CIR Report

Fiscal Year 2002

A Comparative Analysis of Credit Hour Productivity

Office of Strategic Research and Analysis

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Board of Regents

1932 - 2002
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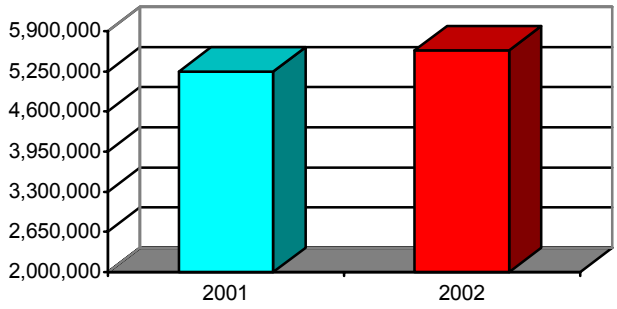
Curriculum Inventory Report
Fiscal Year 2002

Comparative Analysis of Credit Hour Productivity

One-Year Change in Credit Hour Production

The University System's FY2002 total of 5,589,502 semester credit hours represents a 6.6 percent increase or 347,347 more credit hours than in FY2001 (Figure 1). That is over 3 times the growth in credit hour production that occurred the previous year and brings total credit hours generated by the USG to 99.8 percent of the total production in FY 1998.

Figure 1
One-Year Change in Total Semester Credit Hours
FY2001 – FY2002



Change by Instruction Level, Funding Group and Institutional Sector

Figure 2 shows that all three instruction levels increased total credit hours in the last year, at rates ranging from 4.2 percent to 7.1 percent. Upper division courses had the highest one-year growth, 7.1 percent, with the lower division increasing by 6.7 percent and the graduate/professional level by 4.2 percent.

Figure 2
One-Year Change in Credit Hours By Level
FY2001 – FY2002

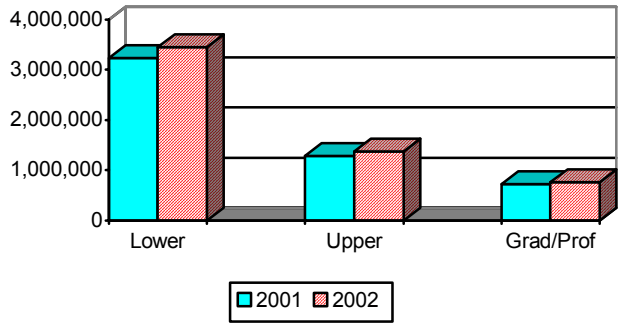


Figure 3 provides one-year comparisons by "funding groups." Funding groups are specific aggregations of disciplines (plus level for Group 5) that are assigned a funding factor or multiplier for formula funding purposes. For example, hours generated in Group 1, e.g., English language and literature/letters, library sciences, psychology, social sciences and history, are funded at the same rate per credit hour, and at a different rate than courses aggregated in other funding groups.

All five funding groups generated more credit hours in FY2002 than in FY 2001. The greatest one-year growth, 7.6 percent, occurred in Group 1. Group 2 (business, communications, education) and Group 3 (biological sciences, computer science, health professions) followed with 6.7 percent and 6.3 percent increases, respectively. Group 5, consisting of the professional level medical disciplines, increased credit hour production by 2.6 percent. Group 4, learning support, which has decreased credit hour production in recent years consistent with strengthened admissions standards and the adoption of degree program credit hour caps, increased its output by 3.4 percent.

Figure 3
One-Year Change in Credit Hours By Funding Group
FY2001 – FY2002

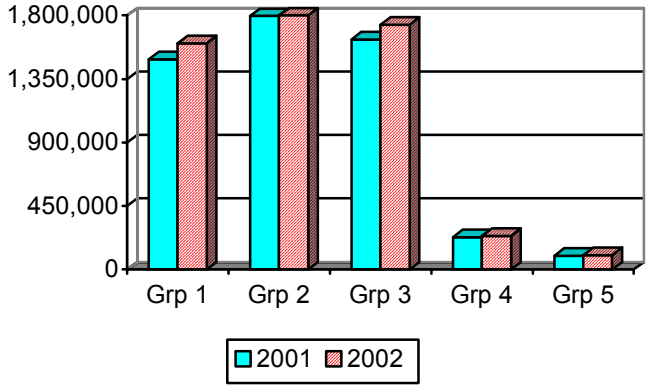
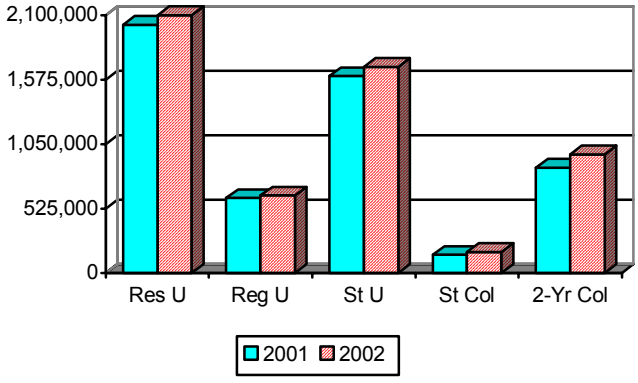


