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Letter to the Editor

Goal: Increased spending on education

A recent letter said that Missouri's scholarship program for undergraduates, Access Missouri, should give every recipient the same amount, regardless of the tuition he has to pay. Drury University, the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Washington University are all the same, apparently.

But the letter-writer confuses cost with price. The tuition prices are different between public and independent colleges because the state provides \$935 million (2008) to run public colleges. This amounts to an approximately \$7,500 subsidy — think of it as a no-need scholarship — for each student at state-funded college. Add in this subsidy, and the costs at public and independent colleges are similar. The prices are different, obviously, because the independent schools don't have a state subsidy, so they have to charge higher tuition.

Missouri's independent colleges educate 36 percent of all the state's undergraduate college students. Imagine what the state's bill would be if it had to support these students at the state's public colleges. The Access Missouri Scholarship Program, in its current configuration, is a terrific bargain for the state and its students.

But the letter-writer and I agree on one crucial point: Missouri should spend much more on higher education than it spends now, including more support for need-based student aid at all of Missouri's colleges. Let's focus on this goal, instead of trying to balance public school budgets at the expense of Missouri's undergraduates who attend independent colleges.

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