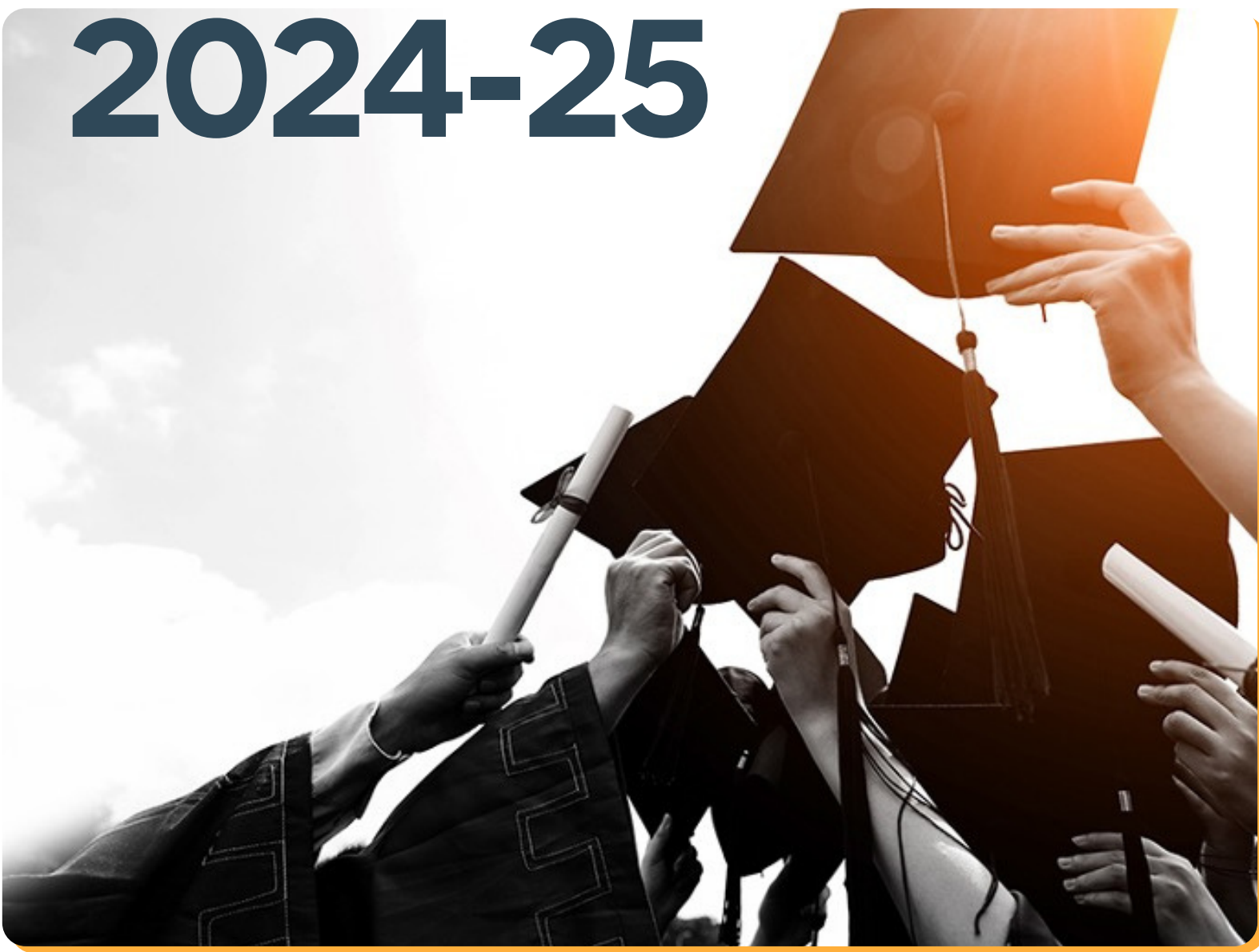


# ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25



UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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# 16 PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Serving 250,000+ students

## OUR VISION

Utah is an innovative global leader in providing world-class higher education and advancing research that enhances the quality of life in the state.

## OUR MISSION

USHE operates cohesively across the state's 16 public colleges and universities to provide valuable education that meets workforce needs and enhances the wellbeing and prosperity of all Utahns.

# UTAH BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MEMBERS



Amanda Covington  
Chair



Jon Cox  
Vice Chair



Javier Chavez Jr.



Jeremy Hafen



Jodi Hart



Danny Ipson



Steve Neeleman



Aaron Skonnard



Cydni Tetro



Garrett Largent  
Student Member



Geoffrey Landward  
Commissioner

Former Student Member  
Muskan Walia

# CHAIR'S MESSAGE

This past year has been one of meaningful progress for Utah's higher education system. The Utah Board of Higher Education has worked closely with our presidents, Commissioner Landward, and partners across the state to support initiatives that keep higher education affordable, accessible, and aligned with Utah's long-term needs.

