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At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in

Oklahoma

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A dissertation

Presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Kirk A. Rodden

December 2017

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Dr. W. Hal Knight, Chair

Dr. Don Good

Dr. Sally Lee

Dr. Stephanie Tweed

Keywords: governing boards, Oklahoma higher education, state legislator perceptions,  
governing board member perceptions, role of governing boards, higher education

## ABSTRACT

At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in

Oklahoma

by

Kirk A. Rodden

This quantitative study examined the perceptions of members of Oklahoma public higher education governing boards and legislators concerning higher education governance. The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding among the participants as to the role governing boards should play in the system. The population for the study comprised 142 members of the Oklahoma Legislature and 107 members of 15 Oklahoma public higher education governing boards. The principal investigator used a web-based survey development company to design, collect, and store survey responses.

Results from the study were examined using independent samples *t* tests and one-way ANOVAs. From these tests, 5 out of 15 research questions had statistically significant findings. Analysis of the data revealed that legislators and members of governing boards perceive the role of governing boards differently in some key ways. There were significant differences concerning governing boards primarily serving to promote the interests of individual institutions, with members of governing boards, Democrats, and participants from suburban areas more likely to agree with this position. Members of the legislature were significantly more likely to agree than members of governing boards that the primary role of governing boards is policy implementation. There were also significant differences concerning the role of governing boards

serving primarily to keep the expenditure of public dollars as low as possible with participants from urban areas agreeing with this statement.

## DEDICATION

### *To my family: Angela and Evan Rodden*

Angela, the odyssey of my participation in the ELPA program began one late summer night in 2013 when you asked me more or less out of the blue if I had ever wanted to get a doctorate, to which I replied “I would love to get my doctorate.” Blame it on the evening’s wine or my having reached a professional plateau and needing to further my education, but without your love and encouragement I would have never started and certainly could not have finished it. You are the love of my life and I am excited about the future with you as the last phase of my career begins. Evan my son, I know this degree has detracted from the trips to the shooting range and fishing hole we enjoyed more often before I began this academic pursuit. But I hope me pounding away on a keyboard mere feet away from you in your room night after night has provided an example of what can be accomplished if you set your mind to it and keep reminding yourself that the sacrifice can be worth it in the end. I love you more than you will ever know.

### *To the faculty, staff, and students of Murray State College*

I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation for your encouragement of my academic pursuits, your assistance as sounding boards and proofreaders, and your tolerance of my preoccupation with assignments and deadlines. I hope to put what I have learned in the ELPA program to work on behalf of all of us for the betterment of the institution we love: “Once an Aggie, Always an Aggie!”

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contacts on various boards of regents. The three of you certainly helped to increase the response rate of legislators. To my good friend and former Senator Jay Paul Gumm, thank you for your participation in the pretest and your encouragement. Thank you to Presidents Dr. Jerry Utterback of Seminole State College, and Joy McDaniel of Murray State College. Your promotion of the project among regents and reputation among your colleagues opened doors for me I might not otherwise been able to enter.

Finally, I would like to remember those I lost during the course of this program. My mother Patsy Rodden passed away in August of 2015 and Master's thesis advisor Dr. William Parle passed away in December of 2016. I know both would have been proud and I miss them very much.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Public higher education institutions are inherently political institutions. As such, they control significant public resources, have the legitimate authority to allocate public benefits, implement policies of significant political importance, and stand as highly visible sites of public contest (Pusser, 2003). All public college and university governing boards stand at this intersection of politics and higher education.

The role of a governing board is vital to the functioning of the modern higher education institution. Governing boards, especially those at public colleges and universities, provide oversight, links to important players in the political system, access to potential contributors to institutional endowments, and representation for the public at large (Bastedo, 2009; McGuinness, 2016).

Yet the role of a governing board is largely vague and undefined. Therefore varied actors may have widely disparate expectations. State governors may expect board appointees to pursue a particular policy agenda. Legislators, at least historically, may desire a response to patronage requests. Institutional and system leaders—presidents and chancellors—may expect board acquiescence to leadership initiatives and directives. Finally, the public expects boards to be responsive to its desires, as nebulous as those may be (Lingenfelter, Novak, & Legon, 2008; McGuinness, 2016).

Governing boards hold the legal authority granted by their college's original charter, whether it arises from articles of incorporation, in the case of private institutions, or from enabling legislation in the case of public institutions (Olivas, 2015). Boards act only

collectively, thus individual board members have no legal authority. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Dartmouth College case (*Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* 1819) has been cited by some scholars as a pivotal point in higher education board governance due to its role in solidifying local board autonomy. The decision laid the foundation for the local governance model of higher education that exists to this day: The oversight authority of an external board instead of an institution governed internally by either a president or faculty (Downey-Schilling, 2011).

Rhodes (2012) pointed out the successful public higher education institution, in the broadest sense, is founded on a social contract through which society supports the institution and grants it a great degree of freedom in exchange for a commitment to use its resources and special place to serve a greater public good. Governing boards are, at least in theory, the primary link between the public and the institution. The key is for the higher education community to recognize that it has a stake—and a responsibility—to engage actively with state political leaders in defining the nature of the relationship (McGuinness, 2016).

Members of boards are responsible to the state for the operation of the institution. They also often assume the values and aspirations of the institution. In this intermediary role, board members often find themselves on the side of enforcing the expectations of elected and appointed state officials. At other times, boards are on the side of resisting these expectations due to the perceived threat they pose to the local institution (Lombardi, Craig, & Capaldi, 2002). Yet relatively little research exists as to the attitudes of members of governing boards toward the role board members play in general. As Sample (2003) remarked, “There may be as many answers (to the question of what is the role of trustees) as there are campuses in the United States” (p. 1).

Many board members are unsure of both their responsibility to society or their authority over institutions and often pursue three agendas simultaneously, sometimes with contradictory effects. There is an institutions first agenda – which includes garnering resources and enhancing academic prestige, and which often includes the bureaucratic imperative of institutional survival. Secondly is an administrative agenda, which is established by state law and includes public accountability as a primary purpose. Finally there is a public agenda, which tends to be less defined, but is focused on the broader social good of higher education. In short the public agenda perspective posits that institutions exist to serve the people and the interests of taxpayers, citizens, and employers first and institutions second (MacTaggart & Mingle, 2002). Increasingly boards are acting more like change agents on behalf of policymakers, bridging the divide between institutions and public. This is to assure boards provide accountability in times of decreasing public support in the form of tax dollars dedicated to higher education, not serve as a buffer between politics and school. This shift comes at a time when higher education has emerged as a political issue in state and national campaigns (Kiley, 2012).

McGuinness (2016) has argued that as state political leadership has become more unstable, the relatively stable legislative memory about a state's higher education policies is being lost. Partisan change in control of state houses and governorships has produced great legislative turnover. As each new legislative session begins, the proportion of new members increases and new issues dominate the policy agendas in state capitols.

This study was conducted to examine perceptions of members of the Oklahoma legislature and members of Oklahoma public higher education governing boards regarding attitudes toward the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma system of higher education. Fifteen governing boards were targeted for the study. They were the Oklahoma State Regents

for Higher Education, the Regional University System of Oklahoma, the University of Oklahoma Board of regents, the Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, the Board of Regents of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, and the Boards of Regents of ten community colleges. These colleges included Carl Albert State College, Eastern Oklahoma State College, Murray State College, Northern Oklahoma College, Oklahoma City Community College, Redlands Community College, Rose State College, Seminole State College, Tulsa Community College, and Western Oklahoma State College. Senators and members of the House of Representatives in the Oklahoma Legislature were included in the study for their role in state policymaking related to higher education.

#### Statement of the Problem

The dichotomy presented by the institution first perspective, which posits the role of a board is to insulate institutions from negative macro-political impacts, and the administrative/public agenda, postulating the role as one of ensuring public accountability offers rich research opportunities. Thus measuring attitudes of actors in the higher education policymaking arena—members of governing boards and legislators—was crucial in achieving a greater understanding of the issue. The problem of this study was (a) to describe the perceptions of legislative members about the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, (b) to describe the perceptions of governing board members about the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, and (c) to determine if a pattern of consensus exists among research participants.

The purpose of this quantitative, nonexperimental survey study was to examine differences in perception between members of the Oklahoma legislature and members of

Oklahoma higher education governing boards as to the role of governing boards in the system. McLendon, Deaton and Hearn (2007) concluded that many reforms have been enacted despite a lack of clear understanding of the relationship between board members, the governance model adopted by the state government, and the state system they served.

Attitudes about the role of governing boards in the State of Oklahoma have been the subject of an ongoing debate among legislators and the public higher education community. A number of legislative proposals to significantly alter or abolish several governing boards were introduced in the 2016 legislative session (Oklahoma Legislature, 2017). Notable among these was a proposal to abolish the state coordinating board, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and return to the practice of making state appropriations directly to colleges and universities. Another would have abolished the statutorily created institutional boards for ten community colleges and placed those institutions under a new nine member consolidated system board. Measuring legislative and board member attitudes toward the role of governing boards would clarify the relationship between important sets of actors in the Oklahoma state system of higher education.

### Research Questions

Fifteen research questions were adapted from previous studies (Collins, 1996; Yowell, 2012) on higher education funding in Tennessee for the purposes of this study. Specific research questions are as follows:

### Primary Role of Governing Boards

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system between state legislators and members of governing boards?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature between state legislators and members of governing boards?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible between state legislators and members of governing boards?

### Geographic Location

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as

compared by legislative district type or institution location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

RG10: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

#### Political Party Identification

RQ11: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

RQ12: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by political party identification as Democratic,

RQ13: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions system as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

RQ14: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

RQ15: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

### Significance of the Study

The study of public governing boards is part of the larger field of politics and higher education. This field has suffered from underdevelopment and is in need of a wider range of issues to be covered (McLendon, 2003a). McLendon suggested an area ripe for exploration is the “alleged politicization of state and campus governing boards by increasingly activist governors and legislatures” (p. 170). Hearn and McLendon (2012) again note that a number of important board-related topics have attracted little attention and researchers have not performed

empirical analysis in this area. Research has been inadequate in determining whether a consensus exists between members of governing boards and state legislators concerning their views about what governing boards should do as part of a higher education system. Thus there was a need to study members of governing boards and state legislatures to determine attitudes toward the role of boards and identify variables which may affect those attitudes.

### Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to perceptions of members of higher education governing boards and legislators in the State of Oklahoma. An additional delimitation included the exclusion of two governing boards from the survey. The Oklahoma system of higher education considers the boards of trustees of the University Centers of Southern Oklahoma and Ponca City to be governing boards in the system organizational chart. Similarly to governing boards, members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed with the advice and consent of the Oklahoma Senate and are required to participate in continuing education activities. However, the role of both boards is largely advisory, with neither having the direct responsibility for overseeing a college as an institutional board nor the oversight role of a coordinating or system board.

A limitation of the study was that views about the role of governing boards will not be applicable to other states. While findings and recommendations will be presented concerning the legislative-higher education relationship in Oklahoma, results from this study will not necessarily help to establish a universal standard for improving relationships between the higher education system and the state legislature. Conclusions based on the findings will be limited to the 15

public higher education governing boards and legislators in Oklahoma from which the data will be drawn.

The research was limited to the willingness of those being surveyed. The assumption of honesty of responses was also a limitation of the study. For instance, there was no way to confirm identified participants were the ones who actually completed the survey.

The research design also contributed to the study's limitations. Measuring individual's perceptions using a quantitative research methodology required participants to select responses that are most applicable. There were no opportunities for interpretation or explanation of participants' responses using the quantitative method of analysis.

Attitudes about the role of governing boards in the State of Oklahoma have been the subject of an ongoing debate among legislators and the public higher education community. A number of legislative proposals to significantly alter or abolish several governing boards were introduced in the 2016 legislative session. Therefore, limitations concerning the political nature of this research may be a factor in the results. Survey participants may have responded to questions in a way that do not fully commit them to a certain position in case their responses are somehow connected to them and made public.

The timing of the study may also have been a limitation. The survey was administered in the months of May and June of 2017; a time when the Oklahoma legislative session entered its most crucial and hectic period prior to adjournment and higher education officials were preparing for legislative enactment of a variety of measures affecting the system, most notable the state budget. Thus participation in the study might have been influenced by the timing.

## Definitions of Terms

The following is provided to guide the reader in understanding terms to be encountered throughout this research study.

Coordinating board- a board which is legally responsible for organizing, regulating, or otherwise bringing together the overall policies and functions in areas such as planning, budgeting, and programming of a state system of higher education, but which does not have authority to govern institutions (Downey-Schilling, 2011; McGuiness, 2016).

Institutional board- a board legally charged with the direct control and operation of a single institutional unit (Downey-Schilling, 2011; McGuiness, 2016).

Legislative member/legislator- member of either the Oklahoma House of Representatives or the Oklahoma Senate. The state of Oklahoma is divided into 149 single-member legislative districts. There are 101 members of the house and 48 members of the senate.

Public higher education- institutions of higher education usually referred to as colleges and universities that are funded in part by the state's taxpayers (McGuiness, 2016; Yowell, 2012).

System board- a board having legal responsibility for functioning both as a coordinating board and a governing board for two or more institutional units which offer programs that have common elements (Downey-Schilling, 2011; McGuiness, 2016).

## Overview of the Study

This study examined the perceptions of members of higher education governing boards and state legislators in Oklahoma regarding the role of governing boards in the state system of higher education. Each year, a myriad of policy decisions are made by governing boards and

legislators affecting students, families, institutional faculty and staff, and Oklahomans throughout the state. Factors such as board type, whether system or institutional; institutional and district location, whether rural, urban, or suburban; and partisan affiliation, whether Democratic, Republican or Independent were explored. Structured responses were provided for respondents to assist in explaining differing attitudes about the role governing boards play in the Oklahoma state system of higher education.

This study will be divided into five chapters, followed by supporting research in appendices. Chapter 1 contains sections introducing the research with a statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, and definitions of terms. In Chapter 2, a review of relevant literature pertinent to the research is presented. The methods and procedures of the this study are outlined in Chapter 3 along with the research design, population, survey instrument, collection of data, and null hypotheses. The results of the data collection are presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the findings from the data are summarized, conclusions from the study detailed, and recommendations for future research are offered.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of public governing boards is part of the larger field of politics and higher education (McLendon, 2003a). The literature on politics and higher education reflected few peer reviewed articles specifically on surveys of attitudes of board members themselves. Much of the literature focused on legislative reorganizations of state governance systems, theoretical approaches to understanding higher education policy making, and higher education funding as a partisan state legislative issue. This literature review includes those issues as well as a historical perspective on higher education governance, with a particular focus on Oklahoma.

#### At a Glance: A Brief History of Higher Education Governance

In the almost four centuries of higher education in the United States since the founding of Harvard University and the College of William and Mary in 1636 and 1692 an overarching distinctive feature has been the exorbitant power and faith the public and institutions have placed in college and university governing boards (Thelin, 2011). Colonial attitudes toward higher education militated against a replication of the Oxford and Cambridge examples. Rather than emulate the faculty governance of the English universities, Americans turned toward the external lay board indicative of the Scottish model, which Thelin has argued is a legacy of colonial colleges that has defined and shaped U.S. higher education to this day. The colonial colleges were then chartered by state governments after the American Revolution, which essentially viewed colleges as public bodies whose charters could be altered or abolished at any time (Bastedo, 2009).

When coupled with strong presidents and administrative teams, this produced a system whereby power gradually gravitated away from boards and to presidents (Thelin, 2011). One 19<sup>th</sup> century regent wryly noted that each board “meeting should begin with a prayer, and after approval of the minutes of the previous meeting, one of the trustees should immediately move to dismiss the president. If the motion fails, the meeting should adjourn” (Sample, 2003, p. 1). The end result for the most part was the establishment of boards quite the opposite of their corporate counterparts, relatively unengaged and uninformed about the nature and circumstances of the colleges and universities they governed (Thelin, 2011). Boards increasingly became silent partners, seldom analyzed and largely unaccountable.

Simultaneous to the increase in public support for colleges and universities between the Civil War and World War I, was a movement among states to begin to intervene directly into higher education through the creation of consolidated governing boards. Such centralization was cast by Brody (1935) as a way to build “a state centered program of higher education to replace the uncoordinated development of separate institutions” (p. 17).

### Legislative Reorganization of State Governance Systems

Thus a focus of reform in higher education in the past few decades has been reorganization of state systems. Rationales for reorganization varied from state to state, but most centered on achieving greater efficiencies, cost savings, and system responsiveness and accountability (Ostrem, 2002).

### State Level Governing Boards

Governing board-specific research has tended to focus on state level coordinating and consolidated boards separately from institutional boards. Prior to World War II, public higher

education governance resembled private colleges. Boards exercised stewardship over public dollars and public and institutional policy for their campuses independent of other institutions (Graham, 1989). The literature on state-level governance developed in the 1950s and 1960s, and mirrored the expansion of higher education in the wake of the Second World War. The span of the literature includes descriptive studies of the development and enactment of state governance systems, attempts to conceptualize governance reforms, and more recent efforts to empirically model state level governance reform and effects (Garn, 2005; Hearn & McLendon, 2012).