Figure 4 shows that all five institutional sectors increased their total credit hour production in the last year. The smallest institutional sector in credit hour production, state colleges, had the highest percentage increase, 16 percent. The range among the other four sectors was from +3.3 percent for regional universities to +12.7 percent for two-year colleges.

Figure 4
One-Year Change in Credit Hours By Sector
FY2001 – FY2002



Credit Hour Proportion by Level, Sector and Group

The proportions of total credit hours generated by level and institutional sector, illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, have remained stable over the last several years.

Figure 5
Credit Hour Proportion By Level
FY2002

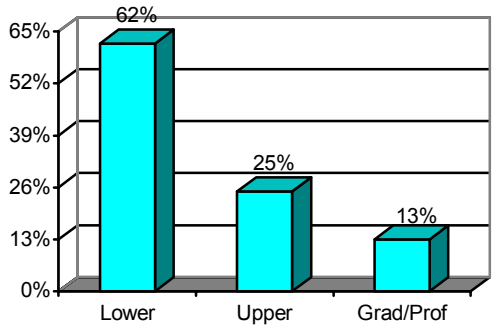
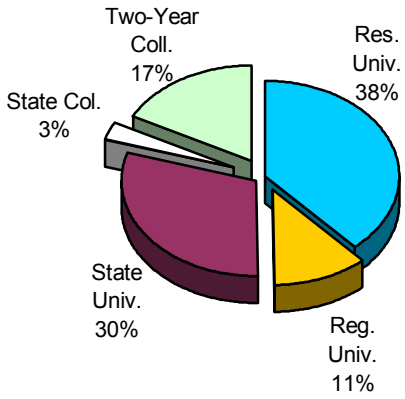
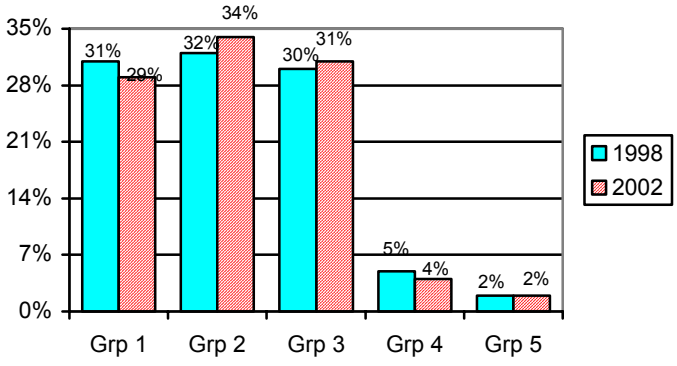


Figure 6
Credit Hour Proportion By Sector
FY2002



However, there has been a shift in credit hour production among funding groups from FY1998 to FY2002, as illustrated in Figure 7. The FY2002 percentage of credit hours produced by Group 1 (letters, social sciences) has decreased, while the Group 2 (business, communications, education) and Group 3 (biological sciences, computer science, health professions) proportions have increased compared to FY1998. This shift reflects changes in student choice of courses and majors during this period.

Figure 7
Credit Hour Proportion By Funding Group
FY1998 and FY2002



Four-Year Trends in Credit Hour Production

In Fall 1998 (FY1999) the University System of Georgia implemented an academic schedule based on semesters rather than quarters. That change is referred to as "semester conversion." One impact of the conversion from quarters to semesters was a decline in credit hour production from the last fiscal year under the quarter system, FY1998, to the first fiscal year of the semester system, FY1999.

