



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

March 21, 2023

Communications Group Strike Team Update

Under the direction of the Utah Board of Higher Education, a strike team made up of communications personnel from USHE institutions and the Commissioner's office developed a coordinated, statewide messaging platform to inform and inspire Utahns about the value of higher education. More than just a one-time undertaking, this shared platform is designed to be used perpetually by all of Utah's 16 public colleges and universities to help key stakeholders promote the value of their institutions and higher education more broadly.

It should be noted that while messaging and tactics for all audiences will be aligned, each will be thoughtfully tailored to ensure accessibility and understanding, particularly when engaging with students, where communication will be adapted to resonate more effectively and cater to their specific needs and perspectives.

Additionally, each institution and the Commissioner's office will create implementation plans for integrating this shared messaging into its existing efforts. The strike team will continue to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) further as institutions and the Commissioner's office determine the best ways to monitor and track their implementation plans.

Positioning Statement

Higher education lifts Utah. More graduates means higher paying jobs, long-term career success, increased civic engagement, more innovation, and economic growth opportunities across every corner of our state. We want to empower every Utahn to take advantage of the varied and exceptional higher education opportunities in this state. A more educated citizenry creates dividends for everyone—the graduates, their families, the state, and society at large.

Key Elements

Timeline

- Beginning July 1, 2024
- Ending July 1, 2027
- Ongoing shared collaboration

Proposed Messaging Framework

- **Affordability:** While students nationally are increasingly graduating with unmanageable student debt, most students in Utah graduate without any student debt. (For the 19-20 graduating class, Utah school graduates' average debt was \$18,344, the lowest in the nation and over \$10k below the average. Utah school attendees have a 39% probability of having debt which is also the lowest of all states.ⁱ)
- **Individual ROI:** Individuals with higher education attainment enjoy greater incomes, economic stability, and quality of life. Median earnings increase with the number of years of education attained, and Utahns with more years of education report higher rates of excellent, very good, or good health.ⁱⁱ
- **State ROI:** Society derives valuable benefits and a positive ROI from an educated citizenry. As individuals receive more education, they rely less on public assistance and report higher volunteer rates and voter participation. It is also estimated that every \$1 the state invests in public higher education returns \$3 in tax revenues from increased wages.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Economic Impact:** Higher education benefits Utah's economy through job and business creation, workforce development, and innovation. Utah's public higher education system is one of the largest employers in the state and contributes \$11.3 billion in GDP to Utah's economy. An estimated 71% of USHE graduates received high-yield degrees in 2022, filling critical workforce needs in the state.^{iv}
- **Lifelong Learning:** Utah's public institutions of higher ed have developed many different pathways for anyone to continue learning, reskill, and/or upskill at any point in their lives. Whether an individual seeks a degree or certificate, or is looking to develop a new skill, there are affordable, flexible options within the Utah System of Higher Education.^v

Next Steps:

- Institutions and the Commissioner's office will complete their implementation plans before May 31, 2024.
- Institutions and the Commissioner's office will create pulse surveys in coordination for pre- and post-evaluation before June 30, 2024.
- Institutions and the Commissioner's office will begin implementing their plans on July 1, 2024.
- The strike team will share evaluations and findings periodically with the Board throughout the implementation period as needed.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only; no action is required.

ⁱ The Institute for College Access and Success: *Student Debt and the Class of 2020*, ticas.org/interactive-map/
^{ii, iii, iv, v} The University of Utah Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute: *The Value of Higher Education*, d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/HigherEd-PB-Feb2024.pdf