professional Education) to determine the University's strategy in this arena. The strong and growing market demand documented by IPEDS data for CIP code for Management Science alone (see p. 5 of the attached report entitled ") merits an analysis of programs that could address this demand. Thank you,
Christina Nicolaidis	Professor, School of Social Work	There is wide-spread recognition of the program's utility to students across the University. Personally, I would hate to see us lose such a useful and successful program. Many of our undergraduate and graduate students take classes in System Science; and some of our PhD students have even said one of the reasons they chose our program was that they could take their substantive area classes in System Science. Plus, I can't count the number of times I have recommended that colleagues consult with system science faculty when faced with complex methodological issues in their own scholarship
Alexis Dinno	Assoc Prof, OHSU-PSU School of Public Health	Delivered two talks on Levins' Loop Analysis methodology to the SySc community—which always includes students and faculty from other departments, including Public Health, Math & Statistics, School of Government, OHSU faculty, etc., I serve on the dissertation committee of a SySc student, and direct my students and fellow faculty that way, when they need resources on complex systems analysis.

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Richard Dozal-Lockwood	Asst Prof, OHSU-PSU School of Public Health, PhD SySc	<p>Demand for Systems Science is growing. The accrediting body for Schools and Programs of Public Health is called the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH.org). Within the past two years CEPH has modernized its criteria for accreditation to include core concepts from the Systems Science scope of practice. The OHSU-PSU School of Public Health is now in its fourth year. At the time of the merger the set of core competencies represented the status quo for programs of this type which had been stable for more than a decade. The discipline of public health is increasingly espousing a domain of expertise that employs interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary theories, methods and partnerships. Grant seeking is shaping this shift. Increasingly, external funding sources are requiring detailed descriptions of interdependencies, relationships, levels of phenomena and dynamics. These ideas are central to the long history of Systems Science. This shift has driven CEPH to require programs at all levels, graduate and undergraduate, to demonstrate "cross-cutting themes" and core competencies in "systems thinking". New texts (i.e., 2019) have been published by medical personnel who have been trained by Systems Scientists, for the purpose of advising programs on how to prepare for this new accreditation emphasis. Portland State University is a center of excellence for this sophisticated domain of research. If PSU recognizes this value and not only retains tenure lines, but strategically enhances the program, then the resource rich domains of medicine and public health could be exploited as target markets. I envision a role for Systems Science at PSU to reinforce the original motive for an urban university - provide high-level training to the stakeholders in the city - much like the Center for Executive & Professional Education. Health care programs are growing in number. The Systems Science program can respond to this new opportunity through distance learning platforms that leverage the longevity and productivity of the program as the sine qua non of expertise. Given this vision, it would be a shame to squander the opportunity.</p>
Craig W. Shinn	Emeritus Professor, Public Admin	<p>Former Department Chair, former Director Public Affairs and Policy Doctoral program and former Director Executive Master of Public Administration "I've long been a supporter of Systems Science because of what it uniquely brings to PSU. It's the birth place of our doctoral programs, a point of origin for our trans disciplinary approach to graduate education, and offers a vital intellectual stimulation for those interested in solving today's and tomorrow's problems in theory and practice."</p>
Tom Gillpatrick	Professor of Marketing	<p>Have worked with system sci faculty and students over the years- an opportunity for university that should be supported at a higher level</p>
Anthony Rhodes	PhD candidate in Mathematics and CS faculty	<p>Intel Corporation Machine Learning Engineer</p>