Among the factors to which that transitional decline has been attributed are: a decrease in the average student course load in reaction to the longer, 15-week term; a marginal loss of credit hours due to the change in number and credit content of courses under the new system; the 120 semester credit hour cap on all but a few bachelor's degrees. Of these three, the only permanent change is the credit hour cap.

Therefore, the first three fiscal years of the semester system have been a period of adjustment. In addition to growing faculty and student experience with the semester system, that period also saw increasing improvement in the preparedness of entering students, changes in the economy and the job market, and efforts by institutional and System personnel to facilitate the transition.

As a result, the USG has returned to its former level of credit hour productivity and surpassed its pre-semester credit hour based formula funding level by $37.2 million in this relatively brief period of time. The increase in formula funding is the result of shifts in course-taking patterns, and thus in the distribution of credit hours among the funding groups.

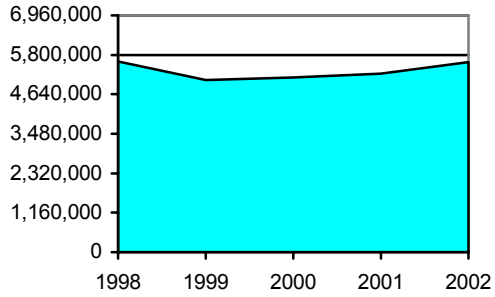
The following analysis explores the details of the University System's credit hour productivity in FY2002 in relation to preceding fiscal years.

Total Credit Hours

The growth in credit hour production in the last year represents the full recovery of the University System from the temporary lag that accompanied semester conversion and the establishment of a cap on hours required for degrees. The next series of graphs analyzes the five-year trends in credit hour production from the last fiscal year under the quarter system to FY 2002.

Figure 8 shows the overall 10 percent drop from FY1998 to FY1999 as well as the steady growth in SCH production from that point to the present. In the last three years, the USG credit hour total has grown by 534,026 SCH to 99.83 percent of the FY 1998 total. The fact that the annual rate of growth in credit hours has both increased each year and has exceeded the corresponding enrollment growth indicates that the students are becoming increasingly comfortable with the semester system.

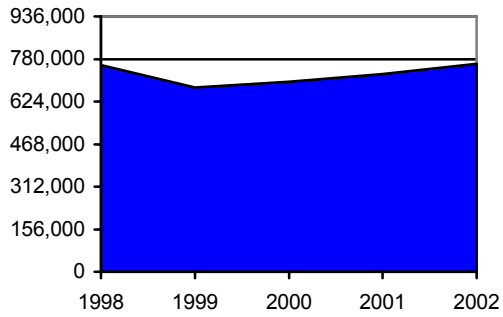
Figure 8
Total Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002



Instruction Level

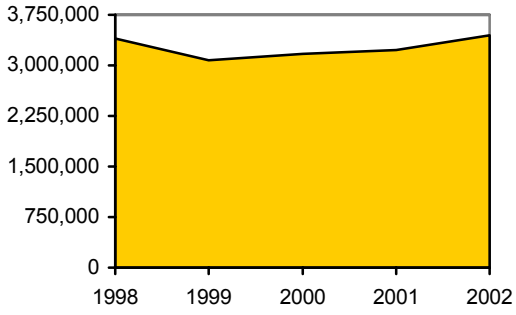
The four-year trends in credit hour production by level of instruction can be seen in the graphs below and on the next page. Graduate/professional level SCH production, which decreased about 9.5 percent the first year of semester conversion, has steadily increased since then to a FY 2002 level that is approximately 6,000 SCH higher than FY1998.

Figure 9
Graduate/Professional Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002



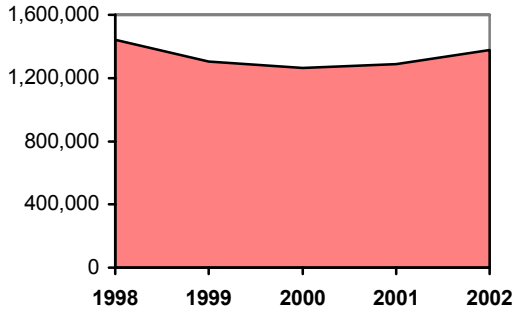
FY 2002 lower level SCH production has also surpassed its FY 1998 level. The FY 2002 lower level total, 3,448,658 SCH, is 217,645 SCH (6.7 percent) higher than last year, and 45,221 (1.3 percent) above the FY 1998 level.

