The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is a president-led network of 39 public urban research universities, located across 25 states, working to drive impact at their institutions and the communities they serve.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- **39 Universities**
- Located across . . .
- **25 States**

Enrolling a total of **1,110,622 Students**

- **44%** Pell Recipients
- **54%** Students of Color
- **19%** Adult Learners (>25)

*Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and 2+
Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) has experienced an impactful year. Our projects continued, we organized consistent presidents/chancellor calls, and hosted a two-day virtual summer meeting, Harnessing the Momentum for Urban University Transformation and Racial-Equity Post-Covid-19.

USU has raised $14,175,705 in multi-year grant funding from seven funding agencies supporting seven current initiatives.

- **Funders:** American Association of Community Colleges (through the support of Ascendium/ECMC), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Department of Education, Raikes Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and Michael and Susan Dell Foundation

- **Initiatives:** 21st Century Workforce, Advancing Racial Justice and Equity, Collaborative Opportunity Grant, Completion Grants, Equity Transfer Initiative, Frontier Set, Partnerships for Adult Learner Success, and Student Experience Project

- **Reach:** We have worked with more than 29 institutions (74% of our current membership) on our six grant-funded initiatives over the last year.

Drawing on the experience of students, faculty, and public university administrators at five public urban universities during the pandemic, USU released the Food Insecurity at Urban Universities: Perspectives During the Pandemic, examining the magnitude of the pandemic’s impact on food insecurity on college students and outlining steps institutions can take to better address food insecurity.

Aimed at preventing low-income college students nearing graduation from dropping out due to a small shortfall in money for tuition, the research team at Temple University along with USU (with support from the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Science) published an article, Completion Grants: A Multi-Method Examination of Institutional Practice in the Journal of Student Financial Aid.

USU has officially launched the Advancing Racial Justice and Equity initiative, starting with the Intensive and Pitch Competition Series.
USU Leadership

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Michael Rao, Ph.D
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Photo Credit: SJSU, VCU

Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) 2021 Annual Report
USU Staff
FY 2022

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Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) 2021 Annual Report 4
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<th>Coalition Membership</th>
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WHAT: USU’s Advancing Racial Justice and Equity focus area is designed as a multi-pronged, multi-year series of engagements aimed at increasing university capacity to confront systemic inequities while building more equitable spaces for historically marginalized students, staff, faculty, and communities to thrive.

HOW: USU will engage members through:

Intensive and Pitch Competition Series — A multi-day, condensed capacity-building, idea-sharing, and skill-building convening meant to spur innovation and action around racial justice and equity issues in the university-city ecosystem and a $20,000 mini-grant.

Summits and Convenings — Targeted meetings where leaders discuss critical challenges and collaborate on strategies/approaches concerning racial justice and equity in higher education.

Externally Funded Projects — Projects focusing on a particular intervention, lens, or approach to mitigate challenges affecting urban universities, minoritized student populations, faculty, and staff, etc. (Example: Partnerships for Adult Learner Success)

WHO: Advancing Racial Justice and Equity convenings, projects, and funding opportunities are open to all USU members.

USU’s first Intensive and Pitch Competition was held during USU’s 2021 Summer meeting. The theme of the competition was "Improving Health Literacy for Equitable Outcomes." Five Universities entered the competition (the University of Cincinnati, University of Memphis, University at Albany, Georgia State University, and the University of Texas at Arlington). The inaugural winner was the University of Texas at Arlington for their "Community Engagement with a COVID-19 Health Literacy Collection and Curriculum" project.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES:

- September 2021: Thriving Universities Intensive and Pitch Competition
- November 2021: Thriving Communities Intensive and Pitch Competition
- February 2022: Thriving Students Intensive and Pitch Competition
- April 2022: Racial Justice and Equity Scholar Summit
- Q2 2022: Chief Diversity Officer Summit
Collaborative Opportunity Grants - Basic Needs

**WHAT:** Collaborative Opportunity Grants (COG) is a seed fund from the Kresge Foundation to support university partnerships to scale innovative practices centering on student/community basic needs. The project concluded in February 2021.

**HOW:** The principal goals were:

1. Identify emerging and/or existing innovative non-educational, non-traditional partnerships that align with and improve student achievement (e.g., access, retention, completion, etc.) by leveraging the community; and,
2. Document and diffuse university-community strategies and practices that lead to meaningful and sustained change and push the envelope on the range of strategies that improve student success.

