

Effective Teaching: A Proven Strategy for Driving Student Success, Even Among High-Performing Students

ACUE certification is linked to higher completion; lower rates of students earning Ds, Fs, and Withdrawals (DFW); and improved average grades, especially for Hispanic or Latino students and general education courses.



Florida Atlantic University (FAU) is a public Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) within the State University System of Florida, serving more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students across six campuses in southeast Florida.

Classified among the nation's top-tier research institutions, FAU's main campus is located in Boca Raton, Florida.

Key Findings

Students taught by ACUE-certified faculty experienced:

- **2%** more course completions
- **3.5%** more completion in general education courses
- **10%** higher grades in general education courses
- **39%** fewer Ds, Fs, and withdrawals (DFWs)

The study found that there was a particularly large impact for Hispanic or Latino students and courses in FAU's general education program.

Executive Summary

Starting in fall 2021, FAU faculty participated in ACUE Pathway courses leading to ACUE's Certification in Effective Teaching. This evaluation focused on faculty who completed certification by the end of the fall 2024 semester, analyzing data from 8,076 course sections taught by 1,092 faculty members, with a total sample of 321,525 student enrollments.

Results indicate that certification through ACUE Pathway courses led to meaningful improvements in indicators of student success at FAU, particularly in general education courses, which are foundational to the undergraduate experience and academic progression. Importantly, these gains were observed with a student population who already had strong academic outcomes at baseline.

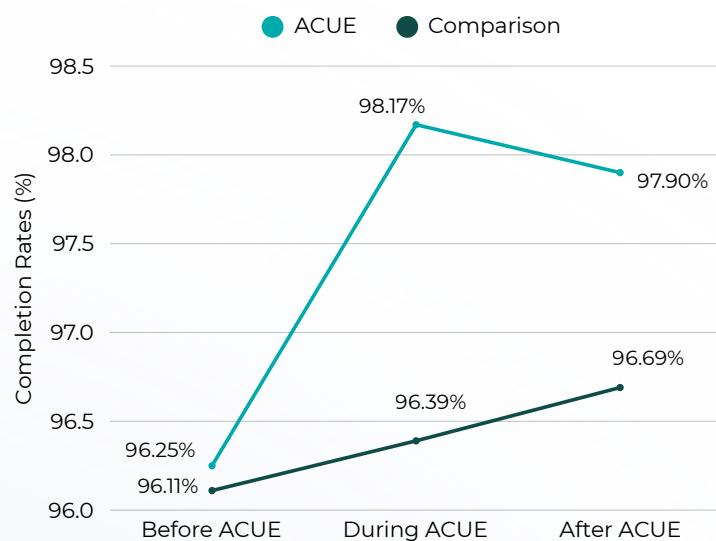
These findings reinforce the effectiveness of ACUE certification in enhancing instructional quality, regardless of certification timing. It also confirms that ACUE certification improves student outcomes, even among high-performing students.

Higher Completion Rates

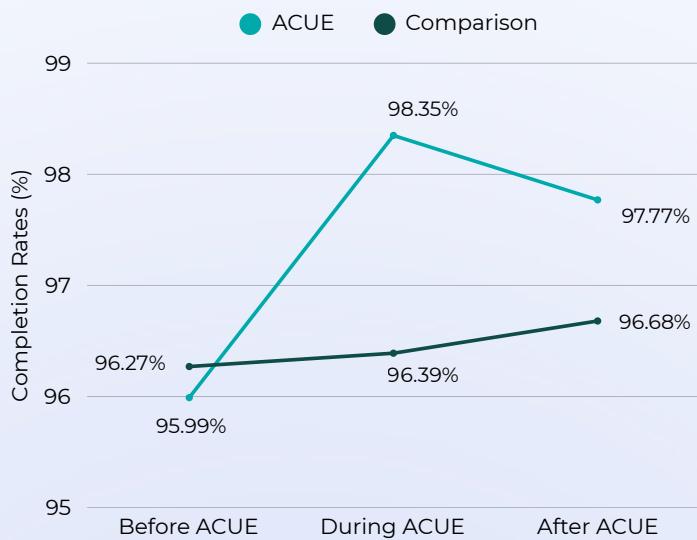
Completion rates improved significantly for students taught by ACUE faculty:

- During certification ($b = 0.009, p = .006$)
- After certification ($b = 0.010, p = .005$)

Completion rates among students taught by ACUE faculty rose by 2% during certification and 1.71% post certification relative to completion at baseline.



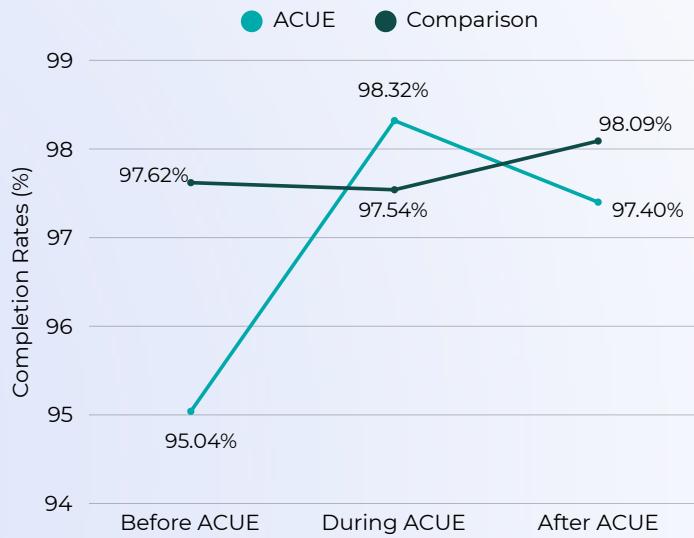
Completion Among Hispanic and Latino Students



Students taught by ACUE faculty in general education courses also saw a larger positive impact during certification, ($b = 0.024, p = .004$), with course completion rates increasing 3.46% from baseline.