Figure 10
Lower Level Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002



The most recent one-year increase of 7 percent in upper level credit hours was the largest growth among the three instruction levels, but the FY 2002 upper level total stands at 95.4 percent of the FY 1998 level. This lag in upper level SCH production probably reflects the 120 hour cap on credit hours for bachelor's degree programs that was implemented in FY1999. Following that policy change, students do not need as many hours to complete most bachelor's degrees.

Figure 11
Upper Level Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002



Funding Group

The charts below and on the next page show credit hour production for the last five years in the five USG formula funding groups. A condensed key to the fields that comprise each group is provided with each graph.

Despite experiencing the slowest recovery of the five funding groups from its FY 1999 credit hour decrease, Group 1 generated 7.6 percent or 112,668 more credit hours in the last year for a FY 2002 total that is 91 percent of the corresponding FY1998 total. Groups 2 (Figure 13) and Group 3 (Figure 14 on next page) continued their strong growth, each producing over 106 percent of their FY 1998 levels.

Figure 12
Group 1 Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002

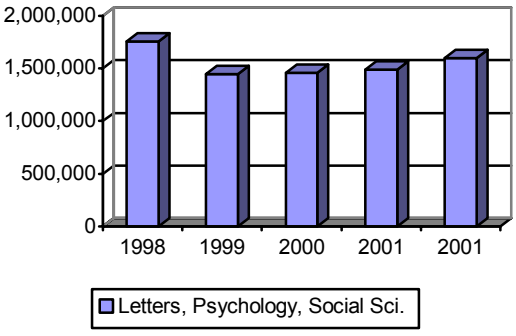


Figure 13
Group 2 Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002

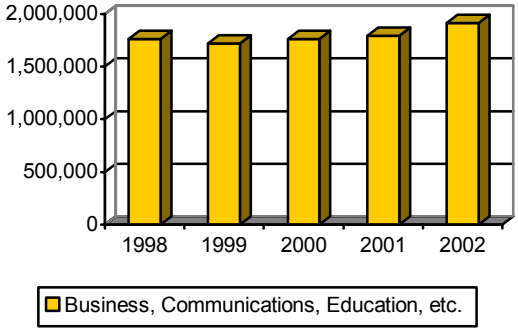
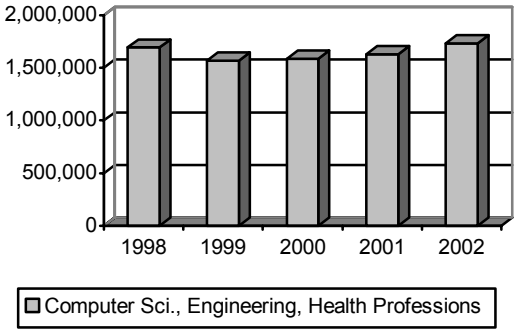


Figure 14
Group 3 Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002



After a sharp decrease in response to USG policy changes, learning support credit hours produced by Group 4 (Figure 15) increased from FY 2001 to FY 2002 by 3.4 percent. This probably reflects growth in the two-year sector, where learning support remains a primary mission. It may also reflect a slight increase in the number of non-traditional students.

Group 5, consisting of professional level medical, dental and veterinary medicine course work, has increased SCH production each of the last four years and produced over 13 percent more credit hours in FY2002 than in FY 1998.

Figure 15
Group 4 Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002

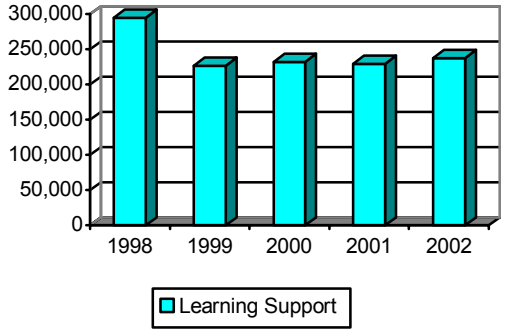
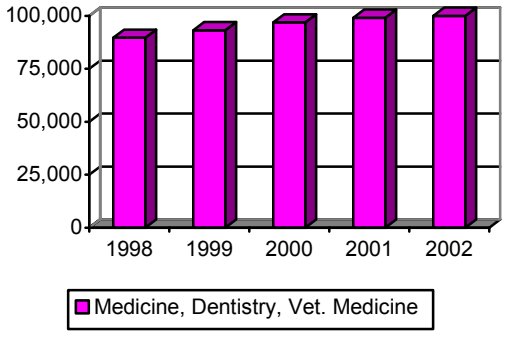


Figure 16
Group 5 Credit Hours
FY1998 – FY2002



Institutional Sector

The comparative change in credit hour production by institutional sector is another indicator of credit hour productivity in the University System. Figures 17 – 20 below and Figure 21 on the following page illustrate those trends.

