



UTAH SYSTEM OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# MEMORANDUM

October 21, 2022

## Utah College Application Week (UCAW) and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Events

UCAW and FAFSA completion events are statewide initiatives that support access and affordability to higher education for high school seniors. UCAW provides every high school senior at our partner schools the opportunity to complete at least one college or university application during the school day with the support of an adult knowledgeable in the process. The FAFSA is the gateway to various college financial aid opportunities, such as Pell Grants, scholarships, federal work-study opportunities, and subsidized and unsubsidized federal student loans. UCAW and FAFSA completion events focus on helping high school seniors, especially students who would be the first in their families to attend college, low-income students, or students who may not have otherwise considered post-secondary education. Lastly, UCAW and FAFSA events are a fundamental function of the Utah College Advising Corps program and directly align with the Access and Affordability pillars of the [Board's Strategic Plan](#).

Utah currently ranks [50th \(38.6%\)](#) in FAFSA completion compared to the rest of the country (57.2%) during 2021-2022. However, in alignment with the [Board's Strategic Plan](#), the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) has established a set of tactics to address FAFSA completion in Utah. For example, the strategic merge of FAFSA completion efforts and UCAW events has already yielded a tremendous increase in FAFSA events to support parents and students. This year, Utah has had the most USHE-sponsored events ever scheduled in the state.

### Utah College Application Week (UCAW)

#### *Purpose and Overview*

The purpose of UCAW is to provide every high school senior the opportunity to apply to college with the help of a knowledgeable volunteer, educator, or adviser. UCAW is part of the American College Application Campaign (ACAC), a national effort to increase the number of first-generation college students and students from low-income families pursuing college.

#### *Program Growth*

Utah started with eight partner high schools in 2013 and has grown yearly. **UCAW grew from 134 high schools for the 2021-2021 academic year to 147 high schools participating in the 2022-2023**

**school year, the largest reach ever.**UCAW's focus is the high school senior; however, younger grade participation grows organically with elementary and junior high engagement in activities to create and increase college awareness. In essence, the success ofUCAW stems from school counselors and access advisers who serve as leaders in implementing a college application event at each high school. The support of volunteers from USHE and partner institutions and regional college access partners provides students first-hand access to a knowledgeable adult on institutional-specific admissions and financial aid process and procedures.

#### *Program Future*

Every year, school leaders engage in training from the Commissioner's office related to FAFSA, state scholarships, concurrent enrollment and technical education in high school, higher education pathways, and Keys to Success. Although this list is not exhaustive, the goal of the training is to provide updates on statewide programming and follow up with resources (i.e., the Utah College Application and Financial Aid Resources [webpage](#)) for school leaders to use during Planning for College and Career Readiness (PCCR) meetings and activities with students and their families. In addition, the Commissioner's office has worked with Keys to Success to develop the College Application Checklist, which interactively walks users through the steps necessary to prepare for college. Inspired by the [Utah College Guide](#) publication, the checklist provides a step-by-step list of the college application process and is available all year to help a student keep track of each step to apply.

### **FAFSA Completion Events**

#### *Purpose and Overview*

The purpose of FAFSA completion events in Utah is to assist students in filling out the FAFSA with the support of volunteers and experts. To aid in the FAFSA efforts within Utah, USHE coordinates with high schools to host FAFSA completion events to give high school seniors and their families a place to get help while completing the FAFSA application. In addition, it is encouraged for all schools to continue FAFSA completion efforts throughout the school year.

#### *Program Growth*

FAFSA Night events were established in 2008 and have been a major focus for increasing Utah's FAFSA completion rates. In 2021, the Commissioner's office merged the FAFSA night andUCAW programs to help students understand that applying for the FAFSA is a crucial piece in applying for college. This merger has initiated an increase in FAFSA event participation with the high schools in the state. **During the 2021-2022 school year, there were 139 USHE FAFSA events statewide. This 2022-2023 school year has 156 USHE FAFSA events scheduled, with over 180 trained volunteers participating. About 138 of those events will happen in October.** Because of the merger of these two programs, school counselors report that events are better attended, and the process is streamlined. From August to September of 2022, the Commissioner's office has trained approximately 300 professionals—including access advisers, school counselors, USHE institutional staff, and access program partners such as United Way, GEARUP, TRIO, etc.)—to assist students and families with the FAFSA this

school year. In addition, OCHE has developed resources for FAFSA completion professionals, including the sharable [FAFSA Walkthrough Video](#), ongoing webinars, publications, and best practices.

