

A PARENT'S CASE FOR TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Why the Proposed Higher Education Funding Cuts Would Be a Mistake for Missouri

SUBMITTED TO THE MISSOURI HOUSE BUDGET COMMITTEE | MARCH 2026

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Why I Am Writing This

I am writing this as a parent, not as a lobbyist or an institutional representative. My daughter attends Truman State University. She is a student athlete on the volleyball team and a merit scholarship recipient majoring in accounting. When she was deciding where to go, she had other options. She chose Truman because of its academic rigor. That was her reasoning, not mine. She will graduate early in December, then stay an additional year to complete her master's degree and sit for the CPA exam. She is exactly where she chose to be, and the institution has delivered on every reason she went.

The funding proposal currently before the House Budget Committee, introduced by Chairman Dirk Deaton, would reduce Truman's state appropriation from \$50.9 million to \$23.8 million. That is a cut of more than 53 percent. State Rep. Ed Lewis, a Republican whose district includes Kirksville, has said publicly that a cut of this size would probably cause the university to close within two years.

I am not writing on behalf of the institution. I am writing because I have looked at the data behind it, and the data does not support what this proposal would do to it. What follows is that data, presented directly, for the committee's consideration.

The Proposal in Plain Terms:

Under the per-student funding model proposed by Chairman Deaton, Truman would receive \$23.8 million in annual state support, down from \$50.9 million today. The university enrolls approximately 3,600 students. At that appropriation level, the per-student subsidy falls below what is required to sustain a selective residential institution with a 12:1 faculty ratio. The university cannot close that gap through tuition increases without eliminating the affordability that makes it worth choosing in the first place.

1. The State Built This Institution on Purpose

In 1985, Governor John Ashcroft signed legislation designating Truman as Missouri's statewide public liberal arts and sciences university. This was a considered policy decision, not an administrative default. The legislature at that time recognized that Missouri was losing its strongest students to private colleges in Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas, and that the state had no public institution capable of competing with those schools on academic rigor.

Truman was the answer to that problem. It was retooled, refocused, and rechristened to serve a statewide mission: retain Missouri talent, educate it rigorously, and keep it in Missouri. For four decades, it has done exactly that.

The funding cuts now under consideration would not reform that mission. They would make it financially impossible to sustain. A 53 percent reduction in state support cannot be absorbed without dismantling the instructional model that produces Truman's results.

2. Truman Is One of the Best Values in Missouri Higher Education

The reason my daughter chose Truman is the same reason many Missouri families are drawn to it: it delivers a quality of education that competes with private liberal arts colleges at a fraction of the price. Even compared to neighboring state flagships like the University of Arkansas, Truman holds its own on cost while offering a more selective, dedicated liberal arts environment. For a merit scholar and student athlete who had other options, that combination of rigor and affordability was the deciding factor.

University	In-State Tuition	Est. Total Annual Cost	MO Student Effective Cost
Truman State University	~\$9,900	~\$22,000 to \$25,000	~\$22,000 to \$25,000
University of Missouri	~\$13,000 to \$15,000	~\$30,000+	~\$30,000+ (full rate)
University of Florida	~\$6,400 (in-state)	~\$22,000 to \$24,000	~\$30,000 to \$35,000 (out-of-state)*
University of Arkansas (Honors College)	~\$10,000 (in-state)	~\$24,000 to \$26,000	~\$28,000 to \$32,000 (with reciprocity)**

* University of Florida offers reciprocity to Missouri students on an occasional and selective basis. When available, effective cost drops; when unavailable, Missouri students pay full out-of-state rates. ** University of Arkansas participates in regional reciprocity agreements that reduce tuition for qualifying Missouri students, though availability varies by program and year. Students who enroll without securing reciprocity pay full out-of-state rates.

The table above tells the real story. Arkansas and Florida appear affordable at in-state rates, and reciprocity agreements can bring costs down for some Missouri students. But reciprocity is neither guaranteed nor universal. It varies by program, by year, and by how many spots are available. Many Missouri families who choose those schools for the brand or the experience pay full out-of-state rates. That is a choice driven by perception, not value. Truman requires no such calculation. The price is what it is, for every Missouri student, every year.

