

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING IN MISSOURI

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine perceptions of state legislators regarding funding of public higher education in the State of Missouri. To this end, I sought to determine how Missouri legislators perceive the purpose of higher education and the role the state government should play in funding it. The concept that higher education is a public good framed this study, meaning that it benefits more than just those individuals who receive it or results in unintended positive outcomes for a larger population than solely its consumers. This justifies its funding, at least in part, through appropriations from the state legislature.

Four key themes emerged based on data from Missouri's Constitution, historical budget documents, and semi-structured interviews with members of key legislative committee members from Missouri's 95th General Assembly: (a) the priority of higher education in Missouri, (b) the value of higher education in Missouri, (c) the need for higher education to prove its worth, and (d) the question of private good versus public good. Implications for policy and practice are presented at the end of the study, along with recommendations for future research.