State Divestment in Higher Education and Students of Color attending Four-Year Public institutions in Illinois

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ABSTRACT

STATE DIVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENTS OF COLOR ATTENDING FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN ILLINOIS

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Northern Illinois University, 2022
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This correlational quantitative study examined a five-year (2014-2019) trend to analyze whether there is a relationship between the level of state funding and the enrollment and graduation rates of students of color attending public institutions in Illinois. For the purposes of this study, the students of color include the following groups: African American, Latinx, and Native American students. Previous studies have shown that divestment in state funds has caused shortages in staffing, experienced faculty, and support services for students attending public institutions. However, there is very little research on the direct relationship between state funding and the collegiate success of students of color versus their White peers.

Historically, public institutions have heavily relied on state funding for their budgetary responsibilities. In the state of Illinois, state funding has significantly decreased for higher education. As a result of the funding gaps, there is a trickledown effect to students, creating larger tuition costs that impact affordability and accessibility to public education for students of color. This study used bivariate Pearson $r$ coefficient correlational tests to evaluate the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the level of state funding to higher education in Illinois and the enrollment and graduation of students of color as well as
scatterplots to determine linear and nonlinear relationships between the variables over a five-year period of study.
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STATE DIVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENTS OF COLOR
ATTENDING FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN ILLINOIS

BY

SIRENA COVINGTON
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
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DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Dr. Xiaodan Hu
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DEDICATION

I am dedicating this dissertation to my heartbeats: my loving husband and supportive son.

Thank you!
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The purpose of this dissertation project was to understand the relationship between state appropriation levels and the enrollment and graduating cohorts of students of color compared to White students. The quantitative approach researched data from 12 public four-year universities in the state of Illinois over a five-year period of study (2014-2019). Resulting chapters of this research project are from the proposal stage, a report on findings, and a scholarly reflection on my writing process and education at the end of the study.

The first chapter is a copy of the dissertation proposal, including edits recommended by the dissertation committee. The proposal was defended in June of 2021, and this chapter outlines the initial plans to carry out the research. The original proposal did not include Asian American students as a part of the students of color sample. As the writing continued, I decided this group as well as biracial students would be excluded from the study. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the reason these groups of students were omitted from the study.

The second chapter is a report of findings using bivariate Pearson’s correlation coefficient $r$ tests and scatterplot tests to determine the linear relationship between state appropriation level and enrollment and graduating percentage. The cohorts of students of color included students who identified as Black, Hispanic and Native American compared to White students. This chapter details the procedures carried out in the fall of 2021; sample institution data were used from IPEDS annual reports and presents the findings from examination of the data. The findings reflected that state appropriation levels had a moderate relationship to Native
American and Black students. The enrollment relationship is a negative, meaning the variables increase and decrease in the opposite direction. The study also found there was no relationship between state appropriation levels and graduating percentages in any of the students of color groups. However, the study did find that state appropriations may be used to fund targeted recruiting of White students who are academically more advanced. The study also found that state appropriations levels may account indirectly for the education gap between students of color attending public four-year institutions in Illinois. The study found that Asian American and biracial students were excluded from literature used to examine students of color in higher education or were grouped in a way that would not decipher data in an effective manner. The sparse literature and discrepancy in data were the reasons these groups were excluded.

The third chapter is a scholarly reflection of my process and learning at the end of the study. This chapter discusses the changes in the students of color study cohort. This chapter also examines the writing process for publication and research methods that can be applied to future research projects. This chapter illustrates how the findings will be applied to my professional and personal goals for advocating for college education for students of color as well as closing the wealth gap in communities of color.
CHAPTER 1

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

In recent political debates there has been a constant concern about closing the wealth gap between communities of color and White communities. Studies between 1984 and 2009 have shown a wealth gap in communities of color, earning three times less than White families, and a contributing factor has been barriers in education (Shapiro et al., 2013). A college degree can create a significant positive shift in income for students of color in that students with a college degree can increase their earning potential and become more fiscally independent (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011).

Public colleges educate over three quarters of the undergraduate student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a). However, the cost of public universities has risen so much that students enroll but do not graduate. Students are largely concerned about increased debt and find it difficult to maintain full-time enrollment while working off-campus (Shapiro et al., 2013). The increase in cost to public education has been largely due to cuts in state-level appropriations that support public universities’ expenditures and student financial assistance programs.

The average four-year public university has seen its per-student state and local funding decline more than 30% over the past 30 years (Webber, 2017). Since the Great Recession of 2008, state spending has remained historically low for public colleges (Mitchell et al., 2018). Public institutions heavily rely on state appropriations, with up to 53% of its budget dependent
on state funds (SHEEO, 2013). Several institutions have shifted the cost to students to compensate for the deficit of lost state revenue (Carlson, 2011).

There have been some institutions that have increased tuition up to 27% and made cuts to services, including library services and computer access to make up for budget deficits (College Board, 2019). The shortage in student services can impact the overall student experience. Over the years, state funding cuts have forced faculty reductions, offered fewer courses, and instituted campus closings (Mitchell et al., 2016). State funding cuts have also impacted direct grants to students in the form of limited funding availability. In Illinois, more than 53% of Illinois Monetary Award (MAP) grant recipients were students of color (ISAC, n.d.). Funding shortages for MAP grants were often exhausted prior to awarding all eligible students, leaving many students taking fewer credit hours or not attending college at all (ISAC, n.d.). This potentially left many students of color out of a college education.

States often decide higher education appropriations based on many factors, including politics, revenue sources, and other expenditures. However, this process does not consider how state appropriations may impact communities of color that are economically struggling. State appropriations can impact several areas, including college access, diversity in the classroom and labor force, as well as income potential and skill sets for communities of color (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this nonexperimental correlational quantitative study is to test the hypothesis of whether decreasing of state appropriations is associated with the proportion of students of color, which refers to African American, Hispanic, and Native American students for
the purposes of this study, attending four-year public institutions in Illinois. I examined 12 four-year public universities in Illinois using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to compare the years 2014-2015 through 2018-2019. From 2007 to 2010, enrollment and state appropriation were impacted at the highest rate. As a result of the Great Recession, between 2007 and 2010, enrollment increased from 18.2 million to 21 million. During this same period, state appropriations decreased from $75.3 billion in 2007 to $73.8 billion in 2010 in the United States (Barr & Turner, 2013). The academic year of 2014-2015 represents the midpoint of heightened enrollment period with the least state financial support. The academic year 2018-2019 represents a five-year trend analysis between enrollment and state appropriations. I examined whether there was a relationship among state appropriations, enrollment, and graduation rates for students of color attending the selected public universities. The goal of the study was to determine whether there was a relationship between state appropriations and student outcomes as well as whether the relationship between state appropriations and outcomes was more prevalent for students of color attending public universities in Illinois.

The following proposal reviews the literature on how state appropriations are determined and current trends in public institutions, including college access, graduation for historically disadvantaged students of color, and the impact that college education has on this marginalized community. The theoretical framework utilized for this study is the resource dependence theory, which explains that public institutions are shifting from relying on state-appropriated funds to external financial resources and tuition revenue to survive fiscal constraints that can impact education-related activities (Fowles, 2014). A quantitative approach aligns with the study’s goals
of testing the relationship between state funding levels and institutional outcomes for students of color. The following research questions were examined during this study:

1. What are the enrollment trends of students of color and White students, respectively, between the 2014-2015 and 2018-2019 academic years?

2. Are state appropriation levels related to full-time enrollment for students of color and White students, respectively?

3. Are state appropriation levels related to graduation rates for students of color and White students, respectively?

Literature Review

Funding public higher education is the lowest priority for states during difficult economic times (Hovey, 1999). Other state interests often take precedence over higher education, such as healthcare, welfare, and corrections, when funding is limited (Okunade, 2004). States find increased costs for medical expenses create deficits that must be addressed in appropriations, and as a result, the appropriations dedicated to higher education decrease (Kane et al., 2005). State funding for higher education represents more than $9 billion in financial aid for students, with two-thirds being distributed to public institutions (Baum et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2009). With these large numbers, the questions become, How are state appropriations in higher education calculated and how does political influence impact this amount?

Determinants of the Level of State Appropriations

State appropriation calculation methods vary depending by state. One method analyzes higher education spending related to personal income, population, and tax revenue (Tandberg &
Laderman, 2018). Another approach uses per capita to calculate state funding appropriation. This means the larger the population, the larger the funding appropriation for higher education. However, this method assumes that the population has high income versus large populations of poor citizens and does not account for the state’s ability to tax citizens (Goldin & Katz, 1998; Kane et al., 2003). The least known method of appropriation is based on available revenue, which can include state tax and lottery revenue. This method is an aggressive funding model that says the more revenue, the larger the appropriations for higher education funding (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). Income, tax revenue, and population are not the only influences on state appropriation. Additionally, a state’s political infrastructure also has an impact on higher education funding (McLendon et al., 2009).

As a result of the population factor and revenue, Illinois has seen changes in its state appropriation for higher education funding. Universities were allocated $1.114 billion in all funds for fiscal year 2019. This represents an increase of $21.5 million (2%) over fiscal year 2018 funding levels. However, this still represents a decrease in funding, as this appropriation was $1.210 billion 2018 (Illinois Board of Higher Education, n.d.).