Approximately half of Truman seniors graduate without any federal student loan debt. At peer public universities, average debt loads reach \$25,000 to \$30,000 per graduate. That gap is not a minor distinction. It is the difference between a graduate who enters her career with financial freedom and one who spends her first decade servicing debt she took on at eighteen. The proposed cuts would force tuition increases that eliminate that distinction. Families who chose Truman precisely because it sits at the intersection of quality and affordability would lose that option. Remove one and you remove the reason to choose it over a school with a bigger name and a larger bill.

3. The Academic Outcomes Are Measurable and Strong

The criticism that liberal arts institutions lack practical outcomes does not hold up against Truman's record. The accounting program's CPA exam first-time pass rates rank among the highest in the nation. That is an auditable, concrete outcome in a profession central to Missouri's business community. My daughter is an accounting major. She will sit for that exam. The program she is completing is the same one that produced those results.

Those results come from a specific instructional environment: small classes, faculty who are genuinely accessible, and a curriculum that builds analytical and communication skills alongside technical knowledge. Truman maintains a 12:1 student-to-faculty ratio. Sixty-seven percent of its classes enroll fewer than 20 students.

These are not marketing statistics. They are the structural conditions that produce the outcomes. A 53 percent budget reduction does not preserve those conditions at lower cost. It collapses them.

4. Truman Graduates Lead Missouri's Civic and Economic Institutions

The committee should consider what Truman alumni are doing in Missouri right now. Among the graduates currently in positions of public and economic consequence:

- Senator Eric Schmitt, United States Senate
- Cara Spencer, Mayor of St. Louis
- Russ Willey, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Enterprise Mobility
- Brian Day, Chief Financial Officer of Mercy Health

Enterprise Mobility is one of the largest privately held companies in the United States, headquartered in Missouri. Russ Willey earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting from Truman. Brian Day earned his business administration degree with a finance emphasis from Truman before becoming CFO of one of the state's largest employers. These are not marginal outcomes. They are what a rigorous undergraduate education produces when it is sustained over time with adequate institutional resources.

These alumni are not exceptions to a weak record. They are consistent with it. The committee's own districts contain Truman graduates. They are in your courtrooms, your hospitals, your county governments, and your businesses. The question this committee faces is whether the funding formula it is considering reflects that, or ignores it.

5. The Per-Student Formula Is the Wrong Tool for This Institution

The logic behind the proposed funding model is straightforward: the money should follow the student. As a general principle, that is reasonable. As the sole variable applied uniformly across institutions with fundamentally different purposes, it produces results that serve no one's stated goals.

A large regional university built to maximize enrollment and a selective residential institution built to maximize outcomes per student are doing different things. Both produce public value. Neither should be funded as if it were the other.

When you apply a per-headcount formula to Truman, you are not measuring whether the institution is doing its job. You are penalizing it for doing its job well. Selectivity, small class sizes, and close faculty mentorship are not inefficiencies in Truman's model. They are the mechanism by which the model works.

Consider the parallel: the federal government does not fund the United States Military Academy at West Point based on how many cadets it enrolls. It funds it based on what those cadets become. West Point graduates roughly 1,000 officers per year from a student body of 4,400. By the logic of the proposed formula, it would be dramatically underfunded. Instead, it is recognized as one of the highest-return educational investments the country makes. The same reasoning applies to Truman.

6. What the Committee Should Consider Instead

I am not arguing against accountability in higher education funding. I am arguing that enrollment alone is not accountability. It is a count.

If the committee's goal is to ensure that state appropriations produce public value, the metrics worth examining are these:

- Graduate retention rates in Missouri after degree completion
- Student debt levels at graduation relative to earning potential
- Professional certification outcomes, such as CPA pass rates
- Alumni presence in leadership positions across Missouri's economy and public sector
- Long-term tax revenue generated by retained graduates over working careers

On every one of those measures, Truman performs at or near the top of Missouri's public university system. A funding model designed to reward those outcomes would look very different from the one currently proposed.

I am not asking the committee to exempt Truman from scrutiny. I am asking it to apply the right scrutiny, one that measures what the institution actually produces for Missouri rather than simply how many students walk through the door.

Conclusion

My daughter is at Truman because it is one of the best decisions Missouri's legislature ever made for students in this state. It gave her access to a quality of education that competes with institutions costing three times as much, without saddling her with debt she would be paying off well into her thirties. That is the value proposition the legislature built. It belongs to her, not to us.

The proposed cuts would not reform that institution. They would end it. The faculty ratios that make the education work, the affordability that makes it accessible, and the statewide mission that makes it distinctive would all be casualties of a funding model that was not designed with Truman's purpose in mind.

