

# Professional & Graduate Degree Excellence Program Report

January 2025



# State University System of Florida Professional & Graduate Degree Excellence Program Report January 2025

## Introduction

The Florida Legislature established the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program to support the efforts of the State University System of Florida (SUS) institutions to enhance the quality and excellence of professional and graduate schools in medicine, law, and business. In addition, the program is intended to expand the economic impact of state universities. Section 1004.6498, Florida Statutes, requires the Board of Governors to submit a report by March 15 each year. The statute requires that the report include information on program expenditures, first-time pass rates on the United States Medical Licensing Examination, first-time pass rates on the Florida Bar Examination, the percentage of graduates enrolled or employed that reflects the added value of a graduate-level business degree, the advancement in the rankings of medicine, law, and graduate-level programs, and the added economic benefit of the universities to the state. The legislature began providing recurring funding to SUS institutions for the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program starting in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017-18. This report explains how SUS institutions spent \$60 million in recurring program funds during FY 2023-24.

Recruiting faculty and research scholars can often take longer than a year, and the timing of hiring individuals may depend on a variety of factors. Other metrics such as exam passage rates, employment outcomes, rankings, and economic benefits to the state often take several years to demonstrate improvements, as data collection and reporting timeframes may lag a year or two behind the fiscal year.

The State University System includes six medical schools, four law schools, and ten institutions with graduate-level business programs.<sup>1</sup> These universities received funding based on prior performance indicators such as licensure exam pass rates, employment outcomes, and the number of graduates. In 2023-24, SUS institutions awarded 713 medical degrees, 726 law degrees, and 5,343 graduate-level business degrees. Appendix A provides details of these awards by institution.

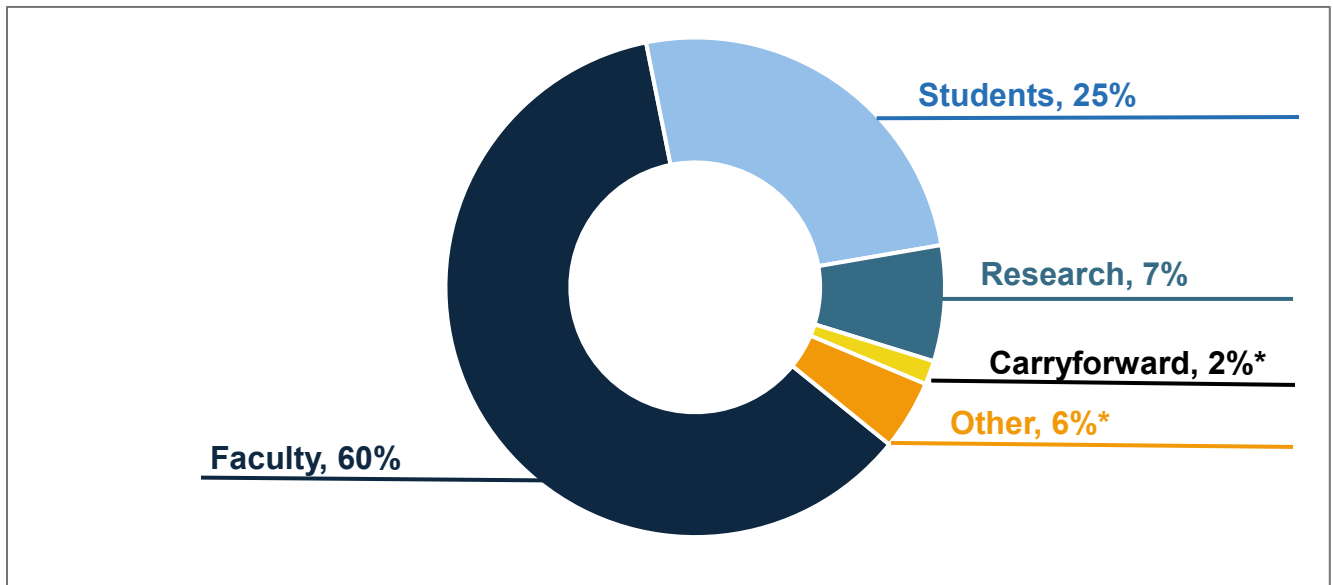
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<sup>1</sup> New College of Florida and Florida Polytechnic University did not receive allocations for this program, as neither has a college of medicine, law, or graduate-level business program.

