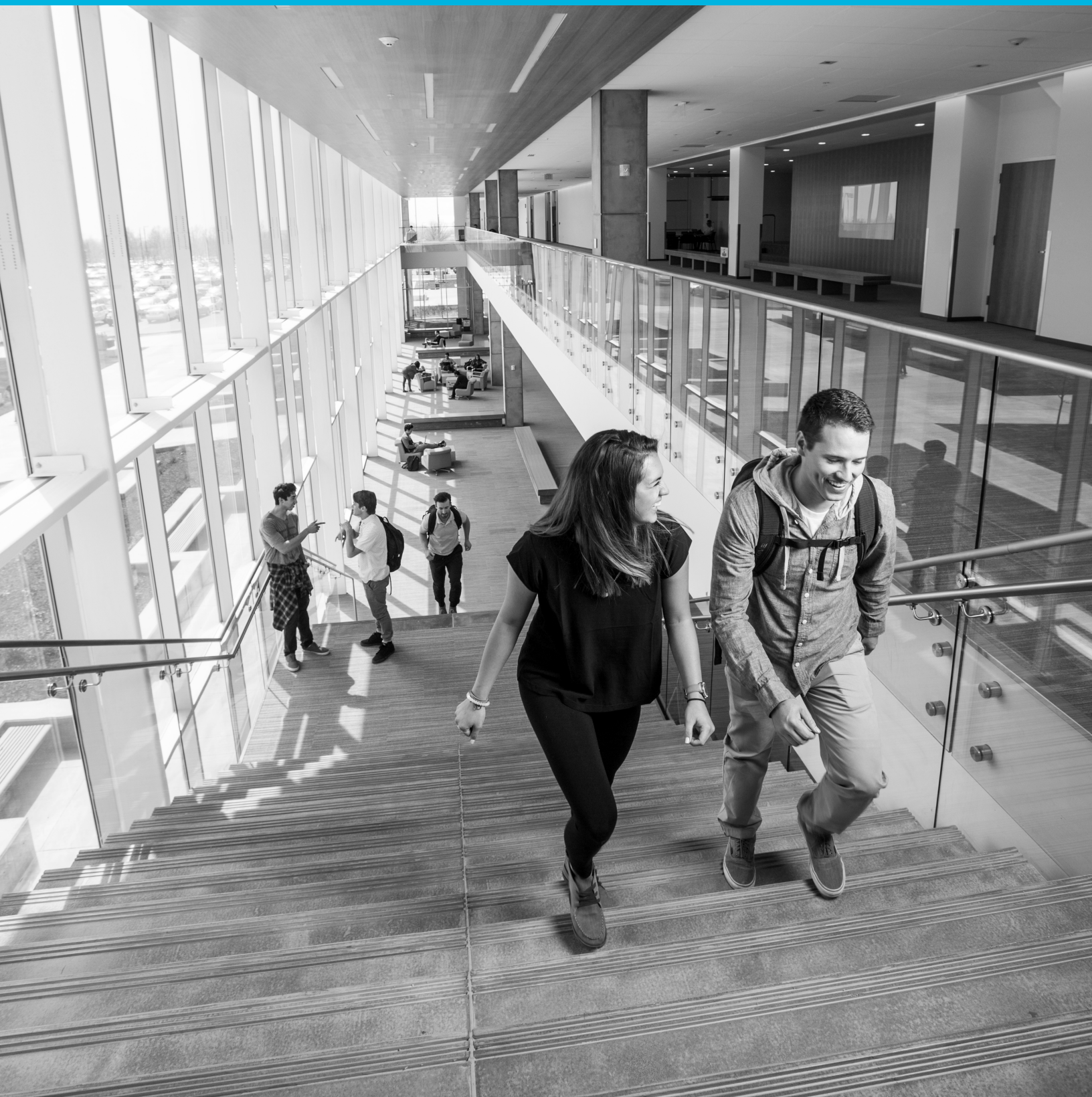




UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION 2019 Annual Report



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Creating a Brighter Future

Over the last year, the Utah System of Higher Education and the USHE Board of Regents made great strides toward improving higher education for all students in the State of Utah. As a college education becomes more important than ever for students entering the workforce, the Board has worked to align programs with local workforce needs, make a college education accessible and affordable, ensure transfer is as seamless as possible, and increase efficiencies across the System. Additionally, the System welcomed a new president for Snow College in 2019, Bradley J. Cook.

Ninety-five percent of new jobs created since the Great Recession require a college education,¹ yet just over half of Utah's population has a college degree or high-quality certificate.² As Utah's population grows and diversifies, it is up to the Board and System to meet the needs of the workforce and Utah communities.

