WHERE DID ALL MY MONEY GO? AN ANALYSIS OF FUNDING MECHANISMS WITHIN STUDENT ALLOCATION BOARDS IN PUBLIC OHIO UNIVERSITIES

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To my family, my friends, and my amazing advisors and mentors.
ABSTRACT

Throughout the United States, higher education funding is being cut across state governments. In Ohio, specifically, research estimates that state fiscal support will reach zero by 2039, considering the state’s current spending habits (Mortensen, 2012). This has caused public universities and colleges to feel the burden of budget cuts. However, student involvement is still an important aspect of the traditional college experience, so it is important to find ways in which student organizations can adjust to budget cuts. This research outlines student allocation boards’ budget structures as well as outlines the different ways in which public Ohio universities allocate the student activity fee to students.
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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

In the United States, higher education is becoming increasingly more popular as students around the country are enrolling in colleges or universities at record numbers (NCES, n.d.). In fact, higher education enrollment rates have increased approximately 134% since 1970 (NCES, n.d.). Simultaneously, state budgets have decreased per student, especially in the state of Ohio. For example, the State Share of Instruction per student has gone from increasing at an average of .74% in the 2006-2007 fiscal year, to decreasing at an average of 1.32 percent in the 2018 fiscal year (Ohio Department of Higher Education, 2013) (Ohio Depatment of Higher Education, 2018). This inverse relationship has caused more students and their families to fund higher education either out-of-pocket or through student loans. Research shows that state college and university tuition and fee rates have increased 230% since 1980 (Mortensen, 2012).

With budgets being tight for institutions of higher education, students are still eager to make the most out of their college experiences. Many schools use their vast array of student organizations as a selling point for students to enroll. If a prospective student were to attend an information session for a prospective college or university, they would likely hear a recruiter say something along the lines of “if you can think of it, there’s a student organization for it!” But where do these student organizations get their funding?

A majority of colleges and universities have a student government that has a budget to appropriate funds to student organizations for programming. In fact, approximately 80% of student governments in the United States are given this power (Miller and Nadler, 2006). This study finds that amount of money that each school allocates to their student government can vary greatly depending on size and the school’s student affairs budget.
When analyzing the literature to preface this research, this study mainly focused on higher education funding and the diversification of the funding structure. The main topics that this research study focused on when analyzing prior studies were college affordability in general, federal spending on higher education, and state spending on higher education. Finally, the limited research that exists on student organizations and student governments was analyzed. These topics provide background information to better understand the results of the research itself.

As research proves, even while taking inflation into account, the cost of higher education has risen tremendously over recent years and decades (Institute for College Access and Success, 2006). As discussed in the literature review section of this paper, it has been reported that the price of higher education has risen nearly 91 percent since the early 2000s (Institute for College Access and Success, 2006). However, even with the cost of higher education rising, enrollment rates are also increasing (NCES, n.d.). This seems to suggest that people still value higher education and are willing to pay the premium prices to receive a quality education.

Moreover, there are many different types of higher education institutions that individuals can choose from (Askin, 2007). Not only are there traditional, public and private schools but there are also community colleges and online colleges that are offering degree-granting programs to potential students. The rising cost of traditional higher education programs has led to growth in the cheaper community college or online options without causing private and public schools to suffer with any sort of extremity as higher education enrollment rates are rising, in general (Askin, 2007).
Literature on federal spending was studied to analyze the effects on students and the higher education funding structure. Whereas students understand that the federal government and the state government provide substantial amounts of funding to higher education, it is important to note the distinction between the two entities (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Federal spending almost exclusively is allocated directly to students in order to pay for subsidized and unsubsidized loans or other types of financial aid (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Typically, federal dollars do not go toward research or operational efforts at specific institutions (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). For the purposes of this research, this paper will only address federal spending as a loan or grant program for students.

State spending, on the other hand, is a major operational revenue source for higher education institutions (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Every year, each state allocates a portion of their budgets to the public schools within their jurisdiction. However, due to budget restrictions, state governments have started to reevaluate their funding models to more effectively distribute their funds (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016). As seen in Illinois, the state tested a Performance Funding structure that evaluated state schools on their quality of public higher education (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016). Unfortunately, that method was not efficient enough to be executed in a timely manner, so it was dismissed. However, their effort to evaluate schools based on performance is not an obsolete idea. Several states have begun to test ways that they can appropriately evaluate schools in order to better allocate their funds (Blankenberger and Phillips, 201).

The final area that was examined prior to conducting our study was student activities and student government. It is essential to understand the purpose and
functionalities of these organizations in order to understand the student experience at higher education institutions. Many organizations exist on campus so students can connect with other students over common interests. Students within student organizations have some sort of similar interest or background that they want to express through their student lives. Student government assists in funding these organizations and ensure that they are able to put on events for the rest of their peers to enjoy, among their other governance and representative duties. As the aforementioned budget cuts and increased costs of higher education exist, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to fund student organizations because there is little money to give out. This paper seeks to identify the different models that are currently utilized within public Ohio schools in order to better understand student organization funding.

This research project focuses on student government appropriations at the thirteen public institutions of higher education in Ohio. Through a Qualtrics survey distributed to all thirteen student governments, their respective advisors, and several student organizations, data was collected to evaluate the operations of student allocation boards from the perspectives of the three groups. The participants were asked about topics such as the operations of their funding model, but they were also asked about the shared governance structure within their university and budgetary topics.

Through the research, we were able to understand the budgetary limitations that each school is going through and we broke down the budget to investigate how much money students are hypothetically receiving through student-led allocation procedures. We found that both advisors and student government representatives are feeling dissatisfied with the amount of money that their group receives. Additionally, through the data, we
identified four funding models that each school could be utilizing and ran statistics to assess their performance.

The research discussed within this thesis will not be able to solve the budget crisis in higher education, nor definitively find the best way to allocate money to every student. However, the research discussed within this thesis can offer insight to higher education professionals and students within student government, so they can better evaluate their spending practices. As a student government representative, myself, it is important to talk about ways in which we can be better for students, our constituents. We were either elected or appointed to serve these students and it should be our mission to provide them with the best processes and services.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before research can determine the most efficient way to distribute funds to students, it is essential to first understand how higher education funding works. The stakeholders affected by higher education financing can be lumped into two categories: students, including their families, and government entities. Throughout this section, we will discuss the involvement of these stakeholders and address their concerns in relation to relative literature.

This literature review will introduce background information about college affordability, federal spending, state spending and tuition and fees. Also, to understand student organizations and student government appropriations, this literature review will introduce literature studying those topics. By analyzing the current state of the higher education funding system and the internal financing within higher education institutions, we are able to better understand student organization funding and the support that they require.

2.1 College Affordability

Families who are sending their children to colleges and universities quickly realize that this will be a considerable investment. Research shows that the national average cost for students to attend a higher education institution for one year was $19,488 in the 2016-2017 school year (NCES, n.d.), which is a 90.8 percent increase from the 2000-2001 school year (Institute for College Access & Success, 2015). This cost varies across states, though, with New Hampshire students paying an average of $26,968 and Utah students paying $13,709 per year (NCES, n.d.). These statistics are only measuring students who are attending public schools in the states where they are residents. The cost of private colleges
and universities tend to be more expensive as they do not receive state supplements for the students that attend their institutions.

