STATE SPENDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

IN OKLAHOMA: PERCEPTIONS FROM MEMBERS

OF THE OKLAHOMA STATE LEGISLATURE

By

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Abstract: A significant body of literature in political science and economics demonstrates that a variety of competing interests impact state spending for higher education. With a changing political landscape and declining university operating budgets funded by state governments, the future of public spending for higher education is uncertain. This dissertation examines state legislator perceptions of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma. In this dissertation, I attempted to explore how legislators perceive state spending for higher education and determine the process by which participants seek to understand higher education’s level of financial need in Oklahoma. This qualitative study aimed to explore these perceptions through legislative session observations, committee documents, and participant interviews of legislative members and legislative assistants. The study found that Oklahoma has a higher education governance system with high autonomy, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE). The OSRHE receives money for all public higher education institutions in a lump sum appropriation. The lump sum is one component of a large omnibus budget bill that legislators vote on for all state agencies. Because of higher education’s autonomy and the methodical appropriations process, there is little need for most legislators to have an intimate understanding of how public institutions operate financially. The findings suggest that higher education’s autonomy and the appropriations process impact how legislators understand and perceive higher education operations and spending habits. The perception of spending habits may have long-term implications on higher education appropriations in Oklahoma.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> *As in all governmental budgetary decisions, politics plays a role in state budgeting for public higher education. There are multiple political forces acting upon the budgetary process that may influence public higher education appropriations each year (Tandberg, 2008, p. 6)*

Higher education has undergone significant changes since World War II. The operations at many public universities have slowly adapted to changing societal needs and governmental initiatives. Many public universities adopted research tendencies, and with the aid of corporate and government grants, attempted to capitalize on potentially profitable partnerships. As many institutions sought partnerships with government and private industry, new departments, offices, and types of professionals emerged to secure the relationship. Many contemporary higher education researchers have attempted to analyze the changing culture of higher education, writing extensively on the economic tendencies that now exist within the academy. *Academic capitalism* (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) initiated a body of research that explored the practice of universities as economic actors. More recent research examined the relationship in greater detail, focusing on specific practices of the university and their impacts on higher education institutions.

The research conducted in this study aimed to further the body of research addressing academic capitalism by exploring the dichotomy of university tendencies and state support for higher education. Through the lens of academic capitalism the study looked at an audience of state legislators and their perception of higher education's level of financial need at the time. The changing culture of higher education since the Second

World War and the integration of universities into the market economy suggested that the relationship between the state and higher education may be impacted by university operations. Multiple scholars have examined the relationship of university operating budgets and state appropriations. Rizzo (2004) and Ehrenberg (2000), among a host of other researchers, found that the percentage of university operating budgets funded by state governments has significantly decreased since 1980. Although the literature examined in this study highlights numerous factors that have contributed to the decline, the study aimed to explore how state policymakers perceive the financial need of higher education institutions.

Background of the Study

The 1940s began a modern series of profound and significant changes to the academy, and witnessed the use of higher education for specific economic and political purposes. The theory of *punctuated equilibrium* in a social policy perspective (Baumgartner & Jones, 1994) suggests that policy changes tend to be evolutionary. The theory contends that policy initiatives remain in a prolonged state of stasis, but are later punctuated by sudden and drastic change. The sudden changes that occur to policy are largely responsive to external conditions and events. This study was framed by the theory of punctuated equilibrium, suggesting that the amalgamation of multiple political, social, and economic events that occurred since 1940 have impacted the state of higher education. The events that punctuated change in higher education and a discussion of the related literature are highlighted in the first section of Chapter Two. The latter sections of Chapter Two discuss the literature related to public policy and state spending for higher education. Collectively, the review of the literature demonstrates that higher education is not a standalone unit but an integral piece of political and societal initiatives.

It is important to note that higher education funding is one consideration within a larger political debate. Policy discussions at the federal level currently center on two different political ideologies. The two main political camps, the Democratic and Republican parties, continue to offer competing views on the purpose of the national government. As a result, uncertainties exist for social programs, specifically Medicaid and Social Security, as the two parties fight for a balance between controlling government spending and sustaining current levels of support for social programs.

Although appropriations to higher education are historically not a function of the federal government, the national debate impacts discussions at the state level. State and federal governments are interconnected; a change to social policies at the federal level may impact how states adjust their funding, including that for higher education. Because higher education is a discretionary spending item, university officials must monitor national and state issues to gauge how changes may potentially impact state appropriations to higher education. Declining monetary support for higher education can largely be contributed to competing factors (Kane, Thomas, & Orszag, 2003). The gradual decline in funding has influenced universities to pursue alternative funding sources and operate more efficiently. Although public universities are impacted by competing factors, all discretionary spending items are subject to the strength of the economy.

At the state level, higher education funding is dependent on economic forces. In 2008, state revenue collections in nearly every state declined as a result of a large economic recession. By the end of 2009, most states experienced revenue collections well below what were anticipated, resulting in midyear budget cuts to most state agencies and a reduction in appropriations the following fiscal year (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2010). As revenue collections slowly stabilized in most states, so too have appropriations. However, the growing federal debt may suggest a potential problem. If greater efforts are made to reduce the national debt, resulting in diminished federal revenue flowing to the states, higher education could be seen as an attractive area for state policymakers to cut due to the ability of higher education to raise tuition (Ehrenberg, 2000). This could further impact the percentage of university operating budgets financed by state governments.

The impact of state governments on university operating budgets has not occurred separate from the changing political landscape at large. This theme will emerge throughout the study and undertones much of the emerging literature in the field and participants interviews conducted in this study. Academic capitalism is a byproduct of a larger neoliberal political philosophy that encourages private markets and privatization of government services. Higher education, as a government service, is impacted by the political perspective of privatization. The decline of state support for higher education increased the percentage of university operating budgets funded by institutions. Chapter two discusses the rise of universities as economic agents, and the expectation that universities seek and generate external funding sources.

Problem Statement

In recent decades the percentage of university operating budgets funded by state governments has decreased, encouraging universities to consider alternative funding sources. In addition, the debate over federal and state spending priorities created uncertainty regarding sustained state appropriations for higher education.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the process through which members of the Oklahoma State Legislature and legislative assistants perceived the current level of financial need and designated related funding at Oklahoma public universities and colleges. Specifically, the research questions were:

1. Through what process or factors do members of the Oklahoma Legislature seek to understand higher education's level of financial need in Oklahoma?
2. What do Oklahoma legislators consider when making funding decisions for higher education?
3. How do legislative staffers interpret their state legislator's understanding of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma?

Significance of the Study

Most efforts to examine appropriations to higher education tend to explore causality, looking specifically at factors that affect state spending for higher education over a certain time period. This study is relatively unique in that the proposed methods were qualitative. The study focused on policymakers and allowed the researcher to ask questions related to the discussions that took place during the appropriations process. In quantitative research, questions about the motives of individuals can generally only be theorized. Although qualitative research is typically not generalizable, because the study explored the perceptions of policymakers and staffers during the appropriations process, the study adds to the existing body of literature.

Overview of Methodology

Although a complete description of the proposed methodology is presented in Chapter Three, the subsequent sections briefly explain the research perspective and proposed methods.

Research Perspective

Studies relating to higher education finance tend to be quantitative in nature. The data for appropriations at both the national and state levels are generally easy to obtain and present an infinite number of possibilities for research. For the purpose of this study, the set of questions proposed are best explored qualitatively. The appeal for qualitative research was essentially two fold. First, the questions are exploratory. Qualitative methods are appropriate because the researcher was interested in the perceptions of state policy makers regarding the funding of higher education. Second, qualitative studies that focus on state appropriations are somewhat unique. The proposed study may provide a new perspective to the body of research, which may further scholarship in the field.

Methods

I employed three primary methods of inquiry, utilizing participant interviews, legislative observations, and document analysis. The data collected provided me an opportunity to observe participants' perceptions of state spending for higher education through multiple outlets. Participant interviews and observations were transcribed and analyzed line-by-line through the open-coding process. I then explored data using the process of axial coding to determine connected categories and themes.

Delimitations of the Study

A variety of delimitations exist for the study. First, the study is limited to the perceptions of members of the state legislature in Oklahoma; no attempt was made to ascertain the perceptions of legislators in other states. Second, legislative staffers served as a supplemental data source for the study and participants had varying levels of knowledge pertaining to the state budget process. Third, qualitative research is typically not generalizable and the results may not truly represent the beliefs of all the state legislators in Oklahoma. Next, the study was focused on the perceptions of state legislators within a specific period of time. Although the study was conducted within the context of the changing landscape of higher education, the set of questions derived from the state of higher education finance within the state of Oklahoma at the time. The study therefore, is a time specific snapshot of the perceptions of the state of higher education finance to a small cohort of state legislators and legislative staffers in Oklahoma.

Definitions of Key Terms

The study uses numerous terms that may have a variety of interchangeable definitions, depending upon the context. The following definitions, therefore, specify the meanings of key terms used within this study.

Appropriations: The term is typically defined as the amount of money given to an agency so that the agency may carry out its function or mission. In this study, it was used interchangeably with the term *allocations,* and may be used to describe; (1) The issuing of money from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher

Education to a public higher education institution, or (2) the issuing of money from a university to the various offices, departments, and divisions comprised within the institution.

Cost efficiency: Cost efficiency was a term used to explain the gap in the estimated minimum operating costs compared to actual operating costs (Robst, 2001).

Instrumentation: The term was used in two different contexts within the study. First, in Chapter Two, it refers to the use of higher education by government as an instrument to serve a societal or political initiative. Second, in Chapter Three, it refers to a section heading that lists the tools needed to conduct the proposed study.

Personnel infrastructure: Slaughter and Rhodes (2004) used the term personnel infrastructure in relation to personnel within the academy. In this context, the term refers to employed professionals within the institution.

Venture capitalists: This term denotes faculty pursuit of government or industry funded grants to pursue potentially profitable research (Blumenstyk, 2001).

Research park: Often referred to as *science cities*, the term is the investment by research universities in building complexes and industrial research laboratories, normally related to the medical field, that are used for the purpose of conducting hard science research (Appold, 2003).

Privatization: This term was used to describe a university's decreasing dependence on state appropriations and increased efforts to fund privately university operations (Tandberg, 2010).

Academic patents: This is a patent filed by an academic entity, or university research faculty, for the purpose of potential financial gain. The passing of the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 gave universities intellectual property rights to patents developed with government-funded research (Mowery & Ziedonis, 2000).

Spin-Off: These are industries that have emerged to commercialize innovative university-based research (Steffenson, Rogers, & Speakman, 1999).

Knowledge-based entrepreneurship: This is a driving force for economic growth, employment creation, and competitiveness. In this context, entrepreneurial universities play an important role as both knowledge-producer and disseminating institution (Guerrero & Urbano, 2010).

Technology transfer. This term refers to a university's creation of new knowledge and deployment of that knowledge in an economically useful way that then contributes to economic growth and prosperity (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2006).

Summary

This study emerged from academic research that suggests that the landscape of higher education funding has slowly evolved since 1940. The research perspective was driven by a collection of research from the fields of higher education and public policy. The study was framed within a political science theory, *punctuated equilibrium* (Baumgartner & Jones, 1994), that suggests that social policy initiatives remain in a state of stasis until driven by external events – focusing events-- that punctuate change (Birkland, 1997). Higher education experienced several focusing events since 1940, and the amalgamation of these events created a higher education system of self-sufficiency and cost containment. Within the context of questions regarding federal and state funding priorities, this study focused on the state of Oklahoma and members of the state legislature and their perceptions of the level of financial need at higher education institutions within the state. The findings were supplemented by legislative staff members and their interpretations of the state spending process for higher education in Oklahoma. Chapter Two further explores the context and focuses on research related to higher education finance and academic capitalism.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research suggests that since 1940, higher education has undergone a systematic shift (Ehrenberg, 2000). The implications of this shift have been the subject of much debate, especially with regard to funding, student education, affordability, access, and the future of higher education itself. Although many scholars have contributed to the larger body of work, the landscape of higher education has continued to change, making further research necessary. This chapter explores the existing research related to higher education funding past and present. The chapters is not limited to funding figures, but embraces a discussion of the shifts in politics, society and culture that have collectively impacted state spending on higher education. Research demonstrates that the percentage of university operating budgets funded by state governments has decreased significantly since 1980 (Ehrenberg, 2000; Rizzo, 2004). The review of the literature explores some of the factors contributing to this change, focusing specifically on three considerations: the use of higher education as a societal instrument, the emergence of universities as economic actors, and changes in public spending habits.

The chapter begins with a discussion of how the search for literature was conducted. An overview of the conceptual framework follows. The chapter then focuses on three trends that emerged following World War II and have influenced the evolution and expansion of higher education systems. The 1940s are an appropriate period with which to begin, as this was a time when universities emerged as a conduit for social capital and knowledge exchange (Archibald & Feldman, 2008b). The three trends discussed in this chapter include the use of higher education as an instrument of war, as an agent of social capital, and for economic development. The review then examines public spending and public policy, political decision-making, interest groups and lobbying, followed by state spending for higher education in Oklahoma. Given the extensive nature of the literature, my intent is to highlight the key points rather than to present a detailed inventory.

Search Process

The search process for this review utilized many of the modern utilities available for academic research. The ERIC database served as the foundational search instrument, and key descriptors were used in an attempt to capture relevant literature, both contemporary and foundational. The search process first utilized ERIC to find an initial set of literature. As the review expanded, an opportunity to survey new areas of relevant literature and key descriptors emerged. Utilizing abstracts, full citations, and literature reviews, the process ballooned. Google Scholar, an academic literature search engine sponsored by Google, was also used. This proved especially valuable because of its ability to interface with university systems, allowing access to academic engines such as ERIC and Lexis Nexus, and providing permissions reserved exclusively for institutions of higher education.

Utilizing both ERIC and Google Scholar, key descriptors related to higher education funding were inserted (higher education funding, state spending, university operating budgets, etc.) to capture related research. Limitations on parameters ("from

1998”, “articles only” etc.) were used to capture more recent literature, while on occasion specific detail was given for historically significant pieces. A benefit of using Google Scholar was that it operates like a spider’s web. After using key descriptors, the engine provided a “cited by” and “related articles” feature. By following the web of information, articles related to the body of research were extracted. The feature also displays the number of times a work has been cited in order to help evaluate its importance (on the basis that the number of references gives some indication of an article’s relevancy). The search started with historically relevant works and then moved to more contemporary research. Trends and events were analyzed and connections made to modern research. The next section discusses the conceptual framework that binds the relevant literature.

Conceptual Framework

The effects of academic capitalism have gradually impacted state spending on higher education since 1940. This concept (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) contends that higher education is becoming increasingly integrated into the new market economy. A body of research related to academic capitalism has emerged to explain the evolving relationship between students, universities, governments, the economy, and business (Robst, 2001). Universities have developed as interstitial organizations, producing knowledge and forming partnerships with both the public and private sectors (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). This relationship has had a profound impact on university spending, campus infrastructure, and revenue streams. The concept was important to the proposed study because of its effect on universities’ operating budgets and state financial support.

More specifically, academic capitalism pertains to how the core characteristics of universities have changed. Several scholars suggest that universities have developed into entrepreneurial business centers (Baez & Slaughter, 2001; Etzkowitz & Kemelgo, 1998). As the percentage of university operating budgets funded by government has slowly declined, universities have sought external revenue sources, and there has been steady increase in investments in academic patents (Mowery & Ziedonis, 2000), research parks (Tuchman, 2004), and auxiliary services (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). This pursuit of external funding may have influenced the way in which their financial need is perceived. The subsequent section is an historical review of state and federal investment in higher education and the integration of universities into the new market economy.

Historical Overview

> *It is commonly acknowledged that the decades following World War II entailed not only an expansion of higher education, but also a dramatic diversification of the activities regarded as the legitimate province of public higher education. These include educating the masses, advancing knowledge through research, contributing to economic development by employing and producing workers, and developing industrial applications.* (Gumport, 2000, p. 74)

Since the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862, the academy has fundamentally served to build and train an educated citizenry. By the middle of the 20th century, a new notion had come into play: the idea that universities could be used to solve a myriad of social, economic, and environmental ills. Beginning in the 1940s, universities began receiving large governmental investments – both at the state and federal level – to serve as a conduit for research, economic development, and social mobility. Higher education systems introduced organizational innovations, including new building projects, expanding research focuses, new types of professionals, and more emphasis on external relations. The following segments survey the research related to the financial relationship between universities and government since 1940. This section serves as a broad foundation for the two corpora discussed later in this chapter, public policy and public spending, and state spending on higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2006; Healy, Malholtra, & Mo, 2009; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Tandberg, 2009; Weertz & Ronca, 2008).

The theory of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) contends that social systems remain in a position of relative stasis until punctuated by drastic change. Evolutionary change occurs only incrementally, and is dependent upon *focusing events* (Birkland, 1997) to substantiate drastic change. Applying the theory to higher education systems, this overview attempts to encapsulate the large events or trends associated with the finance of higher education. A review of the research suggests that three subsequent developments seem to have generated the biggest impact and created focusing events: universities as instruments of war, universities as agents of social capital, and universities as economic instruments.

Universities as Instruments of War

The initial theme to emerge from the literature suggests that higher education finance first changed as a result of the Second World War. This movement occurred as a result of the amalgamation of two important needs and issues: 1) the need for governmental research and development (R&D) for war-related instruments (Geiger, 1988); and 2) a macroeconomic policy initiative to reduce unemployment and restructure American labor markets (Douglass, 2010).

Research and development. Research has not always been an important function of higher education (Hillison, 1996). Although it may be difficult to conceptualize in the light of modern-day academe, the emergence of academic research was long and arduous. It is important to note that the state and federal presence in academic research had a minimal role (outside that of agricultural development) until the Second World War (Kohler, 1987). Financial support for academic research was primarily dependent upon private donations, which had little presence until the late 1920s (Feldman & Desrochers, 2003; Kohler, 1987).

Hard science research truly emerged and solidified its role in American higher education during the 1930s (Geiger, 1988). Although science-related research, specifically engineering and electronics, was already practiced at several public universities (the University of Illinois and Iowa State University to name two), the decade prior to 1940 demonstrated a noticeable interdependence (Seely, 1993). The growth of hard science research played a significant role in the Second World War, as several government agencies approached higher education to assist with war-related developments. In 1945, for example, the Office of Naval Research (ONR) began contracting individual scientists and placing them on university campuses. Other government departments such as the Department of Defense (DOD) started publicly supporting academic research and funding defense-related projects. During the war, six different institutions received more than $10 million in federal support. Their military sponsors generally paid the full cost of their initiatives and controlled the work plans of the groups (Geiger, 1992; Geiger, 1997; Anderson, 2001).

During the height of the war, government-aided grants were reserved for universities with specialized research efforts. The California Institute of Technology, for example, received a series of grants for its jet-propulsion laboratory (Geiger, 1997).

While these select universities took on special assignments, others began entering the research arena and searching for ways to cash in on government and industry-related funds. Defense-related spending may simply have been a byproduct of a general increase in government spending, which almost quintupled during the decade following the Second World War (Ramey & Shapiro, 1998). As universities focused on creating and utilizing the most modern technologies, students became a testing ground for training in the latest innovations (Crow & Tucker, 1999).

In the 1950s, two events helped to secure a steady flow of grants to an increasing number of research universities. First, as a result of the Korean War, defense spending increased from 6.5 percent of gross domestic product in 1950 to 15 percent by 1953 (Ramey & Shapiro, 1998). When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1 in 1957, "it was determined that Soviet work on new materials was perhaps two decades ahead of the United States" (Etzkowitz & Kemelgor, 1998, p. 287). Whether or not Americans had truly fallen behind the Soviets in scientific innovation, the perception resulted in increased allocations of federal research funding. By the late 1950s, several organizations, including the National Science Foundation, called for an expansion of research activity at a larger number of universities (Geiger, 1992). Academic research centers soon began to emerge at numerous state and private institutions.

In 1960, the Seaborg Report declared a goal of increasing the number of research institutions from 15–20 to 30–49 (Geiger & Feller, 1995). Released by the President's Science Advisor Committee as an important policy statement, the report advocated the expansion of science-related research. Its essential argument was that the entire research gamete, from buildings to laboratories, was incredibly expensive and, without increases in federal grants, research universities would be reluctant to undertake federal projects proposed by faculty (Douglass, 1999). Consequently, total research and development funding rose by approximately 35% in the decade that followed, before falling off slightly in the early 1970s.

The expansion of academic research led to the creation of a variety of new academic units within institutions. This in turn increased the number of research initiatives (Gumport, 2000). Universities sought to keep their external funding, and built facilities to keep pace with the growing research agenda (Carlson, 2008). The research system was very adaptive, operating within the old university structure while adopting new academic tendencies (Alpert, 1985). Universities took pride in expansion, believing that the addition of new space and academic units ultimately contributed to the prestige of an institution. Although this expansion may have benefited higher education, it had lasting effects that were not easily retractable (Hummell, 2012). Contemporary research suggests that the emphasis on research generated a culture of unsustainable expansion that was often duplicated regionally and impacted state spending, tuition, and university operations (Carlson, 2008; Hummell, 2012).

In the 1970s, the rise of the research university saw an unprecedented growth in financial resources devoted to research, despite the fact that government and military demand for research was declining (Alpert, 1985). The expansion of university research led to the development of "research parks" and opened direct lines of communication between researchers, government, and industry. Research parks were created to spur economic initiatives and tie universities to local corporations in areas where no such activity would otherwise exist. The intention was originally rooted in military research and development, but in peacetime, the relation with local industry validated the need (Appold, 2004). This expansion also essentially removed the university president from playing a large role in research and fostered departmental sovereignty. As a result, universities' research departments often expanded faster than their overarching administrative structure (Alpert, 1985).

The research presented in this section focuses on the financial impact of defense spending on university research and campus infrastructure. Department of Defense investment in university research may have altered the way in which many universities operated and their financial relationship with state governments. The subsequent section examines university funding related to returning World War II veterans.

GI bill and student aid. Toward the end of the Second World War, a series of financial initiatives for middle- and lower-class citizens was introduced. This section examines university funding related to the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) and the National Defense Act of 1958. Although the GI Bill promoted educational opportunities to returning veterans, its true political purpose was to reduce projected increases in unemployment (Douglass, 2010). The macroeconomic perspective at the time suggested that investment in human capital was the most profitable method of stimulating economic recovery. Specifically, investing in veterans and teaching them a skill would render societal benefits (Archibald & Feldman, 2008a).

Most public universities embraced the increase in student traffic and utilized the boom as a method to increase governmental revenue streams. The increase in students meant an increase in federal dollars that would facilitate university expansion (Olson, 1973). Universities needed to be aggressive in channeling the flood of new students, so new buildings were built, more faculty were hired, and attractive support services were initiated (Gumport, 2000). The influx of veteran students also brought universities a stable income from paying customers.

With a strong national economy and shifts in societal imperatives, universities benefited from the increase in student populations. As a result of the GI Bill alone, 7.8 million new students entered higher education. By 1947, returning veterans represented 47% of all publicly enrolled university students (Mettler, 2002). With such a large number of students suddenly entering the academy, administrators were faced with a gamete of unprecedented questions, such as: What will we do with married students? How will we house them? So what about babies? (Olson, 1973). Although Olsen suggests that these questions were not easily answered, the changing student demographic required administrators to think holistically.

By the mid-1950s, the student demographic had changed, and universities attempted to keep pace. In addition to the GI Bill, the university system continued to serve as an instrument of war and defense. The 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was largely drafted as a response to the discussion provoked by the Sputnik scare (Kessinger, 2011). The NDEA provided funding twofold, first to state agencies to improve science and math teaching, and second, to provide loan and grant opportunities to students interested in math and science. The program featured an investment of $300 million toward state schools and $295 million for a low-interest loan program for college students (Olson, 2000).

The previous paragraphs in this section highlighted the literature related to the use of higher education as an instrument of war. The first part examined the federal government's investment in higher education for defense-related research. The literature advises that this investment had an impact on university systems and campus infrastructure. The second portion focused on literature related to the GI Bill and the National Education Act of 1958. Faced with the sheer number of veterans who seized the opportunity to study, universities were forced to expand services and build spaces while also reacting to changes in the student demographic. These changes are accordingly discussed in the next section, which focuses on literature that suggests that higher education funding was impacted by government's use of universities as agents of social capital.

Universities as Agents of Social Capital

In the 1960s, a series of macroeconomic policy initiatives, including the Higher Education Act of 1965, was introduced to reverse the marginalization of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Born out of a political movement aimed at social equity and a desire to minimize class disparity, these policies sought to use education as a means to alleviate societal ills (Olivia, 2004; Ansell, 2008). The push for college attainment and access led to a shift in the student demographic, both culturally and economically, and the result affected higher education at nearly every level (Altbach, 1999). A larger societal expectation emerged: universities were expected to attract, retain, and produce more graduates as a mechanism to support economic needs and minimize the gap in socioeconomic status. In order to manage expectations, university and government officials developed strategies to cope with the challenges this presented.