I am asking the committee to look at the data in this brief, weigh it against the arithmetic of the proposed cuts, and consider what Missouri loses if this institution closes. The record on Truman graduates is clear. The cost of dismantling the institution that produced them would be felt for a generation.

WHY TRUMAN IS MISSOURI'S HIGHEST-ROI PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

A Quantified Case for Continued Investment

Return on public investment in higher education is typically measured in three categories: talent retained within the state, student debt avoided, and leadership generated in civic and economic institutions. On all three, Truman's output per dollar of state appropriation is among the strongest in Missouri's public university system.

State Subsidy Efficiency

Missouri appropriates \$50.9 million annually to Truman for approximately 3,600 students. That is a per-student state subsidy of roughly \$14,100. For that investment, the state receives a graduating class of 700 to 800 students per year, the majority of whom could not afford comparable private institutions. It receives CPA first-time pass rates that rank among the nation's highest. And it receives alumni who now serve as CFOs of two of Missouri's most consequential institutions, occupy a United States Senate seat, and lead the city government of St. Louis.

The proposed per-student model would give larger enrollment institutions larger appropriations and penalize smaller institutions for the selectivity that produces these results. It optimizes for throughput. Truman optimizes for outcomes. Those are not the same thing, and a sound funding formula should be able to tell the difference.

Talent Retention: Keeping Missouri Graduates in Missouri

Missouri competes with Illinois, Kansas, Iowa, and Tennessee for its strongest high school graduates. Without a public liberal arts option capable of matching the rigor of private colleges in those states, Missouri students who want that kind of education have one practical option: leave. Many of them do not come back.

Truman stops that drain. If 60 percent of Truman graduates remain in Missouri after graduation, the university retains approximately 420 to 480 college-educated Missourians per year who would otherwise have been educated elsewhere. Over 30- to 40-year careers, those graduates generate state and local tax revenue that far exceeds the annual appropriation required to keep the institution open.

Every Truman graduate who stays in Missouri is a compounding asset to the state. The cost of losing that pipeline is not \$27 million. It is generational.

Debt Avoidance as Fiscal Policy

Approximately half of Truman seniors graduate without federal student loan debt. If 350 graduates per year avoid \$25,000 in debt that their counterparts at peer institutions carry, the aggregate debt avoided exceeds \$8.75 million annually. That is nearly one-third of the entire state appropriation, returned directly to Missouri families in the form of financial capacity.

Graduates who carry lower debt enter the Missouri workforce with greater spending power. They are more likely to start businesses, purchase homes, and build local tax bases. That is a concrete fiscal return on the state's investment in Truman, and it disappears if the institution closes.

Leadership Output: The Multiplier That Enrollment Cannot Measure

A CFO of Enterprise Mobility or Mercy Health generates Missouri economic activity that no enrollment figure captures. A United States Senator influences conditions affecting every resident of the state. Standard higher education funding metrics are not designed to measure this kind of output. That does not mean the output is not real or does not matter to Missouri.

Truman alumni hold positions across the full leadership structure of Missouri's civic and economic life. That pattern does not come from large lecture halls and high enrollment counts. It comes from an educational model that requires students to write, reason, and be held accountable in small classrooms with faculty who know who they are. That model costs what it costs. The proposed cuts do not preserve it at a lower price. They end it.

53%

Proposed appropriation cut under current proposal

~\$8.75M

Student debt avoided annually vs. peer institutions

~450

Missouri graduates retained in-state per year (est.)

The Bottom Line

The proposed cuts treat Truman as an institution that underperforms because it enrolls fewer students. The record shows the opposite. Truman's size is a feature of its model, not a deficiency. Selective, rigorous institutions do not scale indefinitely without losing the characteristics that make them worth funding.

Reducing Truman's appropriation by more than half does not make Missouri's higher education system more efficient. It removes the institution most specifically built to retain high-ability students in Missouri, minimize their debt, and produce the civic and professional leadership the state depends on.

Missouri built Truman to do something specific. The return on that investment is measurable. The cost of dismantling it will be, too.

APPENDIX A

Lessons from Florida's Flagship Strategy

How Strategic Investment Turned a Public University into a National Leader

Florida's experience over the past two decades offers a direct and instructive parallel. Beginning in the early 2000s, Florida chose to concentrate investment in institutions capable of competing nationally rather than distribute funding evenly across the system. The state committed to three principles: invest in academic rigor, protect affordability for in-state students, and measure institutions by outcomes rather than enrollment alone.

