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The Political Intervention and Public Policy Influencing High Tuition Rates at South Carolina Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

This investigative journalism project seeks to inform people, especially curious Winthrop students, about the complex reasons for high tuition rates in South Carolina public four-year colleges and universities. Open records, government documents, primary and secondary sources, public sources, news articles, in-depth interviews, and statistical research were utilized and analyzed for the research. State governments attempted to address these issues with legislation and funding initiatives. South Carolina, in response to the recession, slashed education funding across the board, and established the South Carolina Education Lottery to fund for all assets of education. However, the Palmetto State has the second highest average tuition rates in the Southeast as of 2018. Some politicians, including South Carolina governor Henry McMaster, is blaming South Carolina colleges and universities for high tuition prices, despite state funding for postsecondary education institutions decreasing steadily since 2008. Colleges and universities also must keep up with building maintenance and update services and equipment to stay competitive and continue to attract students. This project also addresses the efforts Winthrop is taking to adjust with new funding needs.

Introduction

Winthrop University students often ask why the institution's tuition rates get as they are. This is an important question for students, who wonder why they pay higher tuition and fees to Winthrop compared to other universities who have comparable services as Winthrop. This enterprise project is aimed at Winthrop students and parents of prospective college students from South Carolina, North Carolina and possibly the southeast region of the United States. It will help guide their decision about whether to support better funding for higher education via political advocacy or not. Following the 2007 recession, which changed the financial landscape for colleges and universities, post-secondary and higher education have faced funding issues and political intervention. This project will also address what efforts Winthrop is taking to cope with embattled South Carolina funding.

Methods

Research included primary and secondary sources, academic articles, in-depth interviews, government documents, open and public records, and Freedom of Information Act requests.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION AND PUBLIC POLICY INFLUENCING HIGH TUITION RATES AT SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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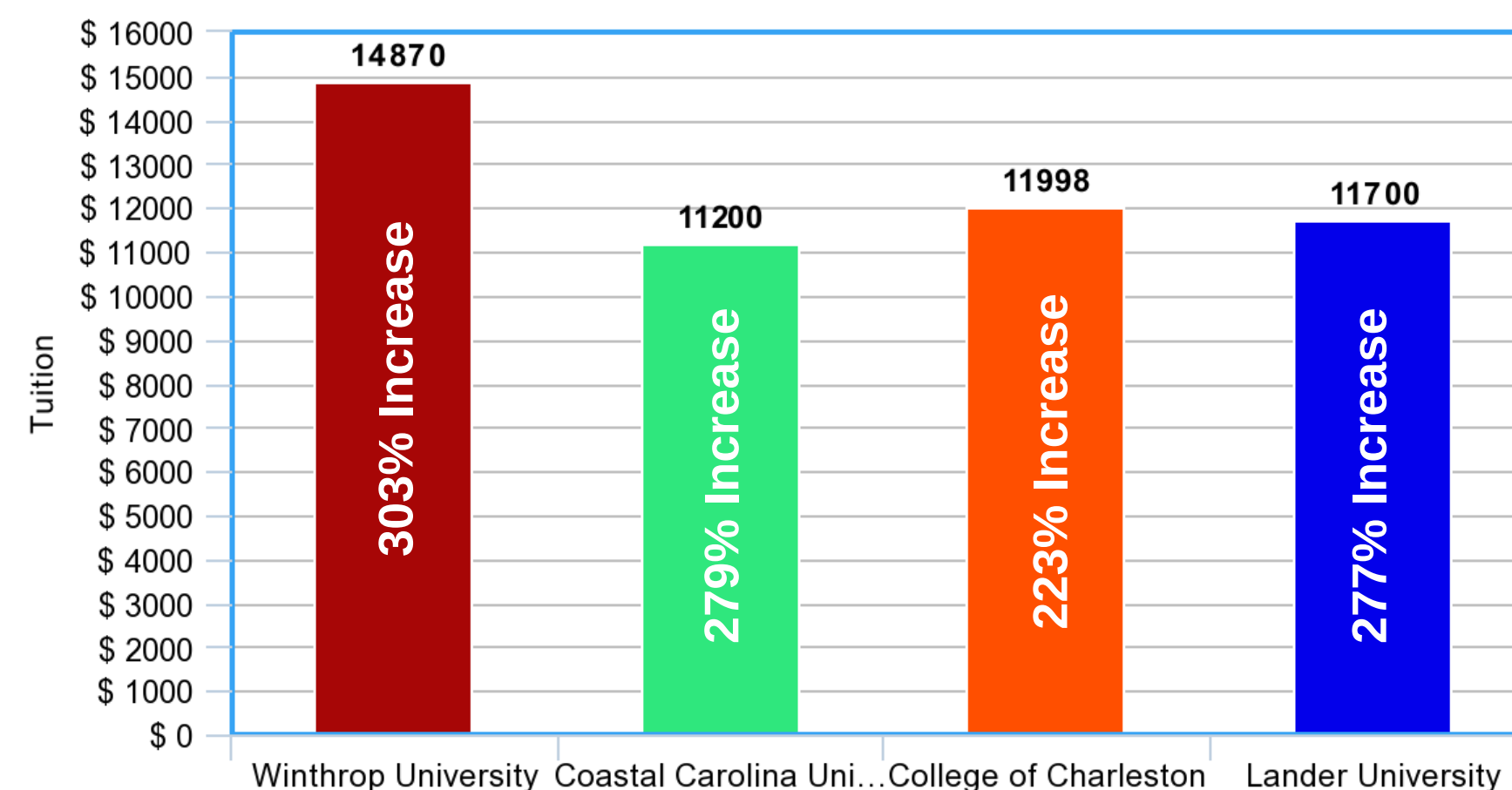
Website:

whatzurisees.wordpress.com

Key Findings

- In 2018, South Carolina had the second highest average tuition rates among four-year public colleges and universities among southeastern states, at \$12,615. Virginia was first with an average tuition of \$12,820 – a difference of \$205.
- The lack of financial support and public policy from the South Carolina state legislature cripples colleges and universities, leading them to depend on student enrollment, tuition dollars and donations for funding.
- South Carolina colleges and universities lack a political constituency for advocacy and potential funding from the state legislature.

