



Student Satisfaction, Enrollment, Graduation, and Employment Outcomes

Benchmarks Report to the Board of Regents,
Regional University System of Oklahoma
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Regents Dashboard Work Team

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This sixth report of Benchmarks constitutes the Dashboard adopted by the Board of Regents of the Regional University System of Oklahoma. The information provided includes benchmarks that document graduating seniors' satisfaction with their experiences, and data sets on enrollment across a broad spectrum of participation: race, age, gender, retention, program selection, and more.

Noteworthy Findings

As in previous Dashboard reports, the comprehensive analysis of information has revealed significant findings that would have gone undiscovered if it not for this exercise.

Discoveries include:

Satisfaction. Our measurement of graduating seniors' satisfaction with the education and institutional experiences remains very strong. ***Student satisfaction at RUSO institutions is very high.***

Student Graduation. RUSO institutions excel at meeting the needs of transfer, returning and adult students. Each year our campuses enroll a traditional freshman class of students who recently graduated high school. We also receive hundreds of transfer students who started somewhere else but who go on to graduate from a RUSO institution. Chart 4 will show a comparison of all students graduating in a year as a percentage of the freshman class entering that year. ***In most institutions, we graduate significantly more students each year than the number who enter as freshmen in the fall.***

Number of graduates. RUSO institutions graduate more bachelor's degree students each year than either the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State University. In the years between 2016 and 2020, OU awarded about 23,174 total undergraduate degrees, and OSU awarded 21,929. In the same five-year span, ***institutions in the RUSO system awarded over 31,407 undergraduate degrees, 70 percent of the total undergraduate degrees of OU and OSU combined.***

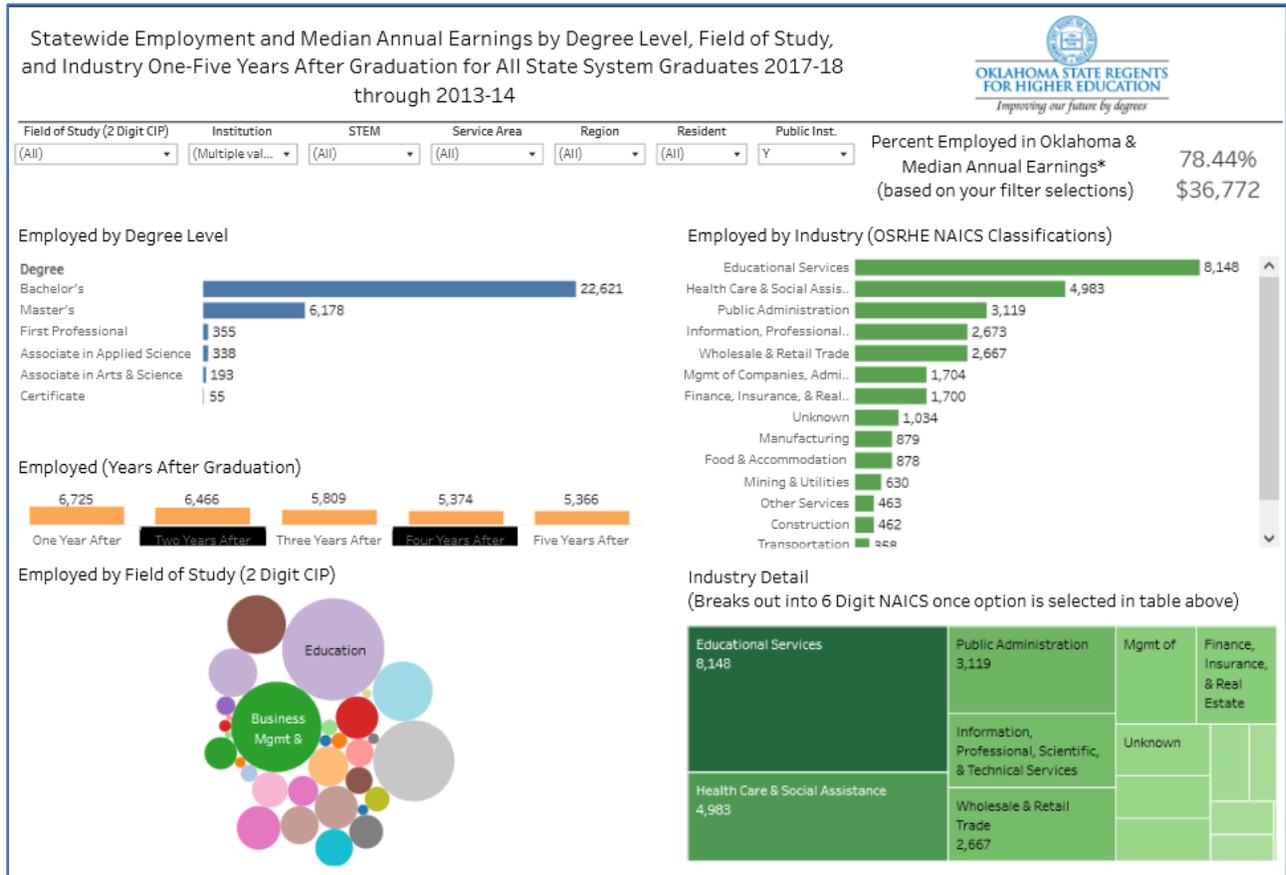
Graduates' Success. RUSO institution graduates in Oklahoma after five years continue to earn more money than graduates of Oklahoma's six similar regional tier institutions. Further, more bachelor's degree graduates of RUSO institutions remained in Oklahoma's workforce (5,366) than did graduates of the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University combined, (4,632). ***RUSO institutions are a "brain gain" for Oklahoma.***

Median Earnings and Percent Employed in Oklahoma

OSRHE information dashboard

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education maintains a [Statewide Median Annual Earnings](#) dashboard that includes data on median annual earnings five years after graduation and percent of graduates employed in Oklahoma. The following picture is a screenshot of the dashboard for the RUSO tier of institutions:

