



Characteristics of In-House Lobbyists in American Colleges and Universities

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Presidents in higher education have been studied extensively, but the campus official who coordinates the university's lobbying efforts has not been the subject of much scholarly inquiry. This article describes the backgrounds of in-house lobbyists in higher education, and explores the perceptions of in-house lobbyists and presidents on the attributes necessary for success as an in-house lobbyist. In-house lobbyists and presidents were interviewed at 20 universities and a national survey of in-house lobbyists was conducted.

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Introduction

An extensive body of scholarship exists on private and public interest lobbyists. However, political scientists, and those who study the administration of universities, have tended to ignore lobbyists for colleges and universities. For example, Milbrath in his seminal work in 1963 chose to study Washington lobbyists as a whole by dividing them into groups and analyzing lobbyists from each group. The groups were: 'large labor, small labor, large farm, small farm, large trade, small trade, corporation, large citizens, service or veterans, church and humanitarian, foreign government or firm (Milbrath, 1963, 31, Table III-1).' Noticeably absent were lobbyists for colleges and universities or for education as a whole.

More recently, Heinz, Laumann, Nelson, and Salisbury in their innovative book *The Hollow Core* focused on four newly constructed domains in which to investigate the work of lobbyists — agriculture, energy, health, and labor. These newly constructed domains were developed to provide classifications of lobbyists that were more useful than those used by previous researchers such as Milbrath. However, they too ignored lobbyists for higher education (Heinz *et al.*, 1993).

Although scholarly investigators have tended to ignore lobbyists for colleges and universities, those who lead and direct colleges and universities have not.



Most medium to large universities, and many smaller colleges, are greatly affected by governmental decision making, and the current proliferation of lobbying offices¹ on such campuses is the result. Regarding this proliferation, one in-house lobbyist interviewed in this research noted:

Well, here in this state, we and... State University (University name removed) used to be the only institutions that had, quote, lobbyists, and now every institution [in the state] does. And I think the same thing is happening all around the country and at the federal level (Interview of in-house lobbyist N).²

Some of the reasons for this proliferation and the recognition of the powerful tool a strong lobbying office is to a higher education institution are obvious. Lobbying efforts can be a powerful aid in helping higher education institutions overcome the erosion of public good will and respect for higher education institutions, an erosion evinced in part by increased public scrutiny of faculty work loads, and calls for efficiency and accountability.³ In addition, federal support of higher education has tended to decline and follow less stable patterns in recent history, with more funding being available from earmarked sources. Federal research funds no longer go exclusively to a few traditionally preeminent research institutions. Occasionally, less traditionally recognized institutions which lobby effectively receive research funding — sometimes at the expense of established institutions. An example of this trend is the National Science Foundation's award of a national laboratory for researching high-magnetic-field technology to Florida State University, which had no lab, but did lobby effectively. The rejection of MIT's existent Francis Bitter National Magnet Laboratory was a surprise to MIT and to much of the scientific community interested in high-magnetic-field research. Once a project is initially funded — often after successful lobbying — there is no longer any continuing guarantee that it will continue to receive funding in the current political climate as evidenced by Congress' decision to kill the Superconducting Supercollider.⁴ In this climate of change and uncertainty many universities are lobbying for 'earmarked' funds directly from Congress. These funds are awarded without competitive or peer review processes. From fiscal year 1980 to fiscal year 1993, \$3.2 billion in earmarked funds were given to 234 universities,⁵ \$2 billion of which was given out in just 1990–1993.⁶ In the mid-1990s there was a mild political backlash against earmarked funds, but after a few years (1994–1996) in which the growth of earmarked funding declined modestly, the practice continues. In fact, in fiscal year 1997 Congress increased the earmarked funds it provided for specific universities by 49 over the previous year,⁷ it rose dramatically again in 1998, and in 1999 rose by 51 to \$797 million dollars, the

highest amount ever.⁸ All these facts have led universities to develop in-house lobbying offices, or to expand existing in-house lobbying programs.

Level of Lobbying Effort

Although seeking earmarked funds is only one aspect of what lobbyists do in higher education, it has caught Congress' and the public's attention and may be illustrative of some of the efforts expended by higher education institutions to receive these and other favors from governmental decision-makers. As defined by the Office of Technology Assessment, an earmark is a 'project, facility, instrument, or other academic or research-related expense that is directly funded by Congress, which has not been subjected to peer review and will not be competitively awarded.'⁹

In September of 1993, fact finding by the House of Representatives' Science, Space, and Technology Committee uncovered some of the surprisingly aggressive efforts of some institutions who seek earmarked funds. Tufts University, for example, revealed that it gave \$3 million between 1984 and 1993 to one private lobbying firm, Cassidy and Associates, a firm with a reputation for being unusually effective in acquiring earmarked funds for universities. Tufts paid as much as \$360,000.00 per year to this one lobbying firm. Perhaps as a result, Tufts received over \$40 million in noncompetitive earmarks during that period, including a \$3 million dollar earmark in 1993.¹⁰ Columbia University also revealed during committee questioning that it pays Cassidy and Associates a retainer of at least \$10,000 per month.¹¹

A September 22, 1992 report from the Congressional Research Service prepared at the request of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology lists the factors or incentives causing institutions to seek earmarked funds. Among the major factors cited were 'professional lobbyists who actively recruit academic institutions as clients; in-house academic lobbyists seeking to demonstrate their usefulness.' The report concluded that 'these and other forces are likely to result in the continuation and growth of academic earmarking.'¹²