A major undertaking this year was the Board's implementation of institutional strategic reinvestment plans required under HB 265, *Higher Education Strategic Reinvestment*. This work prompted each institution to closely evaluate how resources are used and identify ways to direct funding toward high-value academic programs, student supports, and research priorities. The resulting plans reflect a systemwide effort to align investments with student success and workforce needs, positioning our colleges and universities to respond to changing demand and ensure strong returns for students and taxpayers.

We advanced important system-level efforts, taking significant steps to protect affordability. We approved near-decade-low tuition increases and strengthened FAFSA completion efforts that helped many more Utah students access federal and state aid. These decisions reflect our commitment to reducing financial barriers so more students can pursue their goals.

In addition to these efforts, we continued building momentum for Admit Utah, a streamlined platform that allows students to apply to USHE institutions and guarantees admission to at least one. This year, USHE advanced the platform, adding location-based filtering, Spanish translation, financial aid information, and other user-focused features. We also launched a secure Direct Admissions pilot with the Provo City School District, enabling high school seniors to apply to all 16 institutions through a simplified, near-instant process.

This year, the Board approved innovative bachelor's degree programs at Weber State and Utah Valley University, making Utah the first public higher education system in the nation

authorized to offer accelerated degrees. These programs allow our institutions to stay ahead of the curve in rapidly growing sectors while helping our students quickly learn skills aligned with Utah's workforce needs.

We've also strengthened the connection between education and employment. Through programs such as Talent Ready Utah, we supported the expansion of apprenticeship, Utah Works, and Return-to-Work models. We additionally launched new data tools that help students and stakeholders clearly understand workforce outcomes. These initiatives underscore the Board's focus on ensuring that our colleges and universities remain aligned with Utah's rapidly evolving economic landscape.

This year brought important leadership changes across the System. The Board appointed **Shane B. Smeed** as president of Utah Tech University following **Courtney R. White's** service as interim president, and **Brad L. Mortensen** as president of Utah State University following **Alan L. Smith's** tenure as interim president.

The Board also named **Leslie Durham** as interim president of Weber State University and **Kent Thygersen** as interim president of Tooele Technical College, both beginning in November 2025.

We welcomed three new Board members: **Jeremy Hafen**, **Jodi Hart**, and student representative **Garrett Largent**. And in January, the Board appointed **Mark M. Cain** as the next executive director of my529, succeeding **Richard K. Ellis**, who retired in April after a decade of dedicated service.

As the Board reflects on the past year, we are deeply grateful for our institutional leaders, Commissioner Landward and his team, and the faculty and staff whose work and unwavering focus on students underpin every milestone in this report. As we look ahead, the Board remains focused on ensuring that System progress continues in a thoughtful and sustainable way, serving as a powerful engine of opportunity for all Utahns.

**Amanda Covington**  
Utah Board of Higher Education Chair

# COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

Over the past year, the Utah System of Higher Education has continued to adapt and grow in ways that reflect the needs of our students, our state, and a world that is changing faster than ever. Together, we reached important milestones, strengthened student success, and advanced work that sets a strong foundation for the years ahead.

Across our 16 public colleges and universities, we have seen the power of higher education at work. Students are earning more credentials than ever before, institutions are innovating to meet Utah's workforce needs, and faculty and staff continue to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to their communities. These are not just statistics; they represent lives changed, families strengthened, and the state's future being built one student at a time

As we look to the future, our focus is on building a System that is coordinated, aligned, and prepared for what comes next. This includes refining roles and missions so each institution has a clear and distinctive place within the System, and ensuring programs are designed to reduce duplication, improve clarity for students, and support Utah's workforce priorities. These efforts help us think more strategically as a System and better align resources with the areas where they will have the greatest impact.

We are also preparing for a future shaped by artificial intelligence. AI is rapidly transforming industries and the skills Utahns will need to succeed. Our System is working to support faculty learning and build stronger partnerships with employers who are already integrating AI into their work. These efforts will only grow as we adapt programs and learning experiences to ensure students gain the skills needed to thrive in an AI-driven economy.

Our leadership continues to play a critical role in this progress. This year, the Board reappointed **Amanda Covington** as chair and selected **Jon Cox** as vice chair. Their steady guidance, strategic focus, and commitment to our students and institutions help steer the System through this period of transformation and growth.