#### *Program Future*

As previously stated, Utah ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in FAFSA completion, averaging 35% in high school FAFSA completion rates during the school year. USHE is on the right track to address FAFSA completion to increase college enrollment because there is a correlation between FAFSA completion and increased enrollment in postsecondary education. The National College Attainment Network ([NCAN](#)) reports that of those who completed the FAFSA, 91.8% enrolled in postsecondary education. In contrast, for students who did not complete the FAFSA, only 51.1% enrolled in postsecondary education. The increase in events and training efficiency looks promising, particularly with the alignment to the UCAC program, as they continue to be the structure to reach students. The upcoming FAFSA Completion Equity Dashboard, which is in collaboration with USBE, supports FAFSA completion by providing live disaggregated data to high school professionals to strategically support students equitably. Lastly, OCHE serves as the FAFSA expert to inform FAFSA professionals regarding the upcoming FAFSA Simplification Act, which will directly impact students filing next school year.

#### **Commissioner's Recommendation**

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

#### **Attachment**



# FAFSA & UCAW Events Report

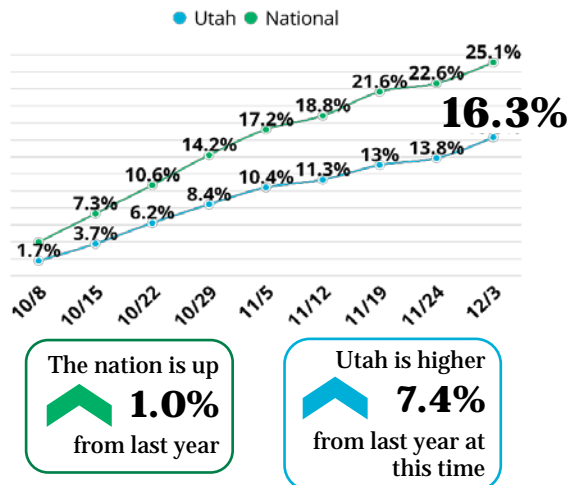
December 2021 (Internal Report)

Dyllen Cafferty & Lisa Molina

## Overview

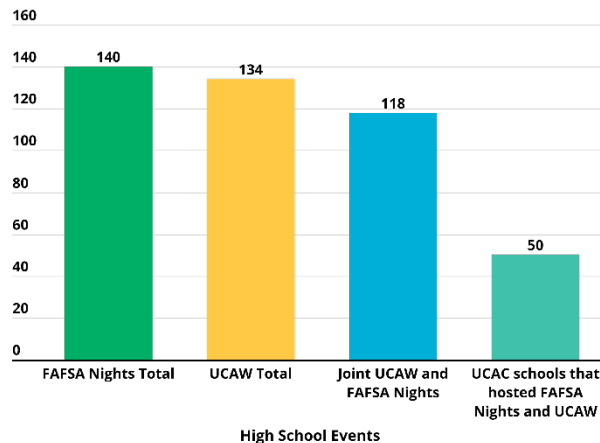
Through events such as Utah College Application Week (est. 2013) and FAFSA Nights (est. 2008), OCHE continues to support high schools as they assist seniors on their journey into postsecondary education. This report highlights UCAW & FAFSA events as yearlong activities that support the access and affordability goals of OCHE's Strategic Plan. We are proud to share FAFSA completion statistics, the number of schools hosting a joint UCAW & FAFSA event, and details of this year's programming:

### Utah High School Class of 2022 FAFSA Completion (As of 12/3/2021)



Utah's Class of 2022 has approximately ~53,000 seniors

### Utah High School FAFSA Nights & UCAW Events



### Utah High School FAFSA Night Events & Volunteers

**140** FAFSA Night Events

**38** More events than last year

**168+**  
Volunteers

**564+**  
Volunteer  
Hours

**We had volunteers from:**

- |                     |        |
|---------------------|--------|
| BYU                 | SUU    |
| Davis Tech          | TRIO   |
| Dixie Tech          | UCAC   |
| DSU                 | UWSL   |
| GEAR UP             | OCHE   |
| SLCC                | USU    |
| Snow College        | U of U |
| STECH               | UVU    |
| Tooele Tech         | WGU    |
| Westminster College | WSU    |
| WSU Student2Student |        |

