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## Utah Women's Postsecondary Education Roundtable

Susan R. Madsen

*Utah State University*, [susan.madsen@usu.edu](mailto:susan.madsen@usu.edu)

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# UTAH WOMEN'S POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

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Recommendations to  
Governor Gary R. Herbert & The Utah Legislature  
December 2018

Sponsored by the Utah Women in the Economy Commission  
and the Utah Women & Leadership Project

*Convened on Monday, October 22, 2018, 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM*

# UTAH WOMEN'S POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

Recommendations to  
Governor Gary R. Herbert & The Utah Legislature

## MAXIMIZING UTAH'S POTENTIAL

Utah must harness the power of education for its residents, as the state's future economic success and high quality of life rests squarely upon having an educated population. Increasing the number of Utah residents completing a postsecondary certificate or degree is a powerful strategy for maximizing the quality of life in Utah. An educated population increases both the social and economic capital of the state. Cultivating an educated populace requires creating a college-going culture and assuring that both women and men earn postsecondary certificates and degrees to the maximum extent possible.

Utah's population is growing and changing. While Utah maintains its signature demographics, it is also trending toward national norms in key metrics.<sup>1</sup> Utah is becoming more ethnically diverse, fertility is decreasing, and migration has become a consistent and significant source of population growth.<sup>2</sup> Within this changing context, Utah women and men have made great strides toward increasing postsecondary educational attainment. As an increasing proportion of adults now holds a college degree or trade certificate, the state grows closer to reaching its goal of 66% of the population holding a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2020.<sup>3</sup> Despite these gains, however, Utah faces a shortage of educated workers.<sup>4</sup> In addition, national organizations consistently rank Utah at or near the bottom in evaluations of women's educational attainment<sup>5</sup> and economic equality<sup>6</sup> relative to other states. The bottom line is that this is a trend Utah cannot afford to see continue. Even though there is a substantial need for both Utah women and men to continue to become more educated, this report will focus on women, in keeping with the overall mission of both sponsoring organizations of this 2018 Roundtable.

Although this report summarizes the need for educated individuals in the workforce, it is important to note that education is important for many reasons. Both women and men with postsecondary degrees and certificates, whether they participate in the paid workforce or not, are better prepared for roles as community members, homemakers, and caretakers. As noted by Dr. Susan Madsen and colleagues, "A college education is more than a gateway to an affluent lifestyle. Earning a college degree has implications far beyond the workplace. The non-tangible benefits of receiving a college degree are, at minimum, equivalent to the monetary ones, and they extend from

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<sup>1</sup> Davidson, Lee. 2017, June 21. "New Census Data Point to a New Utah: A 'Mixed-Heritage, Multicultural Tapestry.'" The Salt Lake Tribune. <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=5425002&citytype=CMSID>

<sup>2</sup> Jeppsen, Catherine. 2018, March. "Utah Women in Higher Education: A Progress Report, 2018." <https://www.utah.gov/women/documents/Utah-Women-in-higher-education-brief.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Lumina Foundation. 2016. "A Stronger Nation: In Utah, Postsecondary Learning Builds the Talent That Helps Us Rise." [https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/stronger\\_nation/2016/utah-brief-2016.pdf](https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/stronger_nation/2016/utah-brief-2016.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Utah Foundation. 2017. "Help Wanted: Workforce Participation, Wages, Job Desirability, and Skills Gaps." Research report number 746. <http://www.utahfoundation.org/uploads/rr746.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Bernardo, Richie. 2017. "2017's Best and Worst States for Women's Equality." WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worststates-for-women-equality/5835/>

<sup>6</sup> US News and World Report. n.d. "Best States." <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/opportunity/equality>; Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2015. "Status of Women in the States." <https://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/utah/>

individuals to families and communities.”<sup>7</sup> Among other benefits, Dr. Madsen cites research that shows the following advantages for college educated women: a healthier lifestyle, increased life satisfaction, better lifelong learning skills, expanded knowledge, enhanced analytic skills, deeper creative thinking, better decision-making, increased civic and community engagement, strengthened leadership skills, more developed social skills, heightened self-esteem, and stronger reasoning. These benefits are felt tangibly as women help mold the next generation of Utah children and strengthen our society.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge for Utah is to continue the work in creating a college-going culture (including postsecondary certificates, degrees, and other credentials) for Utah women and men and to lower the barriers to completion. Financial support from the legislature will be necessary to meet this challenge. Comprehensive and coherent strategies will lead to Utah having a more educated population – poised to meet the family and employment demands of 2020 and beyond.

