

## Public Abstract

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Title: Student Lobbyists' Behavior and Its Perceived Influence on State-Level Public Higher Education Legislation: A Case Study

Researchers have noted that public higher education has become increasingly political, particularly in the state-level legislative arena and over the past 15 years. Despite the reality that state legislators' interest in public higher education issues has been steadily escalating, public colleges and universities have been slow to increase their sophistication in the legislative arena and have primarily been represented by full-time professional lobbyists. Given that the public higher education sector's capacity for effective legislative lobbying has not kept pace with the necessity for it, is it time to take more seriously the role that university students can play in institutional lobbying activity? This study suggests that it is.

This study sought to examine ASUM (Associated Students of the University of Missouri) student lobbyists' lobbying behavior, compare it with lobbying behavior of professional higher education lobbyists, and ascertain its perceived influence on state-level higher education issues during the 2009 Missouri Legislative Session. Through data document collection, observation, focus group interviews, and individual interviews with legislators, legislative staff members, University of Missouri System lobbyists, and ASUM student lobbyists themselves, the results of this study demonstrate that university students can be influential as state-level legislative lobbyists.

This study establishes that not only were ASUM student lobbyists able to actively participate in the state-level legislative process, but they also were able to influence it.

Students derived influence by being able to present a unique perspective valued by legislators, talk personally about how proposed legislation directly affected students, present a consumer viewpoint, access social and personal networks, and share ideas and perspectives unable to be presented by other higher education lobbyists. Given this, as public colleges and universities focus increasingly on having a presence in the state-level legislative arena and increasing their lobbying effectiveness, there is now a demonstrated role for students, a role that has heretofore been overlooked and a role that has now been demonstrated to be influential.