Political Influence

Studies indicate that states’ gubernatorial political parties have different influences on state funding based on public views on spending and taxation. Democratic control of the state house, lower chamber, and governor has a positive influence on state appropriation funding levels because of higher funding levels (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). Conversely, Republican-controlled political offices have a negative influence on funding levels for public higher education because of more conservative spending (Rizzo, 2004). Some state legislators have
personal reasons for influencing financial support to certain institutions. Studies have shown state legislators who have attended public institutions also tend to support their alma mater and give more financial support to public schools based on their personal experiences at the public institutions (Chatterji et al., 2016).

Legislative professionalism has a positive effect on public higher education because the legislature often receives more financial resources to help with decision making (Squire, 2000). As a result, legislative professionalism has been associated with higher public spending (Squire & Hamm, 2005). Term limits have a negative influence on funding, as shorter terms are associated with stricter fiscal spending (McLendon et al., 2009). Interest groups also influence the amount of state funding. If there are high percentages of lobbyists representing colleges and universities, that state tends to spend more in higher education (Tandberg, 2006, 2007). Some researchers believe there is no significant empirical proof that politics significantly impacts state appropriation in relation to higher education funding (McLendon, 2003). However, based on the literature, politics can influence higher education funding. Some states are divesting in education based on lower tax revenues, political influence, and other expenditures. This phenomenon has created a trend in public colleges increasing direct costs to students.

**Increasing Reliance on Tuition**

From the 2008-2009 to the 2013-2014 academic years, enrollment in public higher education was up by nearly 900,000 full-time equivalent students, approximately 8.6% (SHEEO, 2016). Public higher education institutions are now educating more students with increased costs and reduced state revenue. Many institutions have supplemented the state deficit by raising
tuition or cutting spending. However, spending cuts can hurt educational progress more than tuition increases (Deming & Walters, 2017).

Over the past 20 years, tuition revenue at public four-year colleges increased from 15% to nearly 30%, while state contributions have been cut from 65% to 35% (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016). With this trend of more revenue and more educational progress, many institutions have elected to raise tuition and pass the additional cost on to students. Public colleges in both Arizona and California have increased their tuition by 70% since the 2007-2008 school year (Oliff et al., 2013). As public institutions raise tuition, affordability becomes a concern, especially for communities of color. The cost shifting from states to students is a concern, particularly during a period when many families have trouble paying for additional expenses due to stagnant or declining incomes (Mitchell et al., 2019). Net tuition represents the amount of direct costs students must pay out-of-pocket less the amount of financial aid the student receives (Oliff et al., 2013). State funding cuts, including grants to students, create increased net tuition costs for students (SHEEO, 2013). In Illinois during the 10-year period of 1999 to 2009, there was a decrease in need-based grants for low-income students that represented a 28% decline, while during that same period the median income decreased 7%, which creates concern about affordability for low-income students (Perna et al., 2011). Many students who receive need-based grants in Illinois are students of color (ISAC, n.d.).

Research has shown that for every $1,000 per-student cut in state appropriations, the average student pays $257 more in tuition and fees (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). Large increases to public tuition shift students away from public four-year colleges to other alternatives like private institutions or out-of-state colleges (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016). Tuition hikes threaten affordability and access, leaving students and families in high debt or unable to attend
college at all (Mitchell et al., 2019). These trends in higher direct costs to students can have an impact on students of color attending four-year public institutions.

**Students of Color Attending Four-Year Public Institutions**

Students of color suffer at the expense of budget cuts more disproportionately than other communities. In higher education, spending at public two-year and four-year colleges shows the amount spent on students of color is more than $1,000 less per year than White students (Garcia, 2018). Nationally, public colleges spend $5 billion less annually to educate students or color than White students (Garcia, 2018). Disparities in spending could mean students of color do not receive the same support as other students, in including opportunities to work with advisers and tutors as well as access to mental health services (Lipson et al., 2015).

Based on research by the American Community Survey, 12.7% of all Hispanic adults have a baccalaureate degree compared to 30% of White adults (U.S. Census, 2007). Hispanics represent a large and growing portion of the population in the United States, representing 15.4%, and are projected to comprise 25% of all students enrolled in U.S. public schools by 2025 (President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2000; U.S. Census, 2008). The American Community Survey is essentially saying that even though Hispanics represent a large percentage of the population, they are not being college educated at the same rate. College access for students of color impacts the diversity of the college student body. Full-time freshmen enrolled at non-selective schools represented a 4.5% drop in diversity because of the $1,000 increase in tuition costs (Allen & Wolniak, 2018).

Students of color also have historically faced large barriers to attend college. The largest barrier is affordability. Families of color have difficulty obtaining better paying jobs (Mitchell et
The average cost of in-state tuition and fees was 20% or more of the median income in 2017 for Hispanics in 22 states and 33 states for Black households (Mitchell et al., 2018). The continuous rising costs keep some students of color away from a college education, but those who do find themselves on a college campus also find it difficult to graduate.

Retention and Graduation Rates

According to the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE, 2002), in 1999 White students who entered four-year colleges were retained at 80.3%, Black students were retained at 74.7%, Hispanic students were retained at 75.7%, and Native Americans were retained at 67.2%. This is largely due to the financial burden students face. Cuts in state-level appropriations to higher education over the past 10 years have contributed to tuition increases, directly making it more difficult for students to enroll and graduate (Mitchell et al., 2019). Two-thirds of full-time students are receiving financial aid to help offset college costs (American Council on Education, n.d.). However, students from low-income families tend to spend more of their income to cover out-of-pocket cost than higher income families because these costs represent a larger portion of their income (Hill et al., 2005).

There are other institutional support services funded through state appropriations that have an impact on retention and graduation rates for students of color (Lau, 2003). Some programs include learning centers, freshman-year programs, multicultural offices, and study rooms. Learning centers support students by offering tutoring for students who have academic barriers as well as help students from low-income backgrounds who need to balance work, school, and family responsibilities (Lau, 2003). Freshman-year programs help first-year students adjust to college life, and the students who participate tend to matriculate with higher academic
standings (Gaff, 1997). Multicultural offices create a welcoming environment for students of
different cultural backgrounds, allow for a comfortable transition to college, and promote
acceptance and tolerance throughout the institution (Lau, 2003). When institutions have funding
to support these services, students can excel academically with higher retention rates (Lau,
2003).

Zhang (2009) used information from the IPEDS and College Board to compare state
appropriations and a cohort of eight four-year students between academic years 1991-1992 and
1998-1999 to find the correlation between state appropriation and graduation rates. The study
found a direct link between funding and graduation rates. If all factors are equal, a 10% increase
in state appropriations per full-time equivalent (FTE) student at four-year institutions represents
a 64% increase in graduation rates (Tandberg, 2010). In Illinois, there has been concern about the
disparity in graduation rates related to students of color (Perna et al., 2011). Students of color
have been graduating at a much smaller percentage than White students. In 2009, 36% of Black
students and 44% of Hispanic students graduated from four-year institutions within six years, but
66% of White students graduated during that same period (Perna et al., 2011).

Why Equity in Funding Matters

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) include Historically Black Colleges and Universities
(HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs),
predominantly Black institutions (PBIs), and most recently added (2008), Asian American and
Native American/Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISIs). MSIs currently receive
fewer resources than non-MSIs, although these institutions educate one in five undergraduate
students of color (Cunningham et al., 2014). A large portion of MSIs are open-admission public
institutions that serve historically disadvantaged students, with more than two-thirds being low-income Pell Grant recipients (Bustillos, 2012). Although tuition and fees tend to be lower at MSIs than non-MSIs, there is a gap between financial aid and tuition that low-income students are left carrying, making college a less affordable option. Retention rates are also lower at MSIs because students of color often have academic barriers with few resources on campus to support their progress (Cunningham et al., 2014). State appropriations help support MSIs where federal funds have declined. State appropriations help MSIs fund faculty development, establish endowment funds, develop administrative management and improve and develop academic offerings and student services (Cunningham et al., 2014). Student services at MSIs are funded significantly lower than non-MSIs at four-year institutions. The average amount spent on student services per full-time equivalent student is $5750, and at non-MSIs the amount spent on student services is $8399 per full-time equivalent (IPEDS, n.d.). With declining federal assistance and cuts in state appropriations, MSIs are in jeopardy of shortages in academic offerings and student support services that students desperately need to have an adequate chance for college persistence and economic equity.

After World War II, manufacturing jobs were plentiful, did not require a degree, and allowed for financial independence (ISAC, n.d.). There was a shift in the labor market, developing more jobs that were computer and technology based, which created a need for more educated, skilled workers (Goldin & Katz, 2008). By 2026, there will be a greater need for postsecondary education in that 10% more jobs will require a bachelor’s degree, 17% more will require a master’s degree, and 13% more will require a doctorate or professional degree than they did in 2016 (ISAC, n.d.). Therefore, it is imperative that communities of color earn adequate education credentials to remain competitive in the new labor market. It is important that the
public invests in higher education to maintain high-quality, affordable tuition and financially support communities that need it most to develop a diverse and competitive job market (Mitchell et al., 2018). Some students who do not have a college degree have a very different lifestyle than those who are college educated.

