



# **Student Satisfaction, Enrollment, Graduation, and Employment Outcomes**

Benchmarks Report to the Board of Regents,  
Regional University System of Oklahoma  
November 13, 2020 (rev 1.2)

## **Regents Dashboard Work Team**

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

## Noteworthy Findings

As in previous Dashboard reports, the comprehensive analysis of information has revealed significant findings that would have gone undiscovered if it not for this exercise. Substantial "bragging points" include these:

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

*Student Graduation.* RUSO institutions excel at meeting the needs of transfer, returning and adult students. Each year our campuses enroll a traditional freshman class of students who recently graduated high school. Those numbers (and only these) are reflected in the statistics reported through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the U.S. Department of Education. We also receive hundreds of transfer students who started somewhere else but who go on to graduate from a RUSO institution. Chart 1 will show a comparison of all students graduating in a year as a percentage of the freshman class entering that year. ***In most institutions, we graduate significantly more students each year than the number who enter as freshmen in the fall.***

*Number of graduates.* RUSO institutions graduate more bachelor's degree students each year than either the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State University. In 2018-2019, OU awarded about 6,212 undergraduate degrees, and OSU awarded 5,682. In the same year, ***institutions in the RUSO system awarded over 8,000 undergraduate degrees, almost 70 percent of the total undergraduate degrees of OU and OSU combined.***

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

*Institutional Productivity.* RUSO institutions overwhelmingly power the workforce for Oklahoma. State and corporate leaders have historically expressed concerns about the shortage of highly trained professionals to meet current needs. Indeed, state data shows that Oklahoma is a "brain drain" state, losing an average of 5,300 college graduates per year, mostly to Texas (Data from Oklahoma Economist, second quarter 2019 report, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, accessed at <https://www.kansascityfed.org/publications/research/oke/articles/2019/2q-closer-look-oklahoma-brain-drain>). That average number of college graduates leaving Oklahoma each year exceeds the annual undergraduate production of either OU or OSU.

RUSO institutions are in a key position to address these challenges when reviewing performance data collected by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Comparative data are shown in the table below for three cohorts of institutions: RUSO; Oklahoma's other five regional tier institutions comparable to RUSO; and the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University.

Briefly, the data show that the RUSO tier of institutions:

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

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

#### **Oklahoma Higher Education Employment & Median Annual Earnings 2014 OK Resident Graduates, 5 Years After Graduation**

<b>RUSO</b>	<b>Total Graduates</b>	<b>Number Employed in OK</b>	<b>% Employed in OK</b>	<b>Median Annual Earnings (OK)</b>
Northeastern State University	1,650	1,336	80.97%	\$38,508
East Central University	858	678	79.02%	\$37,354
Southwestern Okla State University	855	660	77.19%	\$46,288
Northwestern OK State University	359	274	76.32%	\$36,314
University of Central Oklahoma	2,704	2,004	74.11%	\$42,592
Southeastern OK State University	715	414	57.90%	\$35,800
<b>Composite</b>	<b>7,141</b>	<b>5,366</b>	<b>75.14%</b>	<b>\$40,860</b>

<b>Other Regional Tier</b>	<b>Total Graduates</b>	<b>Number Employed in OK</b>	<b>% Employed in OK</b>	<b>Median Annual Earnings (OK)</b>
Rogers State University	461	387	83.95%	\$45,596
University of Science & Arts OK	156	125	80.13%	\$31,954
Langston University	357	251	70.31%	\$42,996
Cameron University	710	450	63.38%	\$36,476
Oklahoma Panhandle State Univ.	227	101	44.49%	\$43,738
<b>Composite</b>	<b>1,911</b>	<b>1,314</b>	<b>68.76%</b>	<b>\$39,884</b>
<b>OU/OSU</b>	<b>Total Graduates</b>	<b>Number Employed in OK</b>	<b>% Employed in OK</b>	<b>Median Annual Earnings (OK)</b>
University of Oklahoma	4,964	2,104	42.39%	\$48,632
Oklahoma State University	4,855	2,528	52.07%	\$49,324
<b>Composite</b>	<b>9,819</b>	<b>4,632</b>	<b>47.17%</b>	<b>\$49,112</b>
<b>Total Composite</b>	<b>18,514</b>	<b>11,061</b>	<b>59.74%</b>	<b>\$43,704</b>

### **2018 OK Resident Graduates, 1 Year After Graduation**

<b>RUSO</b>	<b>Total Graduates</b>	<b>Number Employed in OK</b>	<b>% Employed in OK</b>	<b>Median Annual Earnings (OK)</b>
East Central University	926	816	88.12%	\$30,000
Northeastern State University	1,730	1,488	86.01%	\$30,190
Southwestern Okla State University	1193	1010	84.66%	\$36,650
University of Central Oklahoma	3,003	2,530	84.25%	\$32,562
Northwestern OK State University	372	305	81.99%	\$29,008
Southeastern OK State University	810	576	71.11%	\$29,468
<b>Composite</b>	<b>8,034</b>	<b>6,725</b>	<b>83.71%</b>	<b>\$31,764</b>

Other Regional Tier	Total Graduates	Number Employed in OK	% Employed in OK	Median Annual Earnings (OK)
Rogers State University	610	561	91.97%	\$34,336
Cameron University	791	666	84.20%	\$24,526
University of Science & Arts OK	134	111	82.84%	\$23,788
Langston University	323	247	76.47%	\$30,304
Oklahoma Panhandle State Univ.	273	163	59.71%	\$23,864
<b>Composite</b>	<b>2,131</b>	<b>1,748</b>	<b>82.03%</b>	<b>\$28,462</b>
OU/OSU	Total Graduates	Number Employed in OK	% Employed in OK	Median Annual Earnings (OK)
Oklahoma State University	5,682	3,554	62.55%	\$31,338
University of Oklahoma	6,212	3,455	55.62%	\$31,720
<b>Composite</b>	<b>11,894</b>	<b>7,009</b>	<b>58.93%</b>	<b>\$31,480</b>
<b>Total Composite</b>	<b>21,736</b>	<b>15,235</b>	<b>70.09%</b>	<b>\$31,168</b>

Source:

<https://www.okhighered.org/econ-dev/dashboards/dashboard-StatewideMedianAnnualEarnings.html>  
(2018-2019)

Please note that universities near a state border (like Southeastern Oklahoma State University and Oklahoma Panhandle State University) have recruiting areas that extend far into neighboring states. For such universities, it is normal for many students to return to their home states after graduation, but SEOSU has a higher percentage of students remaining in OK than other regional tier universities.

