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A comparative study of higher education

Michael Hugh Haynes

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A comparative study of higher education

Abstract

During my undergraduate career at Eastern Michigan University, I have had the privilege to study various aspects of public higher education through my public administration degree work. Most of that work has focused on the state of Michigan alone, giving me only one perspective on the inner workings of state colleges and universities. By the beginning of my final year, there were many questions that I had yet to answer because of my "domestic" focus on Michigan. Why are there so many schools in the state of Wisconsin that are called the University of Wisconsin? Are all universities independent from each other like the ones in Michigan are? Does any university allow students on its Board of Regents? This senior thesis is my opportunity to research and learn the answers to many of my questions regarding public higher education.

Since many of my questions are quite vague and have expansive responses, I have narrowed my study down to three case-study states: Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan. I also have ruled out any institutions that are not 4-year universities, in order to focus my analysis. Including the 2-year colleges and other institutions would lead this study into other directions that would not fit into the scope of my questions. Each of the three states has a distinct method of administering its public institutions of higher education. I will begin this study with rationale for choosing these three states as the paradigm for my research. Since many of my questions are of a similar nature, I have divided the majority of my research into two categories. The first category is governance, and revolves around issues such as the power structure within each state, including the division of authority and the makeup of the higher levels of administration. Secondly, I will analyze the funding and budget processes occurring in each state as they relate to higher education. While there are other issues that should be considered, the governance and funding issues are at focus in this study.

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A Comparative Study of Higher Education

An analysis of public higher education in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio

Michael Haynes

Senior Honors Thesis, 2008

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Michael Hugh Haynes

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

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Supervising Instructor

Honors Advisor

Department Head

Honors Director

*To The United States Student Association, the Student Association of Michigan,
Eastern Michigan University Student Government,
and all of the student activists out there*

Special Thanks

Michael Boulus, Presidents Council of the State Universities of Michigan

Dr. Jeffrey L. Bernstein

The student body presidents at the University of Wisconsin and Ohio universities

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Introduction

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Since many of my questions are quite vague and have expansive responses, I have narrowed my study down to three case-study states: Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan. I also have ruled out any institutions that are not 4-year universities, in order to focus my analysis. Including the 2-year colleges and other institutions would lead this study into other directions that would not fit into the scope of my questions. Each of the three states has a distinct method of administering its public institutions of higher education. I will begin this study with rationale for choosing these three states as the paradigm for my research. Since many of my questions are of a similar nature, I have divided the majority of my research into two categories. The first category is governance, and revolves around issues such as the power structure within each state, including the division of authority and the makeup of the higher levels of administration. Secondly, I will analyze the funding and budget processes occurring in each state as they relate to higher

education. While there are other issues that should be considered, the governance and funding issues are at focus in this study.

The Case Studies

Rationale

Before I begin examining and discussing the various structures of public higher education that are implemented by the states of Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin, I should first like to explain the rationale behind using those cases as the paradigm for my research. There are six main reasons behind choosing these states to analyze.

First, there is the simple fact that these states are all geographically located in the Great Lakes region. This helps control out climate, economic variation, local resources, and other potential influences that would be in play if I were comparing, say, Michigan and Florida, or other states that clearly exist in very different parts of the country and are affected by quite different agents. For example, hurricane season could cause various policies and philosophies to exist for the Florida higher education system, but there would be nothing that is comparable in Michigan, where the worst possible natural disaster involves the dumping of several feet of snow. The Great Lakes States deal with similar issues and thus are easier to compare because of it.

Secondly, these states have different structures of public higher education. This provides an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast various structures. The three state structures are also commonly found throughout the country, so as far as general

operation of the structure goes, they act as paradigm cases to reflect the nation's other state higher education structures. The specific structures are discussed in detail later.

The third reason these states are comparable is because Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin have higher education structures of similar size. Speaking only of 4-year universities and colleges, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio have 15, 13, and 13 institutions respectively. This is important because the distinctly different structures of higher education implemented by each state are serving a similar number of institutions as its peer states, ruling out any variance due to significantly larger or smaller structures. Because there are a similar number of universities in each state, we do not have to take much consideration into the possibility that the choice to implement one structure over another was made because there are only a few schools, compared to another structure that is used to serve twenty schools.

Similar to reasoning on the basis of the size of the structure, the three states have a reasonably equivalent number of students that are enrolled in each state's public higher education institutions. Again discussing 4-year institutions only, Wisconsin serves more than 155,000 students, Ohio has enrolled more than 250,000 students, and Michigan's higher education structure has nearly 280,000 students.¹ This is important again because of variance due to structure size.

The final two reasons for choosing Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio as paradigm cases for this study have to do with money. As I will discuss later, state spending and tuition are connected, and these three states have comparable total state spending and

¹ Enrollment information from individual university and system websites, 2008

student tuition levels. As noted in the table below, the state of Michigan spends more than \$1.5 billion on its 15 public universities, while its students pay an average tuition rate of \$7,504². Ohio appropriates nearly \$1.4 billion on its 13 universities, with students in that state paying average tuition rates of \$9,010. Finally, the state of Wisconsin spends more than \$1 billion on its 13 4-year colleges, and students attending them pay \$6,048 in tuition on average³.

State	# of Universities	Student Population	Average Tuition	Total State Spending
Michigan	15	280,000	\$7,504	\$1.5 billion
Ohio	13	253,000	\$9,010	\$1.4 billion
Wisconsin	13	170,000	\$6,048	\$1 billion

Aside from these six main points, there are two other similarities in the three states that should also be noted. First, according to the ratings which are granted to state economies by *Forbes*, the three states rank closely in the national rankings of state economic status. The economies are rated on characteristics such as the general quality of life and cost of living, labor availability and unemployment rates, potential for growth, and business taxation levels. *Forbes* ranks Michigan overall at 45th, Wisconsin at 39th, and Ohio at 34th (Forbes, 2006). The other similarity among the three states is regarding the college and university rankings produced by *U.S. News and World Report* each year. Each state has at least one university in the list of the top 100 institutions, according to the magazine. The University of Michigan is ranked 25th, the University of Wisconsin-

² Average tuition figures are calculated for full-time enrolled students, 2006-2007 academic year

³ Average tuition figures from National Center for Education Statistics; State appropriation figures from *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2007

Madison is 38th, and Ohio State University is ranked 57th. While these two comparisons are not as significant as the six previously discussed, state economic ratings and national reputations of institutions do play a role in many areas of higher education structural operations and philosophies.

I have chosen to study three states, all within a geographical region, with very different public higher education structures, each of similar size in both the number of 4-year institutions and student populations, and all with similar state appropriation and average tuition rate figures. I will now examine each state and its public higher education structure in detail.