Currently, young adults without a college degree have a more difficult time earning enough to be financially self-sufficient than those in the mid-1970s (Danziger & Ratner, 2010). As a result, many young adults are delaying independent living, marriage, and having children (Danziger & Ratner, 2010). Students with less education have a higher unemployment rate of 30%, with 54% moving back home for financial support (Kaplan, 2010). In 2007, men with college degrees earned 79% more and women earned 92% more than those without college degrees (Mishel et al., 2009). Students of color must have support for college access but must also graduate to remain competitive for these higher paying jobs. Higher tuition costs can impact not only the student but entire communities and states that need highly educated workers to continue to grow and be successful (Mitchell et al., 2018). A college education represents a brighter future for those communities of color where the idea of hope may be lost. A college education gives the community a sense of pride, economic stability, and prosperity.

Theoretical Background

The resource dependence theory was utilized in the study to examine how state appropriations are related to increases in tuition and whether Illinois institutions’ shifts in revenue relate to support service in public four-year institutions, which can impact the enrollment and graduation trends for students of color. States originally create governing boards to control policy and budgets in public higher education based on institutional reliance on state
appropriations (Knott & Payne, 2004). Public universities receive funding from federal funds, state appropriations, endowments, and tuition and fees (Bok, 2003). State appropriations, tuition, and fees are the largest of these sources (Wellman et al., 2009). With declining financial support from both federal and state funds, institutions are now shifting to tuition revenue to make up for lost government revenue (Fowles, 2014). The resource dependence theory was developed through management and behavior literature to examine how funding resources can change organizational behavior (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Organizations tend to change policies, objectives, and goals based on the needs of external stakeholders when the organization is reliant on external funds for survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Shifts in public higher education from reliance on state appropriation to external resources and tuition revenue have also shifted the power of the governing board to external stakeholders, which can directly impact students (Fowles, 2014).

A study conducted by Fowles (2014) used resource dependence theory to examine public institutions and how shifting dependence on external funding can impact the mission of the institution. Fowles's study examined the percentage of institutional education and related activities expenditures (student instruction, academic services, administrative support, operations, and maintenance expenses) of institutional revenue from tuition, in-state tuition and fees, full-time enrollment, and the higher education price index (HEPI). The Fowles study found that resource dependence theory yields significant shifts in institutional expenditures for educational activities based on the source of the revenue. Institutions often must change their mission and policies to align with external funding sources (Fowles, 2014). This can be harmful to students of color if the external stakeholder’s interests do not align with academic and support services to advocate for student success.
In 1995, Illinois reorganized the governing board from a Board of Governors format that shared united goals and priorities for Illinois institutions to a hybrid model that coordinates the governing board with university leaders (Perna et al., 2011). The reorganized format gives more authority to university leaders while stripping away the unified focus and power of the governing board (Perna et al., 2011). Illinois also has reduced resources such as need-based financial aid to students while increasing tuition costs above the rate of inflation (Perna et al., 2011). Illinois does not have unified priorities in higher education nor is there any accountability for not meeting standards related to higher education (Perna et al., 2011).

Research Design

The following sections describe the research approach, research design, methods, and limitations within the study. The following information also explains why the approach and research design were chosen to meet the objective of the study. This study used a non-experimental correlational design to determine the relationship between the independent variable (state appropriation) and dependent variables (enrollment of White students and students of color and graduations rates of White students and students of color). Correlational designs focus on the relationship between two or more variables and allow for a description or measurement of that relationship (Creswell, 2012). This design explained the relationship of state appropriations levels to the college enrollment and graduation rates of students of color. The study ran bivariate correlation tests of the variables related to the academic years 2014 through 2019 to see variations in the state funding and its relationship to students of color and White students.
Data Source and Sample

The data set for this study utilized information from the IPEDS for the academic years 2014-2015 through 2018-2019. Under Section 153 of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-279), the National Center of Education Statistics was authorized to collect, analyze, and disseminate statistical educational data. Completion of the IPEDS survey is required for all institutions that participate or apply for federal financial assistance as authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. For the purposes of this study, the academic year was August 1st through July 31st. The information was used as the sample of all 12 four-year public institutions in Illinois. The study used panel data of institutional-level observations to determine whether state-level funding is related to enrollment and graduation for students of color. For example, Zhang (2009) used this data format to examine whether state funding is associated with college graduation. The final data set for the current study included 60 observations of 12 institutions between 2015 and 2019.

The study used secondary data collected from the IPEDS survey: graduation rates, enrollment, and state appropriation financial aid as defined by the IPEDS. The graduation rate component collects data on the cohort of full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking, undergraduate students and tracks their completion status at 150% of the normal time to complete all requirements of their program of study. The fall enrollment component collects student enrollment counts by level of student enrollment, status, gender, and race/ethnicity. State appropriation revenue received by an institution through the legislative process is used for operating expenses.
For the purpose of this study, only students who self-identified as White or from an underrepresented community of color were included, following Perna et al.’s (2011) study. African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American students were the students of color considered for this study. Students who chose not to self-identify or identified as Asian American, multiracial, or nonresident aliens were excluded. The student’s ethnicity was determined by the institutional record submitted through IPEDS. There was no direct contact with the participants, as the survey is conducted at the institutional level based on public record reporting data. The data were retrieved from the corresponding online resources for IPEDS electronically. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software because of the large numbers and components required to test the information.

**Analytical Strategy**

The study examined whether the level of state appropriations at 12 public institutions in Illinois has a relationship to students of color and White student enrollment and graduation rates. The independent variable for the study is the level of state appropriations; the dependent variables are the percentage of White students enrolled during the period of study, the percentage of students of color enrolled during the period of study, the graduation rate of White students, and the graduation rate of students of color (see Table 1.1). First, the longitudinal study showed the percentage of students of color and White students enrolled across all 12 public institutions from 2015 through 2019. Second, the study showed the rates of graduation % of students of color and White students across all 12 public institutions. Third, the study examined the state-level appropriations distributed to each of the 12 public institutions. The average percentages of each
year are presented in tables and figures to show the trends of the dependent variables in comparison to the independent variable.

Table 1.1

Description of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Percentage of students of color enrolled</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of White students enrolled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduation rate of students of color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduation rate of White students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variable</td>
<td>The amount of state appropriations received</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This study also used bivariate Pearson’s correlation coefficient $r$ tests to determine the significance of the relationship between the independent and dependent continuous variables. Pearson’s correlation coefficient tests do not require identification of independent and dependent variables; however, for the purposes of this study, the independent and dependent variables are labeled. The tests were performed to examine the relationships for both students of color and White students at 12 public institutions in Illinois, respectively: 1) state appropriations and percentage of student of color enrolled, 2) state appropriations and percentage of White students enrolled, 3) state appropriations and graduation rates of White students, and 4) state appropriations and graduation rates of students of color. The bivariate correlation relationship uses a graph/scatterplot to visually show the linear or nonlinear relationships among the variables. The figures also show whether the linear relationship is positive or negative based on the slope of the line. The study also used hypothesis testing. The null hypothesis $H_0: p=0$ says the population correlation is not significantly different from zero. This means there is no
significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The alternative hypothesis $H_a: p \neq 0$ indicates the population correlation is significantly different from zero. This means there is a significant linear relationship among the independent and dependent variables. The significance level of the $p$-value is 5% or $a=.05$. If the $p$-value in the study is less than significance level $a=.05$, then the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is true and there is a significant linear relationship among the independent and dependent variables. If the $p$-value is not less than the significance level of $a=.05$, then the null hypothesis is not rejected, and the conclusion is that there no significant relationship among independent and dependent variables.

Limitations

There are a few limitations in this study. There are issues surrounding the IPEDS report, the consideration of external funding, policy changes, and the exclusion of some student groups. The submitted data relies on institutions reporting data correctly (IPEDS, n.d.). If there are any errors at the institutional level, the researcher has no way to confirm accuracy. The IPEDS report assumes that the institution has proper reporting protocols in place to ensure accuracy. In examining and using IPEDS data, the information is taken as law, which may create inaccurate student outcomes. Also, if students do not self-identify, they are not included in the sample. This may also skew the findings in the current study. The IPEDS report requires that some students are excluded from reports, such as students who transfer mid-year. The IPEDS report is based on Fall enrollment and the Fall cohort for determining graduation rates (IPEDS, n.d.). The exclusion of spring-start students may have had an impact on the outcome of the study.
The study only accounts for the relationship of state funding allocation on direct cost to students and trends in enrollment and graduation. Public institutions are not-for-profit, meaning any surplus revenue is used within the institution for programs that lack funding resources (Fowles, 2014). Some public institutions receive external funding for research opportunities as well as endowment funding from alumni. Some external funding can account for reduced cost to students in the form of larger institutional scholarships. In the study, the type of institution is noted for being selective or research but not if there is significant external funding. There is also additional federal CARES Act funding because of the current pandemic that institutions and students are eligible to receive. The study is tested data prior to this additional funding, which can make the student outcomes seem unrealistic.