It is essential to understand that there are different types of higher education that students can choose from. Additionally, it is essential to understand the differences in funding structures. To put it simply, public schools receive their funding primarily from government funding sources as well as from tuition and fees from students and their families whereas private schools primarily get their funds from tuition and fees from their families and donors as well as private donors like alumni or individuals (Epple et al., 2016). As a result, private schools do not have to abide by strict regulations like public schools do since they are not receiving state supplements (Epple et al., 2016). Thus, private schools are able to more easily to change their bylaws, school policies, and—most importantly for this research—their tuition rates (Epple et al., 2016). This is significant because it means that private schools typically have higher tuition rates causing their students to be from wealthier backgrounds (Epple et al., 2016).

In a research study done by Epple, Romano, Sarpa, and Sieg, they found that a student is more likely to consider private schooling if their family’s income level is in the upper-middle or upper class income brackets (Epple et al., 2016). Consequentially, the research that Epple, Romano, Sarpa, and Sieg conducted suggests that as public schools lose funding, research suggests that they will start to act more similarly to private schools as far as funding sources are concerned (Epple et al., 2016). If this research conclusion proves to be true, the higher education sector may see more normalized prices in tuition across public and private schools (Epple et al., 2016). This would ultimately cause
the cost of public higher education to increase even more than it already is (Epple et al., 2016)

Aside from the more expensive public and private schools, students also have the option of attending a community college. Students who prefer to attend a community college are attracted to its proximity to the students’ home and its cheaper credit hour prices (Askin, 2007). One of the key advantages for community colleges and their respective appropriations is that they have an easier time obtaining funding from not only state government, but also usually have good working relationships with local governments (Askin, 2007). Since community colleges typically educate local students, the local governments are more willing to help them because the community colleges keep people—and business—within the community (Askin, 2007). Public colleges and universities do not see the same return from state governments because many students who attend the schools are from other areas within the state or even from other states (Askin, 2007).

Some state governments are trying to “equalize funding” for community colleges which has caused an increase in state appropriations throughout recent years (Askin, 2007). This is an effort to help the students who cannot afford to go away to college but are still seeking a college degree (Askin, 2007). Community colleges make college more affordable for students who may choose to not take the most typical route for college since they are able to avoid room and board costs and they are able to enroll in credit hours as they please (Askin, 2007).

There is a multitude of reasons why the cost of higher education is rising. A research study entitled “Funding US Higher Education: Policy Making Theories Reviewed” identifies three issues that currently affect higher education (Cooley, 2015). The three
issues are affordability, accountability, and access. The author identifies these issues as the baseline for higher education policy as a whole, stating, “[t]he issue of higher education funding can be attributed to all three of these challenges” (Cooley, 2015, p. 2). Additionally, Cooley notes that the combination of all three issues could be the root of all higher education policy (Cooley, 2015). Thus, affordability, accountability, and access can be used to generalize any higher education problem that funding proposes. In relation to Cooley’s research, affordability, accountability, and access can help diagnose issues regarding college affordability for most students (Cooley, 2015).

Aside from the three main challenges and issues that are present within higher education funding, there are external factors that cause higher education prices to rise. For example, taxpayers are less willing to pay for higher education than they are to pay for issues that they feel directly affect them, like healthcare or defense funding (Fethke and Policiano, 2013). In other words, more United States voters want to see politicians increase funding for healthcare or defense funding, so elected officials may feel that they have an obligation to fund healthcare or defense funding instead of higher education (Fethke and Policiano, 2013). The lack of funding for higher education has prompted higher education administrators to lobby on behalf of their institutions to maintain the funding that they have been provided in the past (Fethke and Policano, 2013).

However, Fethke and Policiano (2013) also propose solutions other than obtaining more funding from their state government. They discuss higher education administrators looking into the average amounts of government funding and adjust budgets from there instead of looking for funding based off of individual need for their institutions. Fethke and Policiano call this type of strategy “positioning strategies” (Fethke & Policano, 2013).
Finally and possibly most importantly, Fethke and Policano address the fact that higher education will likely evolve into more of an “industry” with colleges and universities looking more like corporations, regardless of public or private status (Fethke & Policano, 2013). This will be further explained in future sections.

Even though funding for higher education is being cut across the board, that does not mean that the value of higher education is diminishing. In fact, in the article titled “What is the Greater Good? The Discourse on Public and Private Roles of Higher Education in the New Economy,” authors, Hensley, Galilee-Belfer, and Lee (2013) conclude that higher education is ultimately beneficial for not only students, but also for society as a whole. Throughout the paper, the research focuses on the questions, “Who is ultimately benefitting from college graduates?” and “Are the college graduates, themselves, the only people who benefit from their degrees or does society actually benefit as a result of having more educated individuals in the workforce?” (Hensley et al., 2013). They find that despite rising costs, people are still investing in higher education with enrollment rates rising as funding rises (Hensley et al., 2013).

Finally, in regard to college affordability, it is important to differentiate federal and state spending for higher education. Federal spending on higher education focuses on individual spending whereas state spending focuses on funding for research and institutions (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). College affordability is more easily achieved for individual students through federal spending than it is through state spending because the federal government provides loans and grants directly to students. However, in the long run, the federal government does little to provide for higher education institutions (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Figure 1 further explains the differentiation between state
and federal spending. As seen in the graph, significantly more spending goes toward state appropriations while federal spending goes toward Pell grants and loans (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015).

Figure 1: The Balance Between Federal and State Higher Education Spending Shifted Significantly during and After the Great Recession

2.2 State Spending

Throughout the nation, state fiscal support for higher education is dropping at an accelerating rate (Mortensen, 2012). In fact, average state fiscal support for higher education will gradually reach zero by 2059 and consequently, public higher education is gradually being privatized (Mortensen, 2012). Based on the rate of retrenchment since fiscal year 2000, Ohio’s state fiscal support will reach zero by 2039 (Mortenson, 2012).

The same study by Mortenson also found that tuition and fee charges have increased by 247 percent at state flagship universities and by 230 percent at state universities and colleges (Mortenson, 2012). Furthermore, research shows that appropriations per full-time students were eight percent lower in 2014-2015 than they were a decade earlier, and 11% lower than they were 30 years earlier (Trends in College Pricing, 2016). This is significant
because without the necessary support from the state government, student resources will be cut. Budget cuts typically can cause a decrease in student affairs budgets, faculty salaries, and research endeavors (Trends in College Pricing, 2016).

Some scholars have proposed different funding methods to adjust to decreased state spending. For one, a study called “Performance Funding in Illinois Higher Education” introduces “performance funding” as a method used in Illinois to evaluate budgets and determine which schools receive the most funding (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016). A key advantage to this funding method is that it is supposed to place a focus on academics and it presents an increasingly competitive environment, which could work in students’ favors because they are hypothetically getting the best education from their schools (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016).

On the other hand, a disadvantage to performance funding is that schools may be more focused on statistics and obtaining funding than they are on truly educating students (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016). This kind of competition among schools would not work in student’s favors because the schools would seem to operate as a business rather than an academic institution, or a public service (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016). The study found that performance funding is ultimately a good idea, in theory, but does not live up to the effectiveness that people were hoping for (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016).

Blankenberger and Phillips found that performance funding could not ultimately work in practice because it is not efficient enough. “Budgeting uncertainties and the added pressure that appropriations would not be delivered in a timely fashion set the stage for heightened concerns among institutional and policy leaders should performance funding be implemented in a poorly thought out or punitive fashion” (Blankenberger and Phillips,
2016, p 25). In a perfect and more efficient world, performance funding might be a viable solution to appropriations of state funds but in this world, it is too complicated of a process to execute (Blankenberger and Phillips, 2016).

