

COMPARING THEORIES OF THE POLICY PROCESS AND
STATE TUITION POLICY: CRITICAL THEORY, INSTITUTIONAL RATIONAL
CHOICE, AND ADVOCACY COALITIONS.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation triangulates four theories of the policy process to explain state-level tuition policy change. Very little policy research examines theories of the policy process in concert. Moreover, the field of higher education policy studies tends to be atheoretical in its approach to understanding policymaking. The project applies a Model III mixed methods design in which a primarily qualitative study uses quantitative analysis in a complementary fashion. The Dye, Sharkansky, Hofferbert framework is used to explain tuition policy change across all 50 states from 2000 to 2006, Institutional Rational Choice, Advocacy Coalition, and Critical Theory frameworks are used to analyze tuition policy change in Missouri and Florida. States with more centralized governance structures tend to enact fewer changes in tuition policy. By using the three frameworks in concert we can see that structural change is a means to an end in Florida. In Missouri, on the other hand, structure played a much less central role. Differing state contexts require a slightly different configuration of the frameworks to produce a rich explanation of the events and debates surrounding tuition policy change.