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Hyuny Clark-Shim	Adjunct Instructor & Doctoral Student, SSW	I had an opportunity to take SySc class (Dave Hall's class) previously. I think that class and other courses in SySc offer meaningful learning opportunities for students.
Kelly Cowan	Adjunct Assistant Professor, School of Business Administration	I have also been a student in Systems Science and found it to be indispensable to my future work.
Naghmeh Daneshi	Senior Instructor, Mathematics	I have taken several classes in SySc department and Dr. Wakeland was on my PhD committee.
Nicole Sisco	Assistant Director, Center for Executive and Professional Education (PSU CEPE)	PSU administrative staff member who has worked with stellar Systems Science faculty (David Hall) over the course of 6 years on education abroad for PSU students and professional training opportunities for the community.
Rebecca Lockwood	Grants & Agreements Intake Coordinator - SPA, Alumnus	PSU administrator and alumnus who enjoyed and gained relevant knowledge from the SySc courses I took.
Angela Hamilton	Coor Student Operated Services, Alumnus	<p>This is not only a legacy program and one of the only if it's kind in the country, but Systems Science or Complexity Science is literally the future of natural and social sciences, and as we know, a critical component of sustainability education and developing more complex ways of addressing the wicked problems we face in the world.</p> <p>The Systems Science PhD program is an under-appreciated gem at PSU. It has excellent faculty, close-knit students, research possibilities, and is the epitome of INNOVATION--something PSU is recognized for. However, my own lack of math background led me down another doctoral road.</p> <p>The elimination of this program is precisely indicative of the reductionist science that is countered by an understanding of complexity science and of the narrow thinking that has brought our world to it's current unsustainable, unhealthy, unethical, and unjust state of the planet that we live in. We need MORE SYSTEMS SCIENCE woven into EVERY program at Portland State, not the elimination of it.</p>

COMMENTS BY NON-PSU FACULTY

K. John McConnell	Professor, Dept Emergency Medicine and OHSU/PSU SPH	Director, OHSU Center for Health Systems Effectiveness
Karen B. Eden	Prof Medical Informatics & Clin. Epidemiology, School of Medicine OHSU; PhD SySc:ETM	Every year I send our PhD students to take classes in Systems Science.

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Melinda M. Davis	Assoc Dir, OR Rural Practice-based Res Network; Assoc Prof, Family Medicine OHSU	I have taken classes and I have worked with students and faculty in the program on funded research projects.
Lynn M. Marshall	Assoc Prof, OHSU School of Medicine + OHSU-PSU SPH, Director, PhD Program in Epi.	<p>I'm so distraught to hear that the Systems Science program at PSU is being considered for elimination. Closing the program would be an enormous loss. Your program is the only setting at OHSU and PSU where the School of Public Health (SPH) PhD in Epidemiology students can take courses in systems science and modeling. To my knowledge, at least 2 of our PhD in Epidemiology students have taken your course in Agent Based Simulation (SYSC 625) because it is the only doctoral level course available on this topic locally. It is vital for our doctoral students training in infectious diseases. Specifically, the Agent Based Simulation course was a cornerstone of Dr. Ian Pray's dissertation research on the transmission of <i>Taenia solium</i> from pigs to humans in Peru where cysticercosis is endemic. Likewise, Michael Ray, a current student, took this course in Fall 2019 in preparation for his research on antibiotic resistance. These are two examples of complex problems in diverse areas to which the principles and applications of systems science are essential.</p> <p>A further consequence to halting the Systems Science program would be the loss of faculty locally with irreplaceable expertise in this field. I also know that you are among the few PSU faculty outside of the joint SPH who collaborate widely on pressing public health issues. As a specific example, you served vital role in mentoring Dr. Pray when he was a doctoral student. You served on his Dissertation Committee and guided him in the proper and rigorous implementation of agent based simulation modeling. Without the Systems Science program and your expertise locally here at PSU, Ian would have had to look outside of Portland for this expertise.</p> <p>Systems science has been, and will continue to be, highly relevant to solving complex problems facing our society on local and global scales. Your program and the expertise of you and your faculty enable a) rigorous collaborations among local experts to tackle these problems and b) to train the next generation of experts. Therefore, I fervently hope that the Provost appreciates the value that you and your program bring to scholarship in Portland. Not just preserving, but supporting and advancing Systems Science at PSU would be the ideal outcome.</p>
Nancy L. Haigwood	Prof and Director, OR National Primate Research Center, OHSU	Our center has been the beneficiary of Systems Science through collaborations and shared work that is vital to our continued success.
William Hersh	Prof & Chair, Medical Informatics & Clinical Epi., School of Med, OHSU	Some of our students take courses in the SySc program.