**WHO:**

**Original:**
The State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany
University of Toledo
University of Washington - Tacoma

**Extension:**
Morgan State University
University of New Orleans

**DISSEMINATION:** Project findings were featured in Feeding America Hunger Free Campuses national summit July 2020.

A project extension was granted to focus on the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity at urban universities. The extension resulted in a report that received national media coverage.
Collaborative Opportunity Grant (COG) - 21st Century Skills

USU Staff Leads:
Christel Perkins
Melissa Rivas

**WHAT:** COG 21st Century Skills is supported by the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) to support university partnerships scaling innovative practices. The MSDF program launched in January 2021 and focuses on innovative design and delivery of 21st Century Skills for low-income students.

**HOW:** The principal goals for participating institutions are to:

1) Identify and move equity-based innovations that address 21st Century Skills development from niche areas on campus and/or pilot stages, to scale internally and eventually externally;

2) Increase the adaptation of innovative approaches that more effectively connect learning to workforce needs; and

3) Create and fortify partnerships that bring new resources and support necessary changes that sustain and scale innovation.

**WHO:**
- California State University, Los Angeles
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- University of Memphis
- University of New Orleans
- Virginia Commonwealth University

**COMING IN FY-22:** Cohort 1 will complete its 15-month engagement, and we will focus on dissemination and scaling opportunities associated with their findings. We will select, onboard, pilot, and measure the impact of 2 additional cohorts focusing on innovation in curriculum and new pathways.
WHAT: USU's Frontier Set is an $80 million dollar investment funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Frontier Set project looks to facilitate and study transformation efforts, journeys, student success metrics, and erase attainment gaps with participating sites.

HOW: The network provides structure for colleges universities to share important information, drive university transformation, and experiences and collaborate. Participating institutions will work to:

- Contribute knowledge and understanding of institutional transformation.

WHO: Six intermediaries were selected to lead groups of like institutions. In total, 29 colleges and universities and two state systems, were selected to participate due to their significant work in producing outcomes aligned with the foundations focus areas. Three USU/APLU member institutions are participating.

COMING FY-22:
1. Four case study reports
2. Modularized Online Content
3. Facilitator Guide

1. Unveilings of Course Module and Case Study reports via Op-Eds, blog posts, interviews (Chronicle, Diverse Journal, Inside Higher Ed), etc.

FUNDING: The project began in 2015 and was set to span 5 years to better understand how universities transform to serve the needs of today and tomorrow's learners. The grant was recently renewed by the foundation in 2019 and now is set to end in June 2022.

Total APLU/USU investment: $6,857,037.00
Completion Grants

**WHAT:** This project, funded by the US Department of Education, is designed to evaluate completion grant programs. Completion Grants are microgrants ($1,000-$2,000) universities distribute to support students with unmet financial need but academically on track to graduate within a year who have an unpaid university balance.

**HOW:** This project is a randomized control trial, led by researchers at Temple University's Hope Center. Participating universities distribute funds to experiment group and measure impact of the grant on time to degree, credit accumulation, and graduation rate for four years.

**WHO:**
- Florida International University
- Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
- Portland State University
- Rutgers University-Newark
- University of Colorado, Denver
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- University of Memphis
- University of North Carolina Charlotte
- Virginia Commonwealth University

*2 non-USU universities participate in this initiative *(Florida State University and Arizona State University)*

**COMING IN FY-22:** This initiative is due to conclude December 2022 and will collect its final data Fall 2021. In 2022, we will convene universities for multiple cross-sharing and learning meetings to design a model/framework for completion grant implementation.

A journal article was published in 2021 based on the initial program period findings. In 2022, we anticipate additional manuscripts concerning project findings.
**WHAT:** The Student Experience Project is a collaborative network of public universities and national organizations committed to increasing degree attainment by transforming the college student experience and creating equitable learning environments. The Raikes Foundation is supporting this improvement network with the College Transition Collaborative, the Project for Education Research that Scales, Shift Results, and Education Counsel to improve learning conditions for students in gateway STEM courses.

**HOW:** In FY2021, over 150 instructors across the SEP cohort introduced changes to the classroom to support social belonging and convey growth mindset. All instructors collected student feedback across the term to measure and improve students’ experience. Beyond the classroom, these institutions have also made improvements to early alerts, advising, and their physical and virtual campus environment, and have tested the impact of changes on student experience.