Wisconsin, the System State

State Institutions and Estimated Enrollment, 2007⁴			
Eau Claire	10,500	Platteville	7,100
Green Bay	5,500	River Falls	6,500
La Crosse	10,000	Stevens Point	9,100
Madison	41,500	Stout	8,500
Milwaukee	28,000	Superior	2,700
Oshkosh	12,500	Whitewater	10,700
Parkside	5,000		

The public higher education structure that the state of Wisconsin operates is one that encompasses all of its 13 4-year and 13 other institutions into one organization, which is called the University of Wisconsin System. Each university and college is called the University of Wisconsin with the campus location included in its name. For example, the largest campus of the UW system is named the University of Wisconsin -

⁴ Enrollment Data from the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, Information Paper 36 (2007)

Madison, while other universities within the state include names like the University of Wisconsin – Superior, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. The 4-year universities and the 2-year community colleges are all part of the University of Wisconsin system, but for the purposes of this study, I focus on the 4-year institutions.

At the top of the University of Wisconsin system is the UW Board of Regents. This entity serves as the administration to the entire system and oversees operations and policy for all of the UW system institutions. The universities each have their own set of administrators, specifically Chancellors who serve as the heads of their respective institutions, but all report up to the Board of Regents. As I will discuss more thoroughly in the governance and policy segment of this report, the Chancellors and campus administrators are granted a minimal authority to enact policies and govern their schools (the UW Board of Regents, however, still sets the guidelines and boundaries for such authority).

The University of Wisconsin system has not historically been a comprehensive system of operation. The original University of Wisconsin was created in 1848 and evolved into several campuses by the mid 1900s, with larger locations in Madison, Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Parkside, along with ten smaller 2-year campuses. Additionally, a separate entity known as the Wisconsin State Universities was founded in 1857 as a body of normal (teacher education) schools. By the end of the 1920s, the normal schools had grown into full educational colleges, thus becoming the Wisconsin State Colleges. Then, in 1964, the nine Wisconsin State Colleges became the Wisconsin State Universities with the addition of other academic programs aside from teacher education and liberal arts.

Prior to 1971, there existed in the state of Wisconsin two systems of public higher education. There was the University of Wisconsin system, covering the more general degree institutions, and the Wisconsin State Universities, made up mostly of teacher education institutions and liberal arts colleges. Each system had its own board of control, similar to the current UW Board of Regents, and each collective of public universities and colleges operated independently of one other. As a result of legislation passed in 1971, these two entities merged to become the organization that is now the University of Wisconsin system, and each campus was renamed to their respective current names⁵.

While the merger of the two higher education systems occurred in 1971, debate over the idea of bringing the two entities together began shortly after the end of World War II. In 1949 Governor Rennebohm proposed that a “super board” be created to oversee the functioning of all of the public higher education in Wisconsin, following his commission on education’s analysis of other states with similar structures, including the state of Ohio⁶. The rationale behind this proposal was that with the hordes of soldiers returning from war and heading to college with help from the GI Bill financial aid packages, the state of Wisconsin needed more stable and centralized control over its public higher education. The solution to Rennebohm and his commission was to create an oversight board of control, similar to what exists today as the UW Board of Regents.

The debate over merging went on for two decades, with opponents standing steadfast in favor of leaving the structure of public higher education in the state of Wisconsin as it existed. They were fearful of dampening the quality of education offered

⁵ *About the UW System*, University of Wisconsin (2008)

⁶ *The UW System Merger*, The University of Wisconsin: a history (1999)

by the two systems if the operations and organization of administration were to be altered. In 1971, however, newly-elected Governor Lucey proposed once again (in his state-of-the-state address) that the two higher education systems be combined and an overarching body of governance be established. He claimed that it was imperative to merge the systems in order to stabilize the quality of education in similar programs offered by the different systems. With this, Lucey also was aiming to severely reduce the costs associated with education on the taxpayers in the time of heavy inflation and economic downturn that resulted from the war taking place in Vietnam. Fiscal problems eventually became the main force behind the acceptance of the merger, and what exist today as the University of Wisconsin system and the UW Board of Regents were created.

Michigan, the Autonomous State

Central Michigan	28,000	Oakland	17,000
Eastern Michigan	23,000	Saginaw Valley	9,500
Ferris State	11,000	Univ. of Michigan Ann Arbor	39,000
Grand Valley State	20,000	Univ. of Michigan Dearborn	8,500
Lake Superior State	3,500	Univ. of Michigan Flint	6,400
Michigan State	45,000	Wayne State	33,000
Michigan Technological	6,500	Western Michigan	26,000
Northern Michigan	9,500		

The way that the state of Michigan organizes its institutions of public higher education is the complete opposite of Wisconsin's system structure. Rather than have only one overarching board of governance for all of the universities, each of Michigan's fifteen public universities has its own governing board of regents or trustees, with one

⁷ Enrollment Data from the President's Council of the State Universities of Michigan.

exception. There are three of the fifteen campuses that share one board of regents, similar to the University of Wisconsin system. These campuses are the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, University of Michigan – Flint, and University of Michigan – Dearborn. As I will discuss more thoroughly in the budget and financing section of this paper, however, the three University of Michigan campuses do not function together the same way the University of Wisconsin system does, since each campus is treated by the state government as an autonomous institution with regard to funding allocation line items and capital projects. Each campus administration within the University of Michigan system is also granted much more authority in determining institutional policy than the campuses in the University of Wisconsin system, but while also all reporting to the University of Michigan Board of Regents for policies and issues such as tuition rates, academic curriculum approval, and budgeting.

Because of the fact that each Michigan public university has its own board of governance, and because those boards are given autonomous authority in its decision-making ability, I have labeled Michigan the “autonomous state” for future comparison between the three case study states discussed in this paper. While Michigan’s first universities were created in the early 1800s, the rationale behind this autonomy of institutional authority comes from the 1850 state constitutional convention, where delegates demanded a change in policy toward higher education since too much conflict (as a result of political influences) was causing enrollment and quality of education at the University of Michigan to drop. University of Michigan was then given autonomy from the government to determine its own policies, tuition rates, and budget, and was the first institution in the country to be given such authority. From then on, each university that

was developed was given this traditional autonomous authority as a way to keep “politics out of the classroom” and encourage educational experts, not politicians, to be the operatives and administrators of the public institutions of higher education⁸. Today, each of the fifteen universities is able to decide how to use the appropriations given from the state legislature, set tuition rates, and change institutional policies without much political intervention from lawmakers and other branches of the state government (aside from general laws that impact higher education when enacted, such as employment requirements, state financial aid programs, standards of accreditation, etc.)