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Miranda Lim	Staff Neurologist, Portland VA and Asst Prof Neurology, OHSU	Close collaboration with SySc faculty and trainees through DoD funded grant, resulting in 2 scientifically groundbreaking and seminal papers on factors/sequelae of traumatic brain injury
James C Chesnutt	Assoc Prof Family Med and Neurology School of Medicine OHSU	We have worked on numerous national level projects and high profile publications regarding concussions. In which systems science has been the most significant contributor to the unified importance of our project leading to national and international recognition of our work
Anais Tuepker	Asst Res Prof, General Internal Medicine and Geriatrics, OHSU	How foolish it would be to close this useful program. I hope the letter helps get them to reconsider.
Samuel T. Edwards	Assistant Professor of Medicine, OHSU	I am very disappointed to hear your program is under threat! I have been getting very interested in complexity science, and had been meaning to reach out, but am swamped with other responsibilities. I am a general internist and health services researcher at the VA and OHSU. I currently have a career development award to study a VA program called Home Based Primary Care, which delivers care at home to complex older veterans with functional limitations, with a large multidisciplinary team. Through some experience at a VA sponsored complexity conference in San Antonio in 2016 (speakers included Yaneer Bar Yam, Jeffery Braithwaite, Kurt Stange...) and the complexity science interest group at NAPCRG (North American Primary Care Research Group), I have been trying to think about how to use some of these ideas and methods in my work. Older adults are definitely complex, as are the models we use to try to care for them...
Brian Chan	OHSU faculty	Research collaborator in the PSU Social Determinants of Health Initiative

COMMENTS FROM SUPPORTERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Ian Pray, PhD MPH	Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer, CDC	I recently heard the news that PSU is considering eliminating the Systems Science Program. I hold this program in very high regard, and benefitted greatly from our collaboration and the launch pad it provided for my doctoral research.
Jacquelyn Christensen	Visiting Adjunct Professor of Psychology - Pitzer College	Collaborator in multi-disciplinary endeavors
Nate Forst	Sustainability Consultant	I received an my MBA from PSU in 2012 with a focus on sustainability. I fought hard to take electives in SySc during 2nd year, and the classes I took had a profound impact on my thinking and overall appreciation of my time at PSU. Please reconsider this action immediately.

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Kjell van Zoen	Lean Whole Systems Instr. PSU CEPE, Strat Energy Mgmt Coach Energy 350	Apply systems to my everyday life and work. Coach and teach it. See it as instrumental to changing our current global paradigm.
Teri McKenzie	MA Whole Systems Design, former PSU employee (ESM dept)	I am a former PSU employee (ESM) with a MA in Whole Systems Design (not from PSU). Systems thinking is THE norm nowadays and holds the answers to many, many of the problems currently facing the planet.
Brion Hurley	Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt	No formal connection, but gave a talk at SySc seminar a few years ago, and feel systems thinking is severely lacking in the businesses I consult with
William W Dinsmore	Technology/Quality Engineer 3 Kroger Corp	PSU Alumni Economics 1996. Huge fan of the work the SySc Dept does.
Darcy Bedortha	Director, HORSES on the Ranch	PSU Alumni, with awareness of need for more systems science embedded in all education

COMMENTS FROM PSU ALUMNI/STUDENTS (NOT SYSTEMS SCIENCE)

Allen Grimm	Senior Data Scientist - CVS	My most recent degree is an MS from PSU's EE department. During that time, I took all of my electives within the SySc department and view those classes as the edge that has given me a fundamental advantage in my career ever since.
Jacob McCoola	Outdoor Studies Program Mgr, Colo. Mtn. College	During my Educational Leadership and Policy MS work, I took multiple SySc courses and was a TA for David Hall.
Kelly Nagle	PSU alumni	Course in system science while at PSU opened my mind to how every subject can be connected.
Debbie Gordon	MPA, PSU, 07'	Political activism requires systems thinking. The coming global transformation of our economy and energy systems requires systems thinking.
Kalera Stratton	MS, PSU; MPH Epidemiology student, OHSU; Instructor, PCC	PSU alum & current joint School of Public Health student; I believe that Systems Science programs are vital for moving scientific thinking forward.
William Shelton Wright	PSU alumnus	PSU alumnus who would have minored/majored in SySc if available when I was there.
Jennifer Elstrott	PSU Alum, GIS Analyst	PSU geography alum, wish i had taken systems science sources. Very valuable field for many disciplines.

