University System of Georgia Strategic Enrollment Plan 2024

Prepared by the Strategic Enrollment Management Executive Working Group in collaboration with Ruffalo Noel-Levitz

July 1, 2024

University System of Georgia Enrollment Trends

The University System of Georgia (USG) is comprised of 26 colleges and universities ranging from access institutions to elite research institutions. The USG's variety of institutions allows it to serve the needs of most Georgians seeking higher education and supports the state's workforce development goals. Through hundreds of academic programs and services, the USG is an important part of advancing many other state goals and is critical in the development of new knowledge for the nation and the world.

Except for two years during the pandemic, the USG has enjoyed enrollment increases in each year of the last ten. In the fall of 2023, the USG experienced record enrollment in both headcount and full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) as well as many categories of enrollment of sub-populations. In that fall, 344,392 students were enrolled—a three percent overall increase from the previous year. Such enrollment increases run positively counter to national trends—more than doubling the overall enrollment increase nationally as reported by the National Student Clearinghouse (1.2%). The overall increase in Georgia (all institutions) puts the state in the top four increases nationally.

Figure 1
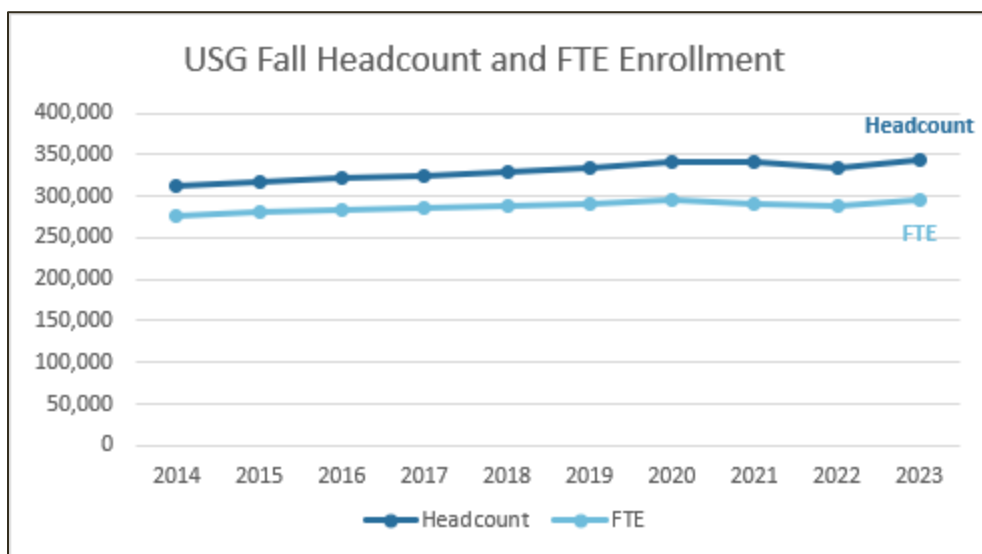
Still, with all this enrollment success, there are important improvements that can be made to continue to serve Georgia and meet our workforce preparation obligations. For this purpose, the University System of Georgia developed this Strategic Enrollment Plan. Although the past trends are important, a strategic enrollment plan looks forward by assessing current practices and evaluating and planning future strategic activities to accomplish the many goals related to enrollment and institutional and system success.

Overarching Strategic Enrollment Plan Justification & Strategy Framework

Rationale for a System-wide Strategic Enrollment Plan

As we emerge from the pandemic, higher education in the United States finds itself in a time of challenge and transition. While there is still significant demand for a residential university experience for 18- to 23-year-olds, the size of that traditional market is shrinking. As the map in Figure 2 shows, in the Southeast, only Florida is projected to have an increase in high school graduates over the next five years. Further, test-optional policies for the direct from high-school population are already influencing students' decisions about whether to migrate out of or stay in state. According to a recent NCES report, Georgia suffers a negative net migration of students even while benefitting from the popular HOPE Scholarship program meant to advantage in-state enrollment (https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/the-where-of-going-to-college-residence-migration-and-fall-enrollment).

Figure 2.

Projected Change in High School Graduates--Public and Non-Public 2023-24 to 2028-29
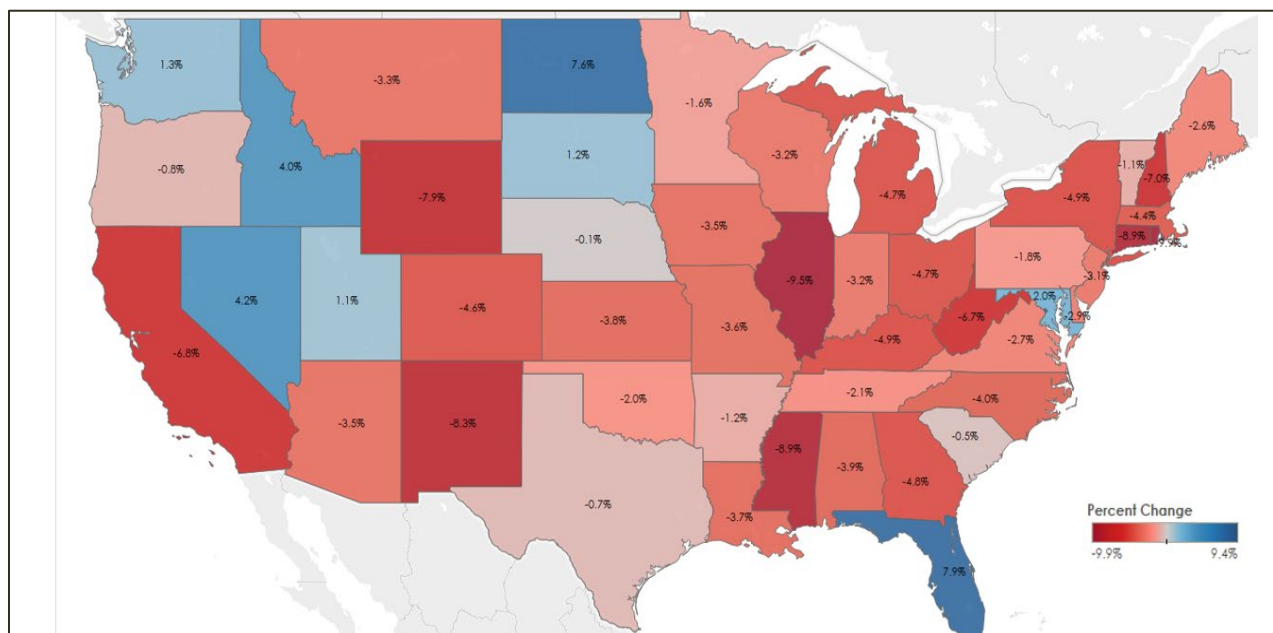
Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*, 2020, www.knocking.wiche.edu

The latest data for Georgia high school projections, see Figure 3 updated by USG Department of Research and Policy Analysis, suggests we will meet our statewide peak in fall 2025 and then begin a decade-long decline of the direct-from-high school market.

Figure 3.

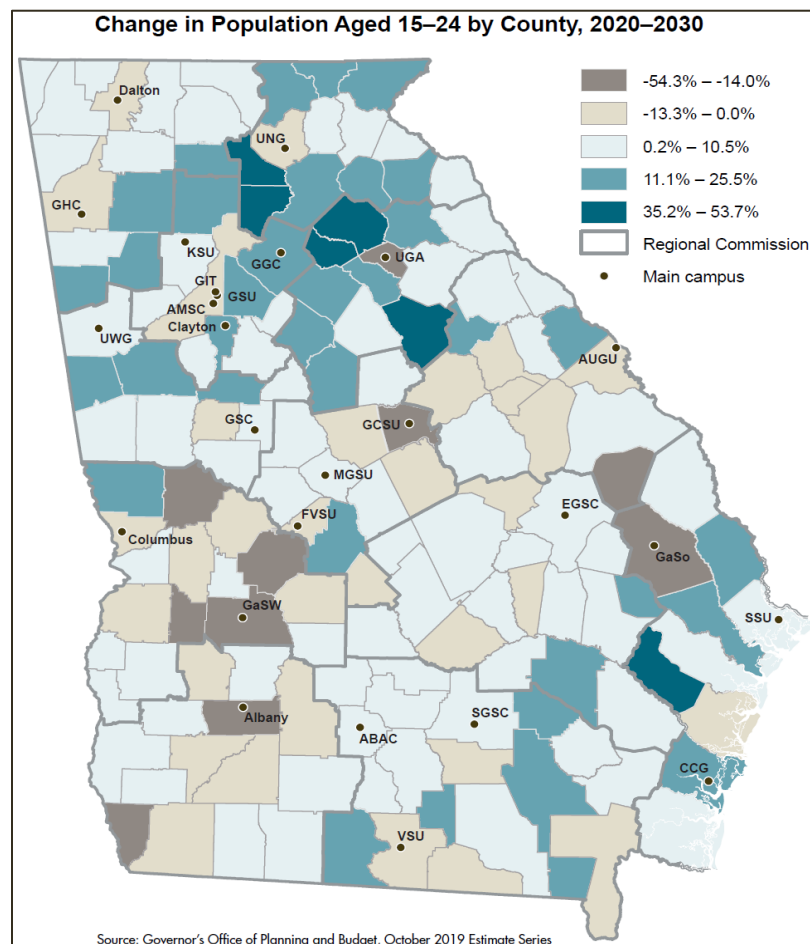Georgia High School Graduate Pipeline
Public HS Graduates
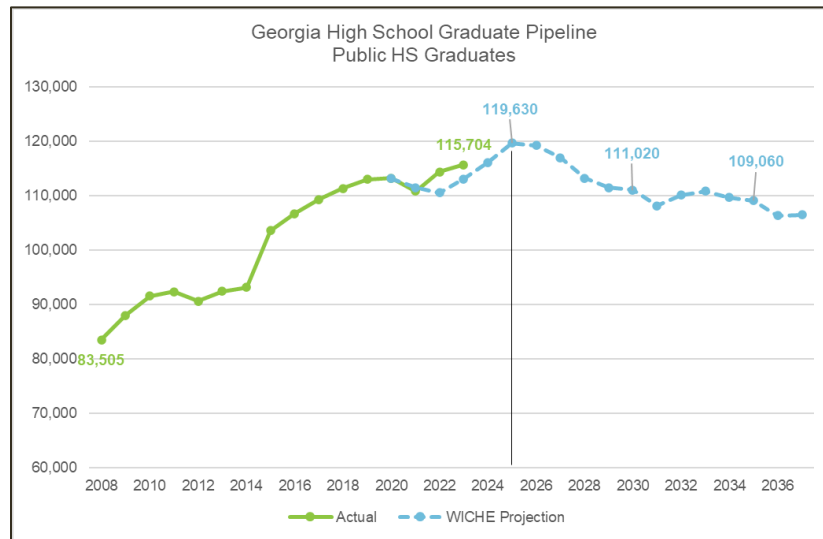
Note: WICHE projections are provided starting in 2020. Actual values for public high school graduates for 2020-2023 with data from Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA)

Within Georgia, we expect significant variation in high school population trends. The map in Figure 4 shows the predicted percent change between 2024 and 2033 of 15- to 25-year-olds by Georgia County, an age range that includes high school seniors. Note that this map is somewhat dated, so does not reflect major business movements in the state since 2020, and so may not account for anticipated in-migration. That said, location has been and will remain a significant factor for individual USG institutions.

Concurrently, as you can see in Figure 5, the number of citizens with some college and no degree is growing. Over 1.38 million Georgians have started, but not completed a college or

Figure 4.

Change in Population Aged 15–24 by County, 2020–2030
Source: Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, October 2019 Estimate Series

university degree while those with only a high school education is higher than the national average. (https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Georgia/Educational-Attainment)

Figure 5.

Further, enrollment patterns are changing. While we have seen modest growth nationally in graduate enrollment, the kinds of credentials that students are seeking are changing, with nationally less interest in degrees, and an increased interest in certificates. Table 1 illustrates the most recent five-year trends in the USG. Note the substantive decline in associate degree enrollment. While all other degree levels show an increase between 2019 and 2023, note that the largest growth

areas (by percent increase) are all shorter-term credentials: advanced certificates (up 102.7%), Education Specialist (up 78.2%), and undergraduate certificates (up 38.1%). Although still a small proportion overall, the number of Nexus degrees is increasing dramatically also. This is a recognized degree specifically designed to meet the needs in high-demand areas. Trends nationally and in Georgia are clearly pointing toward the demand for certificates, credentials, and micro-credentials that can quickly be applied to job placement and workplace advancement.
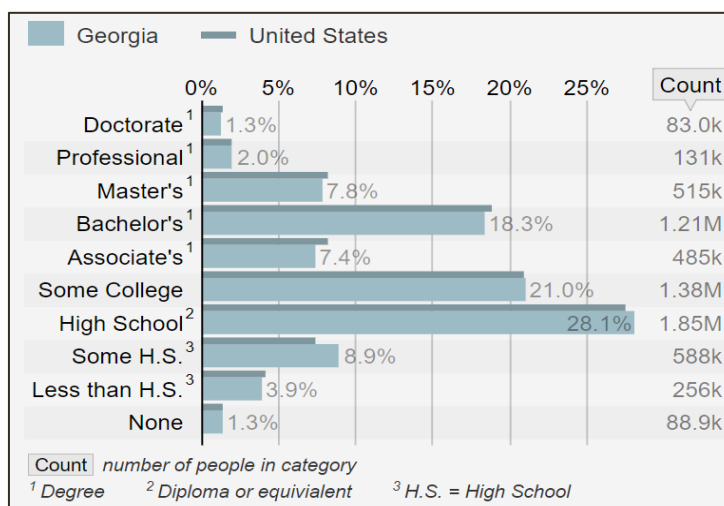
Table 1.