## Expenditure Information

Most of the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program funds were used to recruit and retain faculty and support student success initiatives. The legislature provided recurring funding of \$60 million to the SUS institutions in 2023-24 to support the program. Of this, 60% was used to recruit and retain faculty, and 25% was used to support students through various mechanisms. Some examples of student support activities include recruitment, licensure examination preparation, and advising. Specifically, six universities reported that funds directed to scholarships and stipends aided in recruiting top graduate students and increased enrollment. Florida International University increased the number of doctoral fellowships and enhanced the amount awarded to research scholars. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University reported that scholarships enhanced program quality by retaining competitive pharmacy students. Other expenditure activities varied across the medicine, law, and business categories. Exhibit 1 provides an overview of how SUS institutions spent the funds for the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program in FY 2023-24.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Expenditures of Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program Funds, 2023-2024**



Source: Florida Board of Governors staff analysis of data provided by SUS institutions on the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program, fall 2024.

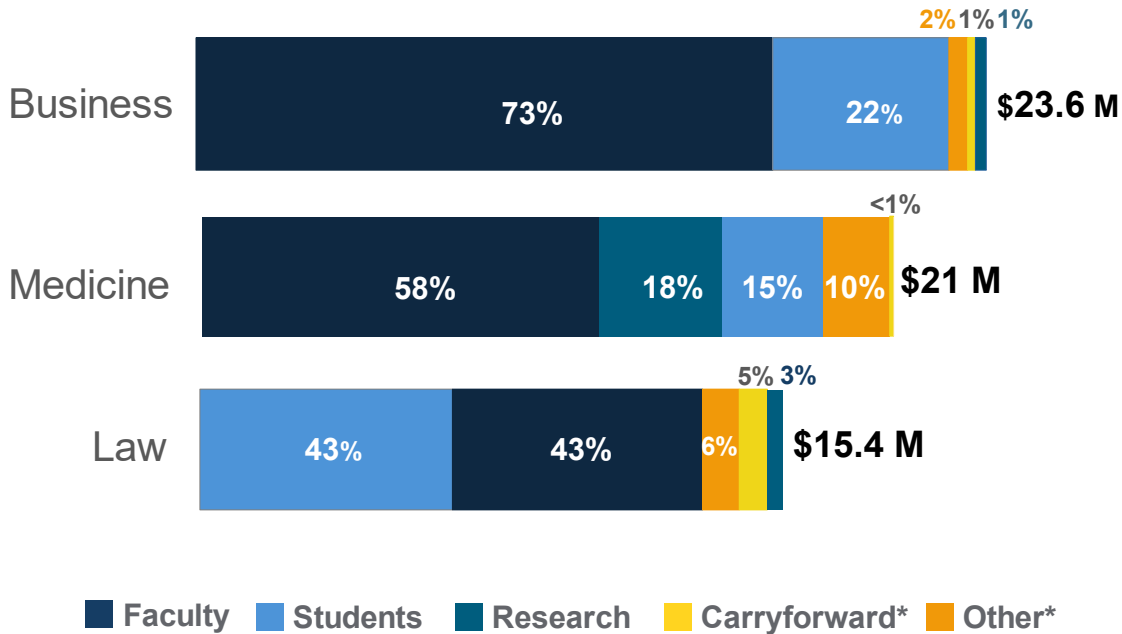
\*Other includes costs associated with conferences, data submission, journal submission, software, computers, space upgrades, and infrastructure. Universities reported that carryforward funding will be used on student financial aid and student services.

Of the funds spent to recruit or retain faculty across the System, universities expended 6% on faculty recruitment efforts and 94% to retain existing faculty. Faculty expenditures generally supported faculty salaries and hiring faculty where needed in various departments. Exhibit 2 provides an overview of how the funds were spent by the program area in FY 2023-24.

- **Business:** State universities spent approximately \$23.6 million of program funds on graduate business education. Most funds (73%) were spent on faculty recruitment and retention, and 22% were used for student recruitment, scholarships, and professional development for students. The remaining funds were spent on research, infrastructure, and engagement, including elevating market awareness of the programs.
- **Medicine:** Over the last year, state universities spent approximately \$21 million of program funds to support graduate education in medicine. Most funds (58%) supported faculty, 18% supported medical research, 15% supported student initiatives, and 10% supported other initiatives such as lab fees, outreach efforts in pipeline programs, and enhancing student practical experiences.
- **Law:** State universities spent approximately \$15.4 million of program funds on law schools. The focus of these funds (86%) supported faculty and students, while the remaining funds were devoted to research and infrastructure. The other category includes program funds spent on Bar Exam preparation tools, diagnostic testing, data analytics, and upgrades to classrooms and other law school facilities.

## Exhibit 2

### Expenditures for Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence by Program Area 2023-2024



Source: Florida Board of Governors staff analysis of data provided by SUS institutions on the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program, fall 2024. Percentages may total to less than 100% due to rounding. \*Other includes costs associated with conferences, data submission, journal submission, software, computers, space upgrades, and infrastructure. Universities reported that carryforward funding will be used on student financial aid and student services.

