



Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation Outcomes and Opportunities

Benchmarks Report to the Board of Regents,
Regional University System of Oklahoma
November 2023

Regents Dashboard Work Team

Dr. Joel Kendall, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, SWOSU
Diane Fitzsimmons, Institutional Effectiveness Specialist, SWOSU
RUSO institutions' Institutional Research offices

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

Key Takeaways

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

Discoveries include:

Enrollment

As a system, enrollment has battled through COVID pandemic and nationwide enrollment downturns. RUSO universities have met the challenges better than most other state institutions. Increasing freshman enrollment and rebounding retention rates are positive indicators for future enrollment growth.

Workforce responses and agility

RUSO institutions are more agile than most universities and systems in responding to changing workforce and student demand. We are quick to adapt to need for new programs, approaches, recruitment strategies, retention strategies, and career counseling. This is shown in our efforts in STEM degrees and concurrent enrollment.

Student-centered efforts

Across the system, the awarding of bachelor's degrees continues to be strong despite enrollment downturns. Additionally, the system is providing students with diversified degree and credential opportunities to help students meet educational and professional goals. The system is also becoming more responsive to student support needs in areas of academics, finances, and on-campus services.

Graduating Seniors' satisfaction with RUSO institutions

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

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

At the conclusion of the Spring Semester, all RUSO institutions asked two questions on their institutional exit surveys. Question No. 1, that queries graduating seniors' satisfaction with the quality of their education, found a 1 percent over-all increase in satisfaction from the prior year. Regarding Question No. 2, there is a 3 percent over-all increase stating students would choose the same institution if they could do it all over again. Comparisons with last year's survey are reported in parenthesis.

Chart 1. Student satisfaction survey results (*same data as April 2023*)

University	Question 1 – Were you provided a quality education/programs?	Question 2 – Would you attend same school if you had to do it over?
ECU	95% (no change)	90% (no change)
NSU	89% (no change)	89% (+1%)
NWOSU	89% (+3%)	88% (-2%)
SEOSU	90% (+4%)	92% (+1%)
SWOSU	97% (+1%)	93% (no change)
UCO	89% (-2%)	79% (-2%)
RUSO AVERAGE	91%	89%

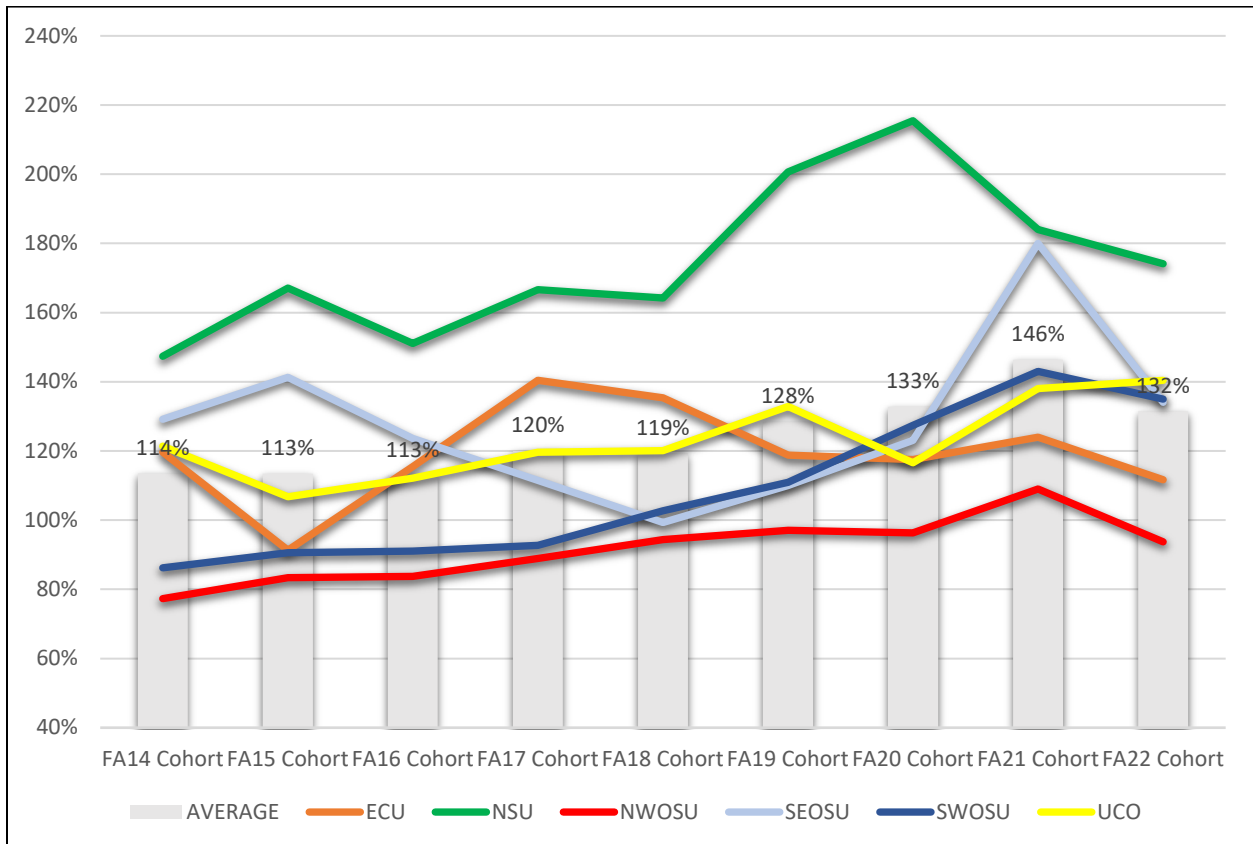
Graduation Success

Graduating more students each year than incoming freshmen

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

Chart 4 provides a comparison (in percentage terms) of the number of students graduating with an undergraduate degree in a given year divided by the number of full-time freshmen entering that same year. The chart shows that, on average, RUSO schools graduate more students every year than enroll as first-time freshmen. **The average is nearing 150%**. Part of this position jump can be attributed to smaller freshmen cohorts in Fall 2020 and Fall 2021. However, we believe that RUSO schools are making great progress in serving transfer students and students who come to the institutions as non-traditional students.

Chart 2. Total undergraduate degrees as a percentage of incoming full-time freshman class



Access, Progress and Completion

Overall student enrollment

The academic year 2022-2023 showed that the system is rebounding from COVID and finding successes in different areas of enrollment and retention. As a system, enrollment is near flat for headcount and FTE, including preliminary fall 2023 numbers. This is in line with other four-year institutions and community colleges. While RUSO institutions dealt with COVID-related issues, they also faced lower college-going rates that are indicative of a trend all universities are facing.

Chart 3. Full-time equivalent students

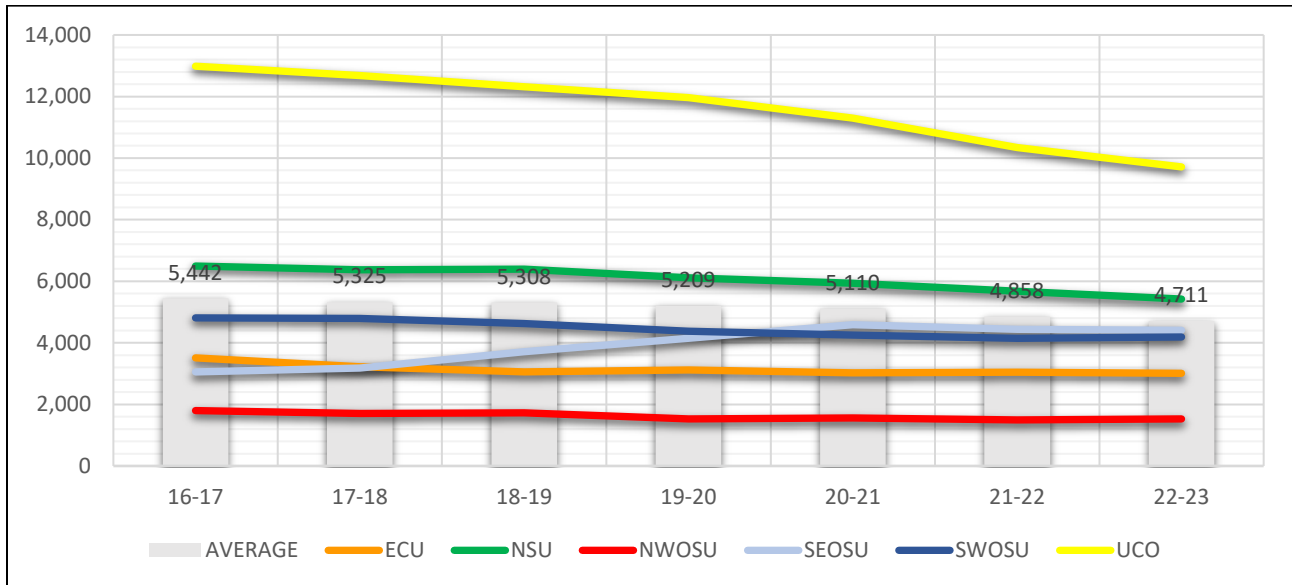
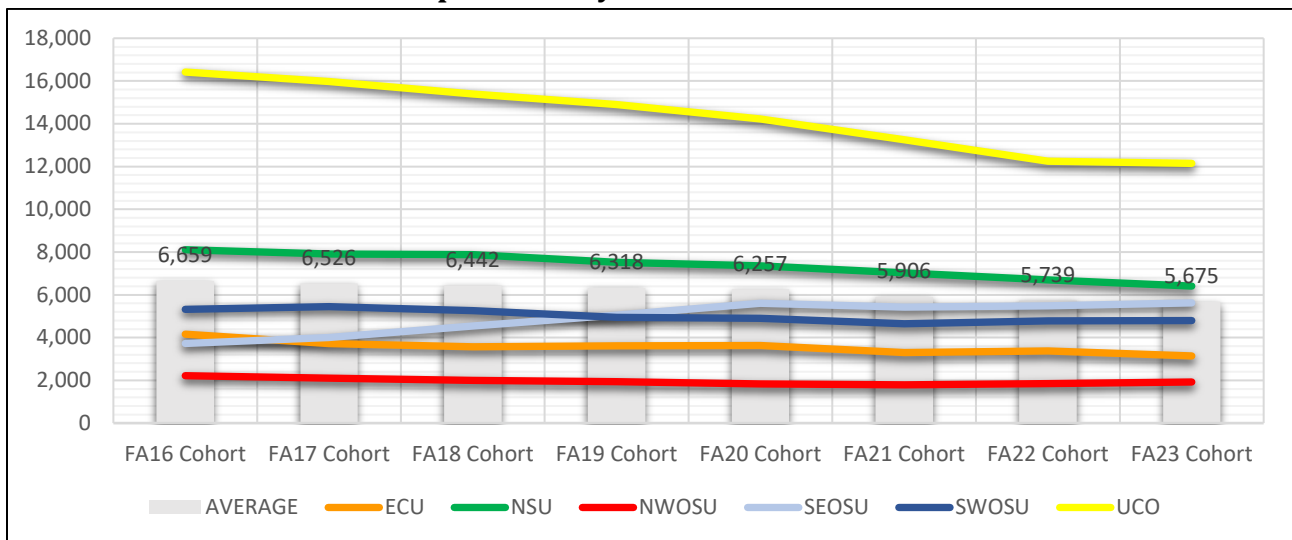