The University of Florida, once a solid regional institution ranked outside the national top 20 among public universities, now ranks in the top five in the country. It achieved that while keeping in-state tuition among the lowest in its peer group. The result was a university that retained Florida's best students and attracted high performers from across the country.

What Florida's Numbers Show

Metric	Early 2000s	Today
National Public University Ranking	Outside top 20	Top 5
Undergraduate Acceptance Rate	~60%	~23%
In-State Tuition	Among lowest in peer group	Remains among lowest
National Reputation	Strong regional	National flagship

Missouri already has an institution with the foundational profile that made Florida's strategy work. The difference is that Florida chose to strengthen its equivalent. Missouri is currently considering whether to defund its own.

States that treat their strongest universities as long-term strategic assets tend to retain talent, attract investment, and strengthen their economic competitiveness. States that defund them tend to export their best students permanently.

APPENDIX B

Flagship Universities as Engines of State Economic Gravity

Strong public universities do not simply educate students. They anchor talent, drive research, and develop the civic leadership that shapes a state's long-term trajectory. Three examples make this concrete:

- The University of Michigan has been central to Michigan's transition from an auto-dependent economy to a diversified technology and research economy. Its talent pipeline and research output attracted the private investment that followed.
- The University of Texas at Austin has been a primary driver of Austin's emergence as a national technology hub. The university's graduates and institutional gravity were prerequisites for the city's transformation.
- The University of Florida now anchors Florida's economic strategy across finance, engineering, agriculture, and public service, producing graduates who power each of those sectors.

How Universities Create Economic Gravity

The mechanism works in three directions. First, talent retention: students who attend college in their home state are significantly more likely to remain there after graduation. Every high-performing Missouri student who attends Truman and stays in Missouri represents decades of tax revenue, consumer spending, and civic engagement that would otherwise belong to another state.

Second, talent attraction: universities draw students from outside the state, many of whom establish careers and families locally. Truman students come from across Missouri and beyond. A meaningful share of them stay. They become Missouri's workforce, Missouri's business owners, and Missouri's civic leaders.

Third, leadership development: the civic and economic leadership of any state disproportionately comes from institutions that combine academic rigor with broad undergraduate formation. Truman's alumni record in Missouri government, healthcare, and business is not coincidental. It is the predictable and documented output of the model.

Missouri's Competitive Position

Missouri competes for talented young people with states that are actively investing in their public universities. Texas, Florida, Tennessee, and Georgia have all increased investment in selective public higher education over the past decade. The proposal before this committee would eliminate Missouri's most selective public undergraduate institution during a period when the competition for talent is intensifying, not easing.

Why Enrollment-Based Funding Models Misprice Institutional Value

Per-student funding formulas are administratively simple and politically defensible. They are also structurally blind to the difference between institutions that maximize throughput and institutions that maximize outcomes per student. Applied uniformly, they systematically undervalue the second category.

Throughput vs. Outcomes

A large regional university can serve 20,000 students through high-enrollment sections and broad credential programs. That is a legitimate and valuable function. A selective residential institution serves 3,600 students through small classes, close faculty supervision, and an intensive formation model designed to develop leaders rather than simply credential graduates. That is also a legitimate and valuable function.

They are not the same function, and a funding formula that treats them as equivalent does not produce better accountability. It produces a system optimized for the wrong output.

The public return on higher education is measured in what graduates earn, where they lead, how they contribute to the state over a working lifetime. Enrollment captures none of that. It counts students at enrollment, not what they become after they leave.

What the Liberal Arts Model Actually Requires

Truman's results depend on structural conditions that cannot be maintained below a funding threshold: class sizes small enough to require active participation, faculty loads light enough to permit real mentorship, and a curriculum that builds analytical and communication capacity across every discipline. These conditions cost what they cost. A 53 percent funding cut does not produce a leaner version of Truman. It produces an institution that can no longer deliver what it was built to deliver.

A Smarter Framework

The committee has legitimate interest in ensuring state appropriations produce public value. The data in this brief suggests a more productive set of accountability metrics than enrollment alone: graduate retention rates in Missouri, debt levels at graduation, professional certification outcomes, alumni leadership positions, and long-term earnings relative to cost of attendance.