In addition to policy initiatives, a greater focus on social science research emerged. As early as 1922, universities were studying social issues. The University of

Chicago, for example, studied census tracts and economic gains in the Chicago area (Lazarsfeld, 1962). Social sciences leaned on natural science for the development of methods and the use of statistical analysis (Heaney & Hansen, 2006). By the late 1950s, social science research began evaluating issues of social equality and humanism. The new public administration (Waldo, 1955) proposed that the responsibility of government included curing societal problems and social injustice. A new field of study, the administration of public policy, emerged as a discipline that was separate from political science (Levine et al., 2001).

As the political mood of the 1960s focused on equality, some of the students who were now entering the academy were different from those of previous generations. As a result, new government and university programs emerged to support a myriad of new student needs and increase retention (Tinto, 1993; Seidman, 2005). For example, a series of initiatives was introduced to enable minority students to make cultural connections (Dey & Hurtado, 1999). Similarly, to address concerns about student preparedness, resources and programs for course remediation were introduced (Merisotis & Phipps, 1999). While governments invested in new populations of students, universities sought to provide the necessary resources. The new program initiated an expansion in student services and office spaces.

This section has drawn attention to the literature related to university funding during the 1960s. The theme that emerged suggests that higher education was used as an instrument for social mobility. The effect of this movement impacted university systems and structures. With new populations of students entering the academy, new resources were necessary to support the changing needs of the student demographic. As the movement for social equity emphasized the policy agenda, the investment in human capital generated a substantial increase in enrollment. The next section focuses on the literature related to the challenges of increased enrollment. The literature indicates that in order to finance the resulting expansion, universities began seeking external funding opportunities.

Universities as Economic Instruments

The research related to state spending for higher education during the 1970s and 1980s indicates that universities emerged as self-sufficient economic actors in this period (Sampat, 2006; Geiger, 2008, Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Two events facilitated this development. The first was the passing of the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980. This legislation established that universities were granted the intellectual property rights to patents developed with government-funded research. This act is discussed more thoroughly in the following section. The second was a partnership between universities and business to develop potentially profitable products.

Bayh-Dole Act. In 1980, the passing of the Bayh-Dole Act (BDA) gave universities a greater incentive to conduct potentially profitable research by granting them the intellectual property rights to the results of government-funded studies. Universities could utilize federal or state grants, generate new patents for their products, and profit from their use without having to share the revenue (Mowery, Nelson, & Sampat, 1999). Although Bayh-Dole established the precedent, several government departments (such as the Department of Defense) were already funding universities and allowing institutions to profit from subsequent commercialization (Samper, 2006).

From a governmental perspective, the purpose of the BDA was to promote innovation. There was a belief that without the potential to profit from research, faculty would have no incentive to disclose innovative findings for public use. As a result of the act, university patent efforts increased significantly. By the mid-1980s, nearly one-tenth of new commercialized products were the result of university-based research (Mansfield, 1990).

Big business. By 1990, patents developed from academic research had become a multibillion-dollar industry. A large number of new businesses emerged from academic patents. “Spin-offs” was the term used by academics to describe industries that commercialized innovative academic research (Steffenson, Rogers, & Speakman, 1999). Spin-offs became big business, with those from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) alone accounting for more than 4000 new companies, employing 1.1 million people (Bank-Boston, 1997). The profit generated from spin-offs exceeded $232 billion per year by 1997 and solidified the relationship between universities and industry.

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) suggest that the integration of universities into the market economy changed the way in which they interact with society. The concept of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) contends that universities have become more entrepreneurial in nature by taking part in industry advancements and interacting with economic interests. Spin-off organizations are essentially the byproduct of university entrepreneurialism. Etzkowitz and Kemelgo (1998) mention further that the capitalization of knowledge created a second academic revolution. Although entrepreneurialism is not necessarily new to higher education, the interaction of universities with the market economy had a major impact. The past two decades have seen an increase in academic literature that discusses the effects of commercialization in higher education and the extent to which the movement has impacted university operations, academic curricula (Rhoades, 2005; Eckel, 2003), and funding initiatives (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Summary

The preceding section highlighted the research related to higher education spending since 1940. Subscribing to the theory of punctuated equilibrium, the review focused on university finance by exploring research related to significant events or movements that occurred in the academy since the Second World War. The review of the literature suggests that the combination of three movements – universities as instruments of war, universities as agents of social capital, and universities as economic actors – may have impacted spending on higher education.

The integration of universities into the market economy has given rise to numerous research studies over the past two decades (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004; Ehrenberg, 2000; Tuchman, 2004; Blumenstyk, 2001; Mowery & Ziedonis, 2000). Academic capitalism contends that an interdependent relationship exists between higher education and the market economy. Furthermore, the theory indicates that by engaging in market behavior, universities will make changes to their organizational governance by developing new offices and personnel to manage these relationships. The interconnectedness of the new networks alters the identity of institutions and their relationship to external stakeholders (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

As state funding declined, many universities sought alternative sources of revenue from corporate sponsors and increased tuition and fees, and applied more resources to fundraising campaigns. Some researchers mentions that a movement toward privatization is occurring (Lyall & Sell, 2006), believing that state policymakers now consider higher education to be a private as opposed to a public good (Rabvosky, 2011; Tandberg, 2010). A different body of research suggests that the reduced financial support for higher education is not necessarily the result of a shift in political perspective, but rather of competing funding initiatives (Kane, Thomas, & Orszag, 2003). The literature discussed in the subsequent sections sheds light on both perspectives, focusing specifically on university operations and government spending. The corpora are public spending and public policy, and state spending for higher education in Oklahoma.

Public Spending and Public Policy

The percentage of higher education expenses funded by state governments decreased significantly from the late 1940s (Boyd, 2002; McKeown-Moak, 2001; McPherson & Schapiro, 2006), while the average tuition price at public institutions increased by 248% between 1970 and 2001 (Ehrenberg, 2000). States funded 74% of the cost of higher education at public institutions in 1970, but by 2000 that figure had fallen to 43% (Rizzo, 2004). State allocations for higher education nearly tripled from the early 1970s, reaching over $60 billion in FY2000 (Rizzo, 2004) and $88 billion in FY2009 (SHEEO, 2009). However, these figures can be deceptive. The number of students attending college rose substantially, thus limiting the funding increase by percentage of students enrolled to only 1% per year (25.9% total), and the consumer rate of inflation rose by 346.56% (Financial Trend Forecaster, 2010). In addition, between 1980 and 1996 the educational expense per student rose 42 percentage points higher than consumer price inflation (Kane & Orszag, 2004).

Public financial support per student has not kept pace with the rate of inflation (Lingenfelter, 2009; Rizzo, 2004; Hovey, 1999), and the largest new source of university revenue is tuition and fees (McPherson & Schapiro, 2003). Current research on the economic outlook of higher education suggests that the general rates of tuition will increase as state spending per student is expected to fall (Hovey, 2009; State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2009). Many universities have accounted for budgetary concerns in their strategic planning efforts (Kotler & Murphey, 1981; Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997), while state governments look for long-term solutions to sustain the value of higher education (Ehrenberg, 2006; Lyall & Sell, 2006; Weerts & Ronca, 2006). The current trends indicate that students will continue to pay higher tuition rates and an increasing percentage of institutional expenses (Boyd, 2002).

Research contends that there are multiple variables that affect state spending for higher education, including tuition and financial aid policy (Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008), revenue shortfalls (Knecht, 2009; Johnson, Oliff & Williams, 2008), university performance measures (Robst, 2001), voter priorities (Cattaneo & Wolter, 2009), and the necessity for an educated workforce (Zumeta & Kinne, 2011). The following section examines the implications of politics, interest groups and lobbying, accountability, and access on public spending for higher education.

Political Decision-Making

State appropriations for higher education may vary depending upon the system in place. Higher education is often subject to larger budget cuts than other state agencies during times of recession, but typically gains during periods of prosperity when policymakers have greater flexibility in discretionary spending (Rizzo, 2004). Higher education is not the only contender in the discretionary pool, however, and the emergence of competing programs has increasingly drained the discretionary pool. During a recession, policymakers tend to single out higher education for cuts because it has the ability to raise tuition prices (Boyd, 2002). Higher education is also a more attractive area to cut than competing social programs because its beneficiaries historically have not been seen as those individuals in society who need significant assistance (Doyle & Delaney, 2009). However, as the economy fluctuates between contraction and expansion, the decline in appropriations is generally larger than any gains (Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008).

A strong economy is especially important to higher education because revenue fluctuations have a history of victimizing higher education (Cheslock & Hughes, 2011). Although there can be a multitude of contributory factors, this can largely be explained by basic economics. When the economy slows, consumer spending decreases and business experiences a decline in profit. With less money coming in, businesses may choose to terminate employees or implement a hiring freeze, or both. With worker layoff greater than normal and fewer job opportunities, the unemployment rate increases. A larger number of individuals then draws on social programs such as unemployment, government-sponsored healthcare, food stamps, etc. (Cattaneo, 2007; Douglas, 2010).

Governments, at the federal and state level, subsidize costs to prevent the general citizenry from defaulting on mortgages, car loans, etc. In order to subsidize these costs to a greater degree, policymakers may pull funding from other discretionary items (Delaney

& Doyle, 2007). The legislature approaches higher education more often because of the system's ability to generate revenue through tuition (Archibald & Feldman, 2008a; Archibald & Feldman, 2008b). During strong economic times the opposite tends to happen (Rizzo, 2004). With an increase in state revenue collections, policymakers look for opportunities to invest, and higher education is an attractive proposition. This stems from the general perception that an educated workforce generates a stronger pool of qualified individuals and decreases unemployment rates (Delaney & William, 2009).

There are an increasing number of discretionary spending items that affect state higher education appropriations. With a stable economy, the slowed growth of higher education funding has been attributed to support for competing social programs such as Medicaid (Kane, Thomas, & Orszag, 2003). Since the 1960s, the introduction of new social programs has prevented higher education from receiving proportional support from year to year. In recent years, higher education allocations have been affected by high unemployment, home foreclosures, declining personal assets, and slowed consumer spending that decreased state revenue collections (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2008). In most states, K-20 education represents nearly 50% of states' general fund expenditures. However, court mandates resulted in common education receiving a larger percentage of educational appropriations (Rizzo, 2004).

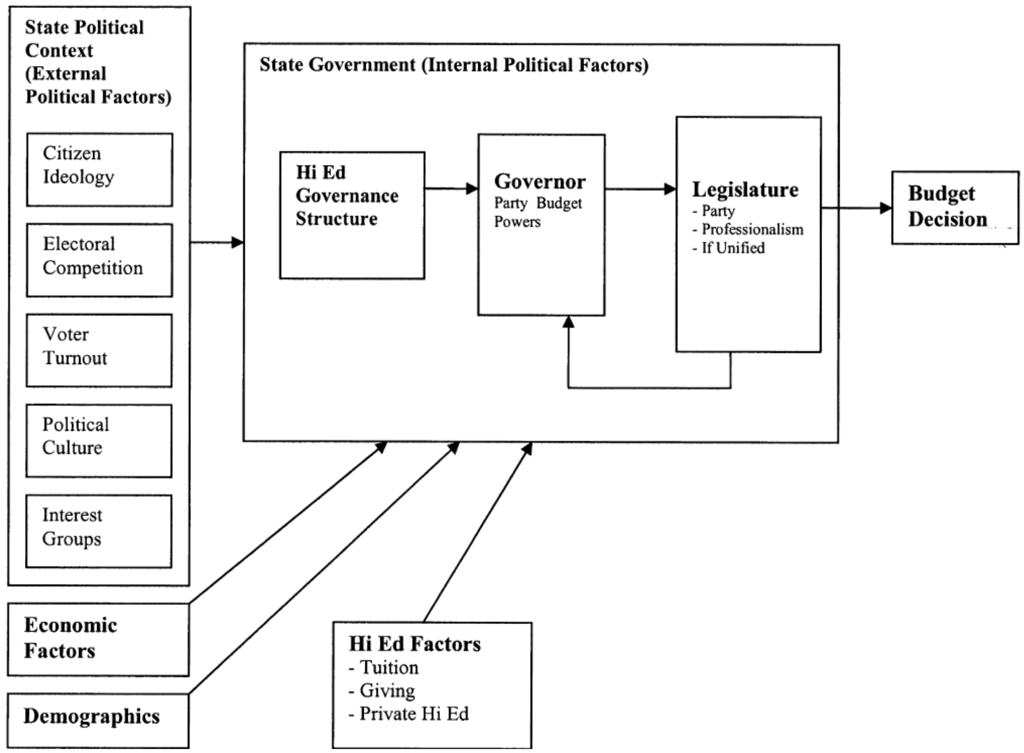
Although the political factors that affect spending vary from state to state, higher education has moved to the bottom of most states' discretionary priorities in recent years (Cheslock & Hughes, 2011). There is a concern that it will be even more susceptible to fluctuations in state revenue collections in the future (Delaney & Williams, 2009). The political debate is between two contending positions: a legislative argument for fiscal accountability (Archibald & Feldman, 2008a; Ruppert, 1996) versus the academy's argument for governmental sustenance of current operating budget levels (Archibald & Feldman, 2008b; Hovey, 1999). The difficulty is that both sides want more from the other. Government sees the benefit of having a larger workforce of educated citizens and urges institutions to increase enrollment, retain students, and produce more graduates (Trostel, 2009). Colleges heed the call by investing in recruitment efforts, support services, technology, and academic and social programming (Gumport, 2000). The result is that university operating budgets increase at a faster pace than public support.

Although public financial support for higher education has fluctuated, some scholars argue for the need to invest in human capital (Titus, 2009). The argument essentially contends that the production of bachelor's degrees is dependent upon the cost that students ultimately pay. The need is therefore for political systems to counter increases in tuition with need-based aid. Although this argument is compelling, what it proposes is in fact a sleight of hand, shifting the responsibility for payment to other areas of government (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011).

Figure 1 below is Tandberg's (2010) state public higher education budgetary picture. The model demonstrates the state spending process and the impact of external political forces. More specifically, the model demonstrates the impact of these factors on higher education spending within a larger political spectrum.

Figure 1.

Tandberg (2010) State Public Higher Education Budgetary Picture

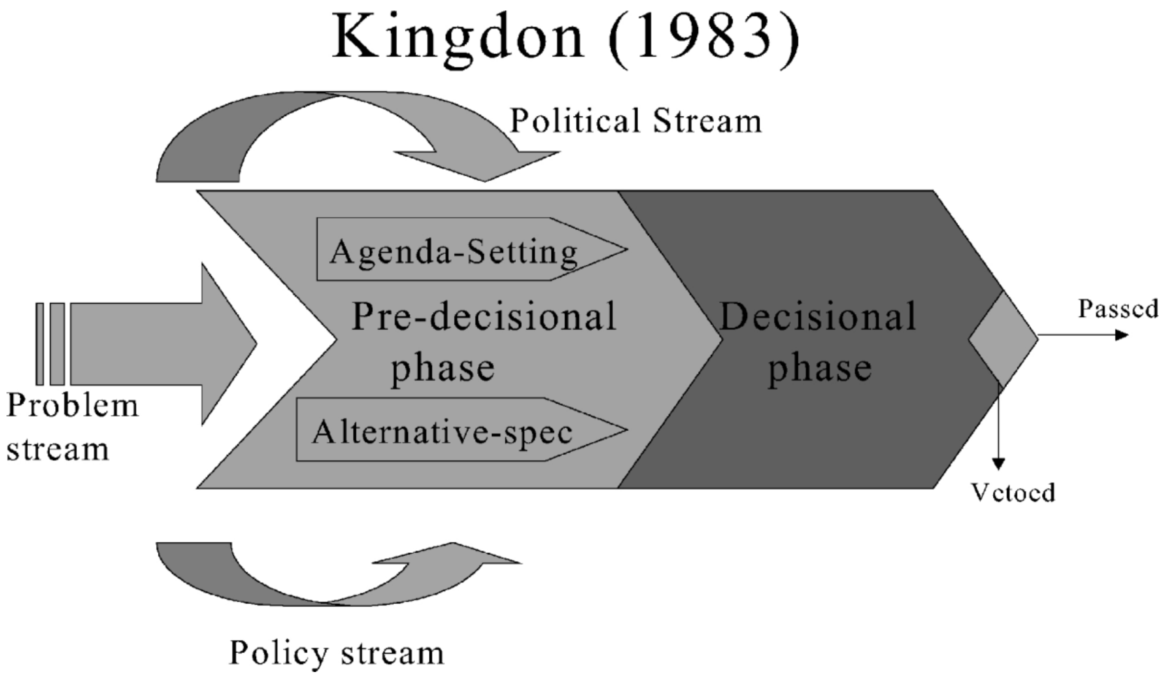


The Tandberg model highlights factors that may influence higher education spending. The model suggests that participants' perceptions may be influenced by higher education governance structure, the state governor, and other numerous external political factors.

The effect of political decision-making on higher education can be illustrated through Kingdon's (1983) Three Streams Model (See Figure 2). According to Kingdon, the three streams are: problems, policy, and politics. In order for any policy to be passed it must: (1) be identified as a problem (2) emerge from a pool of policy issues, and (3) navigate the political gauntlet to be passed in to law.

Figure 2.

Three Streams Model



As new problems enter the state political arena they have the potential to affect higher education funding. As issues navigate the political process legislators evaluate the need and how proposed policies will be administrated. If a policy is passed, it may compete with higher education for discretionary spending dollars. Although higher education may be impacted by other demands, all state-funded agencies are dependent on revenue collections derived from economic output (Kingdon, 1983; Ehrenberg, 2000).

Taken together, therefore, political factors and competing interests may influence higher education spending. Research suggests that higher education may be more susceptible than other spending areas to fluctuations in the economy (Cheslock & Hughes, 2011; Rizzo, 2004). In addition, research suggests that the ability to increase tuition fees may influence the perceptions of legislative members. The Tandberg model indicates that a variety of political factors may impact higher education spending. The Kingdon model additionally suggests that when new problems emerge and policy is passed, that policy may compete with higher education for discretionary dollars. The effects of competing interests and political factors were important to the study, as they may affect participants' perceptions of higher education spending.

Interest Groups and Lobbying

Research related to higher education spending often neglects a fundamental aspect of political power: the impact of interest groups and lobbying. Studies tend to focus largely on demographic and economic variables. Although these elements are important, there is a growing need to understand how actual politics impact state spending on higher education (Tandberg, 2008). The difficulty with understanding the political process is that all of its elements are difficult to quantify. Measuring the impact of interest groups may focus on the amount of money invested in lobbying efforts in correlation to spending output, but the data derived may not tell the entire story. Rizzo (2004), for example, considers all interest groups and political-decision making entities as one large optimizing agent. He understands, however, that the extensive literature on the subject has reached no consensus on who the single decision-making agent in a state is. The following section accordingly examines the impact of interest groups and lobbying on state spending on higher education.

Effects of Interest Groups

Few studies have presented empirical evidence that higher education, when considered as a single entity separate from K-12, is affected by other interest groups (Rizzo, 2004). Studies into the effects of interest groups on state expenditure tend to focus on education spending as a lump entity (Ehrenberg, 1973; Ashenfelter & Ehrenberg, 1975; Tandberg, 2010). Although research into higher education funding is not new, prior to the last decade it largely ignored political variables (Conner & Rabovsky, 2012). In addition, recent research suggests that the relative increase in the number of groups representing higher education, compared to other special interest groups, may positively influence higher education spending (McLendon et al, 2009). There is a need therefore, for research to explore special interest groups and their impact on higher education policy.

Tandberg (2007, 2008, 2010) and McKlendon, Hearn, and Mokher (2009) discussed the effects of interest groups on higher education spending. The series of studies presented by Tandberg looked at the percentage of special interest groups representing higher education in relation to state spending. These studies indicated that there was a positive correlation between the two variables. Building on Tandberg's series, McKlendon, Hearn, and Mokher utilized the data to take the analysis a step further. They found that higher education spending may be impacted by legislative term-limits. Although there may be multiple explanations, their findings suggested that less experienced lawmakers may be more susceptible to lobbying. State lobbying efforts on behalf of higher education have gradually increased since the 1980s, giving the sector a heightened influence in state politics (Conner & Rabovsky, 2012).

Lobbying for Higher Education

Lobbying has not always been a traditional tool of the academy. It is suggested that lobbying first took flight following the Republican sweep of Congress in 1994 (Ferrin, 1996), when universities and colleges felt an urgent need to protect their interests

(Cook, 1998). In-house lobbyists quickly emerged at powerful public American institutions. Most are now funded by a particular institution, and are a part of the discussion of long-term institutional goals. They are seen as uniquely protecting the interests of their client, working closely with the state legislature and the institution they serve (Ferrin, 1996). Initial research indicates that lobbying efforts have resulted in a slight increase in state spending for some universities (McLendon et al., 2009). However, more research should be conducted to consider the specific implications of lobbying efforts.

Summary

Interest groups and lobbying efforts have had an impact on higher education spending for the past two decades. Although more research is needed to understand the true effect of this development, recent findings suggest that an increase in lobbying or interest groups devoted to higher education may result in an increase in state funding. The lobbying movement suggests that universities are embracing their role as economic agents by taking advantage of potential revenue streams. There is a need, however, to consider how lobbying, along with the many other new economic tendencies in which universities have taken part, has affected the overall image of universities and their susceptibility to threats of privatization. The next section considers the policy arena, specifically with regard to state investment in higher education in Oklahoma, and offers a glimpse into the state governing structure for higher education and the way in which public higher education within the state is funded.

State Spending for Higher Education in Oklahoma

Oklahoma traditionally spent nearly 50% of its state budget on common and higher education (Rizzo, 2004). In 2011, however, 36 states, including Oklahoma, cut their funding to higher education operating budgets (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2010). At the beginning of the recession in 2008, Oklahoma experienced its largest budget deficit since the Great Depression (Douglass, 2010). The decline in state revenue collections in Oklahoma led to budget conversations such as cutbacks to higher education, public health, and the state workforce (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2010). This section draws a brief distinction between the different state funding structures used in the United States, before focusing specifically on the Oklahoma system and the funding process currently in place.

Governing Boards and Funding

Research suggests that support for public universities is seemingly contingent on the actions and commitment of three critical entities: a) the campus, b) the higher education governing body, and c) the state government (Weerts & Ronca, 2006). There are three primary structures that states commonly use to appropriate money to higher education: 1) Consolidated governing boards, 2) coordinating boards, and 3) state planning agencies. Several scholars (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Knott & Payne, 2002; Weerts & Ronca, 2006) have suggested that the type of governing body may affect the extent of the appropriations and enhance political control. This section highlights the different types of governing structures and their impact on state spending. The section will end with a discussion of the higher governance structure in Oklahoma and the regulation level of each state.

Consolidated governing boards. A consolidated governing board typically provides the governance for a unitary higher education entity. A unitary governing board is a single body and power is centralized. Although many states have umbrella organizations and boards that assist with regulation, power is centralized within the unitary board. For example, the University System of Ohio contains all public universities, colleges, and technical schools in Ohio. Most states with unitary governing boards allocate money to the governing board at large. Universities that have a single governing board, rather than a larger coordinating board, tend to receive a higher proportion of state appropriations. Examples of states with a unitary governing board include Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Wisconsin (Weerts & Ronca, 2006; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003).

Coordinating boards. Coordinating boards are usually made up of numerous universities and colleges. Coordinating boards are decentralized, and decision-making is left to each system. For example, the state of Texas has six university systems that each contains multiple colleges and universities. Each system is governed by its own Board of Regents. Research suggests that states with a decentralized governing system have higher tuition costs and a larger proportion of tuition paid for by students (Bowen et al., 1997). Coordinating boards do not govern institutions and may or may not have regulatory or advisory authority over academic budgets (Knott & Payne, 2003). Examples of states with coordinating boards include Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Virginia, and Washington (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Knott & Payne, 2002)

State planning agencies. States with planning agencies or advisory committees typically have the least centralized structure. Planning agencies typically do not have any governance authority over higher education institutions. This is the least common governance structure and its impact on state spending varies. However, flagship institutions within these states typically receive the most political favors (Knott & Payne, 2003). There are currently eight states with a minimally regulated planning agency, including California, Delaware, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Vermont, and West Virginia (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003).

Oklahoma. Oklahoma has a centralized and highly regulated governing board with strong regulatory powers (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003). Oklahoma has a state regents system that serves as an umbrella organization covering several smaller boards of regents. The Oklahoma State Legislature pays a lump sum to the Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education (OSRHE), which then allocates money to all colleges and universities on the basis of a formula. The money for all public higher education institutions is dependent on state revenue collections. The following section focuses specifically on the interaction of the OSRHE as a conduit between legislative appropriations and university operating budgets.

Regulatory Powers. Consolidated governing boards will always have regulatory authority over program approval and budget. However, coordinating boards may or may not have regulatory power depending upon the system. Planning or advisory agencies have no regulatory authority. Knott and Payne (2002) researched higher education governance by state. Table 1 demonstrates the regulatory power of higher education systems in each state.