University System of Georgia Enrollment by Degree Level								
Degree Level	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Trend	1-year Change Fall 2022 to Fall 2023	5-year Change Fall 2019 to Fall 2023
Undergraduate Certificate	3,791	4,064	3,988	4,567	5,234		14.6%	38.1%
Nexus	0	0	51	137	225		64.2%	NA
Associate	47,331	42,168	36,429	34,849	34,971		0.4%	-26.1%
Bachelor's	218,429	224,597	224,121	220,498	225,546		2.3%	3.3%
Advanced Certificate	1,431	1,793	1,971	2,247	2,901		29.1%	102.7%
Master's	26,579	28,259	29,733	29,905	31,366		4.9%	18.0%
Education Specialist	2,144	2,450	2,857	2,905	3,821		31.5%	78.2%
Doctorate	11,183	11,355	11,823	11,860	12,266		3.4%	9.7%
First Professional	3,535	3,616	3,712	3,714	3,762		1.3%	6.4%
Total	327,685	335,034	333,912	328,818	339,462		3.2%	3.6%
Notes: The Master's degree numbers above exclude Georgia Tech's online computer science program.								

And as we emerge from the mandatory online learning experience we faced in 2020, we are seeing growth in the demand for online learning opportunities. Certainly, many students were more than ready to return to the classroom, but many also discovered that they preferred the online environment, which gave them more control over how to integrate their educational pathways and programs into their lives and lifestyles. Within the online format we see increased demand for asynchronous instruction (allowing students to learn and work within-term at their own pace), and in terms that are not the traditional 15- or 16-week semester.

It is within this context that the University System of Georgia developed this system-wide strategic enrollment plan. While many of the USG institutions have developed or are developing their own strategic enrollment plans, a college or university plan commonly places the institution in a

competitive position with other system institutions. Most are about growth, and about capturing market share from in-state public and private schools and from regional--or in the case of flagships, national--competitors. A system-level strategic enrollment plan views the system as a whole, not as a cluster of competitors, but as a system that will benefit from collaboration. Whereas an institutional plan would naturally include complex market research and intricate analysis of the efficacy of specific enrollment tactics and actions, a system-level strategic enrollment plan is written at a level to encourage each institution to meet its individual mission and vision and provides an overall vision for the entire system within the emerging enrollment, workforce development trends and population realities. Chancellor Perdue and system leadership have accepted the challenge of thinking and planning strategically to position the system and to support the system colleges and universities to be proactive regarding emerging changes and challenges in higher education. Building an educated citizenry and workforce is essential to feed a strong Georgia economy.

Direct Support of the USG Strategic Plan

This strategic enrollment plan (SEP) is explicitly designed to support the attainment of the USG's overarching strategic plan. The table below illustrates the connection with the USG Strategic Plan. Checkmarks represent the specific areas where the SEP strategy is aligned with the USG Strategic Plan 2029 pillars.

	Strategic Enrollment Plan Strategy	USG Strategic Plan 2029 Pillar			
		Student Success	Responsible Stewardship	Economic Competitiveness	Community Impact
Market Engagement Strategies					
1	K-12 relationship development	✓		✓	✓
2	Dual enrollment programs as pipelines to USG institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	The traditional transfer student	✓		✓	
4	The adult population	✓		✓	✓
5	Out-of-state students		✓	✓	✓
6	Military-connected	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Graduate students	✓		✓	
8	International students	✓	✓	✓	
9	The incarcerated, homeless, and foster populations	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student Success Strategies					
10	Closing retention and completion gaps	✓			✓
11	Attracting and serving the Adult learner	✓		✓	
12	Advising throughout the student engagement stream	✓	✓		
13	Student financial support	✓	✓		
14	Supporting student wellness	✓			

	Market Penetration Strategies				
15	System-level marketing			✓	✓
16	Expanding delivery modalities	✓		✓	
17	Expand coordinated/collaborative services		✓	✓	
	Program Innovation Strategies				
18	Respond to workforce needs and shifting market demands with innovative programs and associated services and supports	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Align innovative programs with market segments, success strategies, and outreach efforts	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Develop industry partnerships with custom courses and credentials	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Close the gap between supply and demand for talent in employment sectors critical to the State's economy	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Deliver programs that are valued by learners and their aspirations – leading to increased retention and completing multiple credentials	✓			✓
23	Develop and measure new metrics for select institutions that reflect a modern knowledge enterprise		✓	✓	
24	Adopt and deploy within and across systems shared data and other assets that when combined with advanced technologies make it possible to deliver personalized learning at scale	✓	✓	✓	

Additionally, the strategy framework described below aligns with key performance indicators (KPIs) and outcomes detailed in the strategic plan:

- System participation of Georgians

- 1-year retention rates (for associate and bachelor's seekers)

- 3-year (for associates) and 6-year (for bachelor's) graduation rates

- Degrees and certificates awarded

- Average loan amount

- Time to degree (associate's and bachelor's)

- Degrees awarded for key employment sectors.

Note that two additional KPIs for the strategic enrollment plan are not on the USG strategic plan dashboard: total enrollment and credits generated.

Tables showing the correspondence between SEP strategy clusters and USG Strategic Plan 2029 KPIs are included in the introduction to each strategy cluster.

The Planning Process

Our process to build the USG strategic enrollment plan was designed to balance timeliness and inclusivity. Entering into a partnership with Ruffalo Noel-Levitz, we built a project executive workgroup that represents all sectors, sought the input of multiple Regent's Advisory Councils (RACs) and University System Office (USO) staff, and engaged with student leaders across USG institutions (see Appendix A for full listing).

The strategic enrollment planning process for the University System of Georgia kicked off in August 2023 with meetings with Chancellor Perdue and the USG Cabinet to frame the project and to identify key outcomes.

Ideal Outcomes

- Achievement of the USG strategic plan metrics (i.e. headcount, retention)

- Elimination or adjustment of policies that create unnecessary barriers that inhibit performance

- Identification of areas of focus to support USG system institutions

- Creation of mechanisms that facilitate institutions learning from each other rather than reinventing the wheel

- Development of a system-wide environment that encourages collaboration and partnership--serving the collective while embracing institutional uniqueness

- Reframing and clarifying the drive for growth and that growth's relationship to allocation of funding

- Providing clarity of direction and vision from the USG while supporting institutional autonomy

The opening event also saw the launch of the Project Executive Workgroup, enrollment leaders from each sector of the system who helped to further frame the objectives and to design the project. Additional focus groups were held with Academic Affairs leadership and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs (EMSA) staff, the Regent's Advisory Committee for Enrollment Management (RACEM), students from USG institutions, and the extended USO staff. The results of those meetings led to the identification of four strategy pillars—market engagement, student success, market penetration, and program innovation—and a set of strategies that would support the system in attaining the broad outcomes of the project.

Following the August launch, three leads were identified from the Project Executive Workgroup to facilitate development of strategy action plans within each strategic pillar. That work was reviewed during working sessions at the USG offices in October 2023, and resulted in the strategies detailed below. A fourth pillar was identified in the subsequent work and signifies the emerging understanding of how our future success is not only contingent on the USG being the best at what we currently do, but also forging ahead of and inventing best practices in our innovation.

The Strategic Framework

The theoretical framework for our project is based on the Ansoff growth strategy matrix (Figure 6). Based on the intersection of two constructs (markets and programs), an organization can grow by working within four quadrants:

- Market Penetration: attract more students from the markets we already serve to programs we already have;

- Market Development: deliver programs we already have to markets we have not previously served;

- Program Development: deliver new programs to markets we already serve;

- Diversification: deliver new programs to new markets.

Figure 6.

Ansoff, I.: Strategies for Diversification, Harvard Business Review, Vol. 35 Issue 5, Sep-Oct 1957, pp. 113-124

The USG's strategic enrollment plan's four pillars adapts the framework slightly: market engagement (a combination of market development and market penetration), student success (a combination of market penetration and program development), market penetration (market penetration), and program innovation (program development and diversification).

Market engagement

Market engagement strategies focus on the key prospective student populations (markets) that USG institutions must attract and serve for enrollment success. USG institutions are already hard at work reaching and serving these populations, with different institutions focusing in varying degrees on different populations. One objective of our strategic enrollment plan is to learn from high-performing institutions with specific populations and to leverage their methods to improve other USG institutions.

Student success

USG institutions are currently at the leading edge of student success. Through the system-wide Momentum Approach and Complete College Georgia initiative before that, all USG institutions have sophisticated and robust student success plans and have made great progress. However, there is still work to be done at the system level to support the scaling of successful programs and to ensure

that students have every chance at success at a USG institution. It is also vital that the many populations we describe in the Market Engagement pillar find the support they need when they enroll at any USG institution. Part-time, non-traditional students often need different kinds of support compared to full-time residential students. Note that this strategic pillar is less about creating new programs, than it is about scaling what works.

Market penetration

Market penetration strategies generally represent opportunities to improve our performance with the markets we already serve and the programs we already have. It's about improving policies, systems, and processes.

Program innovation

Program innovation strategies respond to workforce needs and shifting market demands with innovative programs and associated services and supports. It will be incumbent on us to align innovative programs with market segments, success strategies, and outreach efforts while still being forward thinking.

Overarching Recommendations and Direction

Although the four pillars incorporate a comprehensive strategy and recommendations listing, there are three overarching recommendations that deserve special mention and attention.

In the broadest sense, the cultural landscape and external environment of Georgia and the nation suggest that now is an important inflection point related to understanding the importance of higher education both as an individual economic benefit and a broader workforce and societal economic development strategy. The University System of Georgia (USG) is uniquely positioned in the state, region, and nation to impact widespread improvement in society and must live into that responsibility. To do so means that we must take control of and impact the greater narrative around the value and purpose of higher education, and to do so unapologetically and professionally. This will impact overall societal understanding of our mission and vision related to the value we bring as a University System and our member institutions.

To accomplish this, it is recommended that the USG develop an overarching marketing strategy that fully embraces our role in the development of an active citizenry and workforce for Georgia. While our institutions have individual marketing and communication efforts for their specific needs, the University System should develop an independent marketing effort that transcends any specific institution and speaks to and promotes not only the University System, but also the greater concepts of the value of higher education and the impact we have on workforce development and economic success of the state. Doing this will require significant resources, but the University System needs to clearly articulate our importance and advance the narrative about the pursuit of higher education and its impact on society.

A second overall recommendation is that the USG should employ technology to assist in every component of strategic enrollment management preparation. This includes currently known technology in programs and services that will enhance productivity and success; but it also means an understanding that we need to always be looking for innovative technologies that may currently be unknown or in development. There is great promise in generative artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies, and the USG needs to continue to be on the leading edge of such tech utilization.

Finally, although not mentioned in each of the strategy pillars below, it is recommended that in each area the USG review, adjust, and improve on related policies to streamline services, reduce cost, reduce redundancy, increase responsiveness, and reduce barriers—all this to impact the student experience directly and positively.

Market Engagement Strategies

The strategies in this pillar describe efforts to attract and serve unique student populations. While specific performance indicators (PIs) are listed with each strategy description, how those PIs roll up to the SEP and USG Strategic Plan 2029 KPIs is illustrated in the Table 2 below.
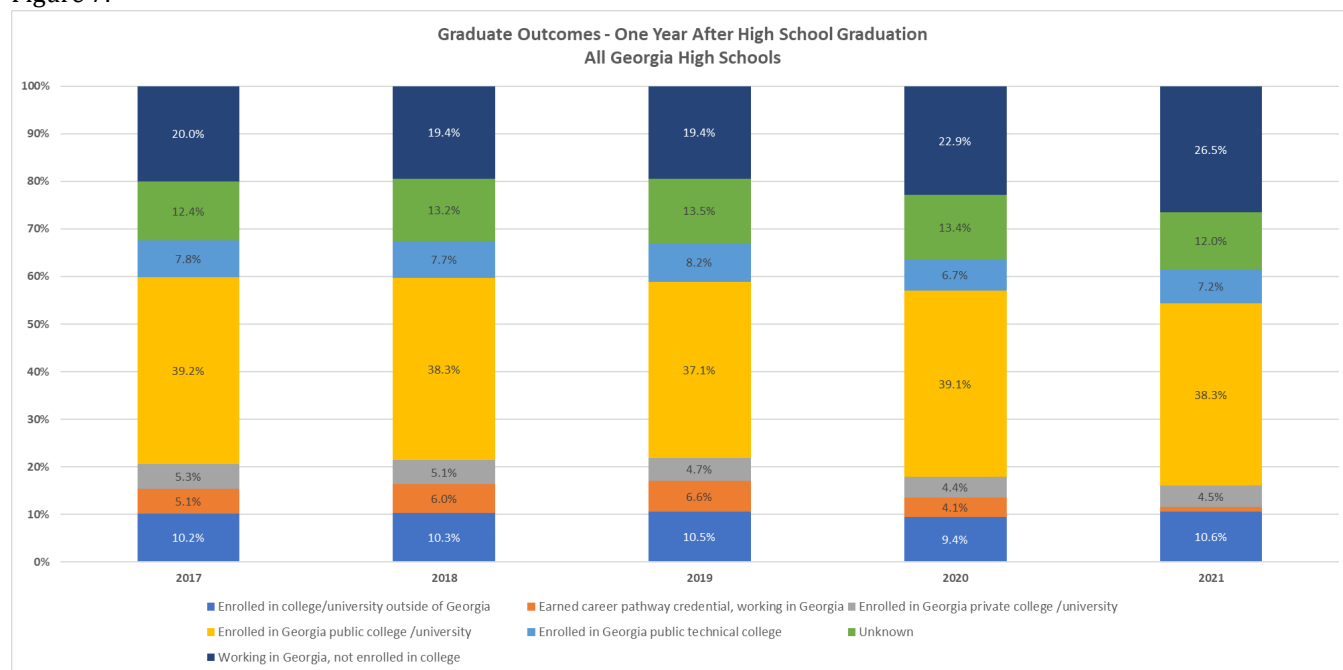
Table 2.