The study only considers the current state funding policies as they relate to higher education allocation to four-year public institutions. The current state funding policy could change based on election of political administration and/or political interest. Higher education funding suffers more than any other public entity under strained state fiscal conditions (Hovey, 1999). Analysis of state funding appropriation indicates that public institutions are heavily embedded in the political environment and can influence policy changes (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). The political influence can change the overall allocation and make the current study obsolete depending on the significance of the changes. There is also the consideration of federal policy and administration changes. If there is significant change at the federal level, there could be a trickle-down effect to state-level funding policy.

Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and biracial students are excluded from the study because of minimal existing literature. There is very little research that uses Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the same study as other students of color; therefore, it is difficult to
gather similar perspectives from other researchers (Escueta & O’Brien, 1991). Also, some studies include Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as one ethnic group, whereas the IPEDS report categorizes these groups separately, making the data hard to analyze. Biracial students were also excluded because the assumption could not be made that all biracial students are students of color who fall in the group used for this study. The exclusion of these groups of students could possibly skew the findings of the study.

Validity

I used construct validity to ensure the quality of the data collected for the study. Construct validity uses a multistep process to ensure the defined variables and the procedures used to measure the theory are adequate and free of measurement errors (Schwab, 1980). It is imperative to currently identify the relationships between variables and measurements are error free to produce valid findings of research (O’Leary-Kelley & Vokurka, 1998). The variables measured in this study are the relationships among state appropriations, enrollment, and graduation rates of both students of color and White students. This information was given numerical values and placed in a custom database to compare relationships among the variables. The relationships were measured over a five-year period from 2014-2015 through 2018-2019. These relationships were also measured using an SPSS database to confirm accuracy between both systems.

The second step to ensure quality data was using statistical conclusion validity. Statistical conclusion validity shows the inferred relationship between the independent and dependent variables and explains whether the variables’ relationships are statistically significant (Christensen et al., 2011). In this study, I examined whether the independent variable State
Funding levels were statistically related to the dependent variables Enrollment and Graduation of students of color in comparison to White students during the defined years of the study.

The non-experimental correlational survey design allowed me to test the impact of state funding on college enrollment and persistence of students of color. The quantitative strategy allowed the variables to have a numeric value that can be compared and placed into a database. The specifics of the data collection and data analysis were summarized to support the objectives of the survey. Based on the design, approach, and methods, the goal of the study should align successfully.

Significance

The significance of this study is to explain the importance of redirecting state appropriations to guarantee equity in access and grant funding to communities of color. The FY 21 State of Illinois Board of Higher Education budget recommended that state appropriations to higher education should be increased by $193.8 million from its current level. The increase in funds should be used to support operating expenses at Illinois colleges, which includes $68.3 million proposed specifically for public universities (IBHE, n.d.). The study also explored the impact of economic equity based on college access. The study showed how building a diverse skilled labor market can be beneficial to the public good. This study also illustrates that future research is needed regarding funding structures in state government.

Redirecting State Funding

Currently, Illinois state appropriations calculations do not have a specific component that accounts for equity in communities of color. While there is ISAC reporting that shows a
significant amount of Black and Hispanic students receive MAP grant funds at Illinois institutions, there is no mechanism that guarantees the amount is always the same and is spread evenly in all communities (ISAC, n.d.). At the state level, there needs to be more effort to direct equal funds to communities of color where college access can have long-term effects on economic outcomes. Previous reporting shows the percentage of Black and Hispanic graduation is at a much lower rate than White students; creating adequate funding resources removes the affordability barrier for students of color (Perna et al., 2011). Accountability is also needed to ensure equitable distribution of funds. This can be done with state-mandated reports to be completed by ISAC. These mandated reports must be reviewed by the governor and General Assembly for approval of appropriation distributions. Reports would be public records, which are easily accessible and listed as an addendum to the Illinois State Board of Higher Education Annual Report.

Economic Equity

Communities of color do not have economic equity and are often oppressed because funding resources are disproportionate (Mertens, 2009). Economic equity in communities of color represents power shifts within the community. Creating a pipeline to college education by developing secured state funding to these communities can create long-term financial freedom. A college education is key to leveling the playing field in terms of socioeconomic growth. For communities of color to compete, there must be a support system in place to gain adequate education as a standard. There is currently research that shows the school-to-prison pipeline in Black communities is a very real thing, including such practices as disproportionate placement of Black students in special education and harsher disciplinary action such as detentions and
suspensions in school systems (Sealy-Ruiz, 2011). Providing adequate financial support in Black communities, specifically for college, can help with dismantling this system to create a school-to-college pipeline to create economic growth.

Diverse Skilled Labor Market

The importance of creating diversity in the labor market is often overlooked. However, the idea of sharing thoughts, ideas, and processes with people from different backgrounds allows for a more productive and progressive learning space for both the employer and employees. A diverse labor market promotes tolerance and acceptance of all people. Corporate America is guilty of creating environments that have a pattern of racial and gender inequality even with the antidiscrimination laws currently on the books (Collins, 2019). This pattern happens because students of color are not graduating at the same rates. Creating a more diverse skilled labor market starts with education and developing a larger pool of qualified applicants. Corporations will then be forced to expand their labor force and be more accepting of employees from different backgrounds.

State Funding Structures

The current funding structure for state appropriations heavily relies on tax revenue. There should be consideration for additional revenue sources to help fund State of Illinois college grant programs. It seems that higher education is last on the list in Illinois in terms of funding objectives. Some studies have suggested an increase in property tax and excise taxes like fuel, tobacco, and alcohol can be used to help supplement higher education funding (Hovey, 1999).
Future research is needed to determine how additional revenue can be allocated to higher education and how that translates to updated policies and procedures within the general assembly.
CHAPTER 2

STATE DIVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENTS OF COLOR ATTENDING PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS IN ILLINOIS

Equity in communities of color has come under scrutiny in recent years, especially in the area of economic equity. Studies have shown the wealth gap in communities of color can largely be attributed to disparities in education (Shapiro et al., 2013). White communities tend to earn three times more than communities of color because of educational barriers (Shapiro et al., 2013). A college education has a positive impact on earning potential for communities of color, thus creating economic equity (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Students of color do not attend college due to the lack of access and concerns about affordability. If students of color do choose to attend college, students choose to attend public institutions because they tend to be lower in overall costs and have less selective admission requirements. Public institutions educate three-fourths of undergraduates attending college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a).

State appropriations are funds allocated by the state legislature as revenue to institutions to offset operational expenses incurred by the institutions (Okunade, 2004). In this study, I examined state appropriations distributed to public institutions in Illinois. Operational expenses in higher education include academic support; student services; instruction, which includes faculty salaries and benefits; libraries; and auxiliary services (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021). The affordability of public institutions is now a concern for students of color because of the decrease of state-appropriated revenue resources. Rising costs are especially significant to this community that struggles with education equity (Mitchell et al., 2016). The
average decrease of state appropriations to four-year public institutions is nearly 30% over a 30-year period (Webber, 2017). Since the Great Recession of 2008, states have continued to reduce funding to public institutions (Mitchell et al., 2018). As a result of the decrease in state appropriations, some public institutions have had to increase tuition by up to 27% (College Board, 2019). Public institutions rely heavily on state allocation, with close to 53% of their budget revenue coming from state appropriations (SHEEO, 2013). When there are budget gaps, students must pay more out-of-pocket costs to help cover those gaps (Carlson, 2011).

State appropriations not only keep tuition rates affordable, but institutions also use state-appropriated funds to support the cost of services within the institutions that can include library services such as study rooms, student outreach centers, and computer labs (College Board, 2019). When state appropriations are limited by the government, many services to students are cut, institutions must limit academic courses, shortages occur among support staff and faculty, and all are included in college budget deficits (Mitchell et al., 2016). These service shortages can impact access as colleges suffer from a lack of personnel to offer support for students of color as well as outreach to continue the high school-to-college pipeline. Campus diversity and creating a diverse skilled labor market are all factors institutions must consider when there is a lack of students of color on college campuses (Mitchell et al., 2019).

While this study is concentrated on state-appropriated funds distributed to public institutions in Illinois for their operational budget, it is also important to note that some state appropriations in Illinois are allocated to be a financial aid funding resource for students. The largest Illinois-funded student aid grant program is the Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant. More than 53% of MAP grant recipients are students of color (ISAC, n.d.). The students of Illinois were impacted by state appropriations shortages that resulted in the limited availability of
MAP grant funds. Students who were eligible for these funds were not awarded aid because of the lack of funding, many had to take fewer credits or did not attend at all (ISAC, n.d.). Illinois appropriations also support public universities by providing revenue for operating expenses through the sale of collegiate license plates (Illinois State University, 2022). Illinois-appropriated funds support public libraries and continuing education through Illinois Equalization grants as well (Public Library Per Capita/Equalization Grant Awards and Expenditures, n.d.). These resources are essential to communities of color and decreases in state-appropriated funds and, therefore, can have an impact on the pursuit of higher education in Illinois.