With a 16 percent increase in credit hour production in the last year, state colleges have surpassed their Fall 1998 credit hour production by over 14 percent. Two-year colleges had the next highest one-year growth rate, 12.7 percent, and as a result generated more than 105 percent of that sector's FY 1998 total. Research universities also increased SCH production in FY 2002 enough to exceed their corresponding FY 1998 level by more than 5 percent.

Figure 17
Research University SCH
FY1998 – FY2002

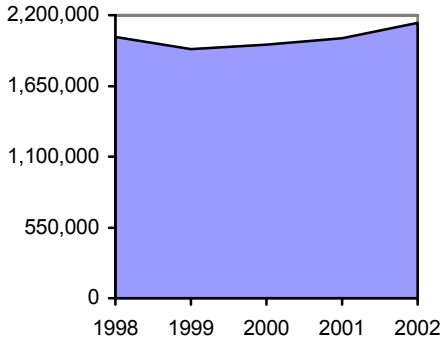


Figure 18
State College SCH
FY1998–FY2002

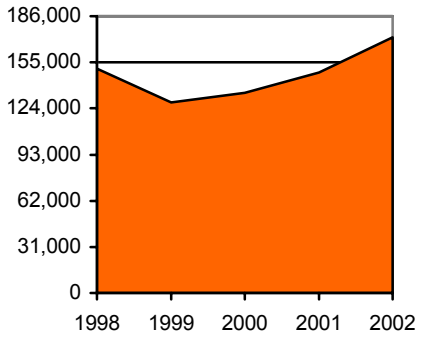
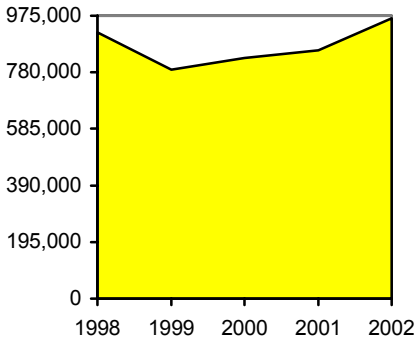


Figure 19
Two-Year College SCH
FY1998 – FY2002



Despite increasing their total credit hours by 4.7 percent in the last year, the hours generated by state universities in FY 2002 were 93 percent of the FY 1998 sector total.

The regional university sector increased credit hour production for the first time since FY1998. Regional universities' one-year gain of 20,773 credit hours brings that sector to 91.3 percent of the corresponding FY 1998 level.

Figure 20
State University SCH
FY1998 – FY2002

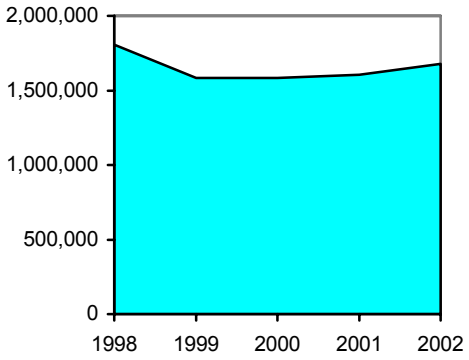
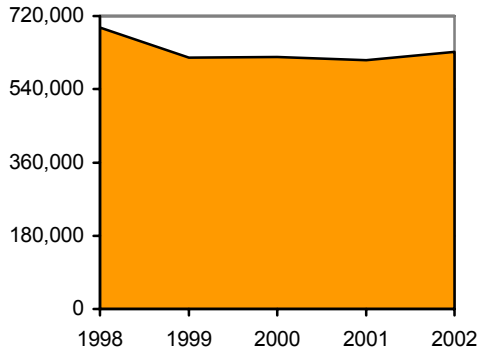


Figure 21
Regional University SCH
FY1998 – FY2002



Summary and Conclusions

Credit hour production in the University System has grown at an increasing annual rate the last four years. That growth reflects the adjustment of the USG and its students to an academic year based on semesters, as well as growth in enrollment. With enrollment anticipated to continue to grow for the next several years, continued growth in total credit hours generated is also expected.