Investigating the role of in-house lobbyists is significant because of their importance to funding and policy issues as noted by the above report, and because of the proliferation of new lobbyists and new lobbying offices in colleges and universities.¹³ In-house lobbyists differ from firm or outside lobbyists in several ways: they are paid a salary, rather than a contracted fee, have only one client, and usually have some input in defining their institutions' goals and their own tasks. Contracted lobbyists are also used by some colleges and universities, but this research focused on in-house lobbyists, as opposed to association or firm lobbyists, because in-house lobbyists were presumed to be



more closely aligned with the plans and structures of a university than contracted outside lobbyists, and because they have been the subject of little scholarly attention.

Studies exist of presidents, and other high academic officers in higher education, and outside of higher education there are studies of special interest, and public interest lobbyists. However, in-house lobbyists at universities, those who are salaried and have only the university as their client/employer, have received little attention. This lack of attention may be because their very existence on college campuses is not widely known.

In-house lobbyists in colleges and universities seem to be administrators that bridge the gulf between pure lobbyists — those with little input into policy — and pure administrators — those who create policy, or develop goals, but may lack the specialized knowledge to determine and advance the political feasibility of those objectives and goals. By combining relatively rare political skills and contacts, with administrative skills and intimate knowledge of their higher education institution, these in-house lobbyists for colleges and universities seem uniquely prepared to advance their institutions and their goals. In fact they may constitute an important and emerging profession in the administration of American colleges and universities. According to the presidents and in-house lobbyists interviewed in this research they appear to be powerful in many ways, including in shaping the institutional agenda.

Research Design

To help understand who these in-house lobbyists at American universities are, and some of what they do for their university ‘employers/clients,’ this research relied heavily on qualitative interviews of in-house lobbyists themselves because so much of what in-house lobbyists do and think is confidential — only fully known by in-house lobbyists themselves and possibly by their presidents. Twenty in-person, in-depth taped interviews of in-house lobbyists, ranging from 45 min to 2 h in length, were conducted — ten at public and ten at private universities, all of which rank in the top 100 of institutions receiving federal research funds. Ten university presidents were also interviewed as a validity check on the responses given by these in-house lobbyists. The interviews of presidents were conducted telephonically at institutions where interviews had already been conducted with one or more of that president’s in-house lobbyists. Also 105 in-house lobbyists in colleges and universities completed a lengthy eight-page survey instrument, which included quantitative ranking scales and essay questions. The institutions sampled stretched from coast to coast, but were not identified



by name to preserve confidentiality of interviewees. The goal of site selection was to sample:

- (1) universities where there was a mature in-house lobbying program, as reported by other in-house lobbyists, college presidents, or other informants,
- (2) universities from a national geographic sample, and
- (3) both public and private universities.

This sampling strategy was chosen to focus on in-house lobbyists themselves, and to avoid iterating idiosyncrasies of the specific institutions at which in-house lobbyists work. The interviews provided a wealth of self-reflection by these in-house lobbyists, who freely discussed incidents, attitudes, and cases on their campuses. They were assured of confidentiality.

Indications of In-House Lobbyists' Influence on Institutional Goals

The following quote represents the type of responses many in-house lobbyists made when discussing their role and influence in institutional decision-making or agenda setting:

In most cases if [a controversial decision or situation] is external, it deals with the world of public policy. The Director of Government Relations would be one of the people consulted...And often [I have to say]...: 'Wait a minute you could never get so and so to join in on that. Can't do it. I know that.' And I'd be listened to. The decision may not rest [entirely] on what I've said, but it would certainly be considered. The decision might be, well...maybe you're right, X won't support it, but the interests of the institution mean we've got to do it anyway...Certainly on most of the issues that I'd call the public policy area, the Director of Government Relations is consulted in an important way. (Interview of in-house lobbyist B)

In an effort to determine the role or influence of in-house lobbyists, presidents interviewed in this research were asked whether they would go ahead with a plan against the advice of their in-house lobbyist. Answers varied somewhat, but most of the presidents interviewed said that if their in-house lobbyist expressed misgivings about a project, those misgivings would be considered very carefully and might cause them to cancel the project, or change the goal. A president of a large state university described the importance of the in-house lobbyist's opinions in shaping the university's legislative agenda.



Let me slice it in three pieces....Some are more important observations than others, and the lobbyist provides very important information and observations.

Second slice, when it comes to actually translating the general goals into specific programs the government relations officer is as influential say as the provost.

