

State-Level Higher Education Interest Group Alliances

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This study asks: Do higher education institutions form lobbying alliances and if so why, when, and how do they function within those alliances? The study employs the conceptual framework developed by Hojnacki and finds her framework useful in understanding state higher education interest group alliances. Institutions form alliances for specific strategic reasons; most importantly to increase the potential influence institutions have on state governments. The study found that in trying to understand state higher education interest group activity, scholars must take into consideration the context within which the interest groups and institutions operate.

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State politics in regard to public higher education is a high stakes game, in which most issues are highly contested, the processes are dynamic, and the issues affect many people. Because higher education institutions are being forced to compete intensely for increasingly scarce and contested resources, they are being called upon more frequently to defend their autonomy and their use of limited state funds (Sabloff, 1997). Institutional lobbying is an important aspect of the politics of state public higher education. Lobbying plays a major role in politics at all levels and one way interest groups attempt to increase the influence they have is by forming alliances. While interest group alliances are receiving growing attention at the federal level among researchers, there has yet to be much attention given to interest group alliances at the state level. Likewise, the lobbying efforts of higher education institutions at the state level have also received little scholarly attention. This paper provides a starting point for filling this research void, presenting empirical questions in regard to higher education lobbying alliances at the state level and beginning to answer them by examining higher education interest group alliance formation in one state through a qualitative analysis.

In order to understand state politics it is important to understand the actions of state-level interest groups. In their pivotal book on state interest group activity, Gray & Lowery (1996) note that, "In modern scholarship on democracy, great emphasis has been accorded the role of interest organizations in providing a second and supporting channel of citizen communication and control" (p. 1). In addition, state-level interest group activity has been shown to impact public policy (Nice, 1984). Therefore, it is important to understand the activities and actions of state interest groups. More specifically, Hojnacki (1997) explains, "To know *how* groups act to articulate their policy preferences and exert their influence, and *why* they choose particular strategies for advocacy is important" (pp. 61-62). Understanding this process is important because it helps explain how and why interest groups have certain effects. Ample evidence exists regarding the outcomes of interest

group activities but, as Hojnacki points out, there is less known about their strategies.

One lobbying strategy, alliance formation, involves interest groups deciding to work together on a particular issue or set of issues. In forming an interest group alliance the institutions involved make a conscious choice regarding resource allocation. An interest group presumably decides that its interests would best be served by forming an alliance and is therefore willing to allocate some portion of its scarce resources (i.e., money, time, people, and materials) toward that alliance. Although it appears from simple observation that interest groups form alliances at the state level, we do not know specifically why and when they form these alliances or how they function within those alliances, especially in regard to state higher education institutions. This paper will address these questions in regard to higher education interest group alliance formation and activity in a large Eastern state by focusing on *if* higher education institutions form alliances and if so *why* and *how* they go about forming those alliances.

Past Research

Some scholars have adopted the perspective that alliances are unlikely or at least are formed infrequently because organizations have an interest in protecting their unique identity and autonomy (Berry, 1977; Wilson, 1973). By protecting their identity and autonomy, organizations are able to develop interest niches and become the policy experts in a given area. This helps them to be able to acquire devoted members and credibility with decision makers (Browne, 1990).

Changes to the political system have encouraged the formation of more alliances. In discussing federal level politics, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) indicate that the increasing numbers of interest groups has led to more interaction among groups. Due to the greater number of groups vying for the same scarce resources, an increased level of interdependence has resulted. Likewise, state level research indicates that the number of state-level interest groups has increased dramatically over the last 20 years (Gray & Lowery, 1996). Therefore, similar effects may be anticipated at the

state level as at the federal level. As Hojnacki (1997) indicates, “Given that more groups and more diverse types of interests are active, organizations’ opportunities for alliance involvement are surely greater now than in decades past” (p. 64).

In regard to the activity of interest group alliances, the structure and character of the group is affected by the amount and type of information members have about each other, the scope of the issue, and the character of the organizations (Hojnacki, 1997). Groups will join an alliance to magnify their power, reduce costs, access information or timely intelligence, and to shape proposals and the debate surrounding the policies they are interested in (Hula, 1995).