Chart 4. Fall Headcount with preliminary fall 2023 numbers



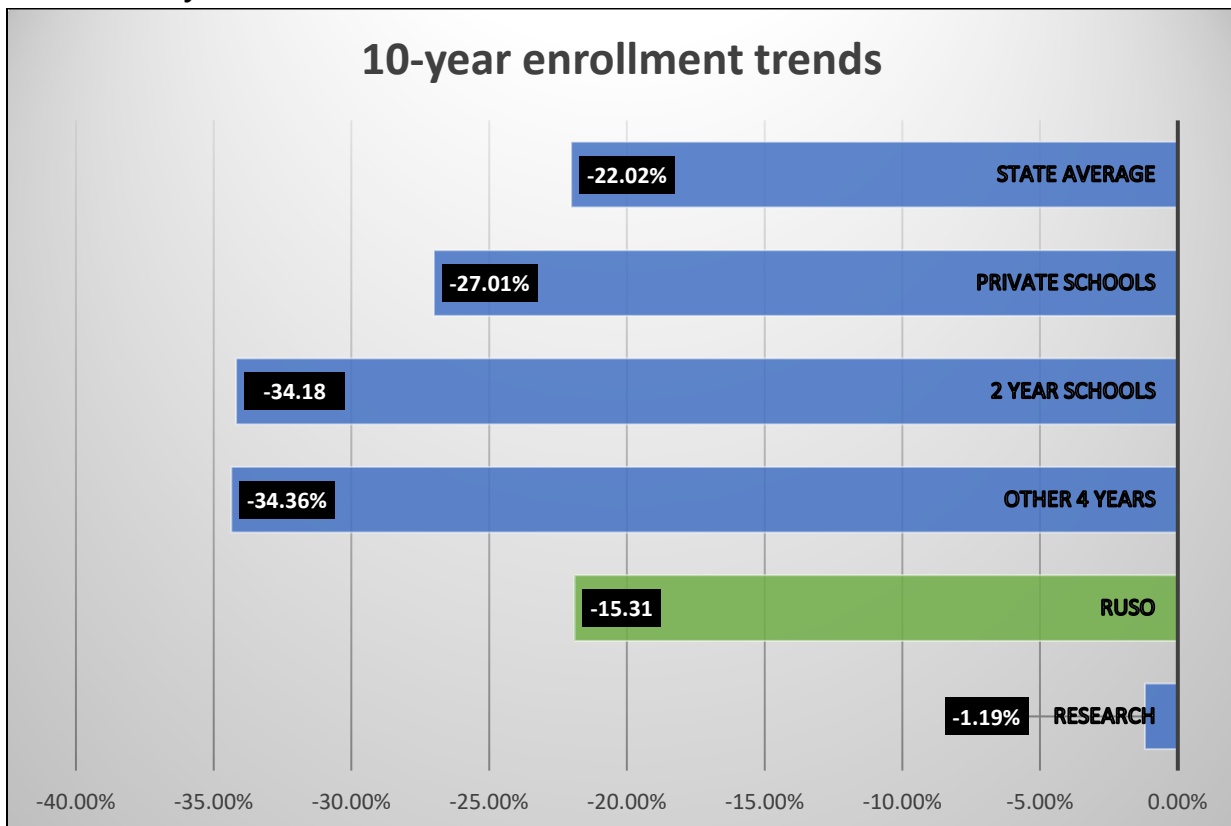
Source: RUSO institutions and OSRHE Preliminary 2023 Fall Headcount

*Preliminary fall headcount is not the same as overall fall headcount. Most likely, all institutions will gain some numbers by the end of the semester.

RUSO enrollment trends compared to other institutions

While RUSO schools have seen decreases in enrollment, other institutions within the state are also experiencing enrollment declines. Over 10 years, RUSO school enrollment has dropped from 50,747 to 42,971, a 15.31% decline. The only group of institutions that have decreased less are OU and OSU, largely in part to their change in admission standards. The other four-year schools (Cameron, Langston, Panhandle State, Rogers State, and USAO) have decreased in enrollment from 19,707 to 12,936, a 34.36% decline. Community colleges have dropped 34.18% in the last 10 years, and private schools are down 27.01%. The chart shows that all non-research institutions have been hit hard with enrollment declines in the past decade, but the RUSO institutions are mitigating the decline better than others.

Chart 5. 10-year enrollment trends of Oklahoma institutions

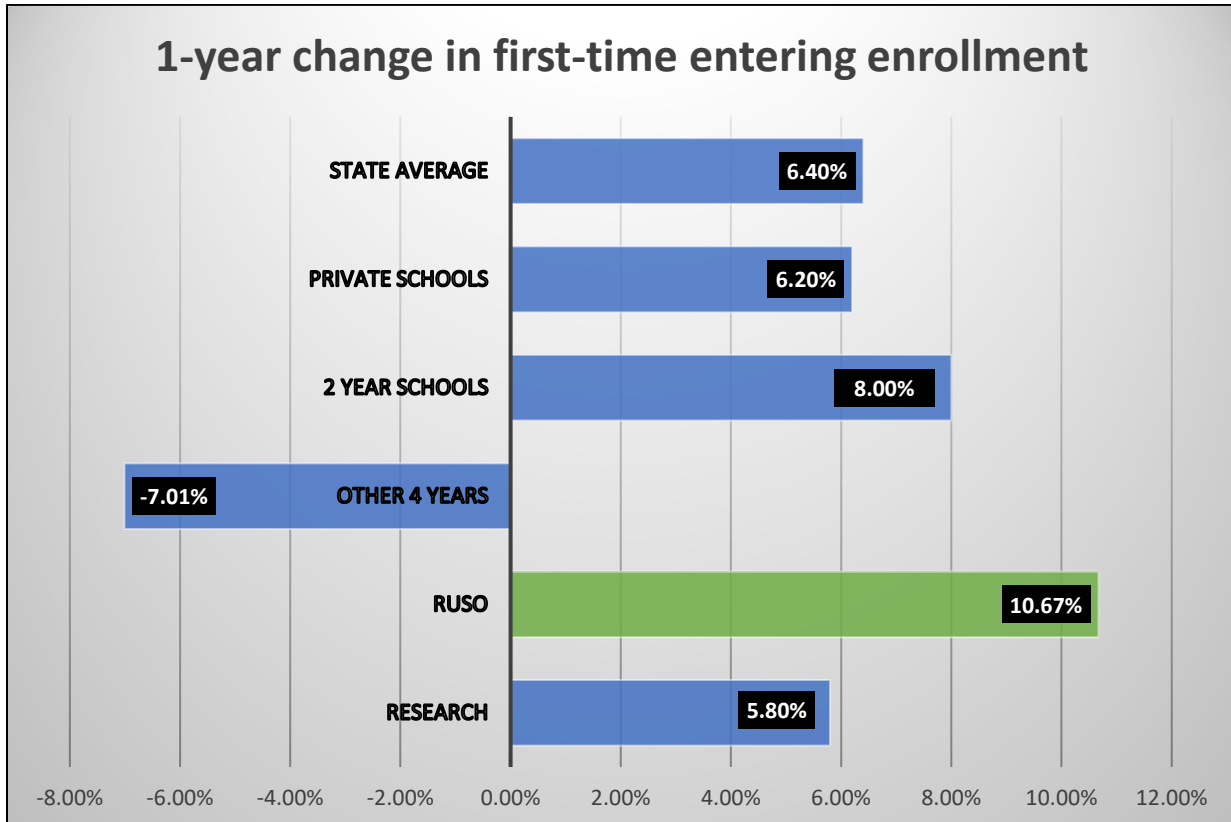


Source: OSHRE annual headcount enrollment, unduplicated within institution, AY13 to AY22

Freshmen enrollment

A good indicator of future enrollment possibilities is through incoming freshman enrollment. Preliminary numbers shows that the RUSO system has a bigger one-year increase of first-time, full-time freshman enrollment than the state average and other systems. While OU and OSU tout record-breaking freshmen classes, RUSO freshman enrollment increased by 5 percentage points more than the research institutions.

Chart 6. Fall 2023 Preliminary First-Time Entering Enrollment

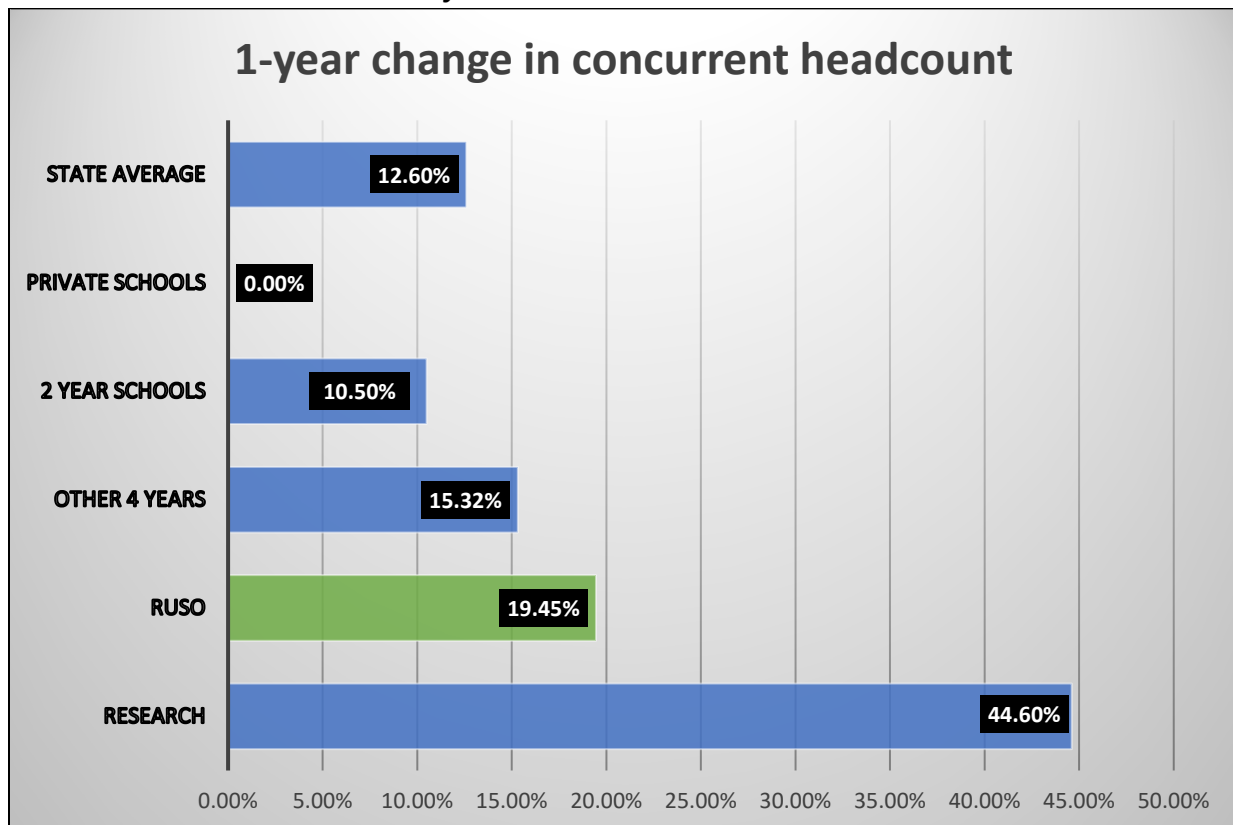


Source: OSHRE Fall 2023 Preliminary First-Time Entering Enrollment

Concurrent enrollment

Preliminary numbers from OSRHE show that RUSO institutions increased nearly 20% in the past year in the number of concurrent students enrolled. OU and OSU increased by more percentage points, but their numbers are smaller. RUSO institutions enroll 1,296 concurrent students, while OU and OSU have 691 students.