Third, when it really comes down to the actual transaction, and...if he says: 'If you do this the governor is going to have your lunch. I recommend that you "can" [or discard] this proposal.' He's very influential at that juncture. He's more influential at that juncture in the advice that goes to me than anyone else. (Interview of President 2)

This president's comments support the contention of most in-house lobbyists interviewed and surveyed in this research that they are very involved in determining the goals and objectives of the university, and of their office. The practical reason that the in-house lobbyist must be given such power may be explained in part by this quote from the president of a midwestern state university:

I think the lobbyist and the president have to be on the same wavelength ...the lobbyist frequently has to make th[e] decision, whether they're in the hallway, or in the committee meeting, or something like that. And so there has to be this level of discussion, dialogue, that has taken place with the president. Or sometimes, after the fact, the president has to say: all right, we can go with that, even though maybe the president wouldn't have gone with that had he been there. He realizes that you have to have that kind of charter.... And the lobbyist may not be able to get hold of the president, and may in fact not want to give the impression that he/she has to go to the president. They want to give the accurate impression that they have his complete confidence and they can speak for the institution at that time. (Interview of President 3)

This 'charter' from the president to the in-house lobbyist is an important and powerful demonstration of the president's confidence. It also powerfully enhances the in-house lobbyist's ability to communicate with important groups inside and outside the university who come to recognize that the in-house lobbyist has the ear of the president. Another president at a large private university, in office for only 1 year, describes this delegation of authority:

The state relations and federal relations in-house lobbyists at [this] university...recommend to the president the agenda for all lobbying efforts. They are central players in any and all decisions having to do with



the state legislature or the US Congress and federal agencies... (Interview of President 1)

When this same president was asked if he ever made decisions against his in-house lobbyists' advice, he expanded on his original answer:

The lobbyists... have significant independent authority. For example, in the final hours of a legislative session, funding decisions are often made very quickly, and legislators ask for immediate decisions regarding funding priorities of the university. When this happens, there is seldom time for consultation with the president, and there I have given the state-relations lobbyist the authority to make on-the-spot decisions on his own....

... Thus far, I have not had cause to make a decision against the lobbyists' advice. The lobbyists and I have been able to reach consensus on the issues we have faced. (Interview of President 1)

The in-house lobbyist has to have this 'charter' from the president to be able to make decisions at crucial moments regarding the attainability of the university's goals. The president and the in-house lobbyist have to have worked together closely enough developing goals and strategic objectives that they are on the same 'wavelength' so that the in-house lobbyist can be armed with the appropriate information and ability to act. In the absence of this type of delegation of authority, and inclusion in setting the university's goals, the in-house lobbyist will be ineffective, and is likely to be bypassed as outside and inside constituencies seek another information and decision source that can facilitate their transactions. This is what one president meant when he said that without this trust and delegation of authority, an in-house lobbyist cannot function effectively.

If [the in-house lobbyist] doesn't have that confidence [from the president... he or she should go somewhere where they will enjoy that level of confidence. (Interview of President 3)

In-House Lobbyists

Assuming, for the sake of argument, and based on the quotes above and the many assertions and indications uncovered in this research, that in-house lobbyists are powerful and important actors in higher education institutions, who are these in-house academic lobbyists at universities? To answer this question, several other associated questions must be asked, and some assumptions and hypotheses addressed. Are the roles of in-house lobbyists



significantly different from the roles of other lobbyists or administrators? Do they wield great power at their institutions behind the scenes? What are their common traits? To begin to answer these questions, it is important to learn more about in-house lobbyists' backgrounds and training.

In-House Lobbyists Described

Since little is known about in-house lobbyists in American colleges and universities, describing these in-house lobbyists, their backgrounds, and characteristics is not easy. Simply determining how many there are at American universities is difficult. They are not listed nationally, nor do they all belong to any one organization. Some may belong to several organizations, giving the organizations overlapping memberships. This overlapping of memberships precludes simply adding up membership lists in government relations sections of national associations. There is no single complete mailing list, directory, or registry of all in-house lobbyists at colleges and universities. Nor do laws on the registration of lobbyists help in this instance, since they vary from state to state, and because many in-house lobbyists in colleges and universities either are not required to register generally, or have been specifically exempted under various statutory definitions.

The best source this research could discover to establish a count of in-house lobbyists in colleges and universities was to ask higher education association professionals with long-time experience and broad purview in their professional activities. These experts' best guesses of numbers of lobbyists in their member organizations are listed with brief explanations in Table 1A. These highly speculative estimates are: American Council of Education, 50 full-time federal-level lobbyists, 100 full-time state-level lobbyists, and at least one person at each of the 1800 American Council on Education member institutions has at least one person who 'pays attention' to state or federal legislative issues; American Association of Universities' 56 in-house lobbyists, one at each of the 56 members; The American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 400 of the 400 member institutions and systems of higher education, although only about a third are estimated to have full-time in-house lobbyists; the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Institutions and Colleges, 100 in-house lobbyists in the member institutions, although only about half of them lobby full time. This is not meant to be a survey of all higher education associations, nor does it purport to be an accurate count of in-house lobbyists at American colleges and universities. These are only rough estimates, but they provide a perspective on this research's sample size of 105 in-house lobbyists sampled by survey instrument, and 20 by in-depth interviews.