Given the previously mentioned exception with the University of Michigan campuses sharing a governing board, the thirteen governing boards are given expressed power to govern and control their respective universities by the state constitution that was ratified in 1963. The state constitution also dictates the methods that are used to appoint each university’s regents and trustees. This is a topic of much controversy within Michigan, as there are two different methods utilized to establish the governing boards. The state constitution essentially splits the thirteen boards into two classes of development: elected and governor appointed. The University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and Michigan State University regents are all elected at-large by the citizens of the state of Michigan, while the remaining boards such as those at Lake Superior State University, Western Michigan University, and Oakland University, are all made by governor appointment⁹. The controversy here, aside from general arguments over which method is best for the quality of education within the state institutions, is over the fact that the three largest universities have a much different method of choosing governing

⁸ “Michigan’s Higher Education System: A guide for state policymakers” Ferris State University, 2003

⁹ Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article X Sections 5-6

board members than the smaller schools, creating the perception of a two-tiered system of higher education.

Arguments have been made against both election and governor appointment for determining governing board members. It has been claimed that electing the board members is not the best method because the entire state does not necessarily have a direct stake in the operations of all of the universities. The idea here is that although people living in southeastern Michigan near Detroit may be more inclined to play an active role at selecting regents at Oakland University or Wayne State University since they are located near where the people live and are major influences in the local economy, those same people may not have as large a stake in the success of Northern Michigan University, which is located on the opposite side of the state in the Upper Peninsula, almost 600 miles away. The people and groups who stand behind this argument favor governor appointment or altering election procedures so that regents are elected within districts or other boundaries that are more local to the respective university, similar to how community college governing board members are elected.

On the other hand, opponents of governor appointed board members argue that since the governor belongs to a particular political party, he or she will most likely appoint board members that belong to that party. They assert that because regents serve eight-year terms and governors serve four-year terms, it is possible to have a governor belonging to one political party appoint half of a university's board, and then have a governor from the opposite political party appoint the other half of the board, leaving a politically split board, causing the operations of the university to be based very much on politics rather than the best interests of the institution. Opponents claim that this is also a

problem when you have regents of the same political party, since voices from the other side of the aisle are perceived to be stifled. This insurgence of politics in the university governance is the complete antithesis of the rationale for having autonomous universities in the first place, which was discussed earlier. Opponents of governor appointments as the method for determining regents tend to support elections and other manners of popular selection.

Michigan has a structure of public higher education that is one of independence and autonomy. I discuss later how this separation impacts the budget process, the ability to have shared governance within the institutions, and other aspects of higher education. Michigan is very distinct from both the state of Wisconsin university system and, as you will see, from Ohio's public higher education, which makes Michigan a fine paradigm case for analysis.

Ohio, the Hybrid State

State Institutions and Estimated Enrollment¹⁰			
Univ. of Akron	24,000	Ohio State	52,600
Bowling Green State	21,000	Ohio	19,000
Central State	1,600	Shawnee State	3,800
Cleveland State	16,000	Univ. of Toledo	19,300
Univ. of Cincinnati	35,000	Wright State	17,000
Kent State	34,000	Youngstown State	12,900
Miami	16,500		

If one were to compare the states' higher education structures to the plans for the United States government proposed at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Wisconsin would be the New Jersey Plan, with a strong, centralized government (the main UW

¹⁰ Enrollment data from the University System of Ohio (2008)

Board of Regents) and little power given to the states (universities, in this example). Michigan would represent the Virginia plan, granting authority and autonomy to the states (the individual universities) with very little national presence (no overarching governing body aside from the legislature and state constitution). Ohio is like the Great Compromise, taking parts from both plans to create a system of governance. Wisconsin and Michigan each have very different methods of operating their institutions of public higher education. In Ohio, however, pieces of both structures are evident.

As in Michigan, each of the thirteen public universities in the state of Ohio has its own board of governance, called the Board of Trustees. The boards are granted a certain amount of authority to enact policies on their campuses by the state, and are the administrative body for their respective campuses. Still, these boards and the administrators at the Ohio universities report to the Ohio Board of Regents, a powerful oversight organization that functions in a similar manner to the University of Wisconsin's Board of Regents. Led by a head Chancellor and several Vice Chancellors, the University System of Ohio Board of Regents handles policy-making and the authority for general control over the entire system of public higher education in the state of Ohio, including 2-year community colleges¹¹. With elements of the autonomy and individual governance found in the state of Michigan and the systematic function with the inclusion of a state board of control found in the state of Wisconsin, Ohio has been labeled a "hybrid" structure of public higher education for comparative purposes. Ohio's public higher education system has benefits and detriments from both structures, but is able to

¹¹ The University System of Ohio (2008)

develop its educational offerings by combining the various aspects of operations found in the other two states.

One aspect that makes Ohio stand out from the other two states is where the majority of authority lies for the governance of the system. Rather than have the head of the system serve at the will of the board of control (similar to how most top executive positions operate at most institutions and higher education systems), the Ohio Board of Regents serves as an advisory board to the Ohio Chancellor, who serves as the highest authority for the University System of Ohio. The Chancellor is appointed by the governor and is the head of the system, presiding over all of the Ohio public universities. This shift in power has only come about recently, as it was enacted in 2007. Prior to 2007 the division of power was reversed, with the Chancellor having little power and reporting to the Board of Regents.

Governance

Each of the states has a different structure for administering its public universities. Some states utilize autonomy in the way that Michigan does, allowing each institution to govern itself with a separate board of control, like the Board of Regents found at the “directional” schools (Western Michigan, Eastern, and Central). Other states grant the bulk of administrative authority to one governing board that determines policies and operations for an entire system of universities, which is the method the state of Wisconsin applies to its University of Wisconsin system. And then there are the states that mix a bit of both structures together, having both individual boards for each university while

also having a centralized body to govern over the system of institutions. Ohio is such a state, granting some authority to each university's Board of Trustees like the one found at Ohio State University, but there is also the Ohio Board of Regents to oversee and administer above each of those institutional boards.

In this section I will dive deeper into each of the three states' forms of governance and administration at its highest level, the boards of control. The discussion will include the composition and selection of the boards, the various levels of authority granted to the different types of boards (such as the ability to set tuition and fees, change campus policies, grant degrees, etc), and the interaction between those boards and other members of their respective higher education communities (especially the level of difficulty in influencing board decisions and policy changes).

Sources of Authority

A significant difference between Michigan and the other two states included in this analysis regarding the governance of public universities is in regards to where important structural information is found. Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan all have volumes of state laws and codes applying to their respective public higher education structures, such as how state appropriations are allocated (see the chapter on the state budget and higher education appropriations for details on this), campus safety and health standards, and even the official declaration of the names of each institution. However, aside from the simple statement in Wisconsin's document requiring a state university be

created somewhere near Madison¹² and a short section in The Ohio Constitution allowing for state loan and tuition credit programs for state college students¹³, there is little to no mention of higher education in the Wisconsin and Ohio state constitutions. In Michigan's state constitution, on the other hand, there are four sections establishing the state's public universities and community colleges and stating specifically how the members of the governing boards at the institutions are selected, as well as information outlining state appropriations to the universities¹⁴. This information for Wisconsin and Ohio can only be found in the respective state laws and codes.