Picture 1. RUSO Tier Median Annual Earnings – OSRHE Dashboard

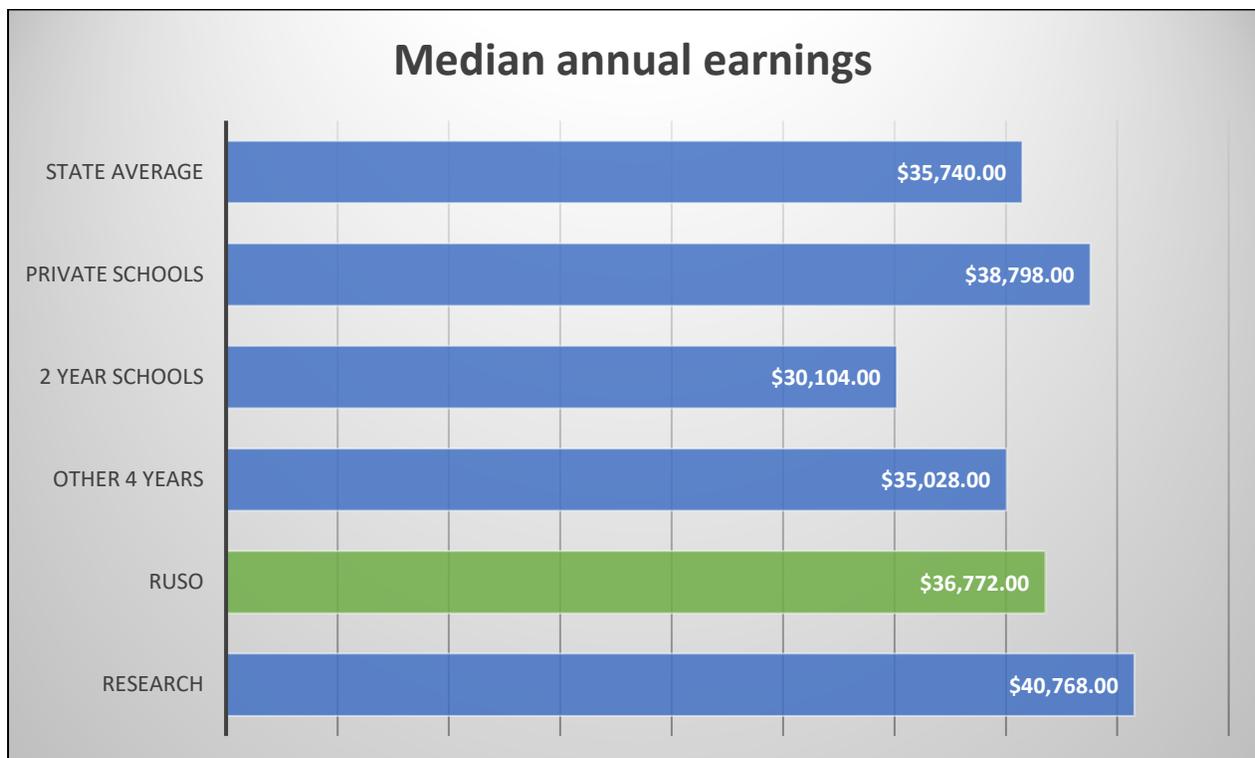


Median earnings

OSRHE's [Statewide Median Annual Earnings](#) can be filtered to show media earnings of graduates of several tiers of Oklahoma institutions. The following chart provides a comparison of those tiers. As shown, graduates from RUSO schools have higher median annual earnings than the other four-year institutions (Cameron, Langston, Panhandle State, Rogers State, and USAO), two-year schools, and the state average.

Additionally, a Georgetown University study on Return on Investment shows that the RUSO tier of institutions fares better than the average ROI for all other tiers beside the research institutions.

Chart 1. Median annual earnings five years after graduation



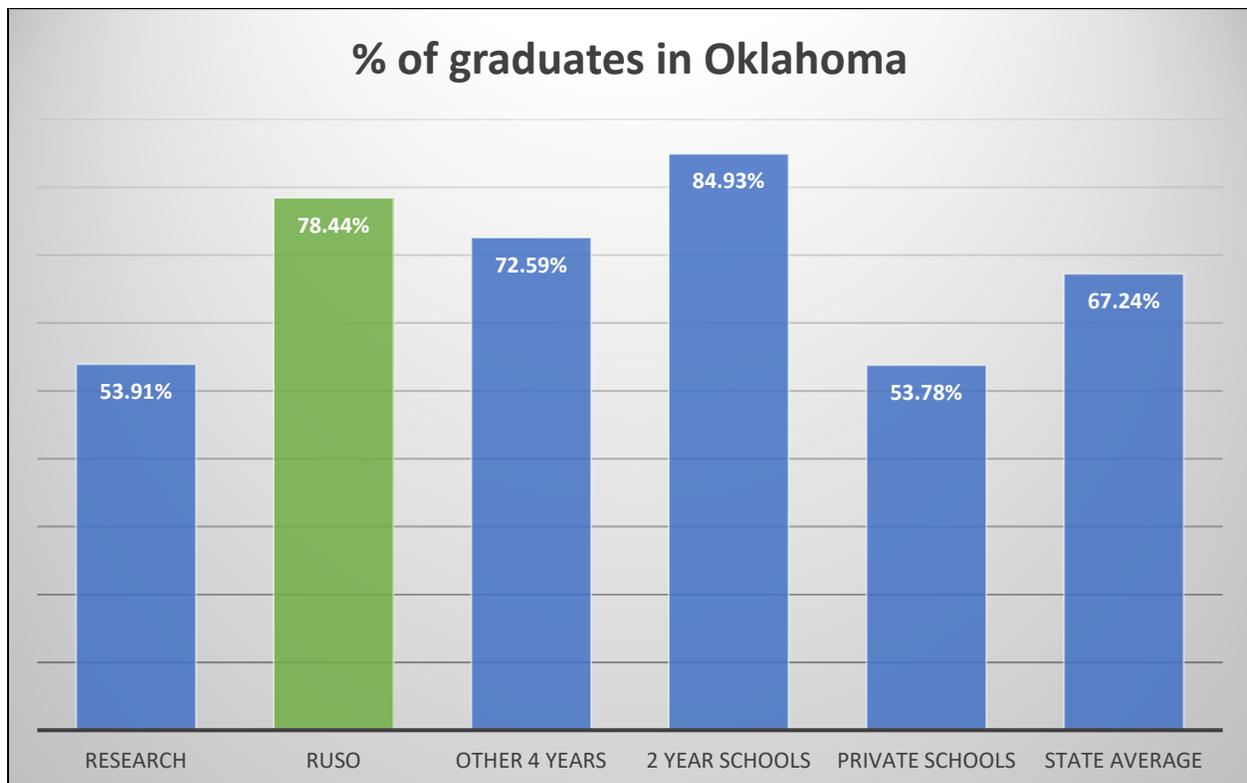
Brain Gain

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education maintains a [Statewide Median Annual Earnings](#) dashboard that includes data on where students are employed one and five years after graduation. Briefly, the data show that the RUSO tier of institutions:

- Graduated more than 3.7 times as many students (7,141) than its five other regional tier peers (1,911).
- Had a higher percentage of graduates still employed in the state, compared to its other tier peers, and both OU and OSU. This is true one year and five years after graduation.
- Five years after graduation, RUSO institutions had more graduates employed in OK (5,366) than the rest of the regional tier (1,314) and OSU and OU (4,632)
- Five years after graduation, RUSO graduates represent 49% of the four-year degreed graduates staying in Oklahoma.

These data clearly point to the efficiency and effectiveness of RUSO institutions in meeting the needs of Oklahoma with highly prepared graduates who, by remaining in state, serve as a “brain gain.” These metrics indicate RUSO institutions are well-suited to address the employment needs of individual Oklahomans who may be displaced while also meeting the demands of employers as Oklahoma’s economy continues to grow.

Chart 2. Percent of graduates employed in Oklahoma five years after graduation



Graduating Seniors' satisfaction with RUSO institutions

All institutions employ a graduation survey for Spring Semester commencing seniors. The information collected is based on questions posed to graduating seniors in the comprehensive National Survey of Student Experiences.

These questions also serve as an indirect means to assess student learning as it assumes that satisfaction with a student's overall experience also indicates satisfaction with what was learned.

At the conclusion of the Spring Semester, all RUSO institutions asked two questions on their institutional exit surveys. Question No. 1, that queries graduating seniors' satisfaction with the quality of their education, found a 1 percent over-all increase in satisfaction from the prior year. Regarding Question No. 2, there is a 3 percent over-all increase stating students would choose the same institution if they could do it all over again. More importantly, 91% of all our students feel they received a quality education and would attend their RUSO school of choice if they had to choose again which speaks well of the RUSO institutions.