At the end of the 1950s, two pivotal studies emerged giving guidance to subsequent studies. Moos and Rourke's *The Campus and the State* (1959) and Glenny's *Autonomy of Public Colleges* (1959) stand out by presenting relatively opposite positions on the autonomy and accountability spectrum. Moos and Rourke (1959) signaled that the increasingly modernized and centralized nature of post-war state government was a threat to the future creativity of the academy, warning against tightly controlled coordinated systems.

Also in 1959, Glenny offered the first detailed analysis of state-level higher education governing boards. Twelve states were studied that used one or another of three forms of statewide higher education organization: Consolidated governance, voluntary coordination, and statewide coordination. Glenny, as opposed to Moos and Rourke (1959), criticized voluntary coordination for failing to provide effective coordination and being unresponsive to the public interest. Simultaneously he was also troubled by the tendency of consolidated boards to create burdensome regulations. Glenny intimated an inclination for the capacity of coordinating boards to meet state needs while shielding higher education systems from direct state government interference.

Over the next two decades many other governance appraisals appeared. Chambers (1961) criticized the effects of bureaucratization on higher education, lauding voluntary coordination. Glenny, Berdahl, Palola, and Partridge (1971) contributed work describing the need for more efficient statewide coordination. Glenny and Dalgish (1973) contrasted constitutionally established higher education systems with those based on state statute only. The result of their empirical analysis was that even though the procedural autonomy of constitutional systems had weakened, the threat of statutory universities becoming akin to agencies of state government was graver.

Other developments in the 1970s included Berdahl's 1971 analysis of coordination in nineteen states. His study created two primary contributions. First, he created the field's standard classification system for state higher education governance structures – consolidated governing boards, coordinating boards, and voluntary planning agencies. Second, Berdahl drew a useful distinction between “substantive autonomy” – the institution's latitude to decide goals—and “procedural autonomy”—the institution's latitude over how it would accomplish those goals—a difference taken up in many studies since. For example, in a study of 25 states, Millet (1982) found dissatisfaction among state legislative leaders who believed statewide boards had become advocates of institutions rather than a firm hand of management, with coordinating boards most aligned with perceived state interests rather than governing boards.

Since the 1970s, researchers have continued in the direction of describing the relative merits of various governing arrangements. At the same time, state governments began to confront new policy challenges in the form of globalization, budget strain, and increasing calls for accountability (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006; McGuinness, 2016). Many states restructured in response by deregulating and decentralizing (McLendon, 2003b). Thus

researchers expanded the field with examinations of state governance reform trends (Leslie & Novak, 2003; Marcus, 1997; McLendon, 2003b). They also analyzed particular restructuring political environments and reform efforts, providing historical contexts and descriptions of actions in states such as New Jersey, Maryland, Michigan, and Rhode Island (e.g. Hines, 1988; Leslie & Novak, 2003; Marcus, Pratt, & Stevens, 1997; McGuiness, 1995; McLendon, 2003b; Novak, 1996; Novak & Leslie, 2001).

Thus, noteworthy reform techniques in the 1990s involved devolution of decision-making authority nearer to the campus level. This included deregulation of state procedural controls; loosening of state governance and coordination; and the emergence of charter, or enterprise, colleges and universities (McLendon & Hearn, 2009). In the case of Florida, a long-standing, powerful consolidated governing board was dismantled and new local boards created, effectively decentralizing and centralizing at the same time. Power was devolved to new local boards while simultaneously a new coordinating “superboard” for K-12 and higher education was created— a “K-20” concept that was the first of its kind in the nation (Mills, 2007).

Overall, reliance on single state case studies as well as multi-state studies has been questioned as to breadth and depth. Each approach suffers from limitations. Examination of the intricacies and labyrinths of individual state politics provides the “how” a policy on restructuring was accomplished but does not necessarily explain the “why” of the restructuring impetus. McLendon (2003b) noted, “reliance on the single case design both limits the analytic generalizability of study findings and prevents the profitable comparison of findings across environmental and organizational contexts” (p. 95). Multiple state studies have measured inputs and outcomes – policies proposed and policies enacted – without uncovering the interactions and influences resulting in relative success or failure. Researchers have often asked what effect state

socioeconomic conditions have on higher education policy outcomes but have rarely delved into the influence of state political or governmental features. An adequate explanation of policy behavior must surely take into consideration the distinct governmental environment in which that behavior occurs (McLendon, 2003a).

Political differences between states formed the core of a study by McLendon et al. (2007) which analyzed legislatively enacted reforms in state governance of higher education from 1985–2000. The researchers tested the political instability theory, which posits that “states where there is greater instability in political institutions will be more likely to undertake governance reforms in higher education” (p. 650). Thus, they hypothesized that among other economic factors, year-to-year changes in partisan control of the legislature, the tenure of governors, and growth in Republican legislative membership played a role in governance restructuring. An event history analysis—a regression-like procedure used to study dynamic political processes—supported the theory, revealing that governance reform is driven more by changes on the macropolitical scene of the states than by state economic climates or by conditions within public higher education systems.

The inability of single case studies to provide generalized analysis across state lines can in part be attributed to the nature of American federalism. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis popularized the notion of states as “laboratories of democracy” (McLendon, 2003a; Steiner, 1983). Higher education systems as creatures of state governments are no exception.

Moreover, higher education politics and policies vary from state to state as do other aspects of the states’ political cultures. The seminal work on state political culture is Daniel Elazar’s *American Federalism: A View from the States* (1966). Elazar noted that “the states are well-integrated parts of the American society and also separate civil societies in their own right

with their own political systems” (p. 1). Therefore, a state’s political culture plays a crucial role in the structure of a state’s higher education system (Bowen, Bracco, & Callan, 1997; Gittell & Kleiman, 2000; McGuinness, 2016).

Gittell and Kleiman (2000) examined the political structures of three states - California, North Carolina, and Texas. Elazar’s model of state political culture was used to describe the predispositions and influences of policy actors and communities. These actors included a state’s governor, legislators, business leaders, higher education officials, faculty and coordinating boards. Four specific policy decisions including affirmative action, affordability, educational preparedness, and economic development were analyzed. They reported a strong link between a state’s political culture and its particular type of higher education system. The authors concluded that “political culture sets the tone of policy debates in each state, an examination of which is essential to the analysis of higher education and policy outcomes” (p. 1059).

### The Case of Oklahoma

Thus, according to Elazar’s model, Oklahoma’s traditionalistic/individualistic political culture has played a role in the structure of the state’s higher education governance. The hallmarks of traditionalistic political cultures include slow institutional change only after much debate and political conflict. At the same time, individualistic cultures tolerate a certain amount of corruption and are doubtful about the place of bureaucracy in the political order (Morgan, England, & Humphreys, 1991). Oklahoma’s agrarian roots created a healthy distrust of concentrated economic and political power (Scales & Goble, 1982). This produced a largely decentralized higher education system as part of a state government whose leaders saw colleges and universities as another avenue for the distribution of patronage (Morgan et al., 1991).

Efforts at coordination were the result of the proliferation of institutions, the resulting competition for state appropriations, and considerable political conflict concerning institutional operations. This last is perhaps most dramatically demonstrated by two incidents in the 1920s-30s. After a long battle in 1923, Governor John Walton installed a former socialist politician as president of Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University) under military guard (Scales & Goble, 1982). In another example of political spoils, in 1931 Governor William H. Murray appointed his nephew as president of the agricultural school that bears his name, Murray State College (Bryant, 1968). Prior to 1941 there were three attempts to create a coordinating authority, two by statute and one by executive order, each falling victim to political patronage squabbles between the governor and state legislature (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2016).

In 1941 a state system of higher education featuring a constitutionally established coordinating board was proposed to the voters through referendum. Known as the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE), the Board consists of nine members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Oklahoma Senate for staggered nine-year terms. The Board has authority to set academic standards, determine the functions and courses of study, and grant degrees for all member institutions. To facilitate and provide leadership for the state system, the Board selects a Chancellor of Higher Education. The Chancellor serves at the pleasure of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and has responsibility in the areas of: Academic affairs, administration, board relations, budget and finance, legislative affairs, economic development, student affairs, and grants and scholarships. Additionally, the Board yearly recommends the budget allocation for the system to the Legislature and has authority to allocate to each institution such appropriations as the Legislature makes annually. The Oklahoma

State System of Higher Education and the OSRHE were established in Article XIII-A of the Oklahoma Constitution by a referendum approved by Oklahoma voters March 11, 1941 (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2016).

The 1940s ended with the constitutional establishment of three other system boards by voter referendum. The Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges is the system governing board for two community colleges and three universities. These include Connors State College, Northeastern A&M College, Langston University, Oklahoma Panhandle State University, and Oklahoma State University. The Board consists of nine members, eight appointed by the Governor. The ninth member is the President of the State Board of Agriculture. Article VI, Section 31a, of the Oklahoma Constitution establishing the Board was approved July 11, 1944 (Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, 2016).

The Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma is the system governing board for three universities: Cameron University, Rogers University, and the University of Oklahoma. The Board consists of seven members appointed by the Governor of Oklahoma. Article XIII, Section 8 of the Oklahoma Constitution establishing the Board was approved July 11, 1944 (University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, 2016).

The Board of Regents of the Regional University System of Oklahoma is the system governing board for six regional universities in Oklahoma, originally established as normal schools. These include East Central University, Northeastern State University, Northwestern State University, Southeastern State University, Southwestern State University, and the University of Central Oklahoma. The Board consists of nine members, eight appointed by the Governor of Oklahoma. The ninth member is the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

elected by the voters of Oklahoma. Known originally as the Board of Regents of Oklahoma Colleges until 2006, the Board was established by Article XIII-B of the Oklahoma Constitution on July 6, 1948 (Regional University System of Oklahoma, 2016). Generally, all three boards provide supervision, management and control over institutions, including the selection of presidents, awarding tenure, and approval of faculty promotions.

Political expediency and institutional mission changes since the 1940s have produced shifts of some institutions from one system to another or the establishment of separate institutional boards. Ten community colleges, six of which were originally locally created junior colleges and one liberal arts university have statutorily established boards of regents (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2016). These include Carl Albert State College, Eastern Oklahoma State College, Murray State College, Northern Oklahoma College, Oklahoma City Community College, Redlands Community College, Rose State College, Seminole State College, Tulsa Community College, and Western Oklahoma State College. The liberal arts university is the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. Thus in Oklahoma, Glenny and Dalgish's (1973) constitutional-statutory dichotomy is manifested in that while there are constitutionally established boards and systems, the legislature retains the authority to move certain institutions from one system to another.

Governing board members serve staggered terms varying in length from 7-9 years depending on the board in question. Moreover, all are subject to an informal "senatorial courtesy" system whereby a gubernatorial appointment generally will not be considered by the Oklahoma Senate unless the home district senator of the appointee moves the name for approval (Morgan et al., 1991). This political arrangement applies to the appointment not only of members of the other system and institutional boards of regents in the state but all other state boards and

commissions as well. This is an expression of Oklahoma's root agrarian populism (Scales & Goble, 1982).

### Theoretical Approaches

A number of theoretical approaches borrowed and adapted from political science, public policy, sociology, and organizational theory have been employed to better understand various issues related to higher education governance. The Interest Articulation Model, Garbage Can Model, Institutional Theory, Political Systems Model, Punctuated-Equilibrium, Multiple-Streams Approach, Positive Theories of Institutions Model and variations of each are present in the literature (Baldrige, 1971; Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Easton, 1953; Jones, Baumgartner, and Mortensen, 2014; Kingdon, 2003; Pusser, 2003).

### Garbage Can Model

Tandberg and Anderson (2012) analyzed the 1991 restructuring of the Massachusetts system of higher education using a revised Garbage Can model of policy making, the "Policy Stream Model of Decentralized Agenda Setting." The Garbage Can advanced "that some actors within these types of organizations have preconceived solution preferences and in an effort to implement those policies search for problems that may justify their preferred solutions" (p. 569). This case study concluded the actors were using the opportunity to restructure the state higher education governance system as a way to gain some sort of political capital. For state policy makers, restructuring the governance system may be seen as an easy way of appearing to do something about public higher education even though the evidence tends to indicate that

governance restructuring has little to no effect on the outputs or quality of public higher education.

### Institutional Theory

Bastedo (2009) used institutional theory to examine how governing board independence is threatened as public universities become more enmeshed with state government, business and industry, and professional networks. With the political environment as the primary focus of analysis, institutional theory predicts regents will move their campuses to align with the expectations and values of political actors and resource providers. Where trustees were once assigned by both governors and institutions the task of protecting public colleges from the political environment, they are now expected to actively engage that environment and make decisions in concert with the external demands of the public and powerful political actors.

Conflicting institutions seek to influence the higher education system. Each of these institutions—political parties, business firms, families, elite networks, professions, and elements of state government—is part of the organizational network providing higher education with both tangible and intangible resources. Each institution has a particular rationale for how the system should make choices aligned to their particular interest.

Yet the interests of these external institutions may not be in the best interests of a college, university, or a system as a whole. Bastedo suggested research into who the external interests are seeking to influence public governing boards and how that influence is manifested.

### Political Systems Model

Ostrem (2002) analyzed the political leadership process used in the 1991 creation of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System; legislation which merged 62 public higher education institutions. The process was viewed through the lens of the Political System with Process Stages model; an adaptation of David Easton's Political Systems Model (Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976). The adaptation adds policy formulation, creation of support, and enactment to Easton's model which stressed gatekeepers in the system. The Political System with Process Stages model provided a description of the political process from input to decision output accounting for relationships between actors, communication channels, cooperation, conflict, persuasion, bargaining, coercion and the formation of coalitions. Central to Ostrem's study was the role played by a particularly powerful political figure – Easton's Gatekeeper—the longtime majority leader of the Minnesota State Senate, in ushering the legislation to passage.

### Punctuated Equilibrium

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) argued American government is highly decentralized with overlapping, semi-autonomous institutions creating a flexible dynamic between macro-political efforts and political subsystems, such as higher education systems. They describe periods of balance between subsystems—where one subsystem of political actors and issue experts establishes a political monopoly over others—as periods of equilibrium. The equilibrium is “punctuated” when these political monopolies are challenged or overthrown and tossed into the macro-political arena—where significant policy innovation, such as higher education reorganization, can occur.

Exemplifying this, Garn (2005) described the policymaking process and policy solutions enacted in the Kentucky Postsecondary Improvement Act of 1997 employing three theoretical frameworks—Multiple-Streams Approach, Punctuated-Equilibrium, and Political Frame—to explore the rise of restructuring of the state’s higher education governance system on Kentucky's policymaking agenda. Further, the study explored the most contentious issue within the act’s consideration—the separation of community college governance from the University of Kentucky—and how the conflict created by this issue was resolved. The theoretical frameworks used offered potential insight as to how legislators conceive of the role of governing boards and how higher education issues emerge on the policy making agenda.

#### Positive Theories of Institutions

Pusser (2003) presented a case study related to the University of California system board of regents ending affirmative action policies in 1995. The decision-making process involved in this action is analyzed through the lens of Positive Theories of Institutions, with its focus on external forces and interests seeking to influence organizational structures and policies.

This is offered as an alternative model to the variants of Victor Baldrige’s (1971) Interest-Articulation model “which depicted the organizational decision-making process as one driven internally by “authorities” who make decisions for the whole, and “partisans” within the organization who are affected by the decisions” (p. 136). Pusser pointed out the divergence of political science and public administration literature as politics and organization became the central concern of the respective disciplines for nearly fifty years prior to 1973. Political science focused on electoral politics and bureaucracy and public administration on organization and leadership.

Pusser argued that positive theories tie the two together by treating higher education institutions as political institutions. Further, he argued studies of higher education have generally conceptualized the university as distinct from the state and vice-versa. This case brings forward theoretical perspectives on state politics with attention to the ways in which actions and interests beyond the institution and outside of the interest-articulation framework shape institutional organization and governance.

### Higher Education as a Partisan State Legislative Issue

Perhaps no other extra-institutional factor is as important to public colleges and universities as their place in a state's budget. In some states higher education spending is the single largest discretionary budgetary item and the structuring – and restructuring- of institutions may be seen as part of a larger political struggle for the benefit of that good (Blackwell & Cistone, 1999). In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis state support for higher education decreased 23% nationwide as of 2014 (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014). The average state is spending \$1598, or 18%, less per student than before the recession (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2016).

Blackwell and Cistone (1999) studied the Florida higher education community and state government concerning the ability of certain actors to influence higher education policy formulation. The study concluded that Florida higher education leaders and state government share common perceptions about the ability of various participants in state policy development. It also concluded that college administrators, members of governing boards, faculty, and students played a less influential role than legislative staff and lobbyists.

Dar (2012) hypothesized a relationship between political polarization in the California legislature and higher education spending. The complexity of the higher education system as a provider of both public and private goods, funded by public and private sources, is a source of instability in political coalitions. This produces ideologically inconsistent combinations of policy preferences. As politicians become increasingly polarized, higher education becomes a loser in the competition for a state's funds. In the case of California, as Democrats have become legislatively dominant, spending priority has gone to K-12 education to the detriment of higher education.