## **BACKGROUND**

This report is a follow-up to the Utah Women’s College Task Force Recommendation Report presented to Governor Gary R. Herbert in February 2012. The plan to form the Women’s College Task Force was discussed and recommended to the Governor by the Governor’s Education Excellence Commission in May of 2011. The Task Force was created and charged with taking action with partners across the state of Utah to increase, within five years, the number of Utah women holding postsecondary certificates or degrees in relation to the national average. The late Honorable Olene Walker (former Utah Governor) and Bonnie Jean Beesley (previously Vice-Chair of the Utah Board of Regents) accepted invitations to co-chair the Task Force. In addition to the full 24-member Task Force, there were three committees—Awareness, State Policy, and Education Policy—that included Task Force members and other critical stakeholders in the community. More details on the Task Force and the report can be found here.

Before the work of the Task Force, the Utah Women & Education Project had been formed by Dr. Susan R. Madsen at Utah Valley University. This Project conducted and published extensive qualitative and quantitative research between 2010-2012 on women and higher education in Utah. After the Task Force concluded its work, the Project was merged into a newly formed Utah Women & Education Initiative that was hosted for one year at the Utah System of Higher Education where additional status reports were published in 2013.

Then, in 2016, the Women in the Economy Commission (WIEC) deemed it critically important to commission a new, more comprehensive study to assess whether there was progress in women’s completion rates and to explore what areas of emphasis should be considered to continue the progress gained. These data are continually requested and needed. And because of the scope and scale of Utah’s ongoing demographic, economic, and cultural transformations, contextualizing research was critical. Because no single source had the data that was needed to accurately describe the current state of women and education in Utah, our understanding and continued progress was hampered. Hence, the WIEC commissioned with the Utah Women & Leadership Project to conduct this research with Dr. Catherine Jeppsen. The research was completed in late 2017, and the Utah Women in Higher Education: A Progress Report was published March of 2018, along with Full Report: Utah Women In Higher Education, 2000-2017.

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<sup>7</sup> Madsen, Susan R., Hanewicz, Cheryl, & Thackeray, Susan. 2010, January. “The Value of Higher Education for Women in Utah.” Research and Policy Brief, Utah Women & Leadership Project (p. 4). <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/1-value-of-higher-education.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## ROUNDTABLE

Armed with these data, the Co-Chairs of the WIEC, Representatives Rebecca Chavez-Houck and Becky Edwards, agreed that it was important to host a one-day convening for key stakeholders to gather, learn about the results, and brainstorm strategies to continue to increase the participation and completion rates of Utah women. The Commission invited legislators and other key stakeholders for this roundtable discussion on Monday, October 22, 2018 in an effort to address some of the challenges that women in Utah continue to face as they pursue postsecondary education completion. The intention was three fold: 1) to review Governor Herbert's 2012 Utah Women's College Task Force's recommendations as well as findings of the Commission's recent study; 2) host a one-hour women students' town hall, inviting Utah women to share their experiences in the Utah higher education system; and 3) convene a working group to discuss next steps and to compile a set of action items for Governor Herbert, Utah State Legislators, and other stakeholders to consider moving forward. The roundtable gathering was attended by about 40 individuals (see Appendix A), including members of the 2012 Task Force who gave updates on how Utah was doing in regards to guidelines from that original project. The following five recommendations emerged from this Roundtable as key areas of concern and opportunities for change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The top themes that emerged from the Roundtable on Women's Postsecondary Education include actions that should be taken in five key areas. These recommendations will help provide the support and resources necessary for more women and families in Utah to receive the benefits of education and for Utah to reach its economic and workforce goals for the future. It is important to note that the participants did not come to a consensus around these recommendations, but that these emerged from an analysis of the data collected and were agreed upon by the co-chairs, facilitator, and data collectors (see Appendix A). Details of each recommendation are provided below:

### *1. Expand Guidance, Counseling, and Advisement Resources to Support a "College-going Culture"*

Despite progress in Utah women's college graduation rates over the past decade, cultural and social stereotypes persist in the state. Unrealistic ideas about women's participation in the labor force, combined with limited views on the overall value of a college education, lead some girls and young women to think that college is "not for them." Utah high school counselors and advisors are uniquely positioned to educate young women on current educational and employment trends and inform them about the wide variety of pathways they can take toward long-term personal and professional well-being. However, past research has demonstrated that high school counselors in Utah are stretched beyond capacity (1 counselor to an average of 341 students<sup>9</sup>), serving many more students than the 1:250 ratio suggested by the American School Counselor Association.<sup>10</sup> We recommend committed, ongoing funding for a near-peer counselor in every high school focused specifically on addressing college-related questions and concerns. These college-focused counselors have the latest information to assist college-going behavior and have specific knowledge about the benefits of college for both women and men attendees for the entire array of career and life goals. Additionally, these advisors can fill a critical need for

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<sup>9</sup> Herrera, Kim, Todd, Holly, & Tsosie-Jensen, Lillian. 2018, January. "Counselor to Student Ratios: Grades Seven through Twelve." R277-462 Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program. Utah State Board of Education.