Chart 7. Fall 2023 Preliminary Concurrent Headcount



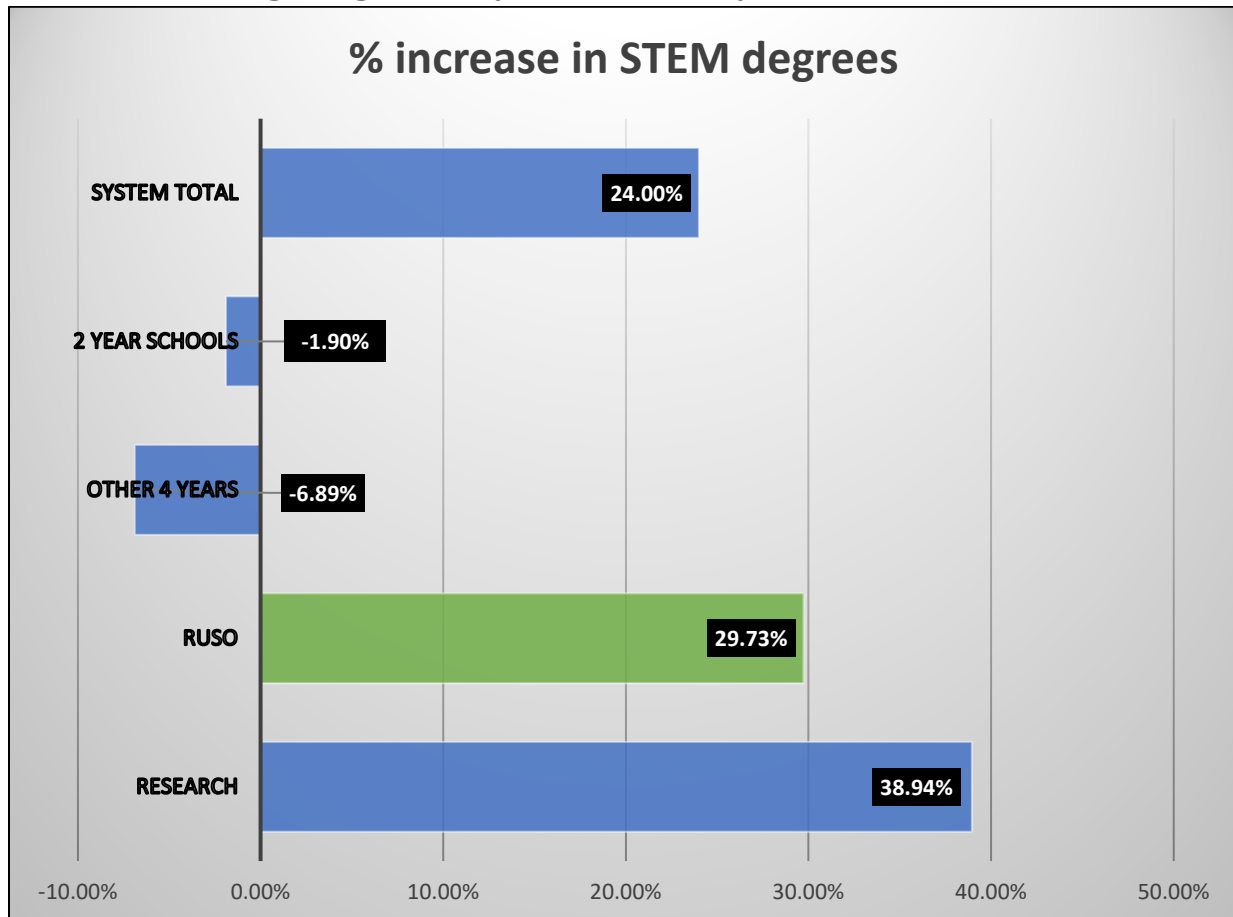
Source: OSRHE, October 2023, Preliminary Concurrent Headcount Enrollment and Hours

Preliminary numbers from OSRHE show that RUSO institutions enroll 8.4% of the students enrolled in concurrent courses statewide. Community colleges enroll the largest percentage of these students by far (76.5%) while the research institutions enroll 4.5% of the state's concurrent students.

STEM Degrees

The agility of RUSO institutions allows them to respond to workforce demands. The chart below shows how the system has increased in providing STEM degrees over a 10-year span. (Note: This is OSRHE's definition of STEM degrees, which does not include nursing and other health-related degrees. The definition is limited to programs such as biology, chemistry, engineering, engineering technology, mathematics, computer science, and engineering physics.)

Chart 8. STEM Degrees granted by institution, 10-year trends

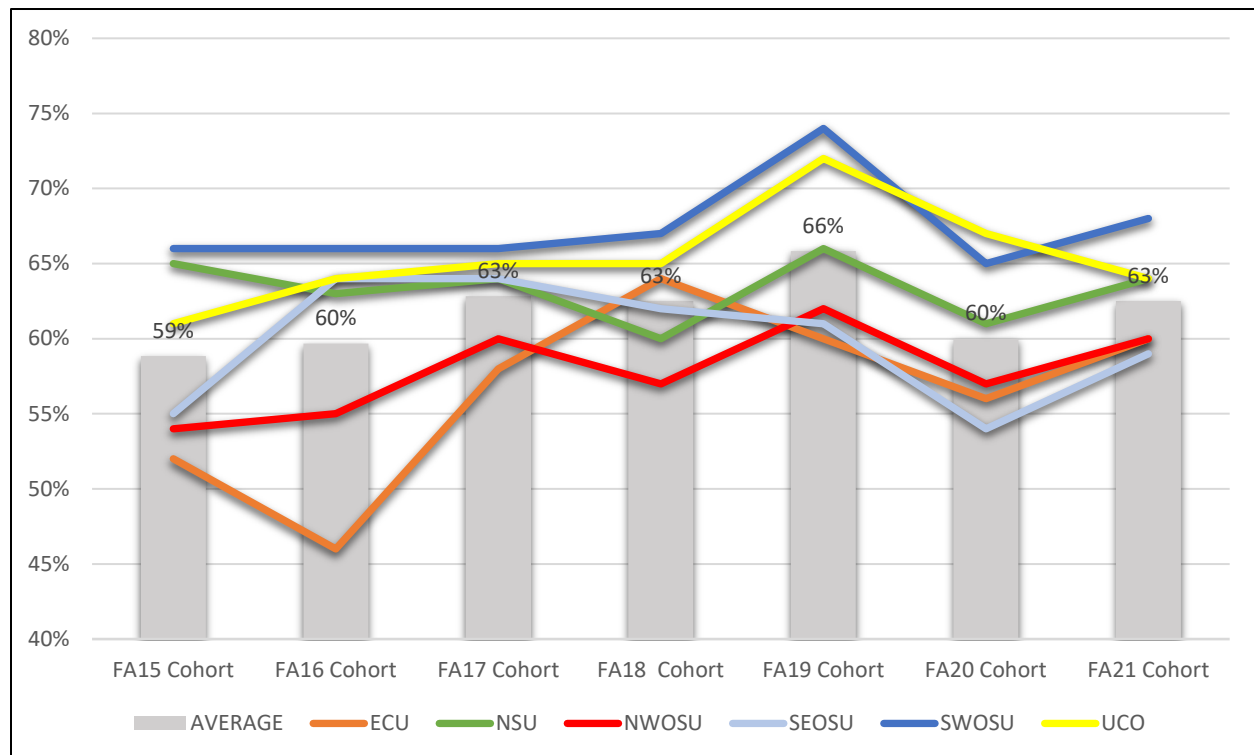


Source: OSRHE, STEM Degrees Granted by Institution, AY13 to AY22

Retention successes and enrollment possibilities

This measures the percentage of students who enrolled as first-time, full-time freshmen in the fall who returned in the following fall. The most recent data is the Fall 2022 freshmen who returned for the Fall 2023 semester. The previous year was in the middle of the COVID-related difficulties. The difficulties experienced by all students in the 2020-2021 year had a drastic effect on first-time freshmen. Each RUSO institution continues to implement retention and recruitment strategies designed to maximize student completion and institutional tuition revenue. Examples of these strategies include new student support services, changes in teaching methodology to increase student engagement, changes in freshman orientation classes to help students adjust to college life, changes to student advising models, and changes in tuition waiver awards to better assist students from low-income families. We know that we are losing students each semester who are unable to pay and consequently stop out or drop out.

Chart 9. Retention rates, first-time, full-time freshmen



Graduation Rates

6-year graduation rates and persistence

The trend among RUSO institutions for six-year graduation is staying at 35%. This statistic is very difficult to put in a stable upward trend, and the improvement to the current level represents considerable work over time by the institutions. There are no shortcuts, and it is problematic to get empirical data on the causes of the improvement. A university often implements many measures at once on a continuous basis, so it is difficult to know definitively which interventions accounted for the change.

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

Chart 10. IPEDS Graduation rates (within 6 years)

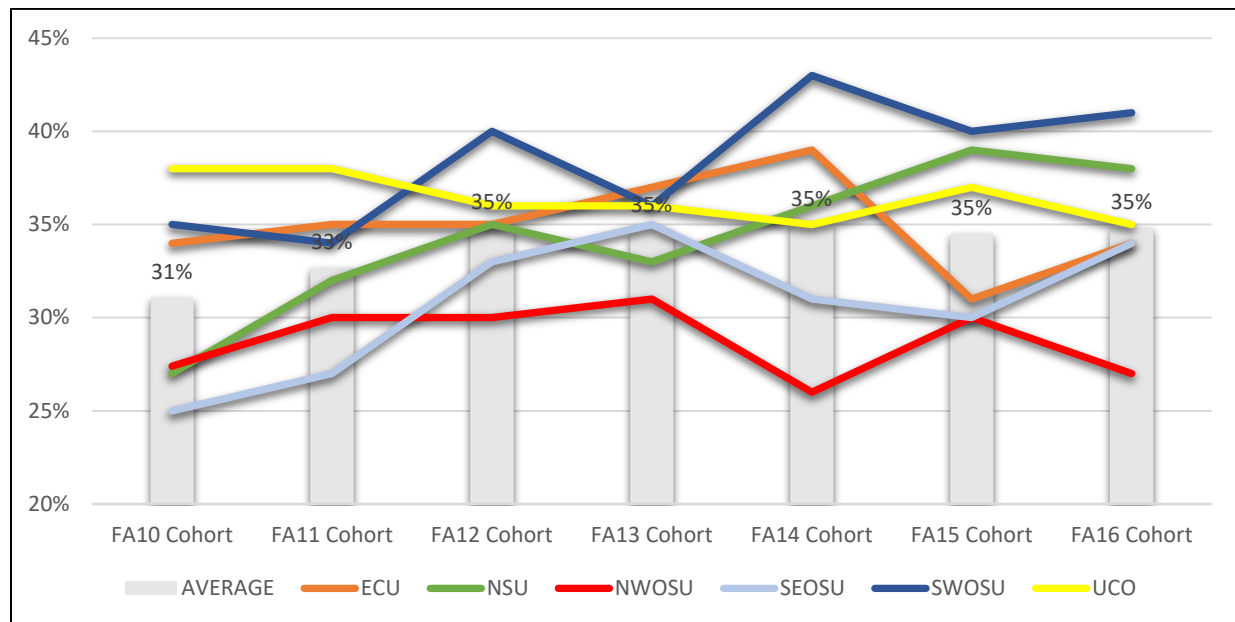
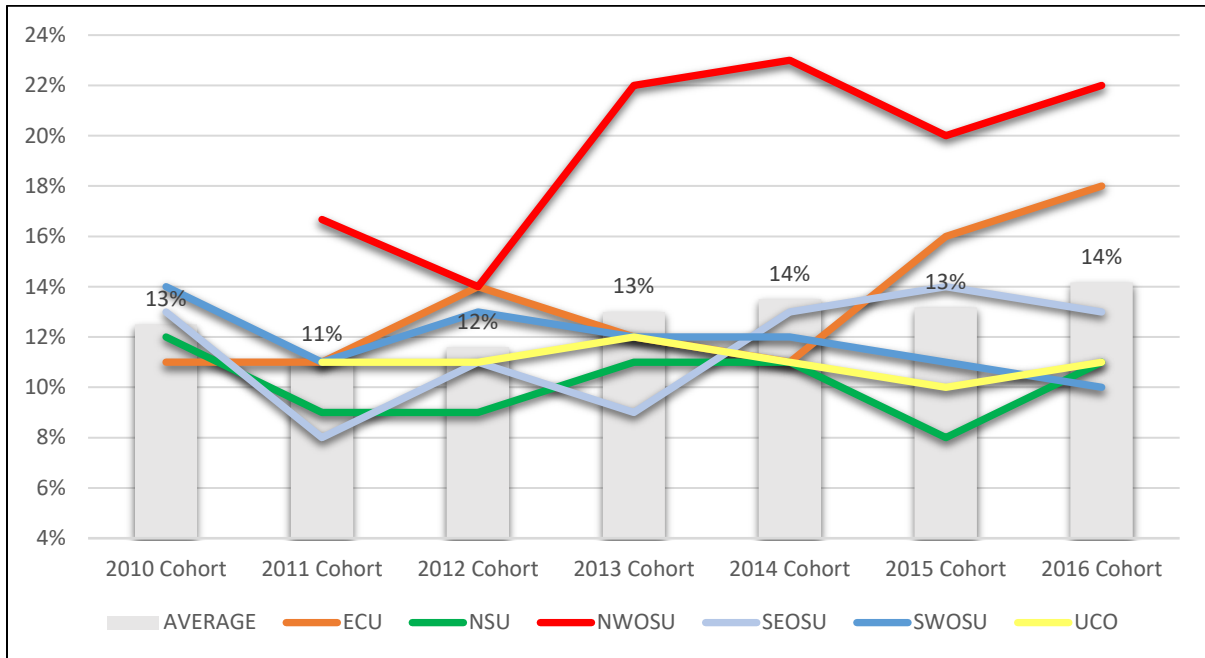