### UCAW Participating Schools

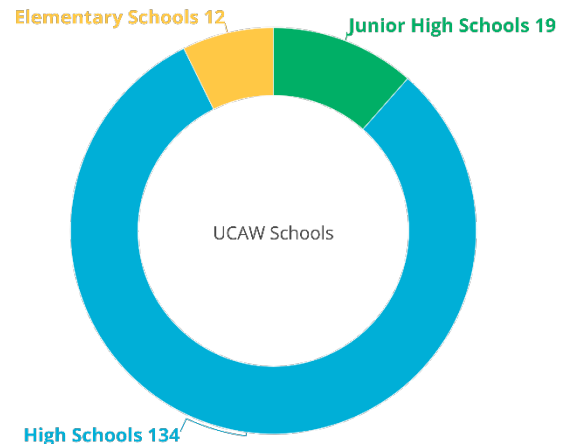


Figure 1. Historically the participation of elementary and junior high schools has organically occurred in the UCAW program

## School Participation

UCAW and FAFSA Nights have been embraced by students, school counselors, college mentors, and administrators across the state as effective college awareness initiatives. This growth has manifested itself in the thousands of college applications filed at 134 participating high school schools. FAFSA Nights also saw an increase in school participation this year, with 140 schools. This year nearly all partner high schools hosted a joint FAFSA and UCAW event to align with the messaging that applying to college goes hand in hand with paying for college<sup>1</sup>. In light of the recent merger of UHEAA Outreach and OCHE Access, this is the first year the same team has coordinated UCAW and FAFSA Nights. We anticipate that, in future years, more schools will host both events to fortify the narrative that applying to college must happen in tandem with paying for college activities.

## FAFSA Nights Survey Data

Below are the statistics of our FAFSA Night Survey data gathered by school counselors providing a link or QR code to students at their FAFSA Night events. Although the survey data does not provide a perfect set of data and it is self-reported data, it gives a robust snapshot of the student experience. Furthermore, our analysis reveals that these participation data are generally representative of the demographic makeup of the senior class at large:

### Data Survey Participation

**1,278+** Students/Families in Attendance

#### First Generation Students in Attendance



#### % of high school survey participation

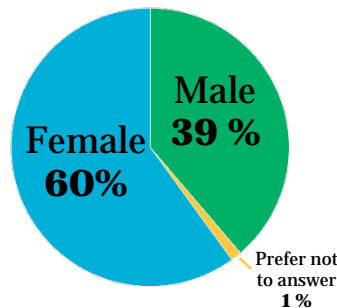


**Most common feedback**  
"Grateful for the help and the volunteers at the event."

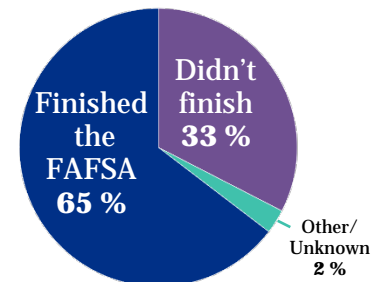
**Most common question**  
How to apply and find scholarships?