<sup>10</sup> American School Counselor Association. n.d. "What Does a School Counselor Do?" <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/careers-roles>

students from underserved communities and populations, where a strong college-going culture needs systemic support and cultivation.

## *2. Implement Institution-Level Strategies for Retaining Female Students through Certificate or Degree Completion*

Utah colleges and universities do well at recruiting new students to their campuses, which has allowed Utah to keep pace with national enrollment averages. The college completion rates of women in Utah, however, are below those of their national peers. We recommend supporting and strengthening institution-level strategies that will enable female students, both continuously attending and returning students, to stay in school and graduate. Foremost among these strategies is enhanced communication and collaboration between academic programs and women's centers on campus in order to address challenges specific to women. Further, we must educate and engage other influencers on campus, including faculty, administrators, and college and career counselors to focus efforts toward female students' retention and completion. Finally, technological solutions and streamlined policies can simplify processes and reduce barriers to graduation. Although these efforts are created and implemented primarily at the institutional level, best practices should be shared and adopted system wide where applicable and practical.

## *3. Create Additional Flexible Attendance and Credit Maintenance Options*

Currently there are too few options available to students who juggle their education, family, and/or work. As the student demographic has evolved to include more individuals who support themselves and families throughout their educational endeavors, it has become more important to adjust the educational settings in which they participate. We recommend that additional measures be taken to include and incorporate more early morning, evening, and weekend classes throughout Utah's public institutions. Such flexibility could simplify childcare pressures, ease financial burdens, and facilitate continuous enrollment for many students. Furthermore, the development and execution of quality, fully online courses and degree programs should be implemented, and the use of advanced educational technology programs and strategies should be utilized to ensure academic rigor and student engagement. Innovative solutions, including competency-based models, stackable credentials, and flipped educational programs that facilitate employment during schooling should be implemented where feasible. In addition, instituting parent-friendly policies (i.e., offering student accommodations, such as class breaks for nursing mothers) can make a positive difference in facilitating completion. Finally, institutions of higher learning should determine if policies that control whether credits "lapse" are overly restrictive, and we must also ensure that transfer students (many of whom are women who follow partners to a new institution) are not penalized or delayed in their progress toward graduation.

## *4. Identify Increased Support for Campus-based Women's Resources that Support College Completion*

As the number of higher education students in Utah continues to increase, including students from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, the need for vital support systems is critical. Many of these are related to issues that affect women disproportionately. The dire need for additional childcare at Utah colleges was mentioned during the roundtable discussion more than any other issue. Securing additional state and federal childcare funding to attain parity between parents in education programs and parents in the paid labor force should be a top priority for all those interested in improving educational outcomes for women. Another key area for women is support for those who have experienced sexual harassment or assault, as well as other types of interpersonal violence. Campuses need educational resources to reduce sexual misconduct of all kinds, as well as care-based training to best serve survivors of all forms of violence and abuse.

Additionally, following nationwide trends, mental health disorders are rampant on college campuses in Utah, and we must ensure students have timely access to mental health professionals and other programs. Good mental health is critical for students in their efforts to stay in school and work toward completion. Finally, in recognizing that some female students may face challenges based on a number of distinct factors (including race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion, disabilities, and other identities), diversity and inclusion programs on each campus should work toward serving students as individuals.

#### *5. Identify Additional Financial Support for New and Continuing Students*

Finally, is it well-established that financial constraints are a key consideration for most college students, especially women who may see college as an “expense” rather than an “investment.” Utah has low rates of students applying for and receiving federal financial aid, possibly due to a lack of awareness and understanding of how federal aid works. Helping Utah students apply for and receive federal aid should be a top priority. However, many students have financial needs that go beyond tuition, and some institutions have successfully implemented micro-grants for students nearing graduation. Such programs could be adopted on a larger scale. Further recommendations include additional funding to support new and continuing students in the form of need-based success stipends, additional need-based and academic scholarships and grants, a greater allocation of federal work study opportunities, and sufficient funding to provide on-campus employment opportunities. The state can also ensure that women who attend school part-time and take longer than eight semesters to finish their degrees because of outside obligations are not penalized with higher tuition rates. Increased financial support for new and continuing students will not only provide an opportunity for them to remain in college long enough to graduate, but it will also reduce the reliance on student loans, which remain a heavy burden for the current generation of students. Other training options, such as technical certificates and apprenticeships that can lead to “debt-free degrees,” are also an important part of the post-high school educational landscape and should be supported as such.