## Elevating the National Competitiveness of the State University System

One of the primary goals of the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program is to enhance the quality and excellence of professional and graduate schools in the System. Section 1004.6498, Florida Statutes, requires the Board to report information on the first-time pass rate on the United States Medical Licensing Examination, the first-time pass rate on the Florida Bar Examination, and the percentage of graduates enrolled or employed at a wage threshold that reflects the added value of a graduate-level business degree.

### Exam Passage Rates

Graduates from the SUS medical schools do very well on the series of medical licensing examinations. As a System, most graduates meet or exceed national exam benchmarks. Exhibit 3 provides the first-time pass rate performance for the last three years on the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam for all six-state university medical schools.

### Exhibit 3

#### Summary of U.S. Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) Performance for the SUS USMLE - Step 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> year of medical school)

Year	FAU	FIU	FSU	UCF	UF	USF	SUS	Benchmark
2021	98%	100%	95%	98%	99%	99%	98%	96%
2022	89%	100%	94%	93%	96%	97%	96%	93%
2023	94%	96%	95%	96%	97%	97%	96%	92%

#### USMLE - Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (4<sup>th</sup> year of medical school)

Year	FAU	FIU	FSU	UCF	UF	USF	SUS	Benchmark
2020-21	100%	100%	99%	99%	100%	99%	99%	99%
2021-22	98%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%
2022-23	100%	98%	99%	100%	99%	99%	99%	98%

Source: State University System Accountability Plan, 2024.

Law school graduates from SUS institutions also perform well on the Florida Bar Exam. Of the four law schools, three schools exceeded the benchmark for all exam takers in Florida. Exhibit 4 provides an overview of the first-time pass rate on the Florida Bar Examination for the four law schools in the System for the last three years.

### Exhibit 4

#### Passage Rates on the Florida Bar Exam

Year	FAMU	FIU	FSU	UF	SUS	Benchmark
2021	59%	87%	74%	80%	76%	71%
2022	53%	80%	75%	77%	73%	65%
2023	41%	89%	82%	79%	77%	70%

Source: State University System Accountability Plan, 2024.

### Employment Outcomes: Masters-Level Business Degree

Section 1004.6498, Florida Statutes, requires the Board of Governors to report on employment outcomes for graduate-level business programs. Exhibit 5 provides an overview of the percentage of master's degree graduates earning more than \$40,000 in the year following graduation. This exhibit reflects graduates who were found employed in Florida in 2022-23. Across the System, 61% of graduate business students met this threshold and were employed in Florida in 2022-23. Doctoral recipients were excluded from this analysis due to the qualitatively different nature of their education and the earnings outcomes for those graduates.

## Exhibit 5

### Employment Outcomes for Masters-Level Business Degrees, 2022-23 Graduates

SUS Institution	2022-23 Total Graduates*	Job Placement of Graduates Earning more than \$40K in Florida or enrolled**	
		Number of Graduates	%
FAMU	43	21	49%
FAU	550	369	67%
FGCU	191	125	65%
FIU	1,416	896	63%
FSU	564	299	53%
UCF	520	352	68%
UF	1,108	534	48%
UNF	191	139	73%
USF	449	315	70%
UWF	227	140	62%
<b>System</b>	<b>5,259</b>	<b>3,190</b>	<b>61%</b>

\*Includes only graduates with valid SSNs.

\*\*Also includes those continuing education. All continuing education outcomes are based on Florida enrollment data for the fall 2022 semester and the preliminary winter/spring 2023 semester. The percentage employed includes only those employed in Florida.

Source: Florida Department of Education, Florida Education & Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) data, provided 12-09-24. All employment outcomes in this table are based on Florida Unemployment Insurance wage data from the October - December quarter of 2023.

## National Rankings

In national rankings, the System continues to be recognized by U.S. News & World Report for excellence in higher education. Florida has been recognized for the eighth consecutive year as the best state for higher education. U.S. News & World Report also ranked six SUS institutions in the top 100 public schools in the 2025 rankings, with UF ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, FSU ranked 23<sup>rd</sup>, FIU ranked 46<sup>th</sup>, USF ranked 45<sup>th</sup>, UCF ranked 61<sup>st</sup>, and FAMU ranked 81<sup>st</sup>. In addition, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University is ranked as the Best Public Historically Black College and University in the country.

Specific to medicine, law, and graduate degrees in business, many SUS institutions are also recognized in U.S. News & World Report. In 2024, U.S. News & World Report reworked its ranking methodology for medical schools, shifting to a tiered system. The new system includes four tiers, with Tier 1 medical schools being the highest-performing and Tier 4 the lowest-performing. The new system uses federal research activity and National Institutes of Health research grants as the criteria to determine the tiers. Exhibit 6 provides an overview of SUS national rankings in medicine, law, and business, compared to all other private and public institutions. In addition, U.S. News & World Report also ranks specific individual programs within these areas, such as Executive Master of Business Administration. However, the rankings provided in Exhibit 6 are the only ones readily available to the public.