		System participation of Georgians	1-year retention rates	Graduation rates	Degrees and certificates awarded	Average loan amount	Time to degree	Degrees awarded for key sectors	Total enrollment	Credits generated
Market Engagement Strategies										
1	K-12 relationship development	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Dual enrollment programs as pipelines to USG institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	The traditional transfer student	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
4	The adult population	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
5	Out-of-state students				✓			✓	✓	✓
6	Military-connected				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	The incarcerated & foster populations				✓				✓	✓
8	Graduate students	✓			✓				✓	✓
9	International students				✓				✓	✓

1: K-12 relationship development

The number of high school graduates in Georgia is projected to peak with the 2025-26 cohort and then begin a steady decline. It is essential that the USG support its member institutions to strengthen relationships with this core sector. Even if USG institutions maintain market share (the proportion of Georgia high school graduates who enroll at USG institutions), the size of these

entering cohorts will shrink creating enrollment decline. We must adopt a multi-pronged approach to support college going rates. While Georgia's 71.6 percent college going rate is above the national average, 10 states have better rates. Concurrently, we should strive to increase the number and proportion of Georgia high school graduates who stay in state to attend a USG institution. Figure 7 illustrates where Georgia high school graduates are one year after graduation. Note across the years the stability of the number leaving the state (the blue bar at the bottom) and those enrolling in USG institutions (the gold bar). The major shift has been those directly entering the workforce (the navy bar at the top).

Figure 7.

Graduate Outcomes - One Year After High School Graduation
All Georgia High Schools

Legend:
- Enrolled in college/university outside of Georgia
- Earned career pathway credential, working in Georgia
- Enrolled in Georgia private college /university
- Enrolled in Georgia public college /university
- Enrolled in Georgia public technical college
- Unknown
- Working in Georgia, not enrolled in college

Category	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Working in Georgia, not enrolled in college	20.0%	19.4%	19.4%	22.9%	26.5%
Unknown	12.4%	13.2%	13.5%	13.4%	12.0%
Enrolled in Georgia public technical college	7.8%	7.7%	8.2%	6.7%	7.2%
Enrolled in Georgia public college /university	39.2%	38.3%	37.1%	39.1%	38.3%
Enrolled in Georgia private college /university	5.3%	5.1%	4.7%	4.4%	4.5%
Earned career pathway credential, working in Georgia	5.1%	6.0%	6.6%	4.1%	—
Enrolled in college/university outside of Georgia	10.2%	10.3%	10.5%	9.4%	10.6%

Source: https://hsgrad.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/HighSchoolGradOutcomes/HighSchoolGradOutcomes.html

Several barriers currently exist that can be eliminated to assist institutions in attracting and enrolling more direct-from-high school students. For example, currently for admission many USG institutions must recalculate the high school grade point average in relation to the approved Required High School Curriculum (RHSC). The calculation of the admission GPA at each institution can result in slight variations in a student's admission GPA calculation. However, the HOPE GPA calculated by Georgia Student Finance Commission is similar and adequate to make initial admission decisions for most USG institutions. Using the HOPE GPA eliminates the time and effort required for institutions to recalculate the HS GPA and is already delivered to USG institutions, thereby decreasing the time delay for admission and relieving USG institutions of the burden and staff time. Perhaps more importantly, using the HOPE GPA adds consistency and transparency to the admission process. Georgia students can monitor their HOPE GPA through their GAfutures account and can be assured that the same GPA will be considered for admission regardless of the USG institution they are interested in attending.

As mentioned earlier, the USG can also play a role in developing the overall community understanding of the value of education in workforce development and future success of individuals. Currently there is no overarching effort to create a USG System brand or marketing campaign. Engagement with a broader marketing and communication plan, developing better relationships with K-12 partners, and engaging with the home-school community will help USG

institutions by creating a broader community understanding of the value of education and its importance in society. This should lead to a higher number of high school graduates seeking education beyond high school to improve their lives and increase their earning capacity.

Finally, there is an increasing population of home school students in Georgia. The USG has long-held established policies regarding home school student admission, however it is time to review those policies considering the changes in home school student options and the quality of students coming from a home school environment. Additionally, the home school population is a growing population that could benefit from increased awareness of all the opportunities the USG provides.

Objectives

- Increase the direct from high school college-going rate
- Develop system-level and institutional level strategies for the home-school population
- Increase the proportion of Georgia high school graduates who enroll in a USG institution to counter out-of-state migration

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Percent of Georgia's high school graduates attending college in Georgia
- Percentage of home school students attending college in Georgia
- Percent of Georgia high school graduates leaving Georgia for college
- Retention, Progression, Graduation of test optional population

Recommendations

1a Develop and maintain a system-wide marketing campaign focused on the value and benefits of Higher Education, why attend college in Georgia, return on investment, etc.
1b Increase outreach to K-12 constituencies with potential collaboration with other stakeholders and agencies
1c Assess home school population for greater opportunities for enrollment of home school students
1d Implement the HOPE grade point average (GPA) as that used to determine USG admissibility

2: Leverage dual enrollment (DE) programs as pipelines to USG institutions

The USG's data ("Dual Enrollment Digest: Updated January 2023." University System of Georgia, Research & Policy Analysis) makes clear that dual enrollment participation continues to grow, garnering a 23 percent increase from fall 2017 to fall 2021 (Figure 8).
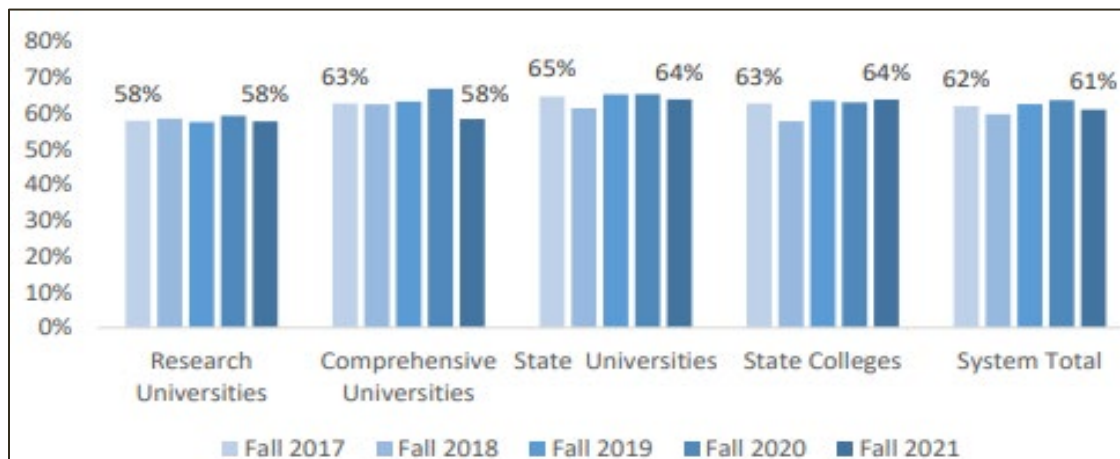
Figure 8.

Number of DE Students Enrolled by Sector
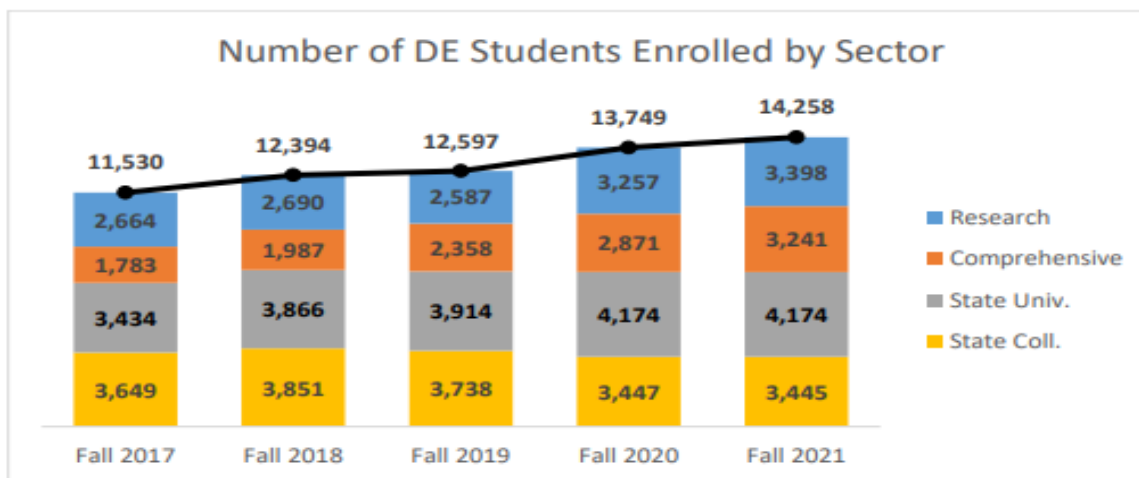
The proportion of DE students matriculating to any USG institution as freshmen over the same period, however, has remained steady, at just over 60 percent (Figure 9).

Figure 9.

*Conversion of Dual Enrollment Students to First-Time Freshmen at any USG Institution by Sector*

The most recent USG dashboard for DE participation shows continued increase in fall 2023 despite the slight dip in 2022 (Figure 10). The high participation rates in DE illustrate the importance of this program and suggests it is a vital area for strategic attention.

It is imperative that the USG continue to support activities that increase DE and to structure our offerings to make the enrollment process more streamlined and efficient. Although there has been both a long history of support of dual enrollment both by individual institutions and at the system level, we need to further develop the effort by having system-level strategic discussions and broad system planning to include the purposes of DE enrollment and the programmatic offerings and pathways that will broaden participation and generate better outcomes. Additionally, particular attention needs to be paid to how the system can further encourage DE students to remain in the system following high school graduation - either at their DE institution or another USG institution.

Figure 10.

USG Overall Headcount for Dual Enrollment
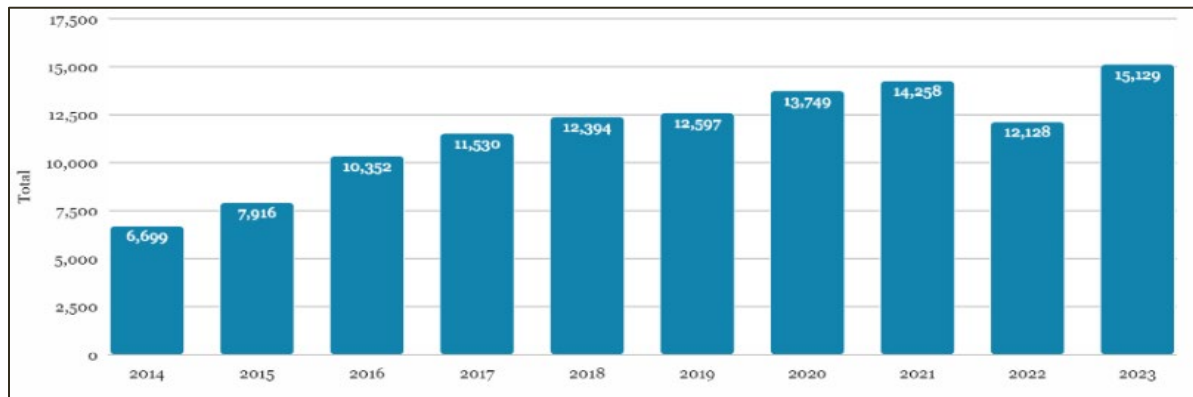
Objective

    – Increase dual-enrollment participation across the state

    – Improve the use of dual-enrollment programs to increase pipelines to USG institutions and develop an understanding of implications for time-to-degree and student pathways

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

    – Enrollment of Georgia HS students in USG sponsored DE programs

    – Number/percentage of Dual Enrollment (DE) participants enrolled at USG institutions as matriculating Freshmen

    – Number/percentage of students who complete DE credits and earn Associates, bachelor's and/or master's degree across all USG institutions

    – Time to degree for students entering a USG institution with DE Credits

Recommendations

2a Enhance Dual Enrollment system-wide assessment and dashboards to identify potential strategic initiatives
2b Create opportunities for broader system-wide interaction on topics surrounding Dual Enrollment and include external agencies, community and business partners, and other constituents
2c Develop system-wide endorsement and marketing of dual enrollment benefits promoting USG institutions
2d Establish clear and purposeful USG pathways to degree completion inclusive of Dual Enrollment
2e Develop strategies to encourage dual enrollment students to remain enrolled in a USG institution following high school graduation

3: The traditional transfer student

In the 2022-2023 academic year, 24,617 students transferred to a USG school -- 10,744 from other USG institutions, 6,608 from in-state non-USG institutions, and 7,265 from out-of-state (USG

[Undergraduate Student Transfer Report 2022-23](#)). A recent [custom 10-year trend report](#) showing only fall first-time transfers shows that new transfers have generally been in decline since the fall of 2014 (17,308 first time transfers) to a low of 14,152 in 2021, with modest increases to 14,493 in 2023. Coupled with the data below related to the adult student strategy, the USG has significant opportunities to facilitate coordination across all colleges and universities in Georgia to streamline transfer and to insure efficient degree completion patterns.

Towards these ends the Transfer Improvement Initiative was developed in 2023 stemming from a President's Workgroup on Transfer developed in Fall 2022. This effort, with more than 100 USG staff and faculty participating, is reviewing policy and procedure, streamlining processes, and employing technology to improve the transfer process between USG institutions and from outside institutions.

Two important areas needing assessment and innovation in the transfer arena include more seamless credit evaluation and articulation and scholarships for transfer students. There are still too many instances of student credit not being accepted by the transfer school and this leads to longer time towards degree and duplicative courses being required. Not only is this wasteful, but it diminishes the student's trust and confidence in the University System and institution.

Inherent in seamless transfer is the need to consider prior learning and ACE credit as accepted forms of proving proficiency and learning. Many times when one institution gives prior learning or ACE credit, a transferring institution must do a new assessment of these credits for their purposes, taking more time and potentially lost credits for the student. A recommendation for more consistent prior learning assessment is in the section for adult students, but it has equal importance in assisting the improvement of transfer student success.