Organizations decide to work in alliances based on their assessment of how likely joining an alliance would increase their chances of success in meeting their policy goals (Hojnacki, 1997). If the organizations feel that working in an alliance will help them achieve their goals, they are more likely to join an alliance. More specifically Hojnacki (1997) explains,

When a group’s interest in an issue is narrow, and when a group’s potential allies ‘signal’ that they have little to contribute to a collective advocacy campaign, the cost of joining an alliance will likely outweigh any benefits that may accrue. But when organizations perceived to be ‘pivotal’ to success are members of an alliance, and when groups represent expressive interests or perceive a strong organized opposition, the benefits of coalition appear substantial. (p. 62)

Further, the issue context, interacting with individual-level characteristics, appears to be critically important in determining whether interest groups form coalitions. Organizations appear to participate in coalitions when they are involved in issues involving little conflict and high salience (Mahoney & Baumgartner, 2004).

How individual members contribute to an alliance is determined by the amount of resistance the alliance faces, the resources the individual members have, and the goals of the individual members. Alliances also present the opportunity for free-riding, where one organization contributes little to the alliance but receives all the benefits (information, credit for taking action,

positive policy outcome, relationships) (Halu, 1995; Hojnacki, 1998). Hojnacki (1998) found that groups in a coalition are less likely to free-ride when their lobbying actions are coordinated (there is a leader), when the alliance has frequent interactions, and when the group is small.

Diversity, the States, and Higher Education

At the federal level scholars have begun to pay some attention to interest group strategies, however, there has been less attention focused at the state level. One possible cause of this is the difficulty of comparing states. Although there are similarities in interest groups and interest group activity across the states, there are also variations in all fifty state systems. There tends to be some agreement among scholars that the diversity is due in part to economic factors and the political environment (Lowery & Gray, 1993; Thomas & Hrebener, 2004). The diversity of state systems provides a great opportunity for comparative studies, even as it adds to complexity of the analysis.

Another level of complexity is added when one attempts to study state higher education interest group activity. Each state government has a different relationship with its public higher education sector. That relationship is related to the higher education environment within the state. This environment includes (among other things) the type and degree of government oversight regarding public higher education, the amount of autonomy a state grants its colleges and universities, and the ratio of public versus private institutions. A state's higher education environment may affect the way institutions lobby and because each state higher education environment is different, the way institutions lobby within each state will be different.

While every state has some sort of state higher education governance structure and corresponding policies, there is great variability in the form that structure takes and in the amount of regulation imposed by the state on its higher education sector. Some states grant colleges and universities a large degree of autonomy and others attempt to tightly regulate and closely monitor the actions of colleges and universities. While some

scholars have attempted to categorize the various governance structures (e.g., planning agency model, weak coordinating board, regulatory coordinating board, and statewide governing board model) (McGuinness, 1997; Richardson, Bracco, Callen, & Finney, 1999) great variability exists within each category.

As an example of the differences that exist between states and models, within the state examined in this study there is a community college sector, a state system of higher education, which includes several institutions governed by one board and closely regulated by the state, and a number of state-related institutions, which have their own boards and a greater degree of constitutional autonomy. Within this state there also exists a large private higher education sector, which is represented by a fairly influential association. This state's system is very different from say Utah, Montana, Nevada, or Idaho, each of which has one governing board for all public higher education institutions and few private colleges and universities.

This diversity presents an interesting challenge to researchers, while providing them with numerous testable hypotheses. While studies of all fifty states can result in general theories of interest group activity, they do not help elucidate the unique complexities of each state's political and higher education systems. Likewise, the opposite is true. Studies of individual states are able to produce an accurate picture of the individual state, capturing its unique characteristics but fail to move the field much closer to meta-theories of state higher education interest group activity and influence. Therefore, both approaches have value and utility.

As indicated before, there has been little state level higher education lobbying research. Gove and Carpenter (1997) found most higher education lobbying research has focused on the federal level. One notable exception is the work done by Murphy (2001). She examined the efficacy of selected higher education lobbying tactics as perceived by governmental affairs staff at selected state higher education institutions. She surveyed 147 governmental affairs staff at colleges and universities from 36 states. Murphy's (2001) analysis was based on four different models of lobbying: the communications model, roles model, a business model, and an

ethical model. However, she did not discuss alliances or coalitions as Hojnacki (1997) defines them. This limited her study in that she provided no information in regard to how institutions interact with each other in the institutions' lobbying efforts. Hojnacki's framework may provide a good lens with which to understand these interactions.

