

**Date:** March 17, 2010

**Subject:** Chronicle of Higher Education UW Data Correction

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published a data chart with the following lead:

**State Appropriations for Major Public Universities: Which Ones Get the Most and the Least**

The *Chronicle* chose one large public research institution per state—often the flagship—and examined its state appropriations for education per student in 2008, the most recent year for which those data are available. This sortable table also shows the percentage of total revenues from state appropriations, a figure that has declined at many flagship institutions.

The accompanying chart, which has since been revised, purported to show ‘Educational appropriations per student, 2008’ for one flagship public institution in each state. The data were attributed to the [DELTA Project](#), and the UW was reported as having the second highest per student appropriations in the country at \$19,575.

Being familiar with both UW state appropriations over time and DELTA Project methodology and data, this figure confounded Office of Planning & Budgeting staff and, given the many internal and external inquiries we immediately began receiving, confused others as well. Upon discussing the methodology and data source with the *Chronicle*, it became clear that instead of using the DELTA Project’s ‘state and local appropriations’ figure (\$9,797 for the UW), they had reported DELTA’s calculation of the overall ‘subsidy’ that students enjoy, which is defined as *all* institutional education and related spending (defined in detail [here](#)) minus net tuition revenue (the ‘student share’). This DELTA ‘subsidy’ figure is inclusive of but *not equal to* the state appropriation.

Because it includes expenditures from funding sources other than tuition revenue or state appropriations, such as gifts and endowment income, the ‘subsidy’ figure calculated by DELTA for the UW is more than twice the amount of actual state appropriations per student. For institutions that are primarily reliant on state and tuition revenue, one would not expect to see much variation between DELTA’s ‘state appropriation’ and overall ‘subsidy’. However, for large research institutions with larger endowments like the UW, one would expect these other funding sources to be quite high.

In light of the above, **we requested that the *Chronicle* revise the chart and accompanying text** because, as presented, the chart was misleading in that it portrayed many public flagship campuses as having far higher taxpayer subsidies than they actually receive, all at a time when those very subsidies are under assault due to state budget crises.

Additionally, **we requested that the *Chronicle* acknowledge that reporting state appropriation and other financial information from 2008 may also be misleading** given the rapidly shifting funding environment higher education has experienced since that time. The year 2008 was, for many institutions, a high water mark in funding before the Great Recession began to take its toll (for example, at the UW we are anticipating that we will have lost over half of our state appropriation between 2009 and 2013).

*Chronicle* staff members were very responsive to our concerns and removed the chart from their website. They then conferred internally as well as with the DELTA Project staff before agreeing to publish (the next day, March 17) not only a revised chart, but also a brief article for context.

Revised Chart: [Education Financing for Major Public Universities: Which Ones Get the Most and the Least](#)

Accompanying Article: [Choice of Measures Influences Data on Support for Flagship Universities](#)

The *Chronicle* will also run a print correction referring readers who may have seen the print version of the chart to the newly revised online version.

We were pleased that the *Chronicle* rectified this so quickly and apologized for any confusion they may have caused. If you have any further questions about state appropriations, UW funding, or the DELTA Cost Project data and methodology, we would be happy to respond.

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