Similarly, Mosteanu and Gherghina discuss the state appropriations funding system. They state, “[i]t is irrelevant that the amount of funds allocated from state budget is, while the efficiency of their administration is not sufficiently focused on increasing the system’s overall performance” (Mosteanu and Gherghina, 2008, p 1). Also, they request that the “funding system be modified, in a fashion that would allow creating an educational system acting as a competitive educational services market, where the access to state funds should be granted selectively to universities and students depending on the performance demonstrated by certain indicators” (Mosteanu and Gherghina, 2008, p 1). Like performance funding in Illinois, these scholars would like to see a state appropriations funding model that rewards “good” schools with more money to perform well for their students.

As scholars are trying to think of a viable solution to figuring out an effective and efficient way to appropriate state funds, the industry is reacting with a crowding out method for the first time in higher education (Sav, 2012). Research shows that private donations makes up of roughly 83 percent of what the state government provides to higher education institutions (Sav, 2012). This is an increase of what the rates were in the 1960s but a decrease of what they were in the 1980s (Sav, 2012). The higher rate causes legislators to ease up on funding because they see that higher education institutions can go without state support (Sav, 2012). The crowding out effect has caused state governments to take a step back from funding but at a seemingly disproportionate rate than private donations (Sav,
However, the crowding out method cannot be used instead of the state spending, but it is meant to be used as a supplement (Sav, 2012). Public education was founded on state support so it cannot exist without government support (Sav, 2012).

In Maryland, there are increased efforts to fundraise, to make up for a lack of state appropriations (Cox, 2010). Cox suggests that state governments should maintain and even increase funding for higher education institutions when they are struggling because the schools will be able to promote themselves more, which will in turn generate more giving from private donors (Cox, 2010). At the same time, as public schools are adjusting to lack of state funding, they are becoming more competitive financially and perform more like private schools (Bailey et al., 2004). Bailey, Rom, and Taylor found that there is a direct correlation between governance structures in comparison to tuition rates and enrollment numbers (Bailey et al., 2004). They identify two independent variables that seem to come into effect when referencing higher education patterns. The first of the two variables is “converge.” Converge occurs when schools will be extremely aggressive in their financials, which ends up allowing for a relaxed approach to budgeting in the following year (Bailey et al., 2004).

The second variable in the Bailey et al. research study was “compete.” Competition has an inverse effect in public and private schools. When a public school uses the “compete” method, they follow a path in which the authors call a “race to the bottom” but when private schools use the same method, they follow a path in which the authors call a “race to the top” (Bailey et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Bailey et al. describe spending per student trends across states. As states spend more on their students, they will run out of money faster than states who spend
less on their students (Bailey et al., 2004). This article explains that competition should stay relatively low in the higher education sector by increasing state government funding. Thus, our first research question is as follows:

**Research Question 1:** How are student allocations budgets reacting to the diversified funding structure that a lack of state funding has caused?

### 2.3 Student Activities

Even though college has become more expensive, students are still making the most of their college experience through being involved in student organizations and extracurricular activities (Jacobs, 1999). Student organizations are groups of students that all have something in common (Jacobs, 1999). Theoretically, everyone in the organization shares something with the rest of the organization whether it be similar majors, similar backgrounds, or similar hobbies (Jacobs, 1999).

Usually, student organizations want to promote themselves across campus so that other students can share their interest (Jacobs, 1999). More often than not, this type of marketing is done through event programming such as speakers or panels, or they attend conferences, so they can network with others with common interests (Jacobs, 1999). In order to put on events and attend conferences, the organizations typically seek funding within the university.

However, student organizations are also feeling the burden of budget cuts throughout the university (Rodriguez, 2011). Rodriguez suggests that student organizations learn how to maximize their available funds in order to carry out their mission (Rodriguez, 2011). In an instructional guide designed for student organizations, Rodriguez seeks to help students maximize their money within student organizations, so they can still put on the best events, regardless of budget cuts.
2.4 Student Allocation Boards

There are three primary universal student government functions that have been identified: representation, advocacy, and voice (Miller and Nadler, 2006). These functions help introduce the meaning of student government and allow certain privileges for the organizations (Miller and Nadler, 2006). These three distinct functions provide legitimacy and stability for the student governments, granting them more power (Miller and Nadler, 2006).

Moreover, student governments are frequently given a budget in which they are trusted to allocate funds to student organizations (Miller and Nadler, 2006). Many student organizations depend on this funding for programming or travel (Miller and Nadler, 2006). Research shows that many universities have granted their student governments this power to strengthen community on campus as there is a correlation between student events and a greater sense of community on campus (Miller & Nadler, 2006). In fact, the funding role of student governments is one of the most common roles that student governments share. Research suggests that approximately 80 percent of student governments have this allocation power written into their constitutions (Miller & Nadler, 2006). Thus, our second research question is as follows:

**Research Question 2:** What are the different types of student allocation boards that exist within Ohio public schools?
CHAPTER 3- METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to analyze the appropriation methods used by student governments at the public higher education institutions in Ohio. Throughout the nation, student governments are given a certain budget to give back to fellow students. Amidst budget cuts, however, the student governments must maximize the amount of money that goes back to students and be more critical and intentional of their spending habits. This research endeavors to identify the most efficient (as perceived by student government representatives and their advisors) ways for student governments to spend their funds and ultimately maximize students’ money.

The overarching question that this research paper addresses is: What are the ways in which the student activity fee is allocated to student organizations through student allocation boards?

This study seeks to present the various funding models that public universities in Ohio utilize to distribute funds to student organizations. Further, this study will hopefully be able to serve as a reference for student government leaders and higher education professionals to assess their university’s student government budget and funding model, compared to similar institutions. The research was conducted to include student government representatives, their university advisors, as well as student organization leaders in an attempt to get different viewpoints on the funding models.

3.1 Participants

This question was measured through a Qualtrics survey that was distributed to all 13 public Ohio higher education institutions’ student government presidents, treasurers (or their equivalents), and their advisors. Additionally, the survey was distributed to
approximately ten student-led organizations at each campus to cross-reference the information provided by people affiliated with student governments. Qualitative and quantitative data was obtained to help understand how individual universities allocate funds to student government as well as the allocation process to distribute said funds to the student organizations.

The questions in the survey were specifically tailored to the individual groups to get a holistic view of the funding process. On the students’ side, the questions were formulated with the intent to describe each school’s student government internal processes and how they provide funds for students. For advisors, the questions focused on how the funds are distributed to the student governments and how they ultimately affect university finances. The student organization leaders were asked questions describing the student government funding process and the reputation of the student government on campus. For a working list of questions, please reference Appendix A.

3.2 Independent Variables

3.2.1 Model Type

Through the survey, we have identified four funding models that were then used as independent variables across groups. The first funding model we identified, Funding Model A, involved an external funding board. This means that the student government does not have the power to allocate student funds. The second funding model, Funding Model B, was classified as committees within student government, with the sole responsibility to allocate student funds. Our third funding model, Funding Model C, allocates funds within student government but by an executive of the student government.
Finally, our fourth funding model, Funding Model D, was a combination of Funding Models A and C. These four funding models are fully analyzed in Chapter 4.

3.2.2 Independent Variable- Participants

There were three participant groups that were surveyed for the purpose of this research study. The first group was student government representatives. These people were contacted through their registered emails found on the student government website portals. Additionally, student organization representatives were contacted through email. We selected roughly ten organizations from each school which broke down to two organizations for each of the following organization categories: programming board, special interest, professional, athletics, academic, and miscellaneous. Finally, student government advisors were contacted to participate in the survey and were contacted via email as well as a follow-up through phone call.

