



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TAB B

September 17, 2021

2020-21 USHE Annual Report

Over the past year, the Utah System of Higher Education experienced a great deal of change, especially with the merger of the two state systems of higher education and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The higher education systems merger will continue to lead to improved statewide alignment, pathways, and performance. As one System, students can access education pathways that match their needs—making higher education more accessible for all Utahns. Additionally, this past year, the new Board developed a comprehensive strategic plan that will improve higher education in Utah over the next five years.

This annual report highlights the major accomplishments of the System office over the past year and sets the stage for plans to improve higher education in Utah in the coming years.

Other updates in the annual report include:

- Equity in USHE
- Statewide attainment goal
- Technical education
- Utah College Advising Corps advisers
- Transfer initiatives
- State aid program updates
- Student safety and mental health
- Shared services updates

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only; no action is required.

2020–21 ANNUAL REPORT



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION





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UTAH BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Nina Barnes, Vice Chair
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2020-21 Student Board members

Glen Rivera, Student Representative for Technical Education
Candyce Damron, Student Representative for Academic Education

2021-22 Student Board members

Valirie Serawop, Student Representative for Technical Education
Tanner Marcum, Student Representative for Academic Education

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

To the Board of Higher Education, System faculty, staff, leadership, and higher education advocates:

I am pleased to share with you the Utah Board of Higher Education's 2020-21 Annual Report.

In the past year, the Utah System of Higher Education experienced a great deal of productive change, primarily due to the merger of the two state systems of higher education—a momentous undertaking full of opportunity.

The new, combined Board was created during the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and despite the many challenges both on and off campus, it pursued a path to equitably provide accessible, valuable, innovative, and affordable higher education for students.

The Board, with state and System partners, developed a comprehensive strategic plan concentrated in six key areas, including System Unification, Access, Affordability, Completion, Workforce Alignment, and Research.

With these priorities in mind to guide its work, the Board will fortify and improve higher education in Utah over the next five years.

Our work is just beginning, and I thank you for your ongoing support.

Harris H. Simmons
Chair, Utah Board of Higher Education



Photo courtesy of Salt Lake Community College

OUR MISSION

The Utah Board of Higher Education governs and supports the Utah System of Higher Education to equitably provide accessible, valuable, innovative, and affordable higher education for students to expand their economic mobility, enhance their cultural awareness, and improve their overall quality of life.

OUR VISION

The Board will ensure the System provides every Utahn—in every place and every circumstance—an affordable certificate or degree at a USHE institution that will meaningfully improve their lives through economic opportunity, civic engagement, and personal fulfillment.

63.9%

of 2017 Utah high school graduates were enrolled in college or university within three years

55.8%

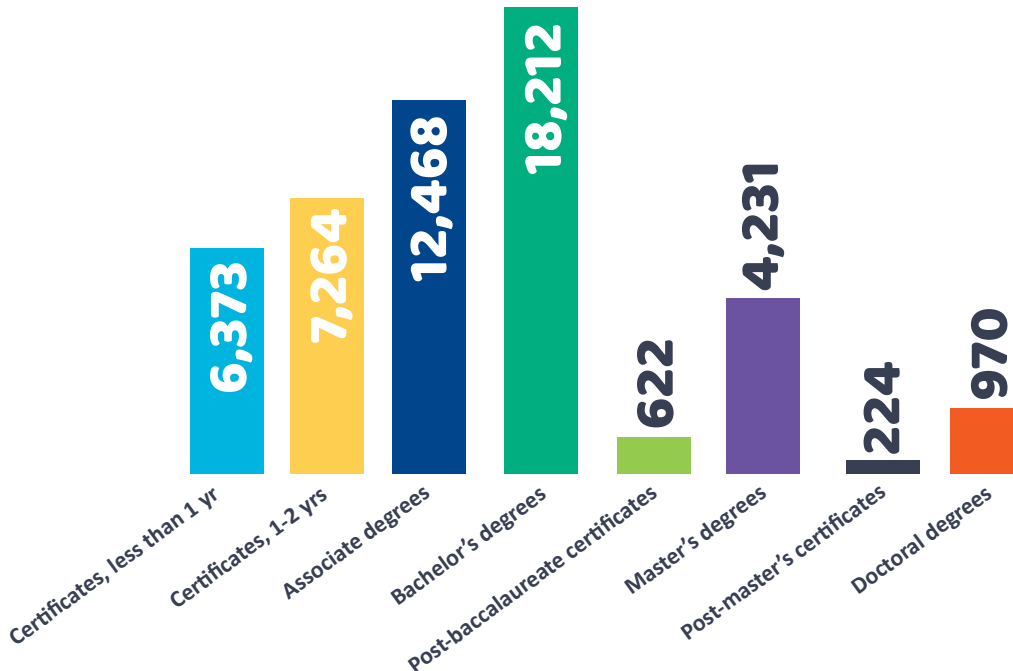
of 2017 Utah high school graduates were enrolled at a USHE institution within three years

40.9%

of USHE students receive an award within 8 years of entry

50,364

degrees and certificates awarded in 2019-20 by USHE institutions



24,718

In 2019-20, USHE institutions produced 24,718 graduates (57.5%) in high-demand fields

Areas of study with the most awards across all 16 USHE institutions in 2019-20.

Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies, and Humanities

Health Professions and Related Programs

Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services

Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services

Education

USHE INSTITUTION HIGHLIGHTS

BRIDGERLAND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Bridgerland Technical College announced final approval by the Utah State Legislature to begin construction on its Health Sciences building. After the funding became another casualty of the pandemic last June, Governor Cox extended his support in recommending this building as his only building priority in the 2021 General Session. Bridgerland hopes to break ground on this building in the fall.

Gene Haas Foundation dignitaries were welcomed to BTech on May 13, 2021, for a ribbon cutting to commemorate the \$250,000 grant utilized in remodeling the Machining Technology department. This grant was instrumental in elevating the hands-on training students receive in the program and expanded the classroom by 50%. The Gene Haas Foundation also donated an additional \$30,000 in scholarship money for students in the Machining Technology program.

2021 marks 50 years since Bridgerland Tech first started teaching students under the name Bridgerland Area Vocational Center. With this milestone (and three name changes later), the college has a renewed focus on history, alumni, and spreading the word about the value of technical education.

DAVIS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

One of Davis Tech's notable accomplishments this year was the development of pilot training for the blind and visually impaired in the CNC (Computer Numerical Control) Machining program, called CNC Enhanced. Three students successfully completed the training and have now matriculated into Davis Tech's full program.

Another major accomplishment of Davis Tech was completing and launching the Michael J. Bouwhuis Allied Health Building. This new building helps the college expand its capacity in Health Professions to help meet employer demand in healthcare.



Photo courtesy of Dixie Technical College

DIXIE TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Dixie Tech was able to thrive and grow, even during the pandemic! A two-month closure at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic caused faculty to quickly pivot to provide online content and keep students actively engaged. Both faculty and students were anxious to get back into regular classes, and especially into labs, so by June 1, 2020, Dixie Tech was re-opened to students. Stellar maintenance and custodial staff worked tirelessly to ensure that all surfaces were clean and disinfected. There were zero documented cases of on-campus transmission of the virus. By the end of 2021, Dixie Tech celebrated its highest graduation rate ever—494 students graduated, an increase of 45% over 2020. In addition, 100% of students from both the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs passed their national exams for licensing.

Dixie Tech capitalized on lessons learned during COVID, particularly with computer-based programs. Digital Media Design program instructor Kevin Pfunder used the lessons learned from adapting in-person teaching to video teaching and reached out to Disney Imagineer Liz Richards, who specializes in 2D and 3D animation. Even though she lives in Southern California, she is now teaching the animation portion of the Digital Media Design Program. While she teaches through a live video broadcast, a lab instructor in the classroom helps support the instructional process.



DIXIE STATE UNIVERSITY

Dixie State University continues to add academic programs, active learning experiences, and industry partnerships that help DSU students graduate career ready as part of DSU's strategic goal to become the first open, inclusive, comprehensive, polytechnic university in the U.S.

The university is constructing two state-of-the-art buildings to accommodate DSU's growing student body: Phase II of Campus View Suites and the Science, Engineering & Technology building. Opening for the fall 2021 semester, the new student housing facility will be home to 534 students. The SET building will hold the specialized classrooms and labs necessary to prepare students for careers in STEM fields.

MOUNTAINLAND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Strategically located within Utah's hub of innovation, Silicon Slopes, the Mountainland Technical College Trades & Technology building represents the ingenuity and passion for learning shared by Utahns across the state. At just over 89,000 square feet of workspace, the opening of its doors creates a new center for technical education in the Mountainland region. With a directive from President Christensen to maximize functional space, the Trades and Technology Building utilizes over 50,000 square feet of high-bay labs and shops for Automotive Technology, Diesel Mechanics, Welding, Precision Machining, and Automated Manufacturing.

Taking advantage of the sweeping Wasatch Range views, the Trades and Technology facility is home to over 39,000 square feet of classroom space for other high-demand, industry-driven programs, including Information Technology, Mobile Application Development, and Web Development.

Mountainland Technical College, in partnership with Micron and the non-profit, Computers for Kids, worked together to solve the technology problem faced by students during the pandemic. Over 500 computers found a home with students through this partnership, free of charge, throughout the Mountainland region.