### **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 2019, 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 an 8 percent over-all increase in satisfaction from 2018. Regarding Question No. 2, there is a 6 percent over-all increase stating students would choose the same institution if they could do it all over again. Each university had a positive increase on each question compared to last year.

Data by institution is shown in the following table. Comparisons with last year's survey are reported in parenthesis. This year's data was collected during the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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	93% (-3%)	90% (-1%)
NSU	91% (-3%)	88% (-1%)
NWOSU	86% (-12%)	95% (+1%)
SEOSU	85% (+1%)	78% (-9%)
SWOSU	95% (-2%)	93% (no change)
UCO	90% (-1%)	81% (-1%)
<b>RUSO AVERAGE</b>	<b>90% (-3%)</b>	<b>87% (-2%)</b>

### Graduation Success

The Dashboard Work Group has previously shared with the Board its dissatisfaction with the graduation data provided 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.

The IPEDS data system has been soundly criticized by institutions across the United States for this narrow spectrum of measuring successful graduation rates, as anyone outside this narrowly defined cohort is not counted. The Student Achievement Measure (SAM) is another source of data. SAM uses follow-up data from the National Student Clearinghouse to provide information on students who begin at one institution and finish at another institution. The SAM data gives more perspective to the student clientele at regional universities.

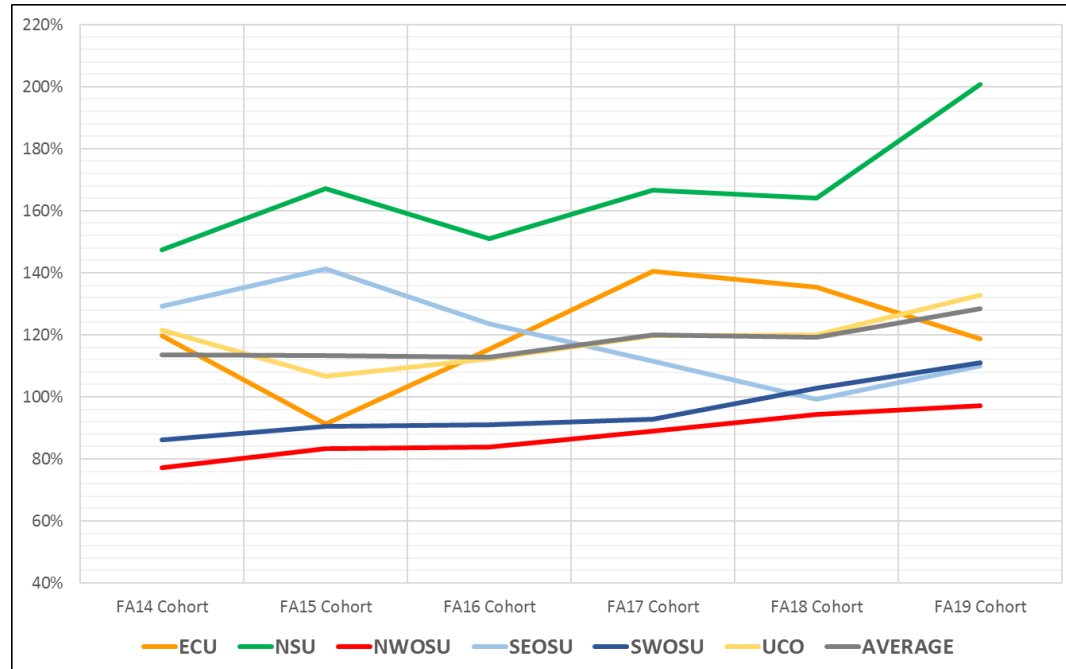
The exceptional success of RUSO institutions in serving the education needs of a broad array of students of all ages and circumstance is shown in Chart 1. This provides a comparison (in percentage terms) of the number of students graduating with an undergraduate degree in a given year divided by the number of full-time freshmen entering that same year.

In the estimation of the Work Group, these numbers are absolutely staggering. The lowest graduation percentage (UG degrees / Entering full-time freshman) at any institution is 78%

over a five-year period, and the highest is 200%. ***The average is consistently above 110%, and is trending above 120%.***

A caveat to this enrollment data applies to the NSU percentages. At NSU-Broken Arrow, which does not enroll freshmen or sophomores, almost the entire graduating class is made up of transfer students, which positively skews the average. Even when removing NSU's degrees from the calculation, the average range was from 103% to 114% over the five year period, with a current average of 114%.

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



### Access, Progress and Completion

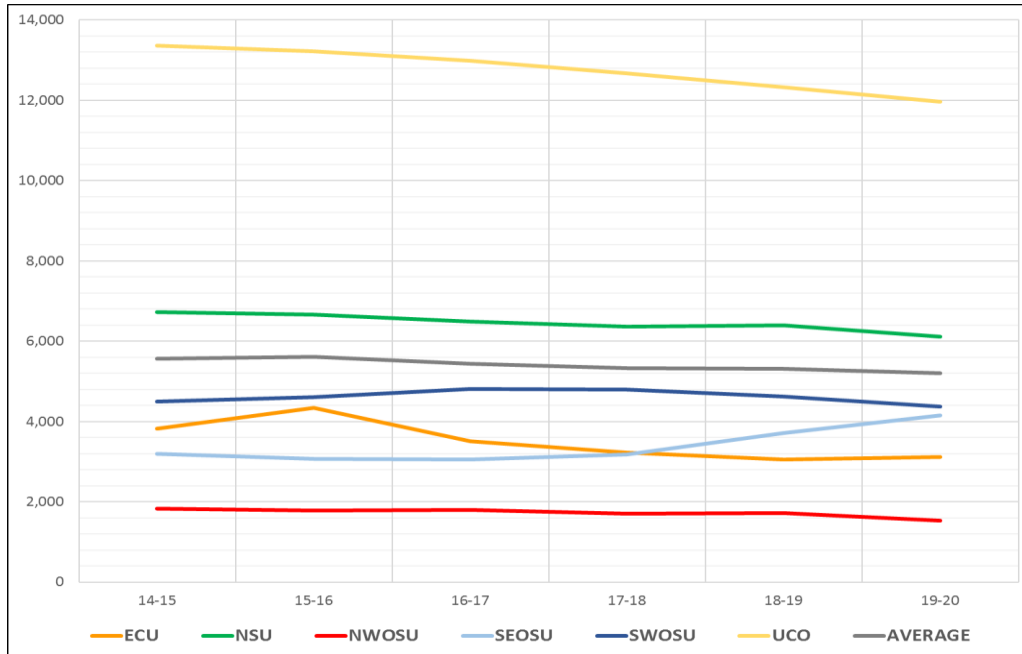
Enrollment at RUSO institutions is a continuing concern. Nationwide, college enrollment peaked in 2010 and has dropped since then, and currently is nearly flat. RUSO enrollment has dropped slightly over the last several years. Many factors could account for this slide, including almost a 30 percent increase in tuition rates among RUSO institutions over the past five years (caused by dramatic and damaging cuts in state appropriations).

Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drop in enrollment this year. A significant contributor also was a change last year in admission standards for OU and OSU, both of which reported record freshman classes in fall 2019. Regardless, many of the students who begin at OU and OSU will transfer and finish a degree at a RUSO institution.

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



Chart 2. Full-time equivalent students



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 3. First-time, full-time freshmen

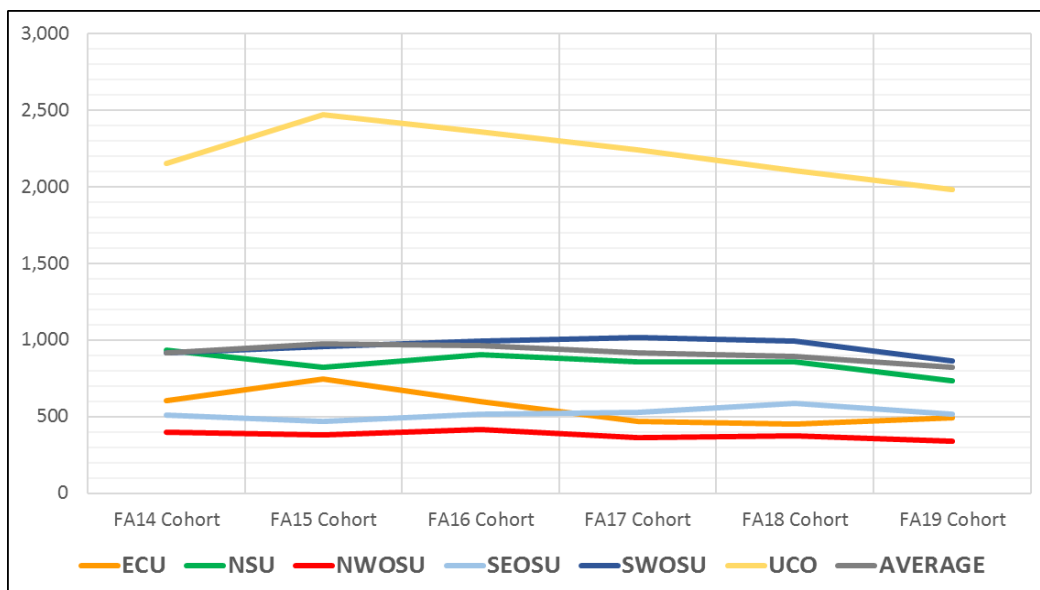


Chart 4. Student Credit Hours

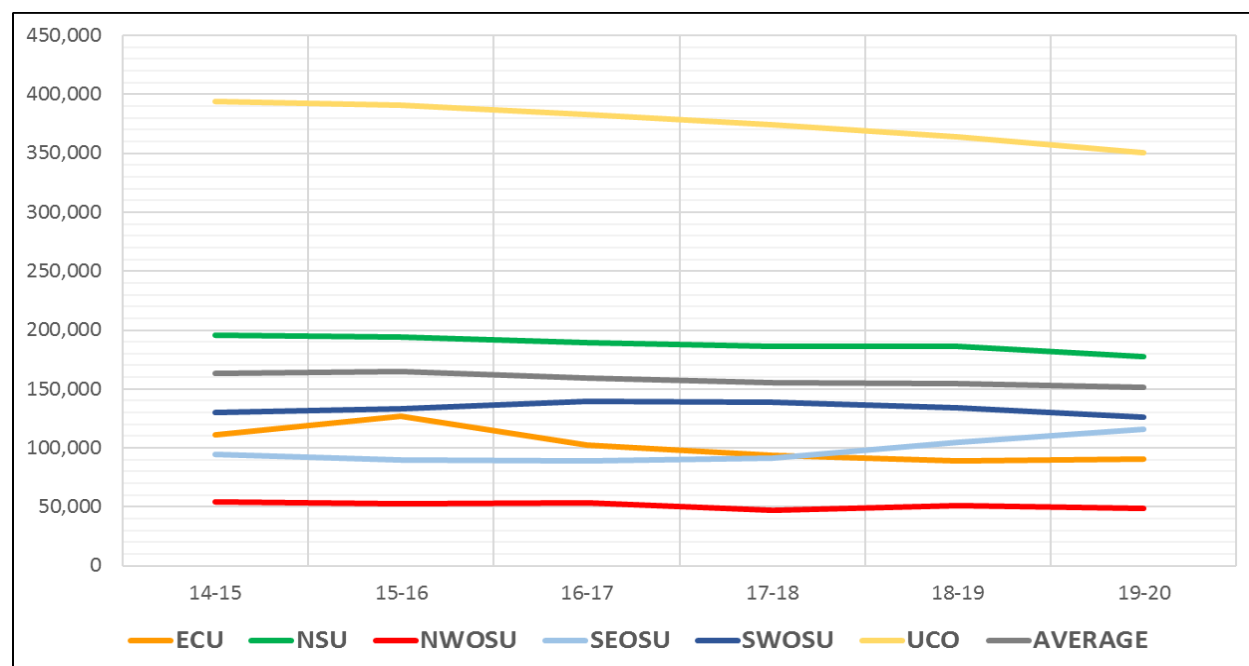
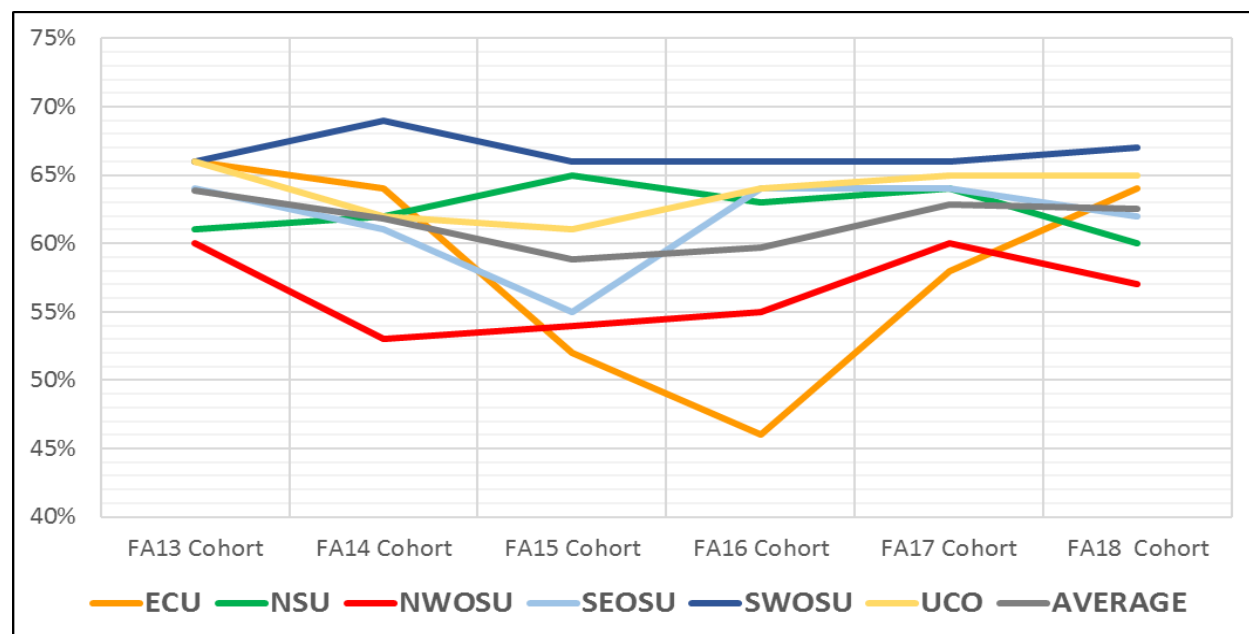


Chart 5. Retention rates, first-time, full-time freshmen



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

	Current Data (in thousands)	Projected Data (in thousands)										Change, 2017-18 to 2027-28
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	
United States	3,296	3,285	3,252	3,271	3,291	3,305	3,366	3,425	3,412	3,327	3,337	1.2%
Oklahoma	41	41	41	42	42	40	43	44	44	44	44	7.4%

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

## Graduation Rates

The trend among RUSO institutions is toward a higher graduation rate (Chart 6). This statistic is very difficult to move, and the improvement represents considerable work over time by the institutions. There are no shortcuts, and it is problematic to get empirical data on the causes of the improvement. A university often implements many measures at once on a continuous basis, so it is difficult to know definitively which interventions accounted for the change.

IPEDS Graduation rates do not account for students who begin degrees at one institution and finish at another. Many of our RUSO students complete their first two years at our institutions, never intending to graduate, and transfer to a specialized program at another institution and graduate on time (Chart 7). 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 6. IPEDS Graduation rates (within 6 years)

