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Support for Higher Education: Perceptions of Selected University Administrators and Legislators in Tennessee

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examined the perceptions of selected university administrators and legislators concerning levels of support for Tennessee public higher education. The purpose of the study was to gain a greater understanding among the various constituents as to the needs and restraints facing higher education funding. The population targeted for this study was comprised of 132 members of the Tennessee General Assembly, the Executive Director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the Chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), the President of the University of Tennessee System, and 36 Chief Administrators at nine state-supported universities. The principal investigator used a web-based survey development company to design, collect, and store survey responses.

Analysis of the data revealed that legislators and higher education administrators in the State of Tennessee perceived funding for higher education differently. There were significant differences between the two groups concerning: use of higher education reserves during weak economic times, the explanation for tuition rises, how much costs students should incur for higher education, level importance placed on state appropriations for funding higher education, and how they perceived priority of higher education in the state budget. There was a significant difference between one's political party affiliation and their perception of access to higher education being an issue. A significant difference was also found between one's education level and ranking of higher education in the state budget.