Finally, transfer student success is seldom considered in resource allocation models or even when looking at general student success metrics of retention and graduation. In fact, transfer many times counts against an institution as the acceptable method of assessing retention and graduation include only measuring the rates for students that persist at the same institution. We believe that transfer should be counted as a success even for the sending institution when the student successfully transfers to another institution and progresses at that institution. Such a broadened definition of student success would go a long way towards normalizing transfer and enhancing each institution's position on participating in successful transfer of students.

Performance

- Leverage best practices to grow and serve the transfer student population at USG institutions
- Improve progression and time to degree completion for transfer students
- Streamline policies, processing, and procedures to streamline transfer into USG institutions

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Number of transfer students enrolled at USG institutions
- Number of degrees awarded to students who entered USG institutions as transfers
- Degree completion rates for students who entered USG institutions as transfers
- Average time to degree for students who entered USG institutions as transfers
- Reduction in the number of students transferring out of USG institutions and out of the USG

Recommendations

3a Explore technological solutions and best practices to enhance the transfer process including admission application, transcript processing, and other relevant supports
3b Review transfer policies to remove barriers to transfer and streamline the transfer process assessment of credit acceptance
3c Increase transparency and predictability in the transfer process potentially including a robust technology solution or transfer "portal" for students exploring transfer opportunities
3d Examine credit acceptance in relation to the transfer process to offer the maximum credit towards degree and decrease time to degree
3e Enhance scholarship and grant opportunities for transfer students as part of the recruitment process
3f Consider the positive impact of transfer between USG institutions in any efforts to revise the USG allocation model

4: The adult and non-traditional learner

According to the Statistical Atlas, 21 percent of adults—1.38 million individuals in Georgia—had some college but no degree, a number that exceeds the number of bachelor's degree holders. Facilitating their entry or re-entry into the USG system is not just an enrollment opportunity, but a workforce development need for the state of Georgia.

Adult student enrollment has declined across time from a high of 33,188 students in Fall 2104 to low of 21,376 in Fall 2023 (see Figure 11). More enrollment increases are expected, but there is much to do to prepare institutions to serve and support this population.

Figure 11.
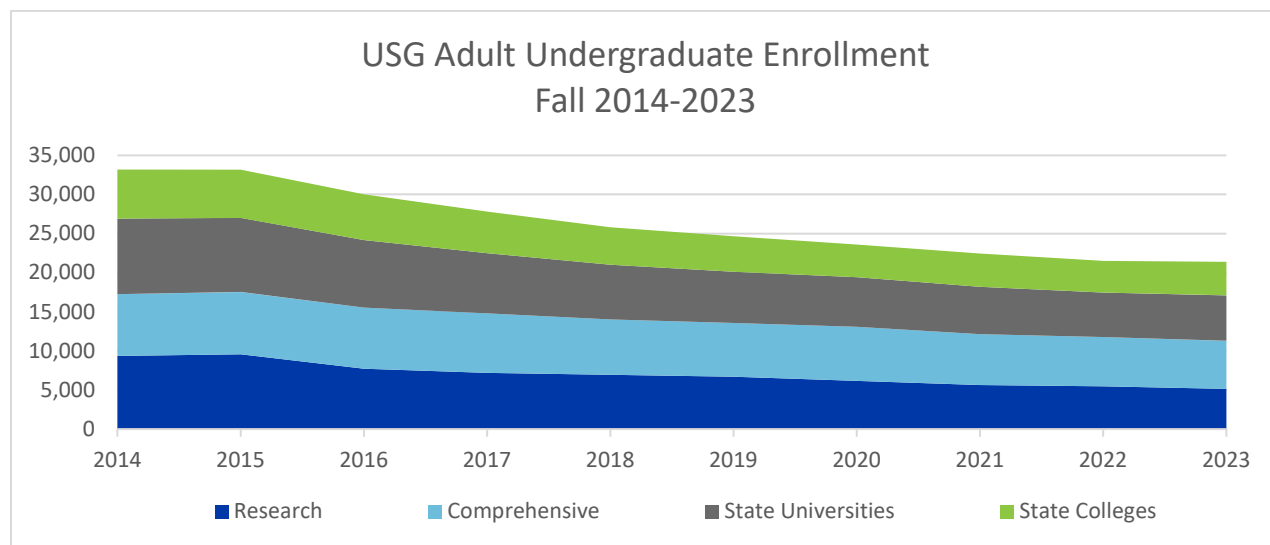
In describing this population, we have chosen to differentiate between adult learners (those entering higher education after age 24) and non-traditional learners (those age 24 or below but with family and life obligations that force them into engagement with higher education that more closely mimics those of adult learners than their traditional direct-from-high school peers).

Regardless of their description, these students seek and need programs, services, and support that is different from the traditional student. However, for the purposes of this section, we will use the term "adult" to refer to both populations.

It is imperative that the USG act now to prepare for the "demographic cliff" that will reduce the number of direct-from-high school students starting in Fall 2026 and continuing through at least 2035. Not only should institutions and the system develop policies, programs, and services to serve the adult student population, there also needs to be an understanding that in just a few short years the population of high school graduates that did not go directly to college will need upskilling and additional training and education to progress into their careers. Today's high employment rate will transition into an educational need for those currently employed also.

Towards this end, the Academic Affairs Division at the University System Office has started an overarching working group to begin to address the complexity surrounding adult recruitment, success programming, learning modalities and methods, and reducing barriers to success. Since our institutions and system office (to some extent) have been focused on traditional students entering and progressing in a traditional linear fashion, the very nature of serving and supporting adults is confusing—with multiple units having some stake in adult student enrollment and success. Academic Affairs, Academic Innovation, Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, and even the Georgia Public Library System have come together to engage in discussions to develop programming that will strengthen efforts towards adult student learning and success.

To serve this population, institutions will need to deploy different practices than those used to support the traditional population. Financial concerns, issues with family obligations and child care, and other life issues often upend the best intentions of adult students to seek higher education. Considerations should be made to counter every barrier experienced by adult students, and institutions should attempt to either support them directly or to work with external partners to encourage enrollment and success.

On the academic front, the USG needs to prioritize development of pathways that enhance adults' ability to both engage with higher education and to benefit from it. Established practices like providing prior learning assessment and creating short-term credential pathways will structure academic programs that are more realistic for adult students. Building on current work to understand how adult students like to learn, we can develop new methods of delivery of programs and services to best meet the needs of this population.

Additionally, many adult students have transfer credit, so they are considered not only as adult students but also as transfers. This is where the Transfer Improvement Initiative and strategies in this plan surrounding transfer students will help streamline transfer and remove barriers while being agnostic to the age of the matriculant.

To address overall enrollment declines in the direct-from-high school population, the University System will need to innovate and improve in the adult student population, and these recommendations will help us to make progress towards that goal.

Objectives

- Enroll more adult students at USG institutions
- Improve outreach to the adult population
- Improving and simplifying the admission and enrollment process for adults
- Enhance alignment between program offerings and local and statewide workforce needs

– Improve all areas of support for the adult population—academic advising, career advising, tutoring, mentoring, daycare, scholarships, financial aid, etc.

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

– Number of new adult students enrolling at USG institutions

– Proportional reduction of adult Georgians with some college and no credential

– Adult market penetration of each USG institution

Recommendations

4a Consider methods to enhance creation of pathways and support services
4b Improve outreach and support for the adult population during the matriculation process
4c Establish generous and transparent methods of granting credit for life and work experience and ensure consistent practices across the USG
4d Develop certifications and short-term credentials, and other positive outcomes of attaining a degree
4e Develop support services to help eliminate barriers to participation in higher education (i.e., childcare, transportation, other needs)
4f Study knowledge, skills, and abilities to determine appropriate delivery structures, and learning expectations to prepare our institutions to better attract and serve the adult population
4g Enhance Adult Learner system-wide assessment and dashboards to identify potential strategic initiatives

5: Out-of-state students

Despite a slight dip in 2022, the USG has seen a steady increase in out-of-state students over the last 10 years (Figure 12). Out-of-state students will be an important population to reach given the projected decline of in-state high school graduates. Out-of-state students also become key members of Georgia's workforce and represent an important revenue stream as they typically pay higher tuition.

Figure 12.

USG Headcount Enrollment for Out-of-State students
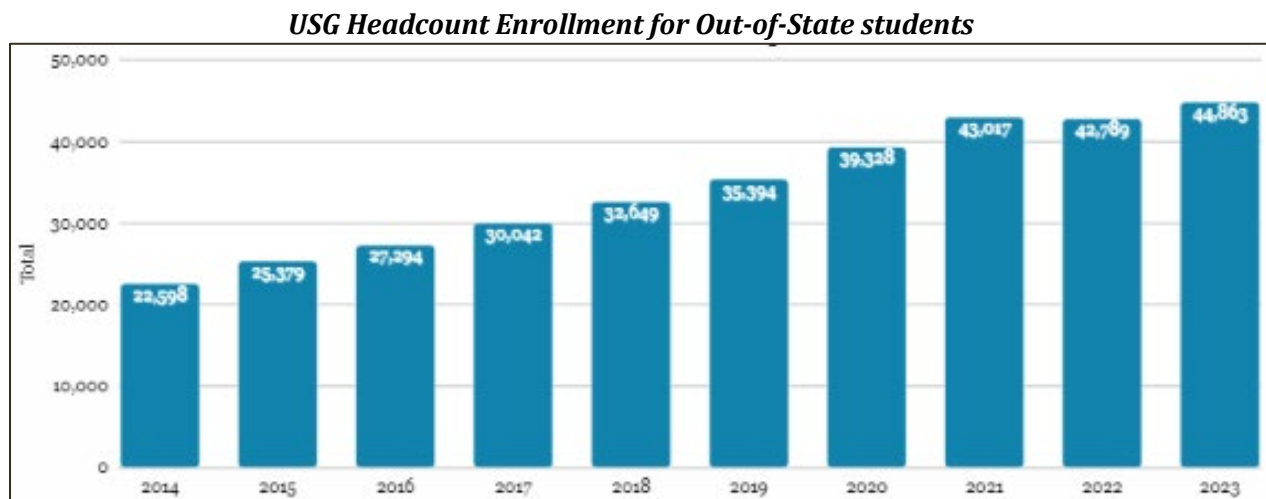
A distinction should be made between general recruitment of out-of-state students and out-of-state recruitment for USG highly selective institutions. USG institutions must consider out-of-state students in support of their individual institutional missions such that out-of-state students do not displace qualified Georgia residents. To the extent that such recruitment strategies as border county and border state waivers encourage enrollment of out-of-state students, it is understood that such waivers attract students that would not otherwise enroll in a USG institution without the waiver.

Opportunities currently exist for border state residents to receive out-of-state tuition waivers creating an excellent chance to increase enrollment at many institutions. However, a review of the effectiveness of the waiver program and additional review of potential discounting and financial aid leveraging options would allow USG institutions to utilize these enrollment tools more effectively.

Similarly, the USG needs to review the barriers that exist to out-of-state students enrolling in USG institutions. For instance, out-of-state students many times will not meet the USG Required High School Curriculum and almost never meet the Georgia History requirements for graduation. Creative options and enhanced programming can reduce these barriers to make enrollment of out-of-state students more streamlined and efficient.

Objectives

- Increase out-of-state enrollment without displacing Georgians
- Assess out-of-state recruitment policies and practices to attract and develop talent in Georgia
- Develop market-based niche academic programs to attract out-of-state students
- Strategically leverage out-of-state tuition waivers to increase out-of-state enrollment at institutions with excess capacity

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Number of out-of-state students enrolled at USG institutions
- Full-pay out-of-state students (not on waiver)

Recommendations

| |
|---|
| 5a Review out-of-state markets for potential recruitment opportunities and coordinate across USG institutions |
| 5b Assess discounting and financial aid leveraging practices outside of border states |
| 5c Examine current out-of-state waivers to assess effectiveness and outcomes |
| 5d Explore alternatives for students, especially out-of-state transfer students, to satisfy the Georgia history and Georgia constitution legislative requirements. Consider a Free-Core class from USG eCore as a potential source of this alternative |
| 5e Evaluate the Required High School Curriculum (RHSC) as an admission requirement to ensure it does not present a barrier to the recruitment of students from states with graduation requirements not fully aligning with the RHSC |

6: Military connected

USG institutions are already embracing and supporting this population, but more can be done. As seen in Figure 13, the military connected population is a substantial enrollment population for the USG.

Figure 13.
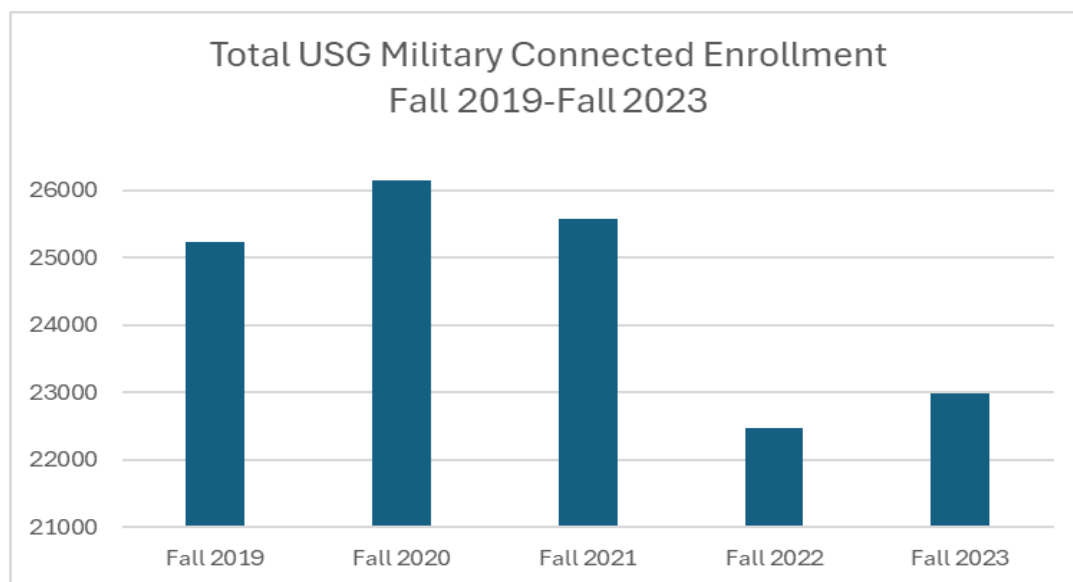
As demonstrated in Figure 14, there are multiple sub-populations included in the military-connected category including Veteran students from multiple federal financial support areas, current active-duty service members, current reserve and National Guard soldiers, and our largest sub-population family members, many of them using educational benefits of a current or former service member. Each population has unique needs and educational goals, and each needs specific programs and services to be successful.