Dar and Dong-Wook (2014) returned to the topic of partisanship and higher education, echoing other scholars (McLendon, Hearn, & Mokher, 2009; Tandberg, 2013) that Democrats are more likely to support higher education, but demonstrated a broader portrait of the relationship. They suggested future research examining relationships between key political and higher education variables and policy outcomes in a way that promotes stronger theoretical foundations while providing models which clearly inform policy and practice.

A quantitative study by Tandberg (2010) used the dependent variable of the share of a state's general fund dedicated to higher education, its HI ED Share, based on data from the National Association of State Budget Officers. This variable is an attempt to capture the factors that influence the decision making of state policymakers as they decide how they will support higher education relative to other areas of state expenditure. State budget making and appropriations are inherently political processes involving give and take and creating winners and losers among state supported entities. Thus using this variable better highlighted the internal factors influencing state policymakers.

Independent variables included measures of income inequality in a state, state citizen ideology, budget powers of the governor, legislative professionalization and electoral competition, number of registered interest groups in a state minus the number of registered higher education interest groups, state political culture, and the type of higher education governance structure in a state. Using cross-sectional time-series analysis these relationships were explored from 1985-2004. The results provided evidence of the effect interest groups and other political forces have on higher education spending levels (Tandberg, 2010).

Yowell (2012) examined the perceptions of selected university administrators and legislators concerning levels of financial support for Tennessee public higher education. There were significant differences between the two groups concerning use of higher education reserves during weak economic times, the explanation for tuition increases, how much cost students should incur for higher education, level of importance placed on state appropriations for funding higher education, and how each group perceived the priority of higher education in the state budget.

There was a significant difference between one's political party affiliation and perception of access to higher education being an issue. Democratic participants tended to perceive access to higher education as more of an issue than Republican participants. A significant difference was also found between one's education level and ranking of higher education in the state budget. Participants having earned a graduate degree tended to prioritize higher education with significantly greater regard in the state budget than the participants with no graduate degree (Yowell, 2012).

Shifting costs from state sources to students in the form of tuition increases has eroded public support for higher education. Immerwahr, Johnson, Ott, and Rochkind (2010) found rising

public skepticism of institutions ability to control costs. Public opinion regarding higher education plays a role in legislative decision making, as policy outcomes are found to be driven by voter preferences, if political leaders know proposals are aligned to suit the voter (Archibald & Feldman, 2006).

Expanding on the potential influence of partisanship, Doyle (2007) asked the basic question: “Do individuals from different parties have different preferences when it comes to higher education policy?” (p. 370). Based on a descriptive statistical analysis of a national opinion poll Doyle concluded while there were no differences between Republicans and Democrats on their perceptions regarding efficiency in higher education, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to see barriers to higher education access for poorer people.

### Chapter Summary

Public college and university governing boards stand at the intersection of politics and higher education. As a result the role of a governing board is vital to the functioning of the modern higher education institution (Bastedo, 2009). The study of public governing boards is part of the larger field of politics and higher education (McLendon, 2003a).

Much of the literature related to politics and higher education has focused on legislative reorganizations of state governance systems, theoretical approaches to understanding legislative decision-making related to higher education reorganization, and attitudes of state legislators toward higher education as a partisan issue. There is a paucity of research concerning the attitudes of governing boards concerning the roles they play in higher education. Further study of the attitude of legislators toward the role of governing boards, how boards perceive their own role, and how the differences between the two can impact policy can fill the void in the literature.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study identified issues considered important to Oklahoma's legislators and members of public higher education governing boards regarding the role governing boards should play in the Oklahoma system. It should be noted that relatively few studies have been published surveying attitudes of either members of governing boards or legislators regarding the role of governing boards. This chapter provides details on the methodology used to examine perceptions of Oklahoma State Legislators and members of Oklahoma public higher education governing boards about the role governing boards should play in the system. Descriptions of the population, survey instrument, data collection, research questions and null hypotheses, and data analysis are provided.

The researcher determined a quantitative methodology most appropriate for this study. The quantitative methodology provides an opportunity to define the current reality that exists and can be used for future research about the role of governing boards in higher education. Using a survey design will further facilitate making comparisons between responses given by both political leaders and members of governing boards regarding the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma system. Gravetter and Forzano (2012) suggested using quantitative methods for accomplishing two goals; providing answers and controlling for variance. Quantitative research designs apply a research model or approach that can be replicated and used to draw generalizations from sample data to a larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This methodology was deemed appropriate for this study because the research is not focused on the rationale behind participants' perceptions.

This study was an examination of the issues affecting attitudes toward public higher education governance in the State of Oklahoma. Members of Oklahoma public higher education governing boards and members of the Oklahoma Legislature were asked to participate in an online survey, hosted by the web-based survey development company Survey Monkey. Individual perceptions regarding various issues were measured using a Likert-scale that ranked the answer choice respondents found most reflected their opinion.

The independent variables in the study included the participants, legislators, and members of governing boards. The dependent variables in the study were the responses to the survey. The survey consisted of single-response ordinal Likert-scale prompts. The objective of the study was to determine if perceptions of legislators and members of governing boards were in agreement regarding the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma state system of higher education.

### Research Questions and Corresponding Hypotheses

Fifteen research questions were adapted from previous studies on higher education funding in Tennessee for the purposes of this study (Collins, 1996; Yowell, 2012). The research questions:

#### Primary Role of Governing Boards

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H1<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards.

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards.

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H2<sub>1</sub>: There is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system between state legislators and members of governing boards.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system between state legislators and members of governing boards.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H3<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards.

H3<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards.

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H4<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature between state legislators and members of governing boards.

H4<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature between state legislators and members of governing boards.

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H5<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible between state legislators and members of governing boards.

H5<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible between state legislators and members of governing boards.

#### Geographic Location

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by legislative district type or institution location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H6<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by legislative district type or institution location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

H6<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by legislative district type or institution location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H7<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

H7<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H8<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

H8<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of

institutions as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H9<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

H9<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

RG10: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H10<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

H10<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

### Political Party Identification

RQ11: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

H11<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

H11<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

RQ12: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

H12<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

H12<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

RQ13: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions system as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

H13<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions system as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

H13<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions system as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

RQ14: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

H14<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as

determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

H14<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

RQ15: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent?

H15<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

H15<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

### Population

The population examined in this study was comprised of members of the Oklahoma Legislature and Oklahoma public higher education governing boards. Article V of the Oklahoma Constitution establishes 48 members of the Oklahoma Senate and 101 members of the Oklahoma

House of Representatives. However, at the time of the survey there were 7 vacancies in the Oklahoma legislature: 2 in the Senate and 5 in the House of Representatives for a total of 142 potential legislative participants. Additionally members of three system boards (Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, the Regional University System of Oklahoma, and the University of Oklahoma), and one coordinating board (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education) were surveyed. The members of eleven institutional governing boards were also included in this study for total of 107 potential governing board participants. Thus the population for the study was 249 participants.

### Instrumentation

The survey instrument for this study was designed to assess individual perceptions regarding the role governing boards should play in the Oklahoma system. Two groups existed for this study, so it was important for the survey instrument to be free from bias and not appear to support a hidden agenda in order to produce accurate conclusions. A web based survey was used and a link to the online questionnaire was emailed to research participants.

The survey instrument for the quantitative study addressed criteria described by Schuh and Upcraft (2001): (a) establish what information is needed, (b) determine the nature of the questions, (c) phrasing of the questions, (d) order of the questions, (e) survey instrument design, (f) determine the appropriate scale for measurement, (g) test the instrument before distribution.

Demographic data identified each research participant as either a member of the Oklahoma Legislature or a member of a higher education governing board, whether they serve on a coordinating, system or institutional governing board; their political party affiliation as Democrat, Republican, or Independent; and whether they reside in a rural, urban, or suburban

district. Specific items concerned the role governing boards should play in the Oklahoma system. A Likert-scale was implemented for such items. Respondents were asked to indicate their response for a series of statements. The final three items of the survey were open-ended questions to provide context for the quantitative data. The dependent variables for the study centered on whether the primary role of Oklahoma governing boards is to: (1) serve the interests of individual institutions; (2) serve the interests of the state system; (3) provide public oversight of institutions; (4) implement policies as determined by the governor or state legislature; or (5) provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars to keep spending as low as possible. The instrument may be found in Appendix A.

On April 3, 2017 the study was submitted to the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. On April 12, 2017 the study was granted an exempt approval in accordance with 45 CFR 46, 101(b) (2) by East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board.

### Pretest

Before the study was administered, a pretest of the survey instrument was conducted. Seven people were used to test the survey software. Three members of the University Center of Southern Oklahoma Board of Trustees and two former state legislators, one each from the Oklahoma House of Representatives and Senate, were asked to participate in the pretest so as to approximate the type of participants responding to the study survey. Additionally, two participants in the pretest were selected for their experience in survey design and data collection. The research instrument was tested using the same conditions as research participants, a web-based questionnaire. The purpose of pretesting was to ensure clarity of instructions. Participants

in the pretesting were asked to look for potential difficulties research participants might encounter while taking the survey. The questionnaire was in English, as all research participants are fluent in that language. There was no need to offer the survey in multiple languages. Their recommendations were incorporated into the survey, including the discovery of an error in the online survey setup requiring all participants to select whether they were members of a coordinating, system, or institutional board. Members of the legislature would not need to answer that question.

### Data Collection

Upon approval of the East Tennessee State University Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department dissertation committee and Institutional Review Board, the administration of the online survey and data collection from participants began. On April 27, 2017 an email containing a link to the online survey was sent from the researcher's Murray State College account to each participant's email address as outlined below. The use of an Oklahoma higher education email account was judged to make it more likely potential participants, all Oklahoma government officials, would respond.

In order to generate a list of research participants for this study, the researcher gathered names and contact information using online databases available to the public as much as possible. Contact information for members of governing boards was requested from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Members of the Oklahoma Legislature were accessed through an online directory providing individual contact information. Additionally, lists of governing board member email addresses were requested of system and institutional board staff. Gathering this direct information enabled the researcher to email participants an

invitation to participate in the web-based survey. Participants were provided a link to the questionnaire in the body of the email messages sent. Copies of the emails sent to the participants are provided in Appendix D to the dissertation.

Letters of support from the researcher's home district legislators, Representative Pat Ownbey and Senator Frank Simpson, were requested to be included in follow-up emails to be sent a few days after the initial emails to legislative participants encouraging participation in the web-based survey. Copies of these emails are included in the Appendices of this dissertation, Appendix E. Follow-up reminder emails were sent each week for ten weeks to all potential participants in order to improve response rates. A copy of these emails may be found in Appendix F. The researcher visited public meetings of various governing boards in June and July 2017 in order to provide potential participants the opportunity to respond by filling out a physical rather than a digital survey, thereby increasing the response rate. These physical surveys were entered manually into the Survey Monkey platform by the researcher.

Research participants were assured by the researcher that individual responses would remain anonymous and confidential whether the survey was completed in physical or digital form. Informed consent of research participants was implied by the submission of a completed survey. The use of a survey instrument that did not specifically identify the participants was applied whether in paper or digital form. The researcher noted participation as voluntary and provided evidence that individual responses would not be identifiable by any means. Based on the results of Yowell's (2012) study of Tennessee legislators and higher education officials, the researcher anticipated a 40% return rate for the study.

## Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis of the data collected. Responses to the completed surveys were analyzed through a series of inferential statistical tests (e.g. *t* test, and one-way ANOVA). The dependent variables for the study centered on whether the primary role of Oklahoma governing boards is to: (1) serve the interests of individual institutions; (2) serve the interests of the state system; (3) provide public oversight of institutions; (4) implement policies as determined by the governor or state legislature; or (5) provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars to keep spending as low as possible.

Independent variables tested in the study were study participants identified as either state legislators or member of Oklahoma public higher education governing boards. Other independent variables included political party identification and geographic location of participant district or institution identified as urban, suburban, or rural.

A series of independent *t* tests was used to address Research Questions 1-5 and 11-15. Research Questions 1-5 compared the perceptions of state legislators and members of governing boards concerning the five dependent variables described above. Research Questions 11-15 compared Democrats and Republican concerning the five dependent variables. There were no other party affiliations self-identified by participants.

Similarly, a series of one-way ANOVA tests were used for Research Questions 6-10 to compare the differences in perceptions of participants about the primary role of governing boards based on the geographic locations of participant districts or institutional locations as urban, suburban, or rural. All data were analyzed at the .05 level of significance.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the study's methods and procedures were presented, including the research design, survey instrument, research questions and corresponding null hypotheses, population, data collection, and the types of statistical tests to be performed for the analysis of research questions. The study included 142 Members of the Oklahoma Legislature (46 members of the Oklahoma Senate, 96 members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives) and 107 members of public higher education governing boards. The boards to be studied included three system and one coordinating board; the Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, Board of Regents for the Regional University System of Oklahoma, Board of Regents for the University of Oklahoma, and Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education; and 11 institutional boards of regents. Data collected from the study is analyzed in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

This quantitative study examined the perceptions of members of Oklahoma higher education governing boards and legislators concerning the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma system. Research participants were selected based on how their leadership position impacted higher education policy. The purpose of the study was to gain a greater understanding among both groups as to the factors affecting higher education governance.

The principal investigator used a web survey development company, Survey Monkey, to create an online survey. Survey Monkey also served as a data collection and storage tool. Once created, the web-based survey was assigned a personal link for participants to access the survey. The link to the online questionnaire was included in the body of each message sent to research participants. There were 13 questions in total; the last three were open-ended. Participants were asked demographic questions and ones focusing on individual perceptions of the role of higher education governance in the Oklahoma system. There were opportunities for participants to provide additional insight to the study in the open-ended questions.

Submission of a completed survey indicated the research participant's consent to participate in this study. Participants were given notice that participation in the research was voluntary and that they could quit the survey at any time. Participants were assured that individual responses would be held in strictest confidence. No identifiable information was retained for this study. Due to the sensitive nature of the results, a survey instrument that did not specifically identify the participants was used.

The population for this study included 142 members of the Oklahoma Legislature and 107 members of Oklahoma public higher education governing boards. All 249 members of the population were invited to participate in the online questionnaire. The researcher anticipated a 40% participation rate. There were 99 completed surveys submitted; a 39.7% rate of return. Fifty-five members of the higher education group responded, a 51.40% participation rate. Forty-five members of the legislature responded, a 30.9% participation rate.

The fifteen research questions in this study were adapted from previous studies on higher education funding in Tennessee (Collins, 1996; Yowell, 2012). The results of these research questions are discussed in this chapter. In addition, open-ended responses from the online survey are examined.

### Research Question 1

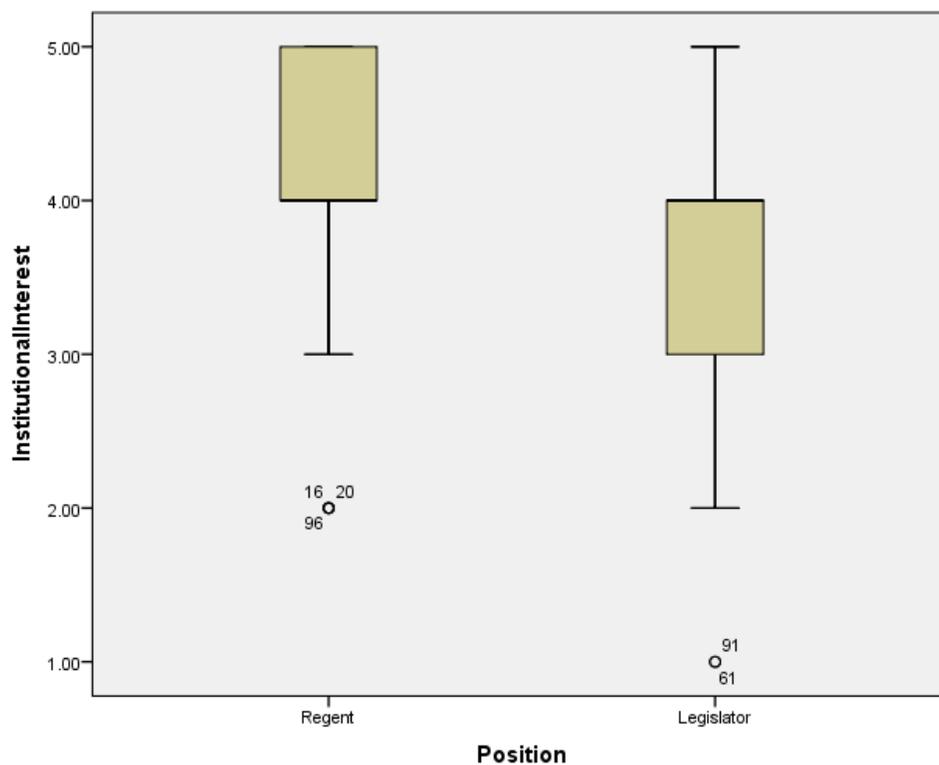
RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the perception of the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H<sub>10</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board as serving the interests of individual institutions based on their position as either a legislator or member of a governing board. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving the interests of individual institutions and the independent variable was position as either legislator

or member of a governing board. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was significant,  $t(97) = 2.54, p = 0.01$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Members of Oklahoma governing boards ( $M = 4.10, SD = 0.80$ ) tended to agree significantly more that the role of a higher education governing board was to serve the interests of individual institutions while legislators ( $M = 3.61, SD = 1.12$ ) were less likely to agree with that position. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 0.10 to 0.89. The strength of the relationship between legislators and board members, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was medium (.062). Figure 1 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 1.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving the Interests of Individual Institutions as Compared by Position

## Research Question 2

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H<sub>20</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system between state legislators and members of governing boards.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board as serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma state system of higher education based on their position as legislator or member of a governing board. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma higher education system and the independent variable was position as either legislator or member of a governing board. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = 1.59, p = .113$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Although not significant, members of governing boards ( $M = 3.83, SD = 0.83$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as primarily serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma system of higher education higher, but not significantly higher, than members of the legislature ( $M=3.54, SD = 0.97$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was

-0.07 to 0.65. The strength of the relationship between legislators and board members, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.025). Figure 2 shows the distribution of the two groups.