3.3 Dependent Variables

3.3.1 Student Government, University Advisor, and Student Organization Comparison

Four dependent variables were measured to evaluate each funding model and each participant groups’ opinions on the variables. The dependent variables were: efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility, and overall satisfaction. Further, we analyzed the total score of each funding model to fully compare across funding models. These variables were presented as statements in the survey and participants responded to the statement on a seven-point Likert scale with one representing strongly disagree and seven representing strongly agree. For more information on the specific questions, please reference Appendix A.
3.3.2 Student Government and University Advisor Relationship

In order to better understand the relationship of student government on campus, several questions were asked to specifically interpret the relationship between student government representatives and their advisors, as well as the university administrators. This identification helped evaluate the student government’s power in legislative matters. For example, if the student government does not have a good working relationship with their advisor, we would be able to understand the cause of some organizational issues. For more information on the specific questions related to student governments’ relationships with other shared governance groups, please reference Appendix A.
CHAPTER 4- FINDINGS

The findings in this research reveal many complexities and variables in the student government funding model in each participating school. First, I will analyze the operating budgets of all the participating schools and compare them to each other. Next, the funding branches that allocate funding to student organizations will be discussed to introduce rules and procedures that may restrict funding. Then, the relationship between students and their advisors is analyzed in order to understand the campus climate under which funding is allocated. From there, the four funding models are introduced and discussed to evaluate how student funds are distributed.

4.1 Budget Analysis

The first main consistency that was discovered through this research was the source of funding for student organization allocations. In every participating school, student fees are used as the primary source of funding. The only university that has reported funds outside of student activity fees was The Ohio State University’s Undergraduate Student Government (USG). The advisor of their student government stated the following:

"Most of USG's budget comes from the student activity fee, which is a mandatory fee of roughly $40 per semester. Another portion of the USG budget comes from the annual interest off of an endowment set up by Coca-Cola about 20 years ago when Coke and Ohio State first reached an exclusive pouring rights agreement."

Comparing secondary research from the literature review as well as the primary data collected from the survey, this is the first time that a diversified funding structure has been reported. This diversification shows that the university’s financial office has prioritized the student organization funding so much that they have set extra funds aside in order to fund the organizations. This is an interesting takeaway because we can deduce that
for the most part, student organizations are mostly receiving their funds from Student Affairs budgets which comes from the student activity fee. However, it is possible for student funding boards to receive funding through this external funding system. As we think about how the State of Ohio is reducing higher education funding, it may be worthwhile to keep corporate partnerships in mind.

Looking at the reported budgets though, there is a wide range of reported budgets as the funding that is allocated to student allocation boards is dependent upon the school’s size and, more specifically, the school’s Division of Student Affairs budget. The reported budgets for student allocation boards from each participating school are shown in Figure 2 titled “Student Government Operating Budget (in thousands).” Let it be noted that for the purpose of budget analysis, two reporting schools were excluded from this graph because they reported a budget of zero because these two schools reported using a funding board that is external to their student government. This, and other, funding models will be discussed in section 4.3 of this chapter.
Looking at the graph, it is interesting to see the extreme differences in the amount of money that each school is able to allocate to its student organizations. For example, Miami University allocates $650,000 to its student organizations while Shawnee State University only allocates $400 to its student organizations.

Breaking these budgets down even further, it is important to look at these budgets on a per-student level. Figure 3 shows the theoretical dollar amount per student that these budgets provide. This graph accounts for the students that fall under the jurisdiction of each student government. In other words, since the student government at Ohio State University is the Undergraduate Student Government, this graph only accounts for the budget per undergraduate student in attendance at Ohio State University.

As seen in the graph, there is quite a wide range in the amount of money that each student theoretically receives through student organization allocations. While Wright State
students can get approximately $46 per student, Shawnee State students will only see about $0.09 per student. One reason for this difference could be the number of residential students on each campus, thus affecting the amount of programming on campus but that type of assumption cannot be made within the scope of this paper.

According to the survey results, many respondents did not feel that these budgets were sufficient for their schools’ size. Reporting on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree), the average satisfaction level with the schools’ student organization funding budget was a 2.79 out of seven. This question was presented to student government leaders and their advisors with generally consistent numbers across the board. Figure 4 displays all of the respondents’ scores to show the range of satisfaction responses.

Since the general dissatisfaction with the budgets was anticipated prior to the collection of data, university advisors were proactively asked about how student
governments could ask for more money from university administrators, if needed. The data generated two main ways that student governments could request more funds.

One way to request more funding was described as “[f]unding is contingent on enrollment.” In this form, it would be typical to see fluctuating budgets as enrollment increases or decreases each year. The other way to request more funding from the university was described as:

“As a student government, the members must petition to the administration (Division of Student Affairs, academic deans, etc.) to justify the need for a higher allocation of funds.”

Using this form to increase funding would likely be dependent on university administrators’ perception of student allocation boards’ value and budget limitations. For example, if the administrators do not believe that the student allocation board is a valuable resource for students or the university is experiencing severe budget cuts, the budget likely would not increase even as enrollment may increase.

The difference between the two forms of increasing funding is the difference of the amount of money that each student would hypothetically receive for student programming. Through analysis of the budget per student, it can be assumed that schools that determine funding based off of enrollment numbers will have a fairly consistent dollar per student. On the other hand, schools that must formally request university administrators for more money will have fluctuating dollar amounts per student.

To address the first research question about lack of higher education funding, we can see through this research that many schools are struggling to adjust to the lack of funding for their students. We found that one school was using a diversified funding
structure through a corporate partnership. This could be a possibility for other schools to explore as need for funding increases without a budget increase.

4.2 Funding Branch

With the responses gathered from the survey, we can deduce that all of the universities surveyed have some sort of funding system in place. Each school has a unique system that they operate under. The categorization of each model will be discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to first understand the results of the funding branches. In almost every school, the student government has at least some level of jurisdiction over funding student organizations. In some schools, student governments have the sole responsibility of funding organizations, while other schools only involve a couple members on a separate committee. This will be further discussed later in the chapter.

Student government leaders and their advisors were then asked about the improvements that they would like to be made within their funding systems, each school has a different problem that they are facing. One issue that two schools reported was the need to have a more streamlined process for students to make direct purchases. In other words, the participants noted that students have to make large up-front purchases and hope for reimbursements. One participant stated:

“Groups can receive up to $3,000 in programming funds, so for some, it can be difficult to pay for $3,000 worth of expenses out of their organizational budget and then wait for the reimbursement. We've done a number of things to mitigate that potential hardship, but we can't disburse the funds in advance because of the financial risk of putting out those large sums without a guarantee that the programs will occur.”

While another participant said the following:

“The problem with our funding process begins after we approve because our university has extremely strict travel policies, reimbursement procedures, and overall low-quality methods of funding university travel.”
In both scenarios, the students are inconvenienced by reimbursement procedures which may slow down the process or cause some students to not see the funds in a timely manner. As students are already paying a lot of money for school and living expenses, it may discourage large programs because students are not able to pay for the events out of pocket.

Another recurring problem that was identified within the research was the need for more student control over the distributed funds. Many student government participants expressed frustrations over the lack of student input on student funds. Two participants voiced concerns that the student government did not have control over the funds. Meanwhile, another participant expressed that they would like to see more students participate in the allocation of funds. In this person’s opinion, since student funds are being allocated, they should have more of a say in where the funds are allocated. This participant’s direct quote is below:

“I wish more students would engage in the process so the Council on Student Affairs (CSA) has a better idea of what student's wish to see done with Student Activity Fee (SAF) funding. Each student pays about $40 each semester into this fee, so it is a quite large sum of money considering the size of our campus. I sit on CSA as an Undergraduate representative and we are currently reviewing this process of SAF distribution.”