**WHO:**

- Student Experience Project Cohort
  - University of New Mexico
  - University of Colorado, Denver
  - University of Toledo
  - University of North Carolina Charlotte
  - Portland State University
  - Colorado State University

- Peer Learning Network
  - Florida International University
  - Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis
  - Morgan State University
  - North Carolina A&T State University
  - Rutgers University – Newark
  - University of Illinois at Chicago
  - University of North Texas
  - University of Texas at San Antonio
  - Wayne State University
  - West Virginia State University

**COMING IN FY-22:** The SEP will share best practices with a broader set of APLU and USU institutions. This includes a First Day Toolkit for faculty to revise syllabi and support equitable student experience on the first day of class, and other actionable tools for instructors to support belonging and growth mindset in their courses.
**Equity Transfer Initiative (ETI)**

**USU Staff Leads:**

Ashlie Prioleau

**WHAT:** The Equity Transfer Initiative is a partnership between community colleges and universities to advance transfer pathways and align them to increase transfer and completion for underrepresented student populations.

**HOW:** The ETI aims to serve 6,000 students from the identified underrepresented groups over the two-year project period. Funded by ECMC Foundation and Ascendium Education Group, each team must place at least 100 students on one of five identified transfer pathways by the end of the first year and 300 or more total by the end of the second year.

**WHO:** Sixteen partnerships from 13 states representing 17 community colleges and 19 universities were selected to participate. Five USU members are participating:

**COMING FY-22:** Participants will complete their work plans, showcase their success, and submit data to show their progress to goal at the end of 2022. This will include:

- Solutions-focused on overcoming obstacles that lead to a strong transfer partnerships
- A review of current and/or new transfer pathways through an equity lens, specifically identifying evidence-based equity strategies or new innovative equity strategies that allow students to matriculate without losing credit and time to degree
WHAT: We aim to drive a cultural and conversational shift that:
• Reaffirms the value proposition of universities.
• Prepares traditional and non-traditional learners with employer and labor market demands.

HOW: Create new and effective methods to scaling affordable pathways:
• Provide opportunities for on – and – off ramps.
• Accelerate reskill and upskill acquisition.

IN-QUEUE:
1. Pulse – Check Workforce Group Check-In
2. Credentials Pathways Project Proposal (Phase II)
3. Digital Credentials with Employers Proposal
4. Fall 2021 Virtual Workforce Series

USU Staff Leads:
Andréa Rodriguez
Mitzy Gonzalez

USU Workforce Strand Leadership

Mark Mone
Chancellor, UW-Milwaukee
Lead, USU Workforce Group

Phyllis King
Vice-Provost, UW-Milwaukee

Vicki Turner
Program Manager, UW-Milwaukee

Photo Credit: UWM
Improving the Health of a Diverse Population

USU Staff Lead:
Christel Perkins

WHAT: USU’s health work took the form of a new network-wide collaborative called the Health Equity Action Group (HEAG). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and USU’s focus are of Advancing Racial Justice and Equity, the group’s purpose is to:
1. Examine the impact that systems, policies and structures have on inequitable outcomes for minoritized populations
2. Create specific collective actions designed to impact health equity in urban communities

Over the course of the year, the group met and advised USU on the creation of the first Advancing Racial Justice and Equity Pitch Competition, focusing on health equity and health literacy

GOALS: Moving forward, the group will engage in activities to achieve its identified goals:
• Define and prioritize critical health inequities that urban universities can/should address
• Engage community stakeholders in design of actions/projects
• Outline metrics for measuring success of work and pilot projects (as applicable)
• Craft working/concept paper on health equity to be presented to foundations

WHO: HEAG Members:
Cleveland State University
Georgia State University
San Jose State University
SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University
The State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany
University of California, Riverside
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado, Denver
University of Massachusetts, Boston
University of Memphis
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
University of North Texas
University of Texas at Arlington
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Wayne J. Riley, M.D., MPH, MBA, MACP
President, SUNY Downstate
Lead, USU Healthcare Working Group
Coalition Impact

**Advancing Racial Justice and Equity:** USU has named The University of Texas at Arlington as its inaugural Racial Justice and Equity Program Award Winner. UT Arlington will build on its work and advance a community partnership model to combat COVID-19 misinformation among Latinx communities through an easy-to-use COVID-19 navigator aimed at accelerating health literacy.

**Collaborative Opportunity Grant Basic Needs Cohort:** All three universities surpassed goals around addressing food insecurity locally:
- **University of Toledo** - recovered and redistributed 12,000 pounds of food to students and community members in need
- **The State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany** - launched a regional approach to addressing food insecurity and served over 50,000 meals in its first year
- **University of Washington, Tacoma** - expanded awareness of cultural food needs in the campus and local community via student research project. Created and offered faculty development on food justice

**Frontier Set:** Sites are advancing their student success efforts through a racial justice and social equity lens. They are continuing to utilize data in their student success efforts and there is evidence of increased data democratization across campuses.