Another exception is the work by Ferrin (2003, 2005). Ferrin's work provides a good description of what college and university lobbyists do, providing contextual information for this study. Ferrin surveyed and interviewed numerous in-house higher education lobbyists (lobbyists that are employees of the college or university, as opposed to contract lobbyists that work for an independent firm) in order to document their character and traits. He also discussed lobbying strategies. He found that in-house higher education lobbyists work differently when they are lobbying for funding and when they are working on specific policy issues. The lobbyists may act as facilitators or as key players. In matters of routine reporting and obtaining additional funding, the lobbyist seems to act more as a facilitator, involving relevant university units and coordinating activities among them. But when a legislative issue touches the university interest's and autonomy, the lobbyist plays an active role in developing the initial strategy, monitoring progress, cooperating with other universities and working closely with individual legislators. Ferrin also found that the in-house lobbyist's relationship with the president is basically advisory in nature; the president has veto-power over all lobbying strategies developed by the lobbyist. Within the university the in-house lobbyist serves as a facilitator and key player in the development of lobbying strategies and, Ferrin found, the lobbyist plays a vital role in developing any university lobbying strategy. While Ferrin's study was not a case study and did not develop a theoretical framework with which to understand state-level higher education interest group alliances, as this study attempts to do, his study does provide valuable information about how offices of government affairs operate.

This present study focuses on one state but extends previous research by looking specifically at alliances and coalitions. This

study also applies a conceptual framework which may be applied to other cases in order to develop a general theory of state higher education interest group alliances.

Conceptual Framework

Interest group alliances are one element of the political game. Politics is a complex web of individual and group interests. The end goal of the political game for a particular group is to influence those in power to act in a way favorable to their interests. Frequently groups representing various interests join together to work towards a common goal. The different arenas within which groups act cause groups to act and interact in ways that are unique to their arena or context. Therefore, the context, the various players, the issues, and the nature of the alliance may all interact to affect the possibility of an alliance forming and how the alliance will function (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Hojnacki's (1997, 1998) theoretical framework takes into consideration the context, the various players, the issues, and the nature of an alliance. This study applies Hojnacki's framework because, while many scholars have studied interest group activity and lobbying, most existing research has examined whether and when an organized interest's or lobbyist's efforts effect policymakers decisions. Hojnacki's framework focuses on the strategic activities of the interest groups as they attempt to achieve the group's goals, which is the focus of this paper. While past researchers, such as Hula (1995), examined the context in which interest groups make decisions about lobbying alliances, aside from Hojnacki's efforts, the existing research has not directly addressed the question of why some groups feel it is advantageous to join alliances and others do not. More importantly, Hojnacki provides a systematic theoretical framework that has been tested at the federal level (Baumgartner, Leech, & Mahoney, 2003; Hojnacki, 1997, 1998; Mahoney & Baumgartner, 2004) and found to be robust. Hojnacki's framework is the most suitable because this study is concerned with determining if higher education institutions form alliances and if so why and how they go about forming those alliances.

In regard to the probability that an interest group will join an alliance, Hojnacki (1997, 1998) developed this formula, which depicts her conceptual framework:

$$\text{Pr}(\text{join}) = f(\text{context}, \text{allies}, \text{autonomy}, \text{character}).$$

Her formula suggests, or hypothesizes, that the probability that an interest group will join an alliance is influenced by the issue context, the potential allies, the group's need for autonomy, and the group's character. Following a brief discussion of Hojnacki's methods, each element of her conceptual framework will be discussed in detail.