A significant factor affecting the higher education landscape this last year was the global pandemic, COVID-19. The pandemic has impacted every area of the state—and higher education is no exception. Across the System, the institutions united on the decision to move courses³ and instruction to alternate delivery modes, like virtual classrooms and labs, provided alternate grading options, extended withdrawal deadlines, and implemented safe social distancing in places on campus that needed to remain open to students, faculty, and staff. For the greatest flexibility, the Board voted to give institutions the option to delay tuition and student fee increases as necessary for the 2020-21 academic year. Though COVID-19 will continue to affect higher education, the System is working with public health experts to fully welcome students back to campus in person, as safely as possible, in the fall of 2020.

The USHE Board of Regents is focused on increasing Utahns' educational attainment to enhance their overall quality of life and to meet Utah's current and future workforce needs.

Laying the Groundwork: Board Committees

The USHE Board of Regents reorganized committees in 2019 to better encompass its priorities. The revised committees for 2019-20 were:

- Academic and Student Affairs
- Finance and Facilities
- Workforce, Access, and Advocacy

The Board Committees worked to identify strategic priorities by collecting insights and feedback from a variety of stakeholders: legislators, institutional administrators, state agency heads, business leaders, and elected officials. As a result of this significant effort, the Board has refined its priorities into several categories:

Workforce

Ensuring graduates from all program types are ready to enter the workforce is a key role of the USHE Board of Regents and institutions. In 2019, the Board established the Workforce, Access, and Advocacy committee to increase the focus on workforce-related issues as well as to focus on ensuring all Utahns have an opportunity to access programs that prepare them for the workforce and beyond.

Population estimates predict Utah will see an increasing number of births as well as an increasing percentage of net migration of individuals relocating to the state. According to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, Utah's economy is robust, and it is attracting new workers to the state⁴ due to the education, health care, and other quality-of-life opportunities unique to Utah.

To further meet this growing need, in early 2020, the Commissioner hired a new Associate Commissioner for Workforce Development & Industry Engagement to focus on key issues related to supporting USHE institutions as they work to align coursework and programs with the needs of Utah employers. This new role is uniquely positioned to integrate programs and develop seamless pathways designed to serve students and regional employers. This coordination will reduce unnecessary credits taken by students as they navigate workforce-focused programs at both technical institutions and degree-granting institutions.

Affordability

Affordability is a strategic priority for the USHE Board of Regents. In November 2018, the Board commissioned a study by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute to research tuition and college affordability. In October 2019 and January 2020, the Gardner Institute presented its results⁵ to the Finance and Facilities Committee and the Committee of the Whole. In conjunction with the study, the Board also established a task force comprised of Regents, institutions, and others to further explore and define a measure of affordability ahead of institutional tuition proposals.

The task force met several times and developed a model for USHE affordability based on work done by the Lumina Foundation and the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. The task force also proposed the following definition of affordability that the Board adopted⁶ in the March 2020 meeting:

“Affordability is the ability of a traditional full-time Utah student from a family of four to cover the cost of attendance at a USHE institution while living at home with financial aid, reasonable family savings, and the student contributing ten hours of weekly work earnings, without incurring student debt.”

Recognizing the relationship between tuition increases and state appropriations, the Board created another task force in July 2019 to study and recommend a model to fund USHE enrollment growth with state appropriations.⁷ The task force created a model that Board adopted in November 2019 and used to request \$3.9 million from the Utah State Legislature for growth funding. The legislature subsequently funded the request, which allows institutions to offer quality, affordable instruction to a growing Utah population without significantly raising tuition.

Additionally, in September 2019, the Board established a State Scholarship Task Force which met throughout the fall of 2019 to explore redesigning the New Century, Regents', and Utah Promise scholarships to make them more accessible to students. In November 2019, the Board approved the recommendations presented in the task force's issue brief, *State Scholarship Redesign Recommendations*.⁸ Fully implementing the recommendations will require legislation.

Access

Too many Utah high school graduates are not going on to college⁹—an issue further compounded by equity barriers that widen Utah's opportunity gap.¹⁰ Ensuring all Utahns have the opportunity to access college is a top priority for the USHE Board of Regents.

During 2019-20, the Board focused on increasing collaboration with key stakeholders, supporting students as they apply to college and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), as well as expanding a proven college access program to 34 high schools across the state.