Though these roundtable recommendations have focused primarily on institution-level solutions (plus the need for college-focused high school counselors), other stakeholders in the state must also do their part. Corporate and industry partners can sponsor mentoring and apprenticeship programs and identify needed job skills, nonprofit and community groups can support educational efforts that align with their mission and goals, and related state agencies can advocate, support, and inform the work happening at USHE institutions. Finally, system-wide communication and cooperation must continue and increase, in order to create consistency and facilitate the sharing of best practices across all USHE institutions. Please see Appendix B for additional ways that each of these organizations can support Utah women’s educational success.

## **CONCLUSION**

Building on the prior work of the Utah Women’s College Task Force, the 2018 Roundtable on Women’s Postsecondary Education was convened to recognize the progress that has been made with Utah women’s educational achievement and to address persisting, critical needs. This group of experts discussed challenges and opportunities, and they made insightful and informed recommendations. In order to provide the greatest change in attitude and behavior and to improve the education attainment of the women of Utah, these community leaders advocate for committed support (including funding and official implementation where applicable) of the five recommendations listed above.

APPENDIX A  
ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

**Co-Chairs**

Rep. Rebecca Chavez-Houck, *Co-Chair, Women in the Economy Commission & Utah House of Representatives, District 24*

Rep. Becky Edwards, *Co-Chair, Women in the Economy Commission & Utah House of Representatives, District 20*

**Facilitator & Data Collectors**

Susan R. Madsen, *Utah Women & Leadership Project, Utah Valley University*

Erin Jemison, *YWCA Utah*

Robbyn Scribner, *Utah Women & Leadership Project, Utah Valley University*

**Participants**

Shelle Allinson, *Utah Department of Workforce Services*

Ciriac Alvarez, *Voices for Utah Children*

Camille Anthony, *my529*

Nina R. Barnes, *Co-Chair, Utah Board of Regents*

Judy Barnett, *Utah AFL-CIO & Women in the Economy Commission*

Erin Laney Barr, *United Way of Salt Lake*

Kathy Bounous, *Utah Department of Workforce Services & Women in the Economy Commission*

Michael Bouwhuis, *Utah System of Technical Colleges*

Rebekah Bradway, *Office of Legislative Research & General Counsel*

Anne Burkholder, *YWCA Utah & Women in the Economy Commission*

Carrie Butler, *Action Utah*

Debra Daniels, *Women's Resource Center, University of Utah*

Patricia Dark, *Tracy Aviary*

Christina Davis, *Utah Department of Workforce Services*

Katie Ellis, *Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel*

Julie Fisher, *LSI*

Jill Flygare, *Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development*

Tami Goetz, *Utah STEM Action Center*

Jared Haines, *Utah System of Technical Colleges*

Julie Hartley, *Utah System of Higher Education*

Allyson Hicks, *Office of Legislative Research & General Counsel*

Elizabeth Hitch, *Utah System of Higher Education*

Denece Huftalin, *Salt Lake Community College*

Tara Ivie, *Women's Success Center, Utah Valley University*

Pat Jones, *Utah Board of Regents & Women's Leadership Institute*

Rep. Marsha Judkins, *Utah House of Representatives, District 61*

Roxanna King, *Community Advocate*

Karen Leonardi, *Select Health & Women in the Economy Commission*

Kirstin Maanum, *Women's Enrollment Initiative, University of Utah*

Jessie Mandel, *Voices for Utah Children*

Jenna Matsumura, *Women's Enrollment Initiative, University of Utah*

Jessica Miller, *Utah System of Higher Education*

Karen Peterson, *Office of the Utah Governor*

Kathryn Macdonald Poelman, *Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel*