OGDEN-WEBER TECHNICAL COLLEGE

2021 marks 50 years of hands-on technical education at Ogden-Weber Technical College. OTech has grown from 93 students in 1971 to 5,433 this year, including 2,681 new enrollees. Four hundred of those students received scholarships worth over \$350,000 through generous donations from organizations and community members. Thanks to excellent instructors and proven community impact, OTech's YouthBuild program received a \$1.2 million grant to continue offering job training and education to at-risk youth. Despite facing unique challenges this year, 903 students have finished their programs and received certificates in high-demand fields. OTech faculty and staff demonstrated creativity and flexibility as they adapted programs to meet changing guidelines. They also cared for struggling students, donated supplies to a campus food bank, and promoted financial aid opportunities. Classes, campus, and faces may have looked a little different this year, but OTech students and staff rose to the occasion.





Photo courtesy of Salt Lake Community College

SALT LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

For the 2020-21 academic year, Salt Lake Community College continued to provide residents of Salt Lake County and beyond access to higher education. Despite challenges presented by COVID-19, SLCC offered students a full selection of classes throughout the year, both in-person and online, and hands-on training in lab settings. In May, the college also awarded associate degrees or certificates to more than 3,600 graduates.

SLCC is set to expand its reach in fast-growing southwest Salt Lake County to continue providing educational access to everyone. In July 2021, the college broke ground on its new Herriman-based Juniper Canyon Campus—a shared project with the University of Utah. Starting in 2023, students will be able to attend the campus to earn associate degrees from SLCC and then continue their studies at the same location for undergraduate degrees from the U.

SLCC also improved its existing locations this year, most notably at its Jordan Campus. The college teamed up with students to build the new Tim & Brenda Huval Student Center, which opened in January 2021. The center is a one-stop location for essential services, including advising, career counseling, health care, financial aid, veterans support, a food pantry, and on-campus childcare.

SNOW COLLEGE

This year Snow College employees adapted their teaching modalities and adjusted workflows to help students have a “real college experience.” Snow College is the only institution in the state to have offered more than 90% of classes face-to-face this year.

The Chronicle of Higher Education recently designated Snow College as the number one institution in its class for student success, measured by graduation rates and successful transfer rates.

With wins in four categories, Snow College had a strong showing in the Best of State awards this year. Snow was honored with the Curriculum Development award for its ability to adapt and provide an excellent student experience for Learn & Work students in Utah. In addition, three Snow College employees were recognized for their excellent service to students and the community: Stacey McIff was named the best higher education administrator for her work in partnering with businesses to bring job opportunities to rural Utah; Professor Jay Olsen was named the best college/university teacher for his commitment to student success and his work in greatly expanding Snow’s agriculture program; and Barbara Dalene was recognized as the educational advisor of the year.

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY

Southern Utah University made two significant moves this year in an effort to make getting a high-quality college education more affordable and accessible. Starting in the fall of 2021, SUU is offering an online \$9,000 Bachelor of General Studies degree for those who are either already in the workforce and looking to advance their career or those who have some college credit but no degree and can’t finish because of the cost. The university also broke ground for a new academic classroom building. Once completed, the 90,000 square foot building will add 14 new classrooms, seven computer labs, eight teaching studios, and numerous faculty offices to the university.

Mindy Benson also took on the role as SUU interim president this year.

SOUTHWEST TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Student Highlight: Oscar Burgueno Jr.

Oscar Burgueno Jr. aspired to become a firefighter after having the awful experience of watching his California home burn down as a child. Oscar found himself in Southern Utah playing football for SUU, but his senior season in 2020 was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Oscar took advantage of the additional time he'd be spending playing football to further his career goals and took advantage of the SUU/Southwest Tech dual enrollment program. Oscar enrolled in the EMT program at Southwest Tech while finishing his senior year. As a model student of dedication and classroom work ethic, Oscar was selected as the Southwest Tech student of the year.

Faculty Highlight: Richard Wittwer

Automotive faculty member, Richard Wittwer, is retiring after 43 years of teaching automotive technology. Richard has taught thousands of students over his career. Richard's service and dedication to generations of automotive mechanics will be missed by peers and students alike. Richard will continue to serve as the State Director of SkillsUSA Utah, where he has served several years.

TOOELE TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Tooele Technical College has an institutional culture of inclusion and support. Our smaller size enables high levels of interaction between students, particularly at-risk students, and their instructors and other support services. Although Tooele Tech is growing, the college will continue to support and honor the institutional culture established that grants access and support for all students, particularly those in financial distress.

Tooele Technical College has been proud to support our local community through the pandemic year in numerous ways. Learn & Work funding paid student tuition from September through December for 208 students in most programs. Membership hours at Tooele Tech grew by 13% over last year and rose by 78% over the previous three years. Tooele Tech's outdoor graduation was a fitting tribute to our students with tremendous support from the community. More than 130 graduates walked across the stage while more than 750 guests cheered them on.



Photo courtesy of Tooele Technical College

UINTAH BASIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Uintah Basin Technical College had three medalists in SkillsUSA's National Skills and Leadership Competition, in addition to three students who finished in the top nine of their respective categories. Trinity Long finished with the bronze medal in the Job Interview Competition for College/Post-secondary, and Davis Thomas finished with the bronze medal in Welding for high school. Lastly, Taydn Holmes took home the gold medal for Carpentry in the College/Post-secondary category. Aimee Smith, Tristen Boren, and Ivan Sheffer placed in the top nine in Prepared Speech, Job Skill Demonstration A, and Medical Terminology, respectively.

UBTech's Practical Nursing Program was voted as the top Practical Nursing program in the State of Utah by BestValueColleges.com. Aspects of the program highlighted included program cost, LPN preparedness, its 90% job placement rate, and program structure built around body systems and concepts that build upon one another.

UBTech named Valirie Serawop the 2020-21 student of the year, becoming the first student of Native American descent to hold the title. As Student of the Year, Valirie represents UBTech at events and promotes technical education throughout the Uintah Basin. She is also an active leader within the UBTech Ambassadors, a student team designed to cultivate students' leadership skills. She was recently appointed to the Board of Higher Education as its Student Representative for Technical Education.

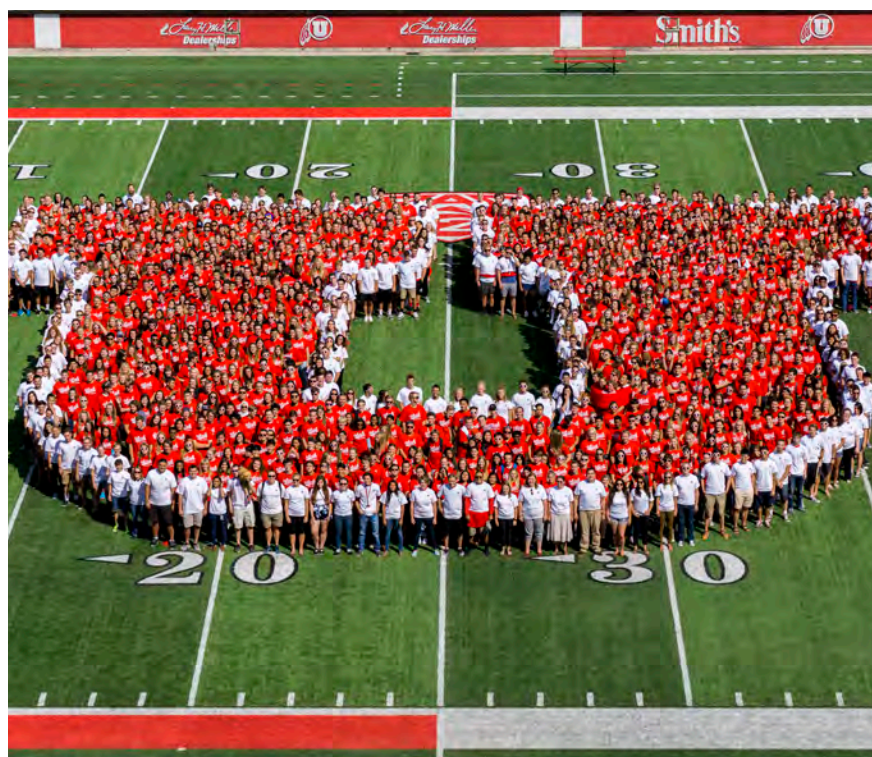


Photo courtesy of the University of Utah

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

The Utah Board of Higher Education selected Taylor R. Randall, Ph.D., as the 17th president of the University of Utah on Aug. 5, 2021. Randall succeeds Ruth V. Watkins, who served as president from Jan. 2018-Jan. 2021.

Prior to Randall's appointment, on June 9, the University of Utah announced a landmark gift of \$110 million for its School of Medicine from the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation and the Nora Eccles Treadwell Foundation to the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine at the University of Utah. The gift will further accelerate the school's ability to provide the highest quality medical education, advanced research, and patient care, dramatically increasing the school's endowment and powering critical research. It will also enable the construction of a state-of-the-art new home for the School of Medicine on the health sciences campus.

Over the 2020-21 academic year, the University of Utah's Equity Diversity & Inclusion team led efforts to take a stand against racism and to bring the U to the forefront of the national conversation on race. As part of this effort, the U's EDI team hosted and sponsored a national lecture series called The Friday Forum series on Racism in Higher Education. The forums welcomed national thought leaders to lead discussions on critical issues and provided the opportunity for participants from across campus and around the country to share best practices for sustained change and action.