We are also strengthening institutional leadership at every level. Presidential evaluations, succession planning, and leadership development remain key priorities to ensure our institutions continue to thrive with capable, forward-thinking leaders who can navigate evolving challenges with clarity and purpose.

At the same time, we remain focused on helping more students persist and complete their certificates and degrees. From aligning pathways and expanding credit for prior learning to simplifying the admissions process, we are removing barriers that slow progress and making it easier for students to finish and transition into meaningful careers.

I want to express my appreciation to our Board, institutional leaders, faculty, staff, and partners across the state for their continued commitment to advancing higher education in Utah. Their work makes Utah's higher education system stronger and more responsive every day.

I am confident that the steps we are taking now will position Utah to lead with purpose, ensuring that every dollar invested in higher education drives opportunity, innovation, and measurable benefit to students, employers, and our communities.

**Geoffrey Landward**  
Commissioner of Higher Education

# 2025 BY THE NUMBERS

## Operating Budget

The Legislature approved an

**\$87.3 million**

increase to the System's  
operating budget

Performance Funding

**\$20 million**

ongoing

Technical College Growth  
Funding

**\$4.7 million**

ongoing

TRU Engineering and  
Computer Science Initiatives

**\$4 million**

ongoing

## Capital Budget

The Legislature appropriated **\$90 million** in dedicated project funds to address the entirety of this year's dedicated capital projects.

**The Board Prioritized Non-Dedicated Capital Projects Funded for Planning and Design**

**\$8 million**

for Dixie Technical College's Trades and  
Technology Building

**\$3.5 million**

for Utah State University's Math, Artificial  
Intelligence, and Data and Analytics Center

**\$500,000**

for Southern Utah University's Engineering and  
Computational Sciences Building

# DATA AND ANALYTICS

## Turning Insight into Action

Behind every major initiative this year, there's a story powered by data. Our Office of Research and Data Science turns complex information into clear insights that guide our decisions, helping us improve access and completion, align programs with workforce demand, and track student success in real time.

Over the past year, their work has informed data-driven action across the entire System. Through new reports and dashboards, we're giving Utah educators, policymakers, and the public a transparent view of progress and the evidence to keep improving.

## Explore how insight translates into impact for Utah students



**\$60.2 million**

in tuition and fees saved through  
**Credit for Prior Learning**

[\(Source\)](#)



**20% higher**

retention for students enrolled in  
fall semester compared to spring

[\(Source\)](#)



**71,262 certificates and  
degrees** awarded in 2025

[\(Source\)](#)



New interactive dashboards released this year:

- [Program Review by Discipline](#)
- [Program Outcomes](#)
- [Online/Distance Education](#)
- [Enrollment of High School Graduates](#)

# Utah Data Research Center

The Utah Data Research Center (UDRC), housed within the Commissioner's office, is a statewide longitudinal database housing historical data from USHE, the Department of Workforce Services, the Utah State Board of Education, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Data are linked using a sophisticated matching algorithm and used to conduct robust analyses to support the examination of policy and programs. In the past year, UDRC hosted a series of public webinars on new data reports and introduced a revised data narrative design with audio summaries to enhance the access and reach of research findings.

## Cost of Living

**90% of USHE graduates** in single-income households with no children **can afford Utah's standard cost of living**

(Source)

## Prior Learning Assessments

**1.62 points average increase** in first-term GPA for students earning 24 AP credits through PLA

(Source)

## Nursing Graduate Outcomes

**92% of LPN graduates remain employed** in the nursing industry seven years after graduation

(Source)

## Charter High School Outcomes

Utah charter high school students **graduated two months sooner from USHE institutions** than non-charter students

(Source)

Explore the full data dashboards and reports at [ushe.edu/data-home](https://ushe.edu/data-home) and [udrc.ushe.edu](https://udrc.ushe.edu).



# A YEAR OF PROGRESS

## Strategic Plan: Year Two

The Utah Board of Higher Education approved its comprehensive 2024-27 Strategic Plan in August 2024, establishing a clear roadmap for Utah's higher education system through 2027. This strategic plan represents the culmination of extensive collaboration between the Board's Strategic Plan Task Force, institutional leaders, and the full Board, incorporating feedback from across the System to ensure alignment with both institutional priorities and broader state needs. The plan is built on four foundational priorities, each with specific, measurable goals.

Track real-time progress and monitor the implementation and success of the plan through the [Board Priorities dashboard](#) and [Strategic Plan Attainment Goals dashboard](#).

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-27

**ACCESS  
COMPLETION  
FINANCIAL  
VALUE  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT**

## OUR MISSION

USHE operates cohesively across the state's 16 public colleges and universities to provide valuable education that meets workforce needs and enhances the wellbeing and prosperity of all Utahns.

