

World Class Faculty & Scholar Program Report

JANUARY 2026



State University System of Florida World Class Faculty and Scholar Program Report January 2026

Introduction

The Florida Legislature established the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program to fund and support the efforts of the State University System (SUS) institutions to recruit and retain exemplary faculty and secure additional research funding. This program intends to elevate the national competitiveness of Florida's state universities through faculty and scholar recruitment and retention. Section 1004.6497, Florida Statutes, requires the Florida Board of Governors to summarize information from the SUS institutions on the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program. The statute requires that the report include information on program expenditures, success in recruiting research faculty, the four-year graduation rate, the number of undergraduate courses offered with fewer than 50 students, and the increase in the national academic standing of targeted programs.

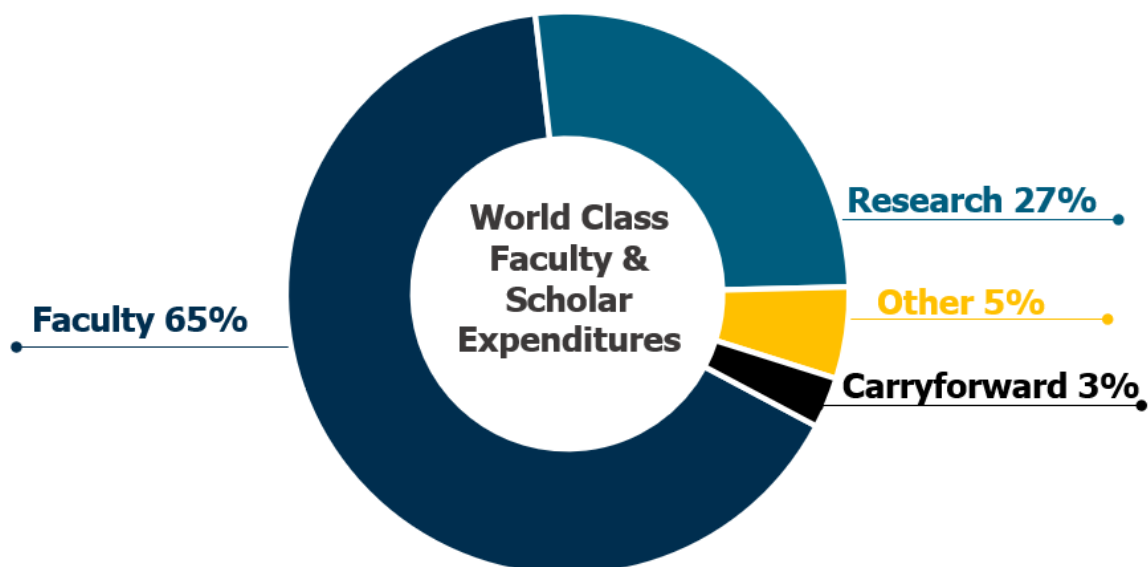
The State University System continues to make great strides to elevate its national research profile to the top echelon. With support from the legislature and the Governor, the System is fifth in the country for public institution research expenditures. Over the past five years, System-wide research expenditures have increased by 39%. Under SUS 30, the Board of Governors' 2030 Strategic Plan, the goal for annual research expenditures for the System is \$3.75 billion by 2030. The World Class Faculty and Scholar Program is one mechanism that provides resources for the System to continue to elevate its research.

Expenditure Information

While System institutions expended World Class Faculty and Scholar Program funds in various ways, most funds (92%) were used to recruit and retain faculty and increase research efforts. The legislature provided recurring funding of \$90.5 million in 2024-25 to the SUS institutions to support the program. Some examples of faculty recruitment and retention efforts include research-centric cluster hires, awards for outstanding performance, professional development, and overall hiring/retention of faculty. Examples of research efforts include instruction and research infrastructure enhancements, faculty research and commercialization efforts, and postdoctoral fellowships. Exhibit 1 provides an overview of how SUS institutions spent or allocated the funds for the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program in Fiscal Year 2024-25.

Exhibit 1

Most World Class Faculty and Scholar Funds Supported Faculty and Research



Source: Florida Board of Governors staff analysis of data provided by SUS institutions on the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, fall 2025.

*Other expenses include initiatives such as sponsoring a research consortium, undergraduate internships, and IT expenses.

Universities reported that carryforward funding will be used on faculty salaries, student financial aid, and research support.

This program has continued to enhance and improve SUS institutions' efforts to recruit and retain faculty. Of the funds used for faculty recruitment and retention System-wide, 25% were spent on faculty recruitment efforts, and 40% on retaining existing faculty. In 2024-25, institutions reported recruiting over 93 faculty and retaining 1,232 faculty due to this program. The faculty turnover was generally lower, with 11 out of 12 institutions reporting reduced turnover rates for faculty hired through the World Class Scholars program compared to their faculty peers. Three institutions (FAMU, FGCU, and UWF) reported a 0% turnover rate for faculty hired through this program. These retained and newly hired faculty transferred over \$57 million in research funding to the institutions, which is \$23 million more than the previous year. Additionally, these faculty have over \$543 million in research proposals under development or review, which is \$290 million more than the previous year. Four institutions (FAMU, FAU, UF, and UWF) reported that faculty supported through this program collectively received over \$70 million in research dollars. Last year, World Class Scholars funding supported initiatives such as coastal resiliency and algal bloom monitoring, intelligent systems and robotics, and a cybersecurity center.