Spencer Pratt, *Legislative Fiscal Analyst*

Rep. Susan Pulsipher, *Utah House of Representatives, District 50*

Holly Richardson, *Former Member, Utah House of Representatives*

Vickie Samuelson, *League of Women Voters*

Dixie Sevison, *Women's Services & Resources, Brigham Young University*

Anna Thomas, *Voices for Utah Children*

Lillian Tsosie-Jensen, *Utah State Board of Education*

Ann Marie Wallace, *Women's Business Center & Women in the Economy Commission*

Emily Walsh, *League of Women Voters*

Rep. Elizabeth Weight, *Utah House of Representatives, District 31*

Rep. Mark Wheatley, *Utah House of Representatives, District 35*



## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF TOPICS

#### **Attitudes and Culture**

Address the all-or-nothing mentality toward education  
Create a college-going culture  
Educate influencers on negative micro-messaging (about careers for girls)  
Educate parents about all aspects of higher education  
Enhance community/stakeholder awareness of higher education challenges for girls and women  
Find ways to address judgments from others  
Help girls see wide range of possible pathways  
Increase awareness of unconscious bias  
Reduce stigma of leaving college so it is easier for students to return  
Research and address stereotypes that push women away from some fields  
Teach young girls to aim high

#### **Childcare and Social Services on Campus**

Address mental health concerns (e.g., high demand for services, long waiting periods to see counselors, need for mobile crisis teams)  
Implement services and support for diverse female students (e.g., first generation, immigrant students, students of color, undocumented students, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities)  
Increase sexual assault/harassment resources on campus (need for care-based, not just compliance-based services in this area, including additional training and support)  
Integrate other resources (e.g., Title IX office, campus safety, Safe UT app)  
Strengthen childcare support on campus (e.g., increased funding from state, federal, and other; demand exceeds available spots, rigid scheduling, potential partnership between campus childcare centers and early education programs)

#### **Financial Support for Students**

Encourage trades, apprenticeships, and “debt-free degrees”  
Explore financial support options (beyond tuition)  
Fund small, targeted grants that can help students overcome final obstacles

Increase federal financial aid efforts (e.g., low rates of FAFSA application, knowledge gap in understanding federal financial aid, returning students not qualifying for federal aid)  
Investigate ways to reduce student debt burden  
Offer more on-campus employment  
Strengthen work study programs

#### **Flexibility**

Address academic scheduling challenges  
Consider a flipped education model (tech courses first, then additional work toward credentials or degrees)  
Educate and motivate faculty to teach evenings and weekends  
Encourage stackable credits and credentials  
Engage family members to support students  
Implement credit maintenance programs  
Implement proficiency-based options instead of strict course requirements  
Increase availability of labs and office hours in evenings and weekends  
Navigate school and fulltime work/other responsibilities  
Offer additional flexible attendance options  
Offer competency-based programming (not semester bound) leading to certificates and degrees  
Provide more quality online courses and programs  
Provide more support for returning students  
Recognize that flexibility could reduce the need for childcare and financial assistance  
Transfer between USHE institutions more seamlessly (many women follow spouses)  
Understand challenges for single-parent students

#### **Institutional Retention and Completion Efforts**

Adopt technological solutions for course scheduling and tracking student progress  
Advocate stronger career placement services  
Build stronger collaborations between academic programs and women’s centers on campus  
Continue Gear-up program for lower-income students  
Educate professors about campus support systems and programs (as main point of contact for students)

Empower professors to advocate for students  
Focus on student-centered care and support  
Mandate early planning with college advisors  
Provide mentoring programs for women  
Redefine “timely completion” for returning students  
Simplify processes so students thrive (e.g., difficulty in name changes for married women; financial aid timing issues)  
Support different learning styles  
Train students to communicate with faculty  
Value returning students for maturity and ability to mentor others

Recognize that policy and advocacy solutions cannot be “one size fits all”  
Scale best practices system-wide  
Streamline process for legislature to evaluate and continue to fund successful programs  
Strengthen corporate sponsorships of programs and pathways

### **Preschool & K-12 Education Efforts**

Address sexism/other discrimination in K-12 classrooms  
Hire and retain good high school counselors  
Increase awareness of possibilities  
Put a fulltime college counselor in every high school  
Support early childhood interventions  
Teach broad benefits of college education  
Understand the key role of K-12 advising, especially in rural and underserved communities

### **State, Corporate, and Community Efforts**

Continue partnerships with public transportation support and options  
Cooperate with Department of Workforce Services and other relevant state offices  
Educate employers on the benefits of tuition reimbursement  
Ensure that the Governor’s Education Excellence Commission is aware of the challenges and opportunities around retention and completion  
Explore related mission-based funding for each school  
Implement more college/technical college dual enrollment programs  
Improve system-wide (USHE) integration  
Increase collaboration between higher education and industry  
Locate and reach out to women who didn’t finish high school  
Offer programs to get women into high-growth fields where they are underrepresented  
Partner with community/non-profit programs to help underrepresented students go to college (e.g., first generation students, students of color, undocumented students, low-income students)