Chart 11. First-time freshmen, transferred and graduated elsewhere in 6 years

Likewise, students who do not complete within six years do not show up as successes in IPEDS data. Many students at RUSO institutions (between 3-7 percent of them) work during school, attend part-time, and take longer than 6 years to finish. Another 6-8 percent transfer to another institution and are still enrolled after 6 years.

Degrees awarded

The numbers of bachelor's degrees awarded has dipped in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 mainly as a result of the drop-off of students enrolling in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 (the lagging COVID effect). Master's degrees are up at most institutions. Certificates also are up in response to a workforce and legislative push to create certificates that are industry-based.

Chart 12. Bachelor's degree awarded

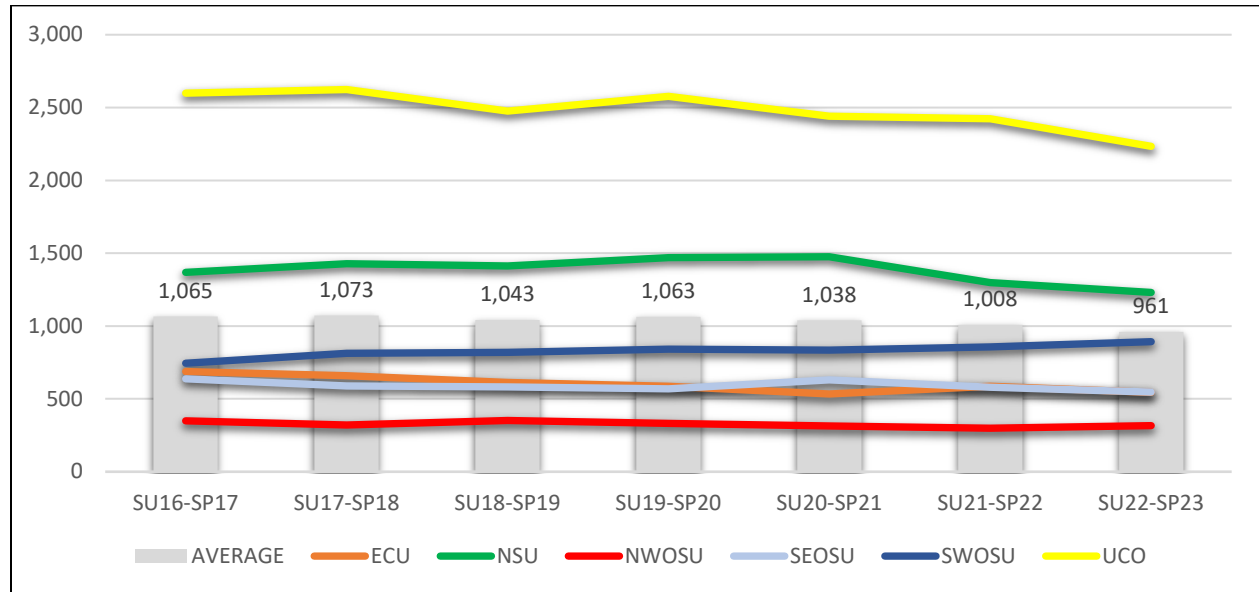


Chart 13. Master's degrees awarded

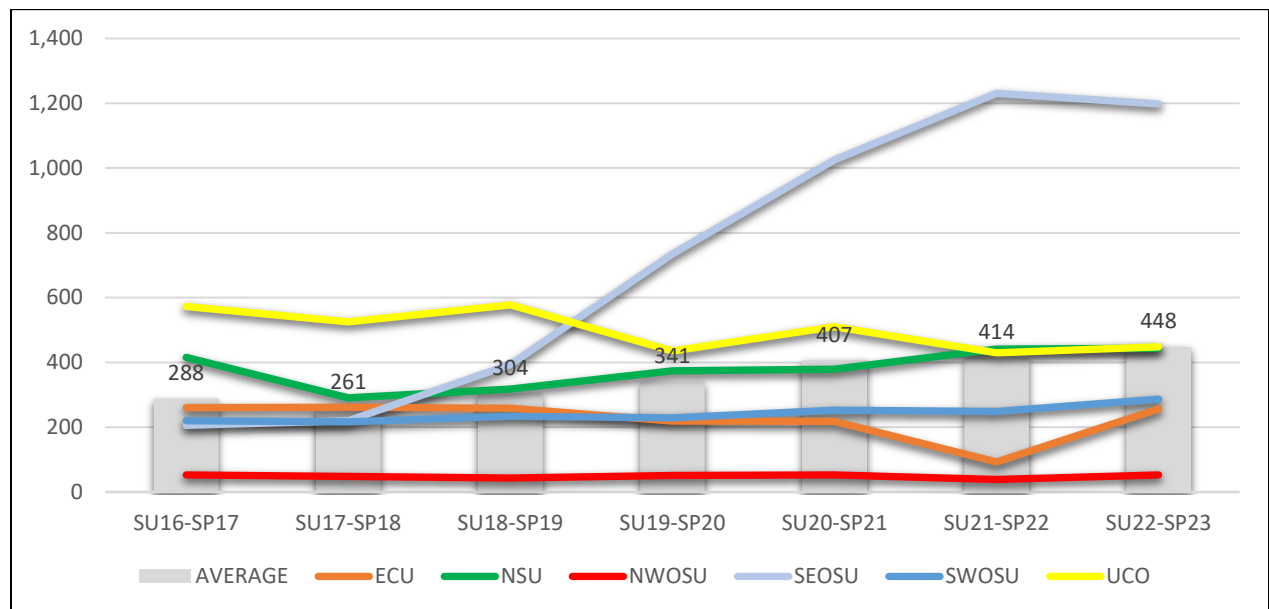


Chart 14. Certificates awarded

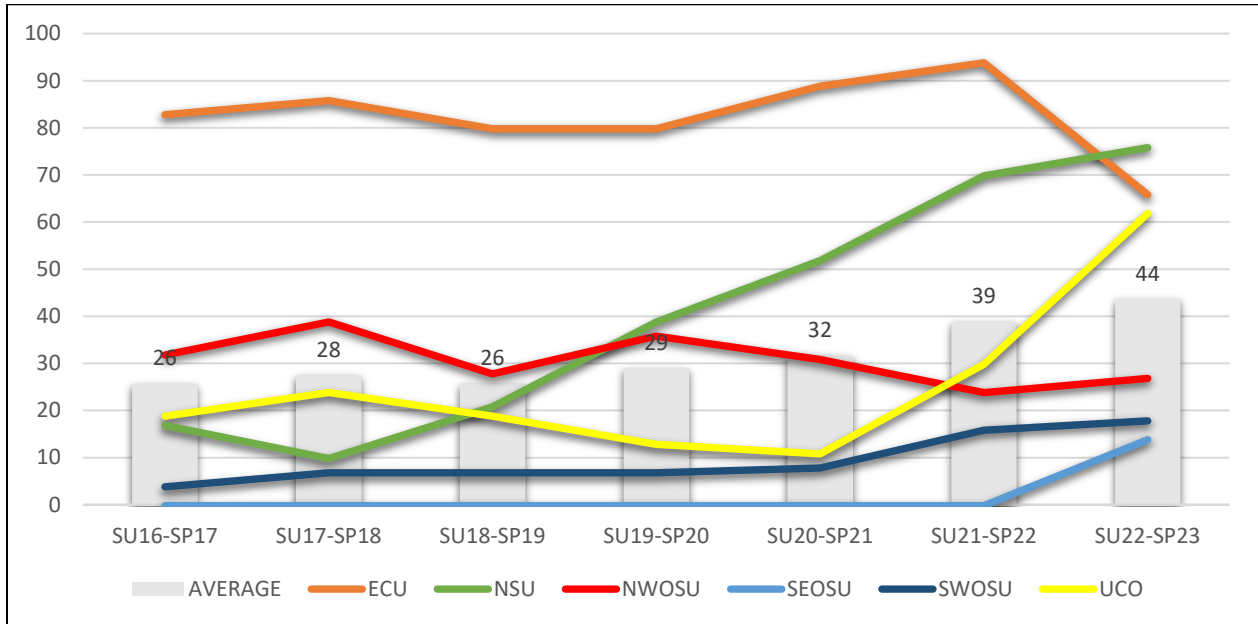
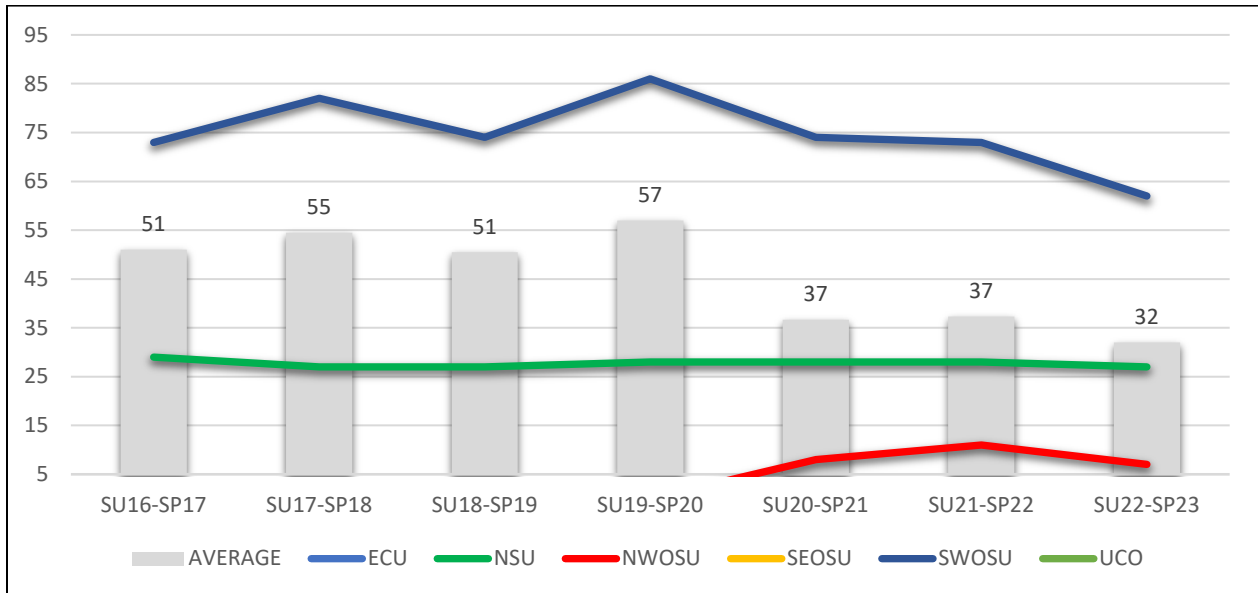


Chart 15. Doctoral degrees awarded



General Education Math and English completion

We track enrollment and completion rates in General Education Math and English courses because most students take those courses as freshmen, and data from *Complete College America* indicates that passing Math and English as freshmen is a predictor of enhanced probability of graduation.