The third most prevalent concern that student government representatives and university advisors expressed was the need for more funding. As previously discussed, many participants were dissatisfied with the amount of funding that they were able to allocate to student organizations. While understanding funding restrictions, many still felt that more money would allow their student funding model to be more effective. One student government representative said the following:
“Our biggest issue is a lack of funding. UFB (University Funding Board) oversees over 300 organizations and allows organizations to request up to $5,500, which in a perfect world would mean at least $1.65 million in funding. UFB does not even receive a half-million to allocate, which means we are highly underfunded and many organizations do not get to use their total funding.”

As this person points out, the student funding board cannot fund all of the organizations that seek funding from them. As outlined in their student government’s rules, each organization is entitled to a certain amount of money, but they are not able to provide that type of funding. This causes increased competition between student organizations to receive funding and typically favors older, more established student organizations who are more familiar with the funding process.

4.3 Student Government Shared Governance Results

Understanding how student governments are able to communicate and function in relation to other stakeholder groups on their campus is important so we can better understand whether or not student governments are able to make effective change to their systems. Student government representatives and university advisors were surveyed about the student governments’ relationships with university administrators. Additionally, student government representatives and university advisors were surveyed about their relationships with each other.

When asked about the student governments’ relationships with their respective university administrators, student government representatives reported an average of 5.29 (on a seven point Likert Scale) as how confident they were in their working relationship (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree). On the other hand, their advisors reported an average of 6.43 on the same scale. The difference in the perception of the student government’s relationship with the administrators is interesting because university
advisors are perceiving the relationship better than student government representatives. In some instances, the advisors of the student government could be university administrators, which would potentially skew the data because they would be assessing their own relationship with the student government representatives.

Next, analyzing the relationship between the student governments and their advisors was an essential step because it is helpful to understand the relationship between stakeholders. When asked about the working relationship between the two stakeholders, student government representatives responded with an average response of 6.57 on a seven point Likert scale and the university advisors reported an average of 7.00. In fact, all university advisor respondents reported a score of 7.00 for their relationship with their student governments.

Additionally, the student government representatives and the university advisors were asked about the advisors’ help in facilitating thought and helping the student government representatives make informed decisions. This question yielded an average score of 4.71 on a seven point Likert scale while we saw an average score of 6.29 from university advisors. Again, we see that the university advisors scored this question higher than the student government representatives which could be problematic because student government representatives seem less satisfied with the services that their advisors and administrators are providing.

4.4 Funding Models

Based on the survey data, we were able to identify three primary parties that may be responsible for allocating student funds. These parties are identified in the dark grey shapes in Figure 5.
Looking at each of the reported funding structures, each structure involves at least one of the primary parties. These funding structures were further broken up into four models. The first model that we identified was an external funding board, separate from the student government. The second model was a group within the student government that made funding decisions. The third model that we found was a system run completely by one to two people, typically known as the Vice President of Finance. The final model that we identified was a hybrid of two of the three previously mentioned systems.

The classification of each participants’ response to the prompt, “[p]lease explain the funding branch of your university’s student government,” determined the funding model classification. Based off of these responses, we found that the most common funding model used was Funding Model B with nine respondents using this model. Further, Funding Model A had six recorded responses, Funding Model C had five recorded responses, and Funding Model D had two recorded responses.

The respondents’ data was compared across groups and funding models to determine each group’s responses, in respect to their school’s funding model, for four dependent variables. These variables were presented as statements and participants
responded with their agreeance on the statement on a seven-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree). For more information on the data collection tool, please reference Appendix A. Table 1 displays all of the quantitative results that were analyzed using SPSS.

Table 1: Quantitative Results

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Group</th>
<th>Model</th>
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<th>Accessible</th>
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<td><strong>5.50</strong></td>
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4.4.1 Funding Models-Funding Model A: External Funding Board

An external funding board was the second most common trend that was reported within the survey. Under this model, the student government may or may not have additional representation on the board. Figure 6 shows how the student activity fee is disbursed through this funding model.

Figure 6: Funding Model A: External Funding Board
A student government representative described this system like so:

“The President of SGA (Student Government Association) serves as the chair for the Student Organization Budget Committee (SOBC), which allocates annual year-long funding to selected student organizations. Members of this committee include several campus leaders and the Assistant Director of Student Affairs. The Assistant Speaker of the House serves as the chair of the Special Funding Committee, which allocates one-time funding to organizations that did not receive SOBC. The committee consists of several campus leaders and the Assistant Director of Student Affairs.”

In their system, they have two primary leaders that are able to make decisions on behalf of students on these external funding boards. While the student government does not necessarily have jurisdiction over the board’s decisions, as the participant explained, they still may influence the allocation of funds to student organizations through a reserved student government seat on the board, or student government representatives being a part of the board separate from the student government.

However, two participating universities have reported that they have completely external funding boards in which no seats on the board are reserved for student government members. Since this funding model does not involve student government members, the student government representatives that discussed this funding model were offering external perspectives to their school’s method.

The participants’ average scores to Funding Model A are displayed in Figure 7.
As the graph shows, there is a wide range of perceived effectiveness among groups. While the student government representatives are generally dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the external funding structure, student organization leaders and university advisors reported that they were relatively satisfied with the funding system—student organization leaders reported more satisfaction than the university advisors.

As we can conclude from the participants’ responses in regard to efficiency, the student government representatives and student organization leaders had the same average satisfaction with their funding model. We can see that university advisors tended to report more satisfaction with the efficiency of this model but for the most part, everyone seems generally satisfied with the efficiency of the external funding board.

As the figure shows, we have consistent results on the accessibility of the external funding board model. Each major stakeholder group involved with the process reported high satisfaction with the accessibility of this model.

The student government reported the least overall satisfaction with the external funding board model while the university advisors show moderate satisfaction with the
funding board model. This discrepancy could be because the student government does not have influence over the external funding board, harboring issues with power over the funding system. However, the relationship between student government representatives and external funding boards is outside the scope of the research of this paper.

Table 2 shows Funding Model A’s scores on each category and the total score of all the categories.

Table 2: Funding Model A Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
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4.4.2 Funding Models- Funding Model B: Internal Funding Board

The next model that was identified is an internal student government group that usually receives applications for funding from student organizations. Both this funding model and the previously mentioned model are similar, but it is important to note that under this model, the student government has funding power whereas the student governments operating under Funding Model A do not have this power. Figure 8 shows the primary stakeholders and how the student activity fee is disbursed under Funding Model B.

Figure 8: Funding Model B Structure

A student government representative described this system as:

“[A] group of 16-21 undergraduate students who meet once weekly to hear budgets submitted by student organizations for programs they host on campus and conferences they attend. Budgets are submitted for each event an organization hosts/attends.”
The data reported under this model was coming from student government representatives as they reflect on their own practices. This means that while the representatives may know more about the processes themselves, they also may be positively biased toward their own practices because the survey asks about the processes that they help facilitate.

The survey participants’ responses for Funding Model B are displayed in Figure 9 below.

![Figure 9: Funding Model B Results](image)

When looking at the effectiveness of Funding Model B, we can see that all groups are generally “somewhat satisfied” to “satisfied.” As the graph shows, student government representatives tended to report the lowest effectiveness scores while student organization leaders reported the highest effectiveness score.