## OUR VISION

Utah is an innovative global leader in providing world-class higher education and advancing research that enhances the quality of life in the state.

## OUR PRIORITIES

### ACCESS

Empower prospective students to take full advantage of admissions opportunities, scholarships, financial aid, opportunities to earn college credit during high school, and college and career mapping.

Simplify institutional admissions processes.

Ensure Utah's public higher education system is best poised to serve modern learners.

### FINANCIAL VALUE

Develop and implement measures to reduce or avoid low-value expenditures and create systemwide financial efficiencies.

Reduce costs for students and help them maximize their return on investment.

Ensure the value of a USHE education is commensurate with the cost.

Establish and maintain a long-term plan for cohesive institutional roles and missions to ensure optimal workforce responsiveness and systemwide efficiency.

### COMPLETION

Innovate to mitigate or remove barriers that increase time to completion.

Standardize the awarding of credit for prior learning and ensure it aids in timely completion.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Meet workforce needs by increasing the completion rates of graduates in high-wage, high-demand programs by 3% by the conclusion of academic year 2026-27.

Advance research that supports economic development and enhances the quality of life in the state.

In partnership with government and industry, advance commercialization and economic development through The Point Innovation District.

# ACCESS

## ADMIT UTAH

Admit Utah is simplifying how Utah students access higher education through a single statewide platform. Launched in October 2024, the program guarantees every Utah high school graduate is admitted to at least one of the state's 16 public colleges and universities through [admitutah.org](https://admitutah.org), regardless of GPA. The initiative represents a bold step toward removing barriers and ensuring every student sees college as an attainable next step.

All Utah high school students can apply for free to any of the state's public colleges through a single, streamlined process. For the 2025-26 school year, USHE launched a Direct Admissions pilot with the Provo City School District, under a secure, FERPA-compliant data-sharing agreement. This pilot allows Provo High School and Timpview High School seniors to apply to all 16 public colleges through simplified data integration that supports near-instant admissions decisions.

Throughout 2025, USHE advanced the technical and design phases of the Admit Utah platform, including the development of location-based filtering, Spanish translation, financial aid information, and other features. These improvements will inform the statewide rollout in October 2026, with ongoing enhancements to support a seamless transition from high school to college, backed by a new transactional data infrastructure.



## Transactional Data System

To strengthen the Admit Utah platform and support Direct Admissions, USHE is leveraging Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) 2023 grant funds to build a transactional data system. This system is designed to facilitate the secure and efficient transfer of student academic records from high schools to USHE institutions, improving accuracy and accelerating admission decisions.

In 2025, USHE began building the infrastructure for the transactional data system, connecting securely with existing student data sources and establishing the necessary legal and technical frameworks to ensure compliance with privacy laws.

This system will support the statewide rollout of Direct Admissions in 2026, enabling the automatic, real-time transfer of student data, reducing manual paperwork, and streamlining the college application process for high school students across Utah.

# FIRST CREDENTIAL

The First Credential Program, outlined in HB 260 (2025), establishes a statewide framework that aligns efforts across K-12, higher education, and industry to ensure each Utah student has the opportunity to graduate with a credential that holds real value in both college and career. The First Credential program operates through five pathways: Concurrent Enrollment, Career and Technical Education (CTE) completion, Industry-Recognized Credentials, Technical College Certificates, and Youth Apprenticeships.

In 2025, USHE, in partnership with the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) and the Governor's Office, convened the First Credential Oversight Committee, including representation from education, industry, and government, to guide this framework. The committee met regularly beginning in the summer of 2025 and finalized the First Credential Master Plan for the Education Interim Committee in November 2025. This plan shapes statewide strategy and guides Utah on implementation imperatives.

For higher education, First Credential creates unprecedented alignment with K-12 systems. Colleges and universities serve as co-architects, ensuring credentials transfer seamlessly into postsecondary credentials. This collaboration strengthens enrollment, reduces time to completion, and positions Utah as a national leader in connecting education to economic opportunity. Together, the First Credential program builds a talent pipeline that benefits students, families, employers, and the state's long-term competitiveness.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

## K-12 AND ADULT LEARNERS OPPORTUNITY

USHE is committed to adult learner access. This year, USHE partnered with Salt Lake Community College and Snow College to launch pilot programs with community-based organizations like United Way and the Utah Education Initiative. This pilot model will help develop a framework to connect students with mentoring, tutoring, and college-prep resources to help them successfully navigate higher education options. USHE also advanced adult learner access by analyzing programs at each institution, mapping community-based supports, and studying national best practices to identify strategies that make it easier for adults to enroll, receive guidance, and complete credentials.