Data by institution is shown in the following table. Comparisons with last year's survey are reported in parenthesis. This year's data was collected while the institutions were still dealing with issues from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart 3. Student satisfaction survey results

University	Question 1 - Were you provided a quality education/programs?	Question 2 - Would you attend same school if you had to do it over?
ECU	95% (+2%)	90% (no change)
NSU	90% (-1%)	88% (no change)
NWOSU	86% (no change)	90% (-5%)
SEOSU	86% (+1%)	91% (+13%)
SWOSU	96% (+1%)	93% (no change)
UCO	91% (+1%)	81% (no change)
RUSO AVERAGE	91% (+1%)	90% (+3%)

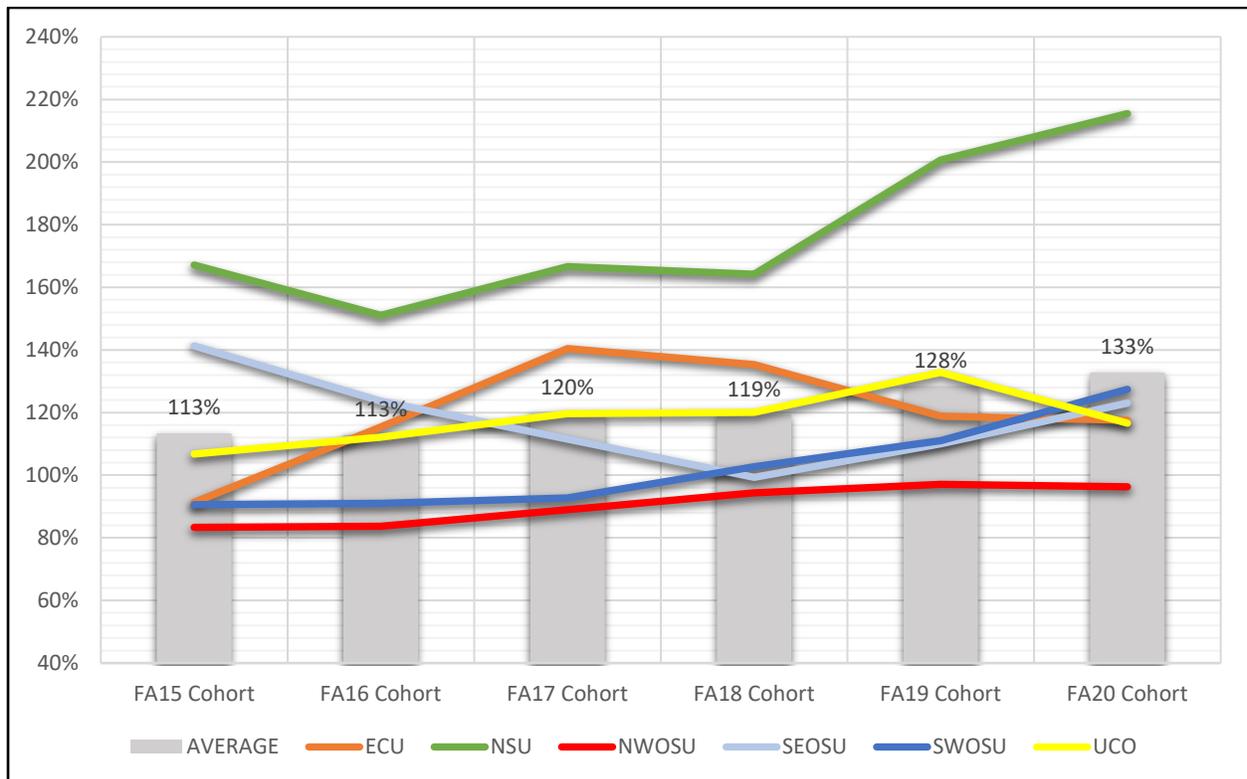
Graduation Success

Graduating more students each year than incoming freshmen

We believe it is our duty to clarify what “graduation rates” entail as defined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System of the U.S. Department of Education. IPEDS only measures the success of the cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen who enroll in the fall after graduating from high school, and then graduate from the same institution. It does not report the graduation rates of part-time, returning, adult, veterans, transfer students, or those who enroll in other terms. These students make up a large percentage of RUSO schools’ enrollment.

Chart 4 provides a comparison (in percentage terms) of the number of students graduating with an undergraduate degree in a given year divided by the number of full-time freshmen entering that same year. The chart shows that, on average, RUSO schools graduate more students every year than enroll as first-time freshmen. ***The average is trending above 130%.*** A caveat to this enrollment data applies to the NSU percentages. At NSU-Broken Arrow, which does not enroll freshmen or sophomores, almost the entire graduating class is made up of transfer students, which positively skews the average. Even when removing NSU’s degrees from the calculation, the average range was from 103% to 114% over the five-year period, with a current average of 114%.

Chart 4. Total undergraduate degrees as a percentage of incoming full-time freshman class



Access, Progress and Completion

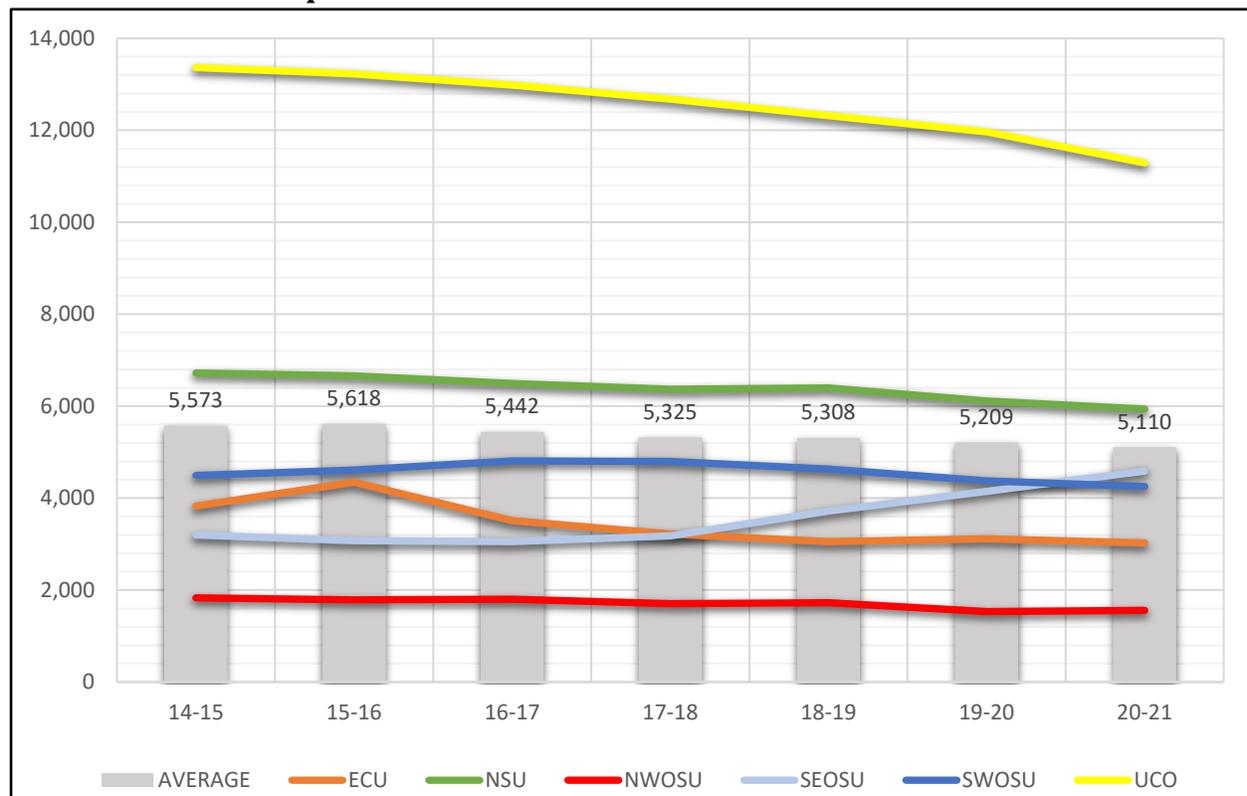
Overall student enrollment

Lower college-going rates and the pandemic have negatively affected enrollment RUSO as it has with other institutions across the state and nation. Nationwide, college enrollment peaked in 2010 and has dropped since then, especially in the past two years. Many factors could account for this slide among RUSO schools, including almost a 30 percent increase in tuition rates among RUSO institutions over the past five years (caused by dramatic and damaging cuts in state appropriations).

Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drop in enrollment in 2020 and 2021. A significant contributor also was a change last year in admission standards for OU and OSU that has buoyed both institutions' enrollment at the expense of other institutions.