Research Questions

A quantitative approach was used in this study to determine the relationship between state appropriations levels and institutional outcomes for students of color. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the enrollment trends of students of color and White students, respectively, between the 2014-2015 and 2018-2019 academic years?
2. Were state appropriations related to enrollment for students of color and White students, respectively?
3. Were state appropriation levels related to the percentage of the graduating cohort for students of color and White students, respectively?
State appropriations calculations for higher education vary based on the state’s funding structure. One method is determined per capita, meaning states with larger populations dedicate more state appropriations to higher education (Goldin & Katz, 1998; Kane et al., 2003). Another method is to calculate funding based on personal income, population, and tax revenue (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). The third, and less common, method is to calculate state appropriations for higher education based on the availability of revenue from other sources such as state taxes and lottery revenue (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). Illinois uses both population and state tax revenue, but as a result of changes in the population and revenue in Illinois, the amount of state appropriation for higher education decreased in 2019 from state appropriations allocated to public institutions in 2018 (Illinois Board of Education, n.d.).

State-appropriated funding to higher education is decided by several factors, including other priorities in state expenditures and political influence. State appropriations to higher education nationwide are roughly $9 billion in financial aid to students, with most of the funding being distributed to public institutions (Baum et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2009). However, state appropriation cuts for higher education have taken place because other expenditures are considered more important, especially during an economic crisis (Hovey, 1999). Priorities in state budgets lean toward healthcare, welfare, and state corrections (Okunade, 2004). When there is an increase in costs in any of these areas, such as Medicaid, there are cuts in the higher education appropriations to cover the higher cost, leaving less funding for higher education (Kane et al., 2005).
Political influence also can determine the amount of state appropriations that funds higher education. The funding infrastructure in many states is determined by the governor and other elected officials based on their views on spending and taxation (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). Democratic political parties tend to be more liberal on spending and taxes and favor more spending for higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). The opposite has historically been true for Republican-led political parties that traditionally have a more conservative view on spending and allocate less funding for public higher education (Rizzo, 2004). There is also the personal agenda some legislators carry that has an influence on higher education funding. For example, if a legislator has graduated from a public institution, they may support more funding for those institutions (Chatterji et al., 2016). Term limits and interest groups are also a factor in state appropriations for public higher education (McLendon et al., 2009). Term limits have a negative influence on state appropriations for public institutions because short terms customarily have tighter spending budgets and have a propensity to spend less on education (McLendon et al., 2009). Interest groups such as lobbyists influence spending on public education, especially if they are representing the interest of colleges and universities (Tandberg 2006, 2007).

The decline in state appropriations resulted in increased out-of-pocket costs for students and families. Many families found that tuition hikes were growing at a rate higher than the rate of income. In-state tuition at public institutions rose 20-33% more than the median income of families of color (Mitchell et al., 2018). Tuition revenue increased from 15% to 30%, while state appropriation decreased from 65% to 35% (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016). On average, every $1,000 lost in state appropriations represents a $257 per-student increase in out-of-pocket expenses (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018). The increased costs for students of color can be quite a task for an already economically struggling community, making a college education a difficult
decision. Public institutions found that not only were students paying more, the decline in state appropriations also created a need for colleges to institute spending cuts to balance the budget (Johnson et al., 2011).

Students of Color Attending Four-Year Public Institutions

Budget deficits and spending cuts impact students of color disproportionately in terms of college access and student services. Historically, there has been less spent educating students of color at two-year and four-year public institutions than White students (on average $1,000 less), which equates to about $5 billion nationwide (Garcia, 2018). For example, recent data indicated that only 12.7% of Hispanic students earn a bachelor’s degree compared to 30% of White students in the United States (U.S. Census, 2007). However, the Hispanic student population is expected to grow significantly by 2025, which will create a larger wealth gap if the education rate does not increase to represent the growing community (President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2000; U.S. Census, 2008). It is also important that college campuses are representative of the population and institutions are sufficiently funded to be inclusive of diverse cultures, making college a more welcoming resource to help close the economic gap (Horta et al., 2008).

Students of color who choose to attend college are not being retained by the institutions or graduating at the same rate as White students. In a report by the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE, 2002), White students who entered four-year colleges were retained at 80.3% while students of color were retained at lower rates (Black students 74.7%, Hispanic students 75.7%, Native Americans at 67.7%). Students must overcome barriers of income, access, social and cultural acceptance, and tolerance on college campuses to be
academically successful. Some of these student barriers can be alleviated with increased campus services.

Shortages in state appropriations account for many of the much-needed support programs being understaffed, underfunded, or nonexistent on college campuses (Lau, 2003). These programs and services can include learning centers, multicultural centers, and freshman-year programs (Lau, 2003). Learning centers and study rooms are advantageous for students of color who are struggling academically by providing individualized support and tutoring (Lau, 2003). Multicultural centers provide an environment of acceptance and/or tolerance of different cultures, which is comforting to students of color when transitioning to college (Lau, 2003). Students of color who participate in freshman-year programs have a higher retention rate and find it easier to adjust and matriculate throughout their college career (Lau, 2003). These services help students of color in a very direct way, and declining state financial support for these programs can make or break a student’s college career.

Graduation rates have also come under scrutiny as they relate to state appropriations and equity. Examining the relationship between state appropriations and graduation rates, Zhang (2009) used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and College Board to determine whether an increase in state appropriation leads to a change in graduation rates. The study found that with an increase of 10% in state appropriation, there was an increase of .64% in graduation rates (Zhang, 2009). The study examined resident students’, minority students’, full-time students’ six-year graduation rates accounting for state appropriation per full-time equivalent (FTE), tuition and fees, age of students, and mean SAT scores. Data examined in the study revealed no statistically significant relationship between minority students and graduation rates, but the study also concentrated more on tuition and fee
costs related to state appropriations and graduation rates rather than ethnic backgrounds of the students (Zhang, 2009). Previous studies have shown that White students in Illinois are graduating at a higher rate than students of color (Perna et al., 2011). In 2009, White students graduated at 66% within six years, whereas Black students graduated at 36% and 44% for Hispanic students during the same period (Perna et al., 2011). Funding and services can change outcomes for students of color who lack financial and academic support (Mitchell et al., 2019).

The labor market has also substantially changed from manufacturing jobs to a more technical skill-based labor market. Manufacturing jobs did not require a degree to earn a living wage that provided financial freedom, but now those jobs are nonexistent (ISAC, n.d.). The current job market requires a technical background that will likely require a degree to earn a living wage (Goldin & Katz, 2008). By 2026, more employers will require applicants to have bachelor’s degrees (10%), master’s degrees (17%), and/or terminal degrees (13%) (ISAC, n.d.).

Young adults without college degrees are now delaying independent living and marriage because of financial constraints (Danziger & Ratner, 2010). Adults without degrees also have higher rates of unemployment or underemployment (Kaplan, 2010). Men with a degree earn 79% more than men without a degree and women with a degree earn 92% more than women without a degree; this issue creates huge financial gaps (Mishel et al., 2009). Students of color will continue to be at a deficit economically if there continues to be barriers to obtaining a college degree.

Theoretical Background

In this study, resource dependence theory was utilized to understand the relationship between the level of state appropriations and the collegiate success of students of color attending
four-year public institutions in Illinois. Resource dependence theory was developed as a management behavior model to explain how the source of funding can change organizational behaviors (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In previous years, the organization of public institutions consisted of a governing board that controlled the mission and funding structure of all public institutions in a state that incorporated unified goals for all public institutions (Knott & Payne, 2004).

Under the financial structure of the governing board, funding resources included federal funds, endowments, tuition revenue, and state appropriations, the largest being federal funds and state appropriations (Bok, 2003). Once the funding decline started for both federal funds and state appropriations, the shift of power of the governing boards started to take place in the organizational structure of public institutions (Fowles, 2014). The trend of increasing tuition revenue and relying on endowments also changed the mission and objectives of the governing board, as now public institutions were at the financial mercy of the external stakeholders (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Governing boards had to incorporate the university leadership to help with external funding resources, which in turn shifted power to individual campus leadership.

In a study conducted by Fowles (2014), the resource dependence theory was used to examine the impact on public institutions that changed the mission of the institution based on the need for external funds. Fowles used the information from the institutional percentage of expenditures, which included student instruction, academic services, and support, and compared that to the percentage of institutional revenue sources including tuition and fees and the higher education price index (HEPI) to determine the relationship. Fowles found that educational services offered and the institutional mission shifted based on the source of revenue. This
concept can be detrimental to students of color if the objective of the external stakeholder does not align with the success of disadvantaged groups.

The Illinois public institutions governing board shifted to a hybrid model in the mid-1990s, giving the Board of Governors less power and including campus leadership in the decision-making process (Perna et al., 2011). The original Board of Governors model included a unified mission as well as goals and financial structures for the greater good of all public institutions in Illinois and their students. Once the hybrid model was enacted, each college shifted its goals and objectives to align with external stakeholders to ensure financial security under the control of campus leadership (Perna et al., 2011). If the needs of the stakeholders did not support funding for low-income students or support services for students of color, many programs and resources were cut (Perna et al., 2011). Currently, Illinois has less need-based aid to students and increased out-of-pocket costs, with very little accountability in the power dynamics based on the need for external financial support (Perna et al., 2011).