This difference is very important to notice because of the difficulty in changing state constitutions versus state code or law. For Michigan, changing the method of selection for its universities' governing boards would take an elaborate effort of either the passage of a bill through both state congressional houses or through citizen petitioning of several hundred thousand signatures (depending on the voter turnout of the most recent gubernatorial election), followed by a statewide vote of the change during the next general election (where most ballot initiatives have historically failed)¹⁵. To make the same change in Ohio or Wisconsin, the state legislature in each state would simply have to change the section of state law that governs board membership – comparatively a much simpler and less difficult process. Essentially, the authority to govern the public institutions of higher education is granted on a higher level in Michigan than it is in Ohio and Wisconsin based on where that information is located and the difficulty in changing it. Thus, either Michigan has historically placed more importance on the functioning of

¹² Wisconsin Constitution, Article X Section 6.

¹³ The Ohio Constitution, Article XI, Sections 5-6

¹⁴ Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article VIII Sections 5-8

¹⁵ Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article XII Sections 1-2

its public universities and colleges than the other two states, or Wisconsin and Ohio are more accepting to changing their systems than Michigan.

Administrative Composition and Selection

Along with the source that grants authority being different among the three states, the size of the governing boards in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio regardless of the level of authority is significantly different. As defined by Michigan's state constitution, each of the fifteen public universities has a board of control consisting of eight members with the university's president serving ex-officio (with the three University of Michigan campuses – Flint, Ann Arbor, and Dearborn – sharing one board)¹⁶. The even number of board members at each institution often results in a tying vote of 4-4, with the university president given the ability to break the tie. All members serve eight year terms, staggered in a manner that allows for two open seats every two years, which are determined in one of two ways (these methods are quite controversial, as discussed in the Michigan state overview section). First, per the state constitution the members of the board of control at the three largest universities, the University of Michigan campus system, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University, are all elected by the state's population at-large in the general election¹⁷. Each candidate for board member office is listed on the ballot with the inclusion of his or her party affiliation.

The second method of selection, which applies to the remaining ten universities, is by gubernatorial appointment. Every two years the current Michigan governor

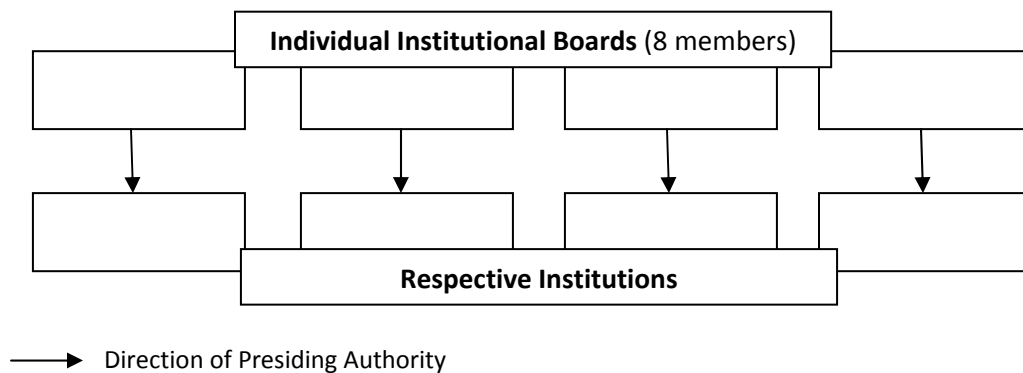
¹⁶ Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article X Sections 5-6

¹⁷ Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article X Section 5

appoints or reappoints (with consent of the Senate) two members to each university governing board¹⁸. While the appointment process is open to any Michigan resident, the process almost always results in a political appointee that matches the political party affiliation of the governor who is making the appointment. This reality, the even number of board members, four-year governor terms, and the staggering of open board seats can easily lead to four Republicans and four Democrats serving on one governing board, often causing ties in voting and giving university presidents more authority to enact and change campus policies through casting tie-breaking votes as ex-officio members of their boards.

All of Michigan’s university boards of control operate independently of each other, with only the state legislature (through the passage of laws) and the governor (through board member appointments) having any potential authority above them.

Michigan’s Administrative Makeup



On the completely opposite side of the structural spectrum, the University of Wisconsin system grants nearly all its governing authority to one Board of Regents. The

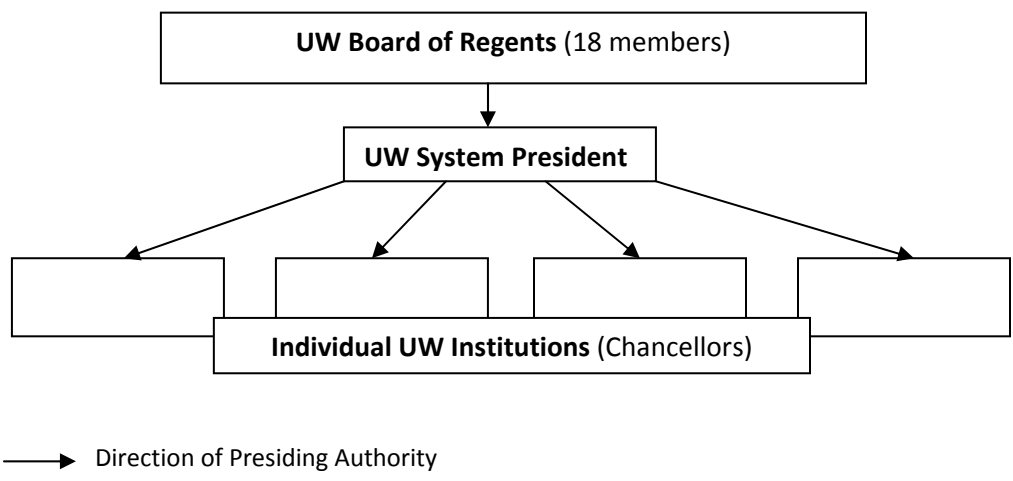
¹⁸ Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article X Section 6

UW Board of Regents consists of 18 members, all selected by gubernatorial appointment. Each Regent is appointed to a term of seven years with two exceptions: two students who serve as full voting members of the board and hold two-year terms. In regards to the student members, the governor appoints a traditional student (one who graduates from high school and immediately attends college the following fall, also known as a FTIAC¹⁹) and a nontraditional student (often a much older student, having entered the workforce instead of attending college following high school) to serve on the board in order to expand the notion of shared governance. There is also a system president for the University of Wisconsin, who serves in a similar role as the individual university presidents in Michigan, except for the entire network of Wisconsin colleges and universities. Instead of the autonomous boards of control at each university, however, each Wisconsin institution employs a chancellor as its chief administrator (at the local level). All of the chancellors report to the system president (who in turn reports to the UW Board of Regents)²⁰. The UW Board of Regents is considered the top level of administration for the university system, with of course the influence of political appointment by the governor of Wisconsin.

