Research Brief
October 2026

ACUE-Certified Faculty Linked to Improved Outcomes in Gateway Courses

Students taught by ACUE-certified faculty earned higher grades and lower rates of Ds, Fs, and Withdrawals (DFWs) at Georgia Southern University and North Carolina A&T State University.

Founded in 1906, Georgia Southern University (GSU) serves nearly 30,000 students, with more than 2,000 faculty and staff across three campuses.

They offer 150 academic programs, including certificates, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral. GSU has been named a "military-friendly" school for 13 years and has received numerous designations for academic excellence.

Serving over 15,000 students, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCAT) is one of North Carolina's top research campuses and the largest Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the U.S.

They are nationally recognized for excellence in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

Key Findings

Students in gateway courses taught by ACUE faculty during and after certification experienced:

- **7.4% fewer** Ds, Fs, and withdrawals (DFWs)
- **2.8% increase** in average grades
- **4.7% increase** in grades among Black/African American students
- **5.6% increase** in grades among first-generation students

The study found that there was a larger impact for Black/African American students, first-generation students, and first-year students, as well as larger impacts at NCAT.

Executive Summary

In 2022, Georgia Southern University (GSU) and North Carolina A&T University (NCAT) participated in the Gates Foundation-funded, multi-institution Faculty Mindset Research Project, which demonstrated improved mindsets among ACUE-certified faculty teaching gateway courses.

Building on these findings, course outcomes were assessed in gateway courses at GSU and NCAT, comparing sections taught by faculty who became ACUE-certified through the Faculty Mindset Research Project to sections taught by non-ACUE faculty.

The sample included 99 ACUE faculty with a total sample of 310,053 non-unique student enrollments in 8,398 sections across three time periods:

- Before (spring 2021–fall 2021)
- During (spring 2022–fall 2022)
- After certification (spring 2023–fall 2023)

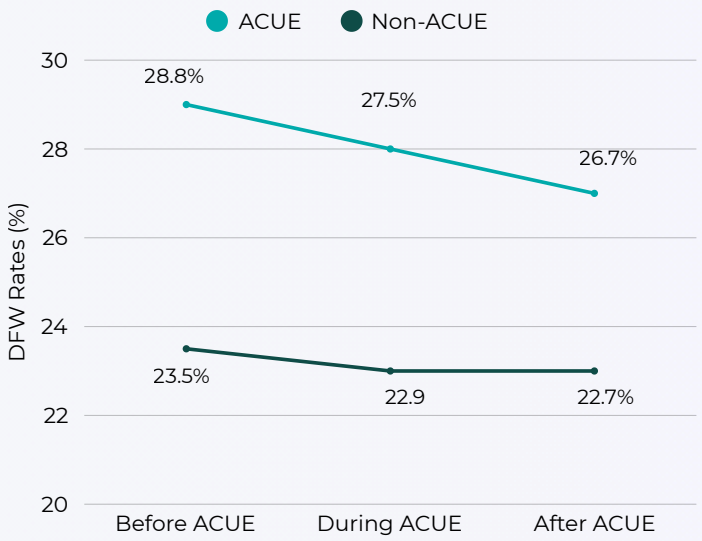
The analyses revealed that gateway courses taught by ACUE-certified faculty had larger improvements in average grades and decreases in DFW rates compared to sections taught by non-ACUE faculty, with stronger impacts among Black/African American, first-generation, and first-year students. Additionally, Pell-eligible students at NCAT also saw larger grade improvements.

The results varied between institutions and the positive effects were more pronounced at NCAT. Further research and ongoing support for faculty are needed to maintain and expand the positive impacts of ACUE certification across diverse educational contexts.

Lower DFW Rates

There was a significant impact of certification on DFW rates in the year following the ACUE course, b = -0.06, p = .039.