Figure 14.

**MILITARY CONNECTED ENROLLMENT
FALL 2023**
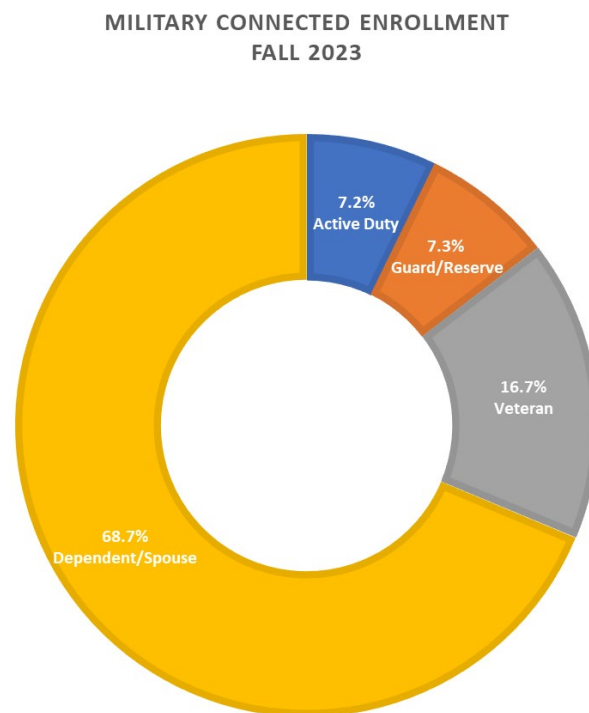
But there are barriers to enrolling active duty and separated military members and military connected students. Despite providing extensive fee waivers in addition to the educational benefits they receive, this population has high sensitivity to educational costs associated with enrollment. However, if the services and programs have high value and seem worth the effort, military connected students will make the investment. Therefore, it is important for us to improve all aspects of the enrollment experience. Recommendations here are meant to simplify the process of applying for college, traversing the pre-enrollment services, transferring credits, and applying educational benefits and financial aid.

Georgia, with multiple military installations and being an excellent state for former service members to live after service, has a tremendous potential for enrolling more military connected students. The USG and most institutions have specific personnel to serve this population and much of their services revolve around the programs and services to support those entering college. More needs to be done to develop recruitment programs designed to attract military connected students including partnership relationships with base career centers and strategies to communicate directly with separating service members.

Objectives

- Increase military-connected enrollment
- Create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for military and military-connected students
- Enhance opportunities for academic success and career progression for military-connected students
- Ensuring USG institutions are positioned as the provider of choice for military and military-connected students

- Developing partnerships with military installations in GA Specifically focusing on workforce needs of separating servicemembers

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Number of military and military connected students

- Number of partnerships and agreements in place with military installations

- Conversion rate (applied to accepted) and Yield rate (accepted to enrolled) for military connected students

- Progression and graduation rates for military connected students

- Time to degree for military connected students

Recommendations

6a Explore opportunities to further simplify and standardize the practices for the award and transfer of credit for military experience and other extra-institutional and prior learning
6b Enhance system-wide assessment and dashboards to identify potential strategic initiatives for military-connected students
6c Maintain and enhance the effort from the System Office to increase strategic partnerships with personnel on military installations and community military related groups
6d Review the Military out-of-state tuition waiver requirements to ensure the waiver facilitates the strategic recruitment of out-of-state military-connected students

7: Graduate students

Graduate enrollment has grown by 78.6 percent in the USG over the last decade, from 37,228 in 2014, to 66,492 in 2023 (Figure 15).

Figure 15.

USG Headcount Enrollment of Graduate Students
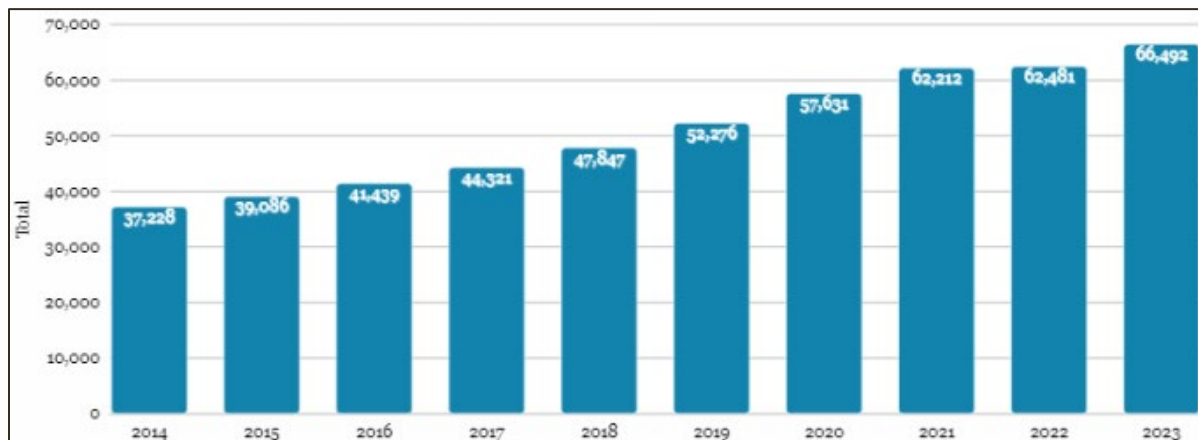
The latest tables from the Digest of Educational Statistics are not as current due to the 2-year lag in IPEDS reporting but do provide a national context: from 2014 to 2021, the USG saw graduate enrollment growth of 67 percent; nationally for the same period, that growth was only 28.6 percent. Clearly USG institutions have been strong performers in growing graduate programs and attracting students to graduate study. Unfortunately, the National Center for Education Statistics

projects a more modest outlook, with only slight increases in graduate enrollment from 2022 to 2028. Given the broad range of graduate program types and graduate learners, the system is in a strong position to support undergraduate to graduate pathways and to coordinate program offerings to maximize system resources.

Graduate enrollment is generally a very diffused effort at USG institutions in that many recruitment and enrollment efforts are completed at the academic college or even the specific academic program level. More efforts need to be made to coordinate enrollment efforts and to streamline communication and support services at the institution level. Such efforts will reduce redundancy and create additional opportunities for cross-recruitment and system level cooperation.

Efficient and effective academic program development at the institution level is key to success in graduate education. Institutions should develop graduate programs that meet established employment needs, meet the state labor needs with high demand programs, and are structured to best fit the needs of students. Except for the Research Sector institutions, new development of graduate programs should be focused on flexible delivery methods including online and asynchronous and should engage students in meaningful experiential learning opportunities. Market forces suggest that entry-level master's programs (3+1 year and 4+1 year programs) are particularly desirable for recruitment of new freshmen because their "guarantee" into a graduate program as long as they meet entry requirements.

Objectives

- Grow graduate enrollment through thoughtful program development related to labor market needs
- Support USG institutions to develop graduate enrollment management plans
- Support USG institutions to develop appropriate technology for recruitment communication and customer relationship management.

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Graduate enrollment growth

Recommendations

7a Expand programs offering a streamlined path to both a bachelor's and master's degree
7b Explore development of additional fully online graduate programs in high-demand areas
7c Consider creating entry-level graduate programs with guaranteed admission when students enter undergraduate—3+2 transfer or 4+1 programs are highly popular
7d Establish a referral process whereas institutions with undergraduate programs in each major, but no graduate program in the same major, will refer their graduates to institutions with a corresponding graduate program
7e Encourage institutions to employ strategic enrollment management for graduate programs including development of a graduate strategic enrollment plan and deploying effective technology for recruitment and customer relationship management

8: International students

Undergraduate international enrollment at USG institutions has been largely flat over the last decade (Figure 16), while international graduate enrollment has grown substantially, up 176 percent (Figure 17).

Figure 16.

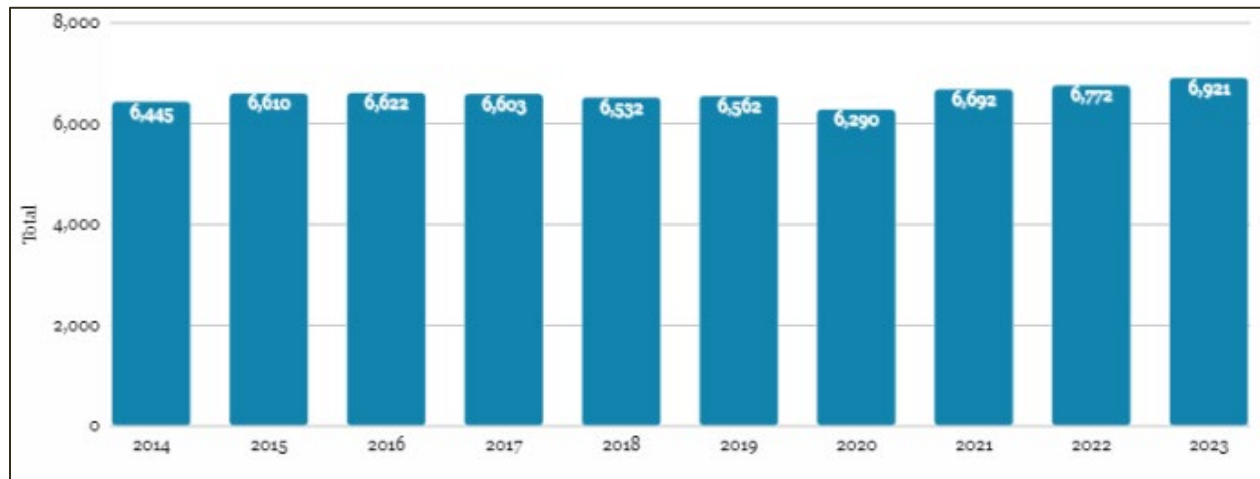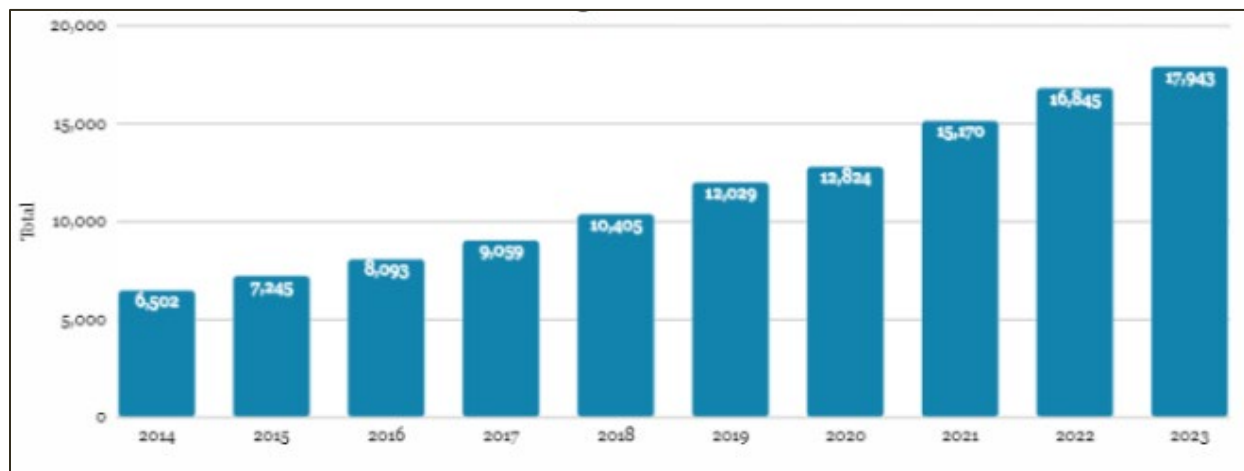**USG Headcount Enrollment of Undergraduate International Students**

Figure 17.

USG Headcount Enrollment of Graduate International Students

In the context of trends reported from the [Council of Graduate Schools](#), growth nationally between 2018 and 2021 was 25 percent for first-time master's and certificate enrollees, yet only a 4 percent increase in first time doctoral students: overall a 20 percent increase in the US in international graduate students. In the same span, the USG saw international graduate enrollment increase 46 percent.

Recruitment and support of all levels of international students is an important diversification strategy and essential to build global awareness and 21st century support for Georgia's growth and workforce development initiatives. Although some of USGs international students may receive waivers, many international students are "full-pay" students—funding the full cost of their education without institution, state, or federal funding. Many that receive funding are on graduate assistantships which require a work commitment to the institution for teaching or research.

As the USG gets closer to the demographic cliff, development of international students will be an important population to offset the decrease in direct-from-high school population. Still, we will

continue to pursue this population only where it makes sense to support enrollment, enhance the institution's mission, and to the extent that it does not restrict access to Georgians.

