

World Class Faculty & Scholar Program Report

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State University System of Florida World Class Faculty and Scholar Program Report January 2025

Introduction

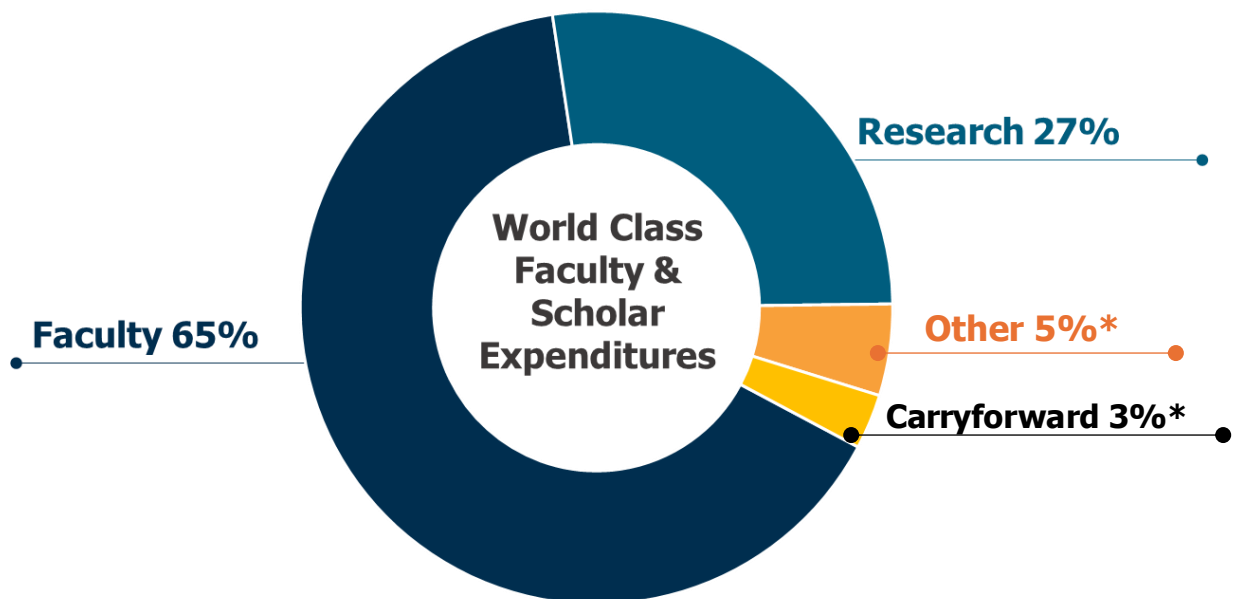
The Florida Legislature established the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program to fund and support the efforts of the State University System (SUS) institutions to recruit and retain exemplary faculty and secure additional research funding. This program intends to elevate the national competitiveness of Florida's state universities through faculty and scholar recruitment and retention. Section 1004.6497, Florida Statutes, requires the Florida Board of Governors to summarize information from the SUS institutions on the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program. The statute requires that the report include information on program expenditures, success in recruiting research faculty, the four-year graduation rate, the number of undergraduate courses offered with fewer than 50 students, and the increase in the national academic standing of targeted programs.

The State University System continues to make great strides to elevate its national research profile to the top echelon. With support from the legislature and Governor, the System is fifth in the country for public institution research expenditures. Over the past five years, System-wide research expenditures have increased by 29%. Under the Board of Governors' 2025 Strategic Plan, the goal for annual research expenditures for the System is \$3 billion by 2025. The World Class Faculty and Scholar Program is one mechanism that provides resources for the System to continue to elevate its research.

Expenditure Information

While System institutions expended World Class Faculty and Scholar Program funds in various ways, most funds (92%) were used to recruit and retain faculty and increase research efforts. The legislature provided recurring funding of \$90.5 million in 2023-24 to the SUS institutions to support the program. Some examples of faculty recruitment and retention efforts include research-centric cluster hires, awards for outstanding performance, professional development, and overall hiring/retention of faculty. Examples of research efforts include instruction and research infrastructure enhancements, faculty research and commercialization efforts, and postdoctoral fellowships. Exhibit 1 provides an overview of how SUS institutions spent or allocated the funds for the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program in Fiscal Year 2023-24.

Exhibit 1 Most World Class Faculty and Scholar Funds Supported Faculty and Research



Source: Florida Board of Governors staff analysis of data provided by SUS institutions on the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, fall 2024.

*Other expenses include initiatives such as sponsoring a research consortium, data analytics, and IT expenses. Universities reported that carryforward funding will be used on faculty salaries, student financial aid, and research support.

This program has continued to enhance and improve SUS institutions' efforts to recruit and retain faculty. Of the funds used for faculty recruitment and retention System-wide, 31.6% were spent on faculty recruitment efforts, and 33.7% on retaining existing faculty. In 2023-24, institutions reported recruiting over 127 faculty and retaining over 1,526 faculty due to this program. The faculty turnover was generally lower, with 10 out of 12

institutions reporting reduced turnover rates for faculty hired through the World Class Scholars program compared to their faculty peers. Four institutions reported a 0% turnover rate for faculty hired through this program. These retained and newly hired faculty transferred nearly \$23 million in research funding to the institutions and have more than \$215 million in research proposals under development or review. Additionally, four institutions (FAMU, FAU, FGCU, and UF) reported that faculty supported through this program collectively received nearly \$43 million in research dollars. Last year, World Class Scholars funding supported initiatives such as the Stiles-Nicholson Brain Institute, the Institute for Human Health and Disease Intervention, and research on the use of nanotechnology for cancer studies. If this trend continues, this program will continue to increase the System's research profile and national ranking.