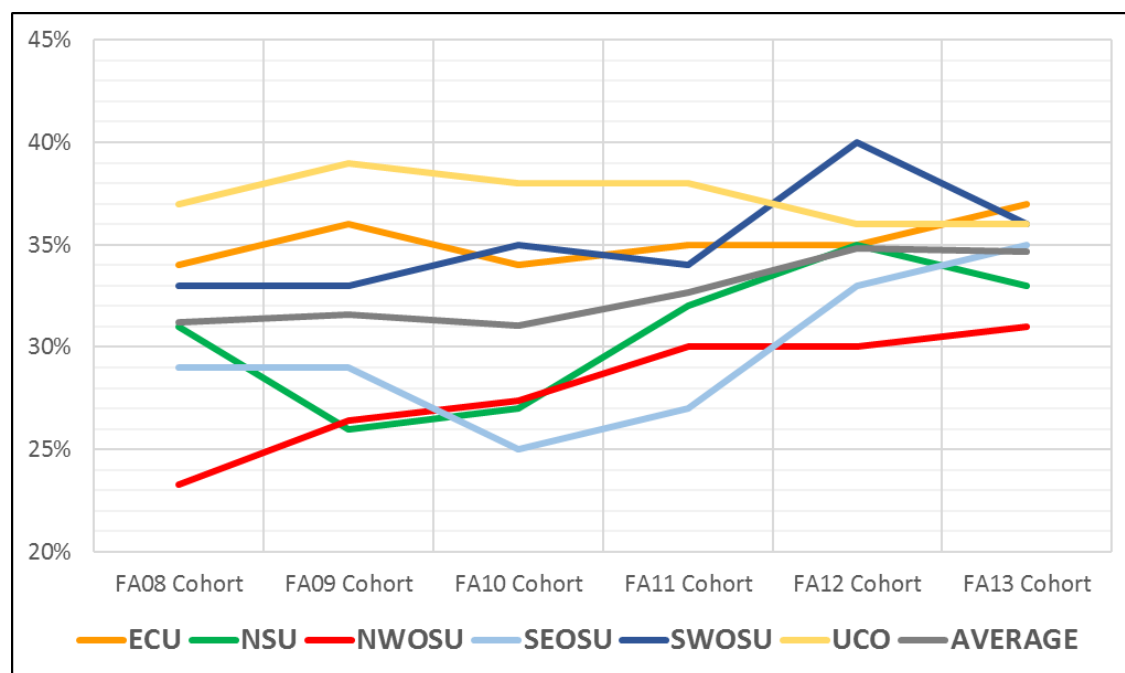
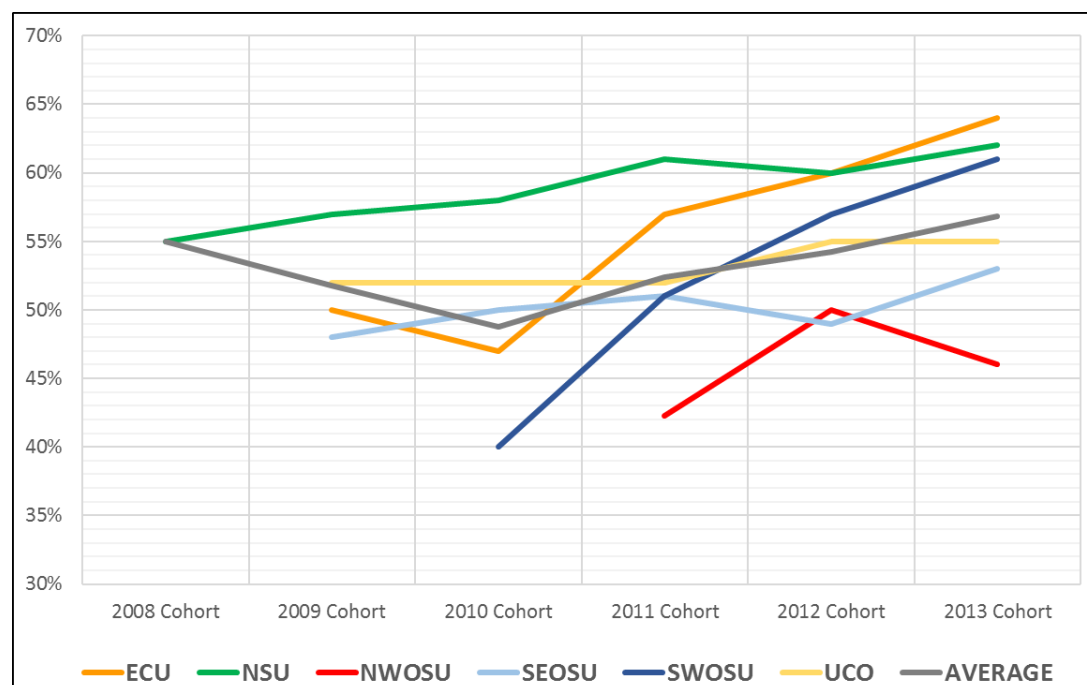
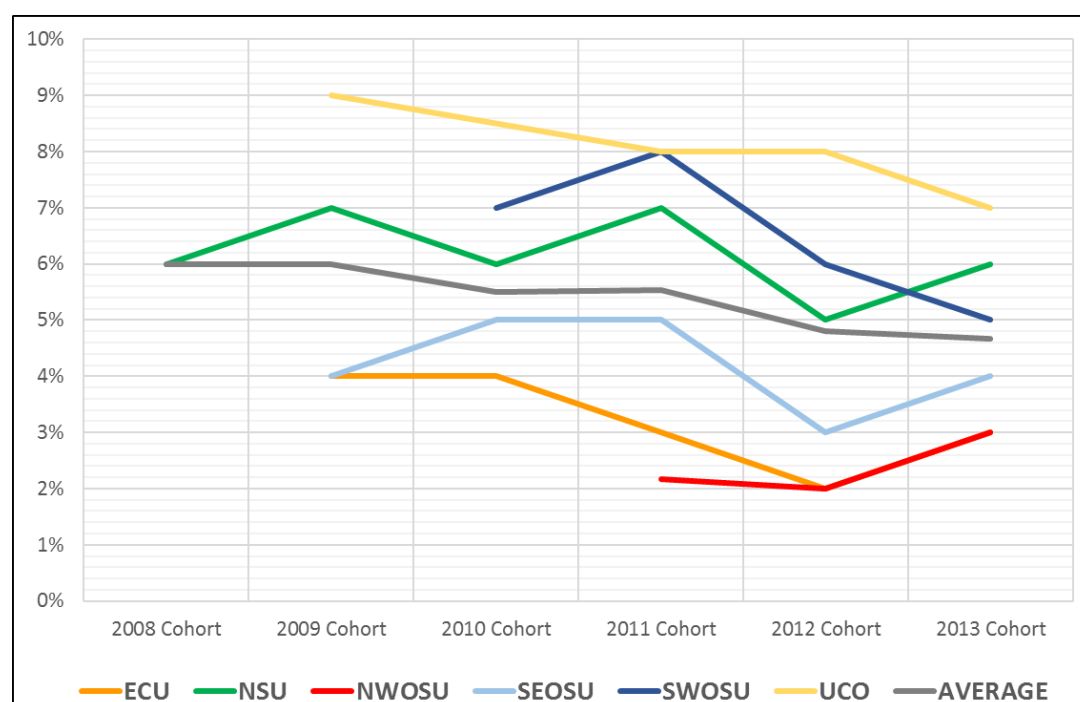