Table 1A

Expert estimates of number of in-house lobbyists

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Expert</i>	<i>Estimate</i>
American Council on Education, 1800 members	Sheldon Steinback, General Counsel, Assistant Vice President and Asst. Director of Government Relations	Estimates there are 100 full-time in-house lobbyists who lobby on the federal level out of his group's 1800 member institutions
American Council on Education, 1800 members	Terry Hartle, Vice President, Government Relations	Estimates 50 lobbyists who lobby on federal level full time, 100 who lobby on state level full time, and mentioned that at each of its 1800 members there is someone who at least part time pays attention to state or federal legislative issues
Association of American Universities, 56 members	John Vaughan, Director of Federal Relations	56 or all the member universities have at least one person. 5-10 of that number do not lobby full time however
American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 400 members	Edward Elmendorf, Vice President for Govt. Relations and Policy Analysis	400 but only one-third of that number or so lobby full time. Five of those school have no representation, have that representation through their state system
NASULGC National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 176 members	Jerry Roschwalb, Director of Federal Relations for Higher Education	Perhaps 100 or slightly more but only 50% of that number lobby full time. The rest have other duties also on their campus.
American Association of State Colleges and Universities, estimated 390 members	Hillary Goldman, Assistant Director for Federal Relations	360 members plus 30 systems. Thinks that each has at least one lobbyist for state lobbying but they may not all be full-time lobbyists. There may also be some federal level lobbyists in these organizations. She can think of at least two but she is not willing to guess on the total number



Several factors contribute to the unreliability inherent in counting in-house lobbyists in American colleges and universities. The first is the difficulty of defining the role of the in-house lobbyist. Not everyone agrees on who, if anyone, acts as the in-house lobbyist or government liaison at a given college or university, nor does everyone agree on what that role is. Second, there is a natural reticence on the part of colleges and universities to advertise that they lobby at all. Like baby rabbits, if lobbyists emerge in sharp relief from the background of the policy process in their state or on the national scene, they often find themselves beset by the coyotes of political backlash. This requires that a delicate balance be struck between brilliant success and pedestrian anonymity.

Almost every in-house lobbyist interviewed claimed to be incredibly burdened and overworked. When the lobbyist was asked why he or she did not hire more staff, the response generally was that staffing a lobbying office too generously is dangerous. It attracts attention. For example, one in-house lobbyist at a public university explained:

I've got one staffer. These are lean budget times. There's always been talk for years I was on the verge of hiring an assistant since there was always the feeling that we should have another lobbyist... But... we thought it wouldn't look good in internal and external politics to hire another person. (Interview of in-house lobbyist G)

It is understandable that in such a climate in-house lobbyists wish to maintain a low profile. Another noted:

...and there's a resentment on campus too. I mean there's always underlying resentment about too much administration. Faculty have that natural tendency. So if you have a legislative relations staff of ten people that could easily backfire on campus as well as off campus. (Interview of in-house lobbyist N)

Having too large an office, no matter how efficient, no matter how much evidence there is that the office is cost effective, makes in-house lobbyists nervous. Experience has taught them that within the university if they are too visible they will become a point of controversy. Also, there are those outside of any university who are poised to criticize the size, or even existence, of a university's lobbying office, especially if the university is a public university.

... Well, lobbyists say universities don't want to be in the paper. We certainly don't want to be in the paper as overly geared to lobbying.... (Interview of in-house lobbyist G)

In fact, even if their office is relatively small, most in-house lobbyists would rather be overworked in a small office and not be noticed by anyone, rather than become a visible target for criticism.

Given the political climate in most states and regions, it is only natural that in-house lobbyists, and the universities that house them, are cautious about advertising their presence and successes.

Titles of In-House Lobbyists

In defining who these in-house lobbyists are, an examination of their titles is more significant than might be expected. First, it became apparent from several sources that there is some minor controversy over the term in-house lobbyist — more specifically over the term lobbyist. It is felt by some that the term lobbyist does not convey an accurate sense of what these actors do, and is in fact misleading. However, using a different term would only beg the question of what the difference is. The unlovely term lobbyist, or in-house lobbyist, seems generic enough to cover the many varied job titles encountered in this research. Also many of those interviewed and those who responded to the survey unblushingly used the term to describe themselves and their peers.

Everything in-house lobbyists do is sensitive and open to potential attack, down to their very job titles. The titles chosen do not definitively predict duties, roles, and behaviors of in-house lobbyists, nor does their level on the hierarchy of the organizational chart. For example, interviews and surveys conducted in this research found that it is not certain that Vice Presidents, Directors, or Coordinators, are less likely to engage in ‘lobbying’ activities, than those with the utilitarian title of ‘Government Relations.’ It is impossible to predict, simply from level in the hierarchy, for example, that a Vice President of Institutional Advancement is ‘above the fray,’ and does not engage in lobbying activities as regularly as a Director of Government Relations. This does not mean that there are no preconceived notions about what employees from certain levels in hierarchy and bearing certain titles do. One President of a prestigious university mentioned in passing his assumption that his university’s in-house lobbyist differed in title from the norm:

... But most places combine this job in a vice presidency with public relations and so forth. [This university] (university name removed) is always a little eccentric and we don’t have that many vice presidents... (Interview of President 8)

In this instance the president had given his in-house lobbyist the title of Special Assistant to the President. He assumed that most of those actually



doing the hands-on lobbying his in-house lobbyist does are at the vice president level. He chose the title, Special Assistant to the President, because he felt that it showed a close relationship between the President and the in-house lobbyist, thus enhancing the lobbyist's effectiveness:

It helps immensely if that person [the in-house lobbyist] is really viewed as having the ear of the president of the university. (Interview of President 8)

Another President gave his opinion about the titles used to describe in-house lobbyists and specifically about the term lobbyist being employed:

[M]ost universities call them Vice Presidents for External Relations, or they somehow cover it up. But I think when push comes to shove and you're talking to legislators or members of the board you want to always use the term lobbyist...because they understand it. When you say external relations they don't know whether that's really the foundation and somebody's going to ask them for money or what that means...I think I feel that I am lobbied from time to time and I appreciate it. Because I think that anybody who is busy and has a good span of control likes to have people come in who are knowledgeable, and may have an ax to sharpen, as long as they identify themselves clearly. I don't mind at all if they come in and say, look this really impacts upon us personally and this is how we see it...If I find out later that they do have a substantial interest that will impact upon them or their program and they haven't revealed it then it really takes away the impact of what they were trying to say. (Interview of President 3)

Obviously, this president assumed that most lobbyists are at the vice president level even though he also chose a different title for his lobbyist. He also not only finds the term lobbyist unobjectionable as applied to in-house lobbyists, in fact he seemed to feel it was ethically important to reveal clearly, through title or explicit explanation, when one is representing the interest of a client/employer.

