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CARROLLTON, GA — Carroll County is among 16 counties in Georgia that gain more than \$10 million in educational value through the employment of graduates of the University System of Georgia (USG) thanks to the presence of the State University of West Georgia.

“The Value of University System of Georgia Education,” a recent report commissioned by the USG’s Intellectual Capital Partnership Program (ICAPP), shows that, for recent graduates of the USG, a college degree is worth an average of \$14,000 a year more than a high school graduate could expect to make.

Over the course of a working career, the average graduate of a public college or university in Georgia can expect to earn nearly \$1 million more than a high school-educated neighbor, the report conducted by researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology revealed.

The authors analyzed the earnings of nearly 90,000 USG students who graduated between 1993 and 1997 and found that, overall, the increased earnings resulting from their college degrees added \$1.25 billion to the state’s economy during 1998, the most recent year for which data was available.

These graduates had widespread impact on the state, bringing at least a million dollars per year in additional economic impact to more than half of Georgia’s 159 counties.

Previous studies of the economic impact of the USG have been calculated on expenditure data, including the cost of constructing buildings and employing workers, and purchases made by students. The last such study was conducted in 2001 and determined that the total impact of UWG on the West Georgia economy was \$218 million.

The current study does not dispute the previous one, but merely looks at contributions of

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the higher education system in other ways. According to Jan Youtie, a researcher in Georgia Tech's economic Development Institute who helped prepare the report, "Universities are in the business of educating people. So the methodology we used, comparing the annual earnings of higher education graduates to the annual earnings of high school graduates, is uniquely appropriate to measure the value of education."

UWG President Beheruz N. Sethna has been telling this story for a number of years to various audiences, and each year he especially targets middle school students to encourage their post-secondary education pursuits.

"When I am in the local schools, I stress to students that choosing not to go to college is like taking a check made out for a million dollars with their name on it and tearing it up," Sethna noted. "That really gets their attention!"

In addition, he uses data from an ARCHE (Atlanta Regional Consortium for Higher Education) report to show that the benefits of a four-year college education include several other benefits:

- The probability of a family's income being in the top two income categories (\$50K+) increase from 28 percent to 64 percent — Increases to 229 percent of its HS rate.
- Unemployment rate decreases from 4.3 percent to 1.6 percent — Decreases to 37 percent of its HS rate.
- Business ownership increases from 16 percent to 24 percent — Increases to 150 percent of its HS value.
- Share of public assistance decreases from 32 percent to 3 percent — Decreases to 9 percent of its HS value.
- Median net worth increases from \$126K to \$306K — Increases to 243 percent of its HS value.
- Children's high school dropout rate decreases from 34 percent to 6 percent — Decreases to 18 percent of its HS rate.
- Children's college enrollment rates increase from 22 percent to 42 percent — Increases to 191 percent of its HS rate.
- Children's SAT scores increase from <999 to 1058 — Increase by 59.
- Children's suspension/expulsion rates decrease from 14 percent to 6 percent — Decrease to 43 percent of its HS rate.

In addition to measuring the value of a college education, the report also looked at the

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educational specialties that offer the greatest financial rewards, the demand for specific college disciplines, occupations in which shortages are anticipated and migration patterns related to occupational needs.

The top 10 occupations that generally require a university degree that are expected to have the most job openings over the next 10 years were determined. In Georgia, these occupations include such areas as nursing, computer support, accounting, elementary and secondary school education, and other computer-related fields.

According to Dr. Thomas J. Hynes, UWG vice president for academic affairs, academic programs in all these fields are offered at West Georgia.

“Because the quality of many of our programs is tied to national program accreditation, students are challenged, as well as prepared for the changing job environment through rigorous and ever-improving curricula,” he noted.

But, according to Hynes, higher education benefits extend beyond individual success.

“Ironically, while universities like ours provide individual citizens with great opportunities for good jobs and better incomes, the greatest benefit is likely collective rather than individual,” Hynes said.

“The greater the level of educational attainment in a community, the greater the level of quality community growth, of educational attainment for children, of contributions to the collective community welfare. Whatever the case for any one individual, for a society, the more we learn, the more we earn,” he concluded.

Slater Barr, president of Carroll Tomorrow, said the impact of UWG upon Carroll County extends far beyond the obvious economic impact upon the community.

“Some of Carroll County’s largest employers are companies founded by university professors turned entrepreneurs,” he noted. “At Carroll Tomorrow, our committees are filled with

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educated, professional leadership from UWG, constantly working to improve our quality-of-life. Even our day-to-day operations are expanded by the work of student interns. When we're working on a community project — and start identifying local resources to help — the university inevitably ends up rising to the forefront as a major player.”

The report listed Carroll County as receiving \$11.6 million in educational value through the employment of graduates of the USG.

Bill Drummond, a professor in Georgia Tech's City and Regional Planning Program who collaborated with Youtie in preparing the report, said the report justifies Georgia's investment in higher education.

“Georgia benefits from the University System in many ways, including the production of an educated labor force, the generation of new knowledge through research, the creation and expansion of businesses, and — perhaps most important in a democracy — the development of educated and responsible citizens,” he said.

“But this study has shown that one factor alone — the direct economic impact of University System graduates — more than justifies Georgia's investment in higher education,” Drummond concluded.

University System Chancellor Thomas C. Meredith said, “As our funding partners struggle with grave budget issues, I would encourage them not to harm this generator of economic growth. Georgia so far has resisted the trend we see in many states to reduce substantially the state's investment in higher education. Our economy has benefited from that decision, and as this study has shown, those benefits will continue to increase in the decades to come.”

Full copies of “The Value of University System of Georgia Education” may be downloaded from the ICAPP website at: www.icapp.org/publications.htm. News releases detailing the economic impact of specific USG institutions also may be found at this address.