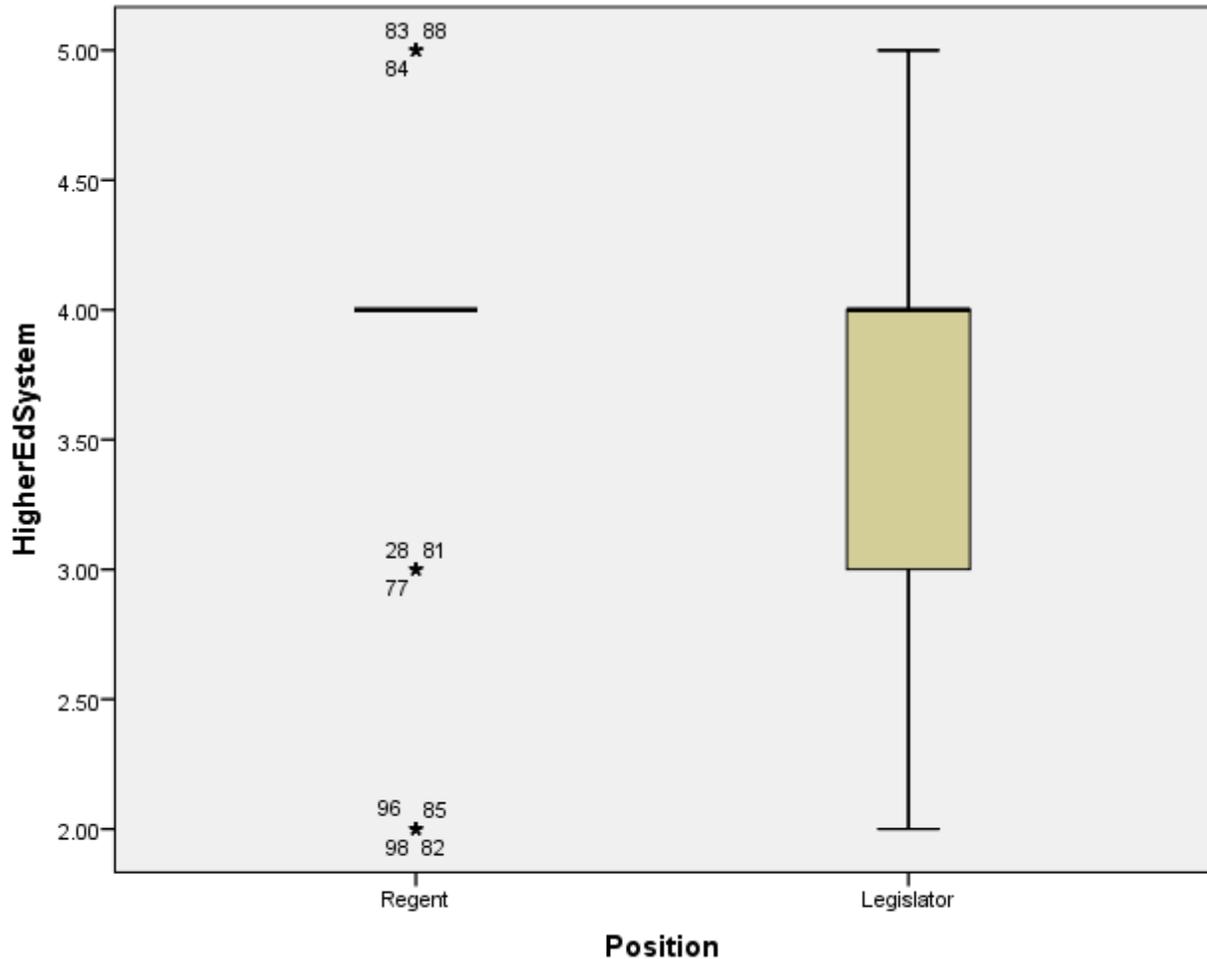


Figure 2. Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving the Interests of the Oklahoma Higher Education System as Compared by Position

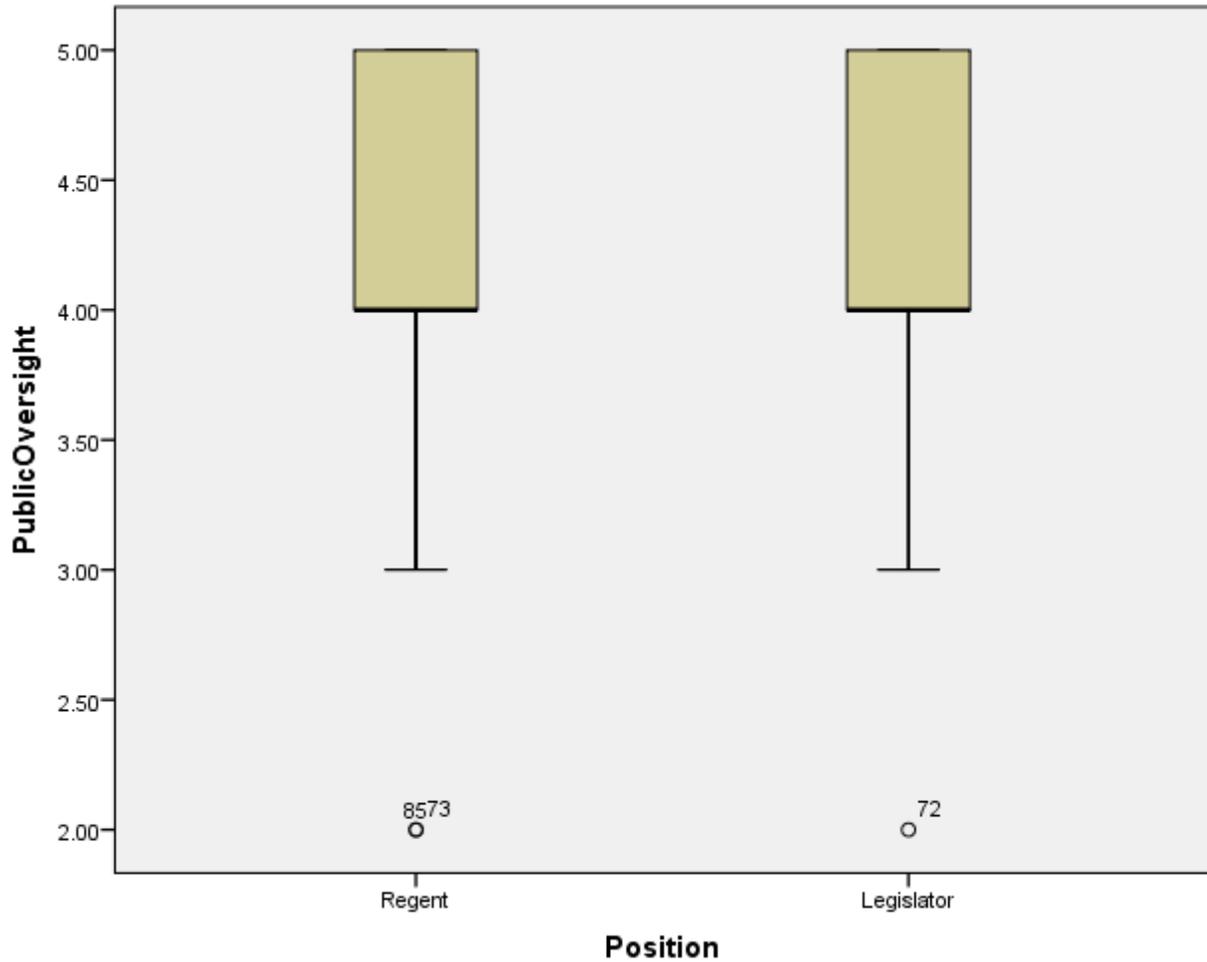
### Research Question 3

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H3<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions between state legislators and members of governing boards.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board providing public oversight of institutions based on their position as legislator or member of a governing board. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving to provide public oversight of institutions and the independent variable was the position as either legislator or member of a governing board. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = -.277, p=.78$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Members of the legislature ( $M = 4.29, SD = 0.63$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as primarily serving to provide oversight of institutions virtually the same as members of governing boards ( $M = 4.25, SD = 0.79$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was  $-.333$  to  $.244$ . The strength of the relationship between legislators and board members, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small ( $<.001$ ). Figure 3 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 3.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Provide Public Oversight of Institutions as Compared by Position

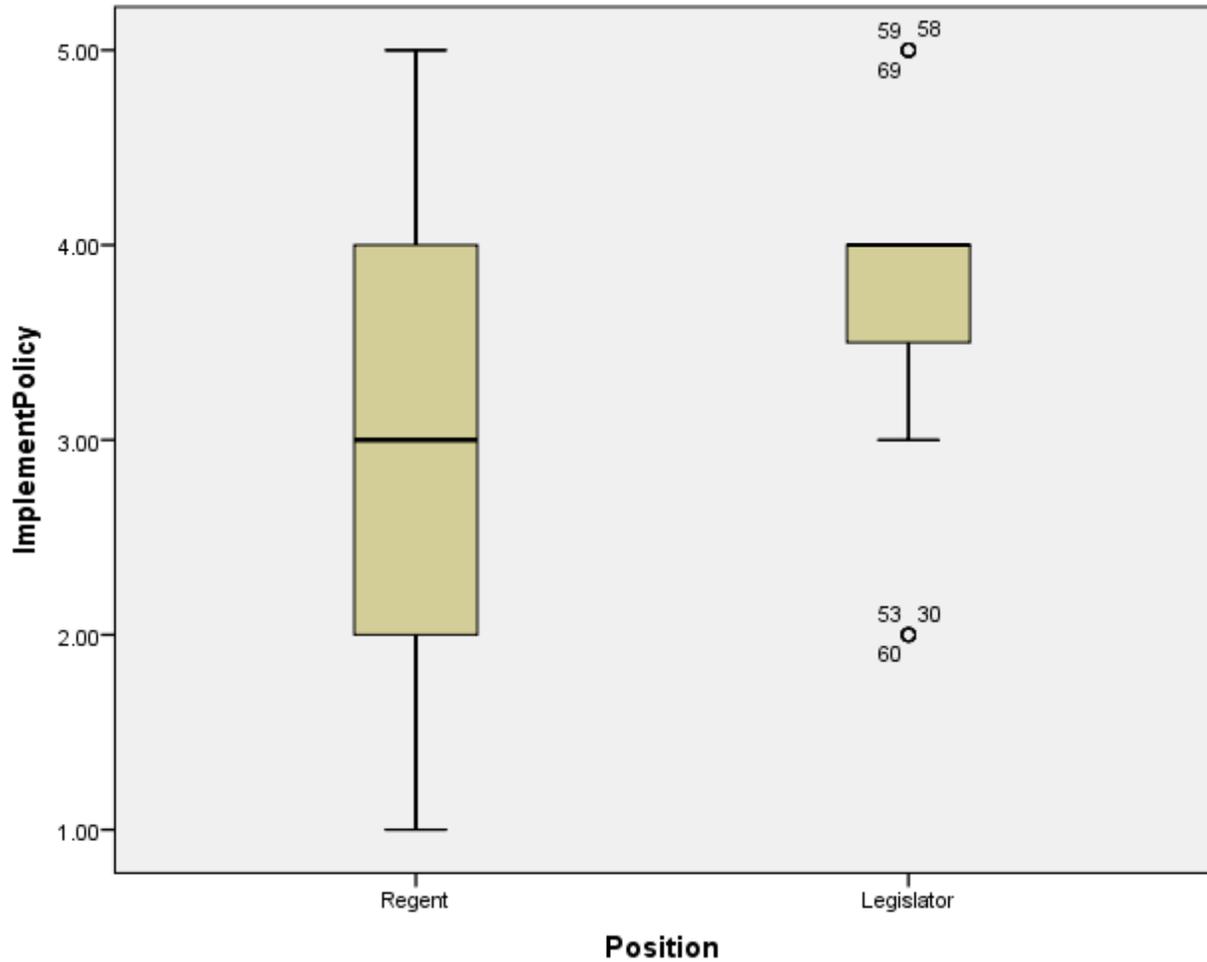
#### Research Question 4

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H4<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature between state legislators and members of governing boards.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board as serving to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature based on their position as legislator or member of a governing board. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature and the independent variable was the position as either legislator or member of a governing board. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was significant,  $t(97) = -.349, p = .001$ ; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Members of the Oklahoma Legislature ( $M = 3.75, SD = 0.81$ ) tended to agree significantly more that the role of a higher education governing board was to serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature while governing board members ( $M = 3.10, SD = 0.97$ ) were less likely to agree with that position. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -1.00 to -.284. The strength of the relationship between legislators and board members, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.001). Figure 4 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 4.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Implement Policy as Determined by the Governor and State Legislature as Compared by Position

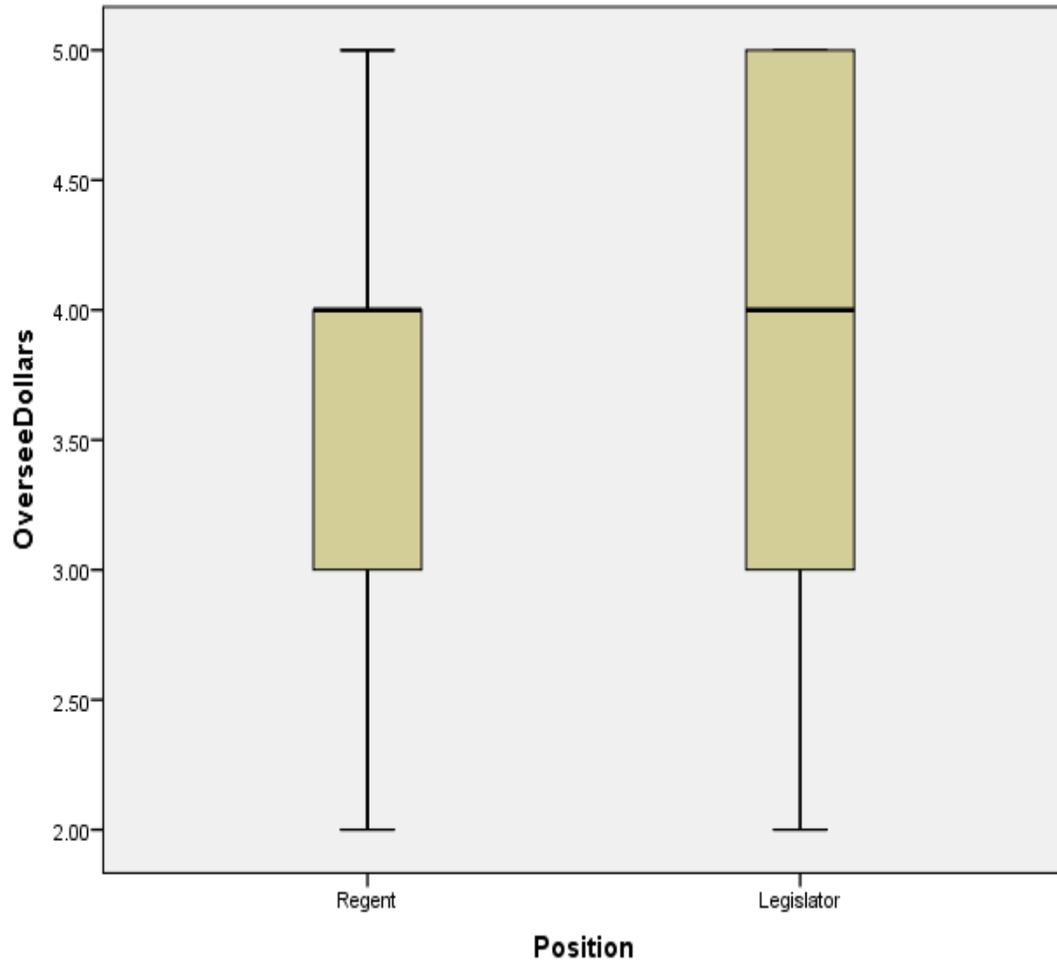
#### Research Question 5

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible between state legislators and members of governing boards?