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

In August 2020, Utah State University received a five-year, \$26 million grant, renewable to 10-year, \$50.6 million, to develop an international research center dedicated to advancing sustainable, electrified transportation. Named ASPIRE (Advancing Sustainability through Powered Infrastructure for Roadway Electrification), the Engineering Research Center focuses on developing new infrastructure that facilitates the widespread adoption of electric vehicles. ASPIRE will be headquartered at USU and operated through strategic partnerships with Purdue University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Texas at El Paso, and the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Additional partners include researchers at Colorado State University, University of Colorado—Colorado Springs, Virginia Tech, Cornell University, and four national laboratories.

USU engineering faculty led efforts statewide to use an "early-alert" wastewater monitoring system, allowing officials to identify and contain COVID-19 cases. In fall 2020, USU was one of only five higher education institutions in the nation to use wastewater monitoring to identify SARS-CoV-2 in sewage. The pilot program began with 10 facilities in Utah and grew to 65 facilities statewide. Wastewater monitoring conducted at Utah State University occurs in coordination with the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, in collaboration with other major research universities in the state, and in communication with local and state health authorities, other universities conducting on-campus monitoring, and federal agencies and authorities.



Photo courtesy of the Utah State University



Photo courtesy of Utah Valley University

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

Utah Valley University's commencement and convocations on August 19, 2020, were hosted drive-in style to meet social distancing guidelines, a first for the university. Graduates lined up their cars in UVU parking lots and then proceeded to walk across the "green carpet" to receive their diplomas. UVU honored the then-largest graduating class in the school's history with 6,410 graduates.

UVU has been under construction, making renovations and improvements for students, faculty, and staff from one end of campus to the other. The new Scott C. Keller Building, which will house the Woodbury School of Business, had its groundbreaking on November 11, 2019, and will be completed in the spring of 2022. UVU, the Utah Department of Transportation, and the Utah Transit Authority completed construction on the longest pedestrian bridge in Utah. Construction also began on the Sorensen Student Center in August 2020.

On September 15, 2020, a team of UVU faculty members received a \$350,000 National Science Foundation grant to study and recommend ways to rejuvenate Utah Lake. A team of students studying environmental science, geology, communication, business management, biology, and chemistry are working alongside faculty members seasoned in those areas, creating a multidisciplinary approach to the project.

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

During in-person ceremonies in April, Weber State University celebrated a record 6,497 graduates.

To ensure continued student success, President Brad Mortensen invited the campus to create a new strategic plan. The plan builds on institutional strengths to inform priorities and goals for the next five years, focusing on retention and completion, equity and diversity, community engagement, educational excellence, and marketing.

Engagement and excellence were evident in the opening of two new university buildings in 2020. The Outdoor Adventure & Welcome Center in Ogden provides easy access to outdoor gear and activities with space to welcome students and families to campus. The Computer & Automotive Engineering Building at WSU Davis in Layton helps the College of Engineering, Applied Science & Technology address explosive demand for an educated workforce in Northern Utah.

Before the pandemic, Weber State initiated long-term strategies to promote digital literacy. The shift to online learning and an infusion of CARES Act funding sped up the project. In March, the university opened its Digital District with an array of technology tools and was approved as an Adobe Creative Campus—a designation applied to a select group of colleges and universities worldwide.

SYSTEM UNIFICATION

On July 1, 2020, the state's two systems of higher education merged into a joint Utah System of Higher Education with one Board, the Utah Board of Higher Education, to govern. During its 2020 session, the Utah Legislature passed S.B. 111, *Higher Education Amendments*—a sweeping change to higher education structure and governance that brought the Utah System of Higher Education and the Utah System of Technical Colleges together.

The unified Utah System of Higher Education is made up of 16 institutions, including eight technical colleges, two community colleges, four regional universities, and two research universities.

To guide the new System, Dave R. Woolstenhulme was appointed to serve as Commissioner of Higher Education after having served as interim commissioner since July 2019.

EFFICIENCIES AND THE VALUE OF COMING TOGETHER AS ONE SYSTEM

As one System, students from all backgrounds can see the full breadth of available educational opportunities, which can complement and build on each other. This allows students to access pathways with outcomes that match their needs within the System—making higher education more efficient and effective for all students.

THE NEW UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD

The new Utah Board of Higher Education is comprised of 18 members, including one technical college student representative and one degree-granting college or university representative.

Through its strong leadership, the Board has the ability to truly impact the course of higher education through comprehensive strategic planning and leveraging the merits of a statewide System for the benefit of students. The Utah Legislature grants it the power to control, manage, and supervise USHE. The Board's major responsibilities include selecting and evaluating institutional presidents, setting statewide policy, approving institutional missions, delegating oversight to institutional boards of trustees, evaluating programs and degree offerings, and submitting a unified higher education budget request to the Governor and State Legislature.

OCHE STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Immediately following the systems merger in July, the Board and Commissioner began the changes to align people and processes to match the desired outcomes for the newly combined System.



Photos courtesy of Southern Utah University (top), Weber State University (middle), and Mountainland Technical College (bottom)



Photos courtesy of Davis Technical College (top), Bridgerland Technical College (left), and Snow College (right)

The Board adopted bylaws, established clearer roles for institutions, and delegated significant responsibility to institutional boards of trustees, specifically for strategic planning, setting tuition and fees, program approval, and maintaining fiscal oversight. The Board also directed its focus on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, adopting resolutions on equity, supporting Dreamers, and supporting and celebrating Juneteenth. The Board also established an equity lens framework to guide all the System's work.

The Commissioner reorganized the System office to better support the Board's strategic priorities and began by aligning staff responsibilities to oversee both technical and academic education. The Commissioner also designated staff to cover key areas including outreach; workforce; economics; student services; financial aid; equity, diversity, and inclusion; strategic initiatives; and more.

The Commissioner made these changes while realizing internal efficiencies and savings for the office as a whole, giving the Board resources to hire former Southern Utah University President Scott Wyatt as a senior executive director who will develop and establish a statewide online education program.

UNIFYING TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Technical education provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to meet industry demand. Instruction is offered at low cost (no cost to high school students) and leads to a certificate. The merger of the state's systems of higher education combined the best in technical colleges and degree-granting institutions and will continue to lead to improved statewide alignment, pathways, and performance.

The Legislature ensured continued focus on technical education by retaining Board members from the former Utah System of Technical Colleges and the Utah Board of Regents. To build a culture that is highly engaged in technical education, the Board and Commissioner's office formed the new Technical Education Committee, hired staff dedicated to technical education, and adjusted budget processes to further the needs of technical education throughout the new System.

The Legislature and Board also clearly defined technical education and institutional roles and missions in 2020, which has led to the ongoing assessment of certificate programs to reduce duplication and ensure program alignment with institutional missions and roles, aligning courses for statewide consistency and transferability, and increasing and streamlining program pathways at both technical and degree-granting institutions.

Transition from clock hours to credit hours

Historically, Utah statute required technical colleges to measure courses and programs in clock hours rather than credit. Clock hours represent the estimated time a student spends completing all the learning activities for a given course or program. The language prohibiting technical colleges from offering credit was removed from the statute when both higher education systems merged.

A Technical Education Committee task force conducted a feasibility analysis of transitioning clock hour technical education to credit. The task force evaluated whether the transition would accomplish the following three objectives:

- Result in a common credit currency used by all 16 USHE institutions
- Address attendance and distance education requirements imposed by the U.S. Department of Education that create student access and completion barriers by requiring students eligible for financial aid to complete all course work in a synchronous (live) format
- Ensure U.S. Department of Education and accreditation rules would not further restrict student access or completion by compromising the flexible enrollment and scheduling currently provided for competency-based education

The task force determined that a transition to credit would address all three objectives and forwarded the recommendation to the full Board, which resulted in its approval in May 2021. Full implementation is expected in FY2023 and will yield benefits for financial aid, distance learning, and articulation.

Making technical education programs more affordable

The three degree-granting institutions that have a statutory role to provide technical education (Snow College; Salt Lake Community College; and Utah State University Eastern, Blanding, and Moab) are also converting courses that previously were offered at higher-cost academic tuition rates to low-cost technical education rates, providing more consistent access statewide to technical education.

Board members, institutions, and the System office will continue to consider impacts on technical education institutions and students to better serve and support them. The System greatly benefits from technical institutions' experience and resources.



Photo courtesy of Uintah Basin Technical College

STATEWIDE ATTAINMENT GOAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMISSION

Strategic Planning Commission

In 2018, the Legislature established the Higher Education Strategic Planning Commission to navigate the coming changes to higher education and the workforce over the next 20 years and gave it the responsibility to develop a strategic plan aimed at meeting the future challenges of the Utah System of Higher Education.

The resulting strategic plan included a directive to reassess and recommit to a set of statewide attainment goals. The commission then created workgroups primarily led by the Commissioner’s office to design new statewide postsecondary attainment goals. Based on the Commissioner’s recommendations, the commission settled on statewide attainment goals that address access, completion, and high-yield awards. Data was then gathered by USHE to identify baseline measures and set ten-year statewide goals.

Statewide Attainment Goal

- **Access**—Increase the 3-year college-going rate of Utah high school students by 10% in 10 years.
- **Timely Completion**—Increase the percent of students who complete their degree or award within 150% of expected time by 10% in 10 years.
- **High-Yield Awards**—Increase the percent of students who earn degrees and awards that align to high-wage, high-demand occupations by 20% in 10 years.

To align the work of the System office and USHE’s 16 institutions to the statewide goals, the attainment goal measures were used as a baseline to drive the creation of the Board’s five-year strategic plan. Three additional measures were added to the goals to reflect the Board’s desire to close equity gaps in all three measures.

