Research Brief
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ACUE Certification Linked to Higher Faculty Retention at the University of Southern Mississippi

New research shows ACUE-certified faculty were more likely to stay, translating to institutional savings from avoided turnover costs.

Founded in 1910, The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) is a public research university that enrolls more than 13,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Faculty at USM participated in ACUE pathway courses leading to Certification in Effective Teaching, designed to strengthen instructional practices and support faculty effectiveness, while advancing the university's broader goals for teaching quality and student success.

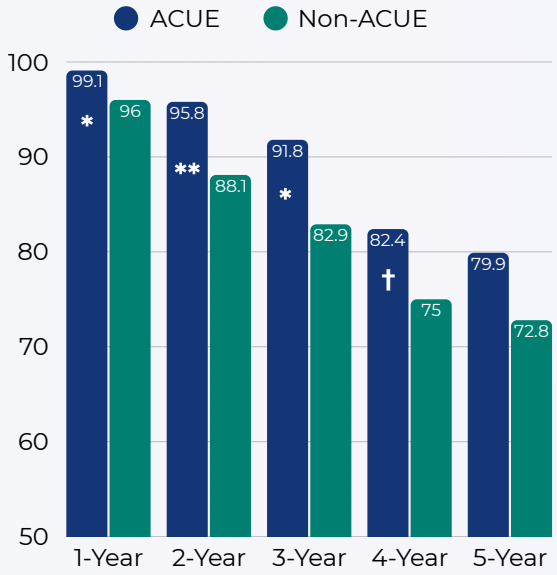
Key Findings

ACUE-certified faculty at USM are significantly more likely to stay at the institution up to 3 years after enrolling in ACUE. Results showed:

- **8.9 percentage point higher faculty retention** after 3 years
- More than **$1 million** in potential avoided turnover costs
- Estimated **261% ROI** over 3 years

Executive Summary

Faculty retention is one of the main concerns for institutions looking to maintain instructional quality, reduce disruption, support continuity for students, and avoid the financial costs associated with faculty turnover (Allen et al., 2010; Brodaty & Gurgand, 2016; Deco, 2025; Dee, 2004; Khan et al., 2021). For institutions that invest in faculty development, retaining participating faculty may also help preserve the instructional capacity developed through that investment.



Note: † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Executive Summary (continued)

This study examined whether faculty who completed ACUE certification were more likely to stay employed at USM than similar faculty who did not participate in ACUE. The study focused on certified faculty who enrolled in their first ACUE pathway course between fall 2016 and fall 2020 and assessed retention 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 years after each faculty member's enrollment term. The matched analytic sample included 110 ACUE faculty and 1,016 matched faculty-reference-term observations from 286 unique non-ACUE faculty.

Across the first 3 years after ACUE enrollment, ACUE faculty had significantly higher model-adjusted retention estimates than matched non-ACUE faculty. Relative to matched faculty, ACUE participants had retention rates that were up to 10.7% higher after 3 years, equivalent to retaining approximately nine additional faculty per 100. Applied to a cohort of 120 faculty across 16 ACUE Pathways cohorts, these retention gains would result in approximately 11 additional faculty retained over 3 years, representing more than $1 million in avoided turnover costs and an estimated ROI of 261%.

Higher 1-Year Retention

ACUE enrollment was associated with 3.1-percentage point higher model-adjusted 1-year retention estimates, $p = .023$.

In practical terms, this difference corresponds to approximately three additional faculty retained per 100 ACUE faculty and a 3.2% higher predicted retention rate relative to matched non-ACUE faculty.

Higher 2-Year Retention

ACUE enrollment was associated with 7.6-percentage point higher model-adjusted 2-year retention estimates, $p = .008$.

This difference translates to approximately eight additional faculty retained per 100 ACUE faculty and an 8.7% higher predicted retention rate relative to matched non-ACUE faculty.

Higher 3-Year Retention

ACUE enrollment was associated with 8.9-percentage point higher model-adjusted 3-year retention estimates, $p = .019$.

This difference corresponds to approximately nine additional faculty retained per 100 ACUE faculty and a 10.7% higher predicted retention rate relative to matched non-ACUE faculty.

These findings suggest a consistent positive and significant retention pattern across the first 3 years after becoming enrolled in an ACUE course.

Potential ROI

To contextualize the retention findings in financial terms, the 3-year retention difference associated with ACUE certification was applied to a cohort of 120 faculty across 16 ACUE pathway cohorts. Based on this estimate, approximately 11 additional faculty would be retained over 3 years who might otherwise have left the institution. Using a conservative replacement cost of 90% of the national average full-time faculty salary (Allen et al., 2010; American Association of University Professors, 2025), these retained faculty represent over $1 million in avoided turnover costs, which would correspond to a net return of over $730,000 and an estimated ROI of 261% over 3 years.

Methodology

To support fair comparisons between ACUE and non-ACUE faculty, Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) was used to identify a matched comparison group of non-ACUE faculty. Faculty were matched based on starting semester for comparison (reference term), college affiliation, faculty role, and years at USM. This approach helped ensure that ACUE faculty were compared to similar non-ACUE faculty in the same time period, with similar academic contexts, role types, and faculty career stages.

Methodology (continued)

The primary outcomes were faculty retention at 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 years after the analysis reference term. ACUE faculty were assigned a reference term based on the semester in which they first enrolled in an ACUE course. Non-ACUE faculty were assigned reference terms based on eligible semesters in which they appeared in the data. Faculty were coded as retained if they remained employed at USM at each follow-up point.

Logistic regression models were used to estimate the association between ACUE certification and faculty retention. Models included CEM weights and clustered standard errors by instructor. To further strengthen the comparison, the analyses controlled for faculty race/ethnicity, gender, salary tier, years at USM, academic year, teaching load at the reference term, and proportion of online/hybrid courses taught at the reference term. These controls helped account for demographic, compensation-related, timing, workload, and teaching modality differences that could also be related to retention. Linear probability models were also conducted as sensitivity checks and showed a similar pattern of results.

Conclusion

Overall, these findings suggest that ACUE certification was associated with stronger faculty retention at USM, particularly within the first 3 years after faculty enrolled in ACUE courses. This showcases the potential value of ACUE not only for supporting teaching effectiveness, but also for contributing to goals of higher education institutions related to faculty retention and stability.

These findings highlight the potential value of ACUE not only for supporting teaching effectiveness and student success goals, but also for helping institutions sustain the benefits of their faculty development investments through stronger faculty continuity.

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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