

10-2014

# The Economic Value of Iowa's Public Universities

David Swenson

Iowa State University, [dswenson@iastate.edu](mailto:dswenson@iastate.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/econ\\_reportspapers](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/econ_reportspapers)

 Part of the [Growth and Development Commons](#), [Other Economics Commons](#), [Public Economics Commons](#), and the [Regional Economics Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Swenson, David, "The Economic Value of Iowa's Public Universities" (2014). *Economics Technical Reports and White Papers*. 8.  
[http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/econ\\_reportspapers/8](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/econ_reportspapers/8)

This Working Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Economics at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Economics Technical Reports and White Papers by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

---

# The Economic Value of Iowa's Public Universities

## **Abstract**

This analysis measures the economic value of Iowa's public universities – The University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa. There are two dimensions evaluated: the overall worth of operating the universities as educational and service institutions and the value of student spending in their respective area economies. This analysis incorporates a number of best practices for measuring the worth of universities to regional economies.

## **Keywords**

economic impact, university economic impact, input output analysis

## **Disciplines**

Growth and Development | Other Economics | Public Economics | Regional Economics

# The Economic Value of Iowa's Public Universities

---

*Dave Swenson*

*Department of Economics, Iowa's State University*

*August 2014*

## Introduction

This analysis measures the economic value of Iowa's public universities – The University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa. There are two dimensions evaluated: the overall worth of operating the universities as educational and service institutions and the value of student spending in their respective area economies. This analysis incorporates a number of best practices for measuring the worth of universities to regional economies:<sup>1</sup>

- University operations are measured with a properly specified regional input-output model that accurately reflects their major spending categories and each institution's primary territory of economic influence.
- Student spending reflects the actual spending pattern of young adults, as measured by the annual Current Expenditure Survey.
- Care was taken to not double count student spending that occurs as part of university operations and student employment with separate student life student spending estimates.

This analysis does not contain an estimate of the visitorship value of the universities for people who visit on university business; attend cultural, artistic, or continuing educational programming; or for attendees at sporting events. An estimate of those values would require a scientifically valid survey of all major

---

<sup>1</sup> University impact analysis standards were the focus of the **Workshop on University Economic Impact: Input-Output Analysis and Other Ways