Because of our investment in the co-requisite model and (in some cases) use of a minimum HS GPA to exempt students from remediation, more students are taking GE Math and English courses, including many who previously would have been placed in developmental courses first. Our current strategy is to enroll most of the deficient students in the GE course along with a required support class. Even though this way of measuring does not show it, we have a higher number of students completing GE Math and English as freshmen than we did previously, which should aid retention. The large dip and subsequent increase in completion rates for deficient students indicates two effects: 1) the negative affect of COVID on the most vulnerable student population – deficient students; and 2) increased efforts of institutions to support students with academic needs.

We are also taking note of the decline in students taking general education mathematics and English. The percentage decline in the number of students taking these courses is much steeper than overall enrollment decline at institutions. This is due to several factors, including the rise of concurrent enrollment, the increased choice for students to take courses from different institutions, and the availability of online general education courses. In 2022-2023, that trend reversed slightly. This is possibility due to increased GE concurrent courses offered by RUSO institutions.

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

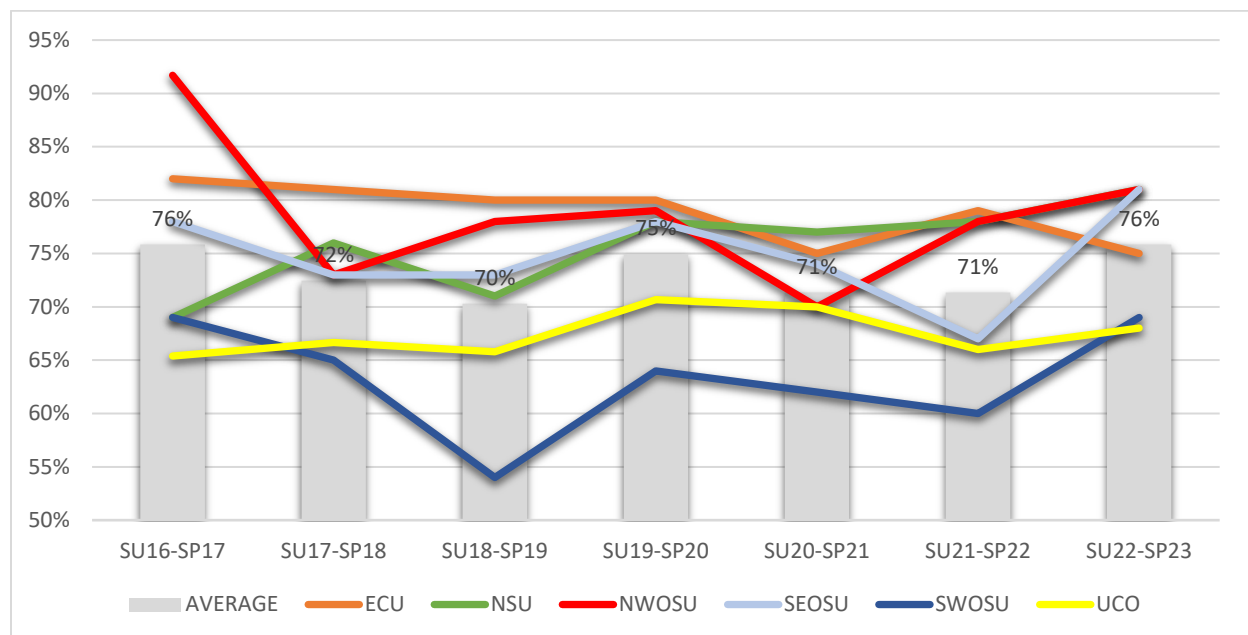


Chart 17: Enrollment in General Education math courses

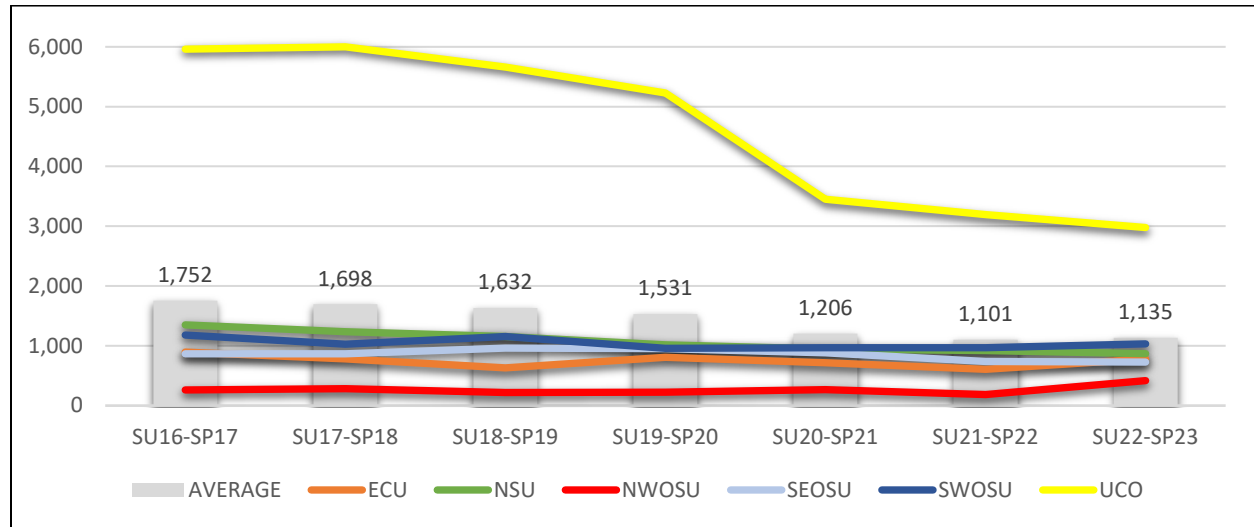


Chart 18. English Composition I completion rates as percentage of enrollments

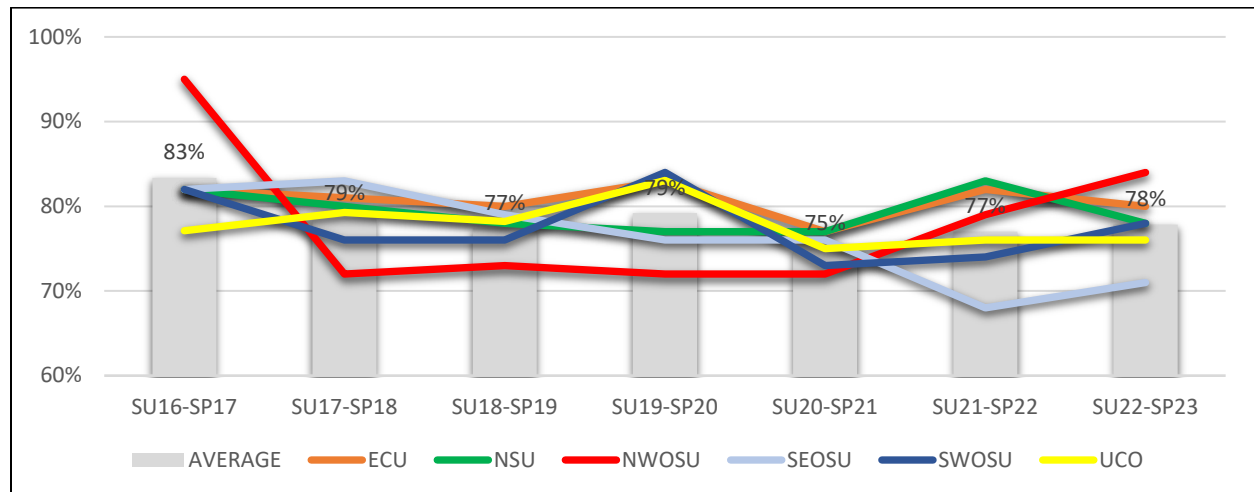


Chart 19. Enrollment in English Composition I

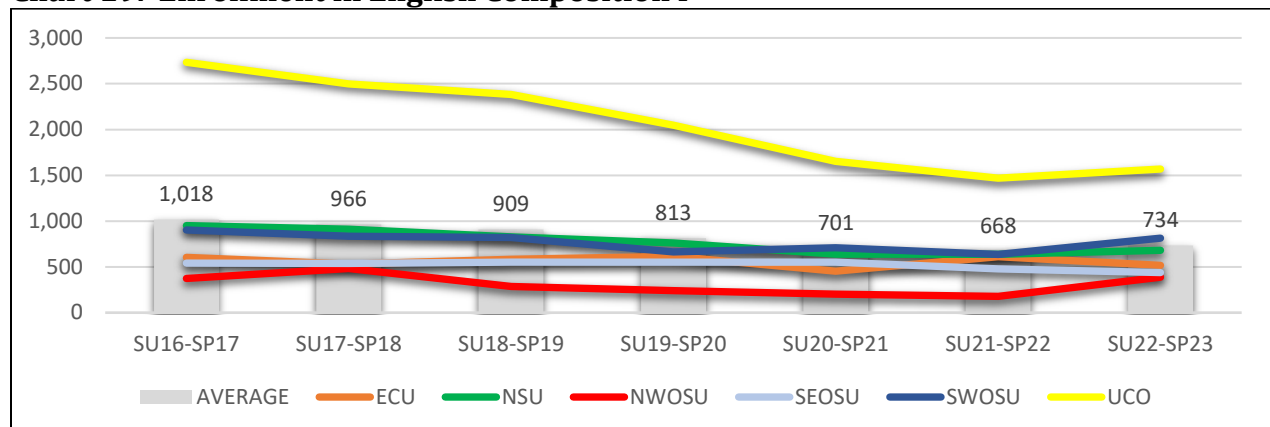


Chart 20. General Education Math completion rates of deficient students as a percentage of enrollments