H5<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible between state legislators and members of governing boards.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board providing oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible based on their position as legislator or member of a governing board. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving primarily to keep the expenditure of public dollars as low as possible and the independent variable was the position as either legislator or member of a governing board. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = -.699$ ,  $p = .486$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Although not significant, Oklahoma legislators ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as primarily serving to keep expenditure of public dollars low slightly, but not significantly, higher than members of governing boards ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was  $-.558$  to  $.266$ . The strength of the relationship between legislators and board members, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.004). Figure 5 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 5.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Oversee the Expenditure of Public Dollars to Keep Spending as Low as Possible as Compared by Position

#### Research Question 6

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by legislative district type or institution location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H6<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by legislative district type or institution location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

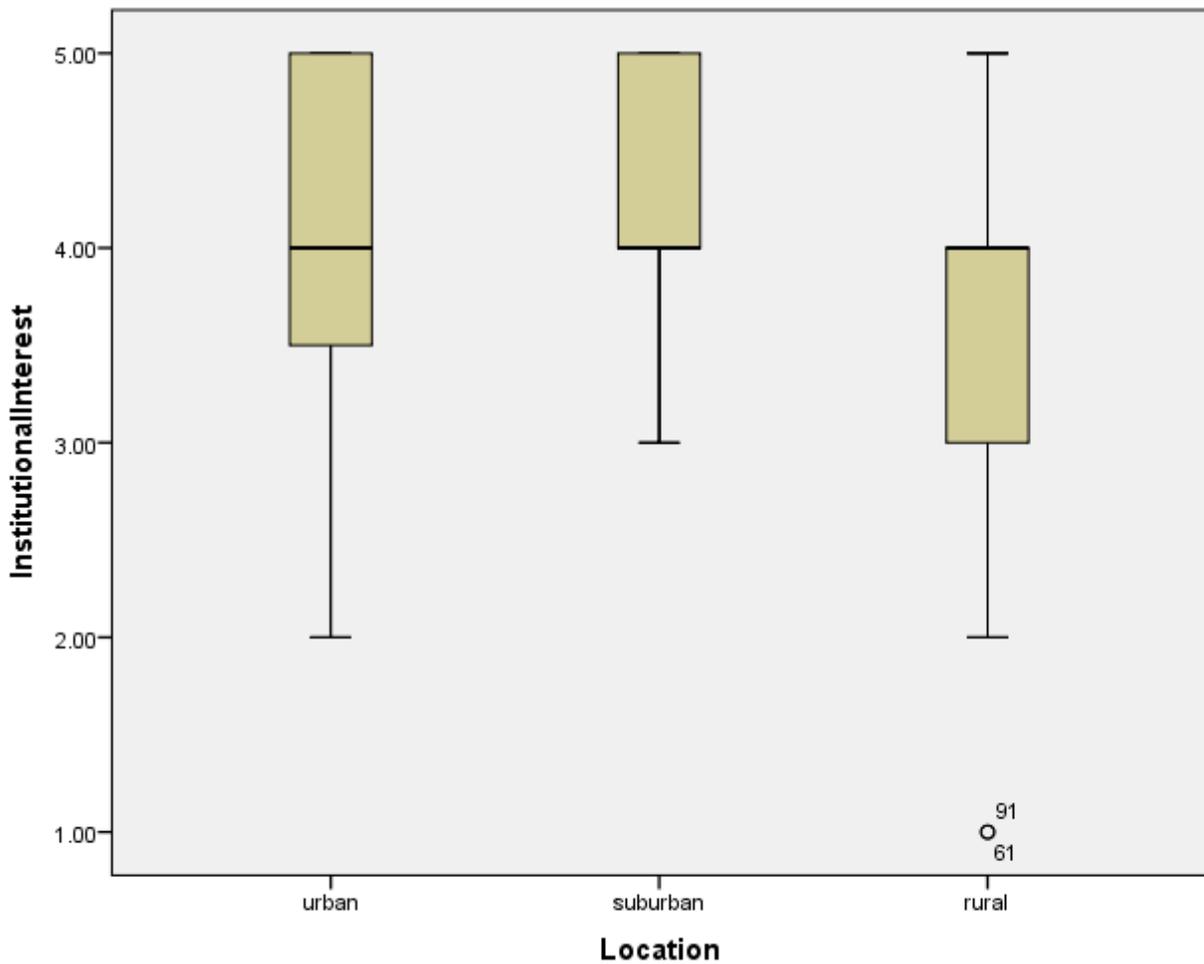
A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the difference between perceptions of participants about the role of Oklahoma higher education governing boards as primarily serving the interests of individual institutions as categorized by their legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The dependent variable was the role of governing boards primarily serving the interests of individual institutions and the independent variable was the legislative district type or institutional location. The ANOVA was significant,  $F(2,96) = 4.415, p = .015$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. The means and standard deviations were as follows for each of the locations: Rural ( $M = 3.70, SD = 1.00$ ), Suburban ( $M = 4.42, SD = 0.59$ ), and Urban ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.08$ ). The strength of the relationship between the suburban and rural locations, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was medium (.084).

Because the overall  $F$  test was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means of the three groups. A Tukey procedure was selected for the multiple comparisons because equal variances were assumed. The urban group had a significantly higher mean than the rural group ( $p = .011$ ). However there was not a significant difference between the suburban and urban ( $p = .134$ ) or between urban and rural ( $p = .833$ ). The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as the means and standard deviations for the three locations, are reported in Table 1. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the three locations.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations with 95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences*

Location of legislative district or Institution	N	M	SD	Urban	Suburban
Urban	20	3.85	1.08		
Suburban	21	4.42	0.59	-1.28 to .132	
Rural	58	3.70	1.00	-.447 to .733	.142 to 1.30



*Figure 6. Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving the Interests of Individual Institutions as Compared by Location*

### Research Question 7

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H7<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

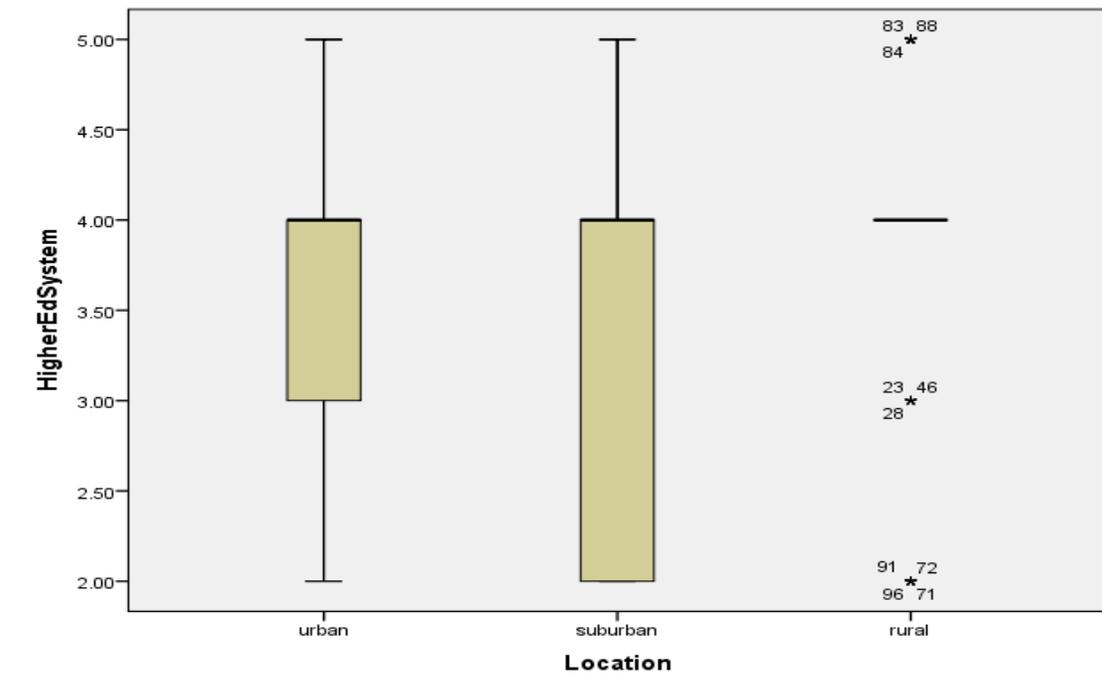
A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the difference between perceptions of participants about the role of Oklahoma higher education governing boards serving to primarily promote the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as categorized by their legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The dependent variable was the role of governing boards primarily serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system and the independent variable was the legislative district type and institutional location. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2,96) = 2.53, p = .08$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. The means and standard deviations were as follows for each of the locations: Rural ( $M = 3.8, SD = 0.85$ ), Suburban ( $M = 3.3, SD = 1.01$ ), and Urban ( $M = 3.7, SD = 0.86$ ). As assessed by  $\eta^2$ , the strength of the relationship between location and governing boards primarily serving the broader interests of the state system of higher education was small (0.05). Thus only 5% of the variance in the ranking of the role of governing boards primarily serving the broader interests of the state system of higher education was affected by location. The means and standard deviations for the three

locations are reported in Table 2. Figure 7 shows the distribution of the three locations. In summary, there is no significant difference in means between the three groups.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Three Locations*

Location of legislative district or Institution	N	M	SD
Rural	58	3.8	0.85
Suburban	21	3.3	1.01
Urban	20	3.7	0.86



*Figure 7. Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving the Interests of the Oklahoma Higher Education System as Compared by Location*

### Research Question 8

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H8<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

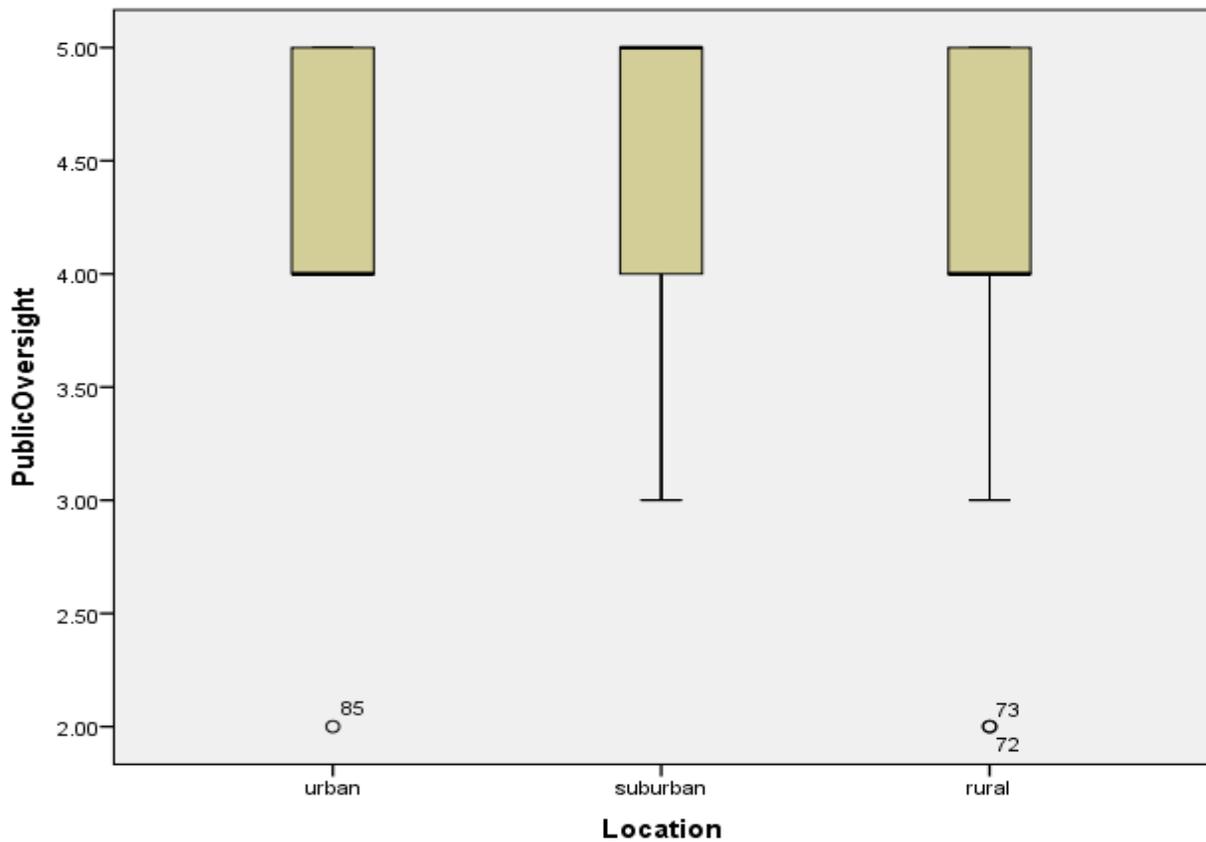
A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the difference between perceptions of participants about the role of Oklahoma higher education governing boards serving to primarily provide public oversight of institutions as categorized by their legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The dependent variable was the role of governing boards primarily serving to provide public oversight and the independent variable was the legislative district type and institutional location. The ANOVA was not significant  $F(2, 96) = 1.22, p = 0.29$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. The means and standard deviations were as follows for each location: Rural ( $M = 4.18, SD = 0.75$ ), Suburban ( $M = 4.47, SD 0.60$ ), and Urban ( $M = 4.3, SD 0.73$ ). As assessed by  $\eta^2$ , the strength of the relationship between location and the primary role of governing boards serving to provide public oversight was small (.025). In other words, 2.5% of the variance in ranking the primary role of governing boards as providing public oversight was affected by location. The means and standard deviations for the three locations are reported in Table 3. Figure 8 shows the

distribution of the three locations. In summary, there is no significant difference in means between the three groups.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Three Locations*

Location of legislative district or Institution	N	M	SD
Rural	58	4.18	0.75
Suburban	21	4.47	0.60
Urban	20	4.3	0.73



*Figure 8.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Provide Public Oversight of Institutions as Compared by Location

### Research Question 9

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

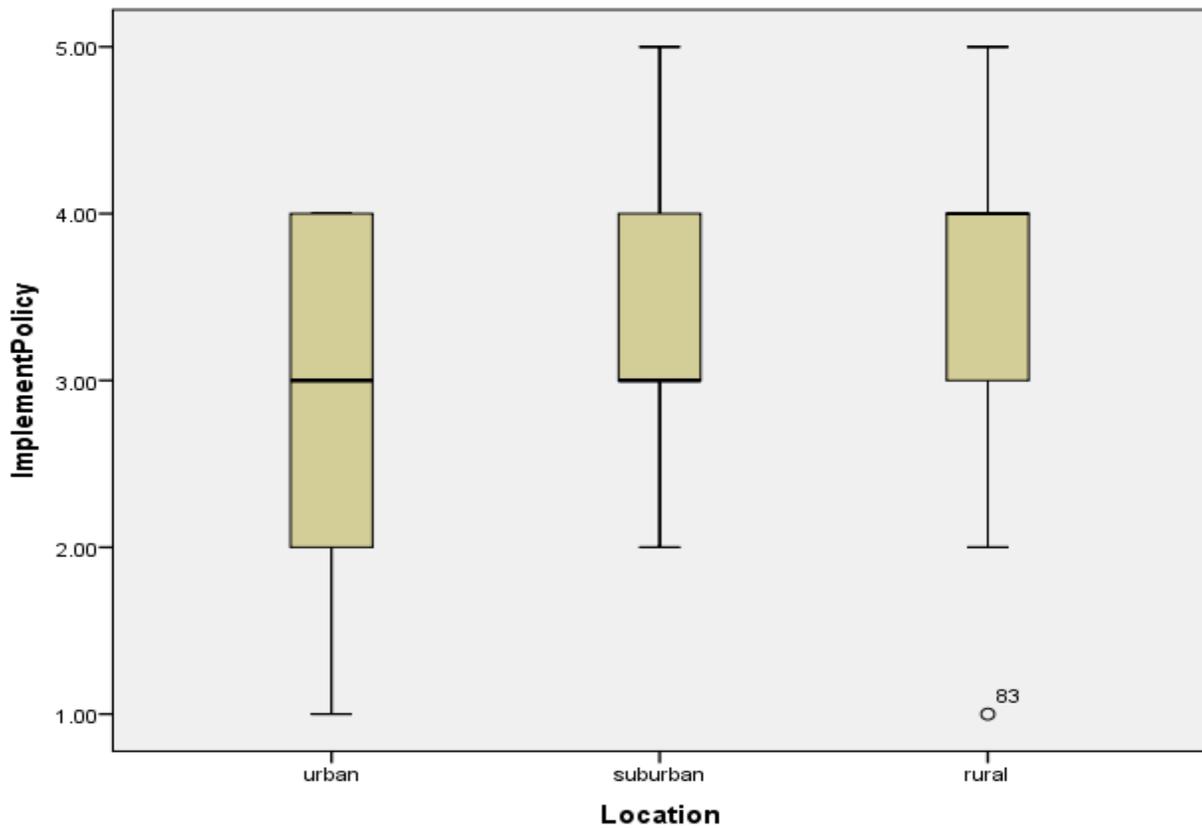
A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the difference between perceptions of participants about the role of Oklahoma higher education governing boards serving primarily to implement policies as determined by the governor and state legislature as categorized by their legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The dependent variable was the role of governing boards primarily serving to implement policies and the independent variable was the legislative district type and institutional location. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 96) = 1.68, p = 0.19$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. The means and standard deviations were as follows for each of the locations: Rural ( $M = 3.50, SD = 0.92$ ), Suburban ( $M = 3.40, SD = 0.97$ ), and Urban ( $M = 3.05, SD = 0.99$ ). As assessed by  $\eta^2$ , the strength of the relationship between location and ranking the role of governing boards primarily serving to implement policies was small (.034). Thus only 3.4% of the variance in ranking the role of governing boards primarily serving to implement policies was affected by location. The means and standard deviations for the three locations are reported in Table 4.

