

Assessing the Impact of Tuition on Access, Affordability, and Institutional Quality

JLARC

Higher Education Project Update

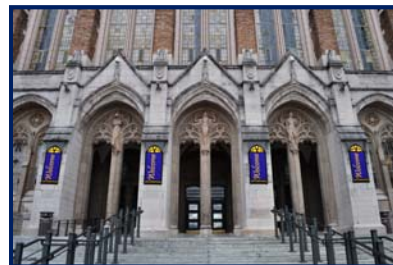
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Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee

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Purpose for This Project Update

- Follow up to S&O, issued in 2012.
- The final report is due by December 2018.
- The report focuses on two components:
 - 1) Discuss how JLARC staff is defining key terms: **access, affordability, and institutional quality;** and
 - 2) Summarize JLARC staff's approach to data collection.



Legislature Wants to Know How Tuition Changes Impact Access, Affordability, and Quality

- Seeking to offset decreased state support for higher education, the Legislature passed **E2SHB 1795** (2011) granting temporary tuition-setting authority to the six public four-year institutions.
- The bill:
 - ♦ Directs JLARC staff to study the “impact of institutional tuition-setting authority on student access, affordability, and institutional quality.”
 - ♦ Mandates that “the audit must include an evaluation...for each four-year institution of higher education.”



What is Meant by Tuition-Setting Authority and How Does It Work?

- Tuition levels are initially set in operating budgets.
- Statute grants institutions the authority to raise or lower tuition beyond budgeted levels for eight years (2011-12 through 2018-19).
- However, the 2013-15 operating budget suspended tuition-setting authority for the current academic year.



Statute Does Not Define “Access,” “Affordability,” and “Institutional Quality”

- JLARC staff explored various avenues to define terms:
 - ♦ Reviewed publicly available, peer-reviewed studies;
 - ♦ Talked with legislators on the higher education committees;
 - ♦ Requested specific information from each institution; and
 - ♦ Reviewed the institutions’ accreditation reports.



General Consensus Regarding “Access” and “Affordability” Definitions and Measures

- JLARC staff will define **access** as the *year-to-year change in enrollment for different subgroups*.
- JLARC staff will define **affordability** in at least two ways:
 - Affordability = $Tuition \& \text{ fees} \div Family \text{ income}$
 - Affordability = $(Tuition \& \text{ fees} - Financial \text{ Aid}) \div Family \text{ income}$
- JLARC staff will work with the institutions to determine if additional indicators will complement this approach.

Little Consensus on Definitions and Measures for “Institutional Quality”

- Many definitions and perspectives on quality.
- JLARC staff asked each institution to provide four types of information:
 - ♦ How does your institution define institutional quality?
 - ♦ What indicators are currently used?
 - ♦ For each indicator, explain how the data is collected (e.g., student surveys, departmental reports, etc.) and how frequently it is collected.
 - ♦ Are there additional indicators you are considering?
- Most institutions did not provide direct answers and referred JLARC staff to their accreditation reports.

Accreditation Reports Do Not Specifically Define “Institutional Quality”

- JLARC staff reviewed the most recently available accreditation reports.
 - ♦ Total number of indicators listed ranges from 30 to 97, but quality indicators are not specifically identified.
- Accreditation is an ongoing process that serves multiple purposes including:
 - ♦ Broadly summarize efforts to meet quality and effectiveness standards; and
 - ♦ Peer- and self-evaluation of mission and goals.



How JLARC Staff will Define “Institutional Quality”

| Quality Indicators | Strengths Include: | Weaknesses Include: |
|--|--|--|
| Graduation Rate <i>(Annual)</i> | Provides aggregate measure of degree production | Graduation rates may be influenced by various factors |
| Retention Rate <i>(First-to-Second Year)</i> | Measures the proportion of students who persevere | Does not account for why students do not persist |
| Mean Time to Degree | Measures the average duration leading to degree attainment | Does not account for why students take more/fewer credit hours |

Data Collection Will Involve All Six Public Institutions

- Collect annual data over a 10-year period (2006-07 through 2015-16 academic years) for all six public four-year institutions.
- Much of the data necessary for this evaluation is currently collected by OFM’s Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), but the institutions may need to provide additional data.
- JLARC staff believe the Legislature wants to know this information regardless of who sets tuition.

Important Points About JLARC's Study Approach

- The Legislature could opt to specifically define access, affordability, and institutional quality.
- The approach will focus on comparing each institution to itself over time.
- JLARC staff will continue to work with ERDC, WSAC, and the institutions to obtain the data necessary to address the Legislature's concerns.



Next Steps and Contacts

Final Report

December 2018

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