Table 1

Knott and Payne (2002) Higher Education Governance Structure by State

State	System Type
Alabama	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Alaska	Minimally Regulated Planning or Advisory Agency
Arizona	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Arkansas	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
California	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Colorado	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Connecticut	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Delaware	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Florida	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Georgia	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Hawaii	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Idaho	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Illinois	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Indiana	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Iowa	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Kansas	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Kentucky	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Louisiana	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Maine	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Maryland	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Massachusetts	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Michigan	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Minnesota	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Mississippi	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Missouri	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Montana	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Nebraska	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Nevada	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
New Hampshire	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
New Jersey	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
New Mexico	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
New York	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
North Carolina	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
North Dakota	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Ohio	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Oklahoma	**Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board**
Oregon	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Pennsylvania	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Rhode Island	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
South Carolina	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
South Dakota	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Tennessee	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Texas	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Utah	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Vermont	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Virginia	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
Washington	Moderately Regulated Coordinating Board
West Virginia	Minimally Regulated State Planning or Advisory Agency
Wisconsin	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board
Wyoming	Highly Regulated Governing or Coordinating Board

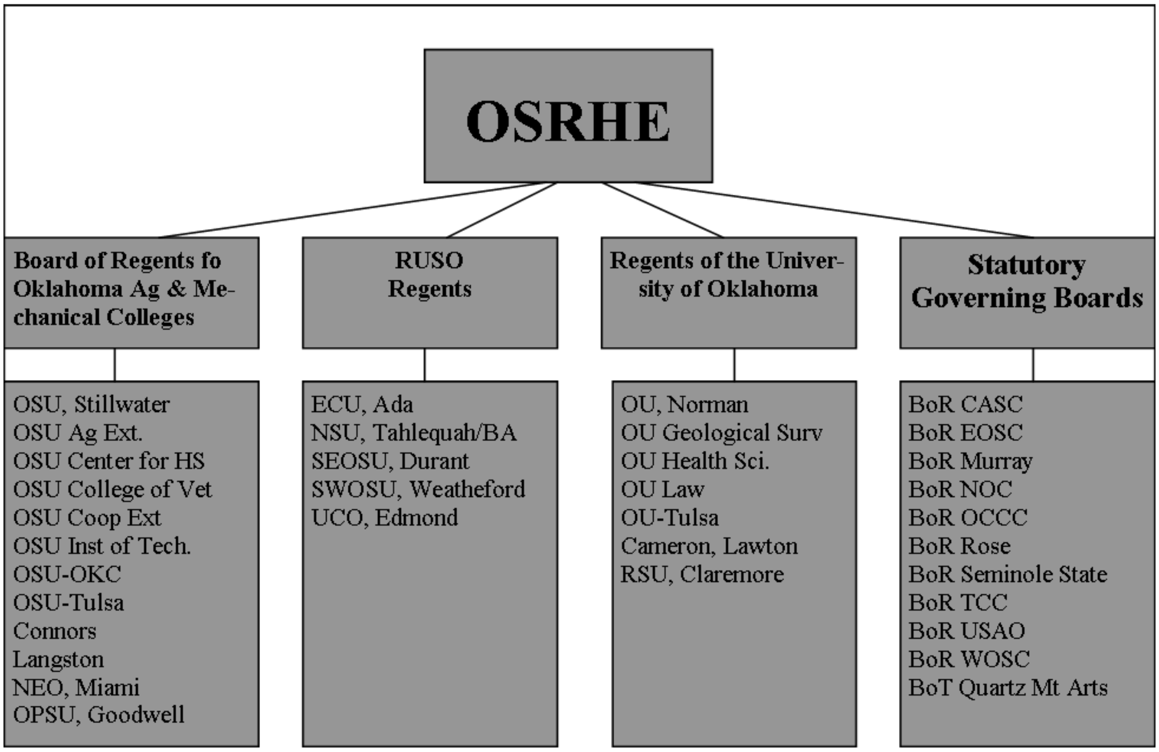
Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

The OSRHE is the entity responsible for the allocation of funds to all public higher education institutions in the state of Oklahoma. The power of the state regents and the defined role of the agency are vested in Article 13, Section A of the Oklahoma Constitution. Established in 1941, the OSRHE seeks to maintain the integrity of the higher education system and to coordinate the state's 25 public higher education entities. It is an umbrella organization comprising two research institutions, 10 regional universities, and 11 community colleges, with each system governed by a board of regents.

To provide an equitable distribution, a funding formula was created to serve as a guide for allocating money to public higher education institutions. Each institution must draft a funding proposal and submit their expected expenses to the regents. The institution must then send representatives to a budget hearing where the school has the opportunity to defend its budget proposal (Kreidler, 2009). The budget proposal provides the regents with an idea of the institutional cost, and they then allocate the money accordingly (Part One: The State System, 2012). Figure 3 below illustrates the OSRHE system.

Figure 3.

Regents System



Functions

The OSRHE is charged with maintaining the integrity of the academic system, allocating funds, setting tuition and fee schedules, planning and construction of public college and university buildings and property, budget administration, personnel management and salaries, and serving as custodian of records (Article 13, Section B-1, Oklahoma Constitution, 1948). The OSRHE was established on March 1, 1941 as a unified system to maintain wholly all higher education systems in the state of Oklahoma:

> All institutions of higher education supported wholly or in part by direct legislative appropriations shall be integral parts of a unified system to be known as “The

> Oklahoma State System of Higher Education"… The Regents shall constitute a co-ordinating board of control for all State institutions described in Section 1 hereof, with the following specific powers: (1) it shall prescribe standards of higher education applicable to each institution, (2) it shall determine the functions and courses of study in each of the institutions to conform to the standards prescribed, (3) it shall grant degrees and other forms of academic recognition for completion of the prescribed courses in all of such institutions, (4) it shall recommend to the State Legislature the budget allocations to each institution, and, (5) it shall have the power to recommend to the Legislature proposed fees for all of such institutions, and any such fees shall be effective only within the limits prescribed by the Legislature. (Article 13, Section A1-3, Oklahoma Constitution, 1941)

State Legislature Appropriations Process

The funding process for higher education in Oklahoma is essentially a five-part process, beginning with state appropriations. In Oklahoma, appropriation for higher education is part of an omnibus budget bill for all state agencies and organizations. Prior to a legislative session, the Governor submits a suggested budget for the state as a whole. During a legislative session, appropriations committee members in both houses draft the omnibus budget bill. Once the bill is drafted, a majority vote in both houses is required for it to take effect. Next, the Oklahoma State Legislature appropriates money to the OSRHE in a lump sum.

OSRHE Appropriation Process

The OSRHE then allocates money to each public institution based on a predetermined formula (Ad Hoc Study Group on Equitable State Funding, 2011):

1) The state legislature appropriates money to higher education in a lump sum. This process is generally based on a variety of factors, notably state revenue collections, discretionary spending income, competing interests, common education initiatives, and political culture and climate.

2) OSRHE compares student funding for Oklahoma to out-of-state peer institutions. The OSRHE uses the lump sum and data made available by surrounding states to determine how each type of institution is appropriated based on the percentage of the lump sum.

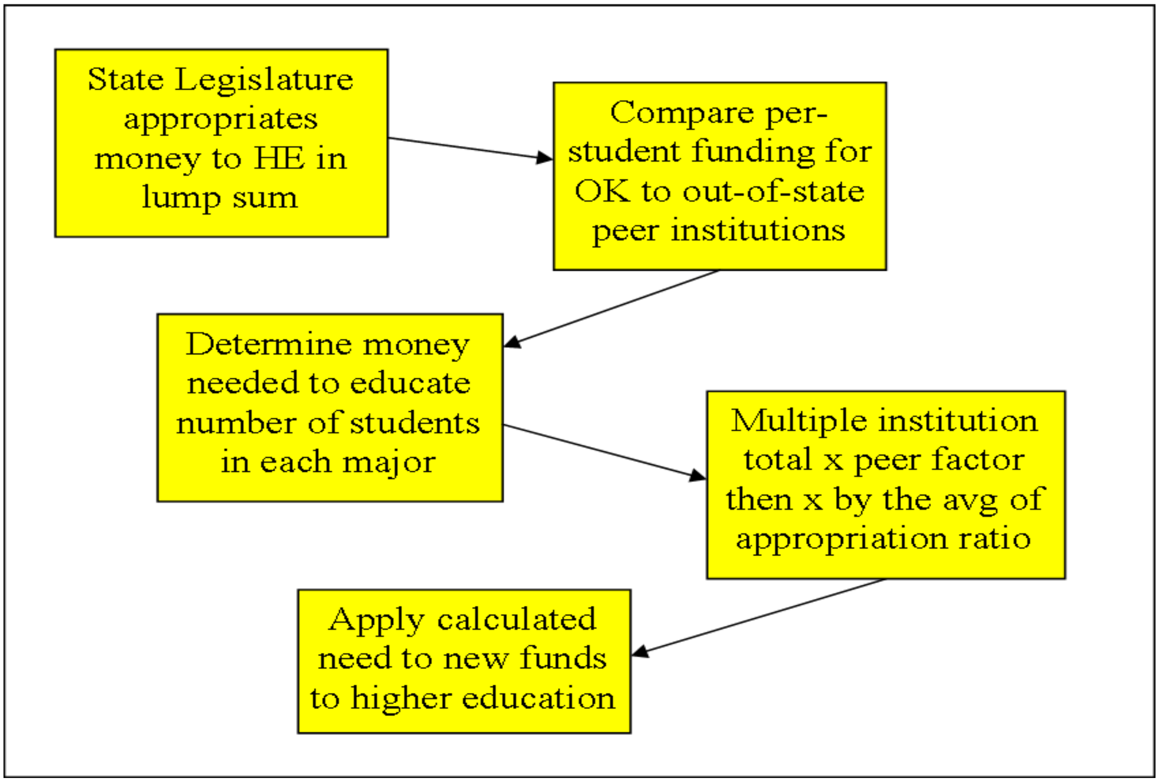
3) OSRHE determines how much money is needed to educate the number of students in each major by institution. The general premise is that majors vary in cost according to the resources they require. For example, a student taking a biology degree program would cost more to educate than a sociology major because of the equipment needed. Additionally, the type of institution will have an effect on funding calculation for the major. It is suggested that a student at a research institution, majoring in the hard sciences, costs more to educate than a student of the same major at a regional institution.

4) OSRHE multiplies the anticipated cost of educating all students in all majors by the determined peer factor, and then multiplies the sum by the average of the appropriation ratio. The intention is to account for all students in all majors at each respective institution, and to incorporate funding for peer institutions in surrounding states to produce a grand total.

5) Finally, OSRHE applies calculated need to new funds to higher education. If new monies become available, they are distributed according to the same calculated appropriation process outlined in the first four steps.

Figure 4.

Funding Formula



Conclusions

The literature regarding higher education finance is expanding. Scholars have attempted to explain trends in state appropriations for institutions. However, trying to predict how the market economy will fare is a unique challenge. Economists and higher education finance scholars have combined to write numerous position papers attempting to predict the future state of higher education finance. Predicting expenditure patterns and forecasting state revenue several years in advance is very difficult. However, as previously mentioned (Doyle & Delaney, 2001; Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008), higher education allocations tend to benefit more than those to other agencies during good economic conditions and experience harder losses in a recession. The trend suggests that appropriations for higher education may continue to fluctuate, and that economic cycles will have a greater effect on higher education than on other discretionary spending.

Further research is necessary to determine how state legislatures perceive the current level of funding in higher education. For example, with Oklahoma having recently seen its largest budget deficit since the Great Depression (Douglass, 2010), how do members the state legislature view the current need of public higher education universities in Oklahoma? Do university efforts to contain costs and generate profit through research or auxiliary activities suggest to members of the state legislature that higher education can thrive with declining state investment? How do current university practices and the needs of competing discretionary interests impact the future of higher education funding in Oklahoma?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III describes the research methodology used for this study. It begins by discussing the general perspective and the research context. The sections that follow address the research participants and the instruments used in data collection. The chapter concludes with a discussion of data analysis and a summary of the methodology.

The General Perspective

The purpose of this research was to explore how members of the Oklahoma State Legislature and legislative staffers perceived higher education's level of financial need in the state. Based on the literature in the preceding chapter, a qualitative design was chosen to explore how legislative members and staffers interpreted and understood their experiences. The fundamental premise of a qualitative study is that social reality is situated in how members interpret its meaning (Creswell, 2009). The study was conducted through the lens of an interpretavist epistemological view that suggests that different perspectives will emerge according to how higher education interacts with the market economy and how members of the state legislature perceive that interaction. More specifically, the study employed a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, believing that change derives from the interaction of members within each perspective (Crotty, 1998). State legislators respond to society's collective conscience by developing policy.

In addition to symbolic interactionism, the study was also grounded in social constructionism. The nature of the policy arena suggests that these perspectives may coincide. Social constructionism was valid in that political systems are dependent upon historical documents. For example, the Oklahoma Constitution and statutes were first drafted more than 60 years ago. The policy arena is an interesting dichotomy of constitutional decree and generational responses to the concerns of the time. New policy is still dependent on the system that was established with the drafting of the Constitution in the late 1950s. Although Oklahoma has a political system that allows for a changing political landscape and grass-roots movements, its established order still drives our actions and the way in which we as members understand the essence of our society.

This research adopted a case study design to understand how participants perceived the level of financial need at public higher education institutions in Oklahoma. The study is a time specific snapshot of a bounded system (Smith, 1978). Studying policymakers and their construction of social constraints may present opportunities for understanding emotional and political tendencies that affect decision-making. The study was exploratory and the purpose was to examine a single entity, the state spending process for higher education process in Oklahoma. The researcher used a variety of methods conducive to exploring state appropriations and how Oklahoma policymakers identified higher education in the greater scope of state appropriations.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the process through which members of the Oklahoma State Legislature and legislative assistants perceived the current level of financial need and designated related funding at Oklahoma public universities and colleges. Specifically, the research questions were:

1. Through what process or factors do members of the Oklahoma Legislature seek to understand higher education's level of financial need in Oklahoma?
2. What do Oklahoma legislators consider when making funding decisions for higher education?
3. How do legislative staffers interpret their state legislator's understanding of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma?

Research Context

The primary setting for this study was the State of Oklahoma Capitol building, which was constructed in 1919. Situated just west of downtown Oklahoma City, one of two metropolitan areas in Oklahoma, the building is identifiable through its white dome and neoclassical architectural features. Each year, the capitol is the gathering site for legislative decision making for the state. It also houses the Oklahoma Supreme Court, the state treasurer, state auditor, and state attorney general.

The study was conducted during the First Session of the 54^{th} Oklahoma Legislature. The legislative session opened on February 4, 2013 and adjourned sine die on May 24, 2013. Observations of legislative sessions were conducted in May 2013. Participant interviews took place after session adjournment, from May 26, 2013 until June 25, 2013.

The research context was important to the findings in this study. Documents and observations provided valuable insight into the legislative process and bill discussion. Interviewing legislators directly after session adjournment allowed for a fresh perspective. In addition, participants were able to more accurately reflect on the entire legislative process and budget bill. Participants seemed to be more open and available for discussion.

Participants

The unit of analysis in this study was the individual participant. Seven legislators and seven political staffers were chosen for interviews. Criterion sampling was used to select interview participants. A detailed description of the selection process for both legislators and staffers is outlined in the subsequent subsections.

Legislator Participants

Legislator participants for this study were members of the Oklahoma State Legislature and were selected on the basis of their political background, educational experience, and committee involvement. Specifically, all participants selected served on one of the following legislative committees: Senate Appropriations Committee, Senate Appropriations' Subcommittee on Education, Senate Committee on Education, House Appropriations and Budget Committee, House Appropriations' Subcommittee on Higher Education, or Higher Education and Career Technology Committee. Participant involvement in one of these committees was important because it indicated that the member should be somewhat familiar with the policies and practices related to higher education and/or state appropriations.

In addition to committee appointment, selections were made such that the set of participants:

- Represented both political parties, Democratic and Republican
- Represented both districts with a public institution and without one

- Represented both first-term legislators and legislators who had served more than one term
- Represented both men and women, and
- Represented both legislative bodies, the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the Oklahoma Senate.

These considerations were important because the study was predicated on the expectation that different perspectives exist. Although qualitative research is not intended to be generalizable, deliberate diversity across the set of respondents helped to ensure a more accurate representation of legislators' voices.

Staff Participants

Legislative staffers served as a supplemental data source for the study. Legislative staffers aid members of the legislature through a variety of tasks that include advising on issues, agenda setting, press correspondence, researching issues, clerical work, etc. Staffers were important to this study because their research and counsel may have influenced the political perspectives of members of the legislature. Seven legislative staffers were chosen for interviews. Although it was not required that they serve a legislator who was also a participant in this study, those selected served a legislator whose committee involvement corresponded with the areas listed in the preceding section.

Instrumentation

The study used qualitative methods and the researcher served as the instrument. Merriam (2002) states that there are three major sources of data collection for qualitative research: interviews, documents, and observations. This study employed participant interviews and a series of observations to ensure data triangulation (Patton, 2002). The protocol for each data source is outlined in the subsequent sections.

Participant Interview Protocol

Participants in the study were Oklahoma state legislators and legislative staffers. A semi-structured protocol was used to generate feedback from participants. Interviews were conducted in neutral locations for the purpose of soliciting honest and accurate data. They occurred at locations beyond but typically near the Capitol to aid in creating a comfortable environment that solicited in-depth data from participants. These locations included coffee shops, restaurants, bistros, parks, and hotel lobbies. I conducted all interviews after adjournment of the First Session of the 54^{th} Legislature. Conducting interviews after the legislative session had ended, and outside the offices of the respective legislators and staffers, produced stronger data. Legislators seemed more engaged with my questions and provided adequate time. Questions focused on behaviors, experiences, feelings, emotions, opinions, and knowledge. They attempted to probe responses and work toward the collection of in-depth and meaningful data. The interview protocol for legislator participants appears in Appendix B. The interview protocol for staff participants appears in Appendix C.

Observation Protocol

Observations were made within the relevant chambers in the capitol building, including the chamber for the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the chamber for the Oklahoma Senate. I sought observations of legislative sessions in which discussions of higher education and/or appropriations occurred. The observation protocol was dependent upon the legislative schedule and agenda. I positioned myself in the chamber gallery and followed the building and gallery rules and regulations.

Data Collection

A previously discussed, I used criterion sampling to identify interview participants. Contact with participants was made by letter, which included an outline of the research and disclosure of the academic intent of the interview (see Appendix A). A phone call was then made to each potential participant, and a follow-up email was sent to those that agreed to take part in the study. The email outlined the research intent and interview protocol (see Appendix B). Interviews were scheduled on the basis of the availability and willingness of individuals to participate.

At the beginning of each interview, a consent form was distributed to all participants. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix C. The form detailed the nature of the research and emphasized respondent confidentiality, access to report findings, and the rights of the participant. In addition, the consent form included a description of how data were to be collected, stored, and secured. Interviews were conducted at neutral locations in multiple Oklahoma cities, but most were within close proximity to the Oklahoma state capitol. All interviews lasted approximately one hour. Time was allotted after each interview for additional note-taking. I used a standard digital voice recorder and took hand-written notes. All voice recordings were transcribed and hand-written notes were typed. The purpose of semi-structured interviews was to capture members' experiences and perceptions in their own terms (Patton, 2002). Although voice recordings were the ideal way to achieve this goal, one participant rejected the use of audio recording.

Concealing Participants

Although the consent form detailed participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were provided for each participant to conceal their identities.

Observations

Observations and field notes were additional data sources. I used a standard digital voice recorder, when approved by the Sergeant of Arms, and employed note-taking utensils. I gave specific attention to discussions of higher education appropriations and practices. This was done to collect rich, thick, and descriptive data to capture individuals' meanings and terms. Utilizing multiple sources for data collection was important to establish data triangulation (Patton, 2002). I also collected documents that were expected to be beneficial to the study, including policy briefings, committee reports, and legislative reports.

Data

Data and all recordings were stored in a secure folder on my personal computer. Audio files were uploaded and saved to the folder using Windows Media Player. The folder was password protected. Additionally, all documents were placed in a shared Dropbox folder that was password protected. A backup thumb drive was also used

Data Analysis

The data analysis section will attempt to explain the process used. The section will first discuss how data were managed and analyzed. It will then discuss the importance of data reduction and reflexivity in the analysis process.

Data

The data analysis process began by exploring the data collected. Taylor and Bogden (1984) suggest the following strategies, which I observed:

1) Read and reread the data
2) Keep track of all possible codes, hunches, and connected thoughts
3) Notice the related themes
4) Construct typologies based on themes
5) Review the literature
6) Develop a storyline.

To accomplish this strategy, I used the open-coding process to discover connected and emerging themes. Specifically, I:

1) Transcribed all data sources in Microsoft Word
2) Analyzed the transcribed data for rich chunks of data and separated those using boxes
3) Gave boxes of data a numerical value corresponding to the interview participant, observation(s), and documents
4) Printed the boxes, cut them out, and applied them to note cards. The note cards were different colors based on assigned numerical value
5) Analyzed each card and then categorized them based on initial and surface-level analysis
6) Gave a brief description and general typology to each category
7) Using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software program, and considered the terms, codes, and themes on a deeper level and made new

connections. The process included considering context, consequences, conditions, and strategies while reevaluating and refining codes and themes.

Data Reduction

Data reduction was an important aspect of interpreting meaning. The use of seven participant interviews and observations produced a considerable quantity of data. Specifically, the interview questions resulted in large amount of data that did not address the research questions of this study. Data reduction techniques were utilized to determine whether the context of the data was relevant to the study and research questions. I then organized the data in a meaningful way and attempted to draw on linkage to channel patterns, ideas, and categories that resulted from the study (Patton, 1987; Merriam, 1998).

Reflexivity

As a researcher, I had experience with the policy arena in Oklahoma prior to the study. While completing a Master’s degree in Public Administration and while teaching government and policy at a local metropolitan university, I had the opportunity to make connections with several people who worked within the policy arena who voiced their willingness to assist with scheduling participant interviews. In addition, these connections were important to the study because I believed that these individuals might be instrumental in establishing my identity and help to solicit more honest and accurate feedback.

My fascination with state spending for higher education began in graduate school. While researching the topic for class assignments, I had the opportunity to discuss the subject with a vice president of finance at a metropolitan university and the president of a two-year college in Oklahoma. In addition, my classroom experiences in political science and interest in state spending led to a fortuitous relationship with several academics and public figures. A series of conversations with people who understood state spending for higher education in Oklahoma helped to expand my knowledge of and interest in the subject. My relationships with these individuals motivated me to develop this dissertation. I believe that my previous research, teaching experiences, and relationship with public figures established a strong foundation for this study.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to investigate qualitatively how members of the Oklahoma legislature and legislative staffers perceived the financial need of the state's higher education institutions. The study employed a case study design and I attempted to draw in-depth meaning from participant interviews. The study included seven participants who served in the Oklahoma State Legislature and were chosen on the basis of their involvement with state appropriations, personal experiences, and committee appointments. In addition, I interviewed seven legislative staffers who serve legislators with higher education and/or appropriation experience. Additional opportunities for participant observations were pursued to triangulate the data. The intent of the study was to capture in their own words the essence of participants' perceptions with reference to the research questions.

The data were then carefully analyzed for the purpose of discovering meaning and intent. I considered the context of the transcribed data and kept note of themes, ideas, and connected thoughts. The analysis attempted to make a linkage within the data, construct typologies, and develop the storyline. The emerging themes were then coded utilizing the open-coding process and subsequently categorized in a coherent and purposeful manner. I then considered the context of the themes and made purposeful decisions on the relevancy of the data.

The following chapter, Chapter IV, provides great detail regarding the participants and the study dynamics. Chapter V presents the study findings and Chapter VI discusses the findings in relation to previous research, theory and practice.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION OF SITES, SOUNDS AND PARTICIPANTS

In the preceding chapter, the research methodology revealed that this study features 14 interviews and several observations of legislative sessions in the Oklahoma House and Senate. Chapter III indicated that although sessions were observed prior to the adjournment of the legislature, participants were not interviewed until after adjournment. This chapter provides greater detail concerning the participants and the study dynamic. It serves as a foundation to the findings and thematic elements discussed in Chapters V and VI.

This chapter first discusses voting behaviors and appropriations trends. The chapter then illustrates the sights and sounds of the House and Senate Chambers while discussing the interaction of state legislators during session. This section discusses visual experiences as well as presents a series of figures to illustrate the setting and interaction of participants. The chapter then discusses the collective experiences of participants and presents demographic information in visual charts, before concluding with specific descriptions of the interview participants.

Voting Behaviors and Appropriations Trends

The state budget is normally one of the last measures voted on in a legislative session. The appropriations process for all state agencies in Oklahoma, either by policy or practice, is wrapped-up into one, very large, omnibus budget bill. The 2013 state budget bill was $7.1 billion, with roughly 53% supporting public education. Although most state funding measures are in the budget bill, a series of supplemental bills normally accompany the omnibus bill to allocate new monies or further designate funds.

From early March 2013 until late April 2013, I tracked six bills relating to higher education appropriations. In late April, House Rules dictated that all six bills would remain in committee and would not be heard during the session. As a result, I turned my attention to bills pertaining to appropriations. The subsequent sections detail my experiences during the observations. The sections are intended to illustrate the nature of the political process and the interaction of legislative members.