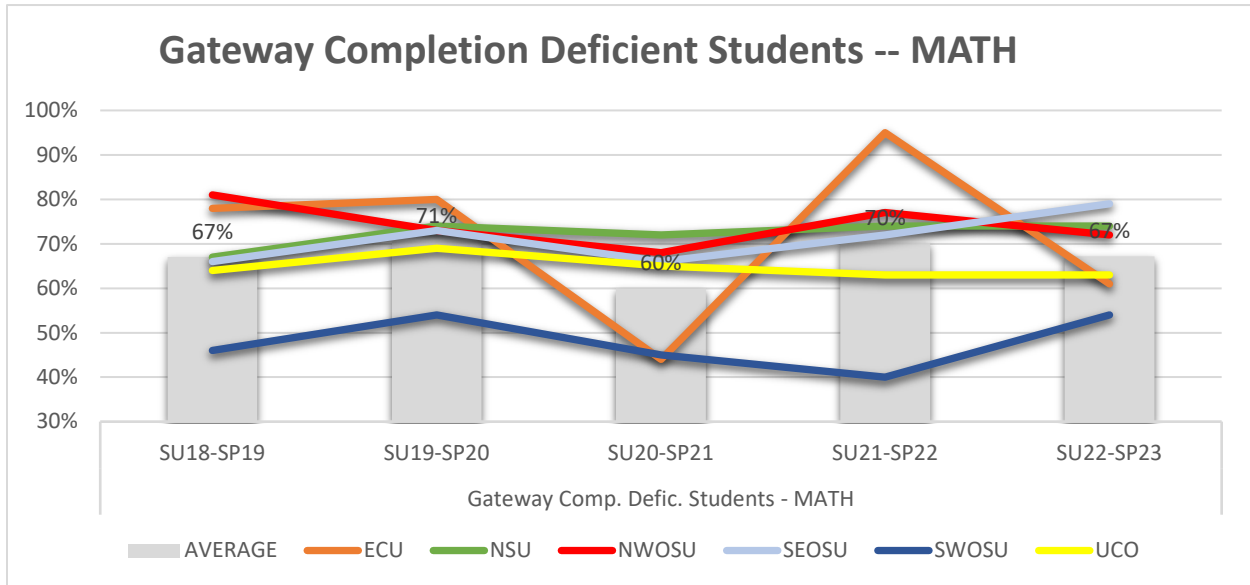
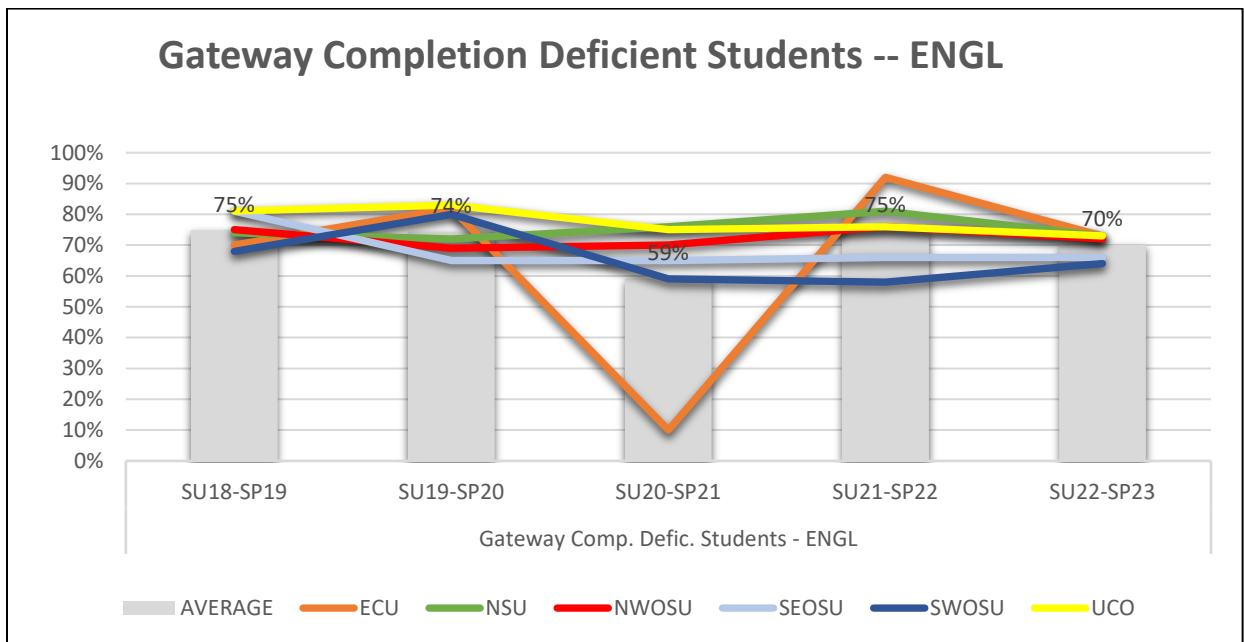


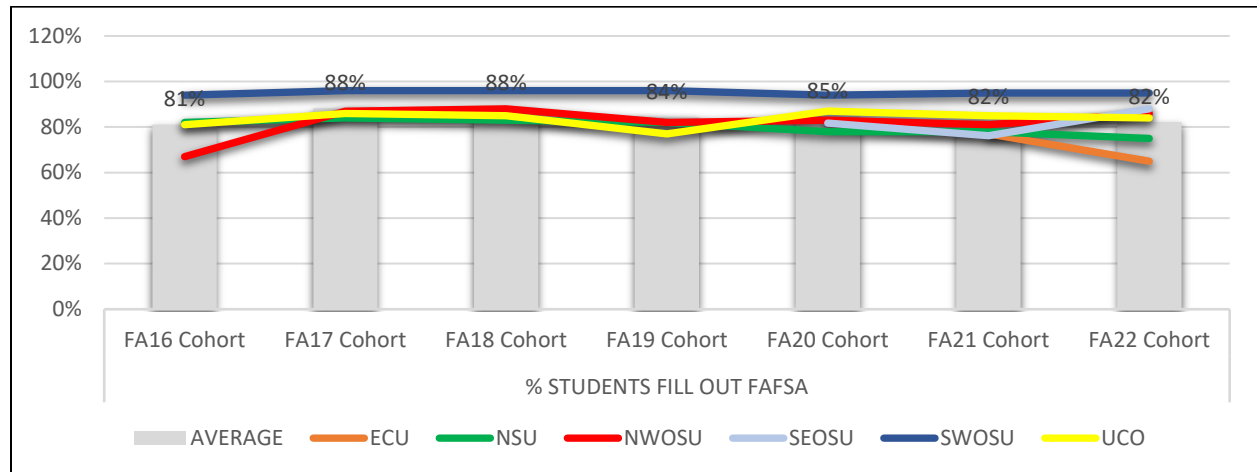
Chart 21. General Education English Composition I completion rates of deficient students as a percentage of enrollments



FAFSA efforts for current students

A higher percentage of students who can fill out the FAFSA financial aid package can result in a higher percentage of students receiving aid that will enable them to persist in degree achievement. RUSO institutions have implemented strategies to highlight the advantages of completing the FAFSA. A new state law in 2023 requires students to fill out a FAFSA in order to graduate high school. This should lead to higher percentages of completion across the board.

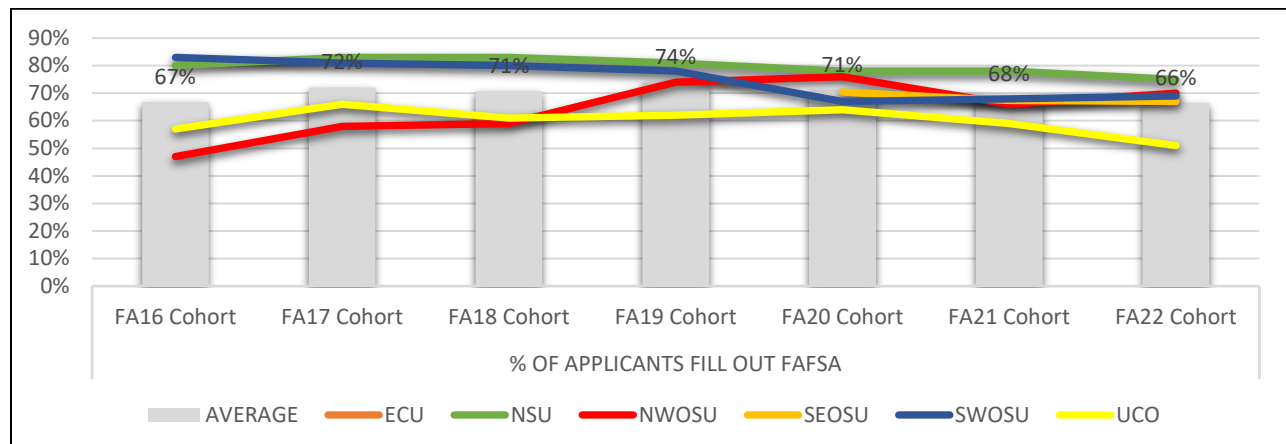
Chart 22. Percentage of students who fill out the FAFSA



FAFSA efforts for applicants

RUSO institutions also have implemented strategies to highlight the advantages of completing the FAFSA for applicants. This will give potential students a better idea of how much financial aid is available for them at RUSO institutions. However, the trend in the past few years has been a lower percentage of applicants filling out the FAFSA. This could be due to decreasing resources at high schools in which counselors do not have time to provide college counseling.

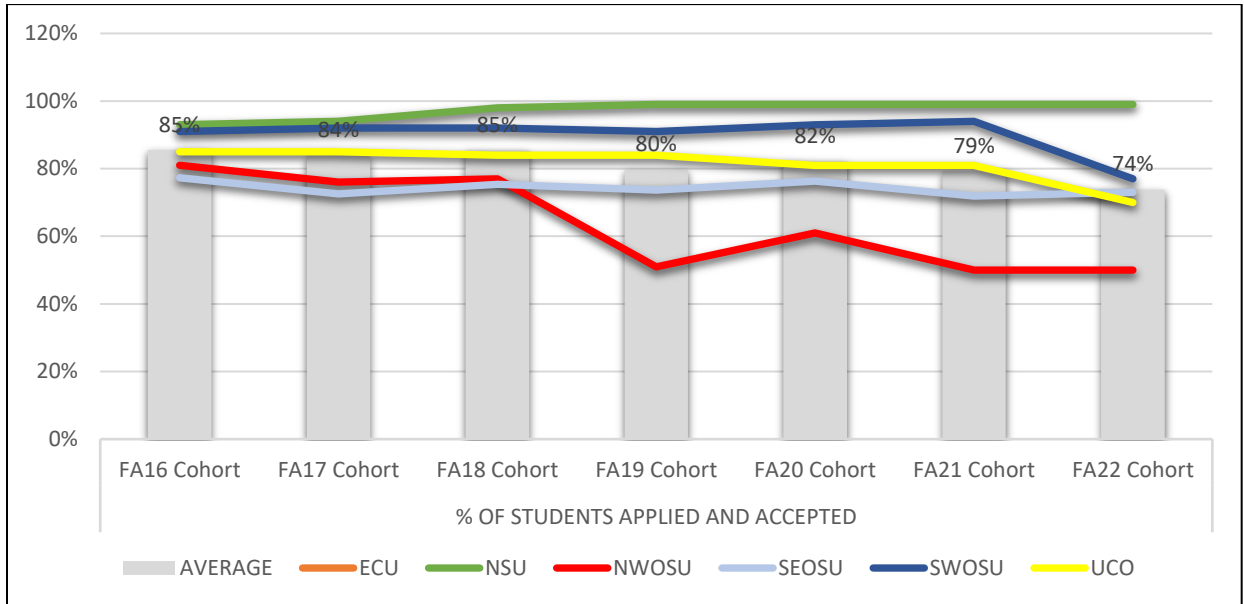
Chart 23. Percentage of applicants who fill out the FAFSA



Acceptance rates

The average percentage of students who applied who were then accepted has decreased somewhat over the past five years. Several factors go into student admittance, including student performance in high school and on standardized tests.