Data and Sample

Public institutions were chosen for this study as state appropriations in Illinois have decreased substantially, possibly impacting public institutions (IBHE, n.d.). Illinois has 12 public institutions that have a variety of student populations: 33.3% are mid-size at 5,000-9,999, 33% are mid-large at 10,000-19,999, and 33% are large with a 20,000+ population of students (IPEDS, n.d.). Public institutions in Illinois are in city settings (50%), suburban areas (25%), towns (16.67%), and rural areas (8.33%). The data represented a range of information that provided a sample from variously sized institutions in diverse settings, percentage of students of color as well as percentage of Pell Grant recipients. The amount of dependence on state appropriations
and support for students of color may vary based on the demographics of the institution (see Table 2.1). State appropriations, over the years of study, represented on average 10% of the revenue sources at public institutions in Illinois (IPED, n.d.). However, noticeably in FY 2016, state appropriations represented a larger proportion of revenue for public schools in Illinois, up to nearly 40% at one school (IPEDS, n.d.).

The correlational study used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Institutions were required to submit statistical data to be eligible to participate in Title IV federal financial aid under the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 (IPEDS, n.d.). The statistical data from the IPEDS report were submitted to the National Center for Education Statistics to be analyzed and distributed for research purposes. The sample was selected from data collected from 12 public institutions in Illinois over the five-year period of study (2014-15 through 2018-2019). Observations for student enrollment for the 12 institutions tracked enrollment of students of color and White students over five years ($n=60$). The sample also used 11 institutions over the five years for each institution to measure a graduation cohort within 150% of normal time. Of note, Governors State University did not have four-year graduation data available. Governors State University was a two-year college until 2014 when the school transitioned to a four-year public institution. The four-year percentage of graduating cohorts of students was tracked from these institutions for students of color and White students. Students of color were defined as the aggregated group of Native American, Black, and Hispanic students. The state of Illinois appropriated funds for each public institution. The study tracked the state-appropriated funds over the five-year study at each school to determine any correlation between state appropriations and enrollment and the percentage of the selected group of students in the graduating cohort.
## Table 2.1
Description of the 12 Public Four-Year Institutions in Illinois

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name</th>
<th>Campus Setting</th>
<th>Institution Size in Fall 2014</th>
<th>Percentage of Students of Color 2014*</th>
<th>Percentage of Pell Recipients FY 2015*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago State University</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Mid-Size</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Illinois University</td>
<td>Town: Distant</td>
<td>Mid-Size</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governors State University</td>
<td>Rural: Fringe</td>
<td>Mid-Size</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois State University</td>
<td>Suburb: Midsize</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern Illinois University</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Mid-Large</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Illinois University</td>
<td>Suburb: Small</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Illinois University-Carbondale</td>
<td>City: Small</td>
<td>Mid-Large</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville</td>
<td>Suburb: Large</td>
<td>Mid-Large</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois Chicago</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois Springfield</td>
<td>City: Midsize</td>
<td>Mid-Size</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois of Urbana-Champaign</td>
<td>City: Small</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Illinois University</td>
<td>Town: Remote</td>
<td>Mid-Large</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Students of Color= Native American, Black, and Hispanic. FY 2015= Fall 2014 through Spring 2015.
Analytical Strategy

The study used a correlational design because the design describes the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2012). The longitudinal study examined 12 public institutions in Illinois and determined whether there was a relationship between state appropriations and the enrollment and graduation percentages, respectively, for students of color and White students. The independent variable used in the study was state appropriations, which was continuously measured for all 12 public institutions over the period of study (IPEDS, n.d.). Dependent variable data for student enrollment from the IPEDS report, which includes data for full-time, part-time, undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree/certificate-seeking students over a 12-month period (July 1-June 30). Enrollment data also included racial/ethnic data as self-reported by the students. The dependent variables were also continuous. The percentages of student enrollment were determined by calculating the number of students enrolled in each group divided by the total enrollment number at each of the 12 public institutions each year (see Table 2.2). Correspondingly, the percentage of graduating cohorts was determined by calculating the cohort number of the students graduated divided by the total number of students graduated within 150% of normal completion time as defined by IPEDS (n. d.).

Determining the significance of the correlation between the independent and dependent variables was examined through the bivariate Pearson’s correlation coefficient $r$ test. The variables were labeled in the Pearson’s coefficient test in this study, although labeling is not required for this test. Bivariate testing and scatterplot testing were used in this study to show the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Field, 2018). The study used hypothesis testing to show the statistical significance of the linear relationships between the
independent and dependent variables. Pearson’s $r$ correlations test the strength of the positive or negative correlation between two variables in the range of -1 and +1 (Schober et al., 2018). A positive correlation $r$ test means that two variables are moving in the same direction. The correlation $r$ test being negative means the variable moves in the opposite direction (Schober et al., 2018). The significance level of the $p$-value was set at .05, representing the threshold of defining a significant linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Schober et al., 2018).

### Table 2.2
Description of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Percentage of students of color enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of White student enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of graduating students of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of graduating White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variable</td>
<td>The amount of state appropriations received</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Limitations

The limitations of the study include other factors that influence state appropriations, IPEDS data resources, policy changes, lack of graduation data available for one of the sample institutions, and student group exclusions. Other factors that influence state appropriations to higher education in Illinois include unfunded state mandates as well as inflation (Illinois Board of Higher Education [IBHE], 2018). The rate of increased cost in the higher education price index (HEPI) has risen more than the consumer price index (CPI) over the past 20 years, creating a budget deficit for public institutions in Illinois. State appropriations were not enough to cover
the gap between inflation and university revenue (IBHE, 2018). As a result, public institutions were forced to increase tuition and fees revenue and cut expenses to maintain their operational budgets (IBHE, 2018).

In collecting data from IPEDS reporting, the data were reliant on the institution submitting error-free information. The data are very detailed, and any data that had been reported incorrectly can skew the results of the study. The Standards and Review Office does conduct peer reviews and analyses to verify the accuracy of data reported by institutions, but it does not guarantee all information is error free based on institutional interpretation of the information to be collected (NCES, 2012b). Transfer students are also excluded from IPEDS reporting. Exclusion of Asian American students for the study presents a limitation because the student data presents too many variables that cannot be controlled and there is limited literature in higher education (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Biracial students were also excluded because of the lack of data available for this student population.

There are often changes in the political environment that can impact changes to funding policy. Higher state spending can increase the budget for higher education, which based on this study’s findings can impact the enrollment of some minority groups. The current Democratic governor in Illinois has introduced a funding model that will appropriate funds for public universities based on the performance of the institution, which can mean more funding for public institutions (Civic Federation, 2021). However, with any given election, the governor and the funding model could very well change based on changes in leadership and political party alignment.

One of the institutions in the study, Governors State University, had been a two-year transfer college for third- and fourth-year students since its inception in 1969 to 2014 (Governors
Governors State University began its inaugural class as a four-year institution in Fall 2014, so as a result there were no graduation rates reported for the period of study by the school. The lack of data available for the institution could have skewed the results of the graduating cohort portion of the study as the data exclusion resulted in 55 observations instead of 60 observations, which was the baseline for the study.

Results

The results of the study are listed below (see Table 2.3) based on IPEDS data from the period of study fiscal year (FY) 2015 through FY 2019. I examined data from all 12 public institutions in Illinois for these five years and calculated the mean and standard deviation of the 60 observations of enrollment and 55 observations of graduation percentages. Based on the findings, White students both enroll and graduate at a much higher rate than students of color. Over 51% of students enrolling in college were White, as compared to 25% underrepresented students of color. This is also true for the graduation percentage in that 30% of the graduating cohort were students of color and 57% were White students. In both cases, there is a huge gap in overall access to and collegiate success between students of color and White students.

The results of the scatterplot testing show the subcategories of relationships between each group of students of color and state appropriations as compared to the White student population and state appropriations. Tests showed that the linear relationship is statistically significant between state appropriations and Black student enrollment at public institutions in Illinois over the five-year study period (see Figure 2.1). The results of the bivariate Pearson’s correlation \( r \) test (see Table 2.4.) show a statistically significant correlation between state appropriation and enrollment of Native American students at the .05 significance level \( (r = -.401, p = .01) \).
also a significant correlation between the percentage of Black students and state appropriations \((r = -.329, p = .001)\). The correlation \(r\) between state appropriations and Native Americans enrollment has a moderate negative relationship. In the case of Native Americans, enrollment decreases at a significant rate as the state appropriations level increases. The moderate negative relationship is also true for state appropriations and Black student enrollment-- Black student enrollment decreases at a significant rate as the state appropriation level increases. There was no significant correlation between the level of state appropriations and enrollment with any other group of students.