The Chambers

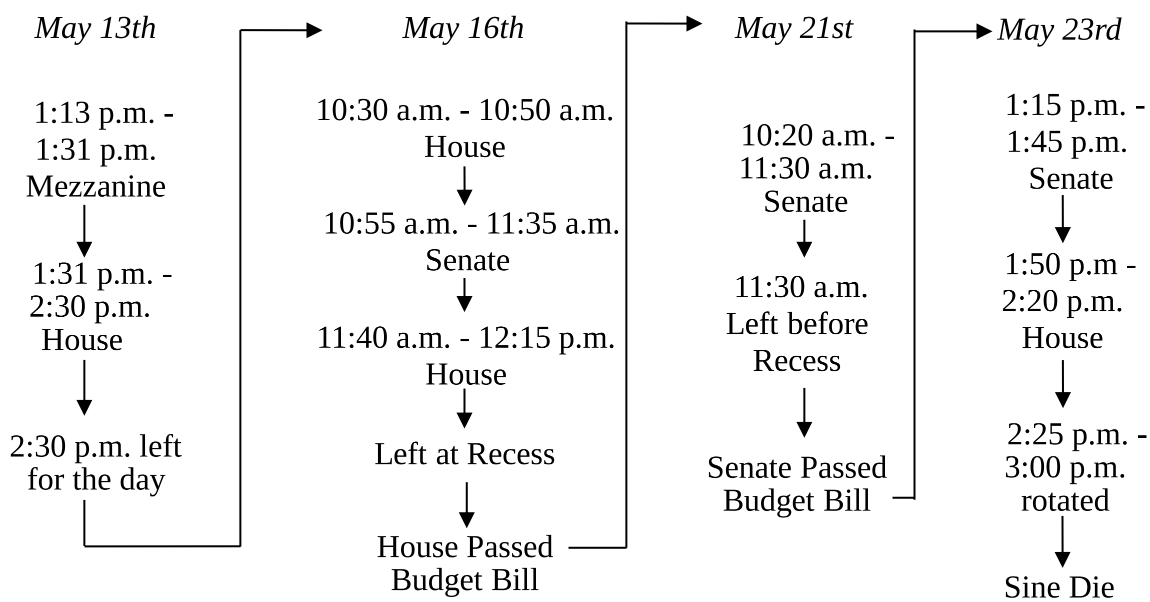
In total, four days of observations were conducted at the Oklahoma capital totaling around seven hours. Although most of my time was spent in the House, I moved often between the two bodies depending upon the nature of their business. This section discusses the collective voice that emerged from those experiences and highlights the interaction of the players while focusing on the emotions and demeanor of the body at large.

The bodies were combinations of emotional highs and lows, and the mood changed quickly from bill to bill. I found bodies to be relatively lax in observation while quickly spurring to debate, depending upon discussion and opposition. Of the 101 members in the House, only 39 were Democrats, giving the Republicans a supermajority and control over most issues.

The observations took place over several non-consecutive days during both morning and afternoon sessions in May 2013. I used a paid internet service to track the bills that would likely be heard on the floor each day. In early May, appropriations bills pertaining to a variety of state services and functions began to emerge. Using the service as a guide, I traveled to the capitol on days of interest and moved fluidly between the chambers and rotunda. Although the subsequent sections detail my observation trail, Figure 5 charts my movements.

Figure 5

Timeline of Session Observations and Events

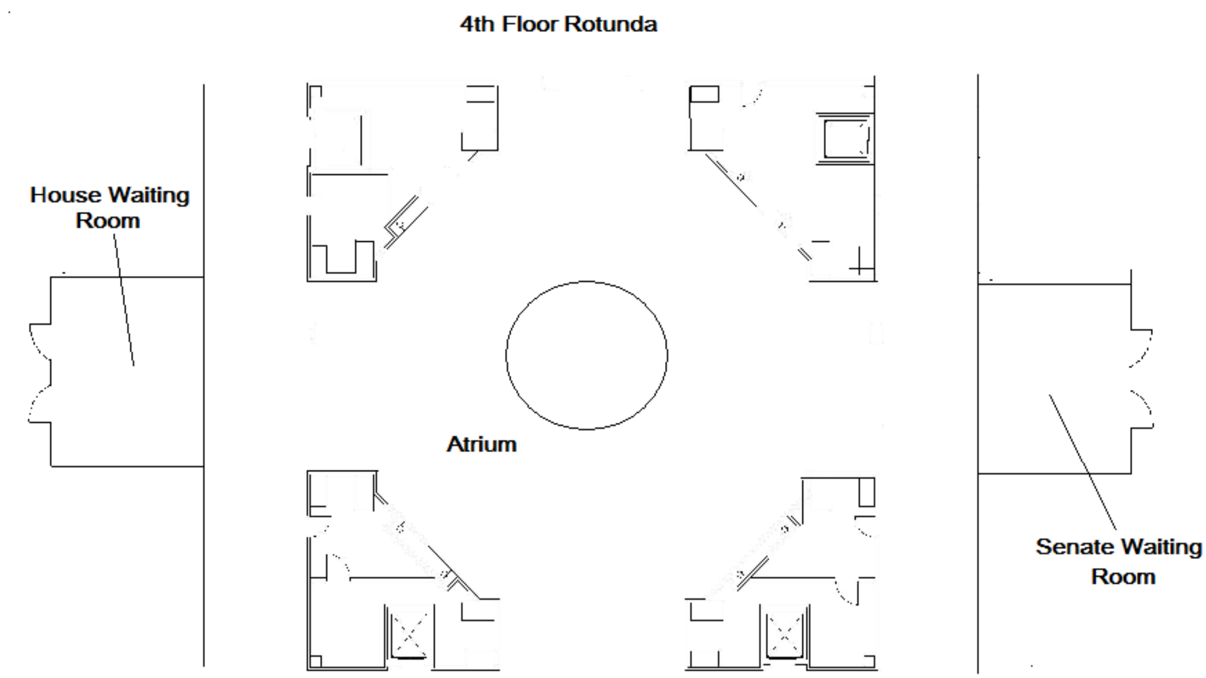


The Rotunda

At 1:13pm, before a mid-May afternoon session, members of both legislative bodies flurried about the fourth-floor rotunda waiting for the sessions to convene. The rotunda was made up of two waiting areas guarded softly by men identified as the Sergeants at Arms. In the center of the rotunda a circular atrium area lay directly below the capitol dome. The center of the atrium was hollowed to give a balcony view to the floors beneath it. Although the outside air shows dark and rainy, the atrium gave way to an abundance of natural light that flowed throughout the larger area. On each side of the atrium, small, open waiting-rooms for legislators lay idle. The rotunda was a hotbed of activity as legislators, staffers and visitors swarmed around each other like busy bees on a warm spring day.

Figure 6

The Rotunda



In the small waiting room outside the House Chamber, nearly 20 members and staffers stood in the protected area conversing in groups. Three Caucasian men stood and discussed while a female representative methodically played with her phone. There was a moderate amount of noise to be heard all around, while behind in the atrium a Native American tribe displayed cultural artifacts proudly. There was a man in a suit holding files in a manila folder while another man paced around outside with his cheek to his phone. Although some stood still in conversation, others moved swiftly about, rotating between the entrance to the small open room and the House Chamber.

A mere 100 feet across, a smaller, open, waiting room was similarly located outside the Senate Chamber. Many similar behaviors took place. A desk sat in the center of the Senate waiting room was occupied by a female speaking on the phone. At 1:20 p.m. an elementary-age group walked through the gallery. About 12 Senators stood firmly outside the chamber speaking in small groups. All were in suits, most were male, and were either interacting with one another or reading newspapers. The activity continued in the lobby outside the House Chamber as I paced between groups, watching the activity and hearing the sounds of the rotunda flow together. As the session start approached, the activity level increased and distant sounds of huddled groups scurrying about could be heard.

I moved one floor up and walked slowly across a balconied walkway that directly overlooks the House waiting room on one side. The other side of the walkway opened up to the atrium and a distant view of the Senate waiting room. As I approached a hallway at the south end of the House Chamber, it remained relatively quiet. The hallway housed the offices of more than a dozen House members and was fairly empty, with the exception of three legislative assistants rotating turns at a large copy machine. Slowly, people entered the hallway from a nearby staircase; many of them had noticeable scattering of raindrops on their business suits. I sat quietly at a small desk with an L-shaped view. At 1:27 p.m. the activity increased, as legislators and staffers moved hurriedly in anticipation of the session start.

As I walked back to the balconied walkway I noticed there was a definite difference between the attitudes of those in the atrium and those in the lobby. Those in the atrium were presumably not in a time crunch because their displays were not influenced by the session start. At 1:29, with the session start looming, the House waiting room grew busy. I counted more than 25 people talking outside in groups of two or three, while some played with phones or other devices. The fourth floor, however, remained relatively quiet. I looked at my watch; it was 1:31 p.m., but the activity outside did not seem to indicate alarm. As I walked through the doors of the House gallery I heard the sounds of “Nurse of the Day” addressing the body, attracting muted claps from the gallery and floor. As the session started, a little more than half of the House of Representative members were on the floor.

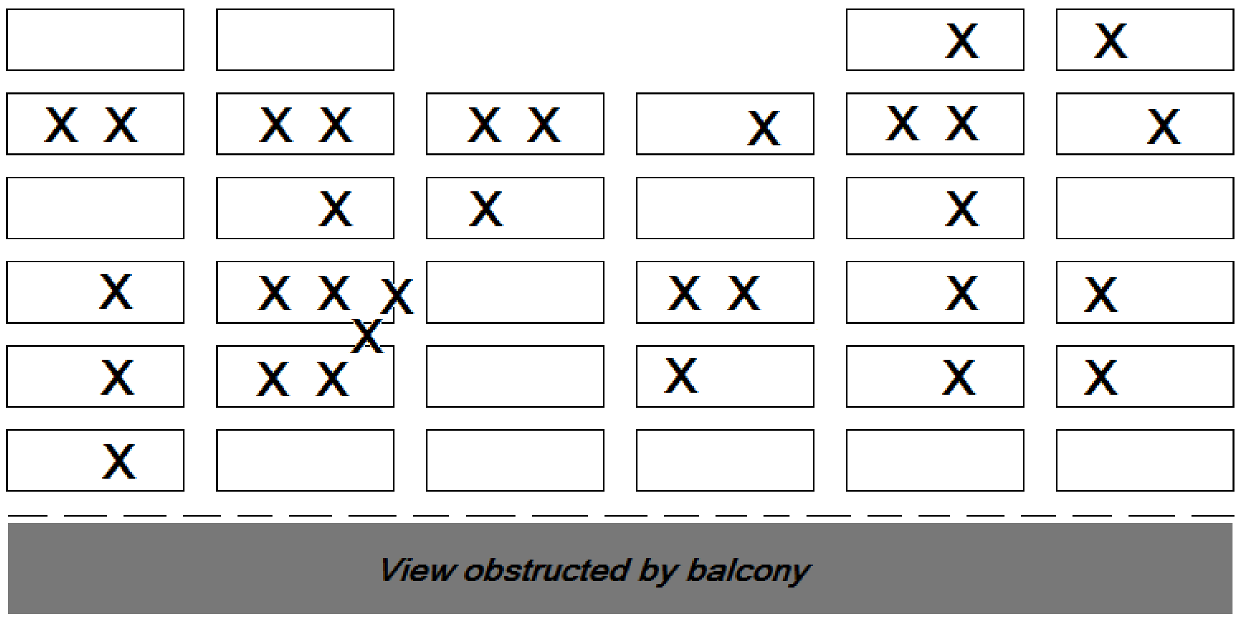
Movement to the House

As I took my seat in a glassed-in viewing gallery that overlooked the House floor I began to notice the sights and sounds. The open room I sat in was mostly reserved for lobbyists and media members, and had a built-in speaker system to relay discussions from the floor. As I took inventory of those who joined me I saw that most were in suits. They held themselves with a reserved sense of attention. Most observers sat in packs of two or three, in the larger portion of the viewing gallery opposite me. They spoke to each other and made light jokes, laughing softly. There seemed to be a network there, and many made friendly gestures to House members whom they presumably knew. One House member tried anxiously to grab the attention of a man in the gallery. He then pointed at his phone, indicating that a private message was received. The true purpose of the 20 or so people in the glassed-in gallery was not thoroughly understood, but it seemed that they had a part to play as either staffers or lobbyist.

At 1:38 p.m. I drew a diagram of my view of the floor, putting rectangles in rows to represent the desks of the House members. I quickly drew an “X” to represent those seated or standing still (see Figure 7 below). Several high-school sports teams sat in adjacent gallery sections, although they are not as formal, and do not contain a glassed-in viewing area. There seemed to be a definite division between those observing from the formal section in which I was based and those in the non-closed-in areas of the gallery. The man presiding over the formal session followed an agenda and recognized several individuals and groups. The representatives seemed pretty casual, many either leaning back in their chairs reading newspapers, conversing with one another, or tinkering with their computers and tablets. It seemed clear that the formal business of the session had not started and the interest in recognizing sports teams and military personnel was routine and informal.

Figure 7

House Seating on Monday, May 13th at 1:38 p.m.



As I walked outside the chamber I began to look over the atrium. It was just as busy as before, although many seemed to be slowly making their way inside. It was nearly 1:45 p.m. now, and I found the Speaker of the House outside by himself in the atrium. I casually observed him from a balconied walkway as he stood at the center of the atrium on the phone. An alarm bell rang in the background, urging both Senate and House members that the session was underway. It did not seem to receive full attention, as both Representatives and Senators stood stationary, casually speaking with one another. As I tracked back to the House Chamber and my previous position in the glass room I was joined by several others. The general mood seemed to indicate that the routine recognitions were over and the discussion of bills would soon follow. I was correct in this assumption, and I took my seat in the glassed-in gallery to hear the introduction of the first bill.

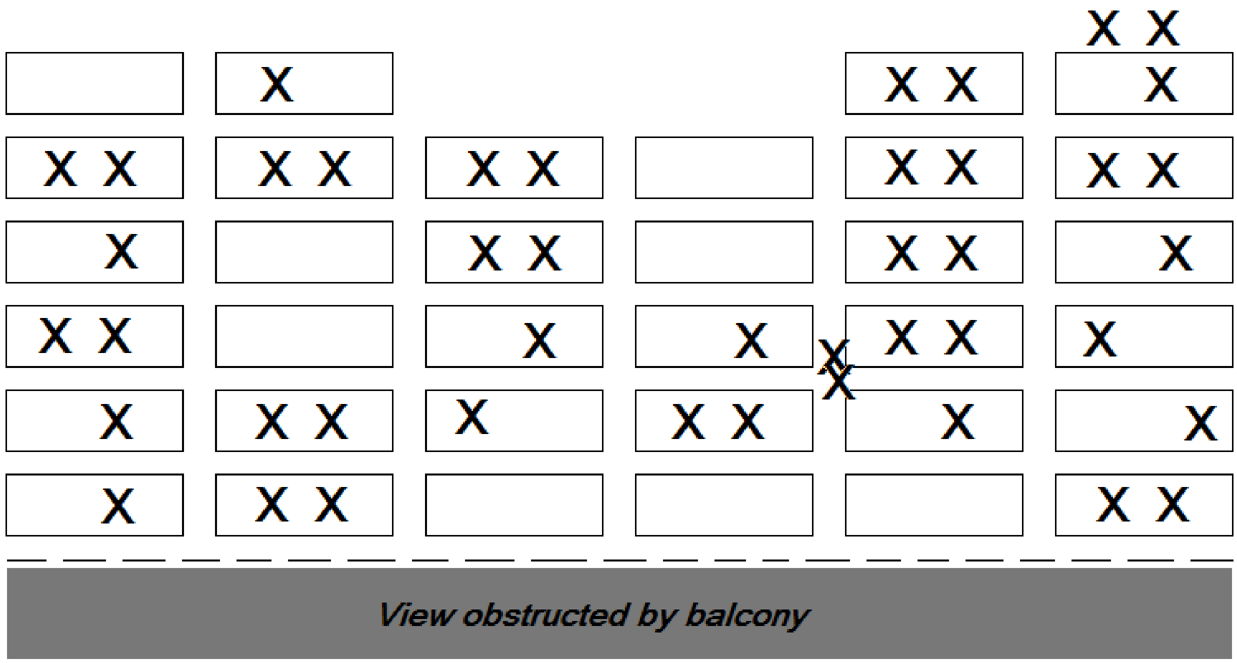
At 1:50 p.m. a woman read the bill very quickly. Little to no activity took place formally on the floor, with no discussion among the legislators. The reading of the bill moved quickly to a roll-call vote, and I heard a Sergeant walking through House members' offices, alerting representatives in the upstairs hallways. As the roll-call vote continued side conversations took place throughout the House. A few looked up at the large marquee that indicated the vote count, but the atmosphere was generally laid back. The voting seemed almost as an afterthought; little discussion took place as most members seemed already decided and cast their vote quickly. As the voting ensued, House members came from the balcony to grab the attention of the man presiding to indicate their vote. A woman yelled "aye" from chamber gallery a mere 20 feet from my position. She was recognized by the floor for vote, and so too was a man who appeared on the opposite side moments later. The bill was an appropriations bill, allocating money to the Department of Health, and passed with a super majority without discussion or debate.

As the session moved on a series of funding and appropriations bills came and went in similar fashion. Several bills were voted and passed without debate or discussion. The floor remained only a little more than half full, as many only seemed partially engaged. There was much background chatter – I quickly jotted down that there were six side conversations taking place during a vote. By 2:10 p.m. the number of members on the House floor had increased. Many sat at their desks while others walked casually around or stood stationary in side conversation. A slight discussion took place on the floor as two men quickly traded words, but most seem disengaged. A roll-call vote on appropriations for health care followed the discussion and it quickly passed by a vote of 87 to 1.

As the session moved quickly to another bill the floor sprang to life. A man asked a question on behalf of another representative, and was quickly greeted by laughter throughout the floor and the glassed-in gallery. I failed to recognize the context of the joke, but there seemed to be a history that most around me understood. Two men passed a note as members continually walked in and out of the swinging doors at the west end of the floor. I counted a total of 27 members with laptops or tablets, and the House agenda was close by most members. As they moved swiftly to a roll-call vote an appropriations bill on substance abuse passed 90 to 0. I overheard discussion that the large $7.1 billion state appropriations bill would be voted on within the week. The omnibus bill contained new monies for higher education over the past year, and an extra $91 million for common education. By 2:30 p.m. the floor was full of representatives sitting at their desks, pacing around, or standing still. A diagram of the seating is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

House Seating, 2:30 p.m., Monday May 16th, 2013



I left the capitol for the day with plans to return early the next week for an observation of the Senate, because it did not meet that morning. When I returned the following week, however, I choose to visit the House first due to the agenda of bills to be discussed. I observed the House in session on two additional occasions before the legislative session adjourned. The second observation of the House occurred during a morning session on the day the large appropriations bill passed. These sessions are addressed in subsequent sections.

The House, Round Two

When I returned the following week I spent 20 minutes in the House before transitioning to the Senate. The atmosphere of the House was slightly different from what I experienced in the first observation. Although they did attempt to move quickly from bill to bill, most featured moderate discussion. I overheard several people speaking in the glassed-in gallery, and their discussion indicated that passing supplemental bills was a race against session adjournment. Although the movement from one bill to the next was swift it was assumed from the comments that most bills would lie dormant in committee and not be heard this session. The quick movement was seemingly an attempt to get as many bills heard before session end, or they risked being forever buried in committee. This observation was similar to what I experienced with the higher education bills in April. In April, six bills relating to higher education funding remained in committee unread and, pursuant to House Rules, were not voted on during the session. After 20 minutes of observing behaviors and the pace at which the bills move, I overheard a gallery discussion that made clear that the "Senate will be where the action is" this day. I wrapped up my initial jottings and moved quietly toward the Senate.

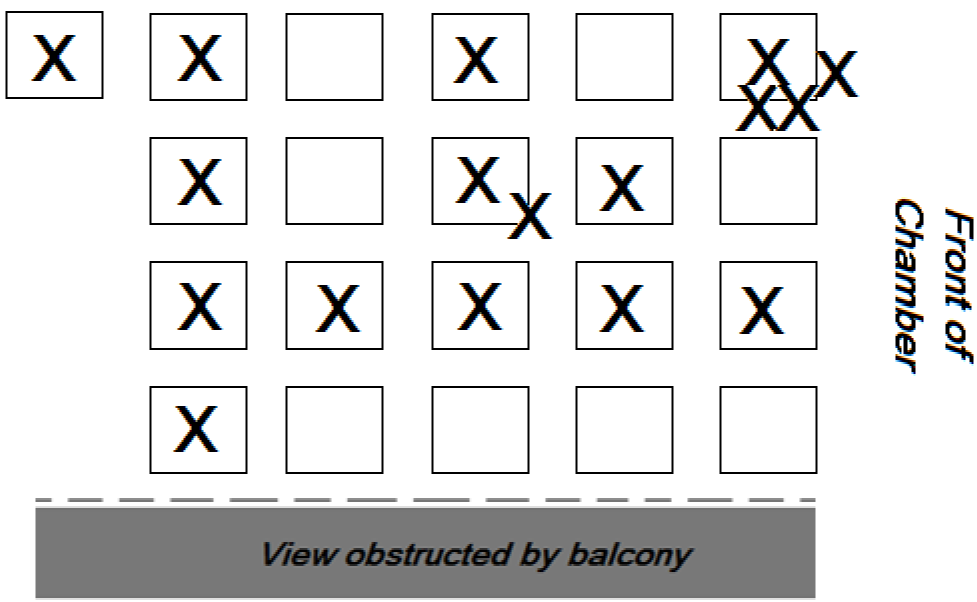
The Senate

As I approached the Senate gallery I noticed several striking differences to the House. It was not as busy with observers, and the entrance was not as inviting. I was a little unsure whether I would even be allowed to enter the gallery, and quickly scanned the rules for reassurance. I walked into the gallery and noticed that the glassed-in area, similar to the one from which I observed in the House, was only for media members. I would not be allowed in and would have to sit in the open area of the gallery, which unfortunately did not display the same luxuries I had been afforded in the House. I took a seat on the back row and began repeating some of the behaviors I found helpful in the House.

I first looked for commonalities and then differences on the floor. I noticed first that the room was similar in structure, though significantly smaller, and had a gallery on three sides rather than four. The floor featured a similar entrance to the rotunda waiting room. However, the House featured split doors to a private area behind the leadership. In the Senate, there was neither the private meeting space nor the split doors. The grandeur of the decor was similar to that of the House, suggesting the importance of the hallowed halls. I then noticed that each member had an individual desk, whereas the House sat two people per table. At this point in the observation it was 11:05 a.m. and the Senate had been in session for over an hour. I began drawing squares to represent the desks, marking those occupied with an "X." Figure 9 below demonstrates the seating plan.

Figure 9

Senate Floor, May 16th, 11:05 a.m.



The seating arrangement allowed only one person per desk, changing the body dynamic slightly. The number of side conversations was limited by the arrangement, because most Senators had to move seats to speak with one another. There was noticeably less traffic and fewer people sitting in the gallery. I overheard a conversation in the gallery that made reference to the House having discussed only three bills that day. Most people around me stared back at this person and shook their head in bewilderment. The discussion among gallery members seemed to suggest a general unspoken contention that the Senate was a superior legislative body compared to the House. In an interview conducted later, a House member alluded to the Senate's attitude of superiority. Also, in a casual conversation, a capitol employee referred to the House derogatorily as a "cluster" when compared to its Senate counterpart.

The traffic on the Senate floor was not as fluid as in the House, but the person reading the bills moved much quicker. There were noticeably fewer side conversations among Senators, with only two pairs conversing. The readings were much quicker and conversations seemed very personal. The make-up of the Senate body was quite different from that of the House. Most notably, it lacked diversity in ethnicity, age, and gender compared to its House counterpart. I was in the Senate for only 45 minutes when they recessed until 1:15 p.m. I made my way back to the House and found that they were still discussing their third bill of the day.

Back to the House

As I entered the House chamber I took a seat near where I sat earlier. Like the hour before the House was alive with energy, but the Representatives were much more engaged. Although the general presence of the members remained fairly relaxed, they still were noticeably more active in the floor discussions. I overheard a comment in the gallery about this being only the third bill. This was a different group of people than those that spoke of it in the Senate. There was confusion and surprise at the remark, which struck me as a comment on the general nature of the process. In the previous observation I noted that the bodies moved quickly from bill to bill. I overheard a comment about the bill being discussed on the floor having trouble in committee. The comment, and generally quick nature of the process, suggested that more action took place in committee than I originally thought. There was quite a bit of discussion on the floor that referred to “the committee,” and the sentiment was echoed by those in the gallery. It seemed that committees played a huge part in advancing bills, and I jotted down a note to locate and print off all meeting minutes for the committees my interview participants represented.