In relation to K-12 student access, the System is finalizing a P-20 best-practices guide to provide institutional leaders with practical tools to strengthen collaboration between K-12 schools and colleges, share resources, and create smoother pathways for students.

Building on these efforts, USHE will be partnering with the Utah State Board of Education to redesign the Postsecondary and Career Counseling and Readiness (PCCR) model to provide K-12 students with clearer guidance on careers, college readiness, and credit opportunities, with statewide pilots aligned with the First Credential program and scheduled for fall 2026.

Together, these initiatives ensure that learners of all ages have the support, guidance, and pathways they need to pursue postsecondary education, advance in their careers, and thrive in Utah's growing economy.



# COMPLETION

## ACCELERATED BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Utah became the first public higher education system in the nation authorized to offer three-year bachelor's degrees and has since expanded accelerated programs to help students complete degrees faster, save money, and enter the workforce sooner. In 2025, the Board approved Utah's first public systemwide accelerated programs at Weber State University and Utah Valley University, offering degrees requiring as few as 90 credit hours. These programs maintain rigorous academic standards while shortening the time to a degree in fields such as politics, philosophy, economics, and sound production.

The accelerated programs are part of USHE's broader strategy to increase flexibility, affordability, and student success. By streamlining degree pathways, institutions can stay nimble in responding to rapidly changing growth sectors, helping students gain skills aligned with current and emerging workforce needs.

USHE will continue monitoring outcomes, supporting program expansion, and ensuring that accelerated programs remain adaptable, relevant, and student-centered, advancing timely completion and career readiness.

USHE institutions awarded **61,265 graduates** with **71,262 certificates** and **degrees** in 2025

# TRANSITION TO CREDIT

Utah's public technical colleges also became the first non-degree institutions in the nation to fully transition from clock hours to semester credit hours. This shift removed federal attendance requirements that previously limited hybrid and distance learning, created a common academic currency across all sixteen USHE institutions, and improved scheduling flexibility for students progressing through competency-based programs. Together, these changes provide clearer program structures, reduce barriers to access, and strengthen completion pathways across the System.

## PROGRAM ALIGNMENT

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education led coordinated systemwide efforts to improve transferability and streamline degree pathways across all USHE institutions over the past year. Through Board policy implementation and collaboration with institutional leaders and 37 major committees, lower-division major pathways and general education requirements were aligned across the System, reducing the number of general education credits from 39 to 27–30.

USHE also advanced statewide technical education alignment under Board Policy R404 by coordinating a comprehensive review of program standards across the System. More than 300 faculty participated in committees to align program names, objectives, CIP codes, program lengths, and essential employment skills across technical education programs. This work created a consistent statewide framework that streamlines program offerings, strengthens transfer, improves clarity for students, and ensures employers can rely on credentials that align with statewide workforce needs.

To support ongoing implementation, USHE launched a centralized resource that allows institutions and stakeholders to access aligned technical education programs in one place.

Building on this work, the Board strengthened systemwide program alignment by adopting updated roles and missions policies (R312, R401, R402, R403, and R315) that clarify which credentials each institution is authorized to offer and define distinctions between academic, technical, and short-term training programs. The Commissioner's office completed a systemwide inventory to identify programs that were out of role, misclassified, or unnecessarily duplicative, and provided institutions with detailed reports and guidance.

Institutions submitted plans in 2025 to address the findings, strengthening clarity for students and ensuring state resources support programs that align with Utah's education and workforce needs.

# CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

This year, USHE has standardized policies and processes for awarding credit for prior learning (CPL), ensuring students can turn their hard-earned work, life, or previous educational experience into college credit.

To make this possible, the Board updated Policy R472 to align CPL with specific courses, standardize awarding and reporting of credit, and coordinate practices across institutions. Faculty and major committees received targeted training to ensure consistency. Additionally, prior learning equivalencies for industry certifications, national exams, and work-based learning were mapped to specific courses.

Annual reporting and cross-institution coordination further support consistent application, helping students reduce time to degree completion and save on tuition.

These efforts create opportunities for students to accelerate progress, particularly adult learners and individuals entering the workforce, and ensure that prior knowledge and skills are effectively applied toward postsecondary credentials.

During 2023-24, more than **34,000 students** earned **246,128 credits** through prior learning, generating roughly **\$60 million in tuition and fee savings.**

## CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

USHE is also integrating technical colleges into Utah's concurrent enrollment infrastructure. Technical colleges already serve high school students on their campuses during the school day, and this initiative preserves those opportunities while expanding access for students who take equivalent CTE coursework at their high schools.