A sample of other presidents and in-house lobbyists would probably provide other preconceived notions about what titles identify those who actually engage in the nitty gritty of lobbying activity. For example, some assume the opposite of those cited above — that Vice Presidents do not normally do actual lobbying, rather they direct such efforts by others; only those with the title 'State Relations, or Director of Governmental Relations' ever actually do the 'real' hands-on lobbying work. These assumptions about titles appear to be overgeneralizations at best, and this research suggests that they have little basis in fact. Evidently, job title is not always clearly related to job duties and role of in-house lobbyists at universities.

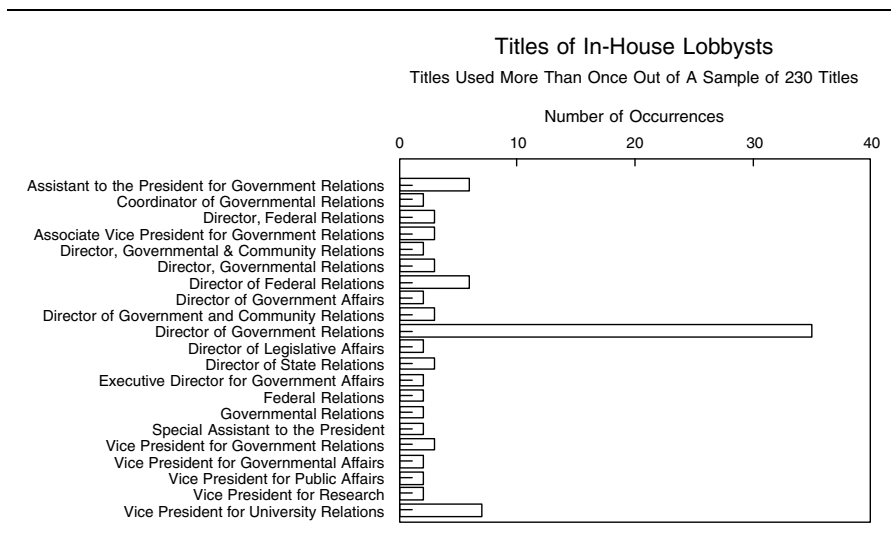
A sample of the titles used by 230 in-house lobbyists was collected, including the titles of 105 in-house lobbyists who completed the survey instrument as part of this research. The list was compiled from several sources: first, from among the membership lists of two national organizations' subcommittees of those interested in governmental relations; second, by identifying in-house lobbyists from referrals of interview subjects; and third, by using the codes provided in the Higher Education Directory. The Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., Falls Church, Virginia, classifies and identifies by role higher education administrators across the country with a diversity of titles from a diversity of higher education institutions. In the key at the beginning of the directory that defines the role played by administrators who identified themselves under the subsequent code numbers is a definition for 'Director, Government Relations.' This is the only code provided for any lobbying activity. The definition reads: 'Coordinates institutions' relations with local, state, and federal government.' Because of the way it is compiled this directory assumes that the most often used job title is 'Director, Government Relations.' However even from this source other titles were apparent among administrators listed who chose to be identified by the same number code. Representative titles from the Higher Education Directory include titles such as Assistant to the President for Government & Community Relations, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Community and Government Relations, Vice Chancellor for External Affairs, and Director of Economic and Community Affairs — all bearing the same code number.

The Directory of Higher Education is not a complete listing of in-house lobbyists, of course. An exhaustive review of the Directory of Higher Education revealed that most of the in-house lobbyists interviewed for this research did not appear at all in the Directory of Higher Education. It is not surprising that the most often used title in this sample was Director of Government Relations, which occurred 21 times. However there were many other titles (Table 1B).

It is interesting that 132 of the titles in the sample were unique, and only appeared once each. (For a list of the many titles that only occurred once in this sample see Table 1C.) Clearly, in-house lobbyists have a wide variety of titles. This research also has found at least one, and perhaps more, in-house lobbyists with titles similar to those above, who are employees of alumni foundations. Technically, since their salaries are not paid by the university they are not employees of the university, even though they may meet with the President weekly and perform duties much like other in-house lobbyists at colleges and universities. This research has not attempted to discover all the in-house lobbyists in all the alumni foundations around the country because of the difficulties of discovering such information. For one thing, these employees are not listed in any national directory. In addition, they are not usually