¹⁹ “First Time in Any College”

²⁰ University of Wisconsin System, 2008

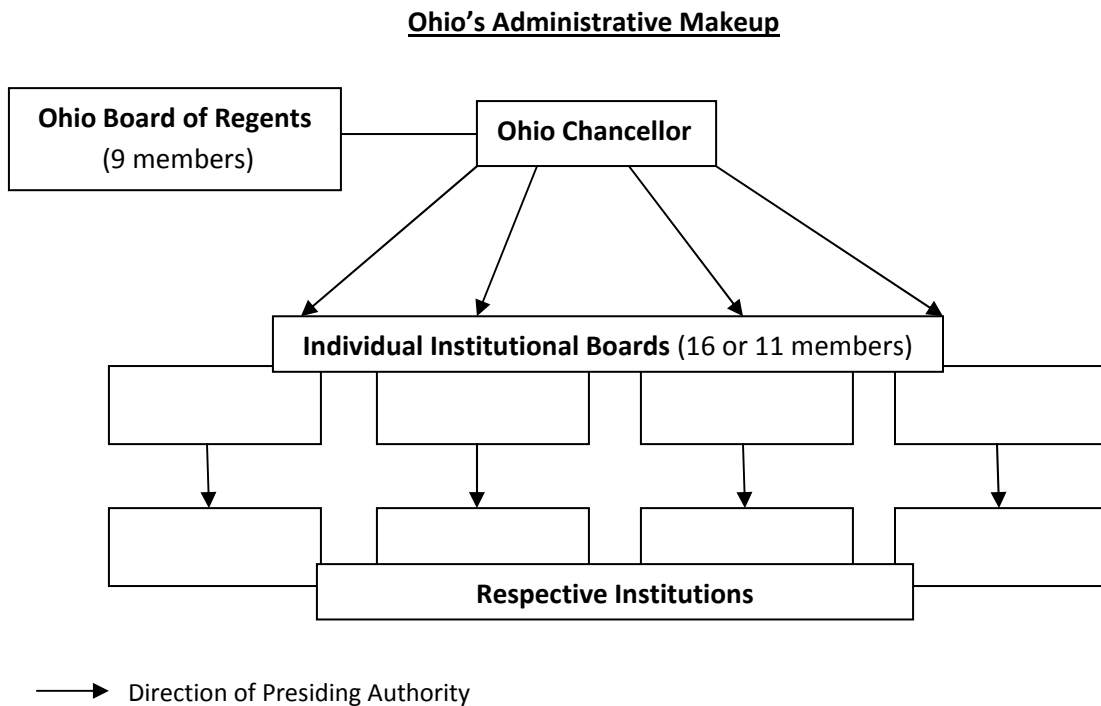
Wisconsin's Administrative Makeup



Ohio, which takes the “hybrid” approach by bringing together elements of the University of Wisconsin system and the autonomy of governance found in Michigan, has both a system-wide Board of Regents and individual boards of trustees for each public university. The Board of Trustees at The Ohio State University consists of 17 members, while the remaining twelve universities each have eleven-member entities. All of the 13 Ohio public universities have two student trustees who serve as nonvoting members of their respective boards²¹. As in Michigan, these institutional boards regulate their respective institutions, but at the same time report to the system-wide Ohio Board of Regents, like the structure found in Wisconsin. The Ohio Board of Regents is made up of nine people and a system chancellor (a position similar to the UW President). Unlike Wisconsin, however, the Ohio Chancellor is given much more authority within the higher education system than the Ohio Board of Regents, which is appointed as an advisory board. Also in contrast to Wisconsin’s method for selecting the system president, the

²¹ Ohio Revised Code Title XXXIII

Ohio Chancellor is appointed by the governor rather than hired by the Board of Regents, a process that solidifies the Chancellor's higher level of authority within the higher education system²².



Students as Regents

The idea of having enrolled students as members of the highest authority of public higher education is one that is often of great controversy. States that have them are often debating whether they should keep them, while states without student trustees or regents debate whether they should add them. Wisconsin and Ohio, which have two different

²² Ohio Board of Regents, 2008

approaches to providing students the opportunity to serve as lead administrators to their universities, are not the only states with student board members. The University of California system, University of Massachusetts system, and the University of Oregon system all have student board members, as well as many other large universities and higher education systems across the United States. Some are granted full voting members, such as the two serving on the UW Board of Regents, while others, like the two at each of the Ohio public universities, sit at the table but are not granted voting privileges. Student regents are chosen in a variety of methods, including appointment by the board itself (California)²³, by governor appointment (Wisconsin and Ohio), and through student election (Louisiana)²⁴, among others.

The controversy over student regents is focused on three main arguments: an argument on shared governance equity, an argument on required experience and age for effectiveness, and the final argument on the “in-and-out” career of a student. The argument regarding shared governance equity revolves around the perception that students are given the opportunity to serve on the governing board as a way to increase the sharing of governance amongst the higher education community. Students are viewed as the primary constituents, possibly even “customers” from a business standpoint, and are brought into the administrative positions as a representative for feedback on the educational quality and offerings of the institution or system. This is the same philosophy behind corporations that allow stockholders to serve on their boards, or nonprofits that offer board positions to the people they serve. While this is acceptable to many members of the higher education community, there is outcry from faculty, staff,

²³ “About the Regents” The Regents of the University of California

²⁴ “State-by-State Analysis of Policies Regarding Student Regents” Middle Georgia College, 2007

and alumni, claiming that they should also be included in the shared governance of the university or system in the same manner as students. They argue that if students are to have a seat (or in some cases more than one) on the board of control, then there should also be a representative seat for faculty, one for staff members, and so on. Since adding more seats or changing the way seats are allocated is often a severely difficult process (especially in cases like Michigan where it requires a constitutional amendment through a citizen vote), those who claim this method of shared governance is inequitable would rather there not be any student regents at all.

Another argument against students as regents is the potentially young age of students being considered for the board positions. In the case of FTIACS or traditional students, candidates for student regent positions may only be 19 or 20 years old, with only a few years of experience in a college setting, let alone any administrative or decision-making experience. It is argued that students who have barely learned to live on their own away from their parents and guardians are not at all equipped to make major decisions that impact not only the thousands of students and employees at their respective institutions, but also the overall level of educational quality in that state, depending on the schools administered by that particular board. Opponents argue that issues like collective bargaining with faculty and staff unions, budget development, and disciplinary policies are too complex for someone with no “real life” experience (especially within the higher education field) to be able to make a well-informed decision, opponents argue. The main point for this argument is that the idea of having students as board members is potentially dangerous to the university or system and the people affected by it.