The student government representatives and the student organization leaders showed moderate satisfaction with the efficiency of the internal student allocation board, whereas the university advisors reported lower scores. While the advisors still feel somewhat satisfied, their responses tended to be lower than the student perspectives. One
possible reason why the advisors may feel this way could be because they either see a more holistic viewpoint on the allocation process, or they see the long back-ended processes that go on to turn the allocations in to funding. Nonetheless, the lower advisor satisfaction rating is an interesting point in the data.

As seen in the results for this question, we see a discrepancy between the three groups. While the student government representatives and the university advisors feel satisfied with the accessibility of the allocation services, the student organization leaders do not feel the same. This can be a conflict for the allocation process as a whole because if the student organization leaders do not feel that the student government allocation board is accessible, they might not be fully satisfied using the process.

From the overall satisfaction results, we can see that the groups are consistently somewhat satisfied with the funding process. Similar to Funding Model A, the university advisors reported a moderately higher overall satisfaction score.

Table 3 shows Funding Model B’s overall averages for each category and the total average.

Table 3: Funding Model B Scores

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<td>5.50</td>
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</table>

4.4.3 Funding Models- Funding Model C: Student Government Treasurer/Vice President of Finance

A third funding model that was identified was a model that involved student government leaders acting as the Vice President of Finance, or the Treasurer, directly allocating the funds. While this model is similar to Funding Model 2 because it keeps the
funding of student organizations within the power of student government, this model does not involve a board of students. Figure 10 shows how Funding Model C disburses the student activity fee.

*Figure 10: Funding Model C Structure*

One of the participants explained it like so:

“The Vice President for Financial Affairs is solely responsible for communicating with student organizations and organizing their attendance at the Financial Affairs sub-committee meeting. The Vice President for Financial Affairs also keeps the budget, and reports on outlays to the body. After a recommendation is made by the committee, a bill is drafted and approved at the General Assembly meeting by the voting members of the Legislative Body.”

Another participant described this model as:

“We have two Directors of Finance within Undergraduate Student Government who report directly to the Undergraduate Student Body President and sit on his cabinet. We have policies set in place on how we allocate funding and that is distributed to Student Organizations on July 1 of every year which is when the fiscal year starts. All organizations can apply for funding for both travel and events. The Directors of Finance work closely with an office within the Department of Student Life and everything is turned into them and USG makes an allocation based on the information uploaded into the online system.”

In the latter system, while the student government has two people fill this main role, they are still utilizing the same structure involving one position making decisions to fund student organizations. These people do not work alone, though, as we can see in both situations. These people make recommendations based off of the submitted funding requests and then the individuals work with the student governments, as a whole, to decide
whether or not to approve funding requests. This was a trend that was not reported in Funding Model 2 where student allocation boards were housed within student government.

Figure 11 displays Funding Model C’s results, as reported by each stakeholder group.

As we can see in the data, student government representatives tended to respond with neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction in respect to the effectiveness of the funding model. Simultaneously, university advisors reported higher scores and reported that they felt “somewhat satisfied” with the effectiveness of this funding model.

Through these results we are seeing relatively high efficiency ratings on behalf of both the student government representatives and the university advisors. Both parties reported satisfied to extremely satisfied ratings from this section. In terms of accessibility, we are seeing a fairly high accessibility rating on behalf of student government representatives but a lower score from their advisors. One reason that could explain this discrepancy could be because the student government representatives are the ones that would be making the process accessible or not. In other words, the student government
representatives would be the people that are accessible or not to the students who use their services.

For overall satisfaction, the student government representatives tended to report lower scores than the university advisors. This is an interesting takeaway considering other response scores were so high coming from student government representatives. Since the student government representatives rated efficiency so much lower than the other categories, it may signify that the student government representatives prioritize efficiency when looking at overall satisfaction. Table 4 displays the average scores that Funding Model C received.

Table 4: Funding Model C Scores

<table>
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<td>5.75</td>
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4.4.4 Funding Models- Funding Model D: Hybrid Funding Model

When sorting through the collected data from the survey, there was one school, specifically, that did not fall under one of the three defined funding models that were identified through the research. Alternatively, this school used combined traits from Funding Model A and C to create a sort of hybrid model that was used to distribute funds to student organizations on campus. Figure 12 shows how this school has disbursed funds using this hybrid model.
The advisor of the school using Funding Model D described it by saying the following:

“Each group (student government) places members on a University Senate committee called the Council on Student Affairs (CSA), which also includes staff and faculty as voting members. CSA is responsible for stewarding our student activity fee, which funds our programming board, the student governments, a discount ticket program, alternative breaks, and programming and operating funds for our 1,300+ student organizations.”

However, the advisor goes on to say that the student government on campus also allocates funds, even though that is not their main job. The advisor said the following about student government:

“Additionally, USG uses some of its own budget to support student organizations, typically for things the CSA process can't fund (e.g., travel).”

This relationship between the two types of funding models can be confusing as there is more than one resource for students to obtain funding. The same advisor concluded their thoughts with the following:

“I just wanted to make it clear that student organization funding is not the responsibility of USG -- they choose to make additional allocations, but the main funding process is run by this committee of students, faculty, and staff (CSA).”
So, while in this hybrid model, the two groups coexist, they do not work together because they exist as separate entities on the university’s campus.

Figure 13 shows the results from the survey respondents’ perception of Funding Model D.

As seen in the graph, we see consistent results across each category among student government representatives and their advisors. The only difference that can be reported in the data is the accessibility. While the student government representatives believe they are accessible to the student body, the university advisors tended to respond with slightly less confidence. Otherwise, nearly all of the responses yielded scores that equated to “satisfied” on the survey.

Table 5 shows the average results for each category for Funding Model D.

Table 5: Funding Model D Scores

<table>
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<tr>
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</table>
4.4.5- Funding Model Comparisons

After analyzing each funding model individually, it is important to compare them side-by-side to fully analyze the differences between the four models. Each funding model and their respective scores are displayed in Figure 14.

As the graph shows, we see somewhat similar fluctuations between Funding Models A, B, and C. Of the three funding models, effectiveness and accessibility tended to be the lowest ranking categories. The overall scores of the funding models show Funding Model D (hybrid model of Funding Models A and C) ranking the highest with a score of 5.88 followed by Funding Model B (internal allocation board) with a score of 5.50, Funding Model C (Vice President of Finance) with a score of 5.375, and finally Funding Model A (external funding board) with a score of 5.04. While we can see distinct rankings of the funding models, none of the funding models had “poor” rankings, per se. All of the average
total scores fell on the top half of the satisfaction range, with the lowest scores falling in between “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” and “somewhat satisfied.”

To answer our second research question asking about the different allocation boards that exist within Ohio public schools, we have identified three main channels of funding for student organizations through this research. The student activity fee is mainly distributed through external funding boards, a committee within student government, or a student government executive. Alternatively, there were four funding models that we have identified, each utilizing at least one of the funding channels.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Key Findings

From this research, it is clear that the participants are unsatisfied with their current activities budget. The analysis shows that students hypothetically only receive, on average, $15.99 for activities per year and respondents reported that they were generally dissatisfied with this budget (μ=2.79). However, there is some room for this budget to increase. As discussed in Chapter 4, section 1, one university obtains money through a corporate partnership with Coca-Cola to increase their student allocation budget. This example is the only reported instance of a diversified funding structure, but since it is used as a supplement to student fees, it may be something that other schools would want to explore. This diversification was also discussed on a larger scale, in terms of university funding as a whole. If public higher education institutions are able to diversify their funding structures through corporate partnerships, they hopefully will explore options to expand these partnerships to benefit the student programming funds.