Full-time equivalent (FTE) is calculated by dividing total student credit hours enrolled in a semester and dividing by 15. Because completing 30 hours per year (15 per semester) will allow graduation for a 120-semester hour degree in four years, that is considered "full-time" for this statistic.

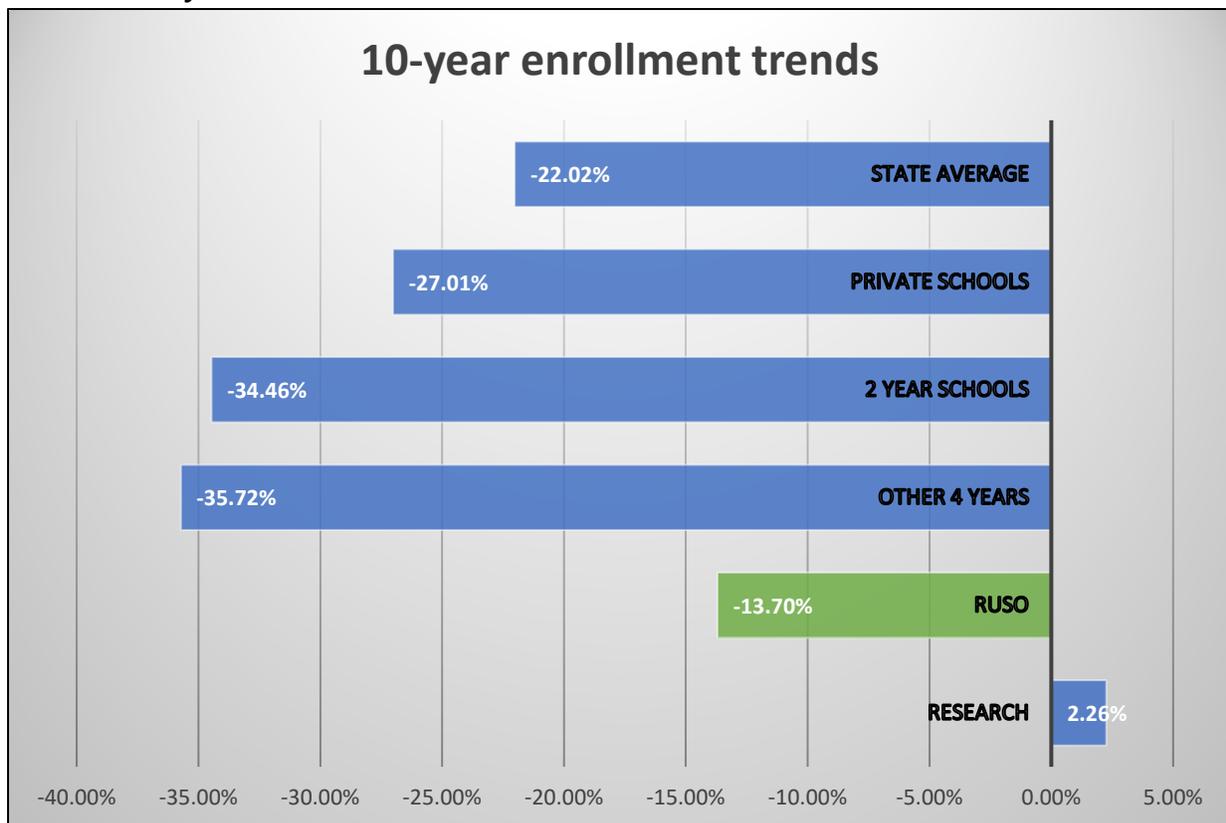
Chart 5. Full-time equivalent students



RUSO enrollment trend compared to other institutions

While RUSO schools have seen decreases in enrollment, other institutions within the state are also experiencing enrollment declines. Over 10 years, RUSO school enrollment has dropped from 51,916 to 44,769, a 13.7% decline. The only group of institutions that have increased are OU and OSU, largely in part to their change in admission standards. The other four-year schools (Cameron, Langston, Panhandle State, Rogers State, and USAO) have decreased in enrollment from 20,808 to 13,375, a 35.72% decline. Community colleges have dropped 34.46% in the last 10 years, and private schools are down 27.01%. The chart shows that all non-research institutions have been hit hard with enrollment declines in the past decade, but the RUSO institutions are mitigating the decline better than others.

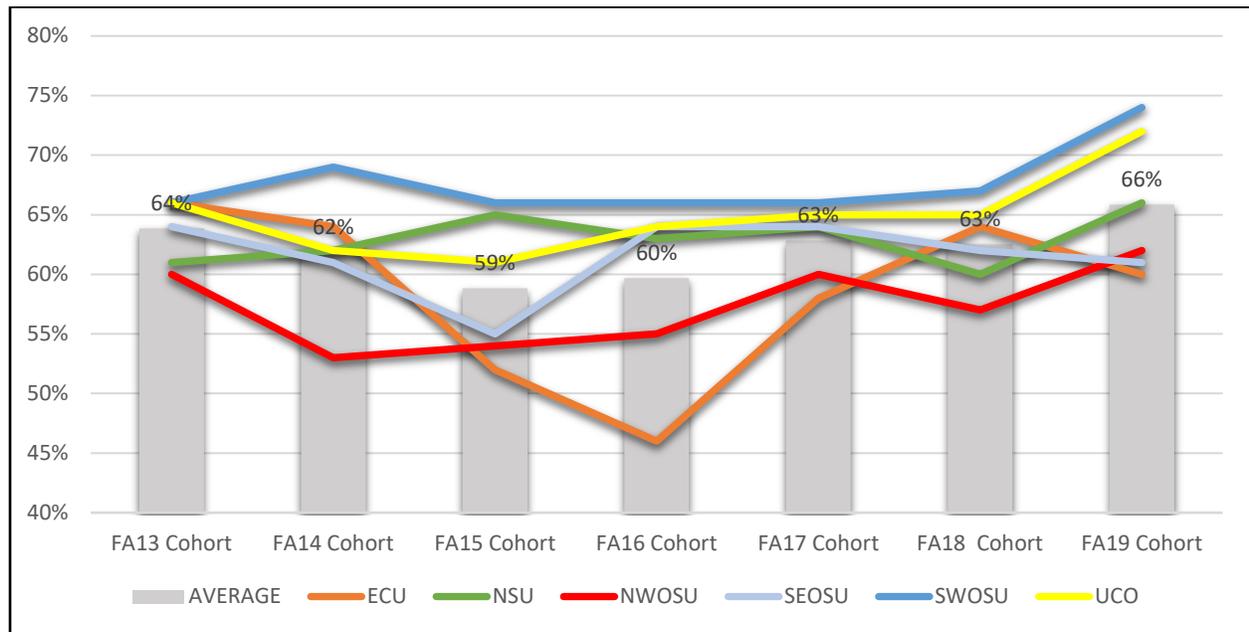
Chart 6. 10-year enrollment trends of Oklahoma institutions



Retention successes and enrollment possibilities

Each RUSO institution continues to implement retention and recruitment strategies designed to maximize student completion and institutional tuition revenue. Examples of these strategies include new student support services, changes in teaching methodology to increase student engagement, changes in freshman orientation classes to help students adjust to college life, changes to student advising models, and changes in tuition waiver awards to better assist students from low-income families. We know that we are losing students each semester who are unable to pay and consequently stop out or drop out.

Chart 7. Retention rates, first-time, full-time freshmen



One potential bright spot in RUSO enrollment is a projection from the National Center for Educational Statistics, which shows a 7.4% increase in Oklahoma in the decade 2017-2028.