ACCESS

Increase the 3-year college-going rate of Utah high school students by 10% in 10 years

TIMELY COMPLETION

Increase the percent of students who complete their degree or award within 150% of expected time by 10% in 10 years

HIGH-YIELD AWARDS

Increase the percent of students who earn degrees and awards that align to high-wage, high-demand occupations by 20% in 10 years

Strategic plan

The Utah Board of Higher Education adopted a comprehensive strategic plan in May 2021 to guide the newly-merged System for the next five years. To develop the strategic plan, the Board and Commissioner’s office engaged in a rigorous, collaborative, and creative process that built on past initiatives from previous boards and incorporated feedback from institutions, state leaders, students, and other stakeholders.

The strategic plan focuses on six key priorities: System Unification, Access, Affordability, Completion, Workforce Alignment, and Research. The plan is guided by two main themes:

1. Alignment of measures between statewide higher education attainment goals and performance-based funding
2. Centering of educational equity and inclusion so that higher education opportunities exist for all Utahns

Upon adoption of the strategic plan, the Commissioner’s office went to work developing an implementation plan and timeline for strategic initiatives. A progress report will be updated monthly on ushe.edu.

EQUITY IN THE UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

During the System merger in 2020, the nation was also grappling with a global pandemic that highlighted growing disparities. Acts of violence against communities of color ignited worldwide grassroots movements, protests, and a national dialogue regarding systemic racism and the institutions that have historically propagated them.

This national dialogue led USHE to sharpen ongoing efforts to close the opportunity gap and specifically focus on how System policies and procedures create structural barriers for students, faculty, and staff who belong to underrepresented and marginalized groups to access, succeed and thrive within USHE. The System office reframed the Utah's Growing Opportunity Gap¹ issue brief to better understand historical disparities we see with the System. And provide a fuller understanding of Utah's higher education gaps. As of 2018, Utah students of color, ages 18-35, were enrolling in college at rates as low as 40% below that of their white peers and graduating from college at rates as low as 35% below their white peers.

These gaps, and others like it, led to the adoption of a Board Resolution to Advance Equitable Systemic Change within USHE. The resolution established an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion workgroup to cultivate collaboration and transparency across all Board and System efforts aimed to close statewide attainment gaps. The workgroup also allowed another way for Board and System leaders to be meaningfully informed on the System's efforts by institutional Chief Diversity Officers as well as underrepresented students, staff, and faculty.

This resolution also called for the creation of an Equity Lens Framework that provides Board and System leaders with shared beliefs, common definitions, and critical questions to guide the evaluation of any existing or new strategy, policy, or initiative. The beliefs and definitions in the Equity Lens Framework ensure the System starts from a common understanding and sets the groundwork for clear accountability, allowing all efforts to be focused on closing opportunity gaps for marginalized populations. Underlying the framework is how data is collected and synthesized to impact policy and systemic change.

The USHE Equity Lens Framework was modeled after the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission's Equity Lens² and further developed by USHE Chief Diversity Officers and the Office of the Commissioner. Since its adoption in December 2020, the framework has received local and national attention within the National Association of System Heads (NASH) as well as the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). The framework is impacting institutional equity efforts and was identified by the Utah Governor's Office as a guiding document for the creation of a statewide equity framework.

Equity and the Equity Lens Framework are central components of the Board's five-year strategic plan. The Board and System leaders will routinely utilize the Equity Lens Framework and remain committed to continually evaluating the impact of any decision on closing attainment gaps and creating more opportunities for all Utahns to thrive.

The System's EDI efforts are a central catalyst in the work that we're embarking on at SUU. The USHE Equity Lens Framework has provided an accessible foundation for advances in teaching and learning, strategic planning, equity in assessment, and critical thinking around equity, diversity and inclusion on our campus.

Daneka Souberbielle
Southern Utah University, Associate Provost for Equity & Inclusion/Chief Diversity Officer

Timeline of events early in the pandemic:

March 3: Institutions mobilized interdisciplinary incident management teams.

March 4: Institutions announced the first wave of travel restrictions and event cancellations.

March 5: USHE COVID-19 task force established self-isolation and quarantine protocols. Within days, travel restrictions and event cancellations were put in motion.

March 6: 1st confirmed case of COVID-19 in Utah.

March 9: Directives were issued encouraging telecommuting where possible.

March 12: Commissioner and Board announced degree-granting institutions would move to online instruction for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester.

March 13: The state mandated limits on mass gatherings and health care facilities, and businesses were encouraged to telework. A two-week K-12 and technical college dismissal was also put into place.

March 26-27: First of several Board meetings took place to discuss the pandemic response and steps moving forward.

March 28: Commencements postponed or cancelled.

March 29: Degree-granting institutions resumed instruction remotely with some limited in-person options.

May 3: Technical colleges resumed instruction with some limitations.

COVID-19 EFFECTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN UTAH

Transitioning Online

USHE initiated its emergency management and communications protocols the first week of March 2020 during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic to coordinate a consistent response across USHE institutions. The institutions also mobilized their individual incident management protocols, as did the State of Utah's central command.

In the time following these initial responses, the USHE COVID task force met weekly to discuss issues resulting from the abrupt transition to online course delivery, including financial aid, scholarship eligibility, accreditation, housing contracts, federal stimulus, and employment policies.

Institution staff and faculty also began planning what a return to campus in fall 2020 would look like and ultimately developed detailed plans for a fall return. As COVID-19 circumstances evolved, it was clear three primary issues would be critical: robust testing, coordinated contact tracing, and clear communication to students regarding online and in-class delivery. Each institutional plan included the framework developed by the Commissioner's office, which established specific gating conditions (criteria institutions had to meet before resuming onsite operations) to ensure systemwide standards aligned to public health guidance.

As the 2020-21 academic year began, COVID case counts continued to climb. At mid-year, as testing supply started to catch up with demand, USHE and the Utah Department of Health established a robust testing plan intended to provide much greater capability to identify hot spots among the higher education community. Those testing protocols were initiated in late November in anticipation of students leaving campus for the holiday break. In the spring of 2021, instruction commenced with mandated testing for all in-person classes and on-campus housing. Institutions devoted significant resources to contact tracing and testing. With the support of the Utah Department of Health, USHE institutions administered over 150,000 COVID-19 tests during the spring semester (not including University of Utah Health Sciences). State public health leaders credited the efforts of USHE institutions as a major contributing factor in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Instructional response from institutions due to COVID

Beyond testing and contact tracing protocols, USHE institutions continued and improved upon instructional measures first implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. Institutions offered many courses through alternate delivery modes, like virtual classrooms and labs, and carefully prioritized the types of courses offered in person. All institutions

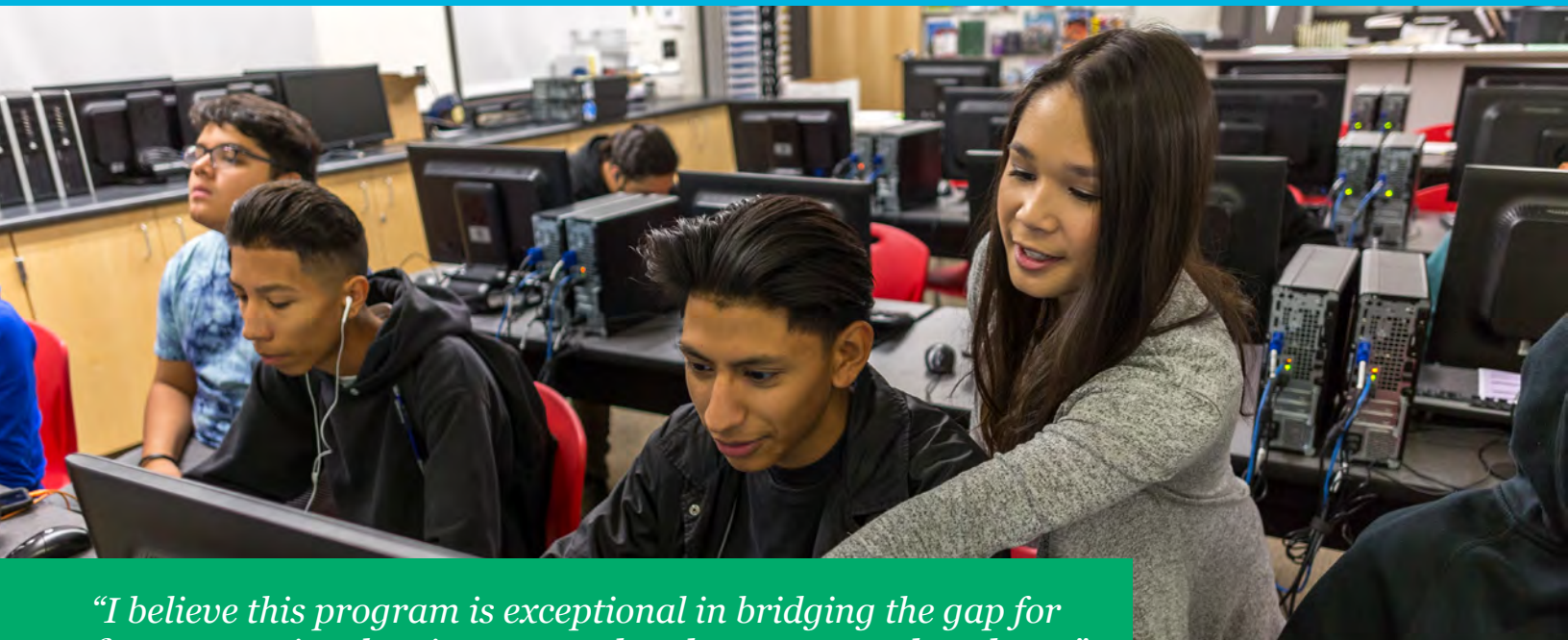


implemented safe social distancing for in-person classes and in places on campus that needed to remain open to students and staff. Some institutions were able to distribute laptops and e-readers, expand access to WiFi, and offer other services to assist students without access to technology or internet connections in their homes. Because several standardized exams like the ACT and SAT had been canceled or postponed in 2020, most USHE institutions waived these test requirements for admission and some scholarships.