Figure 9 shows the distribution of the three locations. In summary, there is no significant difference in means between the three groups.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Three Locations*

Location of legislative district or Institution	N	M	SD
Rural	58	3.50	0.92
Suburban	21	3.40	0.97
Urban	20	3.05	0.99



*Figure 9.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Implement Policy as Decided by the Governor and State Legislature as Compared by Location

### Research Question 10

RQ10: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban?

H10<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban.

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the difference between perceptions of participants about the role of Oklahoma higher education governing boards serving primarily to oversee the expenditure of public dollars to keep spending as low as possible as categorized by their legislative district type or institutional location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The dependent variable was the role of governing boards primarily serving to keep public spending low and the independent variable was the legislative district type and institutional location. The ANOVA was significant,  $F(2, 96) = 5.25, p = .007$ . Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. The means and standard deviations were as follows for each of the locations: Rural ( $M = 3.89, SD = 1.00$ ), Suburban ( $M = 3.90, SD = 0.94$ ), and Urban ( $M = 3.10, SD = 0.96$ ). The strength of the relationship between the rural and urban locations, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was medium (.099).

Because the overall  $F$  test was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means of the three groups. A Tukey procedure was selected for the multiple comparisons because equal variances were assumed. There was a significant difference in the means between the urban and suburban groups ( $p = .028$ ) as well as

the urban and rural groups ( $p = .007$ ). However there was not a significant difference between the suburban and rural groups ( $p=.999$ ). The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences, as well as the means and standard deviations for the three locations are reported in Table 5. Figure 10 shows the distribution of the three locations.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations with 95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences*

Location of legislative district or Institution	N	M	SD	Urban	Suburban
Urban	20	3.10	0.96		
Suburban	21	3.90	0.94	-1.53 to -.072	
Rural	58	3.89	1.00	-1.40 to -.189	-.588 to .604

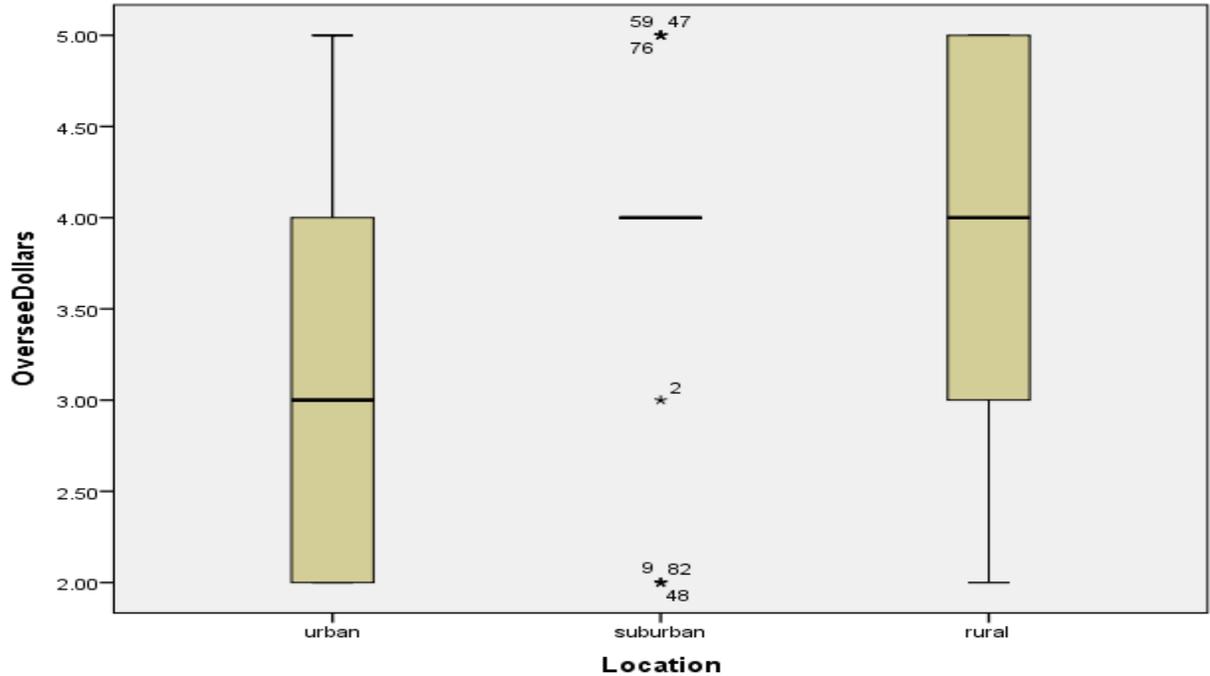


Figure 10. Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Oversee the Expenditure of Public Dollars as Compared by Location

### Research Question 11

RQ11: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican?

H1<sub>10</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board as primarily serving the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving

primarily the interests of individual institutions and the independent variable was the political party identification of participants as Democratic or Republican. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was significant,  $t(97) = 3.34, p = .001$ ; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Democrats ( $M = 4.39, SD = 0.73$ ) tended to agree more that the role of a higher education governing board was to primarily serve the interests of individual institutions while Republicans ( $M = 3.69, SD = 1.00$ ) were significantly less likely to agree with that position. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 0.28 to 1.06. The strength of the relationship between Democrats and Republicans, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was medium (.103). Figure 11 shows the distribution of the two groups.

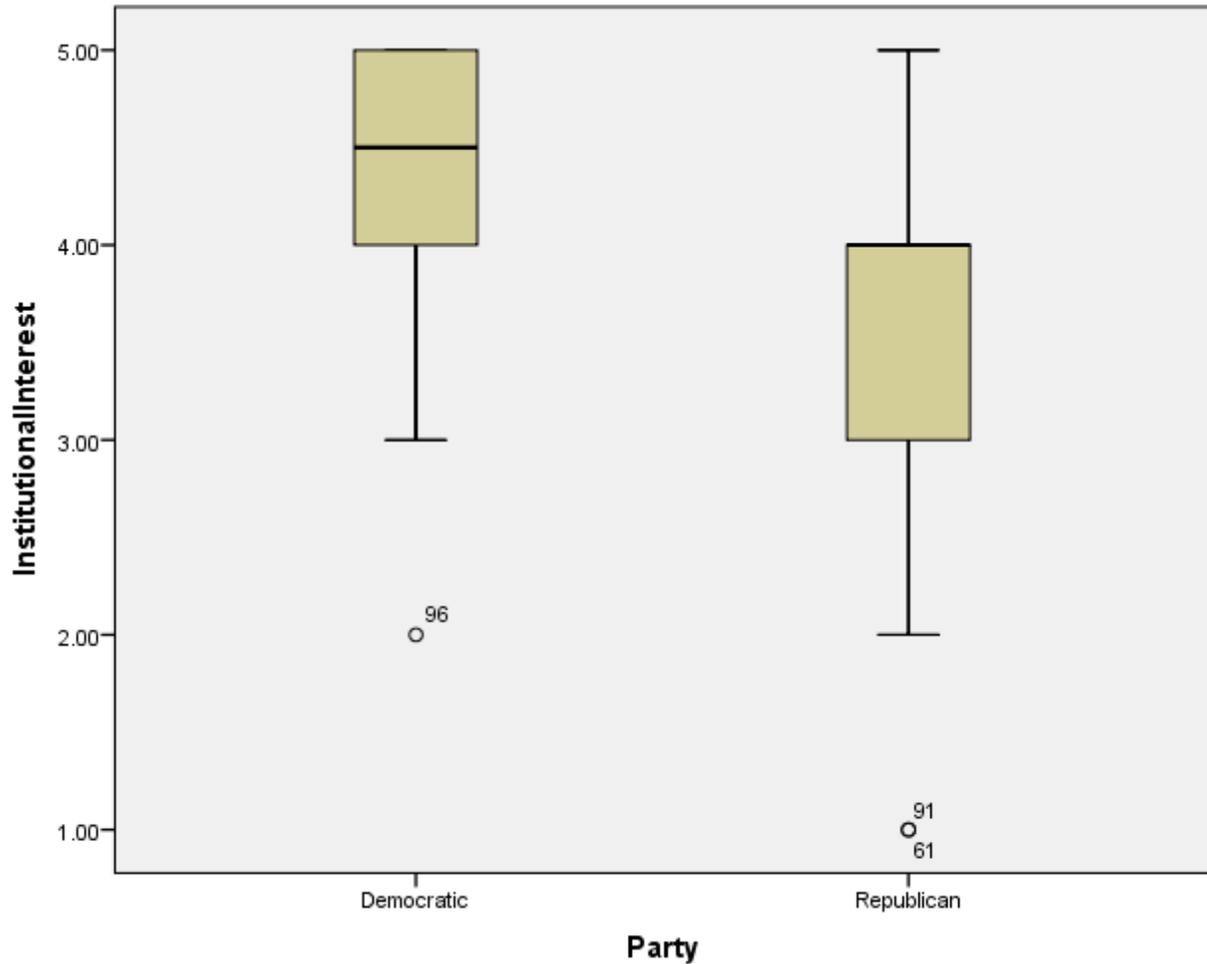


Figure 11. Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving the Interests of Individual Institutions as Compared by Political Party

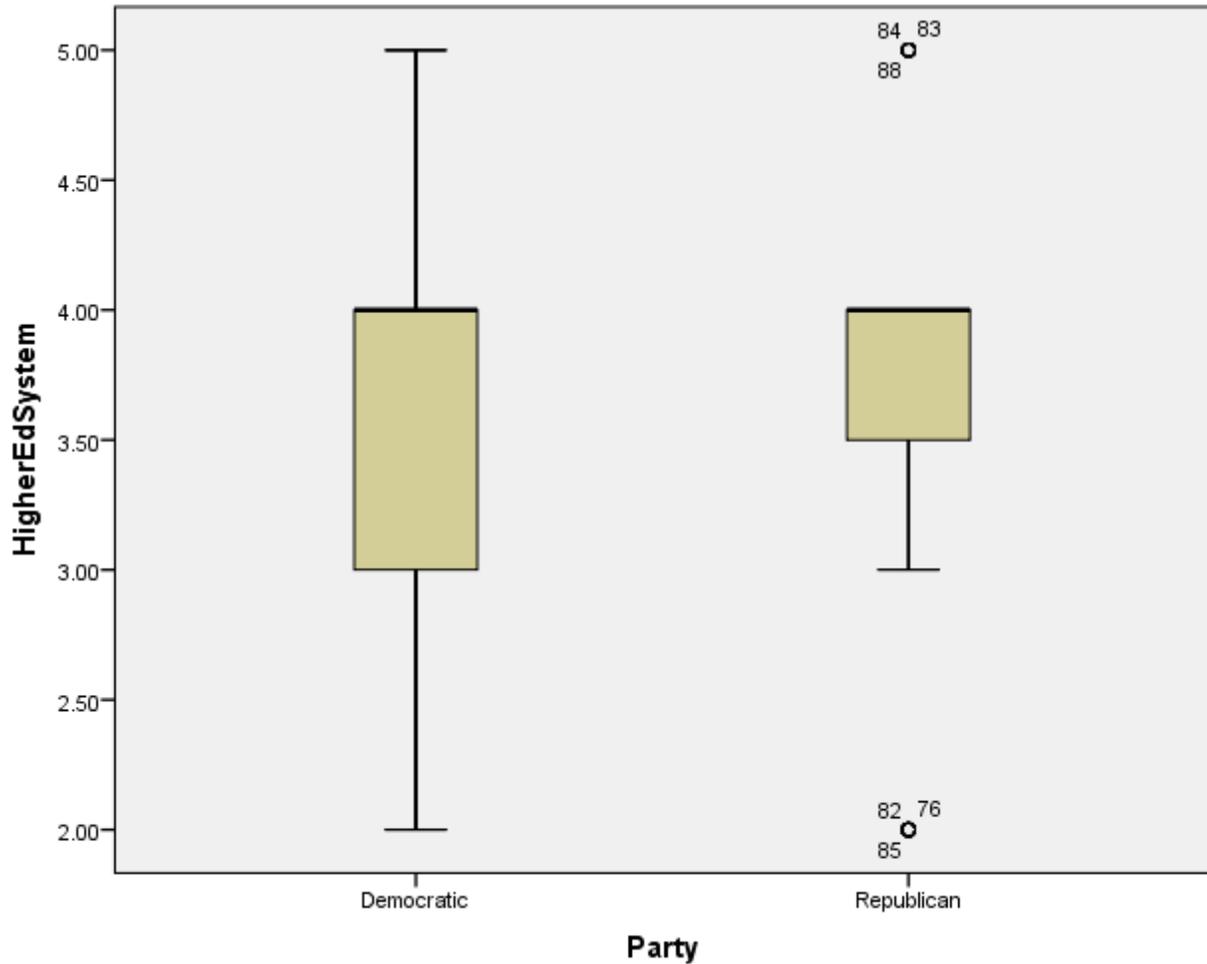
Research Question 12

RQ12: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican?

H12<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board primarily serving the broader interest of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving primarily the interests of the Oklahoma state system of higher education and the independent variable was the political party identification of participants as Democratic or Republican. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = -.687, p = .49$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Although not significant, Republicans ( $M = 3.74, SD = .873$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as primarily serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system slightly higher, but not significantly higher, than Democrats ( $M = 3.60, SD = .994$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was  $-.541$  to  $.293$ . The strength of the relationship between Democrats and Republicans, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.004). Figure 12 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 12.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving the Interests of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education as Compared by Political Party

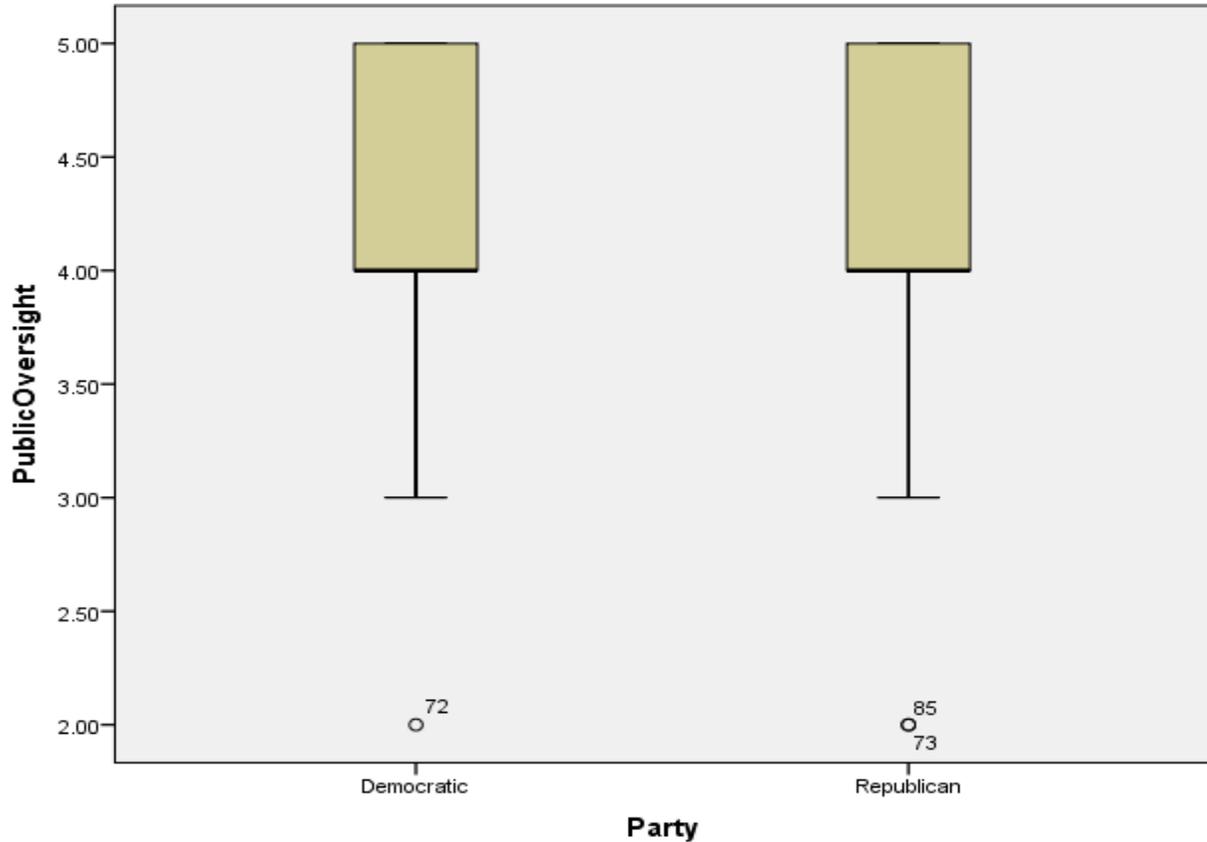
Research Question 13

RQ13: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions system as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican?