Table 1B

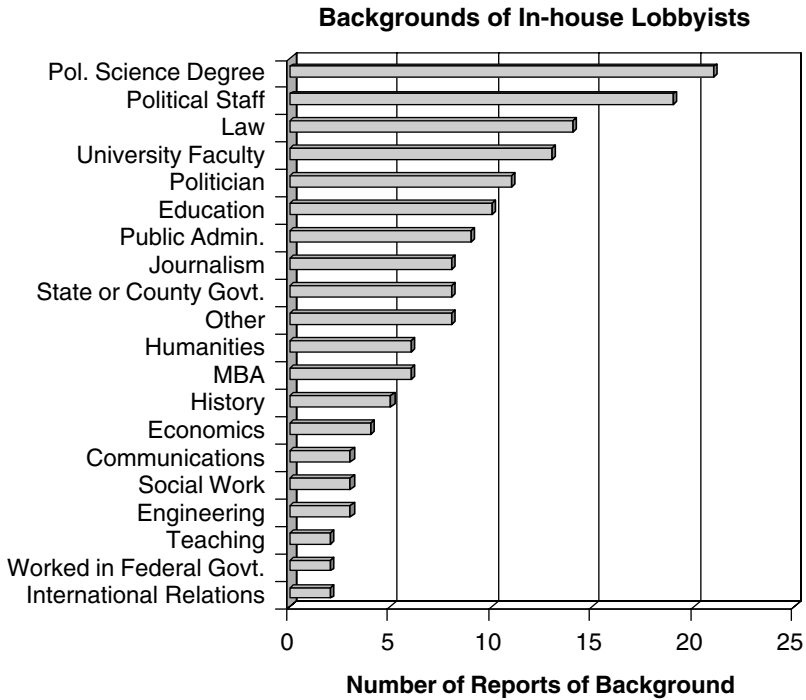


discoverable through state or federal Freedom of Information Act inquiries, nor are their lobbying budgets and contributions, since these foundations are private entities. This, in fact, may be why some in-house lobbyists are housed in alumni foundations.

Educational Backgrounds

Not only do the titles of in-house lobbyists vary surprisingly, the educational backgrounds of these in-house lobbyists also vary more than might be anticipated. In Washington, and in many state capitols, a large number of the lobbyists outside of higher education are lawyers. By contrast, in-house lobbyists in American colleges and universities have a surprising diversity of educational backgrounds. Of the 105 in-house lobbyists who returned surveys as part of this research, 14 had law degrees, 23 had PhDs, four had MBA's, 21 had political science degrees, 10 had education degrees, nine public administration degrees, eight journalism, six humanities degrees, five history degrees, four economics degrees, three had engineering degrees, and various other degrees were present. Many in-house lobbyists had more than one degree. These multiple degrees were counted, so an individual may have been counted who had a law degree and an undergraduate degree in political science. Both were counted. A few in-house lobbyists did not have a college degree.

Table 1C



The large number of political science degrees and law degrees was no surprise. The high number of public administration degrees may also fit with institutional notions about such a group. However, it was surprising to find so many journalism and education degrees. There were also a fair number of humanities degrees. Based on the discovery that these in-house lobbyists possessed a greater diversity of educational backgrounds than might have been expected, a further investigation of job background and experience was developed.

If the frame of reference is broadened to include not just academic degrees but also different types of career experience, we learn even more about these individuals. Using the same sample of 105 in-house lobbyists who returned the survey instrument, this research collected a matrix of reported backgrounds for each individual in-house lobbyist. An individual could have several different areas of experience. For example, if one had an education degree, and had been a legislative aide to a Congressman,



both areas were noted. Information compiled included degrees held, and other broader areas such as: ‘worked in state or county government,’ ‘worked on a congressional staff,’ ‘was on higher education faculty,’ or ‘taught school on a primary level.’ These broader classifications show some interesting trends. See Table 1C for a graphic depiction of the areas of experience. It was no surprise that 19 of the 105 had some experience as political staff. Such experience included working on a federal Congressman or Senator’s staff, and similar experience on the state level, including working on Governors’ staffs or cabinets.

In-house lobbyists who have been shown this data have expressed surprise over the diversity of the backgrounds of their peers. They have consistently been surprised to find how many in-house lobbyists describe themselves as having come from the faculty ranks. In this sample, 13 out of the 105 reported that they had taught on the higher education level. Since this high percentage of faculty experience was surprising to in-house lobbyists who were notified of the preliminary result, an informal poll was also conducted as part of this research at a national conference of university lobbyists. There, through the simple expedient of asking the gathered in-house lobbyists to raise their hands if they had taught at the college or university level, a similar result was produced. Over 10 of those in-house lobbyists had some experience as faculty. Clearly this second sample is very informal, but it does roughly replicate the earlier result. This is not to presume that those describing themselves as having faculty experience were all tenure track professors, but it is somewhat surprising how many of those responding in this manner aligned themselves with the intellectual life of their universities.

One of the 20 in-house lobbyists interviewed in this research teaches concurrently while acting as in-house lobbyist.

Surprisingly, 11 of the in-house lobbyists surveyed either had been politicians or were currently active politicians. Among the in-house lobbyists included in this research is at least one who served as the mayor of the city where the university is located while continuing to work for the university. Most of this group however were not currently holding office. Also surprising was the fact that a sizeable number, eight, had worked in state or county government as government employees. A much smaller group had worked for the federal government.