Chart 8. Projection of High School Graduates

	Projected Data (in thousands)									
	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	2026–27	2027–28	change
United States	3,252	3,271	3,291	3,305	3,366	3,425	3,412	3,327	3,337	1.2%
Oklahoma	41	42	42	40	43	44	44	44	44	7.4%

Projections of Education Statistics to 2027, National Center for Educational Statistics, US Department of Education, Feb 2019

Program Value

Student Loan Debt and Debt-to-Earnings

A 2021 study “Mixed Returns: How Oklahoma College Degrees Fare on Debt-Earnings Tests” studied state universities and the relationship of student loan debt to early-career earnings by program. Overall, Oklahoma’s public institutions rank 9th among the 50 states. The report reviewed a sample of programs at each institution and then determined if they met the rankings of “excellent,” “good,” “mediocre,” “poor,” or “terrible.” The report then ranked the best 50 programs as measured by loan debt to earnings. RUSO programs among the top 50 include:

Chart 9. Top Debt-to-Earnings Programs

Institution	Program	Earnings	Debt	Debt Percent of Earnings
13. SWOSU	Nursing - bachelors	\$62,479	\$14,359	23.0%
14. NSU	Nursing - bachelors	\$69,338	\$16,548	23.9%
22. UCO	Business Admin - master’s	\$67,324	\$18,250	27.1%
28. NWOSU	Nursing - bachelor’s	\$56,505	\$16,524	29.2%
29. SWOSU	Educational Admin - master’s	\$52,464	\$15,374	29.3%
33. NSU	Computer Science - bachelor’s	\$60,298	\$18,134	30.1%
41. UCO	Nursing - bachelor’s	\$61,192	\$20,000	32.7%

Source: OCPAThink: “Mixed Returns, 2021”

	Programs reviewed	Programs assessed as “excellent”
ECU	10	7
NSU	28	22
NWOSU	6	6
SEOSU	5	3
SWOSU	5	5
UCO	39	22

Return on Investment

[Georgetown University ranks all 4,500 post-secondary institutions](#) in terms of 40-year return on investment. The study calculated the total investment in an institution, average annual net price, debt calculations, and 10- and 40-year returns by average earnings of graduates. For Oklahoma, the study calculated a ranking of all 92 institutions that offer some type of post-secondary degree, including technology centers. Key findings are that:

- All RUSO institutions placed in the top quartile of the state rankings.
- Each of the six RUSO institutions were ranked higher than any of the other five four-year master’s level public universities.
- The 40-year Net Present Value of RUSO graduates’ earnings is on average \$271,000 higher than technology centers’ graduates’ earnings, even with average debt.

Graduation Rates

6-year graduation rates and persistence

The trend among RUSO institutions is toward a higher graduation rate (Chart 8). This statistic is very difficult to move, and the improvement represents considerable work over time by the institutions. There are no shortcuts, and it is problematic to get empirical data on the causes of the improvement. A university often implements many measures at once on a continuous basis, so it is difficult to know definitively which interventions accounted for the change.

IPEDS Graduation rates do not account for students who begin degrees at one institution and finish at another. Many of our RUSO students complete their first two years at our institutions, never intending to graduate, and transfer to a specialized program at another institution and graduate on time (Chart 9). In IPEDS statistical reports, these students are treated the same as dropouts who never completed their college degrees, even though they are indeed successful.

Chart 10. IPEDS Graduation rates (within 6 years)

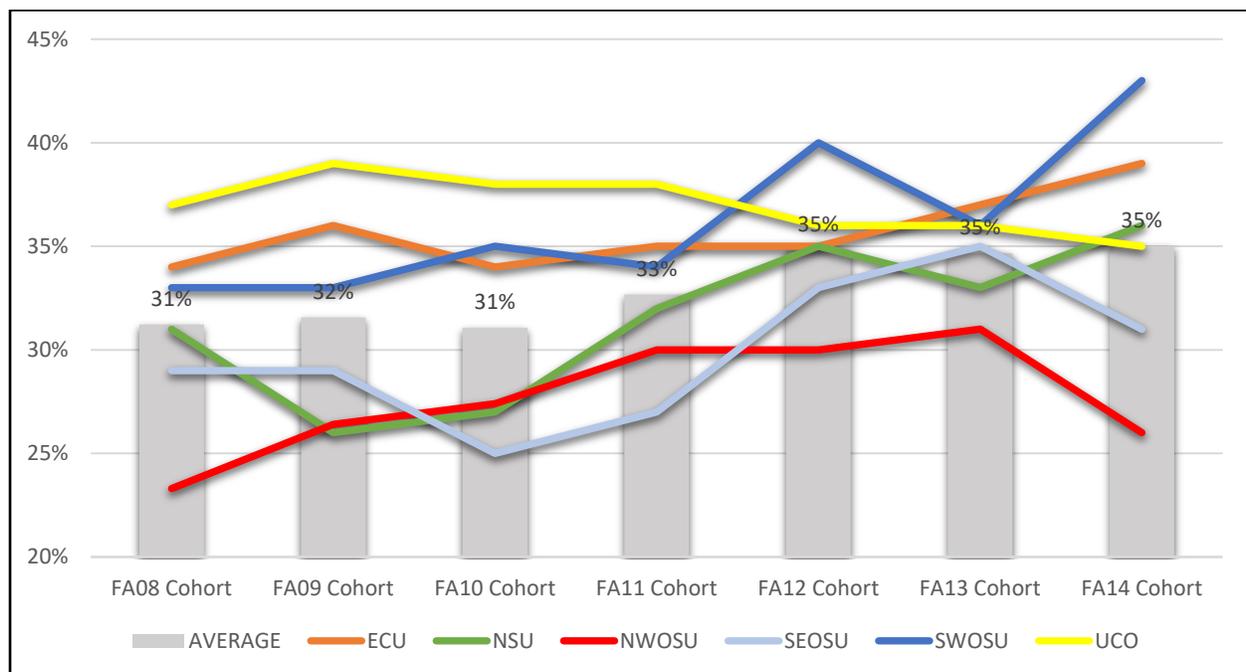
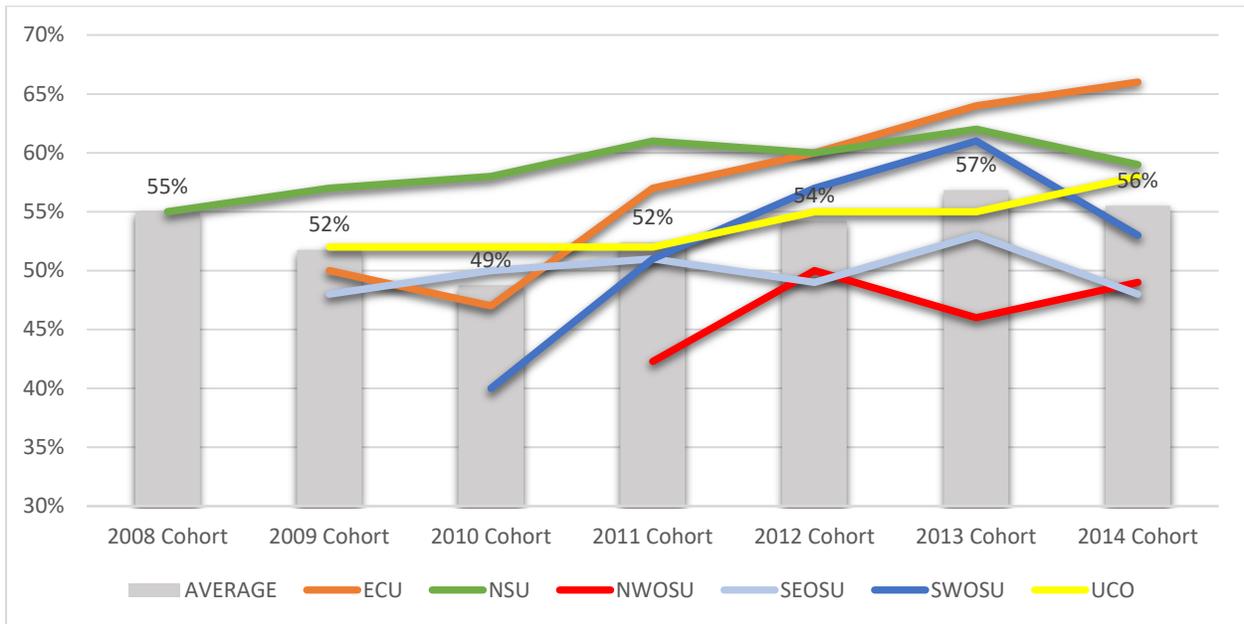
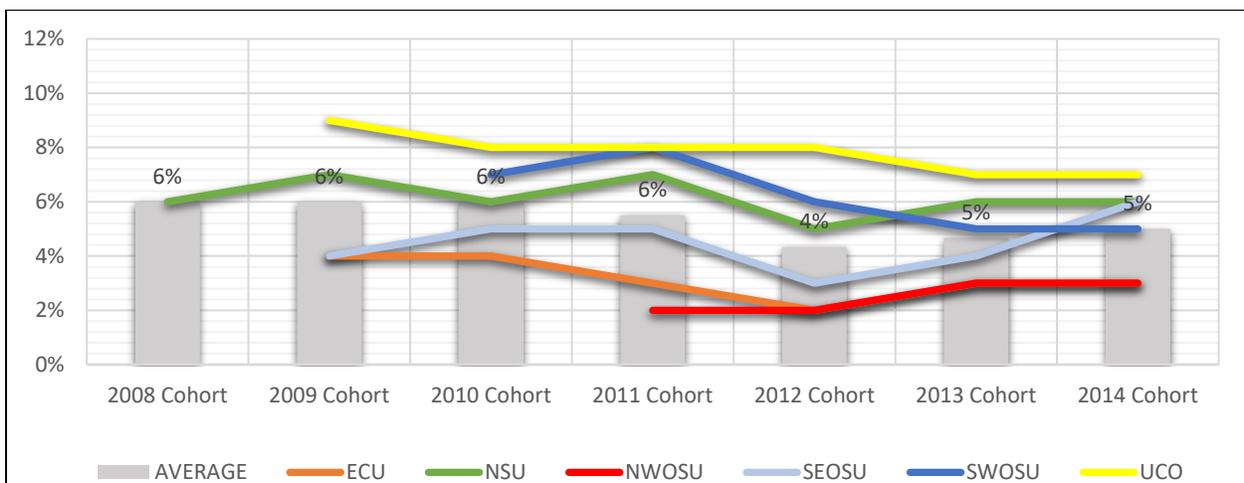