H13<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide public oversight of institutions system as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board primarily serving to provide public oversight of institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving to provide public oversight of institutions and the independent variable was the political party identification of participants as Democratic or Republican. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = .417, p = .677$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Although not significant, Democrats ( $M = 4.32, SD = .722$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as serving to provide public oversight of institutions slightly higher, but not significantly higher, than Republicans ( $M = 4.25, SD = .731$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was  $-.254$  to  $.392$ . The strength of the relationship between Democrats and Republicans, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.008). Figure 13 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 13.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Provide Public Oversight of Institutions as Compared by Political Party

#### Research Question 14

RQ14: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican?

H14<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily serve to implement policies and

reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican.

An independent samples  $t$  test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board serving to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature and the independent variable was the political party identification of participants as Democratic or Republican. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = -.705, p = .482$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Although not significant, Republicans ( $M = 3.43, SD = .952$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as serving to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature slightly higher, but not significantly higher, than Democrats ( $M = 3.28, SD = .975$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was  $-.575$  to  $.283$ . The strength of the relationship between Democrats and Republicans, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.005). Figure 14 shows the distribution of the two groups.

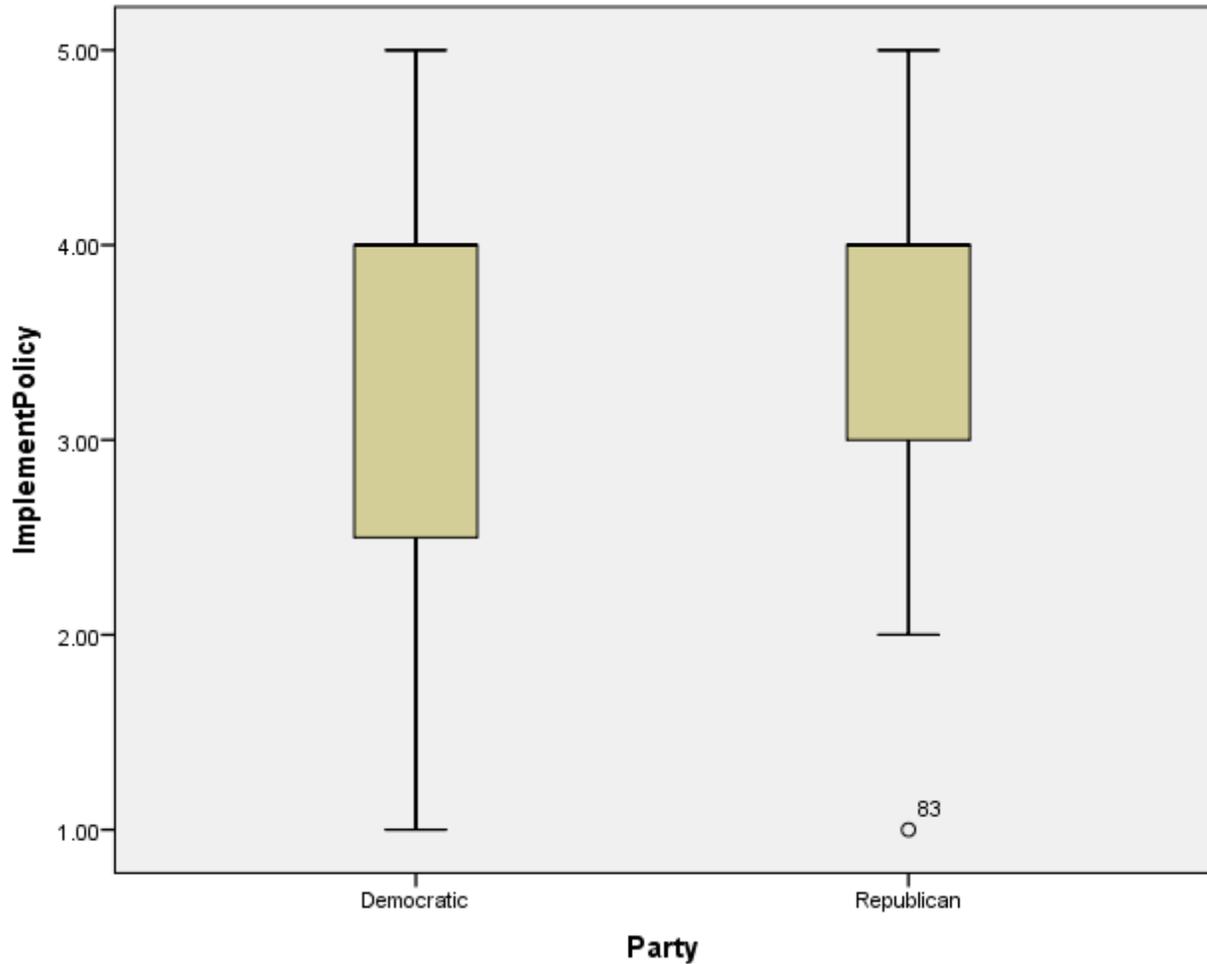


Figure 14. Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Implement Policy as Compared by Political Party

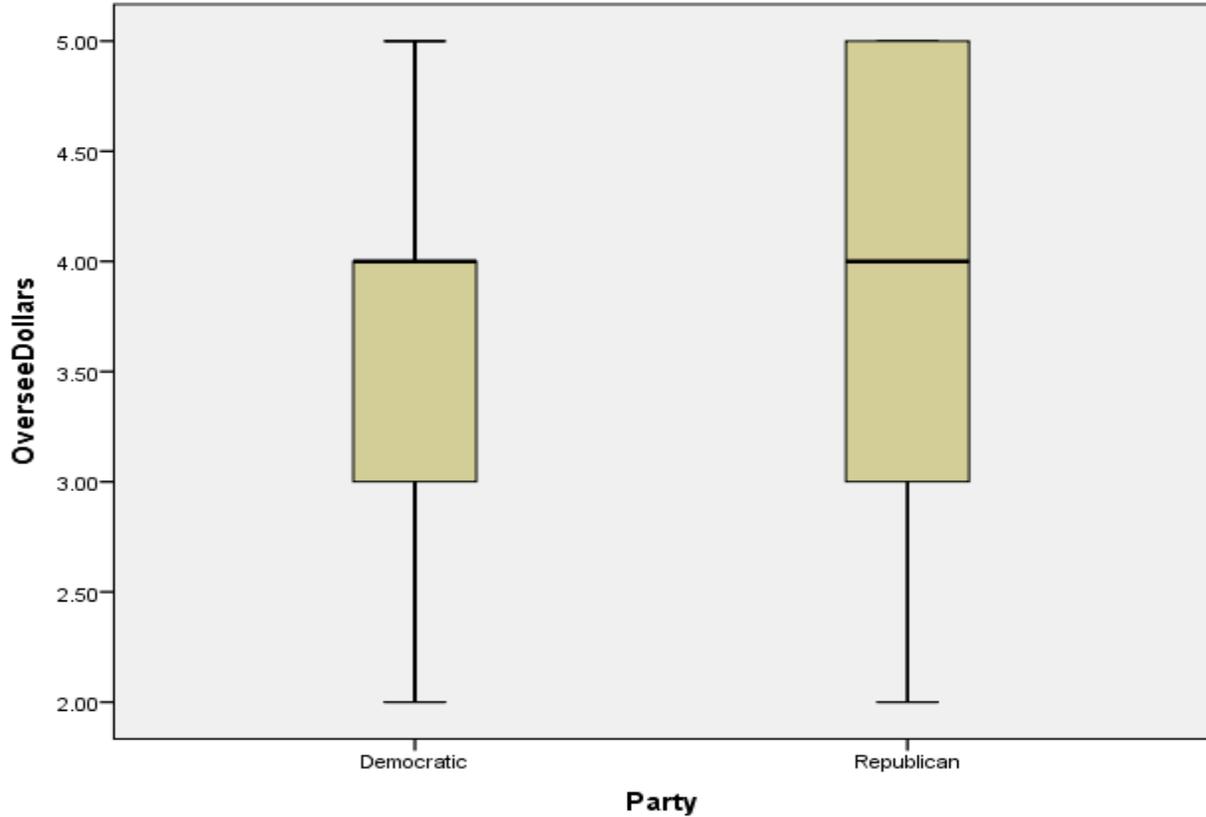
Research Question 15

RQ15: Is there a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican?

H15<sub>0</sub>: There is not a significant difference in the perception of participants about the extent to which governing boards should primarily provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the differences between how participants perceive the primary role of a higher education governing board serving to provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The dependent variable was the primary role of a governing board serving to provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible and the independent variable was the political party identification of participants as Democratic or Republican. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, participants selected their agreement with a statement: 1 representing strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

The test was not significant,  $t(97) = -.356, p = .722$ ; therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Although not significant, Republicans ( $M = 3.76, SD = .944$ ) tended to rank the primary role of governing boards as serving to provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible slightly higher, but not significantly higher, than Democrats ( $M = 3.28, SD = .975$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was  $-.538$  to  $.355$ . The strength of the relationship between Democrats and Republicans, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.001). Figure 15 shows the distribution of the two groups.



*Figure 15.* Distribution of Scores for the Role of a Higher Education Governing Board Primarily Serving to Oversee the Expenditure of Dollars to Keep Spending as Low as Possible as Compared by Political Party

#### Open Ended Responses

Though the study was quantitative in nature participants had the opportunity to comment on and answer in their own words the last three questions of the survey. In order to learn from the research participants, their responses are presented in this section as they appeared in the individual responses.

## Question 11

There were 93 responses to Survey Question 11, “In your opinion what are the top three issues for higher education in Oklahoma?” There were 41 responses from legislators and 52 from governing board members. Of the responses from the legislative group, the following issues were listed more than once. The three top issues were funding and increasing costs to students, each identified by 18 legislators, and career readiness of students, mentioned by 8. Other issues mentioned by legislators are listed here with the number of times each was identified: high administrative costs (5), public perception of higher education(5), access to higher education (5), college readiness of students (4), funding inequity between flagship universities and the rest of higher education (4), marketability of students (4), maintaining high academic standards (4), ideological bias of faculty (4), attracting and retaining qualified faculty (3), lack of legislative oversight (3), lack of legislative budget oversight (2), technological challenges (2), student debt (2), and recruiting quality students (2).

The following was the most expansive response and seems to encapsulate most of the issues raised by legislators.

1– Perception that there is plenty of money in the system, a) much of which is spent on the unnecessary, including fulltime, expensive professors who teach a few hours, whose “research” tends to be work published in each other’s journals, not including those engaged with the business community who develop/deliver economic benefit, b) the high number of scholarships awarded to out of state students who never really intend to stay in [Oklahoma], c) the high paid chancellor and university administrators, especially when one observes the pipeline from politics [former legislators] to the university system, 2 – people think OU/OSU when one thinks of higher ed, forgetting that the regionals [regional universities] are very different (and then questioning why we have all these standalone, independent regionals when we could do lots of administrative consolidation to lower costs, and then 3 – the belief students are not just exposed to lots of different ideas, but that political/social boundaries are excessively challenged (“I’m not paying for my kids to be trained on diversity/inclusion, or to be required to spout back some professor’s political views, or professors teaching theories as facts, etc.-I don’t equate ‘education’ with ‘indoctrination’”).

Members of governing boards responding to Question 11 listed several issues more than once. The top three issues identified were funding, mentioned by 40 respondents, quality of academic programs listed by 11, while 9 identified increasing costs incurred by students. Others issues are as follows accompanied by the number of higher education respondents mentioning the item. Marketability of students after graduation (8), student retention and completion (6), college readiness of students (5), state and federal mandates (4), faculty pay and retention (3), potential consolidation of administrative function across institutions (3), negative attitudes about education by members of the legislature (2), improving student services (2), technological challenges (2), need for more innovative instruction (2), and inequity in funding between differing level of higher education- comprehensive universities, regional universities, and community colleges (2). Two of the more expansive responses from the governing board group are as follows.

1. The defunding of higher ed by the legislature
2. The need to continue tying course offerings to the needs of business and employers
3. Openness to real reform vs. “slash their funding and let them figure it out” approach of the legislature.

[D]ecrease in education funding at all levels of education; decrease in preparedness of high school graduates for higher education; and a lack of emphasis on the importance of education.

### Question 12

There were 86 responses to Survey Question 12: “How has your view of the role of higher education governance changed since you were elected or appointed to your current position?” Of the legislative participants, 39 responded. The most common response was a variation of “has not changed,” with 11 comments. Six mentioned becoming more aware of the challenges facing higher education. Other common issues raised and the number times they

appeared in the responses are as follows: legislators had become more aware of the inability of the state legislature to easily affect higher education policy due to the system's constitutional status (6); expressed concern that the system's community colleges and four year regional universities do not get the attention they deserve from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (3); and some lamented the lack of transparency in the higher education system (3).

Many legislative respondents strayed from the intent of the question – how has their view of the role of higher education governance changed – into voicing general concerns about the system as a whole. However, one response seemed to succinctly sum up similar comments.

Unfortunately, I see regents as mouthpieces and cheerleaders for university administration and not citizens watching out for students and taxpayers.

Of the higher education governing board participants, 47 responded to Question 12. Twelve responded that regents had become more aware, even shocked, at the funding problems and disparities in the system since being appointed. Eight reported they had become more aware of how difficult it was to operate an institution, especially in an environment of declining budgets. Similar to the legislative remarks, another common response was none or very little change in the view of the role of higher education governance, with six regents reporting this thought. One of the comments seemed to address the intent of the question more in depth.

My view of higher education governance has become even more positive. We can truly make an impact with financial knowledge and advice for the college administration.

### Question 13

Legislators provided 30 responses to Survey Question 13, “What concerns not addressed in this questionnaire do you have regarding higher education governance in the state?” The most common was a variation on “none,” with three giving this response. Of pertinent responses three

legislative participants raised the tendency of the public to equate the flagship comprehensive universities with higher education as a whole. Three returned to the theme of the inability of the legislature to affect funding or policy due to structural constraints. Two legislators mentioned the impact of technology and online education as concerns. Two others specifically mentioned the need for diversity in higher education leadership, though without context as to ideological, racial, or gender issues. Two others lamented the lack of a student centered focus of higher education in Oklahoma in substantive responses:

A classic “liberal arts” education no longer seems important. We are graduating too many “ignorant” students. It’s become too much about the fashion of the day. Big bureaucracy, big machine focuses on the institution – not the students.

The power of institutional presidents is far too great. From my days as a student government leader, it always seems as though presidents believed the institutions were created first to serve them, then faculty, and finally, the student population. It should be the reverse, but I have grave doubts as to seeing the order flipped

Among the 36 higher education board member responses to Question 13 the most common were eight participants reporting some version of “no other concerns.” The most common applicable concern was revisiting the issue of funding by seven respondents. Four responses pointed to the need to focus on serving students. Still another common remark was the fear that the shift away from state funding to students would result in a return to a time when only those of means would be able to attain a college degree as identified by two participants. Other concerns raised multiple times included the amount of politics involved in governance, oversight, and funding identified by three respondents. Two of the more expressive responses analyzed the political divide between regents and legislators.

I was under the impression coming in that conservatives believed in local governance. But to see the attempts to micromanage what we can and cannot do as a board of regents by the legislature – from guns on campus to funding to even

my ability to practice my First Amendment Free Speech Rights – makes them no different than their counterparts in Washington D.C.

Why aren't legislators listening to Regents? Most are Republican appointees who share their overall views and are strong community leaders. Legislators continue to claim higher ed is full of waste, yet regents review and vote on the budgets for each school. Regents know far more than legislators about how funds are used but the legislature – as a whole – is arrogant and believes only they know the answers. AND – they more times than not get it wrong.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Included in this chapter are the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research. The purpose of the study was to gain a greater understanding among the various participants as to the factors affecting perceptions of the role higher education governing boards should play in Oklahoma. Data collected from a web-based survey was used to test 15 research questions in this study. The population of this study included 142 Senators and Representatives from the Oklahoma Legislature and 107 members of the Oklahoma higher education governing boards. The governing boards included three system boards (Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, the Regional University System of Oklahoma, and the University of Oklahoma), and one coordinating board (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education) and members of eleven institutional governing boards. The population for the study was 249 participants.

#### Summary of Findings

This study included 15 research questions and null hypotheses. An independent samples *t* test was used to analyze Research Questions 1-5 and 11-15. A one-way ANOVA was used to analyze Research Questions 6-10. The level of significance applied in the statistical analysis was set at the 0.05 level.

From these tests, 5 of 15 research questions had statistically significant findings. Analysis of the data revealed that legislators and members of governing boards in the State of Oklahoma perceive the role of governing boards differently in some key ways. There were

significant differences between the two groups concerning the primary role of governing boards serving the interests of individual institutions and the role of a governing board primarily serving to implement policies as determined by the governor and state legislature. Moreover, there was a significant difference between legislative district type and institutional location defined as rural, suburban, and urban and perceptions of the primary role of governing boards serving the interests of individual institutions. A significant difference was also found between location and whether the primary role of a governing board should be to provide oversight of public dollar expenditures to keep spending as low as possible. There was a significant difference between one's partisan affiliation and the perception of the role of a governing board primarily serving the interests of individual institutions.