Hojnacki (1997, 1998) tested her hypotheses by examining interest groups' decisions to join coalitions related to five specific issues: the energy tax proposals made by Congress and the Clinton administration in early 1993, the striker replacement legislation that was re-introduced during the 103rd Congress, the 1992 Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) amendments, and the family and medical leave legislation that was introduced during the George Herbert Walker Bush administration. Then, using various sources, Hojnacki identified interest groups that might conceivably be interested in the five issues in question. She mailed surveys to 702 organizations asking recipients to answer questions about their lobbying activities and decisions to join or not join coalitions in response to the one or more of the five issues.¹

In addition to analyzing survey data, Hojnacki (1997, 1998) also conducted interviews with 15 interest group representatives who responded to the survey. The set of individuals who were

¹ Hojnacki's efforts yielded an initial response rate of 43%. However, another 129 surveys that were returned were not useable. Therefore only 24% of the total surveys mailed were ultimately used in the analysis. The low percentage of usable surveys is, of course, reason to pause. If there was something systematic causing some groups to respond and others not to then the results may be biased. But there does not appear to be any pattern or reason why any certain group or groups would be more or less likely to complete the survey. Another concern is that Hojnacki's low response rate reduced her sample size which could have caused problems for her statistical analysis, although, this does not appear to have been the case because her coefficients did not have any problem reaching statistical significance.

interviewed included representatives of groups that joined coalitions and those that worked alone. The interviews complemented and reinforced the survey data and provided additional contextual information. Specifically, as discussed in greater detail earlier, Hojnacki found that when a group's interest in an issue is narrow, and when a group's potential allies signal that they have little to contribute to a collective advocacy campaign, the costs of joining an alliance will likely outweigh any benefits that might accrue. But when organizations perceived to be “pivotal” to success are members of an alliance, and when groups represent expressive interests² or perceive a well-organized opposition, the benefits of coalition appear substantial.

Hojnacki's statistical analysis and data coding referenced the constructs included in her formula which were issue-context, the potential allies, the group's need for autonomy, and the group's character. Each of these factors will be discussed in greater detail. Following each explanation I will discuss how each factor may influence state higher education interest group alliance formation.

Context

The context or issue-context are the forces surrounding the issue. A major factor is the amount of organized resistance facing the interest group in regard to the issue. When groups are strongly opposed in an organized fashion, they may find it more advantageous to form or join a coalition. The scope of the issue might also affect a group's decision to work alone or with others. When the interest group defines the scope of a particular issue narrowly it may limit the potential benefits from working in an alliance. Therefore, the broader the scope of the issue, the more likely an alliance will be formed.

This has implications for state higher education lobbying because, as indicated earlier, each state has a different arrangement

² Hojnacki classifies interest groups into two categories: groups that lobby on behalf of an idea, such as pro-choice and pro-life interest groups, and those that lobby for a specific clientele, such as the auto industry and pharmaceutical companies. The auto industry and pharmaceutical companies would be examples of expressive interests, according to Hojnacki.

of institutions, state policies, and governance structures. If the scope of the issue is broad enough it may pull private and public institutions together. Otherwise it may only align state-related institutions (to use the state examined in this study), while leaving private, state-system, and community colleges out of the fray. There could also be times when an issue might directly affect one sector but because the issue is very important to that sector and because the organized resistance is strong enough, that sector might attempt to draw in the other sectors to help overcome the resistance.

Allies

Hojnacki (1997, 1998) hypothesizes that the knowledge a group has about potential allies impacts the probability that the group will align with those allies. This knowledge could be derived from past experience with the potential allies or the reputation of the potential allies. If, based on past experience or reputation, the group believes that a potential ally is a free-rider the group may be less likely to form a coalition with that particular potential ally. Repeated experience with other organizations introduces more stability and trust into the relationship. In addition, the presence of a pivotal player, or a group that is key to the success of the coalition, will entice more groups to join the coalition because it will be perceived as having a greater chance for success (Hojnacki, 1998). On the other hand, when a specific group has the resources, grassroots strength, or expertise to be successful on its own it may be recruited to join a coalition. Under these circumstances the group may not want to join because it may feel that it is being recruited because the coalition is bound to fail or has little to offer (Hojnacki, 1998).

In state higher education lobbying, institutions typically interact with other institutions and systems, therefore they get to know their potential allies very well. But there are also opportunities for aligning with groups outside of the higher education sector. These groups could be medical associations, agricultural associations, or secondary education unions. When an institution is put in the position that it may want to align with a

group outside of higher education, the group's reputation may be even more important.