Objectives

- Increase international enrollment at USG institutions

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- International enrollment at USG institutions

Recommendations

| 8a Explore third-party partnerships to support institutional recruitment efforts |
| 8b Look at insurance clauses and other policies that may limit enrollment of this population |
| 8c Consider working directly with Consulates to develop directed enrollment programs |
| 8d Develop strategies to recruit international students who may transfer from institutions outside the USG |

9: Other Strategic Undergraduate Populations

Foster Children

Georgia has a long history of supporting students who have been served in our foster care system. Still the pipeline into higher education has been difficult to navigate and represents a barrier to individual success. The USG needs to lead our institutions by assessing the needs of this population and considering programs and services that reduce the barriers and create additional opportunities for foster student success.

The Embark program is a notable example of direct service to the foster community encouraging and supporting those aging out of the foster care system. This program's mission is to increase college access and retention for youth who have experienced foster care or homelessness by creating a network of support on campuses across the state. Embark continues to play a critical role by helping students explore their opportunities in the USG, connecting them with vital scholarship and financial support, and guiding them on their path to enrollment. It is important that we continue to foster the connection between the USG institutions and Embark.

Homeless and Home-Insecure
According to the National Center for Homeless Education, during School Year (SY) 2021-22, over 35,000 homeless children and unaccompanied youth attended K-12 Public Schools in Georgia. Many unaccompanied homeless youth have higher education aspirations but find the barriers to enrollment and attendance to be overwhelming. The National Center for Homeless Education provides a better understanding of unaccompanied homeless youth and the educational and other challenges they face. USG institutions should thoughtfully consider and develop strategies and techniques to recruit and enroll students experiencing insecurity as a potential measure to improve lives and provide stability.

Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated population

The USG is mission-bound to support the educational needs of the incarcerated population to support effective re-introduction into Georgia communities, to reduce recidivism, and to foster economic growth for affected families and communities. The timing is right to focus on this population as the US Congress lifted the ban on Pell grants for those in prison in July 2023.

Additionally, to meet the workforce needs of the state, it is imperative for the USG to develop programs and services for the formerly incarcerated potential students. Although there are certain barriers to this population, the attainment of higher education is still important to their personal pursuit of success and our state's workforce development.

Student Success Strategies

The USG and member institutions have a long record of accomplishment of engaging in systematic change to improve student success. Starting in 2011 with the Complete College Georgia initiative and evolving into the Momentum Approach, USG institutions have done excellent work to develop and continuously improve comprehensive campus-level plans to improve retention, progression, and graduation. This system-level methodology is seen as a national best practice in addressing the most difficult metrics to move in college student success. Supporting student success is an especially important part of overall enrollment success, and this strategic enrollment plan relies heavily on the work that has previously been done in the Momentum Approach. With the Momentum foundation already built, this plan seeks to undergird the excellent work already planned and to make recommendations that further that work and make even more impact.

Student success strategies are designed to support students along their academic journey and within their lives. Specific performance indicators (PIs) are listed with each strategy description; how those PIs roll up to SEP and USG Strategic Plan 2029 KPIs is illustrated in the table below.

Table 3.

		System participation of Georgians	1-year retention rates	Graduation rates	Degrees and certificates awarded	Average loan amount	Time to degree	Degrees awarded for key sectors	Total enrollment	Credits generated
Student Success Strategies										
10	Closing retention and completion gaps	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
11	Attracting and serving the adult learner	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

| 12 | Advising throughout the student engagement stream | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 13 | Student financial support | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 14 | Supporting student wellness | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

10: Closing retention and completion gaps

Overall, USG institutions have been working diligently to rebound from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on first to second year retention rates (Figure 19).

Figure 19.
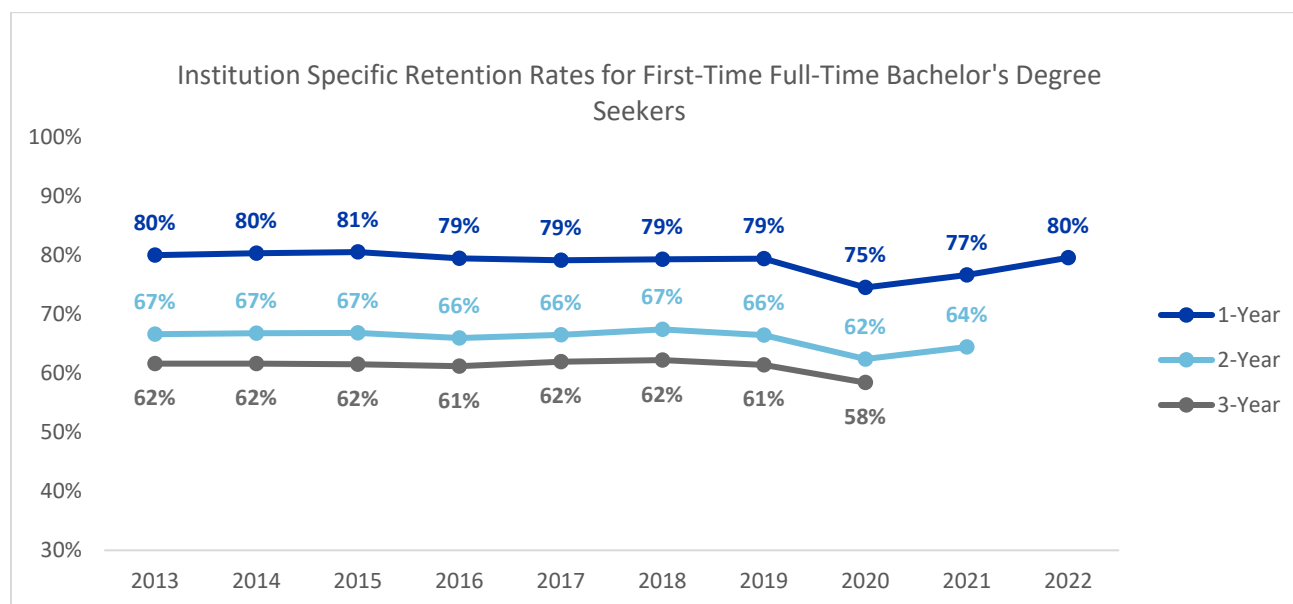
System-wide first to second year retention rates had been hovering between 79 and 81 percent for the seven years leading up to the pandemic; dropped to 75% with the 2020 cohort and recovered to 80% with the 2022 cohort. This was slightly below the national retention rates which hovered near 81% over the same period (NCES Digest of Educational Statistics table 326.3). USG graduation rates (Figure 20) showed slow but steady improvement (6-year rates from 50 percent for the 2010 cohort up to 55 percent for the 2017 cohort). This graduation rate, however, is approximately 5 percentage points behind the national rates (Digest of Educational Statistics table 326.1). This high level, national benchmarking illustrates the importance of keeping student success strategies within the USG strategic enrollment plan. In contrast, the USG 4-year graduation rate has improved dramatically in this same 10-year period, having come from a very low 25 percent to a peak of 37 percent for the 2018 cohort and dipping slightly to 36 percent for the 2019 cohort. This nine-percentage point change is due to the extensive work done through institutional efforts reflecting the work of the Momentum Approach.

Figure 20.

Institution Specific Graduation Rates for First-Time Full-Time Bachelor's Degree Seekers
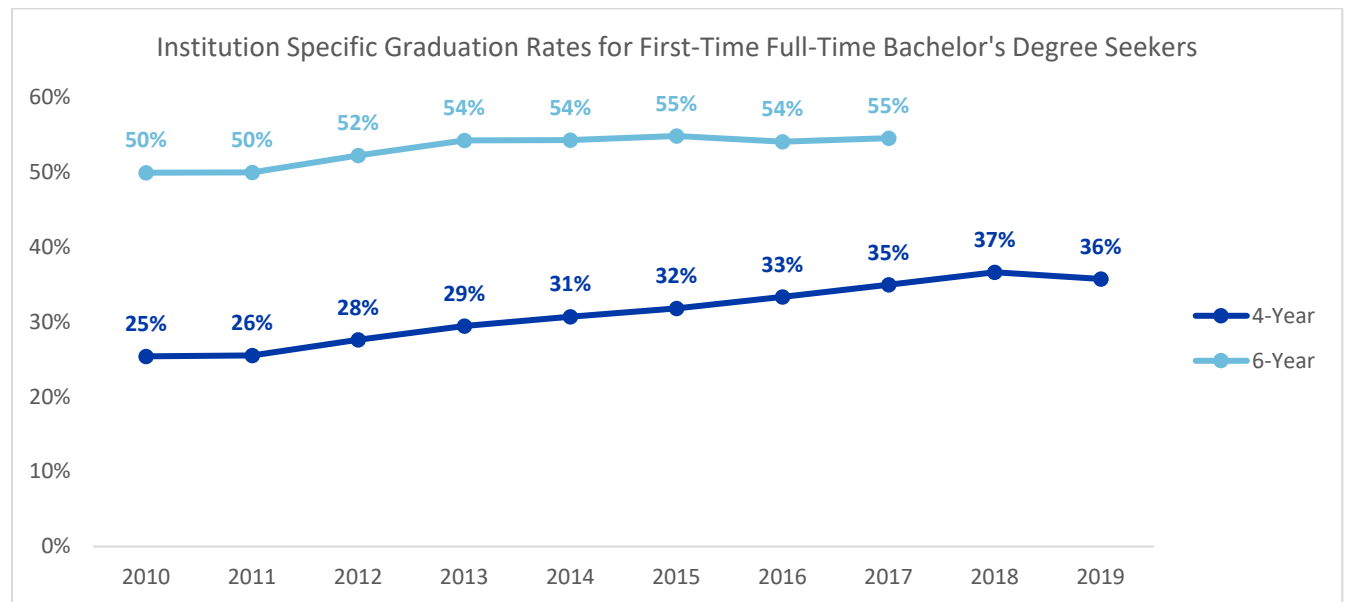
Much work has been done both at the System and institutional levels through the Momentum Approach and multiple student success initiatives. Still, other efforts should accompany those already completed. Building on the success of the nationally recognized student success initiatives at Georgia State University, the USG should engage with the National Institute of Student Success (NISS) to help all institutions employ the best practices so important to increasing retention and graduation rates of all student populations. Additionally, institutions should deploy technology to assist in these efforts, including both assessment tools like data dashboards which measure important metrics as well as advising, early alert, and learning management systems that directly support the student within the student success advising and support structure. Finally, as is the case in several sections of this strategic enrollment plan, it is important to develop effective teaching and learning methods that assist students to be more successful, get better grades, and maintain their academic effectiveness to remain enrolled and graduate.

This strategy will work to allow all USG institutions to support all student populations at peak levels using NISS, other existing initiatives, and the momentum approach.

Objectives

- Close retention gaps
- Provide targeted services, interventions, and programs to bolster student outcomes and sense of belonging

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- 1-Year retention rates for Associate and Bachelor degree seeking students
- Graduation rates
- Year to year progression rates, overall and for sub-populations (Pell-eligible, Hope, Race/ethnicity, First-gen, rural)

10a Adopt the National Institute for Student Success (NISS) methodology for overall student success
10b Encourage and support institutions using best practices in student success as communicated in the Momentum Approach initiative including, meta majors, peer mentoring, interventional advising, early grading and feedback, co-requisite course development, wrap-around student support services, supplemental instruction, tutoring, course learning assistants, and summer bridge programming
10c Assessment of current and development of further technology to enhance and improve student support, early alert, and student communication
10d Further develop student success assessment methods and creation of data dashboards to monitor important metrics
10e Monitor the development and adherence to the campus Momentum Approach plans with specific feedback from USO and peer colleagues
10f Create additional opportunities for faculty development for engaging pedagogy, timely feedback, and learning modalities

11: Serving the adult learner

While strategy four identifies the adult student as a target market to expand engagement with a focus on adult students with some college and no degree, USG data over the past decades shows a gradual decline from a high of 1,244 new first-time adult students in fall 2014 to just 689 in fall 2022, though a rebound in fall 2023 to 875 students. Strategy eleven provides a focus on attracting this important population and layers in the support needed to serve this population once they matriculate.

As a reminder, here we are talking about undergraduate students who at the time of matriculation, or any time during their enrollment, are at the age of 25 or greater. This definition has limitations and leaves out students who seem "traditional" in age but have life circumstances that make them more likely to experience college more like those that are older. Institutions are encouraged to understand this population and to provide programs and services that serve this "non-traditional-traditional age" student in ways that help them succeed. Graduate students are not included because their life situation and supports tend to be more evolved; however, this population of students also still needs programs and services to help them succeed.

Many adult students will not even begin the pursuit of higher education until they know and understand how it will impact their lives—both in terms of outcomes and in practical terms of lifestyle and impact to their family dynamics. For this reason, it is imperative that institutions define what role they will play in the development of adult educational opportunities on their campus, and then invest in developing the appropriate programs and services to support it. Such programs and services need to be built before attempting to attract adult students as they will need to see the entire vision and be confident that the institution will come through on their promises. Otherwise, the risk is too great, and they will abandon this path for one with fewer barriers—even if it does cost more.

There are multiple accepted best practices that assist institutions in attracting, enrolling, supporting, and graduating adult students. Adult students are very concerned about how engaging with enrollment will impact their lives, and therefore it is important to address the potential barriers. The recommendations below reflect potential practices that will reduce the barriers for

adult recruitment and enrollment. Specifically, institutions should develop strategies and techniques to reduce the amount of time it takes to attain a credential and degree, to create opportunities to meet the learning needs and modalities expected by adult students, and to employ accepted practices in consideration of providing credit for life and prior professional experience (prior learning assessment). Employing these and other creative options will reduce the time to degree and provide flexible programmatic options that enhance the ability for adults to engage in meaningful learning experiences leading to workforce development.

Objectives

- Understand adult expectations of service, support, learning modality, term structure, and ancillary services (childcare, etc.)

- Attract and serve the adult learner, to include services and programs aligned with the needs of this population

- Clear policies that address unnecessary barriers or procedures designed around the traditional student but not appropriate for the non-traditional.

- Robust PLA/ACE/Credit for prior learning and generous transfer credit acceptance policies.