Collaboration: K-20 Summit and the College Access Network of Utah

The USHE Board of Regents hosted its first-ever K-20 Summit, facilitating conversations between the Utah State Board of Education, the Utah System of Technical Colleges Board of Trustees, System and state agency leadership, nonprofits, and community partners about improving access to postsecondary education for all Utahns.

The System is also restructuring the College Access Network of Utah, a long-standing organization of college access professionals that encourages strategic focus and collaboration on key access areas. The new structure of CANU ties the organization more closely with the Board and its priorities. It also allows for greater alignment with community partners and programs across the state.

Advising and Outreach: Utah College Access Advisors, Utah College Application Week, and FAFSA Completion Open Houses

For the 2019-20 academic year, the USHE Board of Regents expanded a statewide program that put a permanent, full-time college access advisor in 34 high schools across Utah. Advisors were placed strategically in high-need high schools in four regions: Weber/Davis counties, Salt Lake County, Utah County, and Washington County.

College access advisors help create a college-going culture within high schools as well as help high school students:

- Register for and complete college entrance exams
- Apply for college and financial aid
- Prepare students for the transition to higher education

The advisors set goals in key college access areas for the senior class in partnership with the high school and the district. Program-wide goals for 2019-20 are:

1. Percentage of seniors taking the ACT: 100%
2. Percentage of seniors that complete the FAFSA: 45%
3. Percentage of seniors that complete one or more college applications: 77%
4. Percentage of seniors that complete three or more college applications: 26%
5. Percentage of seniors that have at least one 1:1 meeting: 70%
6. Average percentage of seniors' parents or guardians that meet with an advisor at least once: 30%
7. Average percentage of seniors that the advisor assisted with the FAFSA: 55%

The outcomes from these goals will be reported in the summer of 2020. This is an expansion of a decade-long, proven program overseen by the University of Utah, the Utah College Advising Corps.

Utah College Application Week provides every high school senior in 165 partnering schools the opportunity to complete a college application during the school day. Nearly 25,000 high school seniors participated in 2019, 43% of whom identified as first-generation college students.

In 2019-20, the Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority facilitated over 130 FAFSA Completion Open Houses across the state to help high school students complete their federal financial aid application.

Transfer

In 2019, the USHE Board of Regents made it a priority to assist students in completing degrees and certificates, quickly and affordably, by ensuring that the academic credits they earn will transfer as seamlessly as possible between USHE institutions. The Board has implemented specific strategies to ensure quality, efficiency, and transferability of degree pathways, including:

The Regents Transfer Council

The Board formed the Regents Transfer Council in November 2019. Comprised of Regents, presidents, institutional transfer experts, and faculty representatives, with support from USHE staff, the Transfer Council is working to develop transfer policies, principles, and systemwide expectations for major program alignment and lower-division pathways.

Utah Transfer Guide

The online Utah Transfer Guide¹¹ tool lets students explore their transfer options by searching programs, courses, or course and exam equivalencies among participating institutions. The newly launched Transfer Check feature allows students to see how their transfer coursework fits into degree requirements for select programs from one college or university to the next. The Transfer Check feature contains the degree requirements for 63.5% of all bachelor's degrees awarded by USHE institutions, with more programs being added during the summer of 2020.

Credit for Prior Learning

USHE developed a systemwide plan to make it easier for students to earn credit for learning they acquired prior to enrolling at a college or university. In November 2019, the USHE Board of Regents approved a new policy, R472, *Prior Learning Assessment*,¹² and the USHE Prior Learning Committee completed an inventory of assessment options currently available at all USHE institutions. Early in 2020, 31 Major Committees, comprised of faculty from all USHE institutions, met to agree on recommendations to the Board for the assignment of credit for prior learning from standardized exams, such as Advanced Placement.

Transferability of Concurrent Enrollment

Concurrent Enrollment allows students to simultaneously earn credit for high school and college. In alignment with the Board priorities on transfer and degree completion, USHE focused Concurrent Enrollment course offerings around highly transferable general education credits and offers students guidelines, called Exploratory Pathways, for ensuring the credits they earn through Concurrent Enrollment will apply to degree pathways at USHE institutions. Concurrent Enrollment credits will transfer to any USHE institution.

Student Safety: Ensuring Student Mental Health and Campus Safety

Student safety continues to be a top higher education priority at all USHE institutions. Starting in 2016, the USHE Board of Regents adopted its first student safety policy outlining minimum standards to ensure fairness for everybody involved in campus discipline. It has since developed policies and recommendations regarding campus sexual violence and mental health. The Board continues to seek and support ways to best address these sensitive and critically important safety issues.