Views on the Background of In-House Lobbyists

This sample of backgrounds highlights the fact that those who lobby in-house at American colleges and universities come from a surprising diversity of educational and professional backgrounds. This may support the opinion held by many in-house lobbyists and college presidents that there is no particular

background or career path that prepares individuals to act as in-house lobbyists at college and universities. However, a roughly equal number of in-house lobbyists and presidents have strong opinions that a particular background or career path is required. The opinions of those interviewed fall into three broad categories. The first is that no particular background is required, simply broad personality or character traits. The second, and directly opposed to the first opinion, is the view that political experience is absolutely essential. The third is the belief that for in-house lobbyists to be successful their background and experience has to be from the mainstream of the university, either faculty or administrative, so that they will be perceived as truly representative of university thought and opinion by legislators and other outside constituencies. It has not been judged useful to quantify how many of those interviewed hold view one, two, or three, other than to note that these three broad views were encountered repeatedly during the course of this research.

First view: no particular background needed

The first view is that for success as an in-house lobbyist no particular background is required.

Another president similarly noted that broad characteristics of the in-house lobbyist provided a better background or predictor of success than political experience:

I...think the essential element is that this person be trusted by all parties, be honest, and not be viewed as a wheeler-dealer. (Interview of President 8)

Those holding this view repeatedly cite personal characteristics of the individual such as ‘people skills,’ ‘character,’ or honesty as the most important requisites in a successful in-house lobbyist.

Second view: political experience required

However, many of those interviewed held the second view — that specific political experience was the sine qua non of success as an in-house lobbyist for a college or university. The group holding this view included a higher number of those who came from backgrounds that might be thought of as traditional for a lobbyist — political experience, a degree in political science, or experience on legislative staff. An example would be the response of one in-house lobbyist to the question, ‘What is your professional and educational background, or history?’ His response was: ‘I have spent 10 years as the Director of Governmental Relations at the university. I have a PhD in Political Science



concentrating in American Public Policy. I was probably born to do this.’
(Survey response of RD)

Another in-house lobbyist described her views of the background of her peers:

...maybe 50 percent or more of the government relations people come from having worked in the legislature somewhere and then move into a university, because I think frequently it’s easier to learn about the university and bring a knowledge of government with you, than to be a faculty person and go try to figure out the legislature. At least, that’s my feeling. (Interview of in-house lobbyist M)

An in-house lobbyist holding a similar view stated:

Some other people at other universities have these kind of jobs where perhaps the career tracks are higher education, and now suddenly they’ve been given the federal relations hat to wear. It’s not that they can’t learn somewhat about how the process works. But I’m convinced that the majority of people thrown into those positions never learn the system well enough to be able to do all the kinds of things that people can do like this guy [a colleague with similar extensive political experience at another university] and I do, that almost grew up on Capitol Hill. (Interview of in-house lobbyist F)

The following president also argued that political experience, or at least political acumen, is essential in an in-house lobbyist:

They [in-house lobbyists for universities] have to understand politics. A good friend of mine said that politics is as essential to the social life as sex is to the biological life. I laughed at that, but I think it’s really true. It’s the way we make decisions in our society and shouldn’t be viewed in a negative context. And they [in-house lobbyists] must feel that way also—that this is really the way important decisions are made, and they must enjoy the game, so to speak. They must be thrilled and excited by the contest of ideas and power that is played out as the state legislature or the national legislature makes its decisions. They must realize that logic does not always prevail, in fact frequently does not. (Interview of President 3)

However, those who believe that political knowledge and experience is the important background trait required of an in-house lobbyist often create ways to overcome the in-house lobbyist’s lack of close identification with the

university. For example, the following president stays personally involved in dealing with the state legislature.

Here, the culture of this state is that when they have a question there in the legislature they expect the president to respond to it. By contrast, in other states it isn't that way. But, here, that is the expectation...so the lobbyist and I work very closely together. (Interview of President 9)

Those who hold the view that political experience is the important requisite for an in-house lobbyist argue that knowledge of the arcane workings of the legislative process is essential. They argue that it is relatively simple to graft on knowledge of the university to the knowledge of an in-house lobbyist with great political experience but limited experience with the university, or they provide support for the lobbyist by increased involvement of the president, as explained above.

Third view: intimate knowledge of the institution required

The first two views have many adherents; however, those holding the third view declaim just as confidently that the essential requirement is intimate knowledge of the university and its internal politics and barriers to change. This group also believes that being closely identified with the university, perhaps with a faculty background or an administrative background unrelated to politics, is the most important requirement for success as an in-house lobbyist. This is so legislators and others will perceive the person as a knowledgeable representative of the university community and thus a reliable interpreter of the institution for legislators who are relatively unfamiliar with the university. If an in-house lobbyist has too much political experience, coupled with brief or shallow experience in the academy, she or he runs the risk of being discounted as a mere lobbyist, who is not closely identified with, or representative of, the university. A president expressed this view:

...But I think it would be a mistake to have a former politician or something in this role who didn't understand the inner workings of a university. You've got to be able to translate that to the individuals outside, the legislators and others. They expect you to know and understand the academic programs of the institution. So I think that's a key from my standpoint. Have someone who has that kind of knowledge and credibility. (Interview of President 10)



An in-house lobbyist with long experience also believes knowledge about the institution is important, and also includes some thoughts about the work ethic required of an in-house lobbyist:

...One of them is a certain amount of knowledge about the university. You have to have that so that you're knowledgeable enough so that you don't ever say anything that would come back to haunt the institution....be willing to work yourself to death. Because I think real lobbyists, at least while the legislatures are in session, have to work an extraordinary number of hours. Much harder than most other people are willing to work. (Interview of in-house lobbyist T)

Those who hold this view believe legislators want to be assured that the person they deal with is a university product and insider; not just a political insider, or hired gun. As President 10 quoted above explained, to be effective, an in-house lobbyist needs to be someone legislators can approach and question, knowing that they will get answers that are from an academic insider who has the background and insight that comes from longstanding experience in the university.