The System came together in remarkable ways to deliver quality higher education and experiences for Utah students throughout the past year. Though many innovations and creative approaches to higher education came out of this pandemic, many in our campus communities struggled during this challenging time in their academics, personal lives, and beyond.

We've learned from these experiences, as leadership teams, and the System as a whole. We will continue to implement improvements in every college to support faculty, staff, and students in the year to come for a better higher education experience while keeping students safe and healthy.

ACCESS INITIATIVES



“I believe this program is exceptional in bridging the gap for first generation, low income, and underrepresented students.”

—Ashlie McDonald, Dixie High School Counselor

UTAH COLLEGE ADVISING CORPS ADVISERS

Utah needs an educated population to meet workforce needs and to ensure Utah’s continued economic growth. That means Utah needs more high school graduates to earn a college credential. But it’s clear students and their parents need more support.

- 90% of Utah parents expect their children to attend college, but only 2/3 of high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education within five years of graduating.
- 86% of students and parents believe college is more important today than it was 10 years ago, but only 50% believe college is accessible for everyone in Utah.
- Only half of Utah parents feel confident in finding information on how to pay for college.

The Utah College Advising Corps provides support for high school students as they embark on their path to postsecondary education, leading to certificates, bachelor’s degrees, and beyond. These college access advisers, who are embedded in high schools, help students explore possible future careers, guide them through certificate and degree program options and college admissions and financial aid applications, and connect them to their chosen postsecondary institution. The UCAC program has been proven to increase college enrollment and graduation rates.

The UCAC program is currently expanding to increase support for rural schools while continuing to grow in Utah’s urban areas. Through the 2021 expansion of the UCAC program, a total of 93 schools will be served directly by college access advisers.

UCAC regional coordinators supervise the work of 10-15 college access advisers. Coordinators serve as the link between advisers and higher education institutions in their region. They support the transfer of information and distribution of materials, as well as facilitate cross-training between regions to support statewide awareness of all institutions. The 2021 program expansion made it possible to create the role of a training coordinator,

“I’m pretty grateful that Ms. Taylor is here to help me, because I really don’t know how the college thing works, especially since I am going to a tech school. I didn’t know what the FAFSA even was, but she helped me fill it out to get money for school, and even helped me find a scholarship!”

–Felicity, Roy High School Student

an individual who will ensure consistency of training across all regions and connection to other statewide access programs, including Keys to Success, Utah College Application Week, USHE’s counselor conference, and more.

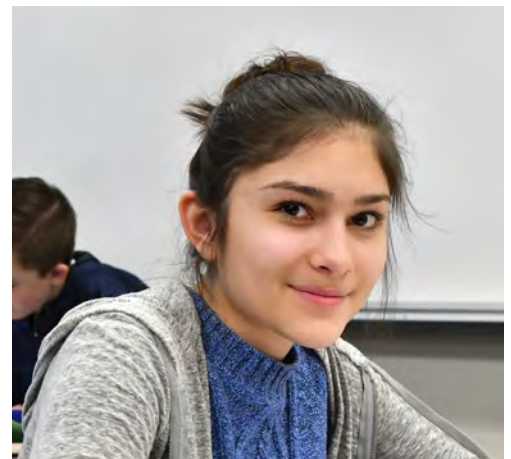
KEYS TO SUCCESS: STATEWIDE COLLEGE READINESS

Keys to Success (ktsutah.org) is a student-driven portal to all things related to obtaining a postsecondary education and career. A student can easily create a Keys to Success account and pick their top five career interests. Keys to Success takes their career choices and provides them with academic and CTE pathways, scholarships, internships, and other pertinent information related to higher education. By exploring all the opportunities Keys to Success provides, students can redeem points for Keys to Success prizes.

Keys to Success has been in select Utah high schools since 2004. The program has evolved as students’ needs have changed. The State of Utah values the resources and tools provided by Keys to Success and decided to provide additional support to the program to make it available statewide. In the 2021 legislative session, the responsibility for coordinating Keys to Success with all other access-focused initiatives for the state was moved to the Utah System of Higher Education. This new collaborative relationship will allow for a more coordinated plan to support students and adults in identifying and following their college and career dreams.

The close partnership between USHE and Keys to Success means a tighter integration with all USHE access programs, including Utah College Advising Corps, Utah College Application Week, the USHE counselor conference, FAFSA education, and more.

The expansion of Keys to Success has allowed for the addition of an adult portal that provides career and program exploration, scholarship and funding access, and connection to available jobs via the Department of Workforce Services job board. The addition of the adult portal makes Keys to Success the one-stop location for all higher education information and related workforce applications for students ranging from age 13 to adult learners. As of June 2021, Keys to Success had over 70,000 users and over 750 counselors with accounts. Keys to Success provides over \$160 million dollars in scholarships and tuition waivers for its users.



COMPLETION INITIATIVES

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

The Board's Prior Learning Assessment initiatives are aimed at making degree progression as accessible and efficient as possible. PLA awards college credit for skills and knowledge that students acquired outside of college if those skills and knowledge align with degree requirements and course outcomes.

In response to H.B. 45, *Higher Education Credit Amendments*³, in 2019, the then Board of Regents created Policy R472 and tasked faculty major committees at the degree-granting institutions with determining minimum scores and maximum credits awarded for Advanced Placement (AP) exams, the Credit for College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST), and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams. Faculty committees forwarded the first set of exam recommendations for Board of Higher Education approval on October 30, 2020. The Board approved the second set of recommendations for additional subjects on May 21, 2021. A third phase is underway to expand options for awarding credit for prior learning through additional nationally recognized examination and portfolio assessment providers, such as StraighterLine, Excelsior College, and Thomas Edison State College.

The Board also updated Policy R472, Credit for Prior Learning, in January of 2021 to provide stronger guidelines for degree-granting institutions on communicating with faculty, advisors, and current and prospective students regarding standards and costs related to credit for prior learning; required training of faculty and advisors on prior learning assessment standards and processes; and portfolio-specific prior learning assessments.

UTAH TRANSFER INITIATIVES

The Board's transfer initiatives are intended to help students complete a program as efficiently as possible. The Board is focusing on three primary transfer initiatives:

- **Policies on curricular alignment and coordination** safeguard efficient transfer. The Office of the Commissioner coordinates over 30 Major Committees of faculty from degree-granting institutions, 45 Program Committees from technical education institutions, and a General Education Task Force consisting of faculty and administrators from all eight degree-granting institutions. These groups collaborate on program alignment, common course numbering, and objectives. Policy for degree programs requires shared general education core and breadth requirements and common lower-division course numbering for general education courses and within majors.
- **The Utah Transfer Guide** is an online platform that allows students with credit from one college, including credit earned through Concurrent Enrollment, to see how their courses will transfer to another college within the System. This year, the Transfer Guide was redesigned and expanded to make it an even more useful tool for students. The guide now also shows students the credit they will receive at each institution for prior learning assessed through standardized exams such as AP, IB, DSST, and CLEP. In addition, the Transfer Check feature allows students to pull in information from their transcript to see how their coursework fits into specific bachelor's degrees across the System. Technical college programs and technical education secondary articulations will be considered in future updates. The guide can be found at utahtransferguide.org.
- **The Board Transfer Council and Direct Transfer Pathways:** In 2020, the Board created a new Transfer Council to define standards and policies and address program and degree structures in order to facilitate transfer across USHE institutions. The council includes two Board members, three presidents, representatives from the Utah Council of Faculty Senate Leadership and the General Education Task Force, and representatives of individual institutions. In March 2021, the Board approved the council's recommendation to allow the Commissioner's office to work with institutions to start developing new direct transfer pathways in select degree majors. These pathways will facilitate students' completion of a bachelor's degree with only two years or 62 additional credits after earning an associate degree in the same major. A pilot to design the first direct transfer pathways will begin in fall 2021.