Beginning in fall 2026, eligible secondary coursework will generate transcribed technical college credit, giving more students a path into workforce-ready programs. This creates a unified statewide approach to awarding credit and reduces duplication of coursework, expediting time to completion and lowering program cost. A statewide steering committee and supporting subcommittees are guiding policy and operational design to ensure consistent practice, clear advising, and seamless participation for students across regions.

## MATH PATHWAYS

USHE advanced the Utah Math Launch Years project to help more students enter college ready for credit-bearing math. In 2025, selected high school concurrent enrollment teachers and college faculty began piloting aligned, credit-bearing math courses for high school seniors. Throughout the 2025–26 school year, USHE will collect classroom data and student feedback to evaluate the approach, with an external review by Cornell University scheduled for June 2026. This work strengthens credential progression, reduces developmental coursework, and supports more timely completion across the System.



# PERFORMANCE FUNDING REDESIGN

USHE continued aligning incentives with timely completion, supported in part by an ongoing redesign of the statewide performance-funding model, which is now being refined in collaboration with institutions and legislators to ensure future metrics support equitable outcomes and workforce needs.  
(See [Workforce Data & Performance Funding](#), p. 26)

# FINANCIAL VALUE

## SCHOLARSHIPS

The Utah Board of Higher Education awarded or allocated state aid to support more than **15,000 students** across Utah. **Over \$27 million** was distributed through **18 distinct programs**, reflecting the Board's dedication to educational access and workforce development.

**15,000+ students**

**\$27 million awarded**

### Support for Public Service

State aid also supported: **First responders** pursuing degrees to become certified mental health counselors. **Public safety officers** in criminal-justice-related academic programs. **Future educators** preparing to serve Utah's schools and communities.

### Expanding Access

Approximately **\$7.5 million** was awarded through the **Utah Promise Program** to students with financial need—more than double the amount awarded the previous year.

USHE continued work to simplify and strengthen state aid programs to better support student success. In 2025, the System updated state aid policy, refined endowment spending guidelines, advanced shared administrative practices, and added new communication tools—including text outreach for Opportunity Scholarship applicants—to help students navigate aid more easily. These refinements improve transparency and reinforce alignment between state aid and measurable student outcomes.

# FAFSA Completion

This year, USHE expanded statewide efforts to increase completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), helping more students access federal grants and other forms of financial support.

**167 FAFSA completion events**  
hosted across Utah

**3,400 students**  
served

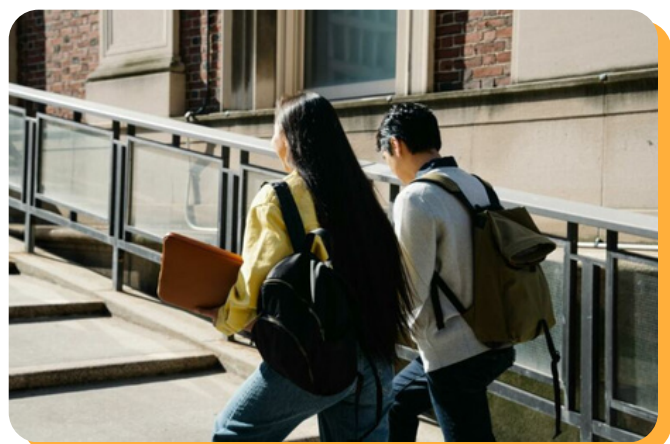
**+16.5% FAFSA completion**  
for the class of 2025

**180 volunteers** contributed time  
and expertise

To improve access, USHE refined its FAFSA chatbot, produced new step-by-step guides and videos for students and families, and provided targeted support for rural schools. These efforts reflect the System's commitment to reducing financial barriers to postsecondary education and helping students maximize available aid.

# TUITION AND FEES

In March 2025, the Utah Board of Higher Education approved near-decade-low price increases for the coming year, demonstrating exceptional commitment to affordability while maintaining educational quality. The Board's decision followed a rigorous review of institutional expenditure plans and reflects an ongoing focus on minimizing cost growth for students while ensuring resources remain available for instruction, student support, and workforce-aligned programs. Utah continues to rank among the most affordable states for public higher education, underscoring the System's disciplined stewardship and responsiveness to the economic pressures facing students and families.



# STUDENT SUCCESS ENDOWMENT

In June 2025, the Utah Board of Higher Education completed critical steps in formalizing the utilization of the Higher Education Student Success Endowment by approving Policy R1101, *Higher Education Student Success Endowment Spending Guidelines and Reporting*. This policy authorizes the Board to use endowment proceeds to advance student success priorities, including supporting Board-directed System initiatives or allocating funds to institutions. Concurrent with the passage of this new policy, the Board approved the distribution and expenditure of \$7.6 million in endowment proceeds to increase financial support for USHE students.