The third and final major argument against student regents is about the length of time a student is associated with a particular institution or system, due to the typical amount of time it takes to earn an undergraduate degree. Typically, board members are appointed for at least six-year terms, which is longer than the four or five years it takes to complete an undergraduate or even graduate degree at a public institution. Assuming that students competing to become board members have completed at least a year of their academic program, they would only be students for three or four more years at best, resulting in a much shorter board member term. This is perceived as problematic by opponents to student regents for two reasons. First, since students are only sticking around for four or five years total to finish their degree, and are then moving on to other ambitions such as entering the workforce, they may not have the long-term interests of the university or system in mind, but rather make decisions only on the basis of their few years as a student. This argument is especially aimed at budget decisions, and it is claimed that students will be more willing to approve spending that will be “quick fixes” to financial issues but will not work out well in the long term. Secondly, because students have only recently arrived at the particular university or system to begin their academic work, and assuming that most traditional students are not engrossed in the operation and activities of their future alma mater during middle school and high school, student regents have very little background and historical knowledge about their constituency. This information could be vital to a board member in avoiding a decision that repeats past mistakes or is not in line with institutional values and tradition.

In order to address these arguments and still have students serve in some capacity on university or system governing boards, compromises have been made in several

circumstances. For example, the age and experience argument has been ameliorated in Wisconsin through the appointment of a nontraditional student as well as a traditional student. The development of faculty and staff advisory councils and boards that are given the ability to heavily influence governing board decisions has been a method for addressing the argument of inequitable shared governance. And restricting student regents to only having speaking privileges rather than being full voting members has helped to stave off the problem of both inexperience and short “student lifespan.”

Distribution of Powers and Authority

While Michigan’s distribution of power (in terms of who gets to decide what) is quite straightforward, Ohio and Wisconsin have a more complex division of authority. Each of Michigan’s public universities has the state constitutional ability to fully operate and regulate itself through its governing board and executive administration. Tuition and fees, campus policies, academic programs, and human resource decisions, among others, are made for each university by each university. The Michigan state legislature can change the codes and laws that affect higher education on a macro level, such as general campus safety standards, academic accreditation and licensing (especially for teachers, health care workers, and other professionals graduating from the institutions), and appropriations and capital project funding, but for the most part each university is left up to its own devices to determine what works best for itself.

This is not the case in Wisconsin or Ohio. In Wisconsin, there is division of authority between the chancellors (a position similar to the president of the university)

and the UW Board of Regents, with the Board holding the majority of power. The UW Board of Regents, according to the UW System website information, “sets admission standards, reviews and approves university budgets, and establishes the regulatory framework within which the individual units operate.²⁵” The Board also appoints all of the university chancellors and other lead executives²⁶ for all of the institutions within the system. This means that the UW Board of Regents has the power to set tuition and fees for all of the universities and set policies that the entire system must follow. It also means that the chancellors and their administrations are given authority to enact policies at their respective institutions by the UW Board policies, and can only take action in a manner that is within the guidelines passed down to them. For example, one of the Regents’ policies is that the final determination of a student’s residency (in order to determine whether a student receives the reduced tuition rate for being a Wisconsin resident) is left up to the chancellor of each university, who is granted the authority to develop his or her own method of making that determination²⁷. There are several sections in the Board Policy Document that delegate specifically the various capacities the individual universities have to develop and enact changes in policies at the “local” level. The bottom line is that if there is a major policy to be made or changed (like tuition), then it is most likely that the UW Board of Regents will have the power to make that change, and if it is a smaller and more localized policy change (for example, banning smoking on campus), the individual university will typically be granted the authority (by the UW Board) to act.

²⁵ “Board of Regents” University of Wisconsin System, 2008

²⁶ This includes the deans of the 2-year colleges and the chancellors for the UW-Extension

²⁷ University of Wisconsin Policy Documents Section 32-1

There is a similar division of power in Ohio, except that there is less direct authority granted to the Ohio Chancellor and Ohio Board of Regents. Rather, the individual governing boards of the universities are given more authority to govern their institution than administrations in Wisconsin. The Ohio Board of Regents acts as an advisory board to the Ohio Chancellor, whose main responsibilities are to distribute state funding allocations from the state legislature to the universities (as discussed more in-depth in an upcoming section) and to approve new academic programs. The boards of control of the universities are granted nearly all of the remaining powers, including setting tuition and fees, making human resource decisions, enacting policies and developing campus capital projects. It could be said that rather than having the universities report to the Chancellor and the Board of Regents through a direct governing relationship (such as is the case in Wisconsin), Ohio's university administrations operate similarly to those in Michigan (aside from not being able to approve their own academic programs).

Analysis

By looking at the power division and the structure of authority within each state, we are able to determine whether or not a particular administrator has the ability to enact or change a specific policy, such as raising tuition or adding a new degree program. This helps us, as members of the higher education community, to find the "decision-makers" on issues that we feel are important. For example, if the students at one of the University of Wisconsin institutions want their student center to be renovated, then by knowing that it is the UW Board of Regents that holds the power (and not their campus administrators)

to approve building construction and capital projects, the students will be able to direct their renovation campaign at the people who can actually help them. Once the “decision-makers” have been determined, efforts to influence those decisions can begin.

Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan each have a different level of difficulty for a non-board member or administrator to influence authoritative decisions (like building renovations or tuition rates) based on the makeup of the power and authority structure. There are two categories of decisions that I am considering. The first category contains decisions on policies and issues that are designed to affect the entire state’s higher education structure. This may include enacting a student fee for a state-wide student association that all students within the state have to pay, or creating a state-wide course textbook database that allows students to easily access information about the books they need for their upcoming courses. The second category includes decisions that are designed to only have an effect on an individual institution. These can be issues like program fees for a specific campus program, or the addition of a new academic degree program.

Regarding the decisions and issues in category one (i.e. the macro level), the University of Wisconsin system is best equipped to make these with the least difficulty, due to its centralized main governing body (the UW Regents). In order to influence the creation or change of a system-wide policy, students at the UW institutions can organize together to lobby the UW Regents, who then can make one policy for all of the universities. This is a frequent occurrence, actually, as the United Council of UW Students is an organization founded to organize students around state-wide issues and lobby the UW Regents, and even the state legislature, for policy changes (like their

current campaign to have the UW guidelines and penalties for non-academic misconduct to be altered in order to protect students from double punishment)²⁸.

Ohio ranks second in this area of state-wide actions, with its Chancellor and Ohio Board of Regents able to enact some policies that affect all of the universities within the state. However, this power is nowhere near as comprehensive as that wielded by the UW Board of Regents, since the majority of authority is granted to the individual Ohio institutions. In other words, issues like budgets, tuition and fees, and academic program guidelines can be changed on a state level, but most other decisions are made at the local, institutional level. For example, in order to have all of the Ohio schools become smoke-free, each campus would have to approve its own version of that sort of policy autonomously. Of course, the state legislature could also pass laws that would affect all of the universities, but that is not a common occurrence considering a historical state philosophy of leaving the higher education system to govern itself.