Chart 24. Percentage of students who applied who were then accepted



**East Central University data did not track this particular data point.*

Course delivery methods

Student demand for alternative course delivery methods rather than face-to-face was expedited by the COVID-19 pandemic. The result is a marked decrease in face-to-face courses. This changing landscape of course delivery brings opportunities but also challenges. RUSO institutions are seeking ways to meet student demand while also fulfilling their missions.

Online and traditional courses

Online courses were highest in 2020-2021 in response to the COVID pandemic. In 2021-2022, some courses returned to face-to-face, but the percentage of online courses is still much higher than pre-pandemic. The rise in online courses in 2022-2023 but a same percentage of traditional courses can be attributed to “hybrid” offerings, such as Zoom and blended courses.

Chart 25. Percentage of courses taught online

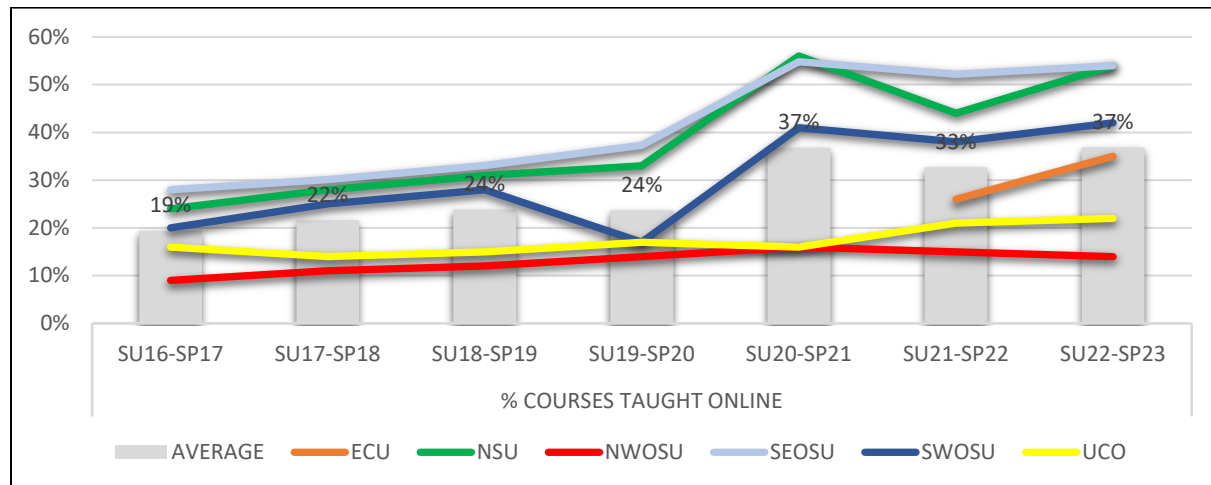


Chart 26. Percentage of courses taught traditional face-to-face

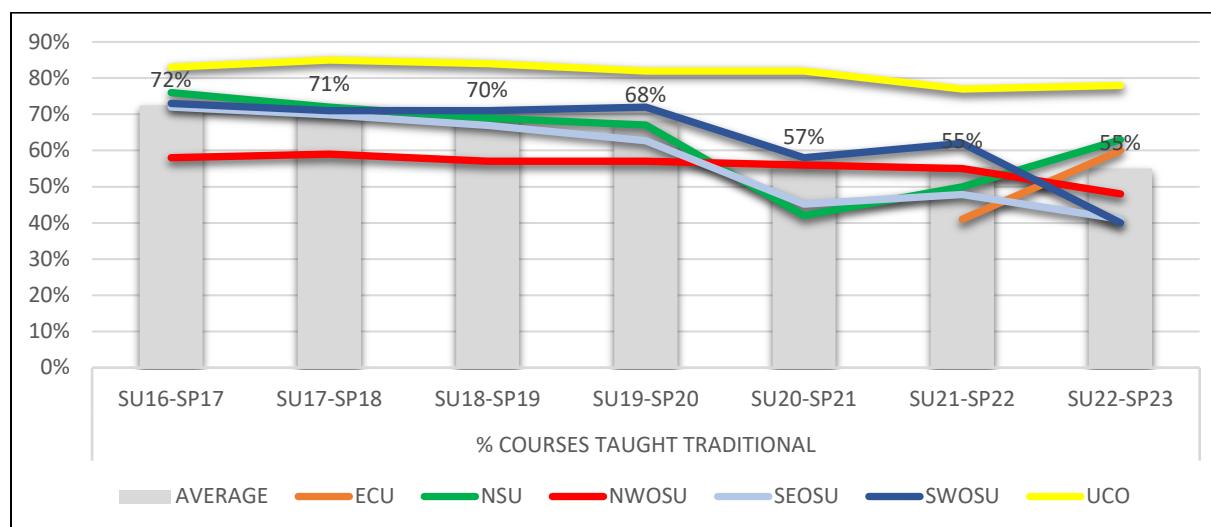


Chart 27. Percentage of students taking only online classes

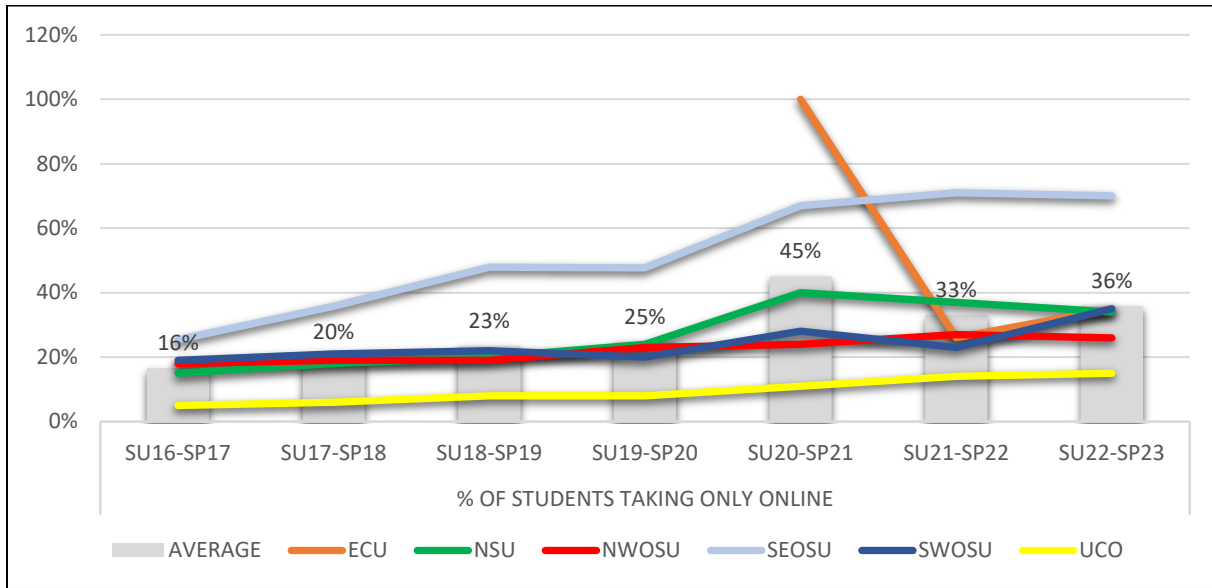


Chart 28. Percentage of students taking at least one online class

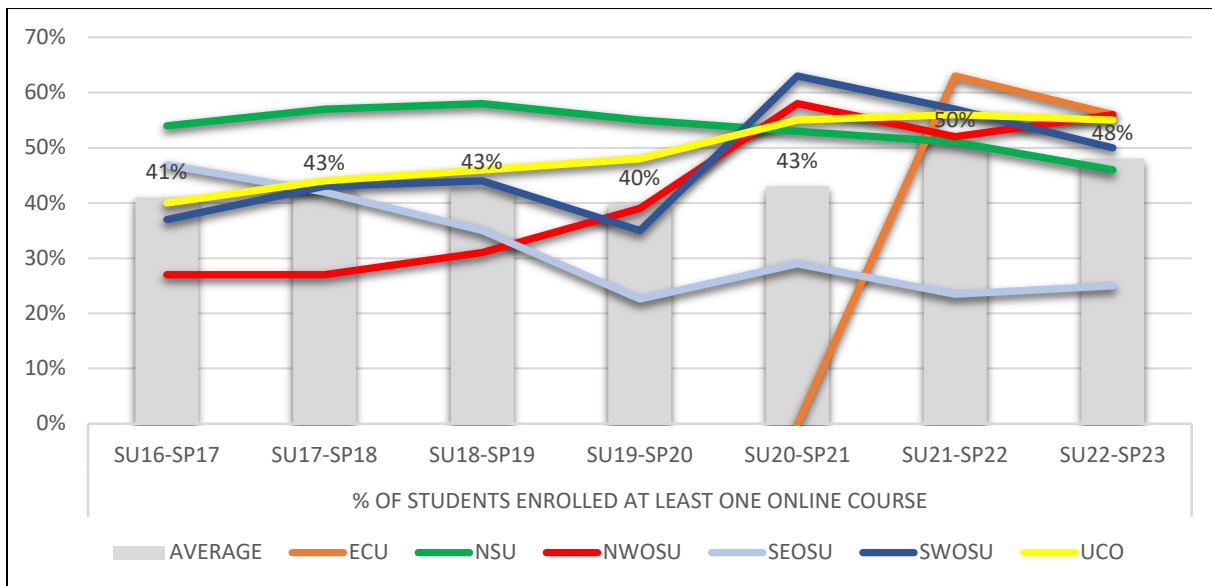
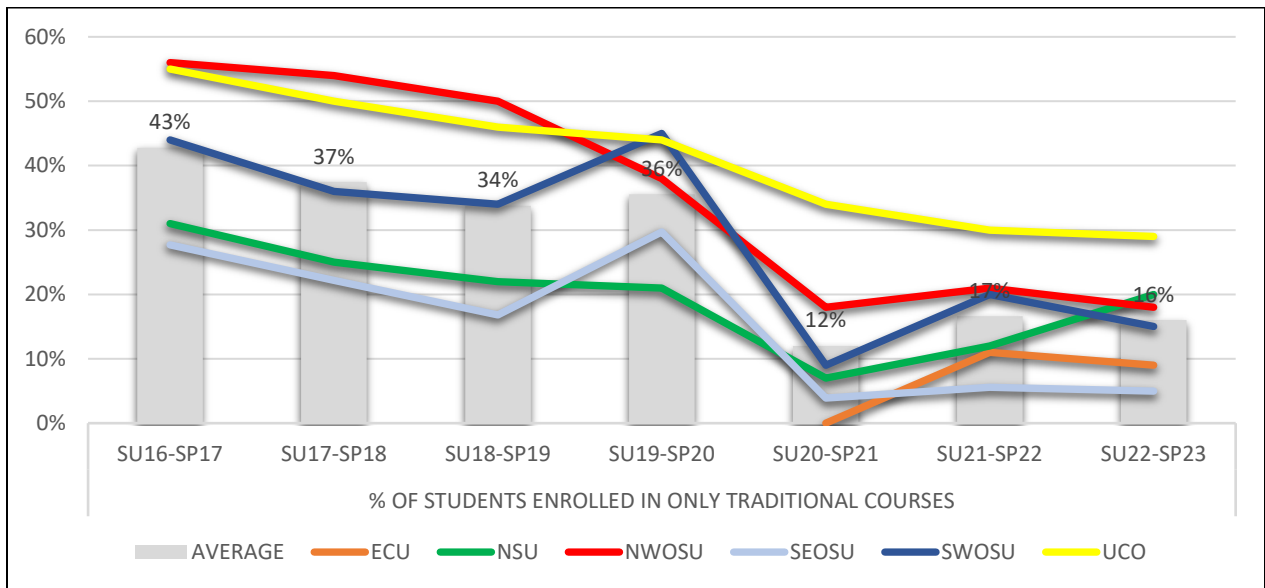