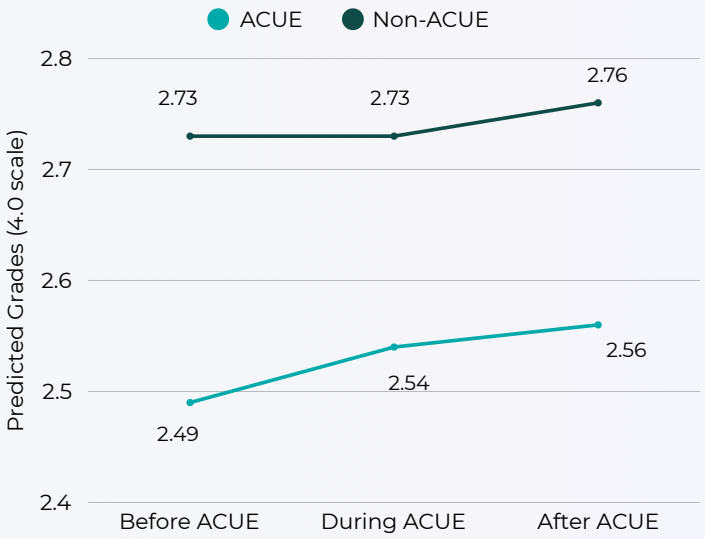
There was an estimated 7.4% decrease in DFW rates from baseline among students who took gateway courses with ACUE-certified faculty, which was not observed among comparison sections.



Higher Average Grades

ACUE certification had a significant impact on students' average grades in the year during, $b = 0.04$, $p = .015$, and after certification, $b = 0.04$, $p = .019$.

Students taught by ACUE-certified faculty showed an estimated 2.1% improvement in average grades during the ACUE course and a 2.8% increase in the year after certification, compared to baseline levels.



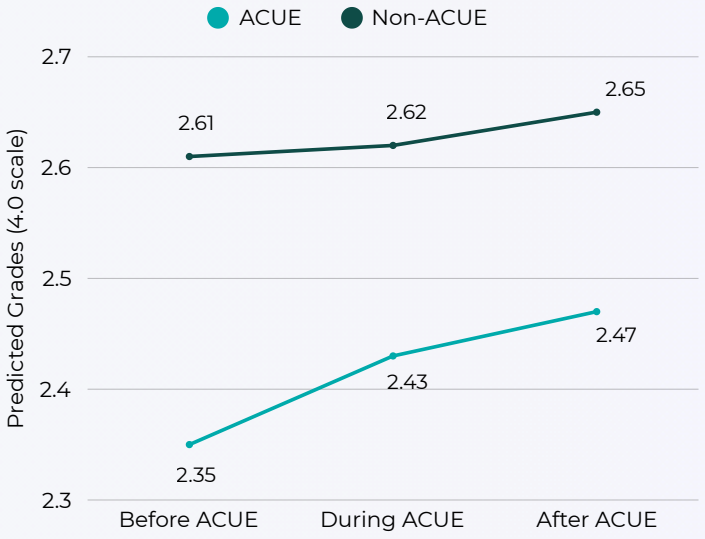
Larger Impacts for Black/African American and First-Generation Students

The positive impact on grades was larger for Black students, $b = 0.12$, $p = .022$, who saw an estimated increase of 4.7% during the ACUE-certification period, compared to baseline.

Similarly, first-generation students saw a larger impact on average grades during the ACUE-certification period, $b = 0.09$, $p = .048$, with an estimated increase of 5.6%, compared to baseline levels.