Chart 11. First-time freshmen, transferred and graduated elsewhere in 6 years



Likewise, students who do not complete within six years do not show up as successes in IPEDS data. Many students at RUSO institutions (this chart shows between 2-8 percent of them) work during school, attend part-time, and take longer than 6 years to finish.

Chart 12. First-time freshmen still enrolled after 6 years



Degrees awarded

The numbers of Bachelor's degrees awarded are holding steady on average. Master's degrees are up considerably at most institutions, and especially at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. Certificates also are up.

Chart 13. Bachelor's degree awarded

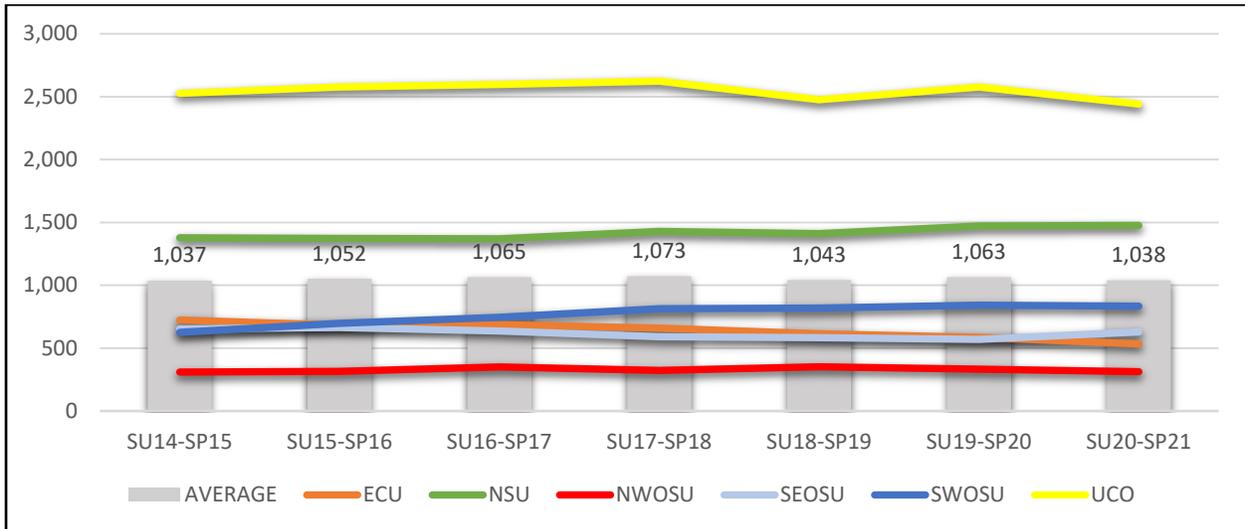


Chart 14. Master's degrees awarded

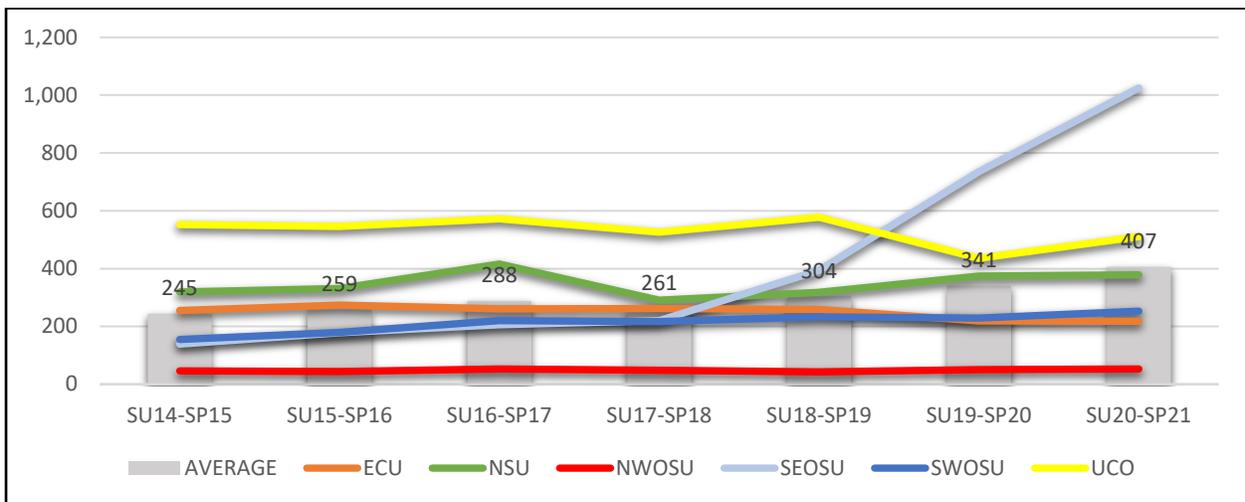
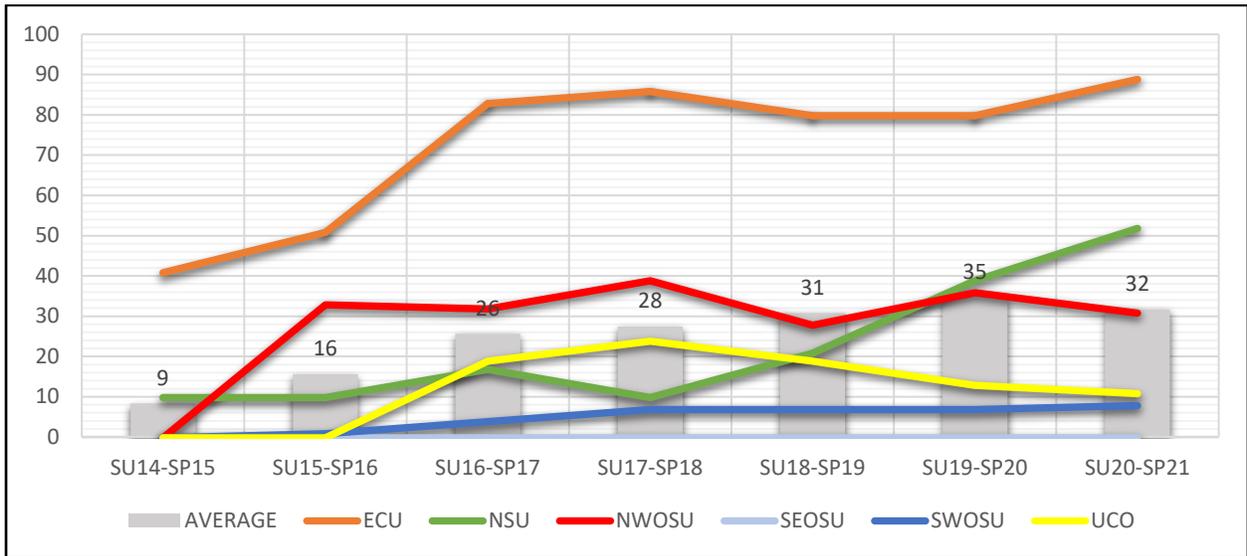