Autonomy

Some groups place a high level of importance on maintaining a distinct identity and autonomy. Hall (1969) indicates that a group's autonomy is affected by its competition with other groups for members and resources. If a group desires greater autonomy it will be less likely to join an alliance. Also, according to Hojnacki (1997, 1998), groups that rely on purposive incentives to attract members tend to be less likely to join alliances.

Most states give lump sum appropriations to the various sectors or to state-wide governing boards, which then dispense funds to individual institutions. Therefore, while institutions may lobby together for a general increase in the state's funding of higher education at one level, at another level they may be competing with each other during the fund distribution phase. Higher education can also be seen as competing with other areas or groups for state resources. Health care, prisons, and secondary education are frequently seen as competitors for limited state resources. Higher education has a long tradition of advocating for greater autonomy and the ability to remain free from outside direction (McLendon, 2003). Therefore, institutions may be willing to work together on common interests but most likely want to preserve the ability to act independently to further their own self interests.

Group Character

There is a difference between interest groups that lobby for businesses, professions, or trades and groups that lobby for specific issues or ideas (i.e., pro-choice and pro-life interest groups) (Hojnacki, 1997). Groups that lobby on behalf of issues or ideas often have less concrete clientele and are held together by shared ideological perspectives and therefore rely on purposive incentives. Hojnacki hypothesized that the social or ideological groups would be more inclined to join alliances because they must work harder than other groups to raise funds, maintain the support of their clientele, and to maintain public focus on their issues. Therefore, these groups must remain visible and active on many

issues and because their resources are limited they are compelled to join with other groups.

Colleges and universities are tangible institutions that take predictable stances on the issues that concern them. Therefore, according to Hojnacki (1997), they are more likely to undertake targeted and pragmatic efforts and are less likely to work in alliances. I believe this to be true when one considers whether colleges and universities would align with groups outside of higher education. However, because institutions' resources are very limited and because institutions often have similar needs, colleges and universities are likely to frequently align with each other even if no umbrella organization exists to help facilitate such alliances.

Contribution of Individual Members

This study focused on the three main issues addressed by Hojnacki (1997, 1998): coalition size, whether activities are coordinated, and frequency of interaction. Due to a lack of access to the same type of information as Hojnacki, this study did not attempt to examine Hojnacki's entire (1998) hypothesis in regard to the amount individual groups contribute to an alliance effort. It was, however, focused on free-riders and the effects of free-riding. As indicated earlier, Hojnacki found that the smaller the coalition, in the presence of a lead organization, and when there is frequent interaction among alliance members, their free-riding is less likely. Colleges and universities within a state may not want to free-ride because of the limited number of potential allies within each state. Institutions know that they will be aligning with other institutions and groups in the future and will therefore not want to damage future relationships.

Methodology

An immersion case study approach was used to study state higher education interest group alliances. Case studies are particularly useful in the study of political processes as "they provide concrete instances of the processes under study, and...[have] a dynamic quality which would not be explored using static methods of observation that concentrate on one point in

time” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 241). For this case study I spent several months observing the lobbying activities of one large research university’s (hereto after referred to as “Large University”) office of government affairs. The university is a large land-grant institution. It is one of the more expensive public institutions in the country and one of the largest. It offers numerous undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Most universities have an office of government affairs which serves as the universities’ in-house lobbyist, handling the responsibilities discussed by Ferrin (2003, 2005) such as the lobbying activities of the university and advising the president on governmental and other political matters. By immersing myself in the office I was able to observe how the lobbyists worked. In addition to interacting with the lobbyists at the university I spent several days traveling to the state capital and observed how the lobbyists interacted with other lobbyists. I also attended planning sessions with other lobbyists (most often other college and university lobbyists) and internal office planning sessions, attended meetings throughout each week, and observed the office’s progress on various projects. Likewise, I reviewed documents, articles, and historical records to get a sense of the office’s past work and alliance activities within the state.

In addition to the immersion and document analysis approaches, I discussed lobbying strategy and alliance formation with lobbyists from several institutions and interviewed two of Large University’s state-level lobbyists that work in the office of government affairs. These interviews were semi-structured and were guided by the studies done by Hojnacki and what I had observed and read over the several months I was with the office. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes.