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Debbie Gordon	BS, BFA, MPA, Climate Activist	Systems Science needed for transformational Changes Ahead
Steven Fiala, MPH	Student, Health Systems and Policy	Evaluation Lead, Oregon Public Health Division, Oregon Health Authority
Rose Goueth	Biomedical Informatics Pre-doctoral Fellow	National Library of Medicine OHSU School of Medicine Graduate Studies
Shauna Petchel	Doctoral Candidate, Health Systems and Policy	OHSU-PSU School of Public Health
Elizaveta Walker	Doctoral Candidate, Health Systems and Policy	OHSU-PSU School of Public Health
Sam Settelmeyer	PhD Student SSW	Out of Department Student allowed to partake in the bounty of our SySc course offerings
Osman G. Tanrikulu	PhD Candidate Public Affairs & Policy Program, Sr Res Asst Ctr. Turkish Studies	I am in the PAP PhD Program; however, I took classes from the System Sciences Program.
Christopher "Risto" B. Rushford	M (Eng) Systems Engr student	I am pursuing System Science certificates in Computational Intelligence and Modeling. I think that what we're seeing here is a real-life example of the path-dependence of a policy decision resulting in decreasing returns to the university as a result of poor management on the administrations part for the program. I'm seeing it in other parts of the college as well (e.g., Systems Engineering program). I appreciated reading through the external review and I think that they touch on something that PSU as a whole needs to face up to with overall decreasing levels of student enrollment: what is the value that an education brings to students, and what is the value that each program brings to society? I'm concerned that PSU's metrics (set by external governors) are requiring them to focus on enrollment numbers, when the metrics should also be weighted by value/contribution to society, which I think systems science adds significant value in spite of the underinvestment. I have a thought, though it's more of a marketing thing: I think a lot of students don't understand what systems science is and so most of them who aren't naturally curious and inclined to investigate will ignore it because of the name. As much as I hate buzzwords, it might be worth it to look at using language that more people would understand to see if that draws greater recognition and attracts more students into the program. I for one think that the certificate programs would be attractive by their names alone if they were just better advertised.

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Kirsten Dukes	Grad Student, ELP	I studied abroad in Peru last year with a mixed discipline program including systems science. I am also a grad student in a related field, Educational leadership in sustainability
Michael Gray	Ph.D. Student & Mathematics GTA	I took courses in Systems Science as my allied area for the Ph.D. program in Mathematical Sciences.
Colin O'Neill	M. ARCH student	I took two systems science classes from Dr. Hall during my undergrad at PSU. I have carried systems thought process into my master's degree in Architecture where it has been immensely helpful.
Margaret Webster	Undergraduate Student	<p>It saddens me to read this. I have spent years of my life trying to find my place in the academia world. I started out at first going into hard sciences, then I tried out social sciences and cultural anthropology, then I tried climate and sustainability sciences. I simply enjoyed everything and eventually decided that just getting a Mathematics degree was easier. It wasn't until last summer when I took a course taught by Garry Sotnik that I fell in love with Systems Science and knew I had found what I truly loved. I realized that all the aspects that I loved from the different departments of academia were found within Systems Science. I've taken three different Systems Science classes so far and plan on graduating with a minor. If it were financially feasible for me, I would continue on to get a Masters. Not only does keeping a Systems Science program benefit myself on a personal level, but I also feel that it is one of the most important field of study in our current age. Our society has gone through the era of Big Data and increasingly faster technology. Now we need bright students who will become our future leaders to study and understand the importance that Systems Science has on our world. Other departments are important no doubt, but Systems Science is needed to be able to connect all these intricate puzzle pieces and solve all the bigger picture problems. This news must be discouraging to you and your colleagues - but know that there are people out there that see the value in what you've done for not only the department at Portland State but also to the study as a whole. I wish you the best of luck in proving the importance of Systems Science, and if there's anything I can help with, let me know. Thank you for your hard work,</p>
Patty Langasek	PSU Biology Alumna and OHSU Bioinformatics Student	OSHU Student Interested in SySc Coursework
Max Perryman	Senior at PSU	Pursuing a BS in Mathematics with a minor in Systems Science