Chart 15. Certificates awarded



General Education Math and English completion

We track enrollment and completion rates in General Education Math and English courses because most students take those courses as freshmen, and data from *Complete College America* indicates that passing Math and English as freshmen is a predictor of enhanced probability of graduation. Because of our investment in the co-requisite model and (in some cases) use of a minimum HS GPA to exempt students from remediation, more students are taking GE Math and English courses, including many who previously would have been placed in developmental courses first. Our current strategy is to enroll most of the deficient students in the GE course along with a required support class. Even though this way of measuring does not show it, we have a higher number of students completing GE Math and English as freshmen than we did previously, which should aid retention.

Chart 16. General Education Math completion rates as a percentage of enrollments

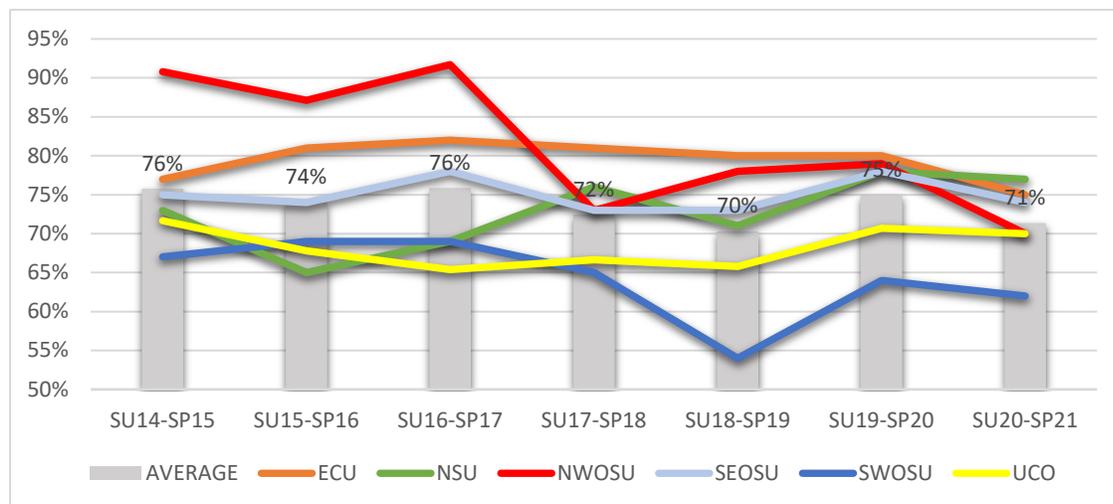


Chart 17. English Composition I completion rates as percentage of enrollments

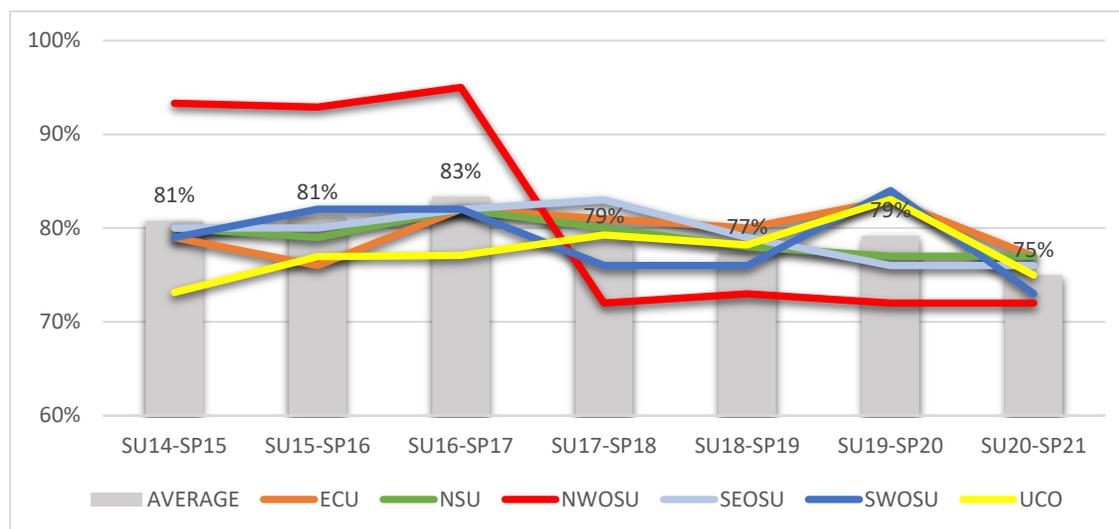


Chart 18. General Education Math completion rates of deficient students as a percentage of enrollments