The state where this study was conducted has several systems of higher education. It has a rather small community college system, yet the system has several staunch allies in the state legislature. The state also has a state system of higher education, which consists of state colleges and universities. Most of the institutions offer bachelors and masters degrees and most have a specific teacher training mission. This system is governed by a

state office and system-wide planning and budgeting are centralized. The state also has four institutions referred to as state-related institutions. These institutions receive a much smaller portion of their budgets from the state. They also have greater autonomy. Three of the four state-related institutions are classified as research universities. Finally, the state has a large and fairly influential private sector, which is consistent with most Eastern states. The state has two very large urban population centers and a large rural population as well. The state is politically moderate and has experienced some economic challenges recently.

Findings

In this section I will examine alliances within the state's higher education system and how the issues of context, allies, autonomy, and character factor in and help us understand how alliances within that sector come to be. I will also discuss how these factors affect how the alliances operate and the issue of free-riding.

Overall the lobbyists at Large University indicated that alliances happen fairly naturally. The lobbyists assess the issue they are interested in and then, based on their intimate knowledge of the system and the players, determine who would make a natural coalition member. One lobbyist indicated that "most lobbyists naturally want to align because they are more powerful that way." Both lobbyists explained that they almost always look to form an alliance because the people or groups they align with always bring with them different friends and support among the policy makers and therefore their influence is expanded and the likelihood of success is increased.

Context

I found that alliances were a natural outgrowth of the political environment in the state and the higher education political environment in particular. The environment creates what appear to be natural alliances. Because there are three state-related institutions that share many common concerns the three form natural alliances on many issues. One issue that they deal with annually is state appropriations. Because Large University is a

state-related institution, it receives a non-preferred appropriation which means its appropriation is voted on separately from the rest of the education budget and must be approved by a two-thirds vote. Because the three large state-related institutions are geographically dispersed, each has its own constituency. Therefore, when the institutions work together, the institutions form a powerful alliance. One of the lobbyists talked about how “This place [Large University] is the 800 pound gorilla but there are too many 500 pound gorillas in this state for [Large University] to get anything done alone and that is why alliances are absolutely necessary.” He concluded that alliances are a natural byproduct of the higher education and political systems of the state.

In the state where Large University resides the four party caucuses (House Republicans and Democrats; Senate Republicans and Democrats) hold the power. The leadership controls the number of staff members a legislator receives, his or her room assignment, reelection bids, and, of course, money. Unlike federal politics, and some other states, committees and committee leaders do not hold much power. One of the committees’ main functions, among other things, is to merely act as a forum for the voicing of opinions. Frequently most of the legislative work is done within the party leadership and/or on the floor of the house or senate. For example if a sponsor of a piece of legislation does not get a good hearing within the committee, the sponsor can take the bill directly to the floor, if his or her leadership is behind it, and fight it out there. A good example of this was a resolution authorizing an investigation into academic freedom on college campuses. It did not get a positive hearing in the education committee so the sponsor took it to the floor where it passed.

This way of legislating has implications for coalitions because it appears to make forming alliances even more important as it forces interest groups to cover all their bases since there is always the potential for a floor vote. Instead of being able to focus solely on committee votes, lobbyists must anticipate such a vote which forces them to work a much larger group representing the entire state. It then becomes important to align with groups or institutions

that may be able to influence different legislators, which is why the public colleges and universities tend to work together.

Allies

As I observed the interactions the Large University lobbyists had with other lobbyists and policy makers in the state capital, it became apparent that current information and knowledge is key to being successful. The lobbyists were constantly trying to “take the pulse” of individuals and the entire governmental institution. They attempt to interact with as many people as possible to find out what they knew about specific issues, what their stand was on those issues, what was going on that day, what was going on behind the scenes, what they knew about so and so, and how so and so stood on various issues. Most of these interactions happened in the hallways of the state capital. The lobbyists indicated that personal relationships are a major factor in their ability to form alliances and be successful lobbyists.

One lobbyist I interviewed stressed the point that there is no substitute for being on-site at the capital interacting with other lobbyists and the policy makers. He indicated that “lobbying is not something that can be done from a distance; you have to be on-site working with other lobbyists and getting face time with the policy makers.” He indicated that people cannot really get to know each other or what is going on without physical interaction and being in the midst of the “game.”