Ranking last in the first category is the state of Michigan, which has virtually no ability to make state-wide policies aside from state legislature action (a reminder that the convention delegates for the current constitution were adamantly opposed to government interference in the state's public higher education). Since each university functions independently of the others, including in determining tuition and fee rates and approving academic programs, the only way to have the same policy at each institution would be to influence each of the fifteen universities into enacting that policy individually. For example, if students at the Michigan universities began a campaign to change the judicial services codes in a way that is similar to the efforts being made by the United Council of

²⁸ United Council of UW Students, 2008

UW Students, they would have to lobby each governing board individually. Since every board responds to different methods of lobbying and influences, essentially it would require twelve different campaigns in order to have a chance at having every school pass the same policy. Chances are that at least one university would reject the proposal, leaving some institutions having the wanted policy and the rest without it. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to have any sort of state-wide decision made without the state legislature passing a related law.

For category two the ranks are reversed, with Michigan leading the pack on making institutional decisions. The reasons preventing state-wide policies are the support for the ease of individual universities making policies and deciding on issues that are designed to only impact them. Michigan's universities run autonomously and independently, so all the decisions their governing boards make are designed to affect their own institution. It also helps that there is not a higher level of authority (aside from the state legislature) above each board of control, so there are not any specific guidelines or boundaries for the authority found at each school. Ohio ranks second in this category of decisions and possesses a large amount of institutional autonomy. With the Ohio Chancellor only authorized to make decisions regarding budgetary issues and academic programs, most of the power to govern an individual university falls on the universities themselves. The institutions in Ohio do not have as much independence as the schools in Michigan, but they have a significantly higher amount of freedom than the members of the UW system. Wisconsin, which brings up the rear in this category, has strict boundaries that determine the decisions that can be made by the chancellors and campus administrators at each of the thirteen UW universities. Most policies and major decisions

are made at the state-wide level, even for those that will affect only one or two universities. Thus the University of Wisconsin institutions have the least amount of authority to enact policies at the local level.

Budgets and Funding

Money makes the world go 'round, at least in higher education. While there are efforts at many institutions to push fundraising and develop a base of donors, public universities are for the most part funded by two categories of money: appropriations from the state government and the tuition and fees paid by students. When one segment of this financial combination changes (most likely it is state appropriations decreasing, as this is the recent trend throughout the nation), so must the other in a proportional amount, unless a school makes extraordinary cuts in their operating budget. Since tuition is thus mostly based on the amount of state appropriations a university receives, it is important to investigate and analyze the processes that states use to decide how much its institutions of public higher education will earn each budget cycle. How do the universities and/or systems fit into the state budget processes? Who decides how much money is allocated to each institution, and are these the same people or entities that determine tuition? Here, I answer these questions while discussing the distinct budget processes and financial issues in each of the three case study states.

Annual and Biennium Budgets

One aspect of the state budget processes that sets Ohio and Wisconsin apart from Michigan is the fact that the state governments in Ohio and Wisconsin run on a biennium (2-year) budget while Michigan operates on an annual structure. This means that all of the state departments and entities, including the higher education systems, know how much money they will be allocated during the next two years following the implementation of the state budget, thus providing for a significant amount of forethought to be made prior to making any financial decisions such as setting tuition rates. During better state economic times, when appropriations are stable or increasing over the two fiscal years, the biennium budget can be very beneficial to the university systems and its students, often leading to lower increases in tuition. In fact, Ohio has placed a tuition freeze, meaning no increases in tuition, for the next two years due to stable funding from the state legislature²⁹.

A biennium budget, however, is not as flexible as Michigan's annual budget, which is able to address rapid changes in the economy, state population, and trends instead of setting a budget that might be completely remade in the middle of the fiscal year. With the annual budget, there is not as much foresight regarding the amount of appropriations to be received, but the ability to make decisions year-to-year can be a benefit, especially in a state that is stuck in an economic recession and has found itself in a deficit for several years³⁰. Both the biennium and annual budget processes have their

²⁹ "Tuition and Fees" The University System of Ohio

³⁰ The FY 2007-2008 deficit was over 1.5 billion and resulted in a government shutdown for over three hours before the state legislature finally passed the budget

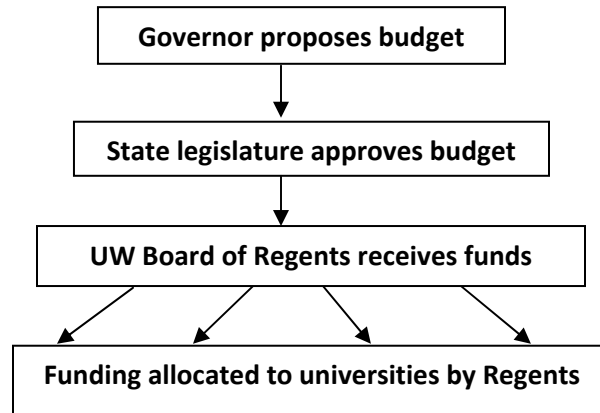
merits and detriments, especially relating to their influence on higher education appropriations.

The Higher Education Appropriations Processes

Wisconsin's official appropriation process begins, like the budget process in all states, with the proposal of the biennium budget by the governor to the state legislature. Before that happens in January of an even-numbered year³¹, however, there is a separate process occurring in the UW system. Prior to November 20 on odd-numbered years, each of the University of Wisconsin schools, including the 2-year institutions, determines its budget needs for the next two fiscal years. They submit this amount to the UW Board of Regents, which then compiles its version of these reports and send it to the governor for consideration. The governor considers this request from the UW system, just as he does for all of the Wisconsin state entities and departments, and then includes his recommended appropriation amount in his proposed budget that is sent to the state legislature.

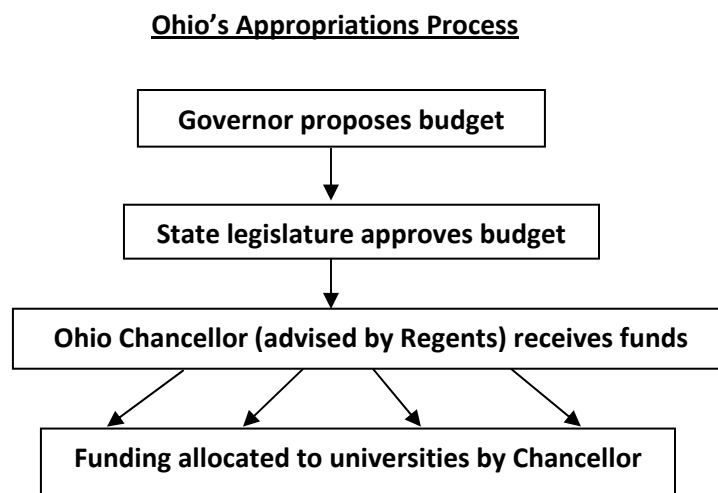
³¹ "State Budget Process" Wisconsin State Legislative Fiscal Bureau, 2007

Wisconsin's Appropriations Process



It is important to note here that the funding amount included on the state executive budget is a lump sum figure allocated to the UW Board of Regents for further allocation at their discretion. Once the biennium budget is approved by the Wisconsin state legislature, the UW Board of Regents is granted the money to distribute to the system's institutions. This means that the UW Board of Regents has the power to prioritize one institution over another, allocating funding to universities in a manner that reflects the board members' wishes and agendas. The Regents also have the authority to set tuition rates, so they have quite a bit of power when it comes to financial issues within the UW system. Also, the universities are competing not only with each other, but also with the 2-year colleges, making the push for higher funding a fight for a bigger piece of the appropriations "pie." Thus each university is lobbying the UW Board of Regents in competition with its familial institutions, pushing to receive a higher share of funds than the others. The UW system schools also work together to lobby the state legislature for an overall larger "pie" through increasing the lump sum figure that is granted to the UW Regents every two years.