- Re-recruiting and supporting students who have left a USG school before completing a degree.

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Enrollment headcount and SCH created by nontraditional students

Recommendations

11a Consider flexible semester start and end times, scheduling of course times, and other best practices for adult success.
11b Assess adult student expectations for co-curricular engagement and academic high impact practices (internships, study abroad, etc.)
11c Continue to determine the best options for course, institution, and system-level articulation agreements with TCSG, private institutions, and corporate education entities.
11d Assess institutional efforts to recruit back stop-out students and measure effectiveness of this effort
11e Encourage all institutions to participate actively in the Adult Learning Consortium (ALC)
11f Develop a list of best practices and resources that institutions should be offering for Adult Learners—including a web page(s) dedicated to adult learners and military-connected students—to increase college completion by adult learners
11g Adopt nationally recognized, standardized prior learning assessment (PLA) options, such as CLEP, AP, and American Council on Education (ACE), and institutionally recognized challenge exams, to include a USG facilitated process to standardize transcripting and coding throughout the system.
11h Encourage institutions to identify a gateway mechanism/department for PLA review to include an appeals process for portfolio submissions that fail to meet the required standards.
11i Consideration for the development of a "Free Core" course from eCampus to assist students in the proper development of a portfolio for PLA.

12: Advising (& coaching) throughout the student engagement stream

Year after year, RNL's Student Satisfaction Inventory identifies 'quality of instruction' and '*academic advising*' as the most important dimensions of students' college experience. Academic advisors and coaches facilitate students' journeys along their academic pathways. As such, every strategic enrollment plan must address opportunities to improve academic advising to improve the student experience and facilitate each student's unique academic goals.

Advising and coaching is addressed in each campus' Momentum Plan and is a critical component of each institution's preparation for student success initiatives. This remains an important set of best practices, and it is important to refocus on it in this strategic enrollment plan.

Institutions have invested heavily in academic advising and student support services related to academic and career success. The recommendations below suggest the continued utilization of technology to enhance the student experience because technology is advancing dramatically in this area due to the use of artificial intelligence and comprehensive customer relation management systems. The USG has invested heavily in such technology and will continue to integrate it into the student experience.

Objectives

- Strengthen advising and coaching throughout the student engagement stream
- Leverage technological tools to support student decision-making
- Support institutional selection and student major determination
- Ensure effective program off-ramps (for students needing to change their major) and program pathways

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Student satisfaction of advising survey scores
- Reduction in frequency of major changes
- Achievement at 30/60/90 credit hour milestones by student type (traditional full-time; traditional transfers; adult/part-time; prior credit and dual enrollment)

Recommendations

12a Develop better tools to assist students in understanding their progress including periodic degree audits, specific academic coaching follow-up, and self-help guides.
12b Encourage the adoption and use of technology to assist in advising (AI bots, degree audit programs, advising platforms, etc.)
12c Provide system-level purchasing and implementation support to optimize platform capabilities
12d More fully integrate career planning, advising, and counseling into the student support model to include the use of technology tools like the Career Planning Platform and Georgia Degrees Pay.

13: Student financial support

Surveys from 2023 by Ardeo Education Solutions & Campus ESP and Ruffalo Noel Levitz suggest increasing sensitivity to sticker prices, showing 68 percent of families will rule out an institution because of sticker price--up from 58 percent in 2022. Further, of first year students already enrolled, nearly half have concerns about their ability to finance their college education, and just over 10 percent have major concerns, meaning they are not sure they will have enough funds to complete college (Figure 21).

Figure 21.

Do you have any concern about your ability to finance your college education?

None (I am confident that I will have sufficient funds): 40.8%
Some (but I probably will have enough funds): 48.8%
Major (not sure I will have enough funds to complete college): 10.4%
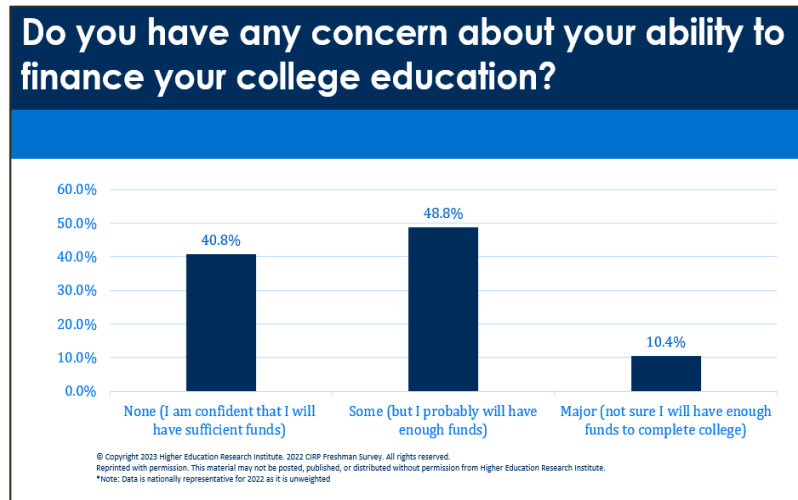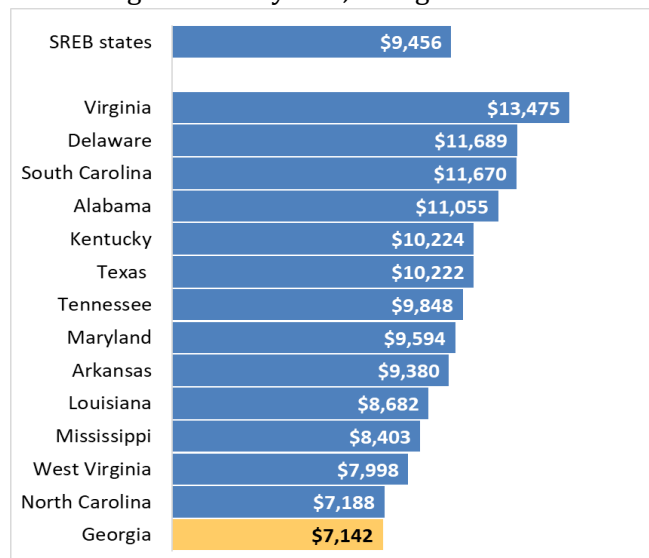
By design and discipline, Georgia has maintained restraint in terms of the direct costs of education—tuition and required fees. As Figure 22 shows, Georgia maintains the lowest median cost in the Southeast (note: Florida and Oklahoma have missing data). With multiple years without a tuition increase and extreme restraint in increasing mandatory fees, Georgia has been able to keep costs low for our citizens.

Figure 22.

Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities Annual Tuition and Required Fees for In-State Undergraduates, 2021-2022

no data for Florida or Oklahoma

State	Amount
SREB states	$9,456
Virginia	$13,475
Delaware	$11,689
South Carolina	$11,670
Alabama	$11,055
Kentucky	$10,224
Texas	$10,222
Tennessee	$9,848
Maryland	$9,594
Arkansas	$9,380
Louisiana	$8,682
Mississippi	$8,403
West Virginia	$7,998
North Carolina	$7,188
Georgia	$7,142

Additionally, USG has made major strides towards affordability and reducing loan debt. Due to system-level programs and technology improvements, the percentage of in-state bachelor's degree graduates with loan debt declined 12.1 percentage points from 66.7% in 2016 to 54.7% in 2022. In addition, over that same time period the average amount borrowed in federal loans declined by $3,516 from $25,835 in 2016 to $22,319 in 2022. Contributing to this is our Know More/Borrow Less initiative where we created more opportunities for student communication within the Financial Aid awarding process. Additionally, we created clarity in the award notification itself, so students understand all the elements of their financial aid and understand the importance of avoiding debt if possible.

On the reduced cost side, along with holding tuition constant for several years in a row, efforts surrounding low-and no-cost textbooks have saved students over $173 million in the last ten years. This year, we also implemented agreements with publishers to offer USG access to a large catalog of inclusive access textbooks at the low-cost (under $40) level. It is imperative that USG institutions and the USG continue efforts to make a USG education affordable and attainable for all Georgians.

Yet, despite these advances, financing remains an important concern for students. The recommendations below highlight some specific areas of improvement and innovation that can assist students in the financial realm. Specifically, more needs to be done to improve Completion Grants, enhance need-based scholarships, and to improve the ability of students to renew scholarships beyond the freshman year. Institutions attract new freshmen with scholarship offers, but there are very few scholarships that continue into the later years even when students are academically successful. Additionally, financial aid is another area where technology is advancing rapidly both on the distribution side and in the ability to help students make better decisions about taking out loans. The Beyond Financial Aid Toolkit and other financial literacy efforts combined with technology advances in the Know More/Borrow Less program allow students to learn more about their own financial situation and encourage them to make sound financial decisions. The use of technology can enhance our institutions' ability to assist students in this life-altering effort.

Objectives

- Explore affordability
- Improve FAFSA filing
- Streamline and improve scholarship awarding policies and practices
- Explore employer partnerships, employer underwriting, employer tuition assistance programs, and internship opportunities.
- Expand scholarship renewability
- Expand need-based aid
- Expand low/no cost textbooks

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- FAFSA filing rates
- Student borrowing rates
- Percent of eligible borrowing by student
- Know More Borrow Less outcomes (lower percent of available borrowing, lower overall debt at departure from college, etc.)

Recommendations

13a Work with GSFC to improve completion grants funding criteria to reduce barriers to awarding
13b Assess renewal GPA for grants and scholarships awarded in the freshman year
13c Communicate widely national best practices for award notification standardization
13d Distribute and encourage widespread use of the Beyond Financial Aid Toolkit

13e Expand Know More Borrow Less to include additional support, potentially including personal coaching and/or AI bot engagement
13f Explore the use of technology at the system level to support institutions efforts to engage with students (i.e., Financial Aid TV, Financial literacy, etc.)

14: Supporting Student Wellness

Among other findings, the 2023 Student Voice survey (a collaboration between Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse) found that

- "56 percent of students have experienced chronic stress in college [and rates are higher for students with physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, or mental health conditions] . . .

- "Three in four students say stress is negatively impacting their ability to learn, focus, and do well academically. . .

- "Just half of students rate their mental health as good or excellent. . .

- "Reducing stress is students' top health and wellness goal. . .."

Supporting student wellness is imperative at all USG institutions and must be considered a strategic enrollment priority for the USG as it impacts students' ability to be successful academically, and ultimately, to remain in school and complete their educational goals.

The Mental Health Initiative started in 2020 is a national best practice that has enhanced student success and supported institutions as mental health concerns loom. Continuing the effort is important to supporting institutions and students. However, as the recommendations suggest, there is also work to be done in the effort to assess campus wellness and Student Affairs programming generally so that institutions and the system office can create a holistic approach to wellness and student support. Inherent in such an approach is assuring adequate staffing which has been enhanced recently with the addition of an Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

Objectives

- Support student mental health needs
- Support student basic needs: food, housing, transportation, and childcare

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Number of students accessing services
- Retention of insecure populations (of students accessing services)
- Graduation of insecure populations

Recommendations

14a Continue to centrally administer the USG Mental Health Initiative and coordinate programs and services under system-level contracts
14b Inventory best practices programs for student wellness across all USG institutions and share outcomes information for greater adoption of successful programs
14c Enhance support for Student Affairs functions at institutions by assuring adequate system-level staff for support

14d Assess campus-level programs and services around student wellness programming utilizing national standards when possible (i.e., JED Campus)

Market Penetration Strategies

Market penetration strategies are designed to improve our performance in the markets we already serve, with a focus on improving policies, systems, and processes. Specific performance indicators (PIs) are listed with each strategy description; how those PIs roll up to SEP and USG Strategic Plan 2029 KPIs is illustrated in the table below.

Table 4.

		System participation of Georgians	1-year retention rates	Graduation rates	Degrees and certificates awarded	Average loan amount	Time to degree	Degrees awarded for key sectors	Total enrollment	Credits generated
Market Penetration Strategies										
15	System-level marketing	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
16	Expanding delivery modalities	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Expand coordinated/collaborative services	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓

15: System-level marketing and development of broad value proposition messages: take control of the value of a college education narrative.

Nationwide, unemployment rates are at a 50-year low, and people can secure hourly pay at higher rates than pre-pandemic. There has been a national debate brewing in recent years (as student loan debt is front of mind) about the value of a college degree. In this climate, it is essential that we market the value of a USG degree. Our focus on workforce development and student outcomes is key to meeting this objective.

Periodically over time, the USG has engaged in broad programmatic efforts to enhance public acceptance of higher education or that encouraged a specific population of students to seek higher education. Such programs as Go Back/Move Ahead and Georgia MATCH are state-level programs that generally attract students; however, the University System has not embarked on a general sustained marketing effort that, combined with individual institutional efforts, markets the benefits of enrollment in the University System of Georgia.

The bulk of the recommendations below encourage us to step in front the narrative and develop a comprehensive marketing program that makes the case that higher education (and enrollment in USG institutions) significantly enhances lives and chances for life success. The message that a bachelor's degree, on average, allows graduates to earn more than $1 million than those with only a high school diploma is a compelling argument, but the message is much broader and deeper than just that message. Additionally, as one of the best (if not THE best) university systems in the nation, it is untenable to remain the "best kept secret" and our award-winning programs, services, and personnel need to be showcased in a comprehensive and professional manner. Such marketing will lead not only to national recognition, but also to a broader audience in Georgia considering enrollment in a USG institution.

Beyond marketing, engagement with efforts like Georgia MATCH and a broader Career Navigator program will help provide more information for potential students to take advantage of USG programs and services. Other initiatives including Georgia Degrees Pay and the USG Career Planning Platform (in partnership with Steppingblocks) increase the comprehensive education and career planning ecosystem necessary to attract and retain students.

Objective

- Raise awareness among Georgians of the quality and range (both from curricular breadth and delivery modality perspectives) of educational opportunities available at USG institutions.