The lobbyists feel that they have an intimate knowledge of their usual allies (the other state-related institutions and the members of the state system of higher education) and likewise they seem to be very knowledgeable about most other lobbyists and interest groups in the state. They indicated that their knowledge guides their decisions about who to work with and when. They assess the issue and then determine who to align with based on their knowledge of the interested groups. They both indicated that trust is one of the most important factors in lobbying and that trust is gained from repeated experience and knowledge of the other players’ motivations. According to one, “Legislators and other lobbyists have to be able to trust you; without that you just can’t be

effective and no one will want to work with you, at least not very frequently.” One lobbyist said that the presence of a pivotal player would make joining an alliance more attractive.

Each lobbyist stressed the point that the various interest groups and lobbyists always do what is in the best interest of those they represent and that other lobbyists count on that. This makes the actions and positions of those they work with dependable and predictable. Therefore, they can make intelligent choices in regard to who to work with and anticipate what it will be like to work with those people. However, in order to make an intelligent choice, they must know their possible allies very well, which as one lobbyist indicated, only comes with time and interaction. Lobbyists must be prepared to gather information on both legislators and other lobbyists and be prepared to lobby each.

Autonomy

For Large University it does not appear that autonomy is much of a concern. The lobbyists allow each other enough autonomy, even while they are in a coalition, to pursue their institution’s best interests. It is even expected. That way each institution is able to maintain its unique identity, while receiving the benefits of coalition membership. One of the lobbyists explained that, “as institutional lobbyists we are accountable to our institution and so we are always looking out for our institution’s best interests. Because we all know this we can anticipate what the other lobbyists are going to do. If they take a different position than we do, we don’t get offended because they are just doing their job and chances are that on the next issue we will be working together.”

One lobbyist explained that institutions will bring different levels of intensity to different issues and that it works well that way. An example of this was when the colleges and universities were faced with legislation that would alter the student financial aid equation. This was of particular interest to Large University but not quite as important to the other state-related institutions or the state system schools. They took a united front in opposing the legislation but they did it for different reasons and with different levels of intensity.

The colleges and universities seldom compete with each other and the lobbyists explained that they would align with anyone as long as it served the institution's best interest. They also did not feel that Large University would ever lose its unique identity. They felt that they are very well known at the capital and that they spend most of their time sharing information about the institution. In fact, one lobbyist said that they spend 80% of their time sharing information on the institution with legislators and other lobbyists and 20% of their time asking for something.

Group Character

Although Large University is a distinct institution with consistent and tangible goals, the lobbyists are always looking for potential alliances. The institution has limited resources and limited influence and therefore the lobbyists feel that alliances are almost always in their best interest. They are equally willing to align with a group from outside higher education as with one inside, although they most often align with another college or university because of similar interests.

Contribution of Individual Members

I found that free-riding does happen periodically, but not very often, and that when there was a free-rider, Large University would only work with them again if it served their self-interest. One lobbyist indicated that, "It is better to have as many groups on your side as possible even if one or two are free-riding. You at least appear more powerful when you got others on you side, at least on paper, and free-riding than not having them with you at all." According to this lobbyist, just having them sign on with you expands your influence and makes the alliance appear stronger and larger. Both lobbyists interviewed pointed out that at times one state-related institution in particular will support Large University on paper but then let Large University do all of the work. Large University's lobbyists continue to work with the other state-related institution regularly because it is better to have them on their side than to not. One lobbyist also pointed out that because the "playing field" is limited (referring to the number of higher education institutions in the state) they repeatedly align with the same people

and therefore no one wants to get a bad reputation or damage future relationships and therefore most institutions avoid free-riding.

As mentioned above, the Large University lobbyists indicated that each member of an alliance will bring different levels of intensity based on their interest in a particular issue. The lobbyists explained that this is understood and that they can normally predict how interested each member will be when they form an alliance. In fact, one lobbyist explained that this can be a positive thing, because they are able to coast on issues that they only have a slight interest in and take the lead on issues that really affect them. Both indicated that they would most often rather have someone else take the lead.