The House was not as loud as during the last session that I observed. A debate ensued and the representatives seemed fairly engaged in conversation. A representative spoke passionately and some turned their chairs to hear the argument. Most seemed disengaged and generally uninspired, however. The debate moved to another member; his voice and presence were on fire, and he commanded the attention of those around him. Although the bill was met with fiery discussion there were not many questions asked from either side. After a quick back-and-forth debate and nearly 20 minutes of discussion the House moved to a roll-call vote. The appropriations bill pertaining to substance abuse passed with little opposition.

I spoke informally in the gallery to an agency administrator for common education and registered lobbyist. He discussed the larger appropriations bill with me at length and predicted that the debate would last well into the night as members attempted to protect their own interests. His prediction eventually became true because the House members stayed late into the evening discussing the bill. Although I was not present that evening for the debate, the documents that I subsequently collected indicated that there was much discussion, with most Democrats opting to vote against the bill at large. However, the supermajority of Republicans in the House was enough to carry the bill and send it to the Senate for confirmation. I chose to return the following day and proceeded first with an observation of the Senate. Later that evening, I learned that both Chambers recessed for the weekend. The Senate would not convene until the following Tuesday.

Back in the Senate

The following Tuesday I returned to find the mood of the Senate floor and gallery to be very different. I soon learned that the previous afternoon session in the House lasted until after midnight, recessing twice in that span. During that time the large omnibus appropriations bill, the $7.1 billion juggernaut, passed the House with significant opposition. The Senate seemed just as formal as it was during my last observation, but most members now stood and there was much more chatter. The Senate moved quickly between each bill and voting occurred without discussion, despite some opposition. Three measures were discussed and voted on in less than ten minutes. Two of the bills received more than ten votes in opposition, but there was no discussion. Why was opposition not audibly voiced? I learned later about the effect of political reality on bill discussions and voting. The political realities of voting habits are discussed more fully in Chapters V and VI.

The Senate was undoubtedly more dynamic with regard to both the persistence of bills and member persona. This observation gave way to a thought about the human nature of the body – the emotional highs and lows, excitement and boredom that take place through the process. The ebb and flow of the process was interesting to watch. The feelings of excitement and disdain moved fluidly between moments of seriousness, playfulness, and confusion. The Senate was a strong legislative body and in debate words were chosen carefully. Although they moved aggressively between bills, with the budget bill having passed the House, they seemed anxious to catch up. Bills and wording moved quickly, votes on appropriations bills were rapid and methodical. The action on the floor was limited, mostly just bill readings and quick votes. Again, there seemed to be a hidden value of committees and work done outside the session. I watched silently as the behavior continued and choose to leave after an hour. The Senate passed the budget bill the following Tuesday. Although I was unable to attend the discussion, I returned that Thursday, the last day of session for both the House and Senate.

The Last Observation

I learned early in the day that this day would likely be the last for both chambers. I made the decision to flow between the two as often as I saw fit. I started with the Senate and found the atmosphere of the body as a whole to be more colorful, with many members joking and laughing. Words were muttered by a man presiding, and Senators let out a playful “boo.” The session was winding down, and with the larger appropriations bill behind them the body was generally less serious than before. There was noticeably more movement from the Senate door as members moved about, socializing. They demonstrated an attitude that could be perceived as either happy or relieved, or perhaps both. The session was almost over and everyone, floor and gallery alike, seemed to understand that reality. I left the Senate and quickly made my way to the House.

The atmosphere in the House was noticeably different than in the Senate. The members were fairly quiet on the floor and side conversations took place throughout. Several representatives upstairs heard the Sergeant at Arms call for roll, and they scrambled to make it to the floor. I overheard one member say “is this the vote?” It is obvious that this bill had more weight than the others, although discussion on the floor did not necessarily dictate so. There was a general attitude that was different than my two previous observations, one that might suggest that the Representatives were tired or just ready to go home. A joke about an appropriations bill in the glassed-in gallery attracted loud laughter that caught the attention of a Sergeant at Arms. A passionate and aggressive debate ensued and, regardless of the opposition, moved to a quick roll-call vote with overwhelming support. Most seemed relieved, and reluctant even to engage in a discussion. One member on the floor mentioned that although they were tired and wanted to adjourn, there were still important measures to be discussed. The gallery attendants seemed tired and disinterested as well. The collective attitudes reminded me of college students at a late-night course, waiting impatiently to go home. The mood was quite different from that of the Senate. Later that day both the House and the Senate voted to adjourn until next year. The House was the last to adjourn.

The preceding observations shed light on the legislative process and provided a glimpse into the business of the legislature. It was interesting to see the interaction of the members, which foreshadowed two factors that would be important in my transition to interviews: the effect of time constraints on decision-making, and the importance of committees and outside conversations on legislation. Taking what I learned from the observations, I redirected my focus toward participant interviews. The interviews featured a wide array of voices, views, and experiences.

The Participants

The first portion of this section provides an overview of the participants, both legislators and staffers. The section concludes with a discussion about each participant individually. Tables 2 and 3 below provide a list of the collective committees that interview participants represented, and the number of participants serving in each. Table 2 represents the committees with direct relevance to the research questions in this study, while Table 3 shows the remaining committees that were not related to this study.

Legislator Participants

Table 2

Relevant Committee Representation, Legislators

Committee	Number of participants in committee
House Appropriations and Budget	3
Joint Committee on Appropriations and Budget	2
House Appropriations and Budget for Higher Education	2
Senate Appropriations Committee	3
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education	2
Senate Education	1

The table above demonstrates that the legislators interviewed had a voice in five committees relevant to this study. Although the level of influence each member reported to have on the committees varied, one member served as Chair while two served as Vice Chairs. Further committee characteristics are discussed in Chapters V and VI. In addition to the collective committees in Table 2, the legislator participants represented additional committees that were not directly related to the research questions. Table 3 highlights the additional committees represented by the legislator participants in this study.

Table 3

Non-Relevant Committee Involvement, Legislators

Committee	Number of participants in committee
House Appropriations and Budget for Public Safety	1
House Government Modernization	1
House Appropriations and Budget for Transportation	1
House Transportation	1
House Long Term Care and Senior Services	2
House Agriculture and Wildlife	2
House Human Services	1
House Appropriations and Budget for Human Services	1
House Tourism and International Relations	1
House Judiciary	2
Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations for Public Safety	1
Senate Finance	2
Senate Public Safety	1
Senate Rules	1
Senate Transportation	1
Senate Subcommittee for Appropriations for Health and Human Services	1
Senate Energy	2
Senate Rules	2
Senate Health and Human Services	1

Table 3 above demonstrates the scope of committee involvement that the participants represent. The list is important to the study because, according to literature presented in Chapter II, many of these areas compete with education for discretionary dollars. A discussion of funding areas that may potentially funnel money away from higher education is discussed in Chapters V and VI in greater detail.

Table 4 contains additional information regarding legislators' demographic background.

Table 4

Legislator Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Years active	District type	College degree?	Public in district?
James	2	Rural	No	2 Year
Betty	6	Urban	No	4 Year
Jane	1	Rural/Urban	Yes	4 Year
Bob	5	Rural	Yes	None
Lane	6	Rural	Yes	2 Year
Sam	11	Rural	Yes	None
Ben	11	Urban	No	4 Year

In addition to the characteristics provided above the study featured four Republicans and three Democrats. Two of the participants were former educators, one at the K12 level while the other was a high-ranking university administrator. Three members had advanced degrees at the masters level or higher. One attended a trade school while another had no level of schooling beyond high school. One member owned a business while another ran a family farm. The age of the participants ranged from early 30s to almost 80, and all five geographic regions in Oklahoma were represented by the participants: southeast, southwest, central, northeast and northwest.

James. With a deep country accent, a polite manner and strong ties to the agricultural community, James represents a rural area of the state. I met with him in a small roadside store in his district. The store provided a variety of services including fishing accessories, fast food, and a gas station. I waited for him at a small table close to the entrance. As he entered he greeted me politely and gave me an overview of his morning. The time was mid-morning and the legislative session had just passed. It seemed there was an element of relief and frustration as he calmly responded to my questions. He seemed open to my questions and at times showed a genuine frustration with the process and the people involved.

Betty. A woman with a strong and towering voice, Betty is an outspoken advocate for human services. In a local coffee shop she shuffled in hurriedly, shaking my hand and thanking me for my patience. She had an armful of papers and a small handbag. She presented herself and asked several questions about the intention of the study. The coffee shop had a moderate amount of business but was large in size. Although people moved around, our conversation seemed quaint and private. She responded to each of my questions without hesitation. Although reminding me of her time constraints, she gave each question a detailed answer.

Jane. Jane is a first-term legislator from an area that is both urban and suburban. She is college educated and admitted an interest in higher education. Her meeting with me was her first of the day; we sat at a local ice cream and dairy store within her region. Within my view were people ordering breakfast, while behind me a group of men conversed over a cup of coffee. She answered my questions and attempted to deliver several sides of the argument. She was very direct, whispering at times as if she was telling secrets. She gave me well over an hour of her time.

Bob. Bob is polite and well rehearsed. In the lobby of a hotel he provided me with 30 minutes of his time between meetings. There was a mild amount of activity in the lobby, mostly from people leaving the meeting in a slower manner than he. He approached his answers by supplying detailed accounts of processes and interactions. He discussed the political realities while showing skepticism about both appropriations and agency spending. Bob shared that he was connected to the source and in good favor with decision-makers, either real or perceived.

Lane. Lane is a long-time legislator from a rural district. The coffee and sandwich shop where we met was urban and trendy. Men and women in business suits ate lunch while college students studied and listened to music. The place was busy and diverse in culture and demographics. He approached each question by giving his account, followed by an historical overview of the issue.

Sam. Sam identifies himself as a staunch conservative with strong feelings about fiscal responsibility. We met in his district at a small coffee shop that was very busy, both in traffic and noise. I located a small two-person table outside that minimized traffic and distractions. As I began to ask the first question, he asked about my study intention and plan. I attempted to move slowly to gain his trust in me and the process. He is a fiscal conservative, and finds value in education. He approached funding from a perspective of core services and minimal federal interaction. He was a polite, self-professed Christian man, who emphasized family values and personal responsibility.

Ben. A long-term legislator, Ben is nearing term limit. Although running a business in his district he maintains a local residence during session. We met at a local coffee shop that was close to his residence. The venue was small and the mid-afternoon meeting met with little traffic. Although serving on an appropriations committee, he shared that, as a Democrat, his level of influence was limited. He was polite and accommodating, but also rigid and somewhat intimidating. He spoke directly and in an aggressive tone, often raising his voice and the level of engagement. As a long-time legislator, however, he provided both an historical account and predictions for the future.

Staffer Participants

Staffers provided an interesting dynamic and positive supplemental data source to the study. Although legislature perceptions of higher education spending was the focus of the study, the decision to interview seven additional staff members was made to confirm legislator behaviors and shed new light on the bodies as whole. Although six of the seven staffers interviewed held the title “legislative assistant,” the way that each explained their roles varied. The seventh staffer served as a bill drafter for the Senate Democrats. The subsequent section provides a more concise description of the roles of various staffers.

House and Senate staffer roles. The House and Senate have teams of bi-partisan researchers who assist with bill research and the drafting of legislation. Each legislative body has approximately seven people who serve all members in this capacity. The bi-partisan research team is not affiliated with any one party or team. However, many have a specialized role such as health care or education. Although many citizens likely think that each legislator has a large team of staffers, that is not necessarily true. Each member of the House and Senate has only one direct designee, a legislative assistant. In many cases the legislative assistant will serve two different legislators. Each holds the title of legislative assistant, but their role can vary significantly. Although most can speak about the legislative action of the legislator(s) that they serve, their knowledge may vary regarding the legislator's involvement with committees and bills.

Legislative assistants and their self-described roles and responsibilities.

- Two described their role as strictly administrative with little to no involvement with bills and legislation
- One described the role as mostly administrative with some involvement with drafting bills and legislation
- One described the role as an even mix between administrative work and conducting fundamental research and bill drafting
- One described themself as an extension of the legislator, providing counsel often and working directly with the legislator to draft legislation
- One described the role as a political liaison, doing slight administrative work while dealing mostly with political issues rather than policy

The last staffer interviewed was employed by the Oklahoma Democratic Caucus as a bill drafter and political liaison. Although the role of this individual varied slightly, she was an important piece to the puzzle. As the above section suggests, the title legislative assistant can be misleading. At the time of this study most legislative assistants, however, had served in their respective bodies for multiple years and for two or more legislators. Table 5 below provides demographic information.

Table 5

Legislative Assistants Demographics

Pseudonym	Years	Body	Party	Leg. committee
Assistant Tina	2	House	Democrat	Higher Education
Assistant Sue	7	House	Republican	HE Subcommittee A&B*
Assistant Amanda	15	House	Republican	Higher Education
Assistant Belinda	5	Senate	Democrat	Appropriations
Assistant Jon	5 months	House	Republican	Appropriations
Assistant Hayley	7	Senate	Republican	Appropriations
Drafter Mary	4	Senate	Democrat	N/A

*HE Subcommittee A&B represents the Higher Education Subcommittee on Appropriations & Budget

Table 5 demonstrates the experiences and characteristics represented by the staffer participants, highlighting the length of their involvement, legislative body, party affiliation, and the committee involvement of their legislator. A large majority of the legislative assistants in general, and accordingly in this study as well, are female. The staffer participants vary in age from late 20s to late 60s. In addition, the participants range in prior profession: two are retired school teachers, one was in her first job following college, one was a former activist, one worked on a campaign for their legislator, and the last previously worked in policy in a different state. The following section provides a brief description of the legislative assistants.

Assistant Tina. Assistant Tina was a dynamic individual with a big personality. She was passionate, direct, and sometimes critical of the process. We met at a small library with little and sporadic traffic. She was knowledgeable about and involved in the legislative process. I found her to be accommodating but slightly disinterested. Although it took her several minutes to engage, she eventually provided what seemed to be a strong and sincere account of her experiences and provided an open dialogue of her experiences, interests and views. She was very supportive of her legislator and described the person as a fighter and activist.

Assistant Sue. Assistant Sue was soft spoken and expressed her limited knowledge of bill specifics. We met at the same library mentioned above, but at a different time, and the setting was similar. Although critical of the process, she described her legislator as being a sincere, involved, and committed servant. Although skeptical of my interview, and specifically the audio recorder, she expressed her trust in me and her anonymity. She spoke passionately about education and parental involvement, while describing her legislator as a person of family values and personal responsibility.

Assistant Amanda. Assistant Amanda was a long-time servant of the legislature. I found her to be direct and assertive, knowledgeable and concise. At a small bench outside the capitol building, the openness was interrupted only by the occasional walker on a nearby pathway. With a background in education and representing a legislator she described as “education-minded,” she explained that she was in tune with appropriations to education at large. She spoke of her involvement, explaining that it was fairly wide and at all levels of the legislative process.

Assistant Belinda. Assistant Belinda joined a long-time legislator in the middle of his career. She was knowledgeable and opinionated, but guarded in response to her involvement. Although she had served for six years and maintained a wide range of responsibilities, she was limited in her knowledge of the legislators’ perceptions and preferences. We met at a small coffee shop as part of her lunch hour. The shop was buzzing with activity and music played at a moderate level. Although she grappled with the integrity of her statements, she shared what she could of her legislators' stance on education and interaction among members of the appropriations committee.

Assistant Jon. Assistant Jon did not describe his work as administrative. Instead, as a person interested in the political process, he described himself and role as a political liaison and constituent correspondent. We met at small bar in the early evening surrounded by a mix of happy hour participants and dinner guests. The atmosphere was moderately lively and the surrounding televisions combined to create light noise. Although he maintained many similar administrative duties as the other legislative assistants, he mentioned that he was very interested in the political process.

***Assistant Hayley*.** A passionate assistant, she described herself as an advocate and activist for human rights and services. Our meeting was fairly informal, and she allowed small phone interruptions, during which she referred to me as a "boy working on a school project." The interview, although scheduled, was a conversation in a parking lot, in which she gave me a snatched moment of time between places and meetings. She was open about her views, delivering harsh words for the higher education appropriations. Although complimentary about her legislator's efforts, she was unique in that she served as an activist in her personal time, often working with agencies to pursue her own agenda.

Drafter Mary. As mentioned previously, Drafter Mary had a slightly different role than that of the legislative assistants. Although she previously served as an assistant her role was to assist in the drafting of legislation and to pursue the interest of the

Democratic Caucus. We met in a small area outside the capitol steps, where she shared many of her frustrations. She moved to Oklahoma from a strongly Democrat state with a large education budget, and expressed her frustrations with the state and its values. She had a unique perspective because her job, as she explained it, was to be disruptive and to locate and take political advantage of factions within the Republican Party.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the legislative process in Oklahoma. The chapter was a fundamental step to understanding the behaviors of legislators, and the political constraints within which they work. The chapter began with a brief discussion of the appropriations process in Oklahoma and a timeline of legislative events. It then presented a picture of the legislative bodies at work. These observations provided the foundation for the study and the thematic elements subsequently presented in Chapter V. The remainder of the chapter focused on the individual participants, including their collective experiences and personal characteristics.

Chapters V and VI demonstrate that although many legislative members believe there is a need to better fund higher education, will is often refuted by reality.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Chapter IV presented participant descriptions and the interaction of members within the policy arena. It highlighted that the policy arena represents a series of differential dichotomies derived from multiple sources, including political affiliation, district culture, and committee involvement. Chapter V discusses the themes that emerged from the interviews and my observations. Data were analyzed using the open-coding process (Taylor and Bogden, 1984) described in Chapter III. In addition to the open-coding process, further analysis was conducted by utilizing the MAXQDA tool. Because this study is based in symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, the coding process attempted to capture the personal perceptions and experiences of participants (Creswell, 2009) as they related to their decision-making and the priorities of the state budget at large.

The participant experiences and perspectives are described through my personal lens as I connected emerging themes using analytic techniques. Thematic elements categorize participants' perceptions, terms, explanations, and stories. The themes focus primarily on narratives provided by legislative and staffer participants, as well as excerpts from committee minutes. The chapter conveys not only participant perspectives on higher education but also how participants viewed higher education's needs within the context of the budget at large.

Emergent Themes

The sub-headings in the remainder of this chapter represent themes that emerged in the study. Sub-headings are derived either from the words of participants or their collective experiences. Themes are organized in a tiered approach, focusing first on the budgetary picture and political realities, and then drilling toward higher education appropriations in Oklahoma.

Limited Participation in the Process

Although many participants shared a general frustration with the budgetary process, most explained that few legislators are involved in drafting the appropriation bills. They emphasized the value of committee work, but most stated that the appropriations process is limited to the caucus and committee leadership.

Very few in the process. Nearly all participants spoke of the limitations of the budget process and that there were "so few in the process." One member stated that, "there are about 6 people in Oklahoma that draw up the budget," while another added that there are "5 or 6 that ultimately have the final say, you're going to see it broaden to about 10 if they trust their staff members, and allow them to speak freely and make recommendations." The reference to the involvement of 10 members or less was repeated by most of the legislators and staffers. In addition, one member spoke of his involvement with the appropriations committee:

> As a member of the appropriations committee for almost every term I've been there, that's 11 years, I have not had one iota of a say in how the budget is crafted for the different entities. And, that disturbs me, and when I tell that to people outside the capitol building, they are also disturbed by that.

Participants explained why so few people are involved in the budget process. According to them, the leadership of the majority party caucus normally assigns committee roles. As a result, the chair and vice chairs of most committees are from the majority party. The result is that most committees are typically led by the majority party. One member stated, "It's just the reality of it. You can't have, you can't do appropriations by committee very well because somebody has to say 'here's the number'." In addition, although the appropriations committees in each chamber may seat a large number of members, only a few are given a spot at the table to write the bill. Another legislator provided further specifics regarding the process:

> The 6 people who consistently draw up the budget are going to be the Chair and Vice Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the Governor's designee who is usually either the Secretary of Finance or often times there will be another person that comes to play in that situation. It may be the Chief of Staff for the Governor, it may be the Secretary of State for the Governor, um, you also see the staff members be at the table, because they're the ones who provide the numbers for the decision-makers to come up with the policy that they want as far as where the budget goes….And, ultimately the Governor will have the veto power on a budget if the Governor does not feel it is the appropriate budget.

Several staff participants agreed with the assessment. One staffer for a majority legislator added that "as far as the omnibus bill…he's not going to be able to impact that, because that's decided by much higher beings." Although they may be a majority member, it seems from the discussion that those majority members who are not in the upper echelon of leadership may have influence but no involvement with drafting. Another participant agreed that "it's 4 or 5 people in this state craft the budget for over 3 million." Although most minority members were frustrated by their lack of involvement, one long-time minority legislator said, "But this, this has been going for quite some time and they complained when I was in the House that the Democrats did this to them but it hasn't changed any." Curious about the process, I asked a minority legislator how involved Democrats on the Appropriations Committee were. The member responded by saying:

> Um, well, I think we have two people that sit on Appropriations (Democrats) and I know that they weren't very involved with it. It's mostly the Chairman and he picks his 'yes' people and then some of the chairs of different committees are able to put some of their input on things that they're committee would go over.

Although legislators may have mixed emotions regarding the process, for most of the 149 state legislators their role within the state budget is limited to a single vote. Each member has a vote on the budget. However, participants shared their frustration with the budget process at large. One described their involvement in appropriations as "left out," while another added "they drop the budget in our laps and say 'you can either vote yes or no'." One participant stated:

> Today it's all done behind closed doors by a select few in leadership and both Democrats and Republican members that aren't in the upper echelons of leadership are left out of that process, and ultimately the majority of the Oklahoma people that they represent are left out of it as well, and that's why they get the short end of the stick.

The role of minority members is particularly small. A higher education committee and minority party member offered that, “in the minority we really don’t see the budget until it’s approved. Or, so far along that it, you know, that it, well we don’t really get a chance to and along the way we just do our best to get bugs in people’s ear and talk about priorities.”

When asked about how budget priorities are developed, a key member of the Senate explained:

> Well let’s see, first of all you start off with the hearings, okay? So, sort of all the various entities come before, and this year we had joint hearings and so people from the House and Senate got together so that we wouldn’t have to say it twice, okay? So, we had joint hearings and there are chairs for the various committees, so there are the Chair for Education Policy in the Senate and a Chair for Education Appropriations committee, but there’s an overall appropriations committee so they sort of farm it out a little bit. But, so, but then there’s similar positions in the House, so those four people we interact all the time, we were just in Santa Fe (New Mexico) and we interact all the time, we discuss what the problems are and how they should be addressed. So, just this morning Senator (High Ranking Chair) called me right before I went to the funeral, and said ‘Hey I think this is an issue that I think we should discuss.’ So I said ‘okay’ and he said ‘Well we’re going to have some hearings and would you be available in October, the first of October? Check the calendar.’ And I said ‘Yes.’ And then, you know, I’m about to go to New Orleans and those four people will be there, in New Orleans, so it’s sort of a constant communication between the four committee

> chairs but, well now, we made a recommendation this year for common education, and I think by and large that was adopted, so sort of at the beginning of the session along with the Chair of (Influential Committee), (High Ranking Chair) and I signed an open letter to all of our colleagues basically said that we need to put 75 to 100 million dollars, we said 90 million dollars to common ed, okay? Well we put in 91, last year, we were saying, well I was saying that we need to do something about endowed chairs [for higher education], that people were going to die, or go away, and we're not going to get the matching funding um, and so, um you sort of have to lobby for things over a period of time. But, it sort of all boils down to um, I think in almost every state since, and I've seen the process in Missouri, and Arkansas, New Mexico and Oklahoma, when you get the Governor and the Speaker of the House, and President Pro Temp of the Senate in a room, you got a lot of decision-makers right there. But, they still are listening during all this time, but it's not as if they're not, it's not as if you don't have a voice but when push comes to shove right at the end, they have an honest influence and that's exactly what's going to happen. And, if you got 48 Senators and 101 people in the House, you can't put 149 people in a room and say 'what are we going to do?' You gotta have someone in a leadership position, but then they come and say 'Okay, well this is the deal I think we can make,' okay? And then the Caucus will support it or not. So it's, it's a, um, a relatively democratic process.

The Senator further explained that the process is "collegial" in nature. The general concept is that the structure of the legislative branch and the executive branch is hierarchical. The Oklahoma Constitution and bylaws of the Senate and House allow for those at the top of the hierarchical structure to run the larger budgeting process without input from all members. Although these few individuals decide how much of the large state budget [this year 7.1 billion] is allocated in lump sum to higher education, supplemental bills are sometimes discussed that provide additional dollars.

Most members of the legislature have influence but no authorship of supplemental bills. Supplemental bills, however, usually deal with smaller appropriations. For example, the observations I conducted featured bills with amounts between $30K and $2 million. Occasionally, a supplemental bill to higher education with a specific purpose – such as endowed chairs – will be introduced and discussed. These bills collectively represent a very small proportion of the funds appropriated to higher education.

The Value of Committees

In addition to party affiliation, committee involvement also impacts a member's level of influence. A dominant theme that sprang from my session observations is the value of committee work. Because the theme emerged throughout the study, I asked a staffer, "Would you consider more work is done in committee rather than on the floor?" The staff participant responded "Right, I would say that. That's absolutely correct, yeah." Additionally, several legislators spoke specifically to the power of committees. One member stated that:

> Well, you'll get a bill that'll come out of a committee that didn't come through the right committee, it didn't come through Higher Education so it came through, something else, Government, or Energy, or…you know, so how did this bill

show up through this committee but all the experts that are on this committee didn't see it? And, when things like that happen then we vote 'no'.