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- System-wide increases in applications, admits, and enrollment

- Percentage of Georgia high school graduates attending USG institutions

- Increase in enrollment of Georgia residents in fully online programs in USG institutions (and corresponding reduction in numbers of Georgians enrolled in fully online programs at out-of-state institutions)
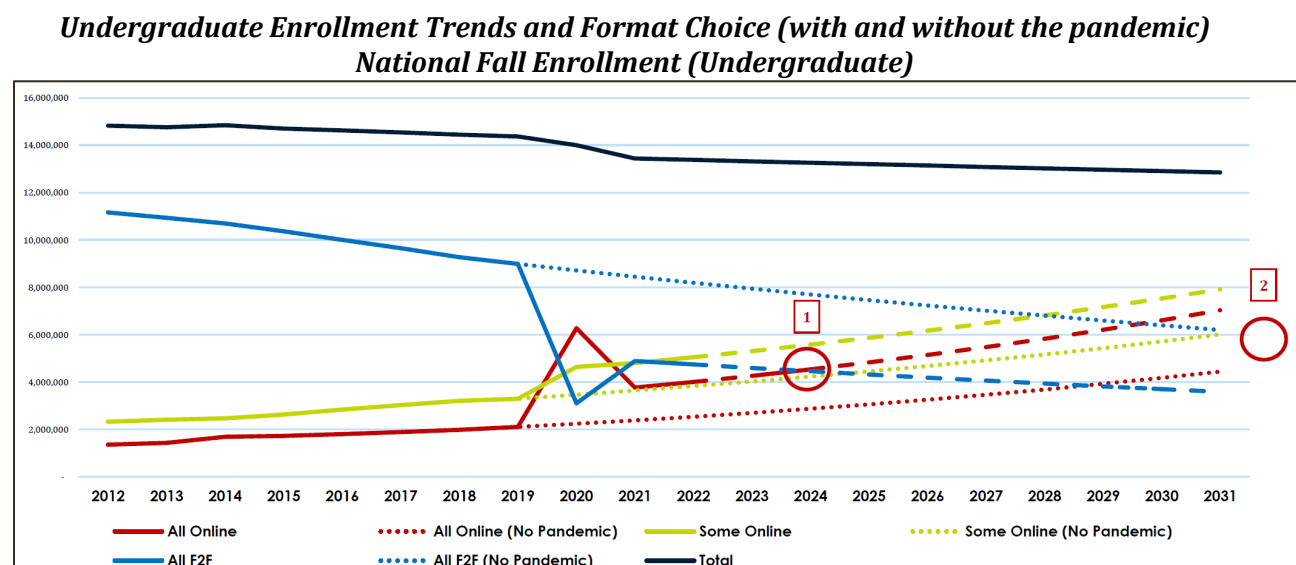
Recommendations

15a Implement a comprehensive marketing effort for the University System of Georgia. 1) Benchmark the USG against other state systems that do system level marketing 2) Offer state priorities and value of higher education in general as components of the campaign 3) Track campaign level indicators to determine effectiveness.
15b Enhance the Georgia Match program to continue to encourage college attendance rates by further reducing barriers to admission and enrollment
15c Develop communication and marketing plans at the system level for each major initiative and point of pride such that all successes are broadly communicated through social media, shared with the campuses to share broadly, and create a mini-viral experience for every success.
15d Consider developing a comprehensive career navigator program to bring together all the college planning resources currently employed and make a clear entry point for potential and current students to explore college and career options.

16: Planning for delivery modalities and programs that meet learners where they are and are delivered in formats (F2F, online, hybrid, asynchronous, accelerated terms) that will resonate with target populations.

Increasingly since the pandemic, the student population is seeking diverse options of engagement in learning and institutions need to adjust to the demand. The complexity of life has altered the needs of USG students, and more than ever they are seeking expanded options for learning so that they can fit higher education around their busy lives. There is still a broad expectation that brick-and-mortar institutions are still the standard. But, absent a broad array of learning modalities, students will leave institutions that are not able to meet their demands and turn to such alternatives as for-profit education and education options that provide the flexibility they need to engage in learning on their terms. To the extent that many of these options are out-of-state companies and educational institutions, the USG would lose potential market share.

As Figure 23 illustrates, students are increasingly choosing online delivery of classes and the USG needs to adjust to this new reality. Nationally, the pandemic hastened the pace at which students seek online delivery of classes and fully online academic programs. Note that in about 2032, students choosing online delivery will eclipse those choosing face-to-face delivery. Even if Georgia's crossover point is further out, the data is clear that to be competitive, we must adjust to this new reality by developing appropriate academic program offerings and providing the support services to enroll this population.

Figure 23.

Undergraduate Enrollment Trends and Format Choice (with and without the pandemic)
National Fall Enrollment (Undergraduate)

Source: RNL Analysis of IPEDS Fall Enrollment Snapshot data. (U.S. degree-granting institutions of at least two years.)

Research from the University of Georgia Online Learning department (Figure 24) shows that the proportion of distance learners from the state of Georgia going out-of-state for their education needs is increasing
in recent years, to 55%, with the number eclipsing 80,000 Georgians taking online coursework out-of-state.

Figure 24.

In-State vs. Out-of-State Distance Learning Enrollment of Georgians

- In 2019, Georgia had **131,488** distance learners
  - 52,606 enrolled in-state
  - 78,882 enrolled elsewhere

- In 2021, the state of Georgia had **176,999** distance learners.
  - 98,770 enrolled in-state
  - 78,229 enrolled elsewhere

- In 2022, the state of Georgia had **176,613** distance learners.
  - 96,356 enrolled in-state
  - 80,257 enrolled elsewhere

- Georgia ranks 4th among SARA members for distance learning demand

Source: NC-SARA, cited in Balfour, S. *Online Learning in Georgia: A Supply*-side Problem. University of Georgia Online Learning.

Figure 24 makes an eloquent case for a strategic approach by the USG to capture market share of Georgians interested in enrolling in online programs. The eCampus department and other collaborative programs represent an important potential for us to grow our capacity to offer different modalities and market these opportunities across the state of Georgia and beyond. Along with general online offerings at most of our campuses, the Collaborative programs reporting directly to the USG offer exceptional resources to improve not only our outreach and footprint in the online space, but also a proven and comprehensive infrastructure driven by recognized best practices and the priority profile necessary to ensure success.

However, to determine the strategic direction needed, we must fully understand why students choose to enroll elsewhere by assessing market share within the state, understanding where students are attending out-of-state and why they choose that option, and then setting specific targets to gain a larger market share in the future.

Objectives

– Understand why Georgians are choosing out-of-state online providers

– Fill gaps at individual institutions for fully online programs potentially through the development of additional Collaboratives and eMajor programs

– Support statewide workforce development efforts

– Improve the capture of Georgia residents enrolling in online programs

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

– System-wide increases in student enrolled in F2F, online, hybrid, asynchronous, and in accelerated terms

– Increase in the market share of Georgians enrolled in fully online programs at USG institutions.

– More fully utilize the extensive efforts of eCampus (eCore and eMajor) and other Collaborative programs to both support campus' base course offerings and create additional major options to meet workforce demands.

16a Review Statewide market share and work directly with USG institutions to focus on capturing a greater market share of the 80,000 seeking online courses outside of Georgia.
16b Develop marketing program to promote more enrollment in online courses in alignment with the major system marketing effort.
16c Provide support to assist faculty in developing courses and programs that meet workforce needs.
16d Do research into the 80,000 students taking online courses in another state to determine where they are attending, what they are studying, etc. Survey these students to learn more about why an out-of-state option was chosen.
16e Set a specific target for gaining market share of the 80,000 students engaging with out-of-state online providers.

17: Expand the coordinated, collaborative, and shared services model

Expand the coordinated services model to deliver high-quality support to students while easing the burden on individual institutions. Currently, each USG institution must collect a variety of documents and information about each student who intends to enroll – this potentially includes:

- Immunization review
- Lawful presence verification
- Tuition classification (in-state/out-of-state)
- Transcript management
- Transient processing
- Financial aid processing (beyond FA verification)
- GPA calculations

Recently the Shared Services Advisory Task Force has developed recommendations for priorities that address some of these issues and lead to more effective and efficient service delivery. Such enhancements will address current barriers, reduce redundancy, and support students in their efforts to progress and graduate. Although some of the issues will be addressed more formally as we implement the Unified Enterprise Resource Platform, there are many efforts we can make now to reduce barriers for students.

Objectives

- Improve service timelines to students
- Reduce duplication of efforts across USG institutions
- Develop a centralized process to allow system-level management of student-related administrative functions

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Timelines within the enrollment process (application to admit; admit to enrolled)
- Increase efficiency across the system
- Yield rates (admit to enrolled)

17a Develop a mechanism for the centralized collection and processing of specified admission and enrollment documentation with the ability for results to be shared with system institutions.
17b Review policies and procedures that could be duplicative.
17c Identify efficiencies present in the ERP and integrate results in practice.

Program Innovation Strategies

Program innovation strategies respond to workforce needs and shifting market demands. This begins with an understanding of talent demand and the competencies, skills, and credentials valued most by employers. Future programs must be designed responsively and flex with economic events throughout the state and beyond. High demand sectors require alternative approaches to program delivery, especially those that scale and help students land those jobs while continuing to develop and upskill. The future of our higher education system must reflect an understanding that very little is learned once – we are continuously developing our knowledge.

A major transformation in how people learn is underway. It is incumbent on us to assure access to the investment in public higher education for all Georgians endures. Program innovation will leverage data systems, adopt advanced technologies for teaching and learning, and measure outcomes valued by employers and learners. To be the greatest system in the country, we must act as a system and leverage all the infrastructure and investment in available resources in ways that close the gap between supply and demand for talent. We will redesign existing and develop new programs and credentials that align and, where needed, scale with the high demand employment sectors driving the economy .

The very nature of Program Innovation Strategies is that they are innovative and emerging. As such, these strategies are just being developed and will take some time to be formed into specific recommendations for practice. The USG Academic Affairs division, by developing the Academic Innovation unit, has already begun working and planning to achieve the above strategies in alignment with the 2029 USG Strategic Plan. This section will be adjusted and completed as that plan emerges and as we respond to the elements impacting successful program innovation.

Objectives

- Respond to workforce needs and market demand for high-demand jobs in Georgia
- Purposefully and thoughtfully employ innovative methods to strategically impact the future
- Leverage collaborative partnerships across systems and external constituencies to transform education for broader impact

Performance Indicators and Outcome Metrics

- Developing KPIs and outcomes metrics will be part of developing each strategy and recommendation

Table 5.

		System participation of Georgians	1-year retention rates	Graduation rates	Degrees and certificates awarded	Average loan amount	Time to degree	Awards for key sectors	Total enrollment	Credits generated
Program Innovation Strategies										
18	Respond to workforce needs and shifting market demands with innovative programs and associated services and supports	✓			✓			✓	✓	
19	Align innovative programs with market segments, success strategies, and outreach efforts	✓			✓			✓	✓	
20	Develop industry partnerships with custom courses and credentials	✓			✓			✓	✓	
21	Close the gap between supply and demand for talent in employment sectors critical to the State's economy	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	
22	Deliver programs that are valued by learners and their aspirations – leading to increased retention and completing multiple credentials	✓	✓						✓	
23	Develop and measure new metrics for select institutions that reflect a modern knowledge enterprise				✓	✓			✓	
24	Adopt and deploy within and across systems shared data and other assets that when combined with advanced technologies make it possible to deliver personalized learning at scale	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Strategic Enrollment Plan Implementation

The process of developing this Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEP) has included multiple constituents and stakeholders who will not only benefit from its implementation but who will be personally involved in many of the strategies and recommendations contained herein. However, a major part of the implementation of the SEP will be to socialize the plan throughout the USG and beyond— making sure as many as possible get exposed to the content, understand the implications for resources and practices, and become champions for the successful implementation of the plan.

In the weeks and months to come after initial release, USO personnel will make appropriate presentations to various stakeholder groups and distribute the SEP and Executive Summary widely. Additionally, USO staff, in collaboration with the SEP Executive Workgroup, will take the following actions:

- Develop methods to define and collect key performance data listed in the SEP

- Develop assessment measures for all items seeking additional information leading to implementation of strategies and recommendations

- Create reporting mechanisms and dashboards that allow USO staff to broadly communicate the KPIs to appropriate stakeholders

- Implement a reporting schedule for USO leadership and other stakeholders to allow for proper accountability and oversight

- Develop a report of resource implications for the strategies and recommendations

- Work with the USO Policy Review Committee to refer appropriate policy changes to reduce the barriers to SEP implementation and student success

- Create an annual review process to study the implementation of the plan and to adjust the plan respective of the strategic direction and best practices that have evolved during the interim

Overall enrollment success and success of the strategic enrollment plan will rely on the data analysis that is adopted and the accountability systems put in place to assess impact and success. The ultimate goal is to comprehensively address elements that influence overall system enrollment performance, especially in light of the demographic cliff and other barriers that impact institutional and system success.

Appendix A

Participants

Cabinet

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AA Leadership & EMSA Staff

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Focus Group-RACEM Group

All Chief Enrollment Officers from USG, plus AVPs, Admission Directors, etc. (Sean Baser, Jacqueline Quiroga, Timothy Hatchett, Elizabeth Boone, Stephen Schulteis, Joel Robinson, Jennifer Fields, Brett Morris, Michelle Eaton, Sheb True, Sharon Duhart, Michael Poll, Jonathon Hull, Brian Dawsey, Tracy Ireland, Lynn Miller, Melissa Johnson, Angie Bell, Chip Reese, Jodi Johnson, Jason Umfress, Luoluo Hong, Gary Bush, Kenyatta Johnson, Scott Burke, Sarah Wenham, Alexis Pope, Julie Harris, Ashlee Spearman, Jennifer Hicks, Susan Meltzer, Angelia Starling, Paul Kohn, Susan Davies, John Cagnina)

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