Elevating the National Competitiveness of the State University System

The World Class Faculty and Scholar Program intends to elevate the System's overall national competitiveness through faculty and scholar recruitment and retention. While it is difficult to know this program's exact impact on metrics such as the four-year graduation rate, the number of undergraduate courses offered with fewer than 50 students, and academic rankings, information for each of these metrics is provided below.

- The System's four-year graduation rate has improved from 53.0% to 61.8% in the last five years.¹ Exhibit 2 provides details by institution.
- Increasing the number of faculty may also help to reduce class size. As of fall 2023, 86.9% of undergraduate courses across the System had fewer than 50 students. Exhibit 2 provides details by institution.

¹ Graduation rates use the SUS Same column in the 2024 System Accountability Plan, which does not include students who transfer between institutions.

Exhibit 2

Summary of Four-Year Graduation Rates and Undergraduate Courses with Fewer than 50 Students

Institution	Four-Year Graduation Rate		% of Undergraduate Courses with Fewer than 50 Students
	2018-22	2019-23	Fall 2023
FAMU	28.4%	35.0%	88.1%
FAU	49.4%	50.3%	87.8%
FGCU	42.2%	42.3%	84.6%
FIU	59.8%	64.9%	87.2%
POLY	41.0%	41.2%	100.0%
FSU	74.0%	74.9%	89.0%
NCF	58.3%	53.1%	97.9%
UCF	54.8%	54.2%	76.9%
UF*	75.3%	76.9%	90.3%
UNF	50.6%	48.4%	89.6%
USF	64.8%	65.5%	86.4%
UWF	47.0%	48.1%	94.4%
System	60.3%	61.8%	86.9%

*The undergraduate course enrollment data only represents the UF main campus.
 Source: Florida Board of Governors, 2024 System Accountability Plan and institutional responses to the 2023-24 Common Data Set (CDS) survey.

In national rankings, the System continues to be recognized by U.S. News & World Report for excellence in higher education. Florida has been recognized as the best state for higher education for the past eight years. U.S. News & World Report ranked six SUS institutions in the top 100 public schools in the 2025 rankings, with the University of Florida ranked 7th, Florida State University ranked 23rd, the University of South Florida ranked 45th, Florida International University ranked 46th, the University of Central Florida ranked 61st, and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University ranked 81st. In addition, New College of Florida was ranked as the 7th Best Public Liberal Arts institution in the country, and Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University was ranked 1st on the list of Best Public Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the country. Exhibit 3 lists SUS institutions on the U.S. News & World Report's Top 100 National Public University Rankings for 2024 and 2025.

Exhibit 3

U.S. News & World Report Public University Rankings – Top 100

SUS Institution	U.S. News & World Report Ranking (Public)		
	2024	2025	1-Year Change
UF	6	7	-1
FSU	23	23	0
USF	45	45	0
UCF	64	61	+3
FIU	64	46	+18
FAMU	91	81	+10

Source: U.S. News & World Report Rankings of National Universities, Top Public Schools, 2024 and 2025.

Specific to research expenditures, the System is ranked 5th among other public systems nationally and has five institutions ranked in the top 100 public institutions for research.² For the seventh year in a row, five universities within the State University System of Florida were ranked on the Top 100 Worldwide Universities Granted U.S. Utility Patents in 2023 by the National Academy of Inventors.³ This recognition demonstrates the real-world impact of research at System institutions, as technology transfers contribute to the economic growth of the state's economy.

² National Science Foundation, Higher Education Research and Development Survey, Downloaded 12/5/2024.

³ National Academy of Inventors, *Top 100 Worldwide Universities List, 2023*.

Return on Investment

Funding for the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program has allowed institutions to realize a positive return on investment to the state. Since the program's inception, institutions have received multiple years of support, contributing to the System's ability to attract new research awards. Expenditures associated with these research awards contribute to the state's economy and often result in a positive economic return. For example, 30% (over \$23 million) of Florida Atlantic University's total research award dollars came from faculty supported by the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, which equates to a 410% return on investment.

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University utilized World Class Faculty and Scholar funds to support the PRISM Scanning Electron Microscope, expanding the university's imaging capabilities to collaborate with other units. Additionally, through the state's investment in the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, the University of Florida's research funding rose 15% to a record level of \$1.25 billion, and the university's student/faculty ratio decreased from 19:1 in 2017 to 16:1 in fall 2023.

Finally, faculty associated with this program engage students in undergraduate research, which enhances students' academic experience and better positions them to enter the workforce with applied knowledge and skills. Better-prepared students provide a long-term strategic and competitive benefit to the state. Together, these program benefits strengthen the quality of education offered by SUS institutions, which helps attract highly sought-after new students, faculty, and businesses to Florida.

Conclusion

The World Class Faculty and Scholar Program has enhanced the ability of SUS institutions to successfully recruit and retain high-quality faculty and increase research efforts. As a result, institutions recruited over 127 faculty who transferred nearly \$23 million in research funding to Florida in 2023-24. Faculty supported through this program collectively received nearly \$43 million in research dollars. These successes have led the System to enhance national competitiveness relative to quality postsecondary education and research.



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