Grade Increases for First-Year Students

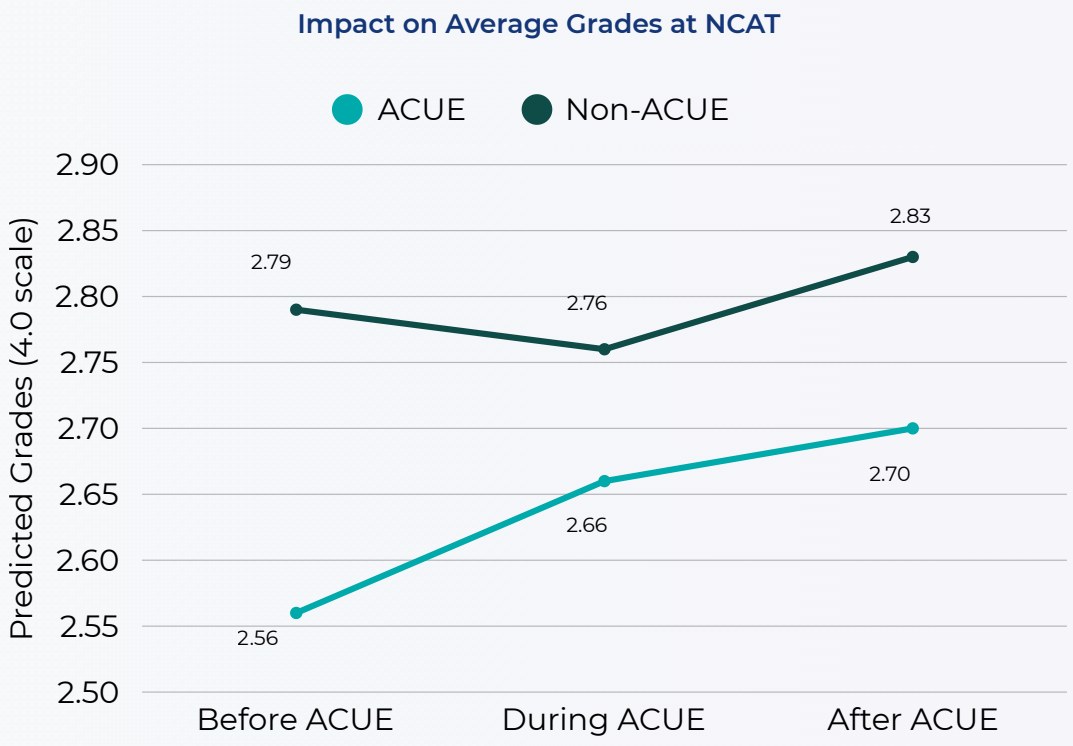
Among first-year students, the positive impact on grades was larger, with sections taught by ACUE-certified faculty showing an estimated increase of 3.8% during certification, $b = 0.09$, $p = .001$, and of 5.3% in the post certification period, $b = 0.08$, $p = .001$, compared to baseline.



Larger Grade Improvements at NCAT

The impacts on average grades were more pronounced at NCAT, with students in the ACUE group having an estimated 4% increase in grades during the ACUE period, $b = 0.13$, $p < .001$, and of 5.4% in the year post certification, $b = 0.10$, $p < .001$, compared to baseline levels. Additional findings at NCAT include:

- First-generation students of ACUE-certified faculty saw a larger impact on average grades, with an estimated increase of 7.9% during certification, $b = 0.12$, $p = .045$, compared to baseline.
- Pell-eligible students of ACUE-certified faculty saw a larger impact, with an estimated increase of 5.6% in average grades during certification, $b = 0.15$, $p = .027$, compared to baseline.



Methods

Course data were combined across gateway courses at GSU (49 certified faculty) and NCAT (50 certified faculty) and analyzed at the student enrollment level, focusing on the faculty who completed the ACUE course in Effective Teaching Practices (ETP) or Effective Online Teaching Practices (EOTP) between spring and fall 2022.

Difference-in-difference (DID) models were used to estimate the effect of ACUE certification by comparing the changes in student outcomes over time between students of ACUE-certified faculty and those whose instructors did not participate in ACUE courses. This approach helped account for any underlying trends or changes unrelated to the intervention itself that occurred across faculty and courses at the institutions during the same period.

Additionally, the models controlled for faculty demographics (gender, age, race/ethnicity, international status, tenure status, and course load), student demographics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, class standing, college generational status, student status, and international student status), course format, academic year, institution, and student headcount per section. Additional analyses were conducted by restricting the sample to first-year students and by performing separate analyses for each institution.

Conclusions

The findings from this evaluation highlight the positive impact of ACUE-certified faculty on student outcomes at NCAT and GSU, seeing particularly significant impact among students who face greater barriers to success such as first-generation and Pell-eligible students.

The results varied between institutions and the positive effects were more pronounced at NCAT. Further research and ongoing support for faculty are needed to maintain and expand the positive impacts of ACUE certification across diverse educational contexts.

Read the full report: *Evidence of Improved Student Outcomes in Gateway Courses Following ACUE Certification at Georgia Southern University and North Carolina A&T State University.*

About ACUE

The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) is dedicated to student success through high-quality instruction. In partnership with higher education institutions, we offer the only nationally recognized Effective Teaching certification, endorsed by the American Council on Education (ACE), supported by a vibrant online community of practice focused on advancing teaching excellence.

ACUE-certified faculty deliver exceptional teaching in every class, resulting in higher student engagement, improved achievement, and stronger retention—outcomes that enhance institutional impact and support long-term student success. Learn more at acue.org.

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