**Student Experience Project:**
- Over 200 instructors from 16 institutions are piloting resources developed by SEP to create more equitable student experience in their classrooms; these tools are being refined and prepared for public release
- Institutions have piloted a new measure called the Student Experience Index; data from over 10,000 students demonstrates that as student experience in a particular course improves, students are more likely to receive an A or B in that course.

**Coming FY-22:** In addition to continuing our grant-funded projects, USU will enter a strategic planning process focused on developing our 2022-2025 priorities. We have a new initiative, Partnerships for Adult Learner Success, funded by the Lumina Foundation. Our Advancing Racial Justice and Equity will have 3 additional competitions across Fall 2021 and Spring 2022.
Partnerships for Adult Learner Success (PALS)

USU Staff Leads:
Christel Perkins
Melissa Rivas

**WHAT:** PALS is funded through Lumina Foundation, and will provide $55,000 to nine institutions over two years, advancing equitable outcomes through university-community partnerships to improve the following areas impacting Black, Latinx, and/or Indigenous adult learners:
- Higher education accessibility and delivery;
- Equity-centered advising frameworks and policies; and
- Support structures that address non-academic success factors

**WHO:** The PALS RFP is open to USU members with an undergraduate adult learner population of at least 20% and/or are an HBCU or HSI. Participant selection will be made in August 2021.

**HOW:** Participating institutions will:
- Contribute to the knowledge base about the Black, Latinx, and/or Indigenous adult learners, articulating their assets, and systemic barriers to success.
- Engage urban universities and partner organizations (including employers) in cross-institutional, multi-disciplinary learning opportunities aimed at increasing institutional capacity for change while centering on the success of Black, Latinx, and/or Indigenous adult learners.

- Build and disseminate an ecosystem/partnership model/framework for Black, Latinx, and/or Indigenous adult learner success.
A Special Thanks

Saul Jiménez-Sandoval, President, California State University, Fresno
William A. Covino, President, California State University, Los Angeles
Erick A. Beck, President, California State University, Northridge
Harland Sands, President, Cleveland State University
Mark Rosenberg, President, Florida International University
Mark Becker, Former President, Georgia State University
Nasser Paydar, President, Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis
David Wilson, President, Morgan State University
Pamela Fry, President, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa
Stephen Percy, President, Portland State University
Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University – Newark
Mary A. Papazian, President, San Jose State University
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Kristina Johnson, President, The Ohio State University
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Havidán Rodríguez, President, University at Albany, SUNY
Kim A. Wilcox, President, University of California, Riverside
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Renu Khator, President, University of Houston
Michael Amiridis, Chancellor, University of Illinois at Chicago
Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, Chancellor, University of Massachusetts at Boston
Keith Whitfield, President, University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Garnett Stokes, President, University of New Mexico
John Nicklow, President, University of New Orleans
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Teik Lim, Interim President, University of Texas at Arlington
Heather Wilson, President, University of Texas at El Paso
Mark A. Pagano, Former Chancellor, University of Washington, Tacoma
Mark Mone, Chancellor, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Michael Rao, President, Virginia Commonwealth University
M. Roy Wilson, President, Wayne State University

The Association of Public & Land-grant Universities

Photo Credit: VCU
Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)

USU is a president-led organization committed to enhancing urban university engagement to increase prosperity and opportunity in our nation’s cities and to tackling key urban challenges. The Coalition includes (40) public urban research universities representing all U.S. geographic regions across 25 states. Annually, member campuses enroll over 1 million undergraduate and graduate students. The USU agenda focuses on advancing racial justice & equity, creating a competitive workforce, strengthening student success, building strong communities, and improving the health of a diverse population.

USU is a 501 (c) 6 membership organization, which has established a permanent partnership with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to establish an Office of Urban Initiatives, housed at APLU, to jointly lead an urban agenda for the nation’s public universities.

Association of Public & Land-grant Universities (APLU)

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. With a membership of 244 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations, APLU’s agenda is built on the three pillars of increasing degree completion and academic success, advancing scientific research, and expanding engagement. Annually, member campuses enroll 5.0 million undergraduates and 1.3 million graduate students, award 1.3 million degrees, employ 1.3 million faculty and staff, and conduct $49.2 billion in university-based research.