Table 2.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>Mean (Standard Deviation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students of color enrolled</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.252 (0.841)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of White students enrolled</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.510 (0.194)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students of color who graduated</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.300 (0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of White students who graduated</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.570 (0.233)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of state appropriations received</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>76,553,054 (81,784,234)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The students of color mean and standard deviation enrollment and graduation data includes Native American, Hispanic, and Black students’ average enrollment and graduation for the study period.
Table 2.4
Descriptive Summary for State Appropriations/Enrollment (n=60)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American Students</td>
<td>-.401</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Students</td>
<td>-.329</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>.723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1. Student enrollment and state appropriation (2014-2019).
The scatterplot testing shows the linear relationship was statistically marginally significant between the state appropriations and Black student percentage of graduating cohorts at public institutions in Illinois over a five-year study period (Figure 2.2). The results of the bivariate Pearson’s $r$ test (see Table 2.5) results also show no correlation between state appropriations and the graduation level in any group of students at the .5 level.

Figure 2.2. Percentage of graduating cohort and state appropriations (2014-2019).
Table 2.5

Descriptive Summary for State Appropriations/Percentage of Graduating Cohort (n=55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American Students</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Students</td>
<td>-.254</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students</td>
<td>-.077</td>
<td>.576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The study revealed a statistically significant linear relationship between the amount of state appropriations received by public four-year universities and their racial/ethnic profile of students enrolled, and the relationship varies by student groups. While White student enrollment does not have a linear relationship between the level of state appropriation, Black and Native American student enrollment did have a moderate negative relationship with the state-appropriated funds public institutions receive in Illinois. The study showed that equity in access will continue to be problematic in Black and Native American communities if the state of Illinois continues to divest in higher education. While Black and Native American student enrollment was related to state appropriations, this idea is not true for all communities of color. Hispanic student enrollment has no linear relationship to state appropriations in Illinois. However, it should be noted that there are issues of privilege in higher education directly related to funding and recruiting. Institutions are spending more funding to seek out students (traditionally White students) who have advanced placement courses and higher standardized testing scores (Ayyad, 2015).
White students are more prepared for college as better education opportunities are available in predominantly White communities at the K-12 level than in low-income communities of color, which traditionally have poor-performing K-12 schools (Shapiro et al., 2013). College readiness is a barrier that continues to create inequity in higher education (Ayyad, 2015). Also, the study found that state appropriations are not statistically related to the graduating cohort rate of any racial/ethnic group of students attending public institutions in Illinois. Although White students are graduating at a higher rate than students of color, this phenomenon is not solely based on state appropriations. Cost is a huge factor in the achievement gap, as White students have 64% college debt versus Black students at 80% debt, which is a deterrent to college completion for Black students (Reed & Cochrane, 2012). Many White students start in an advantageous position academically and financially, making collegiate success a more achievable goal than for students of color (Ayyad, 2015). This is an example of systemic racism that shows how Black students start in a deficit in comparison to the privilege of White students. Black students’ graduation percentages may have a slight relationship to state appropriations based on the collegiate support services that help Black students integrate on college campuses. Services supported by state appropriations like college counseling, academic support, and instructional training helps to retain Black students and allows them to matriculate successfully (Creighton, 2007). While a goal is to equalize college access for students of color and White students, the overall goal is to close the economic gap and create a diverse labor market in communities of color (Ayyad, 2015). Thus, a null finding in this study does not necessarily mean state appropriations at public institutions are not related to access and collegiate success for students of color, but there are other factors that must be considered as well.
In Illinois, state appropriations are not determined by student population. In some cases, schools with a larger White student population are receiving more funds than institutions with a higher minority student population. In this instance, White students are benefiting more from state-appropriated funds than disenfranchised students of color. Over the period of study, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign received the largest portion of state appropriations; however, this institution has the smallest percentage of students of color (IPEDS, n.d.).

Another factor that can be considered regarding enrollment and graduation is the State of Illinois budget impasse. During the FY2015 and FY2016, the state of Illinois’ public institutions faced difficult financial times when the state budget reached an impasse and no state appropriations could be distributed (Dabrowski & Klingner, 2017). For public institutions in Illinois, the financial impact was significant, which caused some institutions to rely on reserved/endowed funds, cut spending, reduce faculty and staff, and cut services (Roberts, 2022). State appropriations in Illinois also fund student aid programs, which schools and students were not receiving during the budget impasse. As a result of these factors, some public institutions in Illinois saw a decline in enrollment that translated to a loss of tuition and fees revenue (Roberts, 2022). While many schools in Illinois have recovered from the huge fiscal shortfall, some schools have not yet bounced back financially and are doing more with less while trying to improve enrollment (Roberts, 2022).

Policy Changes

The study shows that some communities of color do have limitations to college access as related to the level of state support. There must be more done to address the disparity in Black and Native American communities to address these limitations, like more state-level financial
support to encourage college matriculation in Illinois. There has been success with freshman-year programs that support higher numbers of graduating cohorts of students of color (Gaff, 1997). Developing a policy that will guarantee these programs in all public institutions in Illinois will allow students to feel secure and know there will be a support system on campus to promote the retention and graduation of disadvantaged students.

Illinois is an affirmative-action state, which encourages the enrollment of low-income and minority students with the intention of creating a more diverse student body (Williamson, 1998). The intention of affirmative action is to give the opportunity for a college education to those from underrepresented communities who otherwise would not or could not enroll in college (Williamson, 1998). Some states have found the affirmative action programs are unfair and have banned these policies (Epple et al., 2008). As a result of banning affirmative action programs, there has been a decline of 35% of minority students at top-tier universities (Epple et al., 2008). Hence, continuing encouragement of affirmative action and first-year programs could solidify diversity on college campuses as well as support collegiate success for minority students.

College education has been found to be a reason for the wealth gap between White communities and communities of color (Shapiro et al., 2013). As a result of the difference in income and resources, some communities of color are often oppressed and find it difficult to obtain financial freedom (Mertens, 2009). Black and Native American students need state financial support to make college education a more accessible and attainable goal. Investing in these communities can avoid systems like the school-to-prison pipeline that exists in Black communities (Sealy-Ruiz, 2011). All public colleges and universities must have equity in college access at the forefront of their missions to gain economic equity in disadvantaged communities of color.
Funding Structure

The current funding structure has both political influence as well as budgetary constraints based on the priorities of that state (McLendon et al., 2009; Okunade, 2004). Many states are instituting performance-based funding models to address inequities in state appropriations. Performance-based funding is state-appropriated funds for higher education institutions based on the outcomes of the individual institution. Those metrics are determined by the state (Jones, 2017). In Illinois, the idea of performance-based funding for public institutions was introduced to regulate funding for higher education, but it would require the full support of all 12 public institutions (Civic Federation, 2021).

Under Public Act 97-320 in Illinois, the original metrics included advancing the success of financially and academically at-risk, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students (IBHE, n.d.). The current performance-based funding model has been revised to include the following metrics: degrees awarded, research and public service expenditures, graduation rates within 150% of the normal time, persistence (24 credit hours completed within one year), cost per credit hour, and cost for completion (IBHE, n.d.). The subcategories that have been approved are meant to address diversity, and those metrics include Pell-eligible students, students who are 25 and older, African American students, Hispanic students, and students studying STEM and healthcare (IBHE, n.d.).

While the performance-based funding model attempts to address the disparities in college education for poor students and students of color, this structure has not yet been implemented and can be terminated with a change in state leadership (Civic Federation, 2021). The performance-based model also only accounts for .05% of state appropriated funds, which will
hardly have an impact on communities of color (Jones, 2017). The performance-based model also fails to address disparities in revenue from external sources that often replace supplemental state-level funding. If there is no change to the structure of external revenue, inconsistencies will continue between public colleges, often leaving students of color out in the cold. All public institutions should revisit the Board of Governors structure that has one mission, goal, and funding structure in Illinois for the greater good of students attending public universities (Perna et al., 2011).

Future Research

The current study discussed policy and funding structures in Illinois; however, future research is needed to determine the requirements of each community of color. There also must be inclusion of the growing population of Asian American students to determine their needs for collegiate success (Museus & Kiang, 2009). The research should also include the idea of financial literacy in these communities, which includes financial aid programs and scholarship resources available to communities of color. The lack of knowledge about these programs can create a barrier to college education.

The quantitative approach to this study concentrated on numerical data-driven outcomes. For future research, qualitative data should be added to create a mixed-method approach. There should be questionnaires and focus groups on communities of color where students and families could be more involved and give firsthand accounts of what methods work and do not work to encourage collegiate success. This research should include the implementation of programs supported by state appropriation as well as an evaluation of the programs to determine if there needs to be additional funding or resources added to program structures.
Additional research is also needed to determine fixed external revenue structures in Illinois as they relate to higher education. There should be dedicated guaranteed funds regardless of political influence or individual institutional leadership. Developing a fixed external funding source that allows all public institutions to have access to these designated funds can support equity in college access and provide financial resources for all students in Illinois. This plan will in turn create economic equity for all communities and a diverse skilled labor market, which is a win-win for the entire state of Illinois.
CHAPTER 3

SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

My goal for choosing the subject of state appropriations in relation to enrollment and graduation trends for students of color was to determine whether public institutions are using funds to help advance underrepresented communities. I plan to use this information for both personal and professional growth. In the early 1990s, 27% of high school graduates were first-generation students (Choy, 2001). My community did not encourage college education. High school counselors in my community were not providing access to resources for students to prepare for college. Our schools did not prepare students to be academically successful (Thayer, 2000), so I attended a vocational high school because it was normal to learn a skill for work after high school (Striplin, 1999). Along with college readiness, there were many other barriers for students of color, like racial inequities on college campuses, lack of family and institutional support, as well as financial hardships (Falcon, 2015). With these barriers in mind, many students of color do not earn their degrees (Shapiro et al., 2017). Fortunately, I was able to graduate from college in 1991 as a first-generation Black student from a community that was economically disenfranchised. I was a true anomaly.