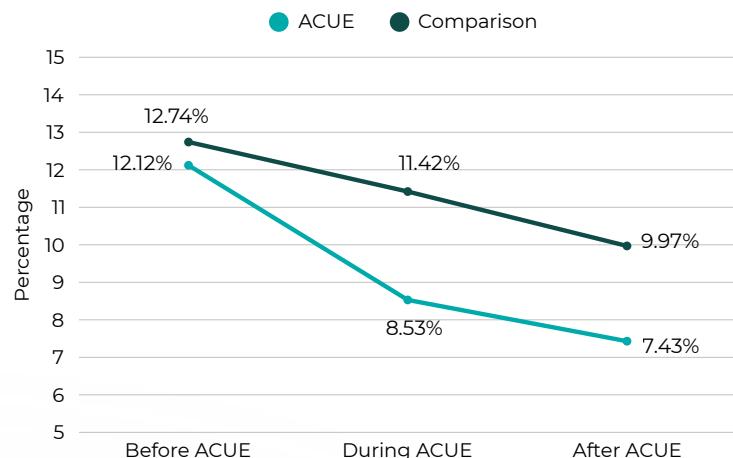
Hispanic and Latino students taught by ACUE faculty experienced a larger positive impact during certification compared to White students ($b = 0.009, p = .040$), with course completion rates increasing by 2.46% from baseline.

Completion in General Ed Courses



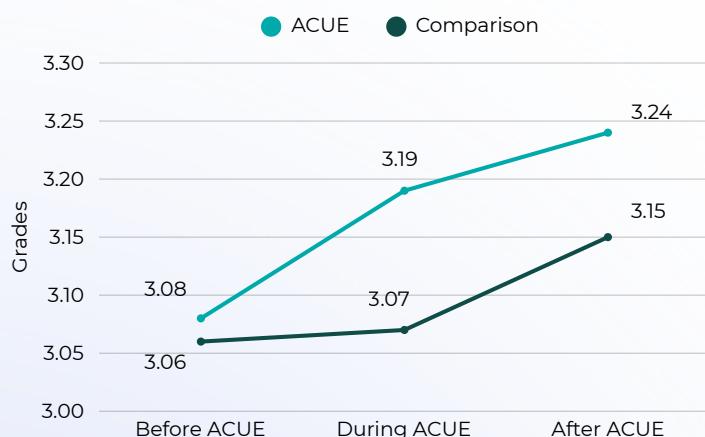
Lower DFW Rates

Students taught by ACUE faculty experienced significantly larger decreases in DFW rates in the post-certification period ($b = -0.020, p = .017$). They also saw a 38.7% reduction in DFW rates, dropping from 12.12% to 7.43%.

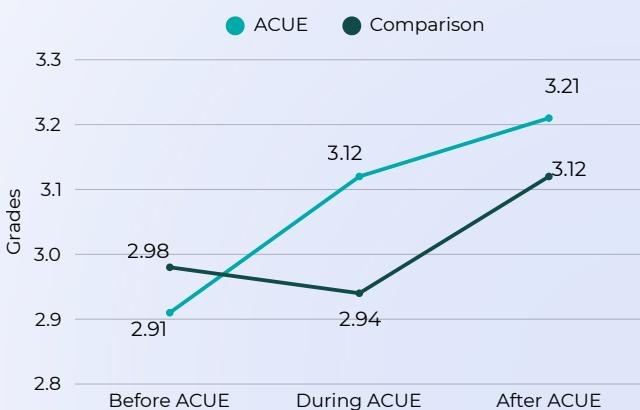


Improved Average Grades

- Average grades increased significantly more among students of ACUE faculty during ($b = 0.093, p = .026$) and after ($b = 0.091, p = .024$) the certification period.
- Average grades increased 3.54% (from 3.08 to 3.19) during the ACUE certification period, and 5.40% (up to 3.24) in the post-certification period among course sections taught by ACUE faculty.



Average Grades in General Ed Courses



General education courses showed significantly larger gains in grades during the ACUE certification period ($b = 0.231, p = .002$), with a 10.11% increase in grades among general education course sections taught by ACUE faculty.

Methods

To ensure fair comparisons, Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) was used to match ACUE and non-ACUE sections by semester, department, course level, and tenure status.

The impact of ACUE certification was estimated using a Difference-in-Differences (DID) model to compare changes in student outcomes over time between ACUE-taught and non-ACUE-taught course sections. Because instructors began ACUE Pathway courses at different times, baseline, during-ACUE, and post-ACUE periods were defined relative to each faculty member's start date and certification date. The model included instructor fixed effects to account for unobserved, time-invariant differences across faculty and controlled for faculty demographic and employment characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, tenure, instructional status, etc.), student characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, college generational status, class standing, etc.), and course characteristics (e.g., course format, course semester, section size, and matching weights).

Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that students taught by faculty certified in Effective Teaching through ACUE's Pathway courses experienced sustained improvements in course outcomes, with impacts on completion and grades beginning while faculty were being certified. These impacts were particularly strong among Hispanic and Latino students and in general education courses. Importantly, these improvements were observed with faculty who followed ACUE's flexible four-course pathway, highlighting the value of engaging with ACUE content regardless of pacing. These findings reinforce the effectiveness of ACUE certification in enhancing instructional quality and advancing academic outcomes for all students, especially those in foundational course settings.

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: *Student Success in Action: ACUE-Certified Faculty Drive Completion, Improved Grades, and Substantial Drop in Ds, Fs, and Withdrawals at Florida Atlantic University (2026)*