Chart 7. First-time freshmen, transferred and graduated elsewhere in 6 years



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

Chart 8. First-time freshmen still enrolled after 6 years



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

Chart 9. Bachelor's degree awarded

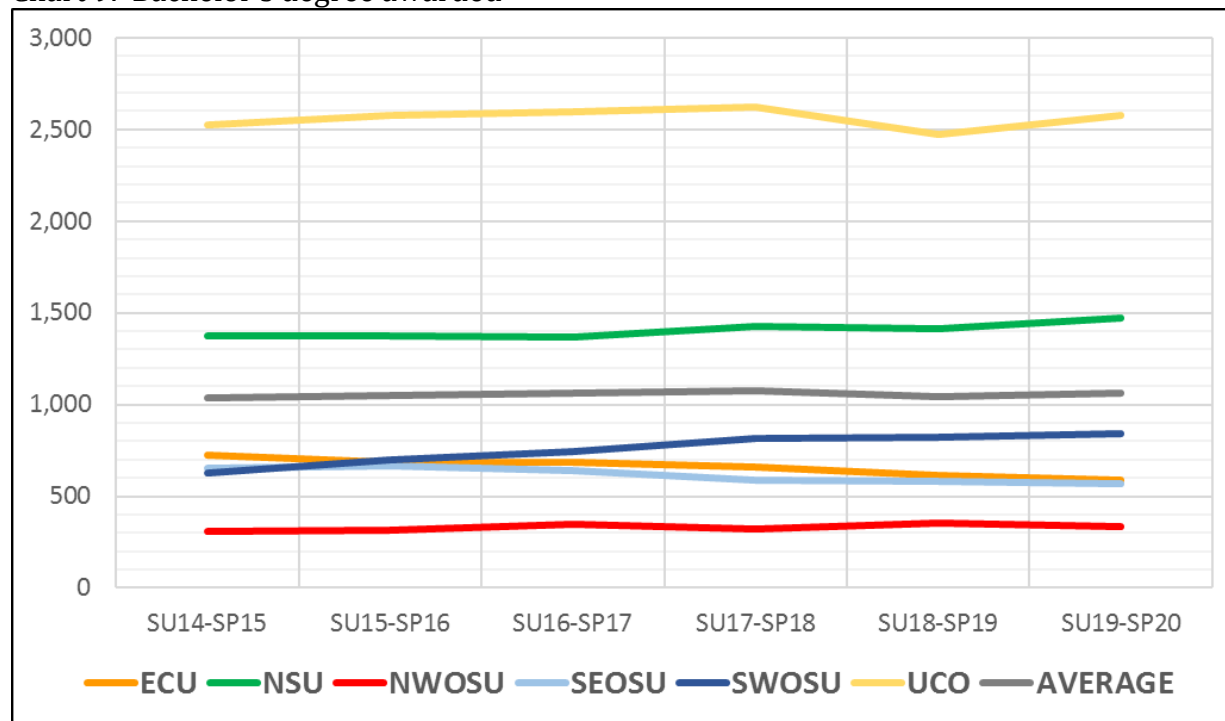


Chart 10. Master's degrees awarded

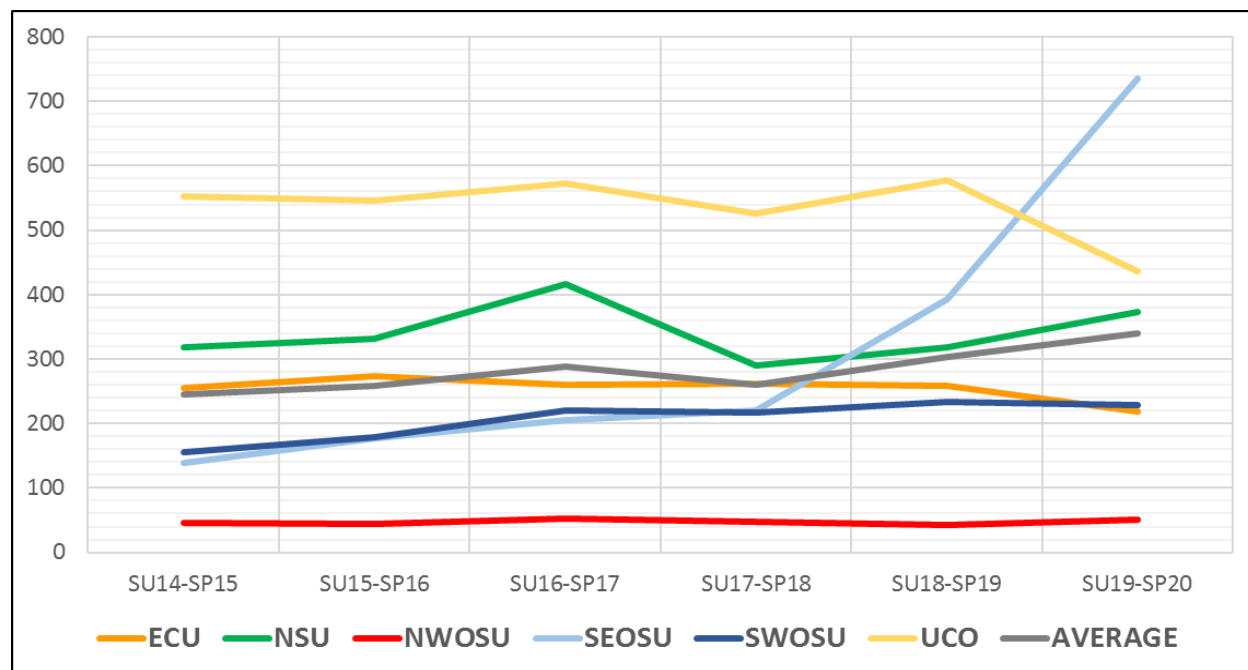
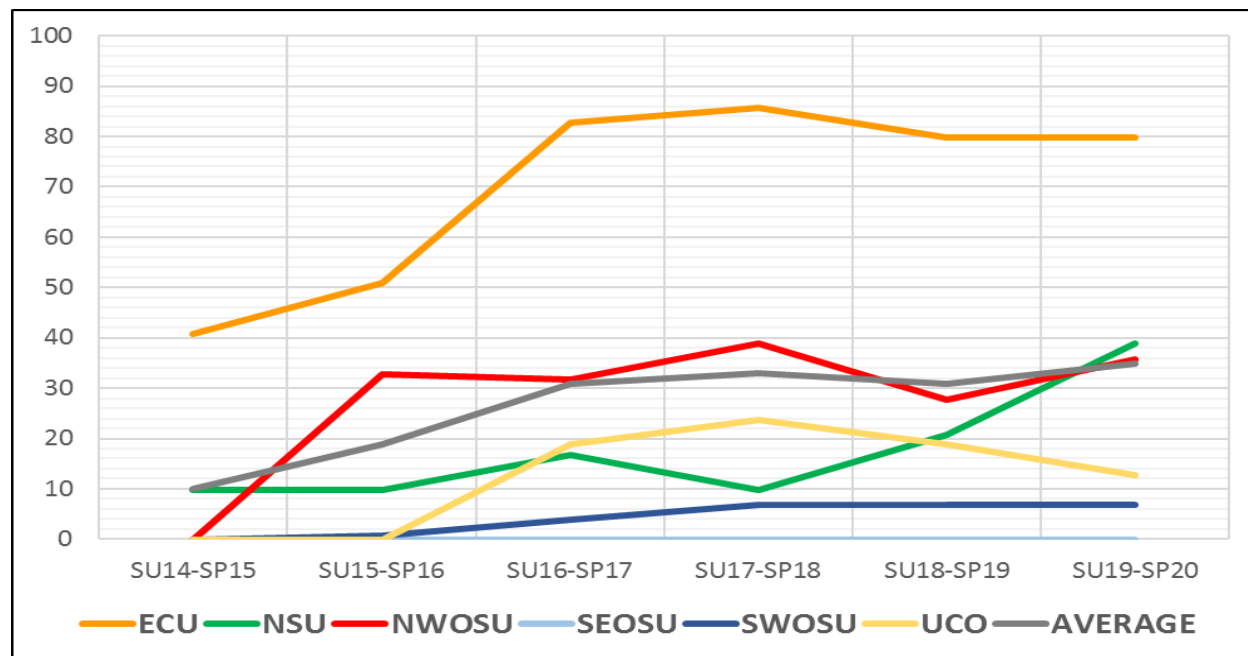


