THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

February 2022

First-Year Retention Rates Higher for Students of ACUE Faculty at the University of Southern Mississippi

Students return in the subsequent year at higher rates when taught in at least one course by ACUE faculty in their first year.

At the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), faculty began taking ACUE microcredential courses in Fall 2016. Given the phase-in of USM faculty who take ACUE courses over time, some students may take courses taught by ACUE faculty while others may not. This analysis focuses on two cohorts of first-year students at USM in academic years 2017-18 and 2018-19. Over these years, first-year students took courses taught by 32 ACUE faculty and 821 non-ACUE faculty. The analysis finds evidence that first-year students who took at least one course taught by an ACUE faculty had a higher likelihood of returning to USM in the subsequent academic year.

Key Findings

Retention: First-year students who took at least one course taught by ACUE faculty were significantly ***more likely to return*** to USM in the subsequent academic year compared to first-year students who took no courses taught by ACUE faculty.

- *Taking at least one course taught by ACUE faculty was associated with a 1.31 times higher likelihood of returning the subsequent academic year, p = .004.*
- *The higher likelihood corresponds to a higher probability of returning in the subsequent academic year, 67.3 versus 71.0 percent, a 3.7 percentage point difference.*
- *These results indicate that, controlling for student demographics, an estimated additional 80 students in total returned across both years than would have otherwise.*

Methodology

This analysis focuses on two cohorts of first-year students at USM in academic years 2017-18 and 2018-19. The sample comprises 3,982 students. In 2017-18, there were 1,902 total first-year students (of which 682 were taught by at least one ACUE faculty). In 2018-19, there were 2,080 total first-year students (of which 1,461 were taught by at least one ACUE faculty). The focus on first-year students helps to reduce the possibility of bias attributable to systematic sorting of students into courses taught by ACUE faculty. It is believed, however, that there was minimal potential for students to sort based on ACUE faculty status given the phase-in of faculty over time to taking ACUE microcredential courses. To further mitigate bias, the model controls for the following student-level characteristics: gender, race/ethnicity (White, Black, and "Other"), age, first generation status, Pell recipient status, ACT score, high school GPA, in-state/out-of-state status, major (STEM vs. non-STEM), transfer credits, total credits attempted in students' first year, whether a student was in USM's Honors College or Lucky Day program, and cohort.

ACUE Student Success Through Exceptional Teaching

For more information about the full report, please contact Meghan Snow, Chief Data Officer at ACUE, at msnow@acue.org.