Chapter III and Chapter IV indicate that university representatives and OSRHE members were occasionally present in committee meetings. Although their level of influence on voting is uncertain, committee attendance could implicate funding decisions. At times these individuals addressed the committee and attempted to educate members on very specific and narrow issues. For example, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education meeting on February 13th, 2013 featured representatives from many regional universities and community colleges. These individuals were there to educate the subcommittee on the Master Lease Program which is discussed in further detail in a subsequent section and in Chapter VI.

The legislation that members present is normally derived from their committee involvement. If a person is not on an education or appropriations committee, they likely have no involvement with the issue other than voting "yes" or "no" on the floor. One staff member stated that "sometimes members vote 'no' on an issue just because they're not involved." The state budget at large is no exception; members that do not sit on an appropriations committee have no formal role with drafting the large appropriations bill. In addition, the members who sit on an appropriations committee may have limited power depending upon their political affiliation and role within their caucus. As a result of committee appointments and political power, most members and staff participants explained that very few are involved in drafting the state budget. "Limited participation in the process," is a powerful theme that affects the remaining themes in Chapter V and the discussion in Chapter VI.

The Divisions of Power

In addition to the limited participation in the process and the importance of committees, many legislative members indicated that true power in the process was divided along multiple dichotomies.

Party lines. Beyond the comments noted in the preceding section, one member stated that “the reality is that, that the party in control occasionally visits with the other party.” The member further explained that “there are also many other divisions.” As several members discussed, however, power within the appropriations process goes beyond party affiliation.

House vs. Senate. One member of the Republican Party shared that:

> Part of our frustration has been at the capital, at least since I’ve been there, but even before that it just felt kinda like the Senate was running the show on everything and the House just had to tag along. And, I think that we’re in the process of exerting ourselves to say ‘hey, we’re an equal partner in these negotiations and we’re going to conduct ourselves as such.’

A member who has had a strong hand in the appropriations process added more to the “Senate vs. House” dichotomy, stating:

> Obviously, the Chairperson leads the budget process. It’s not just what the Chairperson or the Vice Chairperson thinks, it’s about what’s the caucus prioritizes. We still work under the rubric of the Speaker who takes those caucus priorities and then when you get in there it’s not just our priorities, it’s the Senate’s caucus priorities are and the Governor’s priorities. So it’s not just me sitting down and writing the budget based on what I think it should be.

Conservatives vs. uber conservatives. Although both bodies are controlled by a Republican super majority, the power dynamic is more narrowly confined. Nearly every interview, both members and staffers discussed the factions of the Republican Party. Most elaborated that the faction was between "conservatives and uber conservatives" or "libertarian-minded." One member described the division as "very vocal 20% and then everybody else." Another member went into further detail stating:

> It's a part of the demographics on a lot of that. It's a spin-off of the Tea Party movement and I think…and if you look at the pure Tea Party and how it started, that's actually a business-minded, anti-tax, anti high tax, originally…its' morphed in to more of a libertarian, super social conservative movement…and in Oklahoma it looks a lot different than it does elsewhere in the country just because we were already pretty conservative to begin, I mean, even our liberals were pretty conservative…and we are just considerably more conservative so it shifted farther, and it's gotten farther and farther to the right.

Interestingly, the factions within the Republican Party have different perceptions regarding spending for higher education. One member stated:

> You'll see the extreme side say we need to cut all appropriations to public education whether it be K-12, career tech, higher ed…now that is a very minor view in the legislature and it's one that even those who believe it won't voice it for political reasons. But, it is growing more and more popular to reduce that spending. And, you're also going to see others that make the argument not only for the education side but for the research component, the economic development component, why we should be spending dollars in key areas in education.

Political networks. The appropriations process is generally susceptible to a variety of political constraints. When discussing the effects of politics on the appropriations process, one legislative member explained that "I think that everything I do is political, whether that's good or bad, but it is." Another member added that "we just have a lot of politics, and I'm still new enough to this that I'm still, I guess, idealistic enough to not play some of the games." Still another member voiced the effects of politics, stating that:

> I would say there's a handful like me, um, actually there's probably more than a handful like me, but, even like me to a certain degree that know how hard it is to change things so they just say "well, I'll just focus on things that I can change" and then they just kinda forget about it. Move it over to the side, and move on to something else.

Collectively, the effects of political issues and factions impact the tendencies of members. Nearly all legislators discussed how politics affect decision-making and voting. One person said, "our decisions can be affected by umm, a policy, it can be effected by lobbyist, it can be effected by primary relationships that you have, here, so, if you were my friend and a bill came up and you said 'hey, I really need this, I need your support on this'." In addition, many mentioned the effects of "buddy voting." A staffer indicated that "Personal relationships carry a lot of weight around here." Similarly, another staffer described the buddy system as, "Well, I'll vote for this bill even though I don't 100% agree with it, if you know, later on you'll vote for my bill." The effect of buddy votes and political issues can have differential effects on appropriations bills, but nearly all members and staff members expressed that voting tendencies were assuredly impacted by political networks.

Behind-the-scene deals. Several references to behind the scenes work were made by both legislator and staffer participants. The participants mentioned that most of the work is done in a more intimate venue than the session floor. One member suggested that:

> I think a lot of times behind the scenes, you can get what you want if…if somebody requests it. A lot of times, when people ask for appropriations budget, somebody's gotta ask for it. We can't just show up out of nowhere and request it. We have to have a collective voice. And the more voices you have going in the same direction, the easier it is to get what you need.

The reference to work behind the scenes was discussed by members of both parties. A majority party member who is directly involved with drafting the budget stated:

> I don't always get my way. In fact I usually don't. But I still have that behind the scenes conversation and know that they'll listen too. So when it comes out publically that I, um, I can publically support the budget. It's a total package, it's not necessarily everything I like, there's some things I hate in it, but this is the budget I helped write.

Perhaps a staffer summed it up best. When I asked a staffer for a minority party member about the member's influence on the appropriations committee, she responded with "well his influence, he talks to people behind the scenes."

Lobbyists. Although it is clear from the interviews that lobbying efforts influence policy and the budget at large, the effect can be wide spread. I begin here with the comments regarding general lobbying efforts then turn to lobbying for higher education.

General. Several legislative and staffer participants discussed at length the effect of lobbyists. Lobbyists for nearly every industry interact daily with legislators during session at the capitol. Although professional lobbyists take many different forms, legislators are frequently visited by individuals lobbying informally and ranging from agency heads to constituents who are interested in diverse areas such as child services, common education, and public safety. A member who is very involved with the budget process stated, "I can't imagine how much the Chairman hears, the constant parade of people, the lobbyist and agency heads, and other representatives that come in our office wanting this, or not wanting that." Lobbying is a big business, and has a real effect. A staffer who is very familiar with lobbying efforts from all entities added that "sometimes it's about who's hollering the loudest, and who's got the most effective lobby." As a staffer for a minority party member suggested:

> I think lobbyists have more influence on the budgeting process than minority legislatures do. They have significant impact because they are not bashful and they will try to corner a legislator whenever they can and try and make an argument. Individual institutions will have liaisons come up there and lobby for their interest, um, the individual lobbyist that come up there and work, they spend a lot of time developing those relationships and figuring out what's important and what's not to those members.

The effects of lobbyist were mentioned by many of the legislators and echoed by several staffers. One legislator mentioned that spending is influenced by "whoever comes to you the most," while another added, "well, you got lobbyists, powerful entities that have money, and it's just a reality."

Higher education. Many participants discussed the effect of lobbyists specifically on higher education. One participant explained the effect in detail:

> Each of the universities have an army of lobbyists which I don't think is public, and they are titled vice presidents or liaisons or something along those lines, and they're there to provide information to the legislators on what is key to bills, and they spend quite a bit of time at the legislature and they may teach one class at the university and the rest of their time is dedicated at the capital to push their agenda and to try to get as much money as possible... Some will be former legislators, some are political consultants who know the legislators, and some are, well we have one is the daughter of a legislator that works with the Regent's. All of them are going to have some kind of tie, to the legislator, because that's what you see with most of the professional lobbyists because they have that personal relationship or they have developed a relationship with the legislators to make it harder to say 'no' on some instance. And, you will see them scheduling appointments with legislators, visiting with them, attending functions, and just like every other lobbyist they are jockeying for time to visit with the members and figure out who is for and who is against their agenda. Figure out who the undecideds are and then work hard on the undecideds.

One member stated clearly that “those in higher education know that they kind of have the legislature over a barrel, they’re one of the most powerful lobbies, if not the most powerful lobby in the state, literally.” As another member stated, lobbying for higher education comes from multiple entities, “well not just that but then they have their government liaisons, who are actually state funded lobbyists, and then they have lobbyists that their foundations hire.” In a similar statement, a legislator added:

> When I say lobbying, it’s not just the paid lobbyists, and by the way higher ed has a ton of those, and pay them very well…well you know everyone talks about lobbyists and they think these evil corporations but they don’t realize just how many lobbyists that even just two-year colleges have.

Although several participants spoke about the power of professional higher education lobbyists, nearly all discussed the effects of former legislators who now serve as university presidents. One legislator mentioned, “[University President] knows how to work the system. He knows how to get the money in. He knows how to get money in and to his endowment funds.” Another member further discussed the power of the university president and the chancellor:

> I credit that in large part to [University President A] from being such a political power in the state of Oklahoma. He’s been the optimal lobbyist to go to the capitol and make the claim for higher education. And, used his name recognition and the stature that goes with his name to exert a lot of influence, and then you add in that with [University President B] being on the other side of that isle, and being popular, and then you have a chancellor who is the former Speaker of the House, and although he may not be popular with the Republicans, he does remain

popular with the education community and has managed to keep all of the pieces together to make it function.

Numerous legislators and staffers agreed that these individuals exert significant influence on funding for higher education. As one legislator indicated, “I think while [University President A] is there and while he is popular, higher ed is going to have a seat at the big table and they will get the money that they want.” Higher education lobbying is a major them that emerged in this study. In the narrative section near the end of this chapter, I include a detailed story told by one member about a university president, referred to in the study as University President A, and his impact on the previous legislative session.

Your Perceptions are Your Realities

When asked about her perceptions of the process, one legislator responded that “your perceptions are your experiences.” I found the statement to be compelling and realized that many legislators establish budget priorities and policy for Oklahoma’s needs based on their personal views and beliefs. I attempted to capture several instances in which members shared their personal experiences as they relate to spending and budget prioritization.

One legislator stated that “everyone’s perceptions are based on their experiences and we have folks who went to a large university and then folks that didn’t go to school at all.” Another member added, “universities have to be very cognizant of their public perception because of the political reality and, for lack of a better term, the pressure that the far right is going to put on elected officials, when it comes to funding higher ed.” Furthermore, when asked about the perception of higher education spending, one legislator discussed the perception of the far right stating that "they are very anti-debt, and they don't understand that concept and method of financing facilities is extremely important…." A moment later, she elaborated on the importance of educating the far right on higher education funding issues, stating:

> That perception (on bond indebtedness) generally comes from the same group. And the commonality is that a lot of them don't have, they don't have a university experience. They don't understand the value of it….So I think that schools have to, probably the best, the biggest challenge they're going to have is how do they join forces. And, instead of competing, and pitting… and they've gotten better at it over the last few years, and how does our regional university system band together and become kind of a cohesive unit, and how do the large universities, not work against each other, but work cooperatively because that's going to be their big challenge because it's not going away any time soon so they're going to have to work together.

In addition to the perceptions of individuals who have not attended a higher education institution, perceptions of university budgets can be tied to participants' multiple experiences. Several legislators discussed the effect of football and large stadiums on the perception of need. One legislator stated:

> When you're looking at this pot of money and it's hard to put more in to the pot, then you come out on the short end of the stick a lot of times. Which is really unfortunate because it's not, and I think a lot of time too, and I'm not 100% sure on this, but I think a lot of people when they look at Oklahoma's higher education, they immediately think of football. And they think 'oh well these are

> huge money making endeavors, and they have these huge stadiums and they give all these, these schools must have tons of money'.

Another legislator discussed university needs in relation to student contributions:

> People will come out to the Board of Regents and say 'the tuition and fees are too high.' Okay? And I would say, let's get in my car and we will drive through the student parking lot and we'll look at the cars. Okay? That would settle the argument. Okay? … So, there is a perception in the legislature that, um, well, there are very nice cars in the parking lot.

In comparison to the political effect of personal experience, another majority legislator added:

> "And so when you tend to look at people's priorities, it tends to have to do with your personal experiences than even more than party or rural/urban, and those of us that see a value in a four year degree from a major institution and tend to put that as a priority."

Competing Interests

The higher education piece of the pie. Most legislators were quick to note the size of the state budget and the percentage allocated to higher education. One member added, "Our state budget consistently runs 53 to 55 percent of the budget going to education as a whole." Although most focused on the relationship of education appropriations in comparison to the state budget at large, their perception of higher education allocations varied. One member described higher education appropriations as "deplorable," while another added "piss pour." However, one legislator explained, "well, when you look at our total state budget and you look at total state spending, um, I feel like we're in line with other states that are within our region, and other states that we generally compete with." Two legislators echoed that sentiment suggesting that spending by percentage was "in-line" and "a good balance with the state budget." However, another member declared, "the current level of state spending, compared to other states, not near, what I feel we should be at."

Everything from birth to death. As the literature review and the observations indicated, there are a variety of factors that can influence higher education appropriations. The concept of competing interests surfaced in all interviews with legislators and staffers. The review of literature in Chapter II explained other discretionary spending items such as transportation, common education, and health care. When discussing competing funding items, several participants mentioned transportation and corrections. One member stated, "We consider everything from birth to death, we consider health, energy, agriculture, transportation, um, education of course, public safety, so…those are some of the general things that we consider." Another member detailed the relationship between all discretionary spending items and education:

> We're giving the money that's already on the table, that's allotted to our state, away. Here's where the downfall is, if we don't get healthcare right, then we don't get education right. If we don't get education right, then we don't get economic development right. If we don't get economic development right, then we don't get corrections right. And what I mean by that is that, sick people can't earn and sick children can't learn. So, if you're sick, you're not going to go to work. So if you're sick, you're not going to go to school. If you don't go to school, then you're not going to get educated. So the economic development and

> the jobs that we bring in, you don't qualify for. If you don't qualify for jobs but yet you got a family, then the delinquency comes in because you're going to rob, steal, and kill to provide for your family. So if we don't get healthcare right, then education doesn't work. And if you're not educated and healthy, you won't go to work anyway, so now my corrections issue is a greater problem, if you get what I mean.

Participants genuinely value higher education and support funding initiatives. However, their perception of higher education's need in comparison to other areas varied. One legislator stated, "We have a lot of gaps and holes, and we have a lot of areas that we neglected for years that we need to shore up and make sure that we're competitive." Although some suggested that we have to find better ways to fund higher education, most believed that appropriations will "continue to be status quo." One legislator added, "Oklahoma has multiple priorities, and when you start to appropriate dollars, we find things that we've neglected for years." When it comes to education for funding priorities, one participant stated, "It's all linked together….Everything is tied together, and it comes together."

The perception of funding needs for higher education varied among participants. One legislator indicated:

> I really think some of the legislators think we're spending too much on higher ed. One legislator made the comment that, that higher ed is not in the state constitution so therefore we shouldn't have to fund higher ed at all. Like then it's not our responsibility to fund anyone's college education, even if they're really smart and have like you know the best and the brightest in our state. He says that

> it’s not our responsibility to fund them….So when you look at the real question of this state legislative session is that what is what is a core function of government? Do we fund public safety? Do we fund the state highway patrol? Do we fund corrections? Department of Corrections office in my district, they’re outnumbered 100 to 1 in my precinct and there’s no way that’s safe. Those all can affect our views of higher education and could impact funding both in the immediate future and far out.

When comparing the interests of all budget priorities, most agree that their perceptions of funding needs for higher education are impacted by competing interests. Although some participants question university operating budgets and rising tuition prices, their perceptions of higher education appropriations were impacted more by competing interests. This view may be due to the nature of the appropriations process. Possible explanations for this phenomenon are discussed in Chapter VI.

Different perspectives on federal coffers. Although competing interests have an effect on participant perceptions, discrepancies on how to fund government may have the largest impact on higher education appropriations. Although the theme is highly contentious – even among majority party members – a trend has slowly taken shape. One prominent majority member stated, “I do think that we need to look at a push, whether it’s in a bill or in principle, how do we begin to wean ourselves from the federal trough.” Minority party participants were critical of the concept. In addition, most participants recognized that rejecting federal dollars would reduce the funds available to be allocated to higher education. One member stated:

> The federal government has offered us money and we don't take it. Because of politics, where it would benefit the State of Oklahoma, we would not have to worry about allocating as much money to health care…8 billion dollars I think it was. Something like that, I can't remember, but it was an astronomical amount of money for health care. So now, we're putting our money in to health care, which the federal government basically would have funded, and that would have given us more money to operate on. And so, was it smart? No. Will we have to funnel dollars away from other areas like higher ed to pay for something we could have had the feds pay for? Yes.

Several minority party members shared this sentiment. In addition, two moderate conservative participants agreed to an extent. However, there is a counterargument. Two fiscally conservative participants argued that federal dollars come with strings attached that are not popular with a majority of Oklahomans. One member stated:

> I pulled up the Supreme Court decision on Obamacare and the Chief Justice for the Majority. He talked about how the states were independent and sovereign and sometimes they have to act like that. And so, specifically saying that we can say "no" to federal dollars and we should say "no" to federal dollars when they have strings attached that have a different policy then what we've established in the state, or our people in our state have established….So, I think that we're going to have to begin to look at how do we wean ourselves from federal dollars. And, part of that, and this is one of my big things, is that there might be some federal dollars that we're getting for core functions of government that we need to continue that core function. And even that core service that those federal dollars are paying for,

> but maybe we say that we don't want to use federals for that anymore. So, what does that mean? Well, that means it comes from state troughs. And maybe that means we need to look at other core areas that aren't core areas of government that we're funding and say we're going to take it from that so that we can fill that hole that's going to be created when we either refuse money….So it means very hard choices that we're going to have to start making at the state level.

Although competing views on federal spending exist, the general consensus among the legislature is to reduce spending and federal assistance. The impact of the trend on higher education is discussed further in Chapter VI.

Funding facilities. Although opposition to federal policies may affect the availability of dollars, participants indicated that there is resistance to financing college campus buildings. The Master Lease Program was discussed at length in the Senate. One member stated:

> The capital asset and management legislation that passed this year is actually probably going to impact universities because those facilities are going to be inventoried. So as we begin to look at all the state's assets comprehensively all across the state so that we know all that we're managing, all that we're paying to upkeep, um, I think it's going to impact university systems. And redirect those back to services that benefit the state of Oklahoma and not just building buildings, so that will be a change.

Building space was a big concern among several legislative participants. One legislator added, "Well, we need more buildings to graduate more people. Plain and simple. The legislature doesn't think our schools should be built, it's just dollars and cents, and that's going to hurt us in the long run." In addition to the Master Lease Program, the House worked toward a cap on bond indebtedness. Members had varying views. One legislator stated, "Members don't understand capital projects," while another added that "they're good, it's tightening our belt by focusing on core government." In addition, a majority party member added:

> There are those who don't think we should build anything. So, I think really the big challenge over the next few years is going to be facility space and probably not so much as that appropriated but I think it's going to be a battle we're going to fight internally on debt for a long time.

Participants had varying views on leveraging debt for capital improvement projects. Collectively, however, most participants shared that they were conservative on funding initiatives. This theme will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI.

Strategic financing. Several members stated that data pertaining to agency spending, and specifically higher education, were not always readily available. One legislator stated, "I take it for granted before I was elected that our elected officials knew where every dollar went." Another participant stated that, "Can you really say that they're out of control with spending? Or can you say, think they're doing a great job with what they have? We're not sure." Most participants agreed that data could be made available to them. In addition, participants believed the bodies tend to be more reactive then strategic. One legislator stated that, "As legislators, for years [we] have just kind of responded to whatever pressures had to the most, urgent, at that any particular time rather than looking at things as a comprehensive, strategic, manner." A long-time state legislator stated:

> At the end of the day when we bring these appropriation bills out, we voted on the higher ed appropriations and career tech and the career college. And it's not detailed in there how each college gets how much money. And it's not detailed in there on how [much] text books [cost], and like professors on their salaries, or the light bill, or the phone bill, and the internet bill, and, I don't know. No one has ever brought that stuff to me.

Several participants spoke of the difficulty of planning strategically. One legislator shared that, "With term limits now days, it's just so hard to have real oversight." In addition to term limits, one participant explained:

> We respond well to federal funding. We responded well to what teachers and educators are screaming about in that year. But, the opposite is coming up with a strategic long-term plan and saying 'okay well we need to heavily invest in this area to shore up and then, but then, next session, next year, we need to move this along….' But part of that is just politics. It's hard to be strategic and thoughtful.

Several participants stated that the legislature routinely responds to current funding issues and past shortages. However, little discussion of strategic funding took place. One legislator stated:

> We get an awful lot of opinions as elected officials, lots and lots of opinions. But they're focused on what one person, about what they think. But I very rarely do I get real data brought to me, and I kinda like decisions, data-driven decisions, from a strategic background. I'm used to making decisions with what numbers tell me, but we don't get a lot of that, from education, or from anybody, which is not a good thing, because then it kinda looks like we're hiding something, because then

> we don't exactly how much this costs. And then, state agencies are the worst, and higher education institutions are the worst, and they're just as bad about it as everyone else too. They tell us what they want us to know but not what the truth is all the time.

Participants suggested that funding reform is necessary but the process has remained constant. Several participants described budget prioritization as "status quo," while another declared, "Education is going to get 50% of the budget, always." A staffer described the process by stating, "There might be some that want to change how higher ed gets funded but they won't voice it. [My legislator would] rather focus on things he can change."

The State Constitution and Fiscal Control

The preceding section demonstrated that legislators seldom receive data pertaining to higher education spending. In addition, several participants believed the legislature lacked control over government agencies. Several participants, in addition, mentioned higher education specifically. One legislator stated:

> Most people don't understand that there's that constitutional barrier that prevents us from really having a say in how those dollars gets spent. And that's probably true, and actually, there's a hard constitutional barrier when it comes to higher ed. But the populace constitution that we have, which is one of the largest constitutions in the world, especially when it comes to the state governments, dilutes the power of the Governor. It dilutes the power of the Legislature. All these agencies are really their own little fiefdoms. And they really have their own little board that they report to. And especially with term limits now days, it's just

> so hard to have real oversight with any of them, but especially with higher ed because that constitutional wall.

In addition to the constitutional provision, tuition-setting authority has been controlled by the Board of Regents since 2003. One legislator stated:

> These are the things that we don't have any control over as legislators. Sure we can pass bills that say they have to sit on their head three times and spin six times a day, but the thing is that the control, when the money leaves the Senate, the House, the legislative body, we have no more control.

Although most would consider this a win for higher education, the legislature controls the money budgeted to higher education at large. Several participants described funding as "status quo." However, participants were referring to higher education funding in comparison to the state budget at large. The state tax structure and percentage of personal income collected is often a greater indicator of future appropriations to higher education. Higher education spending and the interaction between tax structures, universities, and the legislators are discussed further in Chapter VI. However, a funding structure referred to as zero-based budgeting may impact the budget process and seems to have bi-partisan support.

Zero-Based Funding

Zero-based budgeting, sometimes referred to as target-based budget, is a technique where in which the legislature assumes more control over agency spending. Zero-based budgeting funds government agencies at the legislative desired levels of service, not at which agencies want (Rubin, 1990). Regarding zero-based budgeting, one participant stated:

> Each institution, like the higher ed people come in, like the regents people come in and they start at like 0 and justify every dollar they have to spend. And then, you know, maybe like the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Transportation, they come in and justify each dollar appropriated to them. But that's like what they call zero-based budgeting.

To further explain the concept of zero-based budgeting, one legislator stated:

> I know that there is going to be an interim study this summer that's going to look at target-based budgeting to try and, instead of looking at the previous year's budget and making adjustments from that, actually start at 0, and take out all the money that has to be tied in to matching dollars with the federal government and then do a zero-based climb looking at each of those patterns to see what is going to be their important things.

Zero-based budgeting would provide the Oklahoma legislature with more authority over appropriations. Several legislative participants mentioned zero-based budgeting by name. The concept seemed to have support from both parties and bodies. With regard to higher education appropriations however, one legislator stated:

> [The legislature is looking at] targeted-based, zero-based budgeting, to do more of a thorough review of these agencies. Now, higher ed would probably be exempt from that because they're a constitutional entity and we can't control where that money goes in our system. But, I think we should know more about where the overall dollars are going so that we can make a better educated decision and with that knowledge would come more scrutiny and would make the entities much

> more responsible to the services they provide and those people who are receiving those services.