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Chad Johnson	student OHSU-PSU SPH, Health Systems & Policy	This is very concerning news. As a student, I fully enjoyed your course and have felt its influence on how I think about issues related to the health care system. As a professional working in health professions education and pipeline support, I often hear from health care industry partners that a major concern with early career health care professionals is the lack of awareness around "systemness" and an inability to think about the interactions between departments, units, communities, etc. at a systems-level. The interdisciplinary courses offered through SYSC should be mandatory for many of PSU's (and OHSU's) graduate programs to bolster this skill and produce graduates who fill this unmet need in many industries.
Nametsegsng Boemo-Mokhawa	PhD student Technology Management	Took a class to meet requirements for Graduate Certificate in Business Intelligence & Analytics
Kruti Pandya	Doctoral Candidate, Mathematics	Took several courses offered by System Science as part of my Allied area coursework. I found those courses very useful and has helped me tremendously shape my doctoral studies at PSU.

COMMENTS FROM SYSTEMS SCIENCE ALUMNI AND STUDENTS

Lindsay Mico	Manager Data Sciences, Providence Health	I am super bummed to hear it. There are a lot of impractical and low value majors at PSU whereas Systems Science is incredibly valuable and practical. I'll add my voice to the chorus in any way I can.
Hairong Gui	Managing Director, WaHai International LLC	I was just talking colleagues about the great prospects for combining SySc and supply chain in SBA. This is unbelievable. We must fight.
Christopher Frisbie	Lieutenant Colonel, US Army, Op Res Systems Analyst (ORSA)	This program has been important to my career as an Army Officer and Operations Research Systems Analyst.
Alistair Chan	MSc, MBA, PhD Candidate at McGill U	Every student going through the program deeply appreciates it. The System Science program opened my eyes and my mind and I believe it has been an invaluable part of my education.
David Ostberg	Director of People Science, Culture Amp	It's crazy to imagine PSU not wanting to continue the SySc program. The impact of SySc is massive and it's such an incredibly important domain, particularly as our world becomes more and more data-centric.
Koei Kudo	Insights Manager, Commercial Analytics, Nike, Inc.	Rebranding (name change and more visibility) are needed. I support the highest investment option of an autonomous and integrative unit. "Complexity Analytics" is a great name in my opinion.

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Eran Agmon	Postdoc, Stanford University	The Systems Science program at PSU is very special to me, and provided the foundation for my research career in computational systems biology. I hope you succeed in preserving and expanding the program -- those plans outlined in the external review all seem like reasonable paths forward, however challenging. Please let me know if there is any way I can help.
Leslie Anne Morehead	Alumnus	Grateful graduate of a fascinating program that is needed more than ever in 2020 and beyond
Robert Hammond	Senior Product Manager, VMware Inc.	I am continually amazed at PSU's incredible lack of vision. Your classes should be pre-requisites for any degree program that involves statistics (all sciences, business, urban planning, etc). To simply state it another way: there isn't a decent STEM job out there that doesn't require the ability to study basic systems. Every single role I've had since completing my MBA involved a significant amount of data analysis that would have been impossible without understanding how to study systems. I sincerely hope the provost decides to embrace the future present trend of using simulations to make complex decisions.
Angie Fagg	Systems Science Student	I took one class and learned a lot. And saw the connections to making the world a better place and to evolution itself.