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New Study Shows Investment in Quality Teaching Leads to Higher Student Retention at The University of Southern Mississippi

First-year retention rates at USM significantly higher for students taught by ACUE faculty teaching with evidence-based practices

As higher ed struggles to increase enrollment and graduation rates, ACUE Certified faculty retain more students, measurably improve student outcomes, and narrow equity gaps

New York, NY and Hattiesburg, Mississippi (February 10, 2022) — The [Association of College and University Educators](#) (ACUE) and The [University of Southern Mississippi](#) (USM) today released results of [a new two-year study](#) that finds students who took at least one course taught by an ACUE instructor returned in significantly higher numbers to USM in the next academic year. ACUE, which offers the only nationally-recognized higher ed teaching credential endorsed by the American Council on Education, began its partnership with USM in 2016 to equip faculty with evidence-based practices that improve student achievement and close equity gaps.

An [analysis of enrollment data](#) from 2017 to 2019 found that first-year student retention was 3.7 percentage points higher among students taught by ACUE faculty, a statistically significant difference relative to comparison group data. Within this study, involving 32 ACUE trained faculty, an additional 80 students returned to USM in a subsequent academic year than would have otherwise, as compared to outcomes from over 800 instructors who have yet to earn their ACUE credential.

Since 2016, more than 200 faculty have participated in the [ACUE Faculty Development Institute](#) across USM and – with 1 out of every 4 full-time faculty ACUE Certified – the university is on track to ensure every student benefits from high-quality, evidence-based instruction in every class.

“The implementation of our ACUE Faculty Development Institute has made a significant impact on teaching practices and student success over the past five years at The University of Southern Mississippi,” **noted USM Provost Steven R. Moser**. “We look forward to continuing to reap the rewards of our partnership in the years ahead as more students persist because of positive learning experiences.”

Student retention is only one benefit of the ACUE Faculty Development Institute, **according to USM Executive Vice Provost Amy Chasteen**. “We are seeing a supportive faculty network emerge through our cross-disciplinary cohorts of faculty fellows,” explains Chasteen. “Participants in the Faculty Development Institute support one another’s teaching and overall success as faculty members, resulting in new community connections across the university as well as powerful impacts in the classroom.”

Today's finding is the latest from [a series of longitudinal studies](#) conducted by USM and ACUE researchers. Studies published in summer 2021 will be presented in two sessions at the [2022 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association](#) (AERA). Using rigorous methods to isolate effects of better teaching, these papers show USM students, when taught by ACUE faculty, experience:

- **Stronger achievement in first-year gateway courses** with passing rates up 6.4 percentage points and grades of D, F, and Withdrawal (DFW) rates down by 5.3 percentage points.
- **Stronger equity**, with decreases in DFW rates 6 percentage points greater for Black first-year students as compared to their White peers in gateway courses.
- **Sustained improvement** with DFW rates 3 percentage points lower in subsequent courses among students who took gateway courses with ACUE faculty.
- **More academic success and equity overall.** Students who took more courses with ACUE faculty earned higher GPAs and completed and passed more of their courses – with larger impacts for Black students.

With dramatic declines in enrollments and lagging graduation rates nationwide, higher education leaders stressed the importance of investing in faculty to teach effectively, in order to retain more students and ensure their success through graduation.

“Complete College America (CCA) commends Dr. Steven R. Moser and Dr. Amy Chasteen for their leadership in surfacing these important data focused on faculty impact on postsecondary student success, via this breakthrough report,” **said Dr. Yolanda Watson Spiva, president of CCA.** “These retention findings on first-year students are an indication of the student-focused, student-first attitudes of ACUE faculty, combined with sound knowledge of the disciplines and quality teaching methods. We are proud of ACUE’s work and share their dedication to creating more equitable student outcomes by eliminating institutional performance gaps through structural reforms of faculty teaching and learning.”

“The evidence is clear: ACUE Certified faculty retain more students, measurably improve achievement, and close equity gaps,” **said Scott Durand, CEO of ACUE.** “This new finding is a powerful example of how when colleges and universities invest in their faculty and equip them with evidence-based practices, they can tackle the enrollment and completion crises head on and drive real student success outcomes. We’re proud to celebrate our long-standing partnership with The University of Southern Mississippi and to transform the lives of even more students.”

“ACE engaged in our collaboration with ACUE because of our mutual missions to enhance the ability of colleges and universities to spur greater student success,” **said Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education.** “Effective teaching matters. It is gratifying to see ACUE’s work with the University of Southern Mississippi produce such positive results toward strengthening student learning and persistence.”

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About ACUE:

The [Association of College and University Educators’](#) (ACUE) mission is to ensure student success and equity through quality instruction. In partnership with colleges, universities, higher education systems and associations, ACUE prepares and credentials faculty in the evidence-based teaching practices that improve student achievement and close equity gaps. Numerous and independently validated studies confirm that students are more engaged, learn more, and complete courses in greater numbers—more equitably with their peers—when taught by ACUE-credentialed faculty. ACUE’s online, cohort-based credentialing programs are delivered through institutional partnerships and open enrollment courses endorsed by the American Council on Education.

About USM:

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) is a comprehensive public research institution delivering transformative programs on campuses in Hattiesburg and Long Beach, at teaching and research sites across the Mississippi Gulf Coast, as well as online. Founded in 1910, USM is one of only 137 universities in the nation to earn the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education's "R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity" designation, and its robust research enterprise includes experts in ocean science and engineering, polymer science and engineering, and large event venue safety and security, among others. USM is also one of only 39 institutions in the nation accredited in theatre, art and design, dance and music. As an economic driver, USM generates an annual economic impact of more than \$663 million across the state. USM welcomes a diverse student body of more than 14,000, representing 71 countries, all 50 states, and every county in Mississippi. USM students have collected four Truman Scholarships and 37 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships, while also leading Mississippi with 27 Goldwater Scholarships, an honor that recognizes the next generation of great research scientists. Home to the Golden Eagles, USM competes in 17 Division I sports sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). For more information, visit usm.edu.