Several participants believed that zero-based budgeting would help hold agencies and institutions accountable. Two participants mentioned that higher education would be exempt because of constitutional provisions. One legislator stated, “Money allocated to the OSRHE would be subject to the zero-based formula but the constitutional provision would protect the OSRHE’s internal process [of allocating money to each institution].” This could mean that if the Regents completely justified the budget of one institution, but failed to do so for another it could impact the lump appropriations to higher education.

Participants had varying opinions on whether or not zero-based budgeting will be implemented. However, most participants were interested in holding state agencies, including the OSRHE, more accountable for spending. One member stated that, “You know a lot of people are talking about going back to zero-based budgeting, I don’t think we’ll ever get to that, but the principle is the best way to budget dollars.” Although the concept may not take flight, it does demonstrate the ideals of many legislators. One legislator participant stated:

> I think you can, um, go back home and you can make the argument that depending on how you want to do it you can go back home and make the argument that higher ed is more expensive and therefore we need to hold them accountable, they’re being wasteful with your dollars, you can make that argument. You can actually make that argument to cut the funding, because they’re wasting it, you could go back home and you could make the argument that college tuition is expensive and therefore we need to throw more money at it and

> appropriate more money and make it cheaper. But, really, when you go home I think you need to be honest with your people and I think you need to tell them it's a combination of both, we need to bring back zero-based budgeting that holds higher ed accountable for every penny, and then, we need to get serious about funding it.

As previously stated, although zero-based budgeting may not be implemented the concept seems to be popular with both parties. Republican Party participants viewed it as a technique to reduce wasteful spending. Democratic Party participants view zero-based budgeting as a way to be involved with the appropriations process and have a formal role with the state budget. One participant stated:

> Do I expect it to go anywhere? Absolutely not, cause, that body doesn't matter if it's a Democrat or Republican (controlled) legislature, they always function the way it's always been done. Its status quo and we [the legislators] don't like change.

However, one participant believed that zero-based budgeting "wouldn't matter for higher education." The legislator stated:

> Well, with the political nature of the legislature, the House and Senate have been growing much more conservative with each election cycle. So, with that is a demand to reduce spending in the state. And, as we cut taxes, and we've cut taxes almost every cycle in the legislature, you're going to see a diminishing return on tax collections. So the less money coming in the less you're going to have to spend and you're going to see more of a dog fight to try to get dollars in for programs. And when you have some that have critical needs that you have to

fund, such as corrections and transportation, and you have others like common ed, that make the case for critical needs then it's harder for those entities (higher education institutions) that do receive outside funding, to make the case for appropriated dollars, because they can easily go back and say 'we need to increase what we're charging to our base' and therefore raise fees to cover this and not come back to the legislature and ask for tax dollars. I expect we see that in the future.

Narrative

The subsequent section is an excerpt from an influential policymaker. The excerpt is a story regarding University President A and his influence in the previous legislative session. The excerpt encapsulates many of the themes presented in this chapter.

University President A Made His Rounds

You know, years, well this year I don't think they can complain that they didn't get enough. But, this year it started off when they came to us and said, "Oh we just discovered that," and apparently this was the deal, back when [former governor] was governor and they were facing tough financial times, they had them renegotiate some bonds, and they were basically paying interest only on them, and these new balloon payments started coming due this year. So, they're saying, "We just gotta have all this money, just to stay equal so we can make these new payments." And, so that was a considerable chunk of money and they said, "Well, if you just give us that, then we'll be happy." And then [University President A] actually made his rounds and said, "Well, if you just give us a token amount above that, then we'd be happy." And then the token amount changed

> several times. And so it started with, "Oh, we're just gonna cover the bond," and we gave them that and then it was, "Oh, just give us a token amount," and we gave them that. And then they said, "Oh, well, actually, if you're going to give us that token amount, we actually need a little more than that." You know (laughs), so actually it went up several times. And, they're powerful enough that that will continue. And the status quo of "Well, we actually didn't get enough, so we're going to raise tuition a bit," I just think we're going to see that scenario continue over the next few years.

An important aspect of this story is that University President A did not speak in the House or Senate during the session. The reference to "making the rounds" was intended by the storyteller to describe University President A's efforts to meet with selective members informally. Also, a review of all committee meeting minutes reveals that University President A only attended one committee meeting, the Senate Education Committee on March 4, 2013, to demonstrate his support for the reconfirmation of a Board of Regents member. The story above is intended to describe University President A's continued interaction with members of the legislature and one member's perception of his political power.

Summary

Chapter V presented the findings from the data collected in this study and presented thematic elements that emerged. The completion of the session's observations, participant interviews, and collection of committee documents were analyzed using the open-coding process detailed in Chapter III. As chunks of data were categorized and dozens of themes emerged the MAXQDA tool was used to further organize and refine thematic elements.

Themes first described participation in the process and the divisions of power that affect state spending at large. The themes then discussed perceptions of need and the competing interests that impact state spending for higher education. Next, the chapter presented themes related to the state constitution, fiscal control, and zero-based budgeting. The chapter concluded with a narrative section that presented a story told by an influential member of the legislature. The story attempted to encapsulate the collective themes and lay the base to address the research questions in Chapter VI.

Chapter VI, the final chapter in this study, will revisit the research questions and provide an evaluation and analysis of the thematic elements through the literature and theoretical perspectives. A discussion of study limitations and recommendations for future research will then be presented. Prior to the summary and the final conclusion to the dissertation, contributions to research, theory, and practice will be discussed.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Chapter V presented the thematic findings collected from interviews with seven members of the Oklahoma State Legislature, seven staff participants, and meeting minutes from committees relevant to the study. This chapter will first restate the research problem, review the methodology, and present a summary of the findings from Chapter V. It will then discuss the findings in relation to research, theory and practice, before providing recommendations for future research and concluding with a summary.

Statement of the Problem

In recent decades the percentage of university operating budgets funded by state governments has decreased, encouraging universities to consider alternative funding sources. In addition, the debate over federal and state spending priorities creates uncertainty regarding sustained state appropriations for higher education.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the process through which members of the Oklahoma State Legislature perceive the current level of financial need and designate related funding to Oklahoma public universities and colleges. Specifically, the research questions were:

1. Through what process or factors do members of the Oklahoma Legislature seek to understand higher education's level of financial need in Oklahoma?

2. What do Oklahoma legislators consider when making funding decisions for higher education?
3. How do legislative staffers interpret their state legislator's understanding of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma?

Review of the Methodology

The study used three primary methods of inquiry, including participant interviews, legislative observations and document analysis. The participants in the study were seven members of the Oklahoma State Legislature and seven legislative staffers. Legislative participants served on committees that related to state appropriations, education, or both. Legislative staff members served as a supplemental data source and aided in providing clarity and additional insight into the legislative process. Committee documents served as a third and supplementary data source.

Participant interviews and observations were transcribed and analyzed line-by-line through the open-coding process suggested by Taylor and Bogden (1994). Codes were placed into separate boxes, printed, and applied to multi-colored notecards corresponding with each participant and observation. Notecards were then categorized based on related concepts. The initial themes were documented and the process was repeated. New themes were then documented and compared. Further theme development was then conducted by utilizing the MAXQDA tool, and findings were presented in Chapter V.

Summary of the Findings

The findings revealed six overarching themes that may impact state spending for higher education in Oklahoma. These include: limited participation of legislative members in the budget process, multiple divisions pertaining to power and influence, varying perceptions of higher education spending, competing interests, the state constitution and fiscal control, and the potential impact of a zero-based budget model.

Members of both parties voiced concern about the appropriations process. Several participants indicated that a select group of individuals took ownership of the state budget and that those not on an appropriations committee have no formal authority in drafting the omnibus budget bill. Furthermore, there are multiple divisions of power that derive from party affiliation, the legislative bodies, political networks, behind-the-scenes deals, and lobbyists.

In addition, the life experiences of the legislators had a real effect on their perceptions of higher education funding. Most participants agree that a shift in ideals has resulted in conservative spending habits and a focus on core government services. A growing voice in the legislature has been a very conservative faction referred to by members as the “libertarian-minded” or “über conservatives.” These members are concerned with tightening spending, weaning the state from federal dollars, and decreasing discretionary spending.

Although the long-term impact of the conservative movement remains uncertain, competing interests affect higher education’s piece of the pie. Most legislator participants provided a list of factors that influence higher education funding, such as corrections, transportation and common education. In addition, different perspectives pertaining to federal coffers and funding campus facilities may influence the higher education budget. Although some members believed a greater focus on higher education should be considered, most recognized that increasing higher education appropriations may negatively affect other essential government services.

In 2003, the legislature passed an initiative that transferred tuition authority from itself to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE). In addition, the Oklahoma constitution dictates that money for higher education be provided in lump sum to the OSRHE. The lump-sum provision, coupled with tuition-setting authority, resulted in the OSRHE having sole responsibility for deciding how each institution is funded and whether tuition may be increased. As a result of this dynamic, legislators felt disconnected from the process. Participants from both parties indicated that because they had little control over higher education, attention was given to budget priorities that they could influence.

Legislators from both parties mentioned the need for zero-based budgeting. Many participants agreed that zero-based budgeting is the best process to manage state spending. However, it was uncertain what effect zero-based budgeting would have on perceptions of higher education appropriations. As the potential for declining revenue collections emerged many legislators turned toward accountability and eliminating waste to fill the void. The subsequent sections will discuss the relationship of the findings to research, theory, and practice.

Discussion

In Chapter II, literature was presented that provides a historical overview of spending for higher education in the United States. The section was followed by a review of two large bodies of literature that discussed public policy and spending, and state spending for higher education in Oklahoma. The following sections of this chapter discuss the findings listed in Chapter V and their relationship to the research presented in Chapter II, as well as theory and practice.

Relationship of the Findings to Previous Research

Limited participation in the process. Research related to public spending and policy is overwhelmingly quantitative and focuses primarily on spending outcomes. Although some research (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2006) compared state budget processes, none discussed the number of legislators formally involved in the process. In addition, a body of research discussed the impact of political factors (Tandberg, 2009; Rizzo, 2004; Ehrenberg, 2000) and political culture (Elazar, 1984; Hero & Tolbert, 1996) on state spending for higher education. However, none considered the size of the group involved in that process. According to one long-term legislator in this study, the appropriations process in Oklahoma “has always been this way… Republicans say that the Democrats use to do this [limit participation] to them when they were in control.” This study found that in Oklahoma a small number of individuals determine the budget for higher education. Additional research is necessary to determine the effect of budget participation on the budget process.

Divisions of power. Literature related to the impact of politics on higher education spending has been well documented (Ehrenberg, 2000; Rizzo, 2004; Tandberg, 2009). The findings in this study related to the divisions of power seem to be in line with previous research in the field. For example, findings related to higher education lobbying (Conner & Rabovsky, 2012), revenue shortfalls (Knecht, 2009), university tuition (Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2008) and the necessity for an educated workforce (Zumeta & Kinne, 2011) are impacted by political position. As one member stated, “Well, I’m a

Democrat so anything education I'm going to vote yes on." There was a general perception among participants that the Democratic party favored higher education as compared to the Republic party counterparts, favored higher education.

However, the percentage of appropriations to higher education in Oklahoma has remained relatively constant since 1993 (Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, 2012). Since 1993, the percentage of the state budget appropriated to higher education in Oklahoma has hovered between 15.31% and 15.89%. In 2007, however, the Republican party in Oklahoma took control of both legislative bodies, but the percentage has not fluctuated drastically. Interestingly, in 2012, with a Republican party majority in both houses, higher education made up 15.49% of the Oklahoma state budget. This percentage was higher than any fiscal year between 1993 and 1999, when both chambers were controlled by the Democratic party. Although research suggests that greater spending for higher education has been associated with the Democrats party (McClendon et al., 2004), this does not seem to be true for the past 20 years in Oklahoma. Table 6 highlights fund for higher education spending in Oklahoma since 2006 (Oklahoma Educational and General Budgets Summary and Analysis, 2012).

Table 6

Oklahoma higher education spending by total state appropriations

Fiscal year	Total state appropriations*	HE appropriations*	HE as % of total
FY-06	$6,056.6	$889.4	14.68%
FY-07	$6,555.3	$1,020.0	15.56%
FY-08	$7,071.7	$1,099.1	15.54%
FY-09	$7,143.1	$1093.9	15.31%
FY-10	$6,644.1	$1055.9	15.89%
FY-11	$6,430.9	$1,010.07	15.72%
FY-12	$6,510.5	$1,008.5	15.49%

* State appropriations measured in billions

This finding may indicate that when compared to other states, the political culture may have less effect on state spending to higher education in Oklahoma. This may be caused by the routine nature of the budget process in Oklahoma. However, the trend may also demonstrate the legislature's investment in higher education during a slowed economy.

In addition, the study found that "behind-the-scenes-deals" and lobbyists have a large impact on the budget process. This finding seems to be in line with research related to interest groups (Ehrenberg, 1973; McLendon, Hearn, & Mokher, 2009; Tandberg, 2007; Tandberg, 2008; Tandberg, 2010) and higher lobbying efforts (Cook, 1998; Ferrin, 1996; McLendon, Hearn, & Mokher, 2009). One legislator indicated that the chair of the appropriations committee had a "revolving door" when it came to interest groups and lobbyists. Another participant stated that decisions "are all done behind closed doors."

Although these findings are not necessarily surprising, some findings related to the divisions of power were unique. These are addressed in the subsequent paragraph.

The “conservatives vs. über conservatives” dichotomy is a relatively new concept. As one Republican party member indicated, the faction between the conservatives and über conservatives is “a spin-off of the Tea Party movement.” In addition, research found that higher education typically receives more money when both legislative bodies are controlled by the Democratic Party (Lyall & Sell, 2006). However, as the preceding section advises, this may not be true for the past 20 years in Oklahoma. One participant stated, “There are [über conservatives in office] who don’t think we should fund education at all, at any level.” If über conservative membership continues to grow, it is possible that Oklahoma’s spending output may shift and be more in line with previous research. Although the impact of party factions on higher education spending is not well documented, it may have an effect on future appropriations in Oklahoma. Ongoing research is necessary to determine the impact of party factions on higher education spending.

Competing interests. A large body of research documented the impact of competing interests on discretionary dollars. Research suggests that the slow growth of higher education funding has been attributed to support for competing social programs such as Medicaid (Kane, Thomas, & Orszag, 2003), healthcare and food stamps (Cattaneo, 2007; Douglas, 2010), and common education (Cheslock & Hughes, 2011; Rizzo, 2004). In addition, research indicates that the gradual introduction of new social programs has prevented higher education from receiving proportional support from year to year (Johnson, Oliff, & Williams, 2008). The findings in this study appear to support previous research, as legislators frequently cited a multitude of competing interests. The competing interests listed by participants varied slightly from factors presented in previous literature.

Although several participants mentioned national health care as a concern for higher education, most cited domestic issues that include: police pay, common education, transportation, public safety, and corrections. In addition, participants had different perspectives on the use of federal coffers. When asked of the impact of federal programs, one member said, “National? Well, national is different than Oklahoma. And, the national issues don’t really mean a lot to me when I’m deciding on the budget of Oklahoma.” However, one member stated, “When you look at our budget numbers [for higher education], we’re towards the bottom in overall dollars compared to other states.” Although research indicates that higher education has moved to the bottom of most states’ discretionary priorities (Cheslock & Hughes, 2011), funding for higher education by percentage evidenced little fluctuation in Oklahoma.

The state constitution and fiscal control. Research indicates that support for public universities is contingent on the actions and commitment of three critical entities: a) the campus, b) the higher education governing body, and c) the state government (Weerts & Ronca, 2006). In addition, research indicates that state spending for higher education is impacted by constitutional provisions such as term limits, gubernatorial power, and type of governing board (McKlendon, Hearn, & Mokher, 2009). Legislative perceptions of state spending in Oklahoma, however, appear to largely be impacted by the budget process.

Several members voiced their concern about having little control over higher education spending and tuition and fee increases. With the OSRHE overseeing the tuition authority, several members stated that “they can just raise tuition.” The tuition-setting authority of the OSRHE seemingly had an effect on legislator participants’ perceptions of funding needs. One member stated, “Most don’t even take notice because they weren’t here when we had tuition-setting authority, so it’s not even on their radar.” The finding indicates that most members do little to seek understanding regarding higher education’s level of financial need. Instead, most rely on the expertise of higher education committee members to put forth supplemental legislation. This likely has to do with the lump-sum budget provision and the regents’ authority over tuition-setting. As one state legislator stated, “The budget is status quo. I’d rather focus on issues I can impact.”

McKlendon, Hearn and Mokher (2009) proffer that each state responds to revenue shortfalls differently; some will protect their colleges while others will let institutions decline. In Oklahoma, however, one member suggested, “We’re going to do what we’ve always done.” A separate body of research states that university operating budgets have expanded faster than the rate of inflation (Ehrenberg, 2000). This trend appears to be in line with practices in Oklahoma. Although the overall percentage of the state budget appropriated to higher education has remained relative constant, the percentage of university operating budgets funded by the state has declined. One participant stated, “20 years ago the appropriated dollars were in like the 70% range… today they’re in the 30%.” However, one member added that “Legislators don’t have an opportunity to make a good assessment on if we’re spending too much or not enough. We just compare apples to apples on what’s going on in other states.”

Outside Oklahoma. Although qualitative research is not generalizable, some findings in this study may be relevant to states with a similar structure. In chapter two, figure 1 demonstrated that states contain one of three higher education governance structures: a consolidated governing board, a decentralized system of coordinating boards, and an advisory or planning agency. Oklahoma has a highly regulated consolidated governing board, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003). In addition, Knott and Payne (2002) discussed that highly regulated higher education governance systems may be more susceptible to political influence. The findings in this study indicate that the political implications of a highly-regulated system may be beyond persuasion and suggestions.

States that appropriate in lump sum to a highly regulated governing board may experience a disconnect between legislative bodies and the higher education systems. Higher education systems that are not highly regulated typically have a state legislature that determines funding for each public institution. The result is that those legislators likely better understand the higher education needs of the institutions in their state. Although arguments can be made that autonomy is a good thing for higher education, it may hinder state appropriations. Oklahoma legislators have no incentive to be involved in or understand internal higher education issues. In less regulated states, legislatures determine the budget of each institution and have a better understanding of the issues and needs. Several legislators in this study referenced having no control over the system and many demonstrated little intimate knowledge of their needs.

Taken together, many legislator participants did not view higher education as a partner. Their perception of higher education was a system of "wasteful spending." Most legislative attempts to ascertain the intricacies of university spending habits were in pursuit to substantiate preconceived beliefs of wasteful spending. For many, their understanding of university spending habits was limited to surface-level observations like landscaping, nice cars in the parking lot, and football coach salaries. It is likely that states with the same higher education governance structure have legislators that view higher education in the same way. This may have real impact on the future. As new policy issues arise that can compete with higher education funding, there are likely fewer legislators in those states willing to champion higher education. More research is necessary to explore the issue. Table 1, in chapter two, lists the higher education governance structure by state.

Relationship of the Findings to Theory

The literature presented in Chapter II introduced four theories and concepts that served as the conceptual framework for this study: the theory of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner & Jones, 1994), academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), the Three Streams Model (Kingdon, 1983), and the state public higher education budgetary picture (Tandberg, 2010). The following section discusses the relationships of the findings to each of these.

Punctuated equilibrium. The theory of punctuated equilibrium in social sciences (Baumgartner & Jones, 1994) states that policy issues remain in a prolonged state of stasis until punctuated by sudden and drastic change. This change can be brought about by a variety of factors that may include economic, environmental and political issues.

Chapter V and the preceding section presented six overarching themes that may impact state spending for higher education in Oklahoma: limited participation of legislative members in the budget process, divisions pertaining to power and influence, varying perceptions of higher education spending, competing interests; the state constitution and fiscal control, and the potential impact of a zero-based budget model. This section examines the findings through the lens of punctuated equilibrium and in the context of time. The section lists three events that have occurred since 1980 that may have impacted how legislators in Oklahoma currently perceive state spending for higher education. They are: the decline of the oil and gas industry in the 1980s, the increase of higher education lobbying efforts during the 1990s, and the removal of tuition authority from the legislature in 2003.

Oil and gas. In Oklahoma, an event that may have impacted how legislators perceive funding for higher education was the decline of the oil and gas industry in the early 1980s. One participant asked, "If that happens again, what's going to happen to higher education?" while another stated, "Our revenue collections are largely dependent on oil and gas." In 1980, the percentage of the total state budget allocated to higher education was 18.55%, but by 1989 it had gradually declined to 16.07%. Since 1990, only in one fiscal year (1992) did more than 16% of the overall budget go to higher education in Oklahoma (Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, 2012). One legislator stated, "After that [the oil and gas decline], universities knew they were going to have to take better care of themselves." As a result, universities in Oklahoma implemented new strategies. In the mid-1990s, increased lobbying efforts may have impacted legislators' perceptions of need.

Higher education lobbying. The second event that may have impacted legislators' perceptions of higher education funding was the increase in lobbying. Ferrin

(1996) suggested that a number of powerful universities began hiring in-house lobbyists to pursue state dollars in the early 1990s. Research proposes that in the mid-1990s, lobbying for higher education became popular at all institutions and in all states throughout the United States (Connor & Rabvosky, 2012; Ferrin, 1996). Many of the participants in this study discussed the impact of university lobbyists on the budget process. One member indicated that "I think they have significant impact, because they are not bashful and they will try to corner a legislator whenever they can." Research indicates that lobbying efforts for higher education resulted in a slight increase in state spending for some universities (McLendon et al., 2009).

In this study, several participants spoke of the nature of the process. Some mentioned that universities had an "army of lobbyists," while others told stories of university presidents visiting with legislators behind closed doors. One member indicated that they often used aggressive tactics, while another believed that they specifically target "undecideds" and jockey for their time. As one long-time legislator indicated, "They are titled vice presidents or liaisons or something along those lines…(and) spend quite a bit of time at the legislature…to push their agenda and try to get as much money as possible." The scale of these lobbying efforts seems to have grown considerably since the 1990s. In addition, higher education lobbying in Oklahoma appears to be an extensive and aggressive process, impacting how legislators perceive higher education's level of financial need. For example, one member added "higher education is the biggest lobby of them all," while another added that the chair of an appropriations committee had "a revolving door [of lobbyists]."

Tuition authority. The third event that may have impacted the legislators' perceptions of higher education funding is the removal of tuition authority from the legislature and granting of this authority to the OSRHE in 2003. Although few legislators remain who were in office in 2003, the change impacted legislator perceptions long-term. One member stated, "When I first entered the legislature we had the tuition authority still controlled by the legislature. And they came and asked us for a tuition increase and we pushed to have an auditing provision…." A second member added that the legislature now has "no direct electoral responsibility." This means that prior to 2003, universities had to present their budget needs to the legislature. Today, however, one participant stated, "it's not even on their radar." Both members believed that the perception of higher education's level of need in Oklahoma is impacted by members having less interaction with colleges and universities.

These events impacted legislators' perceptions of higher education's level of need in Oklahoma. They buttress the relevance of punctuated equilibrium to this study. The next section examines the findings in relation to the concept of academic capitalism.

Academic capitalism. Chapter II presented literature devoted to academic capitalism. The concept of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) contends that higher education is becoming increasingly integrated into the new market economy. The concept claims that the market-related actions of universities have had a profound impact on university spending, campus infrastructure and revenue streams. Research related to the concept suggests that the investment in academic patents (Mowery & Ziedonis, 2000), research parks (Tuchman, 2004), and auxiliary services (Archibald & Feldman, 2006) has increased steadily. Several scholars stated that universities have developed into entrepreneurial business centers (Baez & Slaughter, 2001; Etzkowitz & Kemelgo, 1998).

The findings in this study indicated that most participants believe that universities should make a larger effort to secure alternative funding sources. Two participants indicated that there are members of the Oklahoma legislature who believe that higher education should be completely privatized. Although most participants thought that complete privatization was extreme, many expected practices that subscribe to the concept of academic capitalism. For example, one legislator stated, "I don't look at what's good for [public university]. I look at how's [public university] good for the state of Oklahoma. The tenets of academic capitalism acknowledge the emerging relationships of institutions with external entities. One participant believed that any dollar appropriated to higher education should be maximized and multiplied through the institutions' creative business ventures. Another legislator stated, "An appropriated dollar it brings a cost of less than a dollar because of the process that buck has to go to get to the university. So if that dollar, that's worth less than a dollar, allows universities to bring in other dollars, than it's a worthy investment." Collectively, legislators' perceptions of higher education's level of financial need in Oklahoma were impacted by the potential to garner additional revenues beyond state appropriations and tuition increases. What are we going to get on a return on investment?" The findings in this study seem to support several of the general tenets of academic capitalism and further substantiate the development of the concept.