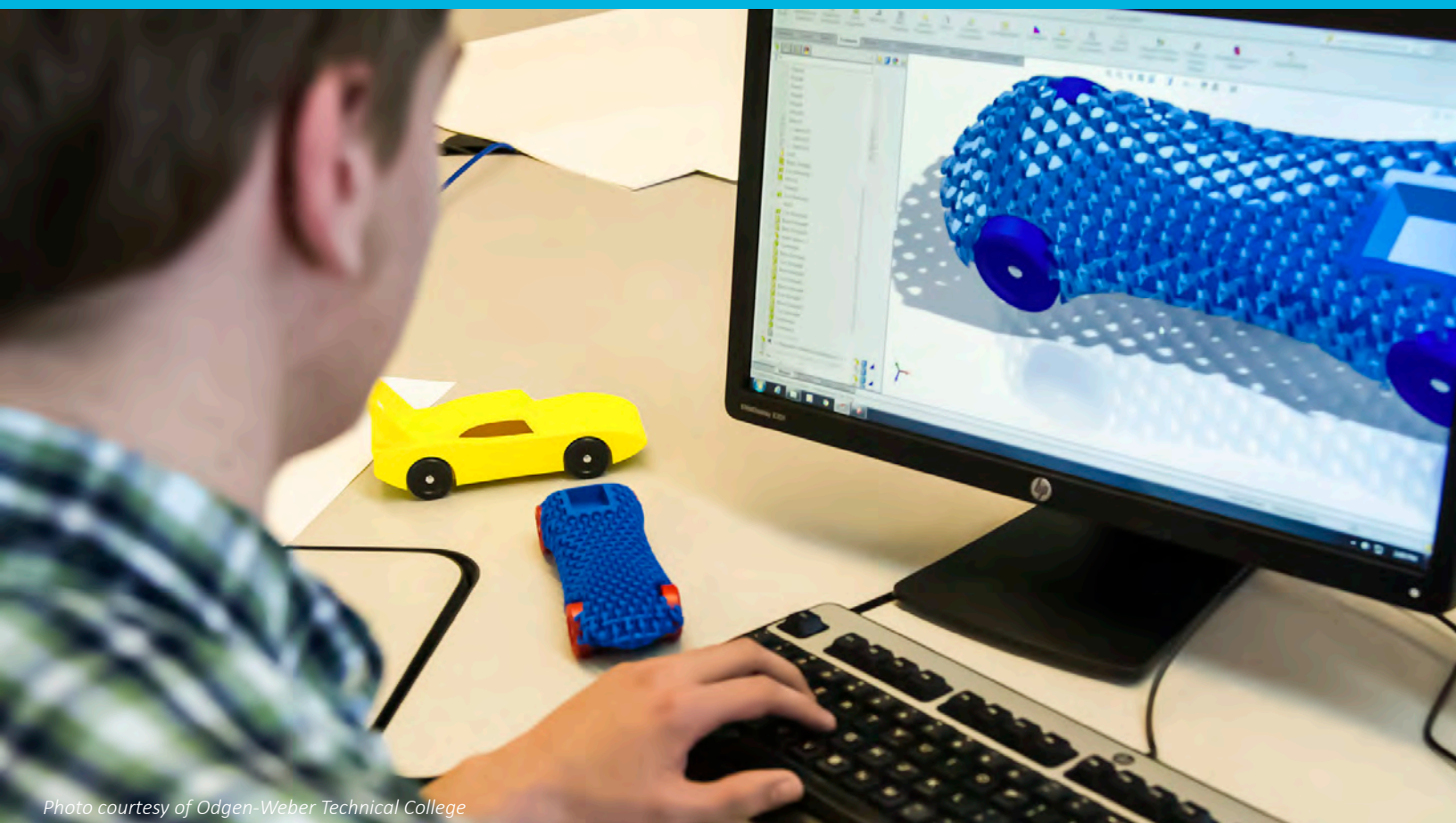


Photo courtesy of Ogden-Weber Technical College

UTAH PROGRAMS AND MAJORS GUIDE

The Utah Programs and Majors Guide allows students, parents, and counselors to search for academic programs offered within the Utah System of Higher Education. There are options to search by subject area, occupation, institution, type of award, and exploratory tracks. The guide was updated, redesigned, and rebranded in 2020-21 to include programming offered at all technical colleges in addition to the existing data on programs at the degree-granting institutions. The guide now includes information on over 3,700 programs, from certificates to doctoral degrees. The Utah Programs and Majors Guide can be found at utahmajors.org.

COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

USHE institutions provide opportunities for Utah high school students to take college courses, progress toward a certificate or degree, and apply their coursework toward high school graduation. College enrollment for technical education programs and Concurrent Enrollment for degree programs allow students to become better prepared for the world of work or to complete courses corresponding to the first year of coursework at a Utah public college or university. The college coursework must count toward a certificate or degree program and is recorded on the student's permanent college transcript. Courses are taught either at the high school or at a higher education institution.

High school students attend technical college courses tuition free. During 2019-2020, technical colleges provided 2,023,561 hours of instruction to 9,835 high school students, saving them more than \$4 million in tuition costs. Of these students, 1,321 completed technical college certificates prior to high school graduation. Another 232 graduates from the high school class of 2019 continued after high school to complete certificates.

Concurrent Enrollment within degree programs is jointly administered by the Utah System of Higher Education and the Utah State Board of Education and is taught by USHE faculty or high school teachers who have been approved for adjunct faculty status. A total of 43,916 students from all 41 school districts in 186 public, charter, and alternative high schools participated in the state CE program during 2019-20. Students earned 323,749 college credit hours. In 2019-20, 75% of earned CE credit was from highly transferable general education courses. The remaining non-general education credits were in select Career and Technical Education courses. The top enrolling course was ENGL 1010, an introductory college writing course required for all degrees and many certificate programs.



Photo courtesy of Mountainland Technical College

In 2015, the Legislature tasked the then Utah Board of Regents and the Utah State Board of Education with increasing the number of students earning Qualitative Literacy general education credit before high school graduation through concurrent enrollment (S.B. 196, Math Competency Initiative⁴). Since then, USHE institutions and public education partners have been engaged in a myriad of initiatives to promote MATH 1030, MATH/STAT 1040, and MATH 1050, successfully doubling CE QL earned credit in four years. And in 2019-20, between 12,000 and 13,000 high school students completed their QL Math through the program.

In 2019-20, the CE program was supported by an \$11.9 million legislative appropriation. The current cost of a Concurrent Enrollment course is \$5 per credit. Utah high school students and their families saved \$62.7 million in tuition costs.



Photo courtesy of Dixie State University

Equity in College Opportunities for High School Students

USHE, institutional leaders, USBE, and high schools are working to address educational equity in line with the Board's strategic goals. Data shows that participation in advanced high school coursework, such as CE and technical education, can have a profound impact on students. Low-income students who participate in CE, for example, attend college after high school graduation at almost double the rate of their peers. However, in 2019-20, there was a 10% gap in participation of students of color and a 20% gap in participation of low-income students in the CE program. Just as program administrators and advisors successfully increased QL Math completion through S.B. 196, Math Competency Initiative, they are now working together with public education partners and with college access groups, such as Gear Up and Latinos in Action, to identify eligible students from populations underrepresented in the CE and TE programs to encourage them to participate.



During 2019-2020, technical colleges provided 2,023,561 hours of instruction to 9,835 high school students, saving them more than \$4 million in tuition costs.

AFFORDABILITY INITIATIVES

SCHOLARSHIP UPDATES AND THE NEW OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP

USHE administers several state aid programs aimed at assisting students in accessing and affording higher education in Utah. In particular, during the 2021 legislative session, several programs were updated to better align with Board priorities. These changes include the creation of the Adult Learner Grant Program, replacing the Regents' Scholarship program with the Opportunity Scholarship, sunsetting the New Century Scholarship, and updating the Technical Education Scholarship.

Adult Learner Grant Program

The Adult Learner Grant Program is a new aid program for students age 26 and older who need financial assistance and who enroll in qualified online programs at technical and degree-granting institutions. Funding for this program will first be available during the 2021-22 school year. The Legislature allocated \$1,000,000 for the program for FY2022.

Changes to Regents' and New Century Scholarships

In the fall of 2020, 2,487 applicants were awarded the Regents' Scholarship, and 274 applicants were awarded the New Century Scholarship. Funds were sent to eligible institutions to be applied toward tuition and fees for these students. For the final Regents' and New Century cohort (2021 high school graduates), there were 4,642 Regents' applications and 533 New Century applications.

Following the 2019 recommendation from the former Utah Board of Regents to eliminate the Regents' and New Century Scholarship programs, USHE pursued legislation to replace the programs with a new, statewide achievement-based scholarship program—the Opportunity Scholarship. This new program focuses on incentivizing completion of advanced coursework demonstrated to most likely lead to college success, an approach based on USHE evidence and peer-reviewed literature. This program will accept its first cohort of applications with the high school graduating class of 2022.

Technical Education Scholarship

2021 legislation combined two similar technical education scholarship programs, housed separately prior to the merger of UTech and USHE, into one Technical Education Scholarship for eligible students that enroll in technical education programs leading to high-demand, high-wage jobs.

General State Aid

The legislation also expanded state scholarship availability, which supports key elements in the Board's strategic plan to better support underrepresented student populations.

“Thank you so much for the financial assistance to receive a college degree. I can’t overstate how much I appreciate the opportunity given to me to become a help to my society.” – New Century Scholarship recipient

These changes have been instrumental in aligning three state scholarships—the need-based Promise Scholarship, the merit-based Opportunity Scholarship, and the Technical Education Scholarship—to incentivize students

to pursue a postsecondary path that fits their goals. These scholarships are stackable, which means students may qualify for all three as they move through their higher education experience. In the fall of 2021, an online portal will allow students to apply for and express interest in these three programs all in one place. The new simplified application process will directly tie to institutional financial aid and recruiting services for a more seamless student transition from high school to college.



Photo courtesy of Snow College

SHARED SERVICES

Shared services is an organizational design used in both public and private organizations to allocate common internal business services between divisions or business units. Examples of common business functions consolidated into shared service centers include finance and accounting, human resources, information technology, procurement, and facility management. Benefits of shared services may include reduced costs, improved services, and standardized processes.

The state Legislature gave the Board the charge to “maximize efficiency through the Utah System of Higher Education by identifying and establishing shared administrative services” across all 16 public higher education institutions in the state. Over the past year, the Board’s Finance and Facilities Committee discussed opportunities for shared services in USHE.