# SHARED SERVICES

USHE advanced efforts to improve systemwide efficiency through shared services in 2025. Continuing work from last year, the Board established a commercialization shared-services framework in policy, which enables institutions to more effectively coordinate technology transfer and expand innovation capacity. The System also finalized the implementation of a shared payroll platform for technical colleges, thereby eliminating unstandardized processes and facilitating administrative efficiency gains.

The Board identified shared employee health benefits as its priority shared services initiative in 2025. To begin, an actuarial firm was contracted to explore the feasibility and options for shared employee health insurance benefits among the 16 USHE institutions, including opportunities for carrier and plan consolidation, shared brokerage, and use of common pharmacy benefit managers, among other potential methods for increasing employee health insurance efficiency, quality,

and value. Identified possible paths for consolidation ultimately ranged from establishing a consortium for group procurement to full medical risk pooling across USHE institutions. Using this information, the Board issued a broad-based Request for Information to crowdsource the best solutions from industry experts when it comes to implementing a new shared services model in this space.

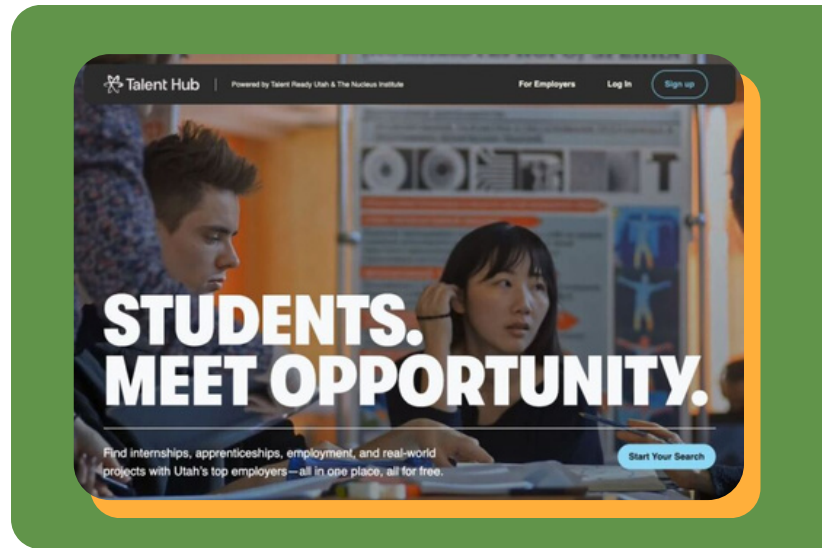
These efforts reflect the System's broader commitment to improving operational effectiveness while protecting affordability for students.

# WORK-BASED LEARNING

USHE advanced major work-based learning (WBL) initiatives that help students gain real-world experience while reducing the total cost of completion. In 2025, the System began collecting baseline participation data across K-12 and higher education to identify gaps and inform future targets. Draft policy work also advanced to standardize definitions, clarify credit-award practices for on-the-job experience, and improve consistency across institutions.

The System also launched the statewide Talent Hub led by its Talent Ready Utah team (see [Economic Development](#), p. 23) in partnership with industry and higher education partners. The platform connects students with employers offering internships, cooperative education, and other hands-on learning opportunities. Talent Ready Utah continued developing guidance and “starter kits” to help institutions and K-12 partners implement work-based learning programs more effectively, including materials for program design, student support, and industry coordination.

These efforts strengthen the value of a Utah education by helping learners build career-relevant skills, shorten time to employment, and improve earnings potential.





# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**USHE contributes**  
**\$12.1 billion** to the state's GDP.

## Research Universities

are especially vital drivers of economic growth, **providing 83% of the System's total economic contribution.** (Source)

## TALENT READY UTAH

Talent Ready Utah is a statewide initiative housed within the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education. It brings together higher education, K-12, workforce partners, and industry to design and scale college-to-career pathways aligned with Utah's high-demand workforce needs.

This year, Talent Ready Utah continued strengthening Utah's workforce pipeline through expanded industry partnerships, regional engagement, and career-connected learning opportunities. Through these efforts, 33 programs received over \$6.14 million in funding aligned to seven unique workforce initiatives, including Utah Works, Talent Ready Connections, Return To Work, Engineering & Computer Science Initiative, Life Science Workforce Initiative, Deep Tech Talent Initiative, and the Behavioral Health Initiative. These initiatives are all in direct response to industry demand and have enrolled an estimated 5,000 students.