Chart 11. Certificates awarded



### General Education Math and English Completion

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

Because of our investment in the co-requisite model and (in some cases) use of a minimum HS GPA to exempt students from remediation, more students are taking GE Math and English courses, including many who previously would have been placed in developmental courses first. Our current strategy is to enroll most of the deficient students in the GE course along with a required support class. Even though this way of measuring does not show it, we have a higher number of students completing GE Math and English as freshmen than we did previously, which should aid retention.

Chart 12. General Education Math completion rates as a percentage of enrollments  
(Shaded bars indicate the completion rate of Math-deficient students)

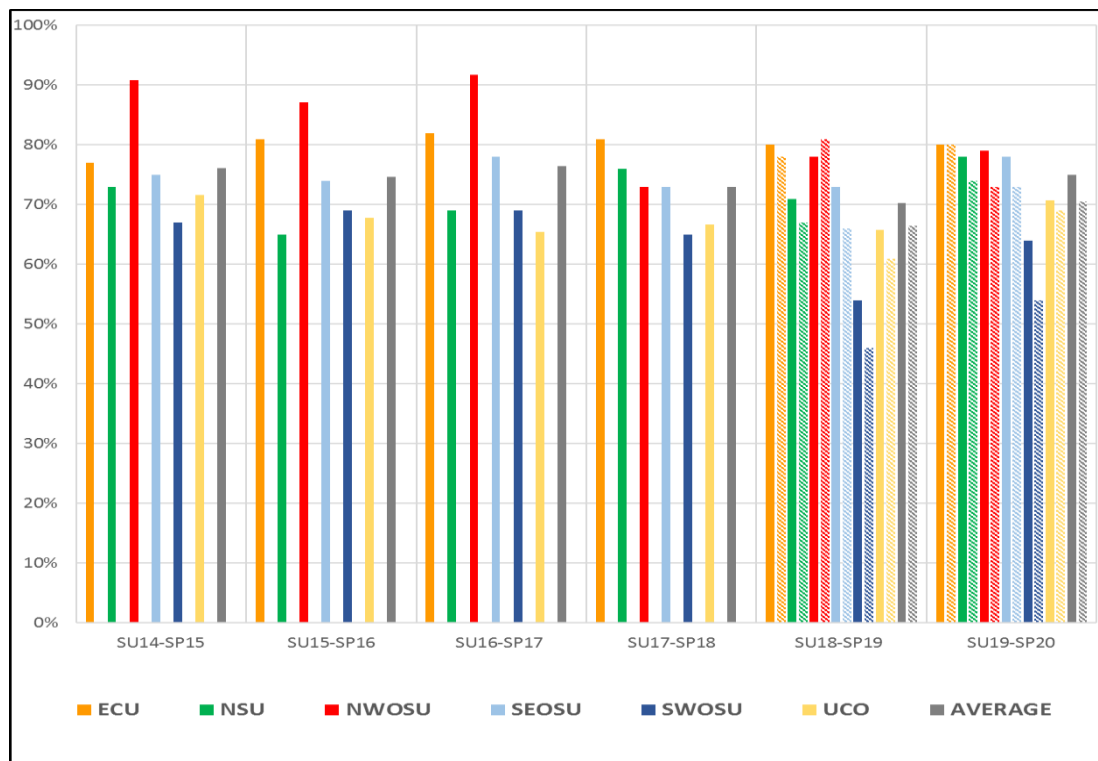
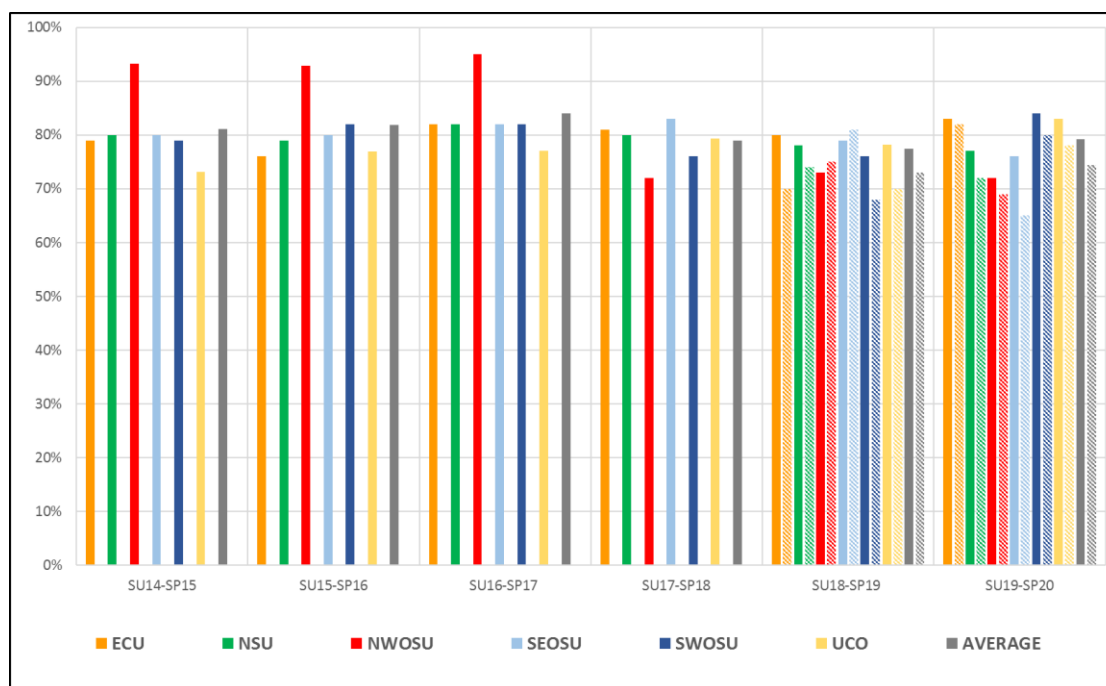