Timeline

- The Finance and Facilities Committee discussed shared services in the September 2020, January 2021, and March 2021 meetings to understand and explore options in the System, including the recommendation to engage outside consulting expertise.
- The Commissioner’s office convened a workgroup, including institutional subject matter experts, to develop a statement of work for a shared services Request for Proposals.
- Using the work group’s statement of work, the Commissioner’s office created and issued an RFP for a shared services consultant.
- The Commissioner’s office worked with the Legislature on funding for a shared services consultant and received \$1,000,000 to use toward a study.
- The Commissioners office has awarded an RFP for a shared services consultant to do the following over the next several years:
 1. Assess the current state of USHE business processes in finance and accounting, human resources and payroll, and information technology;
 2. Describe a future state based on best practices for systems of higher education; and
 3. Analyze the gap between the current state and the future state and provide a roadmap and recommendations for the System to move to the future state.

WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT AND ECONOMIC IMPACT



Photo courtesy of Davis Technical College

LEARN & WORK PROGRAM

In the spring of 2020, the Utah Legislature, with federal CARES Act funding, created the Learn & Work In Utah initiative supporting short-term training programs designed to serve unemployed, underemployed, and vulnerable workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, over \$13 million was allocated to 14 USHE institutions supporting over 150 different programs from a wide variety of industry sectors, including:

- Manufacturing
- Transportation
- Health care
- Technology
- Web design and support
- Microsoft Office and digital tools for the remote work world
- Graduate certificates: cyber security and analytics
- Training educators to transition to digital learning
- Small business support

The programs enrolled over 5,600 students in face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses. These programs have offered Utahn's the opportunity to complete short-term training programs at no cost and re-enter the workforce.

Because of the overwhelming success of the first round of Learn & Work, the Utah Legislature allocated \$15 million in state funding to offer additional programs under the Learn & Work parameters. The second round of funding enabled another 117 programs at 16 institutions to be offered to students. We continue to hear student success stories, with more students graduating and finding work every day as a result of this program.

Mateo, Tooele Tech Student, Cybersecurity Program

Mateo is 20 years old and just completed his GED. He has always had an interest in computer technology, but because he is currently unemployed, he did not have the means to attend school. Because of the Learn & Work program, Mateo has been able to enroll in the Cybersecurity program at Tooele Tech.

*Mitzi, UVU Student, Business Data Analytics
Professional Certificate*

When Mitzi was laid off from her job last year due to COVID, she worried she wouldn't find another job. Through the Learn & Work program, she was able to add a UVU short-term certificate to her educational credentials. Without the Learn & Work program, she said she likely could not have afforded to pay for this training.

The certificate, in turn, gave her the skills she needed to land a new six-figure position, or as she called it, the job of her dreams!

"I learned a ton ... and I know [the Business Data Analytics class at UVU] gave me more confidence to apply for a position that I thought was way above me ... [That] class helped me get the job of my dreams!" –Mitzi

CUSTOM FIT

For more than 40 years, Custom Fit has provided opportunities for Utah businesses to contract with state technical colleges for jointly-funded training that aids in retention and expansion, attracts new businesses to Utah, and meets employer-specific needs.

In FY2020, the Custom Fit program served 19,007 trainees at 1,773 companies with 357,692 hours of training. Instructional hours remained consistent from 2019 to 2020, even after all training ceased in April and May 2020. This illustrates the high demand for Custom Fit training among industry partners, as training opportunities were largely complete and state training funds largely exhausted before the pandemic hit. Forty-nine percent of training sessions were offered to companies seeking increased productivity, 38% to companies seeking growth, and 13% to businesses seeking to gain or maintain a competitive edge.

In 2020, the average company contribution was 58%—8% higher than Board policy requires. The \$3.6 million total contribution stretched the \$5.1 million legislative investment to even more local employers.

Following the merger, USHE conducted a statewide review of Custom Fit policies, practices, and outcomes to ensure that delivery, oversight, and state expectations aligned. The review found that institutions are effectively meeting Custom Fit purposes and that program delivery decisions are best determined by the institutions based on local economic conditions. The review resulted in revisions to policy that clarified state intent, priority of companies served, and types of training, with attention on best practice tools such as outreach, funding limits, and scaled company contributions to maximize delivery and diversity for the best local economic benefit.



Photo courtesy of Ogden-Weber Technical College

STUDENT AFFAIRS



Photo courtesy of Utah State University

STUDENT SAFETY

S.B. 80, Campus Safety Amendments, adopted in the 2020 General Session, required the Utah Board of Higher Education to study and make recommendations for providing public safety services on USHE campuses. The Office of the Commissioner presented a baseline analysis of the public safety organization, policies, relationships, and processes at all sixteen USHE institutions in November 2020. Institutions individually participated in interview sessions from August–October 2020, including several student groups and the campus safety team at each of the 16 campuses.

The analysis recommended four general areas for the Board to address:

1. Improve collaboration across USHE institutions
2. Conduct a systemwide, comprehensive evaluation of student perceptions
3. Develop a unifying System vision and mission of campus security and safety
4. Incorporate equity, diversity, and inclusion within the systemwide vision

Implicit Bias Training

In January 2021, the Student Affairs Committee recommended required implicit bias training as an immediate next step to incorporate EDI into campus safety functions. In March 2021, the Board revised its campus safety policy, R262, requiring implicit bias training for all campus public safety personnel. The Board is expected to consider recommended training at its September 2021 Board meeting.

Campus Safety and Equity Commission

In partnership with the Utah Student Association, USHE established a Campus Safety and Equity Commission whose membership consists of two students appointed by each student body president. The commission, in part, will conduct ongoing systemwide evaluations of student perceptions related to campus safety.

MENTAL HEALTH

Statewide Partnership with The JED Foundation

In January 2020, USHE partnered with The JED Foundation. JED provides a comprehensive approach to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors for mental health and suicide among college students. JED works with over 300 universities and colleges nationwide. This unique statewide partnership, which also includes Brigham Young University and Westminster College, is made possible through the generous support of The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation.

Thanks to the efforts of Board members and legislators, funding was appropriated in the 2021 Legislative session to expand the JED Campus partnership from the eight USHE degree-granting public colleges and universities to the eight USHE technical colleges following the merger. USHE and JED are working to develop a tailored, comprehensive model specific to technical colleges to complement the four-year cohort model for USHE's degree-granting institutions. The first year of the four-year JED Campus program focused on onboarding campuses, building campus teams, administering the Healthy Minds Study to collect student data, completing the JED Campus baseline assessment, and engaging in a campus visit with JED Campus advisors and subject matter experts. In June 2021, USHE institutions published their short-term and longer-term 3-year strategic goals at the USHE/JED statewide convening, despite being delayed due to COVID-19. These strategic goals are the basis from which USHE institutions are implementing their goals over the next three years. The primary objective of JED's comprehensive approach is to ensure equitable resourcing of best practices and programs tailored for each institution while following a common framework with common outcomes that promote mental health and prevent suicide.

After each campus visit, JED creates a mental health and suicide prevention strategic plan that will be implemented over three years with ongoing support and engagement. As part of the funding for the first cohort, there will be opportunities for the eight degree-granting institutions to convene for professional development and peer learning opportunities annually and for ongoing communication via an online listserv and connection calls. More opportunities will be available to USHE technical colleges through their tailored, complementary model.

Huntsman Mental Health Institute

In 2019, the Huntsman family announced a \$150 million gift over 15 years to the University of Utah to establish the Huntsman Mental Health Institute, the largest single donation to the USHE flagship. With the establishment of the institute in January 2021 and the groundbreaking of the Mental Health Crisis Care Center in May 2021, the institute stands to transform mental health services for the State of Utah and, more specifically, 18-24 years olds who are the most impacted by mental health trauma. USHE established a partnership with the institute to visibly promote advocacy efforts to destigmatize mental illness among college students and leverage research systemwide that supports the institute's goal to provide innovative, immediate, and compassionate care to people experiencing a mental health crisis.



The Jed Foundation is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults.

Photo courtesy Weber State University

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

FINANCIAL HEALTH OF INSTITUTIONS

Each year the Finance and Facilities team in the Commissioner's office collects and compiles financial information from the sixteen USHE institutions to create multiple reports reflecting the financial health of the System and the individual institutions. Each of these reports is summarized below, with a link to the full report provided in the end notes.

- **Institutional Summaries**⁵ The Commissioner's office developed a standardized template to communicate institutional finances and financial performance to the Legislature. These documents include summaries of institutional revenues and expenses from the prior fiscal year.
- **Financial Ratio Report**⁶ Institutional controllers submit financial information from audited annual financial statements for three reported ratios: viability, debt burden, and a composite index. Together these ratios historically provide good measures of higher education fiscal health.
- **Report on Institutional Revenue Bond Indebtedness**⁷ The Board issues revenue bonds on behalf of System institutions. This annual report documents outstanding institutional bonds.
- **Auxiliary Enterprise Operations Report**⁸ The annual report assesses the financial condition of institutional auxiliary enterprises (self-supporting programs like bookstores, housing, and dining services). The report includes prior year fund balances and future projections.
- **Money Management Report**⁹ USHE institutions submit monthly and annual reports detailing the deposit and investment of funds. The Board subsequently submits an annual summary report of all investments by institution to both the Governor and the Legislature.
- **Contracts and Grants Report**¹⁰ USHE institutions submit an annual report summarizing the number and dollar amounts of contract and grant awards received during the previous fiscal year.
- **Space Utilization Report**¹¹ The annual utilization report describes institutional classroom and laboratory space use as well as institutional goals and accomplishments to meet Board standards.
- **Report on Leased Space**¹² USHE institutions annually report the square feet, purpose, and cost of space leased for institutional operations.