Three Streams Model. Kingdon's (1983) Three Streams Model was highlighted in Chapter II of this study. The model contends that for any policy to be passed into law it must: (1) be identified as addressing a problem, (2) emerge from a pool of policy issues, and (3) navigate the political gauntlet. Most participants believed that funding for higher education in Oklahoma was a problem. Opinions as to the nature of the problem varied, however. Although most participants recognized a need for additional dollars for higher education, competing interests appeared to impact their position. One staff participant stated, "I think he knows higher education funding is low. But, if he were being truthful he'd probably give a bit more to schools, and I mean common ed." Although several legislators believed funding for higher education in Oklahoma was a problem, substantive discussions have failed to emerge from the pool of policy issues.

The emergence of the issue may be hindered by uncertainties surrounding step three of the Kingdon model. In step three, an issue must navigate the political gauntlet to be passed in to law. Chapter II discussed the OSRHE's responsibilities under Article 13, Section B-1, of the Oklahoma Constitution. The article states that the OSRHE is charged with maintaining the integrity of the academic system, allocating funds, setting tuition and fee schedules, planning and construction of public college and university buildings and property, budget administration, personnel management and salaries, and serving as a custodian of records. The authority prescribed to the OSRHE protects its spending process; and legal changes to this authority would be difficult and time-consuming. The constitutional provision seems to have impacted the legislature's willingness to discuss the issue at depth, as numerous quotations in Chapter V reveal.

In relation to the Three Streams Model, the findings in this study indicate that higher education spending has difficulty at all stages of the process: (1) there are competing views among legislators that spending for higher education in Oklahoma is a problem, (2) a large contingency of legislators would not be willing to champion higher education spending above other competing interests, and, (3) due to the omnibus nature of the budget process, higher education is unable to separate from other funding issues in Oklahoma. There were competing views among participants regarding whether funding for higher education was a problem or if the extent of the problem was greater than the value or need of competing interests. Consequently, the potential for a policy discussion pertaining to higher education spending is unlikely.

State public higher education budgetary picture. Tandberg's (2010) budgetary picture depicts a blanketed process toward state higher education spending. The picture, presented in Chapter II, indicates that several external factors (including political issues, demographics, economics and higher education issues) surround spending and impact internal processes. Tandberg lists the internal factors as higher education governance, the governor, and the legislature. The findings in this study indicate that many factors facing state spending for higher education in Oklahoma were similar to those listed in Tandberg's model. However, the impact of the factors varied, and the findings in this study deviate slightly from the picture.

In Oklahoma, the higher education governance structure has constitutional provisions and internal factors are less susceptible to influence by external politics. In addition, the model presents the three most important components of the legislature as party, professionalism, and whether the body/bodies are unicameral or bicameral. However, the findings in this study indicate that the structure of the budgetary process is equally important. Several legislator participants mentioned the structure and constitutional provisions as having a lasting effect on the budget process. In addition, the previous year’s budget seems to have more impact on the process than change in party control. Although the components may be important to consider when comparing states, higher education in Oklahoma is contingent on the budget process, competing interests, and the strength of the economy.

In addition, the model presents the three most important external higher education factors as tuition, giving, and private higher education. The findings in the study, however, suggest that while tuition and giving may impact legislators’ perceptions, private higher education is minimally discussed as an influential factor. Lobbying efforts and campus facilities appear to be two additional higher education factors that affect members’ perceptions of higher education’s current level of financial need. Because of the budget process and tuition authority being controlled by the OSRHE, the factors that influence legislators seem to be surface-level. One legislator mentioned “cars in the parking lot,” while another added “million dollar pear trees” and football coaching salaries. The perception of spending appears to be more influenced by images of wasteful spending rather than data and reports.

The Tandberg model features external and internal factors that affect state budget outcomes for higher education. The findings in this study seem to support most of the factors presented in the Tandberg model. However, although Tandberg’s picture serves as a positive guide to understanding the budgetary process, participants’ perceptions and the factors that influence spending appear to vary slightly. Discussing the influences on their decision-making, legislator participants mentioned several additional factors, including higher education lobbyists, budget process structure, and constitutional provisions.

Relationship of the Findings to Practice

The previous sections discussed the findings in this study in relation to previous research and theory. Although the findings generally support previous research and theory, the process and perceptions of higher education vary slightly. This section discusses the relationship of the findings to practice.

Investing in universities. As discussed at several points in this study the proportion of university operating budgets funded by the state has decreased significantly since 1980. Academic capitalism indicates that universities have leveraged the decline with increasing tuition fees and external funding opportunities. The pursuit – or expectation – of additional funding opportunities may impact how legislators view higher education's level of financial need in Oklahoma. One legislator stated:

> A dollar for higher ed, what does it mean? It doesn't just mean that it's a dollar. It means that there's federal funds attached to that. It means there's private research dollars attached to that. And does it give the university the capacity to raise funds privately as well? So they [higher education institutions] need to be able to prove to me what does the dollar mean.

Higher education controls the ability to increase tuition and fees. Although most members indicated a need to protect low-income students, participants expected a return on investment. They recognized the interaction between an educated workforce, higher education, and economic development. Participants believed that investment in higher education and students should benefit the state in return. Literature devoted to academic capitalism indicates that state spending efforts for higher education are more calculated than in decades past (Robst, 2001).

Higher education lobbyists. Research related to higher education indicates that lobbying efforts were not common practice until the mid-1990s (Ferrin, 1996). Several legislator participants discussed the impact of higher education lobbying efforts in Oklahoma on policy and spending. Legislators indicated that most institutions have lobbyists that frequently visit the legislature, and many have vice president titles. However, many participants indicated that several university presidents and OSRHE leaders with past legislative experience were the champions of the cause.

Several members indicated that higher education lobbyists have varying effects on the legislature, but have the greatest influence on more newly elected officials. In the past session, several former legislators turned university presidents seem to have influenced funding for the Master Lease Program. In the narrative portrait section of Chapter V, a story was told of a university president who assisted in securing new funds above the need initially reported. Although new lawmakers may appear to be influenced by former politicians in higher education, the effects on long-term legislators were mixed. Although Democrat party members tend to be in favor of education initiatives at all levels, long-term Republican party members reported that lobbying efforts from higher education had minimal impact on their decision-making. All things considered, lobbying efforts seem to affect legislators' perceptions of the current level of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma.

State legislators' perception of higher education's financial need appeared to be influenced by the collective effect of multiple factors including state revenue collections, the state budget process, federal initiatives, university operations, competing discretionary interests and lobbying. Although the OSRHE publishes financial reports online, few legislators sought the information unless the data aided in developing related policy or interim studies. The observed behavior of members suggests that the relationship between universities and the legislature remains fairly contentious. Although universities have experienced a decline in the percentage of their operating budgets financed by the state, state legislators expressed frustration at a general lack of control. Although the perception of the current level of need varied among legislator participants in this study, the findings propose that opportunities to impact perceptions positively may exist. While strategies to improve perceptions may be lengthy, most center on universities and the OSRHE approaching the legislature as a partner, rather than a hindrance.

The findings in this study indicate that most legislators did little to seek understanding of higher education's current level of financial need in Oklahoma. The interaction between universities, the OSRHE and the legislature was limited to those with power and influence. University officials occasionally visited committees to lobby for additional dollars. However, a large percentage of dollars appropriated to higher education came from the larger omnibus budget bill. High-ranking members of the higher education community met informally with decision-makers to influence appropriations decisions, but output by percentage of the budget remained constant. A small group of legislators and governor's designees crafted the omnibus budget and decided what percentage went to higher education.

The OSRHE received an appropriation in lump sum, as dictated by Article 13, Section A of the Oklahoma Constitution, and used a budget formula (Figure 4) to allocate to each institution. In 2003, tuition-setting authority was removed from the legislature and given to the OSRHE. The findings demonstrate that because tuition-setting rests with the OSRHE and most legislators are not involved in the budget process, few members sought a thorough understanding of university operations or the OSRHE distribution process to each institution.

Although most members indicated that they are normally aware of tuition increases, several explained that these are announced in the summer months after a legislative session with little discussion among members. While some think that tuition authority should be returned to the legislature, no member indicated a real desire to reclaim this responsibility. Although many expressed a desire to keep higher education affordable, appropriations have not kept pace with university operation costs. Several members indicated that the budget process should be changed, but action remained status quo. The findings propose that although tendencies have grown considerably more conservative over the past decade, the outlook for future budget process remained uncertain. The legislator participants' perceptions of higher education need at large seemed to be tied to economic outlook and comparisons with competing interests.

Practice. The purpose of this study was to explore legislators' perceptions of spending on higher education in Oklahoma. The findings indicate that views among legislator participants varied, and that many did little to seek understanding regarding higher education's level of need. Six broad recommendations for practice, developed from the findings listed in this study, are presented in the subsequent paragraphs. However, it may be important to first express where much of the disconnect between higher education and state official occurs.

In Oklahoma, nearly every legislator, regardless of political party, understands the importance of an educated citizenry. However, most legislators spend little time researching the intricacies of each individual institution's budget. Legislators have too many issues and entities to examine to know everything on which university officials place value. Unless higher education information is readily available and delivered in a format that demands attention, most of the cost-saving or cost-seeking strategies go largely unnoticed. "Perception is reality," and legislators notice "million dollar pear trees" or "the nice cars in the student parking lot." If legislators search university operating budgets unsolicited, it is likely that they are searching for remnants of wasteful spending to contribute to their argument. This stems from higher education being just one budget item amidst a political landscape that is seeking to tighten and reduce government spending. From this perspective, six recommendations for university and legislative officials emerged.

The first recommendation is for university administrators and state legislators to utilize the time out of session to seek understanding from one another. There seems to be an undertone of distrust and blame. Walking through the halls of a university, a common theme is to blame the legislature for funding declines. In order to balance the money, however, the legislature must determine needs versus wants. The findings in the study suggest that universities do not do enough to demonstrate how they are using the money they receive. One legislator participant indicated that he would spend time out of session in summer 2013 to research university fees in comparison to tuition. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, anytime a legislator examines university spending unsolicited, it is not normally a positive thing for universities.

Universities need to demonstrate to legislators why investing in higher education is a good use of taxpayer money. They must approach legislators in a way that really grabs their attention. Attempting to address funding concerns in the spring, amidst an active legislative session, does little to separate higher education from other discretionary spending items. University officials should approach legislators while their legislators are conducting interim studies. The summer and early fall provide legislators with an opportunity to research and consider the bills they will author in session. Focusing on late summer and early fall as a window to present data may provide a greater opportunity to influence policy-makers and policy. This recommendation deals specifically with timing, but several of the subsequent recommendations focus on means.

The second recommendation is for university administrators to explore opportunities to present data that separates institutional needs and wants. Several participants indicated that the legislature does not often receive data specifically related to higher education spending. Two legislators believed that the public colleges in their district were hiding information from them. University officials should focus on presenting data that demonstrates that universities' operations are maximizing and conserving state-appropriated dollars. The approach should not only demonstrate why universities are a good investment, but how the money is being leveraged in a meaningful way. Members' perceptions of state spending in higher education are often influenced by past experiences. However, most members do little to seek an understanding of higher education's level of need. Their understanding of need is often disrupted by surface-level exposure like football coach salaries, landscaping costs, and new and high cost student-service buildings. Public institutions should explore opportunities to share the story in a process that is data-driven and comprehensive. If money is spent on new buildings, what did the institutions receive in return that suggest it was money well spent? One member indicated that something as simple as a quick, bulleted list would be beneficial.

The third recommendation is for state legislators to seek understanding of higher education's level of financial need. As the subsequent sections indicate, many legislators who are not members of an appropriation or higher education committee did little to determine the funding level and need of higher education institutes. The appropriation to higher education in Oklahoma represents 15.8% of the state budget (Oklahoma State System for Higher Education, 2012) but several participants had a limited understanding of the budget breakdown. One method to achieve this is for administrators to take advantage breaks in the legislative session to share their story.

The fourth recommendation is for university officials to present state legislators with data pertaining to external revenue streams and the minimizing of tuition increases. Several legislative members made reference to public institutions being wasteful in spending. However, many had no clear understanding of the external funding sources that universities seek. Several participants shared that they believed that opportunities exist for institutions to grow alternative funding sources but were unaware of current efforts to do this. One member believed that universities should invite legislators to view or assist in strategic planning efforts that involved spending and funding. Providing opportunities for legislators to see the planning efforts in action may help to positively influence perceptions regarding state spending for higher education.

The fifth recommendation is that public institutions should seek opportunities to collaborate with other bodies and voice collective concerns. One member indicated that higher education institutions must "join forces…and instead of competing and pitting, band together and become kind of a cohesive unit." One participant stated that Higher Education Day at the capitol was not nearly enough to educate legislators, while another said that the OSRHE should provide the legislature with a better snapshot of higher education's needs in general. Two participants suggested a "college fair" for legislators where institutions distributed a brief and concise figure of costs and expenses.

The sixth recommendation is for administrators and public servants beyond the Oklahoma system to examine, and, if warranted, apply the findings from this study. Higher education officials enjoy the concept of autonomy, being able to make budget decisions separate from bureaucratic processes and legislative control. There are certainly advantages to a centralized and self-regulated system. In fact, most state systems tend to be highly self-regulated. Nicholson-Crotty and Meier (2002) suggest one political concern of a centralized and highly regulated system is that all decision-makers are in one centralized location and the opportunity for political influence is greater. In this study, however, an additional concern was identified. Self-regulated systems are still dependent on state funding. However, because of the OSRHE's autonomy, most legislators were not aware of what higher education entities were doing financially. In addition, no real champion of higher education emerged. There seems to be a disconnect in Oklahoma between higher education and the legislature. That disconnect seems to be exacerbated by the limited need for interaction. This has implications for the sustainability of long-term funding, not only for Oklahoma but also for states with a similar system.

Although the above recommendations may help to improve relationships and perceptions, it is possible that such efforts may do little to impact appropriations to higher education. The findings in this study indicate that perceptions of members and consideration of factors have less effect than how the process has been executed historically. However, historic trends demonstrate that the changes to higher education their appropriations in Oklahoma have been evolutionary. The findings in this study, indicate that changes to state appropriations to higher education in Oklahoma will likely continue to occur over time as the political and economic landscapes evolve.

Taken together and against the backdrop of a changing political landscape, Oklahoma seems to be experiencing a gradual shift that is not altogether different from what is happening in other states. Although Oklahoma may have unique interests that compete with higher education for discretionary funds, the funding pattern is similar to that of other states. It appears likely that Oklahoma will continue to fund higher education at a similar percentage of the state budget, but that the dollar amount will fail to keep pace with university operating budgets. My hope is that the state legislature will work with the OSRHE and university officials to pursue private partnerships that can leverage state appropriations and achieve a greater return on investment.

Limitations

In the first chapter of this dissertation I addressed several delimitations that exist in this study. The delimitations stated that: (1) the study is limited to members of the Oklahoma State Legislature and no attempt to interview legislators in other states was made, (2) legislative assistants had varying knowledge of the budget process and, (3) the study was qualitative and the results may not truly represent the beliefs of all the state legislators in Oklahoma. In addition to those listed in chapter one, additional delimitations may exist.

First, with qualitative research the accuracy of the study findings are limited to the information participants share. The legislative participants in this study are public figures and likely considered political implications during the interviews. Second, the interviews took place immediately following the First Session of the 54^{th} Oklahoma Legislature. The 54^{th} Oklahoma Legislature was at the midterm and timing may have influenced what participants were willing to share. Third, I attempted to approach the study without bias, but many legislators seem to assume that I was in favor of increased spending for higher education. This undertone may have impacted the type of information participants were willing to share, especially those participants who identified themselves as fiscally conservative. Fourth, although I am well versed in the academic literature pertaining to higher education spending, my knowledge of the Oklahoma process was limited to relevant literature, participant interviews, observations, and documents I observed. I was not present in closed committee meetings where many of the key discussions and debates took place. I cannot conceptualize the full effect of the atmosphere, passion, or emotion that ensued when budget numbers were being finalized.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the duration of this study, multiple opportunities for future research emerged. The research in this study employed qualitative methods and focused specifically on seven legislators and staffers and their perceptions of the process. The limited scope of this study supports the need for future research regarding legislative perspectives and the developing landscape of spending in Oklahoma. Based on previous research in the field and legislator responses in this study, there is an opportunity for both qualitative and quantitative work investigating party factions, lobbying efforts, and competing interests. This study identified three specific areas that warrant future research: the “über conservative” faction, the impact of in-house lobbyists, and competing interests.

The Über Conservative Faction

Several legislator and staff participants discussed the impact of the über conservative faction of the Republican party. Several believed that the movement was born out of the Tea Party.. Little research has been devoted to the impact of this movement on state politics and spending. The findings in this study suggest that a growing faction of the Republican party serving in the Oklahoma legislature are “über conservatives” and “anti-spending.” One member mentioned that this faction made up 30% of the Republican party members and is very organized and vocal. What effect does this movement have on state spending for higher education in Oklahoma? The study revealed the need to research the über-conservative movement and its impact on state spending and higher education as a derivative.

The Impact of Lobbyists

Many legislator participants discussed the impact of higher education lobbying on state appropriations. Higher education lobbying efforts are relatively new, and literature discussing the matter is limited. There are opportunities to consider the role of higher education lobbyists for future research. A legislator in this study indicated that higher education had “an army of lobbyists.” The comment raised further questions regarding the size and impact of higher education lobbying in Oklahoma. How extensive is the lobbying network in the state? To what effect do higher education lobbyists impact policy? How many employees does an institution have that devote a majority of their time to governmental relations? Research opportunities that focus on network size, investment in lobbying, and perceived influence are seemingly infinite.

Competing Interests

In addition, the findings revealed the need to explore the impact of competing interests on higher education spending in Oklahoma. There appears to be a slight discrepancy between previous research and the findings in this study. Although research on state spending indicates that higher education is largely impacted by social issues, a majority of the competing interests listed by participants dealt with public works. There is an opportunity to replicate in Oklahoma previous quantitative studies related to competing interests. Rabvosky (2010), for example, looked at factors that affected state spending on higher education in a study that could be modified to examine the Oklahoma system.

Legislator Perceptions in Other States

Additional research related to state spending for higher education is necessary. This dissertation suggests that legislators in states where higher education governance systems are similar to Oklahoma may share similar perceptions of spending for higher education. Systems with high regulation authority may have more autonomy and less interaction with their state legislature. Previous research considered higher education systems with regard to performance (Knott & Payne, 2002) and political forces (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier, 2003), but additional research pertaining to the impact of governance systems on state spending is warranted.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a discussion related to the findings listed in Chapter V. The findings were discussed in relation to the previous research, theory, and practice, and recommendations for future research were provided. The results suggest that there is no clear partnership between higher education officials and the Oklahoma legislature. Universities do little to tell their story to the legislature, and most legislators do little to seek an understanding of higher education's level of need. Although most legislators identified that higher education is likely to need increased appropriations, few seemed interested in examining the need specifically. As university operating budgets continue to expand, it is likely that the percentage funded by the state will continue to decline. Universities and the state legislature must work together to determine possible funding solutions that involve creative partnership and leveraging state dollars with private opportunities.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Participation for Research Participation

Oklahoma State University

Dear Legislator __________,

My name is Nathan Woolard and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at Oklahoma State University. I am writing to ask you to be a part of a qualitative study on state legislators' perceptions of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma. This study is being conducted for research purposes and is affiliated with Oklahoma State University in that it is intended for partial completion of a doctoral degree (Ed.D) in Higher Education.

I want to include you in this research study because of your legislative committee involvement. As such, you have intimate knowledge of the state appropriation process. I would greatly appreciate your insights and observations concerning this process. Participation in this study will include:

- A one hour interview to be conducted at a place and time at your discretion.
- Preferably, the interview will be recorded with a digital recorder and notes will be taken using a standard pen and paper.
- If needed, follow-up via email and/or by phone for accuracy and/or clarification purposes.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you agree to participate, your identity will be kept confidential. Your name and district will not appear in the study and you will be referenced only by a pseudonym. The audio transcripts will be stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer and written transcripts will be stored digitally in a password protected file. Audio recording would only be used for the accuracy of the data. My advisor and I will be the only individuals to have access to interview transcriptions and recordings.

If you desire, a written account of the interview will be given to you to ensure the record accurately reflects your comments during the interview. Additionally, if you identify statements within the written record that you would like removed, they will be removed and will not be used in the dissertation.

I am responsible for this research and may be contacted at (918) 344-3685 regarding with questions about this research. You can also contact me by email at nathan.woolard@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Nathan Woolard

APPENDIX B
Interview Protocol

1.) How would you describe the current level of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma?

2.) What factors do you consider when looking at state budget priorities each year?

    a. How will you prepare for this year based on your past experiences?

3.) What is the biggest misconception about the higher education appropriation process?

4.) How would you describe university spending habits regarding state funds in Oklahoma? Has your perception changed?

5.) What are some of the challenges facing higher education appropriations in Oklahoma?

6.) How would you describe how other members of the state legislature perceive state spending for higher education? Are there competing views?

7.) How do your personal interests affect your decision-making in the appropriations process?

8.) How do national government initiatives affect the state appropriations process in Oklahoma?

9.) How would you describe the future state of state appropriations to higher education in Oklahoma?

10.) What are some of the short-term funding challenges that may affect higher education in Oklahoma?

11.) What are some of the political challenges that affect state appropriations?

APPENDIX C
Informed Consent Form

Project Title: State Spending for Higher Education in Oklahoma: Perceptions from Members of the Oklahoma State Legislature

Investigators:
Nathan A. Woolard
Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D.

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to explore how members of the Oklahoma State Legislature perceive the level of financial need for Oklahoma higher education institutions.

2. **Interview Procedures:** This consent form must be signed at the start of the interview. The interview will preferably be recorded, but only at the participant's approval. Data will be transcribed, and made available at your discretion. The interview protocol will be emailed to you prior to the scheduled interview. You will have the right to review transcripted data for accuracy and clarity. If you request that excerpts be removed from the study, it will not be included in the study.

3. **Risks of Participation:** There are no known risks in participating in this research.

4. **Benefits:** The results of the research are expected to benefit the academic community. There are no direct benefits to respondents.

5. **Duration/Time:** The interview will last 60 minutes. Follow-up questions (if needed) will be asked via email or phone.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you agree to participate, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and district will not appear in the study and will be referenced only by a pseudonym (e.g. legislator 1, legislator 2, etc.). The audio transcripts will be stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer and written transcripts will be stored digitally in a password protected file. Audio recording will only be used for the accuracy of the data. The principal investigator and his advisor will be the only individuals to have access to interview transcriptions and recordings.

7. **Compensation:** There will be no payments or any monetary compensation for participation in this research study.

8. **Contacts:** You may contact either of the researchers at the following addresses, phone numbers and email addresses, should you desire to discuss your participation in the research study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D.
309 Willard hall
Stillwater, Oklahoma USA 74078
405-774-3982
Steve.wanger@okstate.edu

Nathan A. Woolard
208 W. 7th Street
Edmond, Oklahoma USA 73003
918-344-3685
nwoolard23@yahoo.com

If you have questions about your rights as a researcher volunteer, you may contact:

Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair
219 Cordell North
Stillwater, OK USA 72078
405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

9. **Participant Rights:** Your participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without any negative reactions or penalty.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

______________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

______________________________ __________________
Signature of Researcher Date

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval Letter

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Thursday, April 11, 2013
IRB Application No	ED1364
Proposal Title:	State Spending for Higher Education in Oklahoma: Perceptions from Members of the Oklahoma State Legislature
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 4/10/2014

Principal Investigator(s):

Nathan A Woolard	Stephen P. Wanger
	309 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia M. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Nathan A. Woolard

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: STATE SPENDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN OKLAHOMA: PERCEPTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE OKLAHOMA STATE LEGSILATURE

Major Field: Educational Leadership

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Public Administration at The University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in August 2009.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in General Studies at The University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2007.

Experience:

Director of Leadership Studies, Emporia State University, 2013- present

Assistant Director, Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment, The University of Central Oklahoma, 2010 – 2013

Coordinator, Transfer Student Support, The University of Central Oklahoma, 2009 – 2011

Prospective Student Counselor, The University of Central Oklahoma, 2008 – 2009

Professional Memberships:

OACRAO: Oklahoma Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers

Name: Nathan Andrew Woolard Date of Degree: May, 2014

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: STATE SPENDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN OKLAHOMA: PERCEPTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE OKLAHOMA STATE LEGSILATURE

Pages in Study: 171

Major Field: Educational Leadership

Scope and Method of Study: This study examined state legislator perceptions of state spending for higher education in Oklahoma. This qualitative study aimed to explore these perceptions and the process by which state legislators consider and understand higher education spending. Interviews of seven current state legislators and seven legislative assistants were conducted. Criterion sampling was used to select interview participants.

Findings and Conclusions: The study found that Oklahoma has a higher education governance system with high autonomy, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE). The OSRHE receives money for all public higher education institutions in a lump sum appropriation. The lump sum is one component of a large omnibus budget bill that legislators vote on for all state agencies. Because of higher education's autonomy and the methodical appropriations process, there is little need for most legislators to have an intimate understanding of how public institutions operate financially. The findings suggest that higher education's autonomy and the appropriations process impact how legislators understand and perceive higher education operations and spending habits. The perception of spending habits may have long-term implications on higher education appropriations in Oklahoma. In addition, the study findings may be applicable to other states where governance structure and spending process are similar.

Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: ____