Ten research questions related to the role of governing boards were found to have no significance based on the responses. Independent variables in Research Questions 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, and 15 were found to have no impact on how participants perceived the primary role of higher education governing boards as serving the broader interests of the state system of higher education, providing public oversight of institutions, and implementing policies and reforms. Those independent variables included position as a legislator or governing board member, location determined as rural, suburban, and urban, and partisan affiliation as Democratic or Republican.

In addition, the open-ended questions of the survey disclosed further insight to the study. The findings of the study are not generalizable to other populations based on the following limitations:

1. The response rate was approximately 39% of the targeted population for the study.

2. The study only included legislators and higher education governing board members in Oklahoma.
3. This study is limited to the time period (April 27 – July 10, 2017) in which it was administered.

### Research Question 1

For Research Question 1, the principal investigator sought to determine if perceptions of the role of a governing board primarily serving the interests of individual institutions was influenced by one's position as a state legislator or member of a governing board. Previous research suggested that state legislators believed boards had increasingly become advocates for institutions rather than a firm hand of management (Millet, 1982). Members of Oklahoma governing boards tended to be significantly more likely to agree that the role of a higher education governing board was to serve the interests of individual institutions while legislators were less likely to agree with that position.

### Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked if there was a significant difference in perception of participants about the primary role of governing boards serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma state system of higher education. While not significant, it was observed that members of governing boards tended to rank this role slightly higher than members of the legislature. One possible explanation for the higher ranking from governing board members may be their alignment with the interests of higher education in general.

### Research Question 3

The third research question sought to establish if a significant difference existed between how members of governing boards and state legislators in Oklahoma perceived the role of governing boards as primarily providing public oversight of institutions. No significant differences were observed. Members of governing boards and state legislators tended to perceive the role in similar ways.

### Research Question 4

Significant findings were found in testing whether members of governing boards and legislators differed on the role of governing boards primarily serving to implement policies as determined by the governor and state legislature. Results indicated legislators were significantly more likely to agree the role of a governing board is to implement policy than were board members. This is perhaps not surprising given the relative position of legislators in state government vis a vis members of governing boards. Some research suggests legislators increasingly expect greater accountability in state government (McLendon et al., 2006; McGuinness, 2016).

### Research Question 5

No significant findings were found in the difference in perceptions of participants about the primary role of governing boards primarily serving to provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible. While not significant, legislators tended to rank the primary role of governing boards serving to keep expenditures as low as possible slightly higher than board members. Given that legislators are constitutionally responsible for the overall state budget this outcome is to be expected. Moreover, the decline in

state support for higher education nationwide, and in Oklahoma in particular, since the 2008 financial crisis makes it more likely that legislators would see this as a priority (Mitchell et al., 2016; Seltzer, 2017).

#### Research Question 6

A one-way ANOVA test found there was a significant difference between perceptions about the role of higher education governing boards primarily serving the interests of individual institutions of legislators and members of governing boards based on location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. Legislators and members of governing board representing districts and institutions identified as suburban were significantly more likely to agree that the primary role of a governing board is to serve the interests of individual institutions. There was no significant difference between the suburban and urban groups or between urban and rural.

The result is somewhat surprising due to the economic impact higher education institutions have on smaller rural communities when compared to suburban or urban areas. Legislators and board members from rural areas would presumably closely guard the prerogatives of those local institutions. However the size of the population at 39% might be a factor in this result.

#### Research Question 7

Research Question 7 tested whether there was a difference in participant perception about the role of governing boards primarily serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as categorized by location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The result of was not significant.

### Research Question 8

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test if there was a difference in participant perception about governing boards primarily serving to provide public oversight of institutions as compared by location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The test was not significant.

### Research Question 9

Research Question 9 tested whether participants differed significantly in perceptions of governing boards primarily serving to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature as compared by location identified as rural, urban or suburban. A one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences.

### Research Question 10

A one-way ANOVA was used to test whether participants differed in perceptions of governing boards serving primarily to oversee the expenditure of public dollars to keep spending as low as possible as categorized by location identified as rural, urban, or suburban. The result was significant. There was a significant difference between the urban and rural groups as well as between the urban and suburban groups. Urban participants were significantly more likely than their suburban and rural counterparts to agree that the role of a governing board is to keep public spending as low as possible. This result is supported by some of the research indicating state government budget strains and calls for accountability affecting higher education policy (McLendon et al., 2006; McGuinness, 2016).

### Research Question 11

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to test whether there was significant difference between participant perceptions about governing boards primarily serving the interests of individual institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The results revealed there was a significant difference between groups. Democrats were significantly more likely to agree than Republicans that the role of a governing board is primarily to serve the interests of individual institutions.

Partisan differences about various higher education issues have been examined in the literature. Democrats are more likely to support higher education generally (Dar & Dong-Wook, 2014; McLendon et al., 2009; Tandberg, 2013). Democrats are also more likely than Republicans to see barriers to access to higher education for poorer people (Doyle, 2007; Yowell, 2012). The findings of this research question help broaden the understanding of partisan differences about higher education.

### Research Question 12

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to test whether there were significant differences in participant perceptions about governing boards primarily serving the broader interests of the Oklahoma state higher education system as compared by political party identification as Democratic or Republican. The test was not significant, though Republicans tended to rank the broader role slightly higher than Democrats.

### Research Question 13

Research Question 13 tested if there was a significant difference in the perception of participants about governing boards primarily serving to provide public oversight of institutions as compared by political party identification as Democratic and Republican. An independent samples *t* test revealed no significant difference. Though not statistically significant, Democrats ranked the role of providing public oversight slightly higher than Republicans.

### Research Question 14

An independent samples *t* test was used to determine if participants perceived the role of higher education boards serving primarily to implement policy and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislator differently as compared by party identification as Democratic or Republican. The test was not significant. However, while not significant, Republicans tended to rank the role of policy implementation slightly higher than Democrats.

### Research Question 15

Research Question 15 tested whether Democratic and Republican participants differed significantly in their perceptions of the primary role of governing boards serving to provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars in order to keep spending as low as possible. An independent samples *t* test revealed there was no significant difference. While not significant, Republicans tended to rank the role of governing boards serving to keep public spending as low as possible slightly higher than Democrats.

### Recommendations for Further Research

This quantitative study was conducted within the limitations outlined in Chapter 1.

Several recommendations for expanding this study include, but are not limited to:

1. A study using a mixed method design, both quantitative and qualitative methods, may reveal greater understanding of the factors contributing to perceptions of the role higher education governing boards should play in a state higher education system.
2. Reproducing this study in other states as there is a wide range of governing systems nationwide.
3. This study focused on perceptions of members of 15 public governing boards and legislators in Oklahoma. Additional research is needed on the perceptions of chief administrators at individual institutions in order to create a more complete representation about the role of governing boards in Oklahoma.
4. A study should be conducted on the organizational structure of higher education in Oklahoma. Quite a few comments from the open-ended responses were made suggesting the state system was in need of overhaul.
5. Comments provided from the open-ended responses could provide a basis for future research questions. Specifically, how to improve and stabilize state funding for higher education in Oklahoma.
6. A qualitative study of Oklahoma higher education leaders – the Chancellor of Higher Education, chairs of governing boards, college and university presidents – about the role governing boards should play.

## Conclusions

Rufus Miles, Assistant Secretary for the U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare under presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, once famously suggested what has become known as Miles Law concerning matters of politics and policy: “Where one stands on an issue often depends on where one sits” (Miles, 1978). Differences revealed in this study regarding perceptions of the role governing boards should play in the state system between state legislators and members of public higher education governing boards suggested this is certainly the case in Oklahoma. Differences between legislators and governing board members concerning regents promoting institutional interests as a primary role have been shown to be significant, reflecting the conclusions suggested in other studies. Increasing partisan differences as well as differences between populations in diverse geographic sections of the state – always an issue in Oklahoma politics – about higher education governance and policy reflect similar conflicts manifesting across the United States as presented in the literature on politics and higher education.

The implications for Oklahoma higher education of the differences between legislators and governing board members are profound. Legislators indicated increasing concerns about the inability of the legislature to affect the higher education budget due to the constitutional status conferred on the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education as discussed in Chapter 2 (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2016). The political forces at play in 1941 which caused reformers to press for constitutional status – political interference in college and university operations, ideological conflicts between elements of state government and higher education actors, and the desire to use state funding to leverage political ends – are still present in the Oklahoma system.

As reported in the open ended responses, funding is a major concern of legislators and members of governing boards. Members of various boards are greatly concerned about the sustainability of their institutions in the face of deeper cuts and the concomitant tuition increases and burden shifting to students and families. As the issue of funding of all state services becomes more pressing, the conflict between higher education and state government is likely to become more intense. Without policymakers reaching a consensus concerning the role of higher education – and of governing boards – in Oklahoma stakeholders are likely to continue to see declining budgets, underserved students, and public dissatisfaction with higher education policy outcomes.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Survey Instrument

1. Clicking the AGREE button below indicates:
  - I have read the above information
  - I agree to volunteer
  - I am at least 18 years of age
  
2. I hold a position in:
  - Higher Education
  - Oklahoma Legislature
  
3. What is your political party identification?
  - Democrat
  - Republican
  - Independent
  
4. The legislative district or higher education institution I serve is best described as:
  - Urban
  - Suburban
  - Rural
  
5. If a member of a governing board, the governing board on which I serve could best be described as
  - Coordinating
  - System
  - Institutional

When thinking about the role of governing boards in the Oklahoma system of higher education, please indicate which of the following most accurately reflects your thoughts using the five point scale: 1 strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, 5 strongly disagree

6. The role of a governing board is primarily to serve the interests of individual institutions  
Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7. The primary role of a governing board is to serve the broader interests of the Oklahoma system of higher education.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. The role of a governing board is primarily to provide public oversight of institutions.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9. The primary role of a governing board is to implement policies and reforms as determined by the governor and state legislature.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. The role of a governing board is primarily to provide oversight of the expenditure of public dollars to keep spending as low as possible.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

11. In your opinion, what are the top three issues for higher education in Oklahoma?

12. How has your view of the role of higher education governance changed since you were elected or appointed to your current position?

13. What concerns not addressed in this questionnaire do you have regarding higher education governance in the state of Oklahoma?

## APPENDIX B

### Initial Invitation to Participate Emails

Regent-

The following is a link to a survey about perceptions of legislators and regents concerning the role of public higher education governing boards in the Oklahoma system of higher education. The survey is in conjunction with my doctoral dissertation "At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma" through the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

Your participation is crucial to my study. A high response rate is critical for the validity of the results. It will provide greater insight into factors influencing higher education policy and governance.

It should take approximately ten minutes to complete. The survey will be active for approximately one month. The population for this study includes Oklahoma legislators and members of Oklahoma higher education governing boards. Participants are asked demographic questions and ones focusing on individual perceptions of the role governing boards should play in the Oklahoma system. There are also open-ended questions which will allow for additional insight to the study.

Your response is completely anonymous and confidential. More information is available at the beginning of the survey.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

*Kirk A. Rodden*

**Professor and Social Science Chair**  
**Murray State College/Ardmore, OK Campus**  
**Office [580-220-2860](tel:580-220-2860) Cell [580-257-0278](tel:580-257-0278)**

**Mission Statement: "Murray State College Provides Opportunities for Student Learning, Personal Growth, Professional Success, and Community Enhancement"**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

Representative-

The following is a link to a survey about perceptions of legislators and regents concerning the role of public higher education governing boards in the Oklahoma system of higher education. The survey is in conjunction with my doctoral dissertation "At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma" through the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University.

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<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

Senator-

The following is a link to a survey about perceptions of legislators and regents concerning the role of public higher education governing boards in the Oklahoma system of higher education. The survey is in conjunction with my doctoral dissertation "At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma" through the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University.

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Your response is completely anonymous and confidential. More information is available at the beginning of the survey.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

*Kirk A. Rodden*

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<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

## APPENDIX C

### Legislative Support Emails

Dear Colleague:

Subject: “At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma”

Mindful of the great demands on your time, I would appreciate your participation in a survey that was emailed to you by Kirk A. Rodden, a Murray State College professor, doctoral student at East Tennessee State University, and a constituent from Ardmore. Recognizing that new knowledge, principles and techniques can be effectively developed through graduate research, I support the study in the belief that in the long run this research might lead to significant improvements in our legislative relations with the public colleges and universities in our state.

The online questionnaire is provided through <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>. While I have read it and believe the questions to be pertinent, in the final analysis, the content must remain the responsibility of Professor Rodden and not me or any member of the House of Representatives.

Please be assured that responses will be held in the strictest confidence. No identifiable information is to be retained for this study. Due to the sensitive nature of the results, a survey instrument that does not specifically identify the participants will be used. If the results of this study are to be written for publication, no identifying information will be used. With this in mind, I hope you will take the time to contribute to the study by completing the questionnaire and submitting it promptly.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Best regards,  
Pat Ownbey  
Oklahoma House of Representatives  
District 49

Dear Colleague:

Subject: At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma

Mindful of the great demands on your time, I would appreciate your participation in a survey that was emailed to you by Kirk A. Rodden, a Murray State College professor, doctoral student at East Tennessee State University, and a constituent from Ardmore. Recognizing that new knowledge, principles and techniques can be effectively developed through graduate research, I support the study in the belief that in the long run this research might lead to significant improvements in our legislative relations with the public colleges and universities in our state.

The online questionnaire is provided through <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodde-m-sc-survey>. While I have read it and believe the questions to be pertinent, in the final analysis, the content must remain the responsibility of Professor Rodden and not me or any member of the Senate.

Please be assured that responses will be held in the strictest confidence. No identifiable information is to be retained for this study. Due to the sensitive nature of the results, a survey instrument that does not specifically identify the participants will be used. If the results of this study are to be written for publication, no identifying information will be used.

With this in mind, I hope you will take the time to contribute to the study by completing the questionnaire and submitting it promptly.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Best regards,  
Frank Simpson  
Oklahoma Senate  
District 20

## APPENDIX D

### Follow-up Email Sent to Participants

Representative,

Regarding the research study “At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma.”

I would first like to thank those of you who have already participated in this study. Your participation in the survey is appreciated and your input is greatly valued.

I would also like to again extend the opportunity to those who have not yet participated in this study to do so using the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

This quantitative study is part of my doctoral dissertation through East Tennessee State University. You have been asked to participate in this research based on your leadership position and knowledge in the area of Oklahoma public policy.

It should take ten minutes or less to participate. Your response is completely anonymous and confidential. It will provide greater insight into factors influencing higher education policy and governance.

I value your input and thank you in advance for your time in completing the survey.

Now that the legislative session has ended if you could find a few minutes to complete the survey I would greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,

*Kirk A. Rodden*

**Professor and Social Science Chair  
Murray State College/Ardmore, OK Campus  
Office [580-220-2860](tel:580-220-2860) Cell [580-257-0278](tel:580-257-0278)**

Senator,

Regarding the research study “At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma.”

I would first like to thank those of you who have already participated in this study. Your participation in the survey is appreciated and your input is greatly valued.

I would also like to again extend the opportunity to those who have not yet participated in this study to do so using the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

This quantitative study is part of my doctoral dissertation through East Tennessee State University. You have been asked to participate in this research based on your leadership position and knowledge in the area of Oklahoma public policy.

It should take ten minutes or less to participate. Your response is completely anonymous and confidential. It will provide greater insight into factors influencing higher education policy and governance.

I value your input and thank you in advance for your time in completing the survey.

Now that the legislative session has ended if you could find a few minutes to complete the survey I would greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,

*Kirk A. Rodden*

**Professor and Social Science Chair  
Murray State College/Ardmore, OK Campus  
Office [580-220-2860](tel:580-220-2860) Cell [580-257-0278](tel:580-257-0278)**

Dear Regent,

Regarding the East Tennessee State University study “At the Intersection of Politics and Higher Education: Policy, Power, and Governing Boards in Oklahoma.”

I would first like to thank those of you who have already participated in this study. Your participation in the survey is appreciated and your input is greatly valued.

I would like to extend the opportunity to those who have not yet participated in this study to do so using the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

This quantitative study is related to my doctoral dissertation. You have been asked to participate in this research based on your leadership position and knowledge in the area of Oklahoma higher education public policy.

Your response to the survey will provide greater insight into factors influencing higher education policy.

I value your input and thank you in advance for your time in completing the survey.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rodden-msc-survey>

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VITA

KIRK A. RODDEN

- Personal Data:           Date of Birth: November 1, 1966
- Place of Birth: McAlester, Oklahoma
- Education:                Kingston High School, Kingston, Oklahoma
- Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma; 1984-1986
- Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
  Political Science, BA, 1988
- Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma;  
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  Department, 1988-1990
- Instructor, Murray State College, Tishomingo, Oklahoma; 1990-  
  1994
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- Professor, Murray State College, Tishomingo, Oklahoma; 2014-  
  2017
- Publications:             Rodden, K. (1995, October) [Review of the book *The Lost Promise  
  of Progressivism*, by Eldon Eisenach]. *Journal of  
  Oklahoma Politics*, Fall 1995.