Another key finding within this study is the commonality of the external funding board. While prior research has shown that not all student governments have funding power, this research did not anticipate the frequency of this pattern. The different funding models added an unanticipated dimension to this research project. By understanding that there are different types of funding models, this could make the process of improvement easier for student government representatives and their advisors. For example, if student government representatives are unhappy using an external funding board, they may be able to alter their method to include an internal funding mechanism within their student government.
5.2 Limitations

Although this report has identified different funding models and budgetary restrictions that student allocation boards face, there are a few limitations that inhibit the study from being conclusive. For one, since the external funding board was unanticipated, only student government representatives were included in the survey. Had we known about the prevalence of the external funding board, we would have been able to survey the members of that group, rather than the student government. This solution would have provided us with more holistic data on the external system and would have provided more conclusive numbers for the student programming budgets. The information provided on these boards were based off of outside assumptions from the respondents at that school.

Another limitation that this research encountered was a lack of participation on the survey. This research is missing information from two universities and only provides limited information on other universities. Student government representatives and university advisors were contacted via email, and some via phone call but since this was a voluntary survey, we were not able to collect all of the information that we would have liked. Furthermore, we were unable to collect robust responses from student organization leaders, which would have helped provide a different perspective on the allocation process. We had hoped to collect more student organization responses to evaluate the allocation processes against each other, but without the extra data, that comparison would not be appropriate.

5.3 Further Research

This research study can serve as a guiding tool to provide more in-depth research on student allocations for programming. One potential future research project could include
an analysis of the method that returns the most amount of money to students; a study that focuses on the method that students prefer. This research study would likely involve more in-depth communication with student organization leaders who would evaluate their allocation process. This study could be used as guiding research in an attempt to maximize the amount of money that public Ohio students receive for programming efforts.

Another future research project could examine the difference between budgets across universities. In other words, this study could find out why each university has varying budgets per student. In a perfect world, all students would hypothetically receive the same amount of money for programming, so each student would have the opportunity to have the same experience for involvement no matter which public institution they attend.

Furthermore, from the budgetary research collected in this study, it would be interesting to look at the budget breakdown across different departments. So, students could look at how much of their fees are going to areas such as health services or athletics, for example, and how that amount compares across similar institutions. This type of research would further help students understand the budget breakdown of their university and how their money is being utilized for higher education purposes.

5.4 Conclusion

The data collected in this research study should be used as a resource for students and higher education professionals who are involved in the student allocation process. The information about budget within this paper will be helpful for involved parties to understand the magnitude of the problems that they face. Similarly, the knowledge of the different allocation methods can be used as a tool when student government representatives and their advisors wish to update their processes. From my knowledge and research, the
A compilation of different allocation methods is the first of its kind for student affairs and, specifically, student government.

If students are able to understand where their money is going and how it is being used, they will hopefully be more willing to have an opinion on this matter. As of right now, many students are not aware of the ways in which their funds are being used so this research study can hopefully offer some clarity on their financial decisions.

As previously discussed in this report, higher education budgets are tight. Research has shown that state fiscal support is decreasing at an aggressive rate, compared to prior years, which means that public higher education will likely be feeling that burden in the next few generations. If this trend continues, research suggests that the public higher education structure, in its current form, will no longer exist. This will cause colleges and universities to start cutting fiscal support for programs on campus. It is important that student organizations are still able to exist and thrive, amidst these cuts.

Being involved in student organizations is such an important aspect of the collegiate experience and these funding models described within this report aim to financially assist students to get involved within their community of peers. Students need to be able to take advantage of the financial resources on campus, so they can make the most out of their college experience. By sharpening students’ knowledge on the different types of funding models as well as their allotted student activity fee, they will hopefully be able to take advantage of the resources.
CHAPTER 6- PERSONAL JOURNEY

The road to completing this thesis was not only an uphill climb, but it was an uphill climb with a winding path. To understand my journey for my thesis, I need to take you through the four years that I spent at Ohio University in the Honors Tutorial College. I began paving this path when I was just 17 years old and touring college campuses in the summer before my senior year.

I remember my first time in Athens vividly. It was the day before I started my senior year of high school and I was touring the University of Akron with a few friends. After walking around Akron for a little bit, we got bored and got back in the car. One of my friends said only halfway joking, “hey, wouldn’t it be fun to go to Athens and see OU?” We all agreed that it would be fun and spontaneously drove three hours to Athens without telling our parents. This was meant to just be a fun, albeit reckless, trip with friends because I was not going to attend a “party school.” Yet, at five o’clock that afternoon, I bought an $18.04 sweatshirt at the College Bookstore and I decided I had to apply to Ohio University.

Now, it is September of my senior year and I have hyped up Athens and Ohio University to my parents (even though they were not happy about my spontaneous trip). They had a Business Pre-Law major which seemed cool, and they also had an honors college that seemed kind of cool too. I remember emailing Dr. Frost, trying to sound very professional and collegiate. We set up an informational meeting for a time that I would officially tour campus and I was ecstatic. My tour guide was decent but my meeting with Dr. Frost was amazing. I left Athens on October 8, 2013 and I decided that I absolutely had to be a student the Honors Tutorial College.
Come August, I came to Athens with my sights set on studying Pre-Law and becoming the next Elle Woods (I watched a lot of Legally Blonde in high school). If you are reading this without knowing me, I will spoil the ending and let you know that this is not actually what happens. I quickly found out that I hated studying the law and I needed to find a new career path. I remember spending the first year and a half of college feeling lost and overwhelmed. I never thought I was good enough to be in HTC and I did not even know what I wanted out of this experience.

Luckily, I had surrounded myself with the best support system possible and the best people helped me figure out my genuine interests and purpose at Ohio University. Through my good friend and fellow HTC Business student, Natalie Clark, I got involved in a Student Senate campaign. They told me that I could join something called SAC because I took an accounting class and I might be good at it. At that point, I thought, “it’s worth a shot” and before I knew it, I was interviewing to officially join Student Senate. This was the role that truly changed the course of my college career.

I have always known that I wanted to spend my time helping others, but I never really knew how I could do that. It was not until I became immersed in SAC that I was able to fully understand how I could help fellow students. SAC is a commission within Senate that allocates approximately half a million dollars to student organizations for programming activities. At first, it was just cool to see all of the events that went on around campus. Then, I started to realize the magnitude of the group. Recently, I was having a conversation with a student and she told me about how SAC funding sent her organization to a conference for photojournalism where she secured her dream internship for the
summer. She told me, “without your help, I wouldn’t have even been able to talk to the people at the internship I wanted.” Her words stunned me.

I was able to climb through the ranks to eventually become commissioner of SAC, which meant that I led the group of students that allocated this money. I do not take this role lightly. My experience in Senate has been the best of my life and anyone who knows me well can confirm that. I really found my passion for public service and helping to finance others’ activities.

Now, you are probably thinking, “so why did you do your thesis on it?” This answer is honestly simple. Like I mentioned before, I felt lost at Ohio University. While I was able to suppress that feeling in my student organization life, that feeling still lingered in my academic life. Since I was not taking the traditional corporate route that many of my peers were taking, I could not relate to typical business research problems. I spent my whole sophomore and junior year tossing around different thesis ideas.

Thinking back, I probably had a new research topic each month and each time, I was absolutely sure that this would be my actual thesis. I was envious of my fellow HTC business cohort who already had their topics. It was not until my spring advising session in my junior year that I sat down with Dr. Frost and told him about my predicament. He asked me about my work in Student Senate and asked if I would be interested in researching student organization financing as a thesis topic. I remember thinking to myself, “I can do that?” Sure enough, this was the answer to my academic problems.