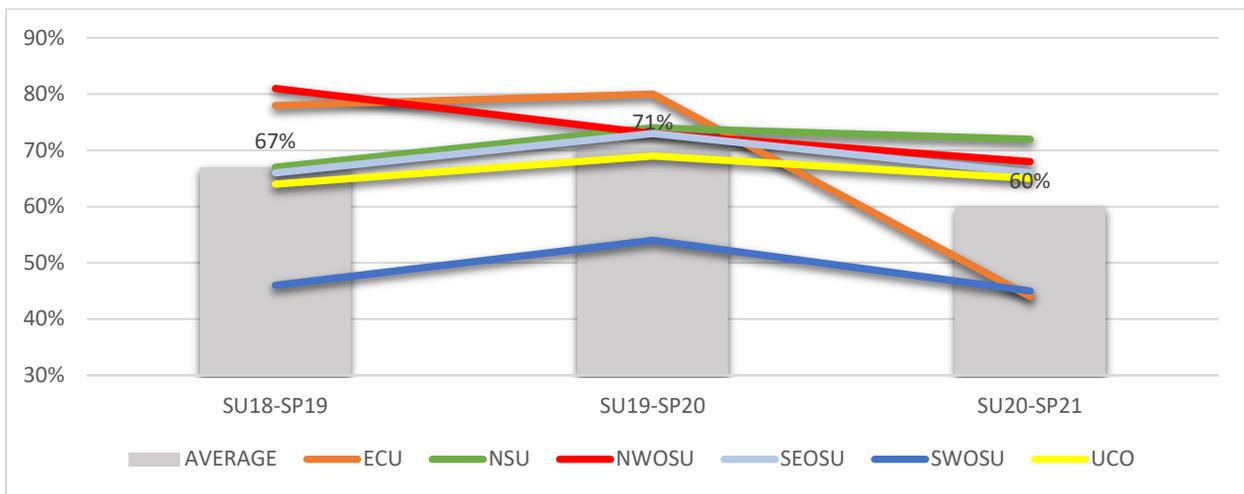
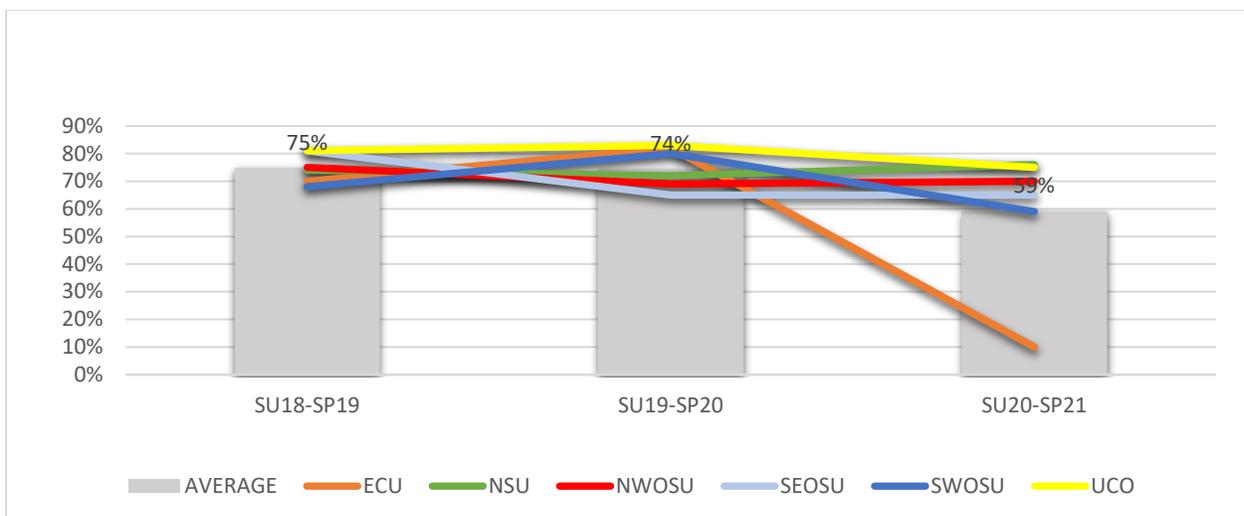


Chart 19. General Education English Composition I completion rates of deficient students as a percentage of enrollments



Concluding Observations

The data sets and their interpretation in this report point to a substantial array of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to RUSO institutions. They are summarized below.

The **STRENGTHS** of the RUSO system are many and profound.

- RUSO universities provide an education at a much lower cost of tuition and fees than do the doctoral institutions.
- Our students are very satisfied with the quality of their education. The overwhelming majority would choose their same institution again to pursue their degree.
- RUSO graduates stay in Oklahoma and work for at least 5 years at a rate that exceeds all other state systems and tiers.
- Our cost in tuition and fees is among the lowest in the central Midwest.
- Our retention rates and graduation rates are on the rise, indicating that we support students to the point that they stay in college and graduate.

Our **WEAKNESSES** include a chronic state funding problem.

- State appropriations to higher education have dropped at an alarming rate in recent years, 25% over the past five years, and at the same time we have been politically unable to raise tuition sufficiently to make up the difference. Because of the population we serve, our institutions are price-sensitive to the ability of our students to pay higher tuition and fees.
- We are beginning to see evidence that the rising cost of tuition at RUSO institutions is a serious barrier to many of our students, even though we are still at or below regional averages for overall tuition and fees.
- Like many universities around the country, we are experiencing a decline in enrollment that is influenced by a myriad of issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We continue to battle high school preparedness for university coursework, especially considering two years of “pandemic” learning. Students are increasingly ill-prepared for the rigors of university coursework. All RUSO institutions have support services for these students (co-requisites, academic support centers, Title III services) but the strain on university faculty and staff to ensure these students’ success is increasing.

We have **OPPORTUNITIES** for increased tuition revenue if we can improve student retention and capture our share of a projected growth in potential students.

- Our institutions have great relationships with area high schools and are working with those schools to expand concurrent offerings.

- Oklahoma is among 26 states that are projected to see an increase in traditional high school graduates between 2017-2028. OSRHE in its analysis offers the increase will be primarily among non-white students. RUSO institutions must closely focus on their recruitment and retention strategies and tactics to attract these new students.

THREATS limit our ability to carry out our mission.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted enrollments. Numerous Oklahomans have experienced layoffs, lost jobs, or other reductions in employment as a result of the pandemic. Because the pandemic is spreading almost unchecked, it remains a large factor in future financial viability of our institutions.
- Both OU and OSU enrolled larger freshman classes the past two years, primarily by slightly lowering admission standards. They are now accepting students who traditionally would have entered a regional university, and many of those students eventually find their way back to RUSO universities as transfer students.
- Future reductions in state appropriations remain a possibility should the United States enter a recession. Past recessions have taught us that a slowdown in the economy overall will result in less demand for energy resources. This volatility of a major revenue source for the state results in budget reductions. A lesson learned from past recessions is that RUSO institutions must be active public policy advocates and entrepreneurs to help diversify Oklahoma's economy.
- The misleading narrative of low graduation rates of regional universities harms us. We must do a better job of telling our story to decision-makers and leaders across Oklahoma of the many students who we graduate but are not counted by IPEDS. This includes hundreds of students each year who begin at OU or OSU and transfer to and complete their educations at a RUSO school.
- Declining ACT scores among Oklahoma high school seniors and the increasing number of students declining to take the ACT present us with remediation challenges.

Recommendations for Action

One specific action that could be taken by the RUSO Board of Regents is to support our universities as they try to meet workforce needs across Oklahoma. Specifically, RUSO institutions are seeking ways to increase graduates in the fields of healthcare and aerospace. However, the lion's share of appropriations earmarked for these fields in 2020-2021 went to OU and OSU. We are working on ways to educate legislatures and the public that RUSO institutions are very capable of meeting those workforce needs. We appreciate the work of regents in facilitating efforts such as the Tinker Air Force tour that open communication and networking possibilities for RUSO institutions and potential employers. We also believe we have an opportunity to strengthen transfer pipelines among RUSO institutions through programs such as pre-professional, masters-level, and doctoral-level programs.

Appendix A: Data Sources

The Benchmark and data sources are as follows:

- **Student Satisfaction:** RUSO institutions graduating senior survey.
- **Enrollment:** OSRHE Unitized Data System.
- **Retention:** OSRHE Unitized Data System.
- **Credit Accumulation:** OSRHE Unitized Data System.
- **Gateway Course Completion:** OSRHE Unitized Data System.
- **Education Programs Offered:** *Institutional data.*
- **Transfer Rate:** OSRHE Unitized Data System.
- **Graduation Rate:** OSRHE Unitized Data System.
- **Program of Study Selection:** Institutional Data Collection.
- **Enrollment by Preparation, Economic Status, Age, Race/Ethnicity:** *OSRHE Unitized Data System.*
- **Progression Performance by Preparation, Economic Status, Age, Race/Ethnicity:** *OSRHE Unitized Data System.*

The financial Benchmarks are as follows. All are the province of the Business Officers for data collection and analysis:

- **Composite Financial Index:** *RUSO Business Officers.*
- **Viability:** RUSO Business Officers.
- **Debt Burden:** RUSO Business Officers.
- **Return on Total Net Assets:** *RUSO Business Officers.*
- **Net Operating Revenues:** RUSO Business Officers.
- **Restricted to unrestricted net assets ratio:** *RUSO Business Officers.*
- Gross tuition contribution ratio and state appropriations contribution ratio:
RUSO Business Officers.