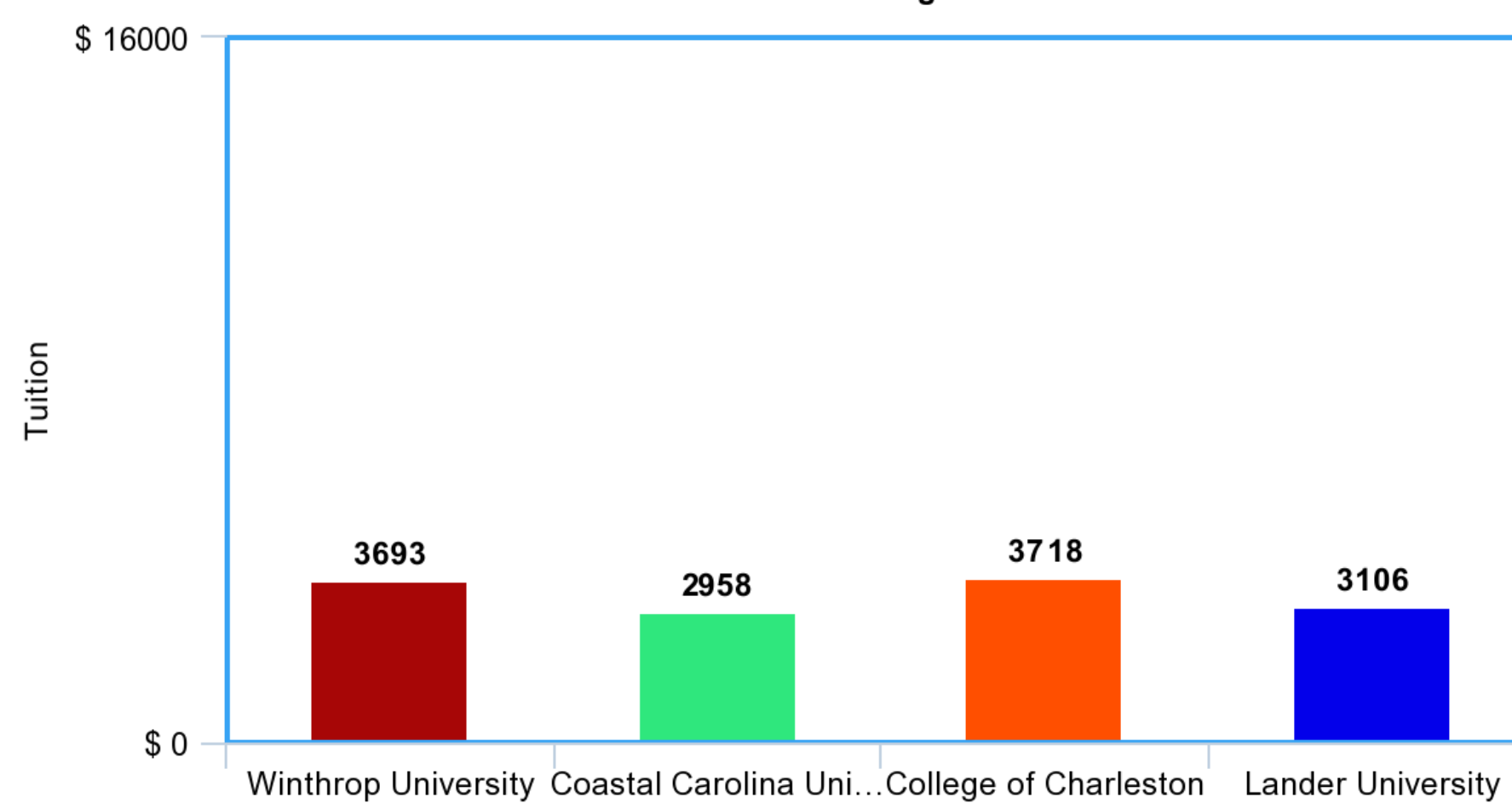
South Carolina In-State Tuition: 2017-2018 (Comprehensive Teaching Institutions Only)
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education



Public 4-Year Comprehensive Teaching Institutions

meta-chart.com

South Carolina In-State Tuition: 1986-1987 (Comprehensive Teaching Institutions Only)
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education



Public 4-Year Comprehensive Teaching Institutions

meta-chart.com

*These figures were adjusted for inflation

WHO'S GOING TO VOTE FOR IT?

How electoral constituency affects South Carolina tuition rates

Information from Dr. Laura Ullrich, Winthrop University



With no constituency, state politicians are not going to be proactive about tackling funding for postsecondary and higher education institutions.

CONSTITUENCIES BY AGE

18-29

31 percent of eligible voters voted in the 2018 midterm elections. The Atlantic reported that there was a significant increase of young voters, but they usually have the worst voter turnout each election year. A lack of voters means a slim constituency for higher education funding.

30-44

Middle-aged people tend to have younger children. They typically do not argue for college tuition costs, according to Laura Ullrich. They are more focused on argue more for K-12 education. As a result, when they speak with candidates or representatives, they do not argue for more tuition funding.

55+

People at this age usually do not have children in college or university. Therefore, they may not be concerned with college and university tuition rates. Most states waive tuition costs for elderly people to attend colleges and universities.