People always talk about how you know when you found “The One” in respect to a significant other or a home, but I knew I found “The One” with this thesis topic once I started my secondary research for the literature review. In the past, academic papers would
give me headaches. How many times would I have to read about the different types of nonprofit organizations before I actually understood it? How many times would I have to read about basic human rights in business before I wanted to give up on humanity? But I never had those mind-boggling questions when reading about university finance. I was excited to learn about Ohio’s state budget and even more excited to learn about the structure of university finance. I finally found my niche and it has been relatively smooth sailing ever since.

Alas, I would be amiss to not mention the people that have influenced my time at Ohio University. First, I need to call out my HTC Business cohort. I am still not sure how Dr. Frost was able to put together a group that is so perfect for each other, but he did it. This group was quite literally together since day one of college and I am sure we will always have a special bond. The nine of us have always been there for each other, whether we needed help in classes, were having student leadership dilemmas, or just needed a laugh. This group is truly a family and I could not imagine my time without these people.

Next, my roommates deserve praise for their time living with me if nothing else. I am sure that I am not the easiest person to live with, but somehow, they do it and still seem to love me for who I am. Specifically, I am convinced that my roommate, Jessica, is an angel sent from heaven. She has lived with me, and put up with me, since freshman year and even though we could not be more different in everything we do, our relationship works so well. She has been one of the most stable people in my life and I could not be more grateful for her.

Finally, my friends that I have made in Student Senate have made all the difference in my college career. In my first term as a student senator, I did not branch out and try to
make friends within the organization, so I did not feel myself as engaged as I could be. The
two years after that, I found my people. The bonds and relationships that I have built with
my close friends in Senate have made me a better friend, student, and leader. Moreover, I
have been blessed with the best mentors this past year. Todd and Makenzie have taught me
so much about leadership and I am so grateful for their guidance and friendship.

I would be nowhere in school and not nearly as prepared for the real world if it were
not for the best people in my life. Every day I feel lucky to have surrounded myself with
such smart, passionate individuals because their energy is infectious. I have become
grateful for my struggle and my journey in school because it ultimately made me stronger.
I would not be who I am today without the constructive hardships that I had to endure for
the first year and a half of my journey at this school. I have nothing but great things to say
about HTC and the path that I have taken at Ohio University. While I am sad to leave and
actually sad to be wrapping up my academic course load, I am excited about the future
because I feel ready.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Student Government Questions:

- University name *(drop down menu)*
- What is your annual budget? *(short answer- open ended)*
  - I feel that this budget is an appropriate amount for the size of my university. *(7-point scale)*
- Please explain the funding branch of your university’s student government. *(extended response- open ended)*
- If you could make your funding method better, how would you change your system? *(extended response- open ended)*
- What is the average annual amount of student organizations that receive funding each year? *(short answer- open ended)*
  - What is the average annual amount that these organizations receive?
- How do student organizations find out about you? *(extended response- open ended)*
  - I feel that this method is effective *(7-point scale)*
- How do you decide whether or not to fund organizations/events? *(extended response-open ended)*
- Does your student government have a way of funding new student organizations? *(yes or no)*
  - Yes prompted explanation box
- How does your student government break down funding different types of programming? *(i.e. you allocate a portion of your budget to focus on funding diversity or sustainability programming.)*
- Do you have an audit process? *(yes or no)*
  - Yes prompted explanation box
  - I believe that our audit process is fair. *(7-point scale)*
  - I believe that our audit process is well-known. *(7-point scale)*
- Scale questions
  - I believe that my university’s student government funding system is effective. *(7-point scale)*
  - I believe that my university’s student government funding system is fair. *(7-point scale)*
  - I feel that university administrators are receptive to additional requests for funding. *(7-point scale)*
  - I feel that my student government has a good working relationship with university administrators. *(7-point scale)*
  - I feel that my student government has a good working relationship with our advisors. *(7-point scale)*
  - I feel that my advisors help guide my student government to make informed decisions on our own. *(7-point scale)*
  - My student government is responsive and efficient in their processes. *(7-point scale)*
  - I feel satisfied with my student government’s funding system. *(7-point scale)*
    - Please list what your student government does well. *(extended response-open ended)*
Please list things that your student government could improve upon. (extended response-open ended)
- My student government is accessible and visible across campus. (7-point scale)
- We regularly meet with student organizations to address funding concerns. (7-point scale)
- How active are you in assisting student organizations through funding requests? (7-point scale)
- My student government requires student organizations to seek outside funding in addition to student government funding.
- Do you have an appeal process? (yes or no)
  - Yes prompted explanation box
  - I believe that our appeal process is fair. (7-point scale)
  - I believe that our appeal process is well-known. (7-point scale)
- Please list ways in which student organizations can contact your student government? (extended response-open ended)
- We ensure that student organizations are held accountable for the funding they receive. (7-point scale)

Advisor Questions:
- University name (drop down menu)
- What is your annual budget? (short answer-open ended)
  - I feel that this budget is an appropriate amount for the size of my university. (7-point scale)
- Please explain the funding branch of your university's student government. (extended response-open ended)
- How are funds distributed to student governments? (extended response-open ended)
- Where do your funds come from? (extended response-open ended)
  - How can your student government request more money from the university? (extended response-open ended)
  - What percentage of your student activity fee goes toward your budget? (short answer-open ended)
- How much money do you usually have leftover at the end of the academic year? (short answer-open ended)
- Please explain the funding branch of your university's student government. (extended response-open ended)
- If you could make your funding method better, how would you change your system? (extended response-open ended)
- Scale questions
  - I believe that my university's student government funding system is effective. (7-point scale)
  - I believe that my university's student government funding system is fair. (7-point scale)
  - My student government has a well-defined mission and well-defined goals. (7-point scale)
My student government is effective in carrying out their mission and goals. (7-point scale)
I feel that I have a good working relationship with my student government. (7-point scale)
I feel that my student government has a good working relationship with university administrators. (7-point scale)
As an advisor, I help the student government make informed decisions. (7-point scale)
My student government is responsive and efficient in their processes. (7-point scale)
I feel satisfied with my student government’s funding system. (7-point scale)

Please list what your student government does well. (extended response-open ended)
Please list things that your student government could improve upon. (extended response-open ended)

My student government is accessible and visible across campus. (7-point scale)
My student government regularly meets with student organizations to address funding concerns. (7-point scale)
My student government ensures that student organizations are held accountable for the funding they receive. (7-point scale)

Student Organization Questions:

- What’s the size of your organization? (short answer-open ended)
- Please select the closest description of your student organization. (drop-down menu)
- What’s your student organization’s annual budget? (short answer-open ended)
- Does your university have a method for your student organization to obtain funding? (yes or no)
  - Please explain your university’s funding method. (yes prompted)
  - Has your organization ever applied for student government funding? (yes or no)
    - Yes prompted- how satisfied were you with applying for student government funding?
- How many events does your student organization host per year? (short answer-open ended)
- Is your student organization tied to a specific college? (yes or no)
- Scale questions
  - How did you find out about student government funding? (extended response- open ended)
  - I believe that my university’s student government funding system is effective. (7-point scale)
  - My student government is responsive and efficient in their processes. (7-point scale)
  - I feel satisfied with my student government’s funding system. (7-point scale)
- Extended response comment box to follow
  - My student government is accessible and visible across campus. (7-point scale)
  - Does your student government have a funding appeal process? (7-point scale)
    - If you have appealed your student government’s decision, how satisfied were you with the process? (7-point scale)
  - I feel that my student government is transparent in their funding process. (7-point scale)
  - My student government is respected on campus. (7-point scale)
  - I feel that my student government values my organization. (7-point scale)