Finally, and as might be expected, there are those who suggest that in-house lobbyists must have some of all these elements in their backgrounds — broad personality traits, familiarity with the legislative process and political experience, and a deep understanding of the university. As one president stated:

...What makes a good assistant for me is somebody who really understands the Washington process intimately and really understands the goals and mission and workings of the university. Finding those two things in the same person is very difficult. (Interview of President 8)

This same president went on to say later that important personal characteristics such as reputation for honesty and charisma were also required.

As might be expected, these views are somewhat correlated to role and background in that in-house lobbyists who came from a faculty background, or who had little political experience, tended to view their background as the appropriate background for an in-house lobbyist. And of course in-house lobbyists with political experience also tended to believe their background was essential. The important point, though, is not that in-house lobbyists tended to think that backgrounds like their own were essential, but that they had apparently inaccurate, and in some instances exaggerated, perceptions about how widespread backgrounds like their own were distributed among in-house lobbyists for colleges and universities. For example, an in-house lobbyist

quoted above had stated that she thought that 50 or more of in-house lobbyists had legislative experience:

I think you would find that maybe 50 percent or more of the government relations people come from having worked in the legislature somewhere and then move into a university. (Interview of in-house lobbyist M)

Although this in-house lobbyist believed 50 or more of her peers had legislative or political experience, data collected in this research showed that only 13 out of a sample size of 105, or 12.5 per cent, reported that they had any experience working in a legislature, either state or federal, or working on a political staff.

Among the in-house lobbyists and presidents interviewed, expectations about who these in-house lobbyists are, what their backgrounds are, and what the appropriate attributes for success are varies. There is no unanimity. Obviously, these important actors are not well understood as a group even by their peers. Generally, in-house lobbyists tend to believe that the appropriate background of in-house lobbyists is one that is like their own. Coupling this with the fact that the backgrounds of these in-house lobbyists vary more than might be expected, reveals how little information exists about these important, and almost invisible, institutional actors — even among their peers.

In-house lobbyists come from varied backgrounds — traditional lobbying backgrounds and other eclectic backgrounds. This research has not found that those with any particular background as a group have been described by either themselves or their presidents as more or less successful than those with any other background. Nor does background necessarily predict what tasks and roles in-house lobbyists will be given or their perceptions that they are successful.

Notes

- 1 This proliferation of lobbyists and lobbying programs is noted by all these interviewed in this research, including the interview estimates of Shelley Steinback, Director of Government Relations, American Council on Education, and John Vaughan, Director of Federal Relations, American Association of Universities.
- 2 In-house lobbyists quoted within this research are referred to by letter: 'In-House Lobbyist A,' and presidents are referred to by number: 'President 1' 'to preserve confidentiality. If survey responses are cited respondents are cited by two letters such as: 'Response of MD.' Appendix F shows which in-house lobbyists and presidents come from public and which come from private institutions. Because the professional world of in-house lobbyists at American colleges and universities is very small, no further descriptions are given, so that in-house lobbyists or presidents who might read this research will be less likely to be able to identify each other.
- 3 'Colleges Face new Pressure to Increase Faculty Productivity,' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 15, 1992. 'Tight Budgets Demand Studies of Faculty Productivity,' *Chronicle of Higher*



- Education, February 19, 1992. 'Explaining What Professors Do With Their Time: The Concerns of Government Leaders and the Public Require a Response,' *Chronicle of Higher Education* July 15, 1992. 'States Weigh Bills to End Colleges Tax-Exempt Status' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 24, 1994. 'Sabbaticals Under Fire,' *Chronicle of Higher Education* February 23, 1994.
- 4 McDonald, K. (October 27, 1993). Superconducting supercollider gets a final 'no.' *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A28.
- 5 Cordes, C. (September 22, 1993). House panel grills college officials about congressional earmarks. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A30.
- 6 Savage, J.D. *Trends in the Distribution of Apparent Academic Earmarks in the Federal Government's FY 1992 Appropriation Bills* (Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, September 22, 1992).
- 7 Cordes, C. (March 28, 1997). Congressional earmarks for colleges grew by 49 for 1997. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- 8 Brainard, J. and Cordes, C. (July 23, 1999). Pork-Barrel Spending on Academe Reaches a Record \$797 million. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A44.
- 9 Office of Technology Assessment, *Federally Funded Research*, 1991, 87.
- 10 Wyatt, J. (October 12, 1993) *New York Times*; Cordes, C. (September 22, 1993). House panel grills college officials. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A30.
- 11 Cordes, C. (September 22, 1993). House panel grills college officials. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A30.
- 12 James, D. Savage, *Trends in the Distribution of Apparent Academic Earmarks in the Federal Government's FY 1992 Appropriations Bills* (Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, September 22, 1992).
- 13 See note 1.

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