I attended public institutions at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, which was the primary reason I chose this type of institution for my study. In my experience, public institutions host a wide variety of students: rich, poor, academically advanced as well as those who need
academic support services. I started this research to better understand how state-appropriated funding relates to the collegiate success of students of color. I wanted to show that students of color who are coming from a disadvantaged position need services at public institutions such as first-year programs like TRIO and learning centers (Gullatt & Jan, 2003).

First-year transitional programs and financial aid programs are supported by state-appropriated funds (Mitchell et al., 2016). In the state of Illinois, financial aid programs like the Monetary Award Program (MAP), Minority Teachers of Illinois (MTI) Program, and Illinois Veterans Grant (IVG) are funded by state appropriations to help students finance higher education (ISAC, Gift Assistance Programs, n.d.). When there are shortages in financial aid programs, affordability becomes a concern many students cannot overcome (Mitchell et al., 2016). I personally understand how finances can make or break a student’s college career. I relied heavily on federal and state financial aid programs to continue my education as my family was not able to help me financially. Without financial aid, a college education would have been impossible.

A college degree in disadvantaged communities is more than just a piece of paper; it represents opportunities that would not otherwise be possible. A degree is a representation of hope to change the trajectory of not only the community but the trends of a family. In my case, I was the first, but every generation after me has attended college, with nearly all earning degrees. It has now become normal in my family to assume college will come after high school. As a result, my family dynamic changed. My family now has a better economic standing than we had experienced in the past. In my current position as Director of Financial Aid at a small private institution, I also understand from an administrator’s perspective how the revenue from state appropriations can impact institutional budgets and may cause cuts in services and financial aid
in my institution. It is quite the dance to balance the needs of the students and needs of the institution with limited funds available.

Research Experience

I started my research project with my personal and professional presumptions, which I believe led me to my predetermined ideas of what my findings would prove. However, what I found in my study was that while enrollment of some groups of color were related to state appropriations in Illinois, that was not true for all students of color. Native American and Black student enrollment had some relationship to state appropriations levels; however, this was not the case with Hispanic students. The data also indicated that White students enrolled in public institutions at almost double the percentage of students of color.

I also learned that the percentage of graduating students of color is half of the percentage of graduating White students. The study showed that while the gaps in graduating cohorts are alarming, the gaps are not directly related to state appropriations. I found that White students may benefit from state-appropriated institutional revenue used for targeted recruiting and systemic educational inequities, but my thoughts were not fully reflected by the findings related to enrollment and graduating percentages for students of color. I found that I could not just group all students of color together and assume the education gap was all directly caused by state appropriations levels. Other factors may play a more significant role in enrollment and percentage of graduating students of color.

During the research process, I found the literature to be very limited in the areas of Illinois higher education funding, particularly related to the biracial and Asian American student experience in public institutions. I found there were more peer-reviewed articles on the
California school system and international school systems but very little about the Illinois school system as it relates to funding structures. The limited amount of literature about Illinois presented a bit of a challenge as I could not gather information from many different perspectives.

I was also unsure about including or excluding Asian American students. Data for Asian American students were available from IPEDS, but the corresponding literature was sparse. Studies related to minorities in higher education label minority students as Black, Hispanic, and Native American (Escueta & O’Brien, 1991). Hence, when researching literature, I could not use those studies when examining the Asian American experience in college with other students of color. Unfortunately, Asian Americans are often overlooked when it comes to research in higher education, largely due to oversimplifying this group of students (Escueta & O’Brien, 1991). Asian Americans are often a melting pot that can include Pacific Islanders in some cases but not always, so it is very difficult to find studies that incorporate all groups of minority students (Escueta & O’Brien, 1991). There was also the question of including biracial students because I could not assume that the student would be considered a minority. Again, other studies did not include biracial students. Ultimately, I decided to exclude both groups of students so the literature I gathered could be used more effectively. This issue left many students unaccounted for in the research, and I wonder if the results would have been different if these students had been included.

If given the opportunity to research the topic again, I would use a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods would allow the quantitative portion to examine the numerical values of the relationship between state appropriations and enrollment and graduating percentage. The qualitative portion could examine the student experience through firsthand testimonials from students who have been impacted by funding and service shortages. This information is a big
piece of what I felt was missing. Numbers can only go so far in painting the picture of student needs, but student testimonials, parental questionnaires, and feedback from faculty and staff at the sample institutions could have helped the audience connect to the findings. I also believe that the findings would be deemed more trustworthy because the study would present more information from a variety of sources. It is also possible the mixed-methods approach could present additional findings that would possibly have taken the study in a totally different direction. I believe the findings from a mixed-methods study could have presented the incentive that many institutions need to see the value and opportunities for change related to educating students of color.

Research Implications in the Professional Context

As Financial Aid Director, I plan to use the information to better advocate for student literacy and institutional literacy related to state appropriations. I plan to inform students about additional financial aid programs and external scholarship resources to help fund their college education. I want to encourage students to use fewer loans to decrease their debt while also stressing the importance of college completion. I would like to see the completion rate increase at my institution, and I believe encouraging less debt may make this a reality. I have noticed over the years that our small population of students of color is not graduating at the same percentage as White students, which may be due to costs.

Another issue I would like to tackle using the findings from my study is the effort to recruit more students of color. Our current admission practices do not include a specific strategy to encourage minority enrollment. During my 10-year tenure at my institution, there has never been an initiative to diversify our predominantly White student body. I would like to present the
ideas to upper management to use institutional funds to recruit a more diverse incoming student body. The current admission goal is like many other music schools, which is to recruit the most academically and musically advanced students; these students are traditionally White. I am willing to share the findings of my study; however, I am unsure if this will convince management of the advantages of changing our recruiting strategy. This is an area I struggle with personally because my institution sits in the heart of Bronzeville, located in the city of Chicago, which is historically a community of color. I will likely need to expand my reach by being more active in community organizations that promote college education for students of color, such as Ada S. McKinley Community Services (2022) and the Chicago Urban League (Chicago Urban League, n.d.), which is located very near my institution.

Changes in my organizational structure, in terms of funding literacy, will be a bit of an undertaking. I intend to use the information from my study regarding other state programs like the Illinois License Plate Program to receive a larger portion of state revenue so we can expand the programming for diversifying our institution. My fear is that the extra funds will be used to continue with our current policies and support only the programs we currently have in place. We have a Board of Directors in place; however, we are a private institution and decision making can be influenced by campus leadership and external stakeholders.

Research for Publishing

I found the writing process for publication to be quite difficult. Research writing for publication requires detailed information in a limited number of words. I found it difficult to figure out what information was needed and what was excess information. Trying to nail down the appropriate amount of information was a trying process. There is also the responsibility to
the audience who will read this information. It is important that the content is being received in the way you intend. I had to consistently proofread and rewrite content because I skipped a sentence or detail because I understood the concept but did not provide adequate details to my reading audience.

Also, technical writing for quantitative data for publication also presented challenges. I found it difficult to simplify the finding and results sections and present the data in reader-friendly terms. I simply could not copy and paste the calculations. I had to explain what each of the calculations meant as it related to my study. This was my first time writing a quantitative research project, so it was very confusing writing formulas and creating charts to explain the findings. Publication writing taught me how to be clear and concise in presenting my ideas to my audience.

Future Research Projects

In future projects, I will view research as an opportunity to learn and grow. Throughout the writing process, I endured the sleepless nights, frustration with editing, and getting so close to just throwing in the towel and giving up. I realize now that I am nearing the end that the research process was meant to teach me about myself as well as teach me about my project. I learned how to be patient with myself and allow errors or small failures that might require me to start over. I learned that research is better when your own personal bias does not overshadow the goal of learning more about your topic. It is okay if your study proves you are wrong rather than fight with the facts. I needed to just accept the new knowledge. In future research projects, I will incorporate these concepts but also create more tactical task lists prior to taking on this learning opportunity. It is important to have a feasible timeline for meeting deadlines and to incorporate
downtime for small mental breaks. I would also set goals that will allow me to balance work and personal life.

After earning my degree, I would like to transition to a position that will allow me to make an impact on higher education policy and procedures at the state or federal level. I would like to use future research projects to have a direct influence on increasing college education opportunities for students of color. I would like to use research to show the implication of systemic education bias that starts with K-12 schools that shape the collegiate landscape that students of color now must overcome. I want my future research projects to encourage some sort of policy changes that will benefit my community. I want to close the educational gap as much as possible with my future research projects.
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