Ohio's appropriations process runs similarly to Wisconsin's, with a biennium budget that begins every other July. The state legislature allocates a lump sum amount to the Ohio Chancellor and Board of Regents, which then distributes funds to each of the thirteen universities, as well as the other 2-year colleges and extensions. The same competition issues apply in Ohio as they do in Wisconsin, with the community colleges and universities fighting for allocations from the same large fund.

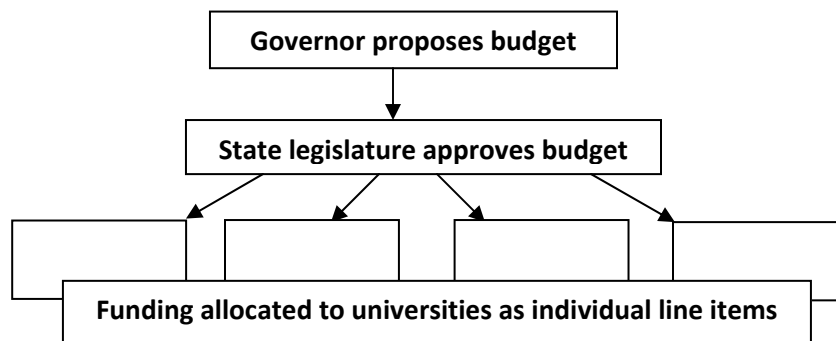


The main difference here from Wisconsin is that tuition is set by the universities, rather than the Chancellor or Board of Regents. This gives the universities a bit more ability to compete against the priorities of the Chancellor. Where in Wisconsin the UW Board of Regents sets tuition and distributes funds, controlling the total amount of operating funds each university has, a university in Ohio has a better ability to offset any reduction in funding through increasing tuition and fees.

Unlike in Wisconsin or Ohio, Michigan's university appropriations are not filtered by any entity between the state legislature and the schools themselves. Appropriations are granted directly to the universities upon approval of the budget. Thus

the higher education appropriations process in Michigan is fairly straightforward and short (not necessarily in time, but in the number of people involved). Also, instead of one lump sum amount allocated to the universities, each institution is appropriated separately as a line item in the executive budget. When the governor of Michigan releases her budget proposal each January or February³², under the section labeled “Higher Education” one can find a line item for each of the fifteen universities³³. It is important to note that even the three University of Michigan campuses are included as separate items during allocation, rather than granting the money to the main campus (Ann Arbor) to filter it through to the other two (Dearborn and Flint).

Michigan’s Appropriations Process



Because of the individualistic method of allocation for the Michigan universities, the officials and administration at those institutions are not necessarily competing with each other for state funds. Unlike Ohio and Wisconsin, there is no “pie” to fight over for the biggest piece, but rather there exists the potential for the legislature and governor to grant each university all of the money they want, if only there were enough money to be

³² Depending on if the governor is an incumbent or newly inaugurated that year; “Budget Process Introduction” Michigan Office of the Budget

³³ “Executive Budget, FY 2009” State of Michigan

allocated. Instead the universities typically work independently in their lobbying efforts, pushing to increase the amount of money the legislature allocates to their respective institutions. The ability to prioritize one university over another lies with the state legislature, whereas that power sits in the other states with the Ohio Chancellor and the UW Regents. If the state legislature feels that research and technology are priorities this fiscal year, then they would most likely allocate more funds to the universities that excel in those areas, such as the University of Michigan or Michigan State. On the flip side, if they would rather increase the number of teachers available in Michigan, then money would probably go to schools with larger teacher education programs, like Eastern Michigan University or Central Michigan University. The way the appropriations process works in Michigan allows for more economic and educational influence by the state legislature when it comes time to make budget decisions. If the state legislature feels that a particular school is not producing as much of a certain kind of profession as another school, it will be reflected in the funding figures.

Another thing that is different between Michigan and the other two states is that the “Higher Education” section of the state budget is separate from the “Community College” section, meaning that the 2-year colleges and the 4-year universities are addressed individually rather than as one budget item like in Wisconsin and Ohio. Because community colleges in Michigan are allocated separately from universities, there is very little competition between the two segments of higher education, and they can be viewed like as distinct state departments.

Fiscal Year Fun

An aspect of the financial and budget processes that is quite intriguing deals with the fiscal years of the state and its respective public universities. In Wisconsin and Ohio, both the state governments and the public higher education systems run on a July-June fiscal year structure. The Michigan state government operates on an October-September fiscal year while the universities begin their fiscal years in July. On top of fiscal calendars, universities have to appeal to the academic calendar, which runs from the beginning of September through the end of August (similar to the K-12 systems). Tuition rates are typically set at the end of June, when the upcoming fiscal year budget is approved. The ability to have the state budget begin at the same time as the university budget is incredibly beneficial since the administration within the universities has a better sense of the amount of state appropriations it will be receiving, and thus can determine a more appropriate rate of tuition. For the Michigan institution administrators, tuition rates and budget decisions are often based more on educated guesses than exact figures, especially in the past few years when the passage of the state budget has gone down to the wire on the night of required approval (Midnight on September 30). This gap between fiscal years can complicate the budget processes, both at the state and university level, since not having a concrete figure other than the one that is proposed by the governor can make the administration at a university set tuition rates too low or too high, depending on the information they possess at the time.

Conclusion

It is difficult to determine whether there is a better structure of public higher education. Each state and its variation of a structure, whether it is implementing a system or allowing autonomous operation, has benefits and detriments. For example, the complete autonomy found in Michigan is effective in allowing universities to tailor their programs and policies to best serve their respective students. The centralized authority found in the University of Wisconsin system, however, is most appropriate and efficient for enacting policies that impact all of the universities. While this study focuses primarily on structural issues relating to governance and budget processes, there are many more aspects of public higher education that, if analyzed, would support or detract from the analysis completed so far. By looking closely at Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin, I have been able to begin an investigation into all of our nation's public higher education, from the schools in Maine to the institutions in California.

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