STUDENT FEES INTO TUITION

During the August 2020 meeting, the Board discussed and adopted duties and responsibilities to delegate to institutional boards of trustees. Among those duties and responsibilities is the review and recommendation of institutional requests to adjust tuition and general student fees. The Board revised Policy R516, General Student Fees, to include greater Board of Trustee involvement in the review, creation, elimination, and continuation of institutional general student fees. Institutional boards of trustees were asked to review all general student fees and institutional requests to adjust tuition for affordability, equity and need to recommend action to the Board of Higher Education. During the tuition and fee setting process in the spring of 2021, the Board of Higher Education additionally asked institutional boards of trustees to review each general student fee and recommend the continuation, elimination, adjustment, or transfer to tuition.

Accomplishments

- Organized a workgroup of presidents, student leaders, administrators, and Board members to review general student fees for degree-granting institutions, determine when such fees should be rolled into tuition, and amend Policy R516¹³ to include specific guidelines for degree-granting institutions and boards of trustees.
- Created and received feedback from institutional constituent groups and student leadership on a System policy (R516) that was adopted in October
- Formalized the delegation of duties and trained Trustees on those duties
- Held a successful Tuition and Fees hearings in March in which general student fees were reduced on average across the System by 11.5%, eliminated as fees, and moved to tuition.

Goals

- The Board will continue to review and monitor general student fees in the annual tuition and fee-setting meeting.
- The Board will refine and expand the model of affordability that will assess institutional tuition, fees, and costs of attendance for affordability and equity for Utah students.
- The System will study technical college general student fees during the summer of 2021 and modify policies accordingly.
- The System is in the process of adopting a policy for course fees and program fees and will work with institutions on compliance and implementation of that policy.

PERFORMANCE FUNDING

Over the last decade, the State Legislature appropriated funds to both degree-granting institutions and technical colleges for performance. The 2019 legislative session saw a significant increase in performance funding from an average of \$4.5 million annually to \$31.5 million. Performance funding is likely to become a significant portion of the annual USHE legislative appropriation in the foreseeable future. While the performance funding model has evolved over time, recent adjustments from the 2021 Legislative Session further refine the model to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability in meeting System and institutional goals.

The Commissioner's office worked with the Legislature to amend the current performance funding model to align with the Board's work on the statewide attainment goals in the areas of access, timely completion, and high-yield awards. The amended model replaces a historical performance improvement requirement with an annual and 5-year goal-setting process. The Board now has greater flexibility to work with institutions and their Boards of Trustees to set and achieve meaningful goals for which the Legislature will award performance funding. The legislation provides a two-year implementation phase in which the current model will be used to allocate performance funds while the Board works with institutions and their trustees to develop goals for the amended model.

Accomplishments

- Worked with internal and external stakeholders and the Legislature to amend the current performance funding statute and model.
- Developed a refined performance funding model that aligns attainment goals with performance funding.
- Worked with USHE institutions and their constituent groups to communicate proposed changes, receive input, and revise the model accordingly.
- Communicated changes to the performance funding model with all 16 institutional cabinets and held trainings for board of trustee chairs.

Goals

- Continue working with institutions on setting 5-year goals for the amended model.
- Institutions and the System will provide recommended 5-year goals to the Board for review in the September 2021 meeting.
- The Board will then take recommendations for institutional and System 5-year goals to the Legislature as an informational item in the October interim meeting.
- Use feedback to refine and adopt 5-year goals in the January 2022 Board meeting.
- Take adopted 5-year goals to the Legislature during the 2022 General Session for adoption.
- Begin the annual goal-setting process in May 2022.

IMPROVEMENTS IN DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In order to increase the ability of our Institutional Research staff to conduct informative analysis, three key data collection improvements were made over the last year: data alignment between the degree-granting and technical education institutions; implementation of automated, structured, space inventory data collection; and regimented



Photos courtesy of Uintah Basin Technical College, University of Utah, and Southern Utah University (left to right)

data error checks. Improvements in these areas allow USHE to make data-driven decisions that significantly impact the System, our students, and funding allocations.

Merging the two systems brought the opportunity to align some key measures across all sixteen institutions. Aligning the measures allows for easier comparisons and consistent analysis of student outcomes. Prior to the merger, measures in some key indicators were compiled differently by the two systems, at times causing misunderstandings and inaccurate comparisons. Because of the differences in mission and program structure between the technical colleges and the other institutions, complete alignment is not desirable.

To systematize the process of analyzing space inventory and space utilization across the sixteen institutions, IR staff designed a database to track classrooms and other campus space. In partnership with facilities leadership at USHE and the institutions, the research team was able to design a database to automate the storage and updating of space inventory. Additionally, they were able to design the database to work with pre-established enrollment data collection to create space utilization analysis. FY21 was focused on designing the database; FY22 will be the first year USHE will run space utilization analysis using the database.

The third improvement to data collection at the system office focused on improving and expanding data error check processes. Each institution collects data on students and campus operations that are then provided to USHE IR to conduct system-level research for the Board and other stakeholders. For quality assurance, error check processes are in place that review datasets for systematic errors. Over time it became apparent that the processes had blind spots or weren't always followed carefully, resulting in erroneous or inconsistent data. To address this, significant portions of the research team's resources were redirected to quality assurance. Ineffective error checks were rewritten, new error checks were added, and data quality standards were upheld. Moving forward, we expect that this change will result in easier data analysis and efficient and robust research.

ECONOMIC AND EDUCATION OUTLOOK

Enrollments at the degree-granting institutions remained essentially flat from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020. Enrollment decreases at community colleges (coinciding with national trends) were offset by small increases at some regional universities, while enrollments at technical colleges for students seeking certificates and continuing occupational education were down 3.13% in Fall 2020. Due to the hands-on nature of some technical programs, the need to socially distance significantly impacted the colleges' ability to continue offering instruction.

The share of course credits delivered solely face-to-face by degree-granting institutions decreased from 77% in Fall 2019 to 31% in Fall 2020, reflecting the need for institutions to use technology-enhanced course delivery methods during the pandemic.

The Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority is the financial aid arm of the Utah Board of Higher Education and is charged with providing financial pathways to higher education. Since 1977, UHEAA has improved the lives of Utah students as a student loan provider and servicer, paying-for-college community outreach partner, state financial aid program administrator, and resource to higher education institutions for loan default prevention and other services. UHEAA focuses on Utah students and their families as they plan, prepare, and pay for college.

The 2020-21 fiscal year brought UHEAA many opportunities to support Utah students through state aid, repayment servicing, and outreach. Some highlights include:

- Provided \$6 million in borrower benefits to 35,000 borrowers, including 27,000 Utah borrowers, through its \$1.15 billion legacy student loan portfolio.
- Helped five of the eight USHE credit-granting institutions lower their Cohort Default Rates by an average of 31% through its RepayCentsibly default prevention program.
- Rehabilitated \$3.7 million in defaulted loans back into good standing despite payment and collection activity moratoriums due to COVID. This effort clears the derogatory credit marks for these individuals and allows them to leverage federal financial aid again if they decide to return to higher education.
- Hosted 103 school-based and 10 statewide virtual FAFSA Completion Nights.
 - 69% of those who attended completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid at the event, with 32% of those being first-generation students.
- Developed FAFSA Walkthrough Videos in both English and Spanish, garnering 60,380 views.
- Continues to maintain a 0% default rate in its state-based supplemental loan program, Complete Student Loans.
- Administered six state financial aid programs that provided \$6.8 million to help over 5,000 Utah students fund their higher education.
 - 94% of the funding was need-based financial aid, while the rest served military veterans and public safety officers in the community.

Looking into the 2021-22 year, UHEAA remains committed to guiding families through the financing of their educational pursuits. UHEAA will continue to focus on its strategic priorities, including building community partnerships, enhancing customer-facing technology, administering scholarships and grants, and increasing its reach to underserved and underrepresented populations. In alignment with the Utah Board of Higher Education, UHEAA will continue to contribute to the statewide higher education strategic priorities of access, completion, affordability, workforce alignment, and research, in part with its commitment of \$2 million annually for the next three years to support the expansion of the Utah College Advising Corps.

my529 is Utah's official 529 educational savings plan. Currently the nation's third-largest direct-sold plan, my529 has been helping families in Utah and across the United States invest in higher education for 25 years. Accounts are free to open and require no minimum deposit. my529 funds may be used for qualified higher education expenses, including K-12 tuition expenses, qualified education loan repayments, and registered apprenticeships. Beneficiaries can attend eligible educational institutions—colleges, universities, trade and technical schools, and graduate schools—anywhere in the U.S. or abroad that accept federal student aid. With \$19.9 billion in assets under management, my529 currently services more than 464,000 accounts (as of June 12, 2021).

Accomplishments

- Account growth among Utah residents is up 22.3% compared to the previous year.
- More than 11,000 new accounts were added in FY2021.
- my529's purpose is to help account owners grow their investment. In FY2021, 36% of every dollar withdrawn by Utah account owners came from earnings on their investment.
- More than \$62 million was used by Utah account owners to pay for qualified higher education expenses in FY2021.

Goals

Over the coming year, my529 will work to:

- Increase the diversity among Utah account owners. my529 wants everyone, regardless of circumstances or background, to invest for their future and prepare for additional training and education.
- Develop financial literacy material to educate prospective account owners. my529 can help individuals with making wise financial decisions.
- Create materials that demonstrate the value of education. my529 will help individuals understand the value of additional training or education beyond high school and how to prepare financially for that opportunity.



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END NOTES

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