On every one of those measures, Truman performs at or near the top of Missouri's public university system. A funding model designed to reward those outcomes would increase Truman's appropriation, not cut it by more than half.

The most valuable institutions in a state's higher education system are not always the largest ones. They are the ones that produce graduates capable of shaping the state's economic and civic future.

Small Flagship Institutions Produce Disproportionate Leadership Outcomes

West Point, the University of Arkansas, and the Case for Missouri's Investment in Truman

That smaller, more selective institutions produce disproportionate leadership outcomes is not a matter of theory. It is documented consistently across American higher education. Three institutions illustrate the pattern precisely.

United States Military Academy, West Point

West Point enrolls approximately 4,400 cadets and graduates roughly 1,000 officers per year. No institution in the country has produced a more concentrated record of civic and military leadership from a comparable enrollment base.

- Two U.S. Presidents: Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower
- 76 Medal of Honor recipients, more than any other undergraduate institution in the country
- 70 Rhodes Scholars and 20 NASA astronauts
- Founders and senior executives of AOL, USAA, and multiple Fortune 500 companies

West Point operates on a 6:1 student-to-faculty ratio. Its model is built entirely around leadership formation, not enrollment volume. The federal government funds it based on what its graduates become, not how many cadets it commissions each year. That is the right question, and it is the one this committee should be asking about Truman.

West Point's history department operates under an unofficial motto: "Much of the history we teach was made by people we taught." The same can reasonably be said of Truman's role in Missouri civic and economic life.

University of Arkansas Honors College

Arkansas provides a directly relevant regional comparison. Facing the same challenge Missouri faces in retaining high-ability students who might otherwise leave for private colleges out of state, Arkansas invested in a selective, intensive honors program within its flagship university. The model is structurally identical to what Truman provides as a standalone institution.

The Arkansas Honors College admits students with an average ACT of 30 and a 4.1 high school GPA. It operates through small seminar-style classes, mandatory mentored research for all graduates, and close faculty relationships. Every fellowship recipient must pass a writing examination and a campus interview. The program has produced Rhodes, Marshall, Fulbright, and Goldwater Scholars, and Honors graduates have achieved a 90 percent acceptance rate to medical school.

The argument Arkansas made in building that program is the same argument this brief makes about Truman: selective, rigorous, small-cohort education produces outsized outcomes per student, and those outcomes are worth the investment. The difference is that Arkansas built that capacity inside a large university. Missouri already has it as a dedicated public institution. The question before this committee is whether Missouri will

protect what it has already built, or whether legislators in neighboring states will be the ones making this argument about their own investments while Missouri dismantles its equivalent.

What These Institutions Share

West Point and the University of Arkansas Honors College share the structural characteristics that explain their outsized outcomes:

1. Small class sizes that require active intellectual engagement rather than passive attendance
2. High faculty-to-student ratios that allow genuine mentorship rather than transactional instruction
3. Rigorous writing and analytical training embedded across the curriculum, not confined to a single department
4. An institutional culture oriented toward developing leaders, not simply conferring credentials

None of these characteristics survive a 53 percent budget reduction. They require sustained investment to function. They also require enrollment to remain at a scale where they are possible to maintain.

Truman in This Context

Truman operates within this same model. Its 12:1 student-to-faculty ratio and the fact that 67 percent of its classes enroll fewer than 20 students are not coincidences. They are the structural conditions that produce Truman's outcomes.

Arkansas chose to build a selective honors program inside a large university to replicate this model for its strongest students. Missouri has the model itself, purpose-built and statewide. Truman delivers it at a total annual cost of \$22,000 to \$25,000, accessible to any Missouri student with the academic ability to earn admission, regardless of family income. My daughter is one of those students. She chose Truman over other institutions because of what it offered academically. The institution has to remain viable for the next student who makes that same calculation.

If Truman closes, no comparable institution exists in Missouri's public system to replace it. Students who need what Truman provides will either pay private tuition elsewhere or leave the state. Neither outcome serves Missouri, and neither is reversible once the institution is gone.

12:1 Student-to-faculty ratio at Truman	67% Classes with fewer than 20 students	~\$22K Total annual cost vs. \$85K+ at comparable private colleges
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Missouri does not need to choose between access and excellence. Truman has already solved that problem. The question before this committee is whether the state will protect the solution or eliminate it.