Elevating the National Competitiveness of the State University System

The World Class Faculty and Scholar Program intends to elevate the System's overall national competitiveness through faculty and scholar recruitment and retention. While it is difficult to determine the exact impact of this program on metrics such as the four-year graduation rate, the number of undergraduate courses offered with fewer than 50 students, and academic rankings, information for each of these metrics is provided below.

- The System's four-year graduation rate has improved from 62% to 64% in the last year.¹ Exhibit 2 provides details by institution.
- Increasing the number of faculty may also help to reduce class size. As of fall 2024, 87% of undergraduate courses across the System had fewer than 50 students. Exhibit 2 provides details by institution.

¹ Graduation rates use the SUS Same column in the 2025 System Accountability Plan, which does not include students who transfer between institutions.

Exhibit 2

Summary of Four-Year Graduation Rates and Undergraduate Courses with Fewer than 50 Students

Institution	% Four-Year Graduation Rate		% of Undergraduate Courses with Fewer than 50 Students
	2019-23	2020-24	Fall 2024
FAMU	35	41	93
FAU	50	53	88
FGCU	42	45	92
FIU	65	70	86
FL POLY	41	37	99
FSU	75	76	90
NCF	53	47	100
UCF	54	59	75
UF*	77	78	90
UNF	48	45	90
USF	66	66	84
UWF	48	54	94
System	62	64	87

*The undergraduate course enrollment data only represents the UF main campus.

Source: Florida Board of Governors, 2025 System Accountability Plan and institutional responses to the 2024-25 Common Data Set (CDS) survey.

In national rankings, the System continues to be recognized by U.S. News & World Report for excellence in higher education. Florida has been recognized as the best state for higher education for the past nine years. U.S. News & World Report ranked seven SUS institutions in the top 100 public schools in the 2026 rankings, with UF ranked 7th, FSU ranked 21st, USF ranked 43rd, FIU ranked 46th, UCF ranked 57th, FAMU ranked 92nd, and FAU ranked 100th. In addition, New College of Florida was ranked as the 10th Best Public Liberal Arts institution in the country, and Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University was ranked 1st on the list of Best Public Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the country. Exhibit 3 lists SUS institutions on the U.S. News & World Report's Top 100 National Public University Rankings for 2025 and 2026.

Exhibit 3

U.S. News & World Report Public University Rankings – Top 100

SUS Institution	U.S. News & World Report Ranking (Public)		
	2025	2026	1-Year Change
UF	7	7	0
FSU	23	21	+2
USF	45	43	+2
FIU	46	46	0
UCF	61	57	+4
FAMU	81	92	-11
FAU	NR	100	Ranked

Source: U.S. News & World Report Rankings of National Universities, Top Public Schools, 2025 and 2026.

Specific to research expenditures, the System is ranked 5th among other public systems nationally and has five institutions ranked in the top 100 public institutions for research.² For the eighth year in a row, five universities within the State University System of Florida were ranked on the Top 100 Worldwide Universities Granted U.S. Utility Patents in 2024 by the National Academy of Inventors.³ This recognition demonstrates the real-world impact of research at System institutions, as technology transfers contribute to the economic growth of the state's economy.

² National Science Foundation, Higher Education Research and Development Survey, Downloaded 12/29/2025.

³ National Academy of Inventors, *Top 100 Worldwide Universities List, 2024*.

Return on Investment

Funding for the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program has allowed institutions to realize a positive return on investment to the state. Since the program's inception, institutions have received multiple years of support, contributing to the System's ability to attract new research awards. Expenditures associated with these research awards contribute to the state's economy and often result in a positive economic return. For example, 45% (over \$42 million) of Florida Atlantic University's total research award dollars came from faculty supported by the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, which equates to a 750% return on investment.

Florida International University utilized World Class Faculty and Scholar funds to increase the amount of awarded sponsored research at the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine by 18%. Additionally, through the state's investment in the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, the University of Florida's research funding rose to a record level of \$1.27 billion, and the university's student/faculty ratio decreased from 19:1 in 2017 to 16:1 in fall 2024.

Finally, faculty associated with this program engage students in undergraduate research, which enhances students' academic experience and better positions them to enter the workforce with applied knowledge and skills. Better-prepared students provide a long-term strategic and competitive benefit to the state. Together, these program benefits strengthen the quality of education offered by SUS institutions, which helps attract highly sought-after new students, faculty, and businesses to Florida.

Conclusion

The World Class Faculty and Scholar Program has enhanced the ability of SUS institutions to successfully recruit and retain high-quality faculty and increase research efforts. As a result, institutions recruited over 110 faculty who transferred over \$41 million in research funding to Florida in 2024-25. Faculty supported through this program collectively received over \$70 million in research dollars. These successes have led the System to enhance national competitiveness relative to quality postsecondary education and research.



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