### Industries Served

9 Industry clusters and  
more than 50 companies

### Workforce Initiatives

33 programs funded  
5,000+ students served

Over 1 million training hours  
\$6.14 million in funding

## Apprenticeship Governance and International Collaboration

Talent Ready completed a statewide youth apprenticeship governance study with the Utah Education Policy Center and began developing cross-agency legislative recommendations with USBE and the Department of Workforce Services. In parallel, Utah signed a partnership with the Republic of Austria to exchange best practices and expand youth apprenticeship opportunities statewide.



## Advances in AI Education and Workforce Development

This year, **USHE research universities**, along with legislative leaders and the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, **partnered with NVIDIA** to accelerate **AI-focused education, research, and workforce development**.

# Expansion of TRAC, Utah Works, and Return-to-Work

In 2025, Talent Ready Utah accelerated growth in three flagship workforce programs—Talent Ready Apprenticeship Connection (TRAC), Utah Works, and Return-to-Work—which together provide students and adult learners with direct pathways into high-demand, high-wage careers.

**TRAC** gives high school students an “earn-while-you-learn” model by splitting classroom time with paid workplace experience. It aligns secondary- and postsecondary-level credentials, connects youth with industry partners, and strengthens Utah’s talent pipeline. New programs with Snow College are supporting advanced manufacturing for numerous central Utah employers. In preparation for the 2034 Olympics, an anticipated Hospitality TRAC program in partnership with SLCC, the University of Utah, the Salt Lake City School District, and The Grand America Hotel was also designed and will officially launch in 2026. TRAC employer participation more than doubled last year, with the number of students increasing from 14 in 2023 to 25 in 2024 and 29 in 2025.

**Utah Works**, designed for adult learners and incumbent workers, delivers short-term, industry-aligned technical training and partners with businesses to meet workforce needs quickly. Courses are developed in collaboration with employers and higher-education institutions, with expanded partnerships this year in advanced manufacturing and biotechnology. The initiative has delivered nearly 200,000 training hours to date.

**Return-to-Work** extends these opportunities to adults re-entering the workforce, offering focused up-skilling and re-entry programs in high-demand sectors. Through June 2026, the initiative continues to provide accessible, short-term training to help Utahns transition back into stable, high-wage employment.

## Other Key Accomplishments This Year

- Completed benchmarking work to evaluate workforce-grant ROI and guide ongoing legislative investment in high-demand fields such as engineering, life sciences, and deep-tech.
- Increased collaboration with state agencies and legislative partners on policy development supporting workforce growth, including initiatives related to energy education, justice-involved learning pathways, and Talent Connect programs.
- Received over \$1.3M in private sector grants and began establishing a 501(c)(3) to expand access to federal and private workforce-development funding
- Launched the Educator Fellowship Initiative that will give stipends for instructors and professors to work a week with an industry partner to better connect classroom curriculum with the needs of Utah employers..
- Continued integrating workforce alignment into program planning and review under Board Policy R411, including more structured faculty–industry engagement.
- Through campus-based speaker series and employer convenings, TRU expanded opportunities for faculty to connect directly with industry to inform curriculum and strengthen job-readiness expectations.

These efforts deepen collaboration between higher education and employers, expand access to flexible workforce pathways, and help Utahns transition more efficiently into high-wage careers.

# WORKFORCE DATA AND PERFORMANCE FUNDING

USHE strengthened students' ability to make informed choices about education and career pathways by launching the [Graduate Workforce Outcomes dashboard](#), which provides Utah-specific earnings and employment data by institution and program of study. Students, families, advisors, and institutions can now compare wage growth, industry placement, and early-career outcomes to better evaluate program return on investment.

The System also collaborated with institutions and legislators to redesign the performance-funding model. While still in process, new model metrics should address differences in student populations, research activity, and adult-learner engagement, helping ensure funding supports equitable student success and statewide workforce needs.

**76.3%** of 2025 USHE students graduated in **high-demand, high-yield fields**.

# INNOVATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION AT THE POINT

In 2025, USHE laid important groundwork to strengthen Utah's innovation ecosystem at The Point. The System formalized a governance structure under HB 530 and established the Nucleus Institute entity and governing board to guide cross-institution collaboration in commercialization and applied research.

USHE also supported development of Convergence Hall by securing funding and advancing program and partnership planning. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2026, followed by a two-year build timeline. The Utah Innovation Fund continued expanding opportunities to support technology commercialization and industry partnerships. USHE further evaluated models for state-supported research funding, including exploring how performance metrics could better recognize the role of research universities in advancing innovation and economic development.

These steps moved The Point from planning to implementation and positioned the System to accelerate research translation, talent development, and statewide economic growth.

