



PSEO
COALITION

Program Productivity Metrics: Integrating PSEO Data at a Public University System

Executive Summary



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

This project was funded by a grant from the Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) Coalition, made possible with support from Strada Education Foundation. The [PSEO Coalition](#) generates, analyzes, and shares employment data that demonstrates the value of higher education. The data are publicly available through a [dashboard](#) and [downloadable dataset](#) on the U.S. Census Bureau's website.

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Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO), an initiative of the U.S. Census Bureau, provides valuable data regarding UNC System degree completers' outcomes and, when used in conjunction with other data, can be used to develop or enhance a robust program planning review.

Using the PSEO data, not only has the UNC System produced more degree completers over the last 20 years, the employment rate (percentage of degree completers who are active wage earners) has increased over time. While baccalaureate completers typically have lower near-term employment rates, non-earners may be pursuing an additional credential. Within program disciplines¹, the lowest employment rates are typically Philosophy and Religious Studies at the baccalaureate and masters levels and History at the doctoral-research/scholarship level (below 60% and as low as 38% in aggregate), while the highest employment rates are Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services, Education, and Engineering at all applicable levels. Health Professions and Related Programs and Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services also frequently have high employment rates (above 90%).

Accounting for inflation, median wages for UNC System degree completers have increased over time. The median wage at one-year post-completion in the most recent cohort was around \$45k for baccalaureate earners, \$62k for masters earners, \$86k for doctoral-research/scholarship earners, and \$76k for doctoral-professional practice earners. Within program disciplines¹, the lowest median wages were typically Visual and Performing Arts at all applicable levels, but otherwise varied between non-STEM disciplines depending on the degree level. Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services; Engineering; and Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services typically reported the highest wages depending on the degree level. The increase in wages over time implies that employers continue to value these degrees and are willing to pay employees higher wages making the credential increasing more valuable.

¹ [Classification of Instructional Programs](#) (CIP) taxonomy are developed and maintained by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). All disciplines noted by their CIP Broad Subject Area (2-digit).

The vast majority of UNC System wage-earning degree completers work in the South Atlantic Division and a majority of those wage earners work in North Carolina (baccalaureate earners are above 80% in aggregate). Within program disciplines², Education degree completers at all applicable degree levels consistently reported the highest rates (above 90%) in the South Atlantic Division and in North Carolina. Given the high retention rate in North Carolina and the South Atlantic Division, the UNC System is not only providing educational opportunities for North Carolinians, but also providing credentials necessarily for the statewide and regional workforce demand, a key tenant to our mission.

The [2025 Biennial Program Productivity Review Report](#) identified a few programs with increasing Student Demand and negative ROI based on earned wages in North Carolina. While PSEO reports that degree completers of the identified programs initially have lower median wages than all completers of these institutions, wages improve over time and their employment outcome nationally is less problematic than their employment outcome within the state.

I recommend that the UNC System incorporate PSEO data in our current program planning metrics and templates for new program proposals. The UNC System may consider adjusting the cohorts currently used in these metrics to match the cohort groups that PSEO uses. Further analysis with additional data sources like [National Student Clearinghouse](#) and institutional cost data would provide a comprehensive review of the data and actionable items for program planning. Additionally, the [PSEO Coalition](#) includes many statewide, public university systems like the UNC System with applications of usage in areas of research and strategic planning.

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