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Lynne A. McNamara, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Vietnam Education Foundation
2111 Wilson Blvd, Suite 700
Arlington VA 22201

by email to lynnemcnamara@vef.gov

Dear Dr. McNamara:

On behalf of my colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley, I am pleased to offer our perspective on the value and contributions of VEF to the training of scholars from Vietnam and to the relationship between the United States and Vietnam.

Since UC Berkeley began admitting VEF students to our graduate programs in 2004, two have earned the PhD in Civil & Environmental Engineering, another earned a Master's in the same field, and a fourth earned a Master's in Public Health. Several VEF fellows are currently pursuing graduate degrees in the fields of Electrical Engineering & Computer Science, Physics, Statistics, Mathematics, and Civil & Environmental Engineering.

Both U.S. and international studies of institutions of higher education consistently rate UC Berkeley's graduate programs as top-ranked in the world. This means that admission to our programs is highly competitive and only superior applicants are accepted. The fact that, thus far, a dozen VEF students have earned places in our graduate programs speaks well of their preparation and selection by VEF for these opportunities. Those who complete their degree programs here will be exceptionally qualified to develop their future careers and make important contributions to the welfare of their professional and social communities.

Attestations from our VEF fellows highlight the pivotal role of VEF support in their ability to pursue advanced studies at Berkeley. One student wrote: *"With a fellowship from VEF, I had more chance to successfully pursue my graduate studies at a prestigious university like UC Berkeley. I truly appreciate the tangible and intangible support from VEF during my academic life at Berkeley."*

Another wrote: *"VEF awarded me a wonderful fellowship and played an extremely important role in my graduate study at Cal, one of the best universities all over the world in my research area. It was really helpful to have constant support, especially in understanding the big picture of the education"*

system of the universities in the U.S., during the time I applied to graduate schools. I have been really enjoying the research atmosphere at Cal and thanks to VEF, I have had some extra free time during my very first semesters to conduct more research."

A third student wrote: "VEF helped me pay the tuition fees and nonresident student tuition fees. Thus, I did not need to work [as a teaching assistant] like most of other students for first year. I could focus my time on taking required courses. In addition, [a small grant was] used for buying some textbooks and reference books as well as computers which were important to me in studying and researching work."

And a fourth wrote: "I, probably like many other students, went to US with little knowledge about this country, but knew that the expense here were out of my family budget. So, I would imagine that I would be much more worried about how I could survive literally and academically if I didn't have sponsor from VEF. Well, with VEF, the procedures for me to come to the U.S. were simpler than at first sight. And then, as I came to Berkeley, I could spend more time studying rather than doing a teaching assistanceship to support myself. That eased my life of course. So I think VEF has made our initial steps easier to adapt to a new environment."

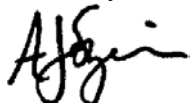
From an institutional vantage point, VEF's financial support of its fellows during their two years of study enables UC Berkeley to offer places to highly qualified international students who could not otherwise be supported from university funds. Berkeley contributes about half of the cost of education and living expenses for VEF fellows in their first two years and all of the costs in the subsequent three years.

The mission of the Vietnam Education Fund to improve relations between Vietnam and the U.S. through educational exchanges in science and technology is important and deserves continuation.

The scope and impact of VEF could be strengthened by Congressional appropriations sufficient to reduce the cost-sharing burden on Alliance schools that are public institutions, such as the University of California, where under-funding by state government is felt acutely. By forging stronger partnerships between the Congress and the National Academies, on the one hand, and state universities, on the other, more students and scholars – those who are U.S. citizens as well as those who are Vietnamese citizens – would be better served.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the strong merits of the VEF initiative.

Sincerely,



Andrew J. Szeri
Dean of the Graduate Division
Professor of Mechanical Engineering
University of California, Berkeley