**Most common reason for not finishing**  
Not having enough time to finish during the event

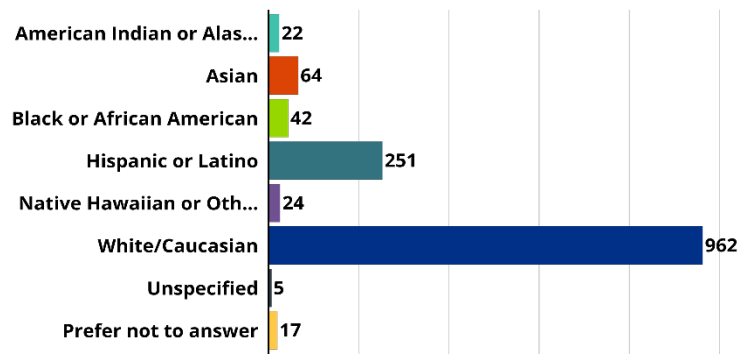
#### Gender Identity



#### In-Event Completions



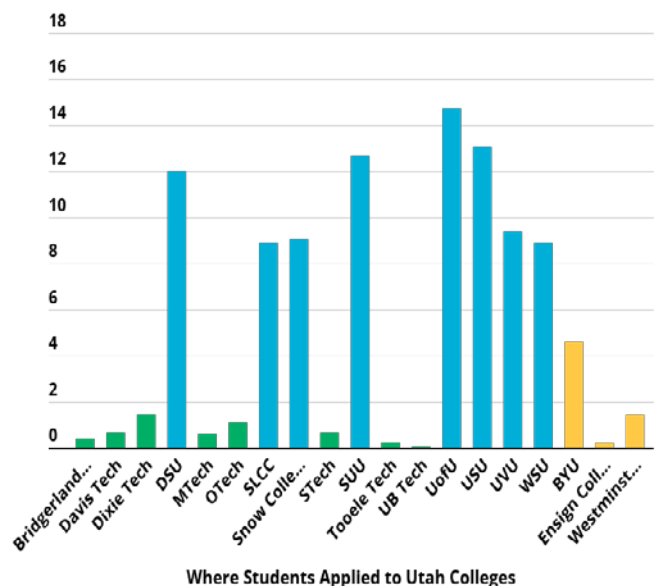
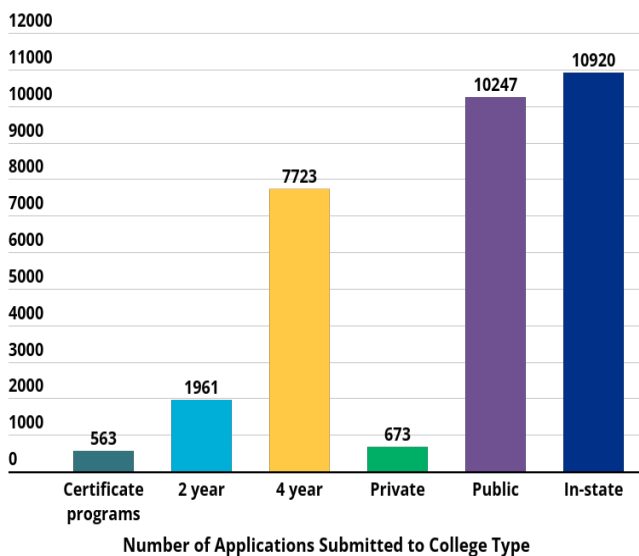
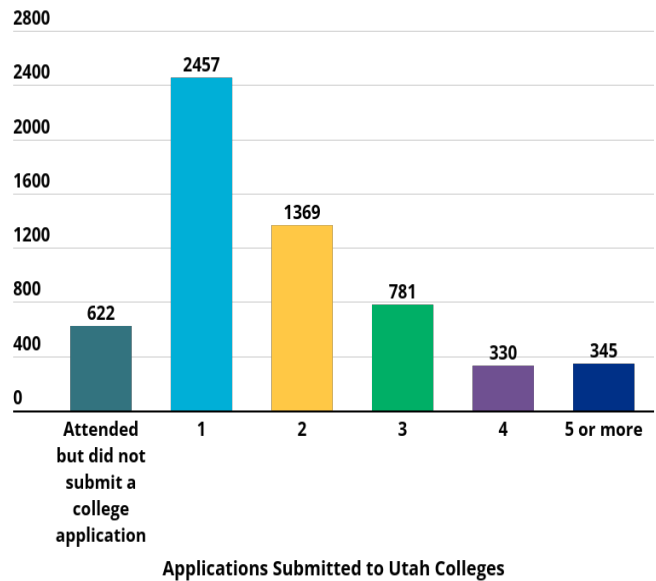
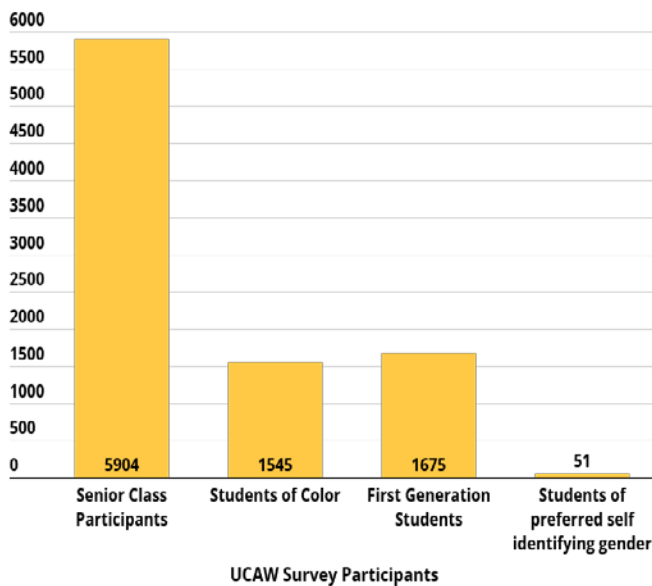
#### Race/Ethnicity Demographics