The lobbyists at Large University held weekly phone conferences with their regular allies (the other large state-related institutions and the state system lobbyist) when they were busy working on various issues and specifically during appropriations time. Their alliances generally did not include more than four or five members, and whoever was the most interested and passionate about a particular issue typically took the lead on that issue. Both lobbyists from Large University indicated that they are in almost constant contact with their allies through phone, e-mail, and formal and informal meetings at the capital. They explained that the leader generally steps forward naturally based on the group's level of interest in a particular issue. They felt all of these factors contributed to limiting free-riders and, in fact, they reported that free-riding did not happen often.

Limitations

Because this study is an individual case study it has very little generalizability. The findings from this study can be specifically applied only to the case studied in this paper. The generalizability is further limited by the unique aspects of the state in which the study took place. As discussed earlier, the state is unique in its arrangement of higher education institutions and how its legislature operates, therefore the findings from this study relate to those unique arrangements. Higher education lobbying alliances may

operate differently under different arrangements. Another limitation is the fact that more interviews were not conducted, therefore the views expressed represent a small cross-section of the people involved in higher education lobbying in the state in which the study took place. Having noted these limitations, however, this study still provides a new theoretical perspective on state-level higher education lobbying that can be applied to different states and situations and the findings from this study may provide insights that can guide future research. This study is one step in the theory building process.

Conclusion

Hojnacki's conceptual framework provided a useful lens through which to examine state higher education lobbying in this particular state. But by applying this framework to the state level future researchers will need to pay close attention to the affect of context and structure because of the differences among states. Because the playing field at the state level is much smaller, it appeared that Large University was less free to choose whom to align with. In fact, it was not so much a question of if they would form an alliance as it was who they would form an alliance with.

Forming an alliance was almost a given in most circumstances because of its potential for greater influence. Also, in order to really have an impact they needed to have allies that had influence on other parts of the state, in part because of the way the structure encourages the bypassing of committees for floor votes and because Large University generally has its greatest influence over the elected officials from central part of the state. This is slightly different than federal lobbying because, at the federal level, some organizations are national organizations (such as the many issue based organizations) and therefore they are not always identified with a particular state or region. In light of these observations, Hojnacki's finding that context matters, has particular importance when her model is applied to state level interest group coalitions.

In regard to the other factors raised by Hojnacki, I generally found support for her findings. Just like at the federal level, knowledge about potential allies and the other players and issues is

key when forming alliances. In this particular case autonomy was not much of an issue because Large University felt their unique identity was safe and that their normal alliances allowed them enough freedom to have their own identity. While my observations in regard to group character were slightly different than Hojnacki's, I did find that group character mattered because it is, in part, the character of Large University and the other institutions that motivates them to align. Each institution had limited resources and influence and therefore felt that they must align with other institutions and organizations to be successful.

Free-riding was not much of an issue because they normally formed small coalitions, maintained frequent contact, and normally have an unofficial leader. These points support what Hojnacki found. But there were also other factors that may have played a part in limiting the number of free-riders, such as the smaller playing field. Because, as one lobbyist pointed out, the groups know they will be aligning again in the future, no one wants to damage their reputation or future relationships.

Higher education institutions and lobbyists may want to consider to the potential impact lobbying alliances may have in the realm of state higher education policy. Based on this case study, alliances appear to have the potential to increase the influence institutions have on the political process. They also appear to provide avenues of communication and information. According to this case study the sharing of knowledge and information is not only a benefit of alliance formation, it also encourages further or more alliance formations. Therefore, higher education institutions may want to consider ways in which they can encourage and facilitate the sharing of information between institutions within their individual states. This may help result in better lobbying strategies, more coordinated efforts, and more alliances. However, institutions and lobbyists may do well to follow the example of the institutions in this case study by ensuring that the political agency of each institution is ensured so that each institution can seek its own self-interest without fear of reprisal. Also, each state's higher education political environment will differ and therefore the

institutions within each state will have to assess the environment and adjust their lobbying strategy accordingly.

Future research on state higher education lobbying activities should not only take into account Hojnacki's findings on interest group alliances, but as this study and the work of Gray and Lowery (1996) make apparent, future research should pay particular attention to the state environmental and structural factors that may impact higher education interest group activity and coalition formation.

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