Chart 13. English Composition I completion rates as percentage of enrollment  
(Shaded bars indicate the completion rate of English-deficient students, a new statistic)



## Concluding Observations

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

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

- RUSO universities together grant almost 70% as many undergraduate degrees as OU and OSU combined.
- RUSO universities provide an education at a much lower cost of tuition and fees than do the doctoral institutions.
- Our students are very satisfied with the quality of their education. The overwhelming majority would choose their same institution again to pursue their degree.
- RUSO graduates stay in Oklahoma and work for at least 5 years at a rate that exceeds all other state systems and tiers.
- Our cost in tuition and fees is among the lowest in the central Midwest (and indeed the country).

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

- State appropriations to higher education have dropped at an alarming rate in recent years, 25% over the past five years, and at the same time we have been politically unable to raise tuition sufficiently to make up the difference. Because of the population we serve, our institutions are price-sensitive to the ability of our students to pay higher tuition and fees.
- We are beginning to see evidence that the rising cost of tuition at RUSO institutions is a serious barrier to many of our students, even though we are still at or below regional averages for overall tuition and fees.
- Like many universities around the country, we are experiencing a decline in enrollment that is influenced by a myriad of issues, including college readiness and finances.
- We also have relatively low retention rates, due partly to inadequate college preparation. It is certainly a part of our regional mission to be a point of access for these students, but it presents challenges when substantial numbers must be remediated to have the necessary foundation to succeed.

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 analysis shows that a good deal of our attrition occurs due to financial pressure on students and families. If we can improve the delivery of financial aid, we can improve retention.
- The RUSO board last year requested that OSRHE raise the tuition-waiver cap, and OSRHE has done so, from 3.5% of E&G to 5% of E&G. Used correctly, this can enhance retention and net tuition revenue if waivers are strategically used to help retain students who are financially at risk.



- The expansion of Oklahoma's Promise eligibility to current college students will significantly help retain and graduate our lower-income students. This would take legislative approval.
- Oklahoma is among 26 states that are projected to see an increase in traditional high school graduates between 2017-2028. The Center for Educational Statistics with the U.S. Department of Education predicts a 7.4% increase in these graduates. OSRHE in its analysis offers the increase will be primarily among non-white students. RUSO institutions must closely focus on their recruitment and retention strategies and tactics to attract these new students.

### **THREATS** limit our ability to carry out our mission.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted enrollments. Numerous Oklahomans have experienced layoffs, lost jobs, or other reductions in employment as a result of the pandemic. Because the pandemic is spreading almost unchecked, it remains a large factor in future financial viability of our institutions.
- Both OU and OSU enrolled larger freshman classes the past two years, primarily by slightly lowering admission standards. They are now accepting students who traditionally would have entered a regional university, and many of those students eventually find their way back to RUSO universities as transfer students.
- Future reductions in state appropriations remain a possibility should the United States enter a recession. Past recessions have taught us that a slowdown in the economy overall will result in less demand for energy resources. This volatility of a major revenue source for the state results in budget reductions. A lesson learned from past recessions is that RUSO institutions must be active public policy advocates and entrepreneurs to help diversify Oklahoma's economy.
- Public PK-16 education is not a priority for legislative funding. This makes a substantial impression among corporations as they investigate potential states for relocation. A recent study completed for the Oklahoma City Chamber by Site Selection Group (SSG), a major recruiter for corporate relocations, found numerous strengths for the metro. On the negative side of the ledger were two significant threats expressed by out-of-state business leaders. They contend that Oklahoma has a shallow workforce talent base, and they hold the perception that lawmakers do not value and will not fund public education. An analysis conducted by SSG of Tulsa's corporate relocation marketability had similar findings.
- The misleading narrative of low graduation rates of regional universities (based solely on skewed IPEDS performance statistics) harms us. We must do a better job of telling our story to decision-makers and leaders across Oklahoma of the many students who we graduate but are not counted by IPEDS. This includes hundreds of students each year who begin at OU or OSU and transfer to and complete their educations at a RUSO school.
- Declining ACT scores among Oklahoma high school seniors present us with remediation challenges.

### **Recommendations for action**

One specific action that could be taken by the RUSO Board of Regents is to support a statutory language change (70 O.S. § 2605 (OSCN 2019) Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Act) to expand Oklahoma Promise eligibility so that students can apply during college.

Many students miss the opportunity to apply when the application window is open 4-5 years prior to college for reasons often beyond their control. Consequently, they struggle financially to remain in school because they are not receiving this scholarship support. In emerging discussions with legislators and OSRHE staff, there is support for a narrowly focused discretionary authority to award scholarships by campus admissions or financial needs basis.

An award would match the same eligibility criteria under current state statutes. Scholarships could be awarded at any point in a student's academic career based on its essentiality to making a difference in whether the student will persist to graduation.

Data is currently being gathered on the RUSO institution retention rates of students who drop out due to financial struggles. Preliminary data indicates that RUSO students who receive only Pell grants have a much higher drop-out rate than students who received both Pell grants and Oklahoma Promise scholarships.

## Appendix A: Data Sources

The Benchmark and data sources are as follows:

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

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

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