1. <https://ushe.edu/utah-college-application-week/>

## UCAW Survey Data

The data gathering for UCAW was captured from the Keys to Success app and the Senior Exit Survey to maintain the established partnership with schools. The survey engaged about 5900 seniors from 75 schools with self-reported responses. Although there was low survey engagement, we must acknowledge that this year served as a pilot to integrate the KTS app within UCAW and FAFSA events. Even though schools are accustomed to using only the survey, approximately 97 schools synchronously engaged with the survey and the [UCAW & FAFSA app feature](#). The next step is to work collaboratively with Keys to Success to disaggregate the app data to align with the survey data to merge both data sets on [Metabase](#) for specific high school reporting. Below is an example of the information individual schools would receive regarding where students applied and the demographics of students who attended UCAW:



## **Utah College Advising Corps Alignment**

UCAW and FAFSA events are the fundamental programs promoted by Utah College Advising Corps (UCAC). In this expansion year, 50 UCAC schools participated in joint UCAW & FAFSA events, while statewide, we had 118 schools engage in joint UCAW & FAFSA events. The State Access and State FAFSA Coordinators will work together to bring training to each UCAC region. Regional coordinators will then work with access advisers to promote and aid in the event planning and execution (depending on the school). The overall setup of the UCAC planning structure is to support programming through the regional coordinators as the first ones to answer FAFSA questions for access advisers working on the ground, and access advisers help with UCAW and FAFSA events.

## **Keys to Success Alignment**

The OCHE Access state coordinators continue to focus on integrating the Keys to Success platform into postsecondary planning programming. We must acknowledge that this year served as a pilot to integrate the KTS app within the UCAW and FAFSA program. An intentional effort has been made to craft the newly developed app feature to merge the two programs as synchronous events. However, feedback from school counselors about the KTS platform demonstrates that schools need additional training on the functionality and benefits of the app. The goal is to bring intentional training opportunities to schools to continue to use the platform during college and career readiness planning with students.

## **Proposed Future**

The following points are future directions of UCAW and FAFSA Events:

- Confirm bipartisan recognition and support between OCHE, USBE, and the Governor's Office (i.e., Commissioner, Presidents, State Superintendent, and Governor). We are positioning UCAW and FAFSA as an expectation; therefore, turning UCAW and FAFSA into an ongoing sustainable K-16 initiative.
- Merge UCAW and FAFSA counselor and college adviser resources (i.e., [Transfer Guide](#), [Programs and Majors Guide](#), and [Launch My Career](#)) to continue the narrative of marrying UCAW and FAFSA.
- Continue to strengthen the participation of Technical Colleges in UCAW to denote the system unification of technical education.
- Build out target messaging to elementary and middle schools to engage in UCAW activities with feeder high schools and continue to build on postsecondary planning for younger grades.
- Build out target messaging for alternative high schools to engage in FAFSA activities that make sense for their students' needs and demographics.
- Couple Decision Days with UCAW and FAFSA Events for a wraparound approach to postsecondary planning