In November 2019, the Board compiled five-year campus safety plans from every USHE institution. In December 2019, with the help of The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation, USHE institutions entered into a systemwide partnership with the JED Foundation, a nationally recognized nonprofit focused on student mental health and wellness. The statewide partnership achieves significant cost savings for USHE institutions and ensures consistent and coordinated efforts across the System. In January 2020, the Board sponsored its first forum on student safety, featuring state and national experts in areas including law enforcement, equity, K-12 partnerships, healthy relationships, mental health, and effective campus safety app implementation. A second statewide safety forum is scheduled for January 2021.

The Board coordinated and endorsed legislation to study and make recommendations for providing public safety services on college and university campuses. The study will be completed in mid-2021.

Data

USHE's Institutional Research team provides data, research, and reporting necessary to execute the priorities of the USHE Board of Regents. Throughout the last year, the IR team has provided in-depth analysis for key projects such as transfer, state aid, and college access, including Utah's Growing Opportunity Gap.¹³ The IR team also provided key data for the Higher Education Strategic Planning Commission to facilitate the analysis of Utah's postsecondary landscape.

Additionally, the IR team improved capacity for research and analysis by reviewing all data collection and data reporting to identify gaps and needed improvements. In the coming year,

the team will make key changes to increase efficiencies in existing reports, elevate online data delivery, and increase data detail to understand the true effectiveness of USHE's key programs and policies. The team will also focus on developing new measures to harness the full picture of Career and Technical Education.

Looking Ahead: Combining Utah's Two Postsecondary Education Systems

Over the last year, the USHE Board of Regents made major progress on initiatives in the areas of access, student safety, workforce, transfer, affordability, and more in higher education.

In 2018, the Utah Legislature formed the Higher Education Strategic Planning Commission¹⁴ to develop a long-term plan for Utah's postsecondary education systems. Efforts between higher education and state leaders to streamline educational processes and keep college affordable and accessible for all students culminated during the 2020 Legislative Session with the passage of S.B. 111, *Higher Education Amendments*,¹⁵ which combines both systems of postsecondary education in the state.

Beginning July 1, 2020, Utah's two systems of postsecondary education will combine to create the Utah System of Higher Education, governed by a single board, the Utah Board of Higher Education. The Utah System of Higher Education will then be comprised of eight technical colleges, two community colleges, four regional universities, and two research universities.

Moving forward, a major focus of the Board will be setting a statewide postsecondary attainment goal in an effort to align state goals and strategies to increase access, completion, and workforce connection for all Utahns. Additionally, current key measures of institutional success will be revisited once the new System is in place in July. One of the first tasks of the new Board will be to develop clear and consistent institutional performance measures in line with Board priority areas and state attainment goals.

Although Utah previously set an attainment goal in 2012, the higher education landscape and the state have evolved significantly since then:

- COVID-19 and its continuing fallout will pose challenges for the institutions, but dedication to academic quality, affordability, and student safety will remain top priorities.
- Utah's higher education institutions are pursuing innovations in services to students including transfer articulations, awarding credit for prior learning, and innovative pedagogy. Institutions are also taking significant first steps to better applying opportunities for big data and artificial intelligence to better serve students.
- Workforce uncertainty and stymied wage growth have created an environment wherein more students not only work while in college but also leave and come back to college throughout their careers.
- Major pressures exist concerning the overall cost of higher education.

Such factors make it critically important for the new Utah Board of Higher Education to build its priorities around a cohesive vision for the future of higher education in Utah. As the next era of higher education in Utah begins, USHE is ready to continue to find ways to better serve all students and work to make Utah's future bright.

Sources

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Board of Regents

The USHE Board of Regents is the governing body for the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE). 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 policy, reviewing programs and degrees, approving institutional missions, and submitting a unified higher education budget request to the Governor and State Legislature. The USHE Board of Regents is comprised of 17 Utah citizens, all appointed by the Governor.

Commissioner of Higher Education

The Commissioner of Higher Education is the chief executive officer of USHE and is appointed by the USHE Board of Regents. The Commissioner provides statewide leadership, makes policy recommendations to the Board of Regents, and executes Board of Regents policies and programs.

Utah System of Higher Education

The Utah System of Higher Education is comprised of the eight public colleges and universities in the state:

Research universities:

University of Utah (flagship, medical school, dental school, pharmacy school, law school, etc.)
Utah State University (land grant; 33 regional campuses statewide)

Regional universities:

Weber State University
Southern Utah University
Dixie State University
Utah Valley University

Community colleges:

Salt Lake Community College
Snow College