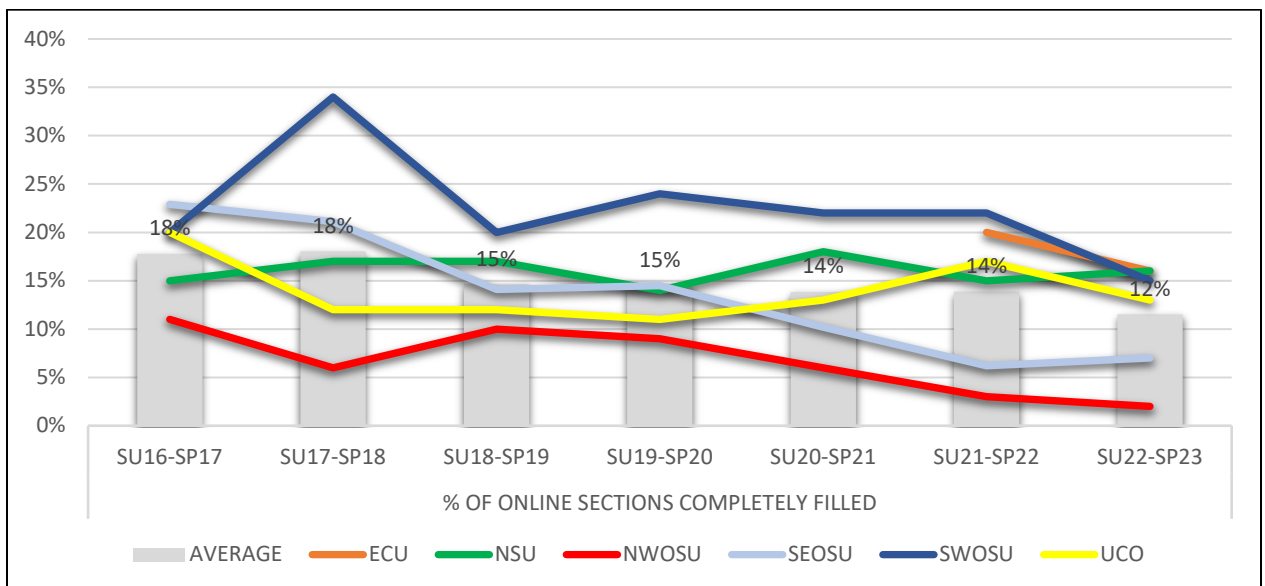
Chart 29. Percentage of students enrolled in only face-to-face courses



Meeting online course demand

One way to determine if an institution is meeting online course demand is to monitor the enrollment in online sections. If many sections are completely filled, it is an indicator that students want more online sections than are being offered. In the past year, universities are keeping close tabs on student demand for online courses, leading to a decrease in the number of completely-filled sections.

Chart 30. Percentage of online sections completely filled



Campus services

Auxiliary services on campus are services that must be profitable in order to operate. Two major areas are campus housing and meal plans. RUSO institutions are aware that the number of students living on campus and using campus meal plans are not only provide additional revenue for the universities, but they are also more connected to the university in ways that could help with retention and completion. System-wide, the percentage of students who live on campus and enroll in meal plans is slowly increasing.

Chart 31. Percentage of students living in campus housing

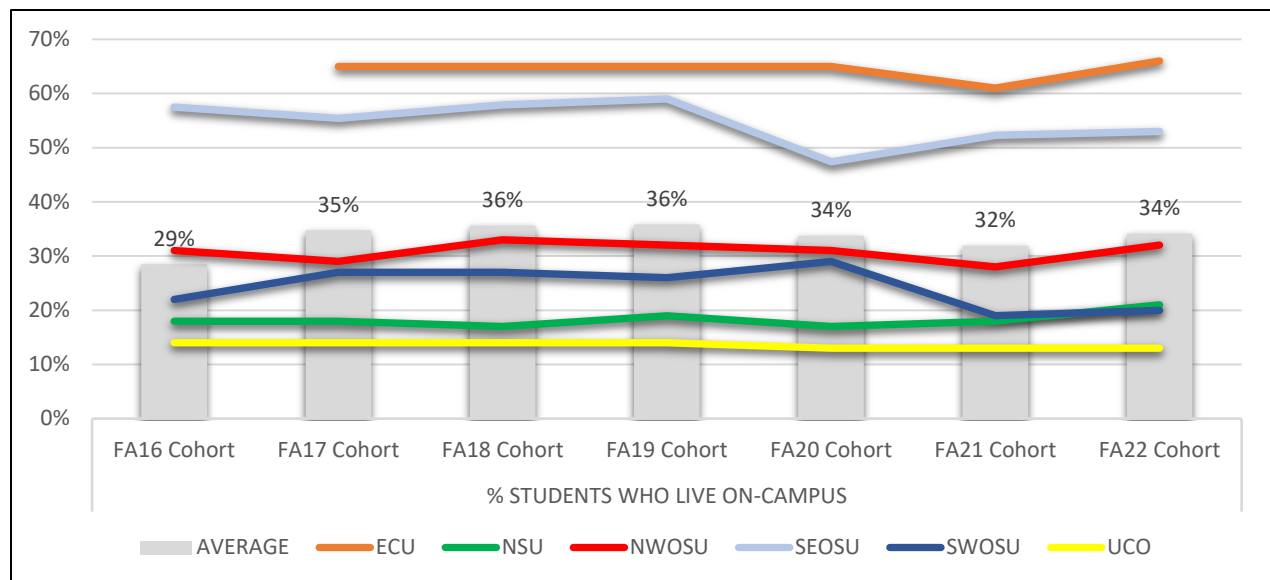
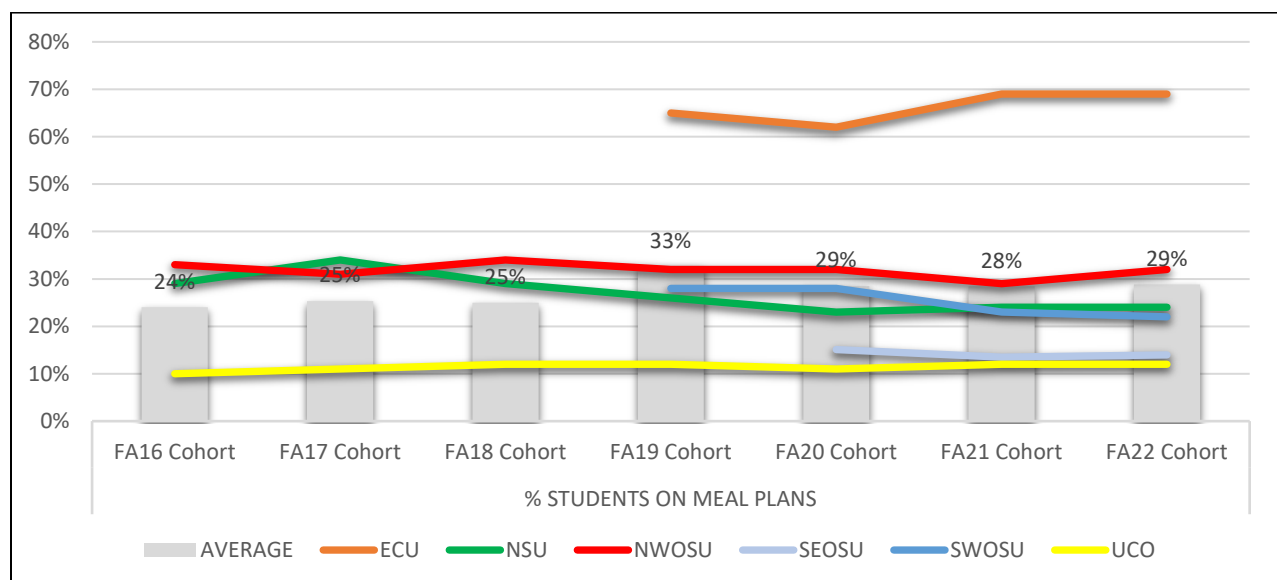


Chart 32. Percentage of students enrolled in meal plans



Concluding Observations

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

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

- RUSO institutions are agile and adaptable. They are able to quickly respond to student needs and workforce demands.
- RUSO institutions are meeting student needs in providing a variety of degree and credential options, a variety of instruction delivery options, and relevant workforce-related degrees.
- RUSO schools are finding ways to strengthen their enrollment strategies to sustain growth over time.
- RUSO institutions have several advocates in the state legislature and other key institutions who have been carrying the banner of our system for the past few years.
- Our retention rates and graduation rates are stronger than most universities and systems, indicating that we support students to the point that they stay in college and graduate.

Our **WEAKNESSES** are mainly tied to financial pressures and enrollment trends.

- Despite a one-year increase, state appropriations to higher education have dropped at an alarming rate in recent years. Politically, increases in tuition are tougher to get approved and have a negative effect on student retention. Because of the population we serve, our institutions are price-sensitive to the ability of our students to pay higher tuition and fees.
- Like many universities around the country, we are experiencing a decline in enrollment that is influenced by a myriad of issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We continue to battle high school preparedness for university coursework, especially considering two years of “pandemic” learning. Students are increasingly ill-prepared for the rigors of university coursework. All RUSO institutions have support services for these students (co-requisites, academic support centers, Title III services) but the strain on university faculty and staff to ensure these students’ success is increasing.

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

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

- Oklahoma is among the few states that are projected to see an increase in traditional high school graduates between 2023-2030. OSRHE in its analysis offers the increase will be primarily among non-white students. RUSO institutions must closely focus on their recruitment and retention strategies and tactics to attract these new students.
- RUSO institutions are more agile in responding to student demand for alternative course and program delivery options.
- RUSO institutions are also more agile in responding to changes within workforce demands.
- ARPA funds for various programs provide opportunities as “jumping off points” for innovative approaches to recruiting students and meeting workforce needs.
- OSRHE changes may allow for more innovation in programs and program delivery.

THREATS limit our ability to carry out our mission.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted not only enrollments, but also student needs. We are experiencing the effects of students who for two years dealt with large-scale interruptions in their high school education. Additionally, mental health issues are increasing dramatically. The effect of the pandemic remains a large factor in the future financial viability of our institutions.
- Future reductions in state appropriations remain a possibility should the United States enter a recession. Past recessions have taught us that a slowdown in the economy overall will result in less demand for energy resources. This volatility of a major revenue source for the state results in budget reductions. A lesson learned from past recessions is that RUSO institutions must be active public policy advocates and entrepreneurs to help diversify Oklahoma’s economy.
- Declining ACT scores among Oklahoma high school seniors and the increasing number of students declining to take the ACT present us with remediation challenges.
- Aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance grow as major financial needs.

Recommendations for Action

- Work as a system to monitor and respond to enrollment trends.
- Educate legislators and the public about how RUSO meets workforce needs.
- Ensure that RUSO institutions can continue to meet their mission in the face of ever-changing pressures on enrollment, retention, and completion.
- Work with industry to develop partnerships that will benefit both the workforce and the students.
- Implement best practices system-wide to facilitate transfer student support while continuing to meet institution mission.

Appendix A: Data Sources

The Benchmark and data sources are as follows:

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