**Exhibit 6**  
**U.S. News & World Report 2024 Rankings, Specific Graduate Programs**

SUS Institution	Medicine (Research)	Law	Business
FAMU		178-196	Unranked
FAU	Tier 3		Unranked
FGCU			Unranked
FIU	Tier 3	68	110
FSU	Unranked*	48	109
UCF	Tier 3		Unranked
UF	Tier 2	28	36
UNF			Unranked
USF	Tier 2		87
UWF			Unranked

Note: These rankings represent only those publicly available. Unranked indicates that the program was listed as unranked due to incomplete submissions or beyond the ordinal ranking system.  
 \*Florida State University College of Medicine did not participate in the medical school rankings the last few years. The university reported that it plans to participate in this ranking moving forward.  
 Source: U.S. News & World Report Rankings of Best Medical Schools: Research, Best Law Schools, and Best Business Schools, 2024. reported by US News & World Report.



## Economic Impact

The State University System is an essential contributor to Florida's economy directly and indirectly through spending for university operations, sales and services of component units, and other purposes. Additionally, the Board maintains a research and innovation dashboard that includes metrics calculating return on investment. As the Board's dashboard reported in March 2024, the System created or supported over 25,000 jobs through external funding in FY 2022-23. Further, the calculated economic impact of state and federal research expenditures was over \$5.5 billion in FY 2022-23. Through the Professional and Graduate Degree Excellent Program, universities have enhanced their graduate programs, continued to grow enrollment, and hired additional graduate-level faculty. For example, the Colleges of Law, Business, and Medicine at Florida International University invested funds to support student scholarships, career and advising services, student recruitment, and student facilities upgrades. The university's efforts focus on strengthening the caliber of students entering specialized master's degree programs in areas of strategic emphasis while adding value to future career prospects.

Institutions have also reported utilizing funding from this program to invest in graduate-level student scholarships, which reduces the cost of education to students, lowers student debt, further incentivizes Florida residents to attend an SUS institution, and attracts new talent to attend graduate school in Florida. The University of Central Florida reported that it was able to offer more competitive packages to attract and retain top graduate students. The university reported that these program funds helped the university to improve the quality of education and strengthen the university's national academic profile.

Finally, funding for this program has contributed to scientific research and discoveries that translate from institutions to the marketplace, improving the lives of Florida residents. Florida Atlantic University reported that this program has supported research in advancing the treatment, management, and care of Alzheimer's disease. Similarly, the University of Florida reported that its highly ranked graduate programs translate scientific discoveries from labs to patients, positively impacting the health of Florida residents.

## Conclusion

The Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program has allowed the State University System to support and enhance professional and graduate education in the state, improve national rankings, and help contribute to Florida's economy.

## APPENDIX A

In 2023-24, SUS institutions awarded 713 medical degrees, 726 law degrees, and 5,343 graduate-level business degrees. Tables 1-3 below provide additional details of the degrees awarded by the institution for the previous three academic years.

**Table 1**  
**Total Graduate Degrees Awarded in Medicine (MD)**

Institution	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
<b>FAU</b>	64	64	56
<b>FIU</b>	117	118	114
<b>FSU</b>	119	125	110
<b>UCF</b>	107	122	116
<b>UF</b>	130	141	141
<b>USF</b>	165	179	176
<b>Total MD</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>713</b>

Source: Florida Board of Governors, Office of Data Analytics, December 2024.

**Table 2**  
**Total Graduate Degrees Awarded in Law**

Institution	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
<b>FAMU</b>	158	112	100
<b>FIU</b>	174	153	170
<b>FSU</b>	216	188	191
<b>UF</b>	221	220	265
<b>Total Law</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>726</b>

Source: Florida Board of Governors, Office of Data Analytics, December 2024.

**Table 3**  
**Total Graduate Degrees Awarded in Business**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
<b>FAMU</b>	87	43	61
<b>FAU</b>	611	579	633
<b>FGCU</b>	140	191	305
<b>FIU</b>	1,579	1,616	1,369
<b>FSU</b>	516	574	414
<b>UCF</b>	595	542	440
<b>UF</b>	1,202	1,228	1,154
<b>UNF</b>	237	205	166
<b>USF</b>	661	605	532
<b>UWF</b>	213	238	269
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,841</b>	<b>5,821</b>	<b>5,343</b>

Source: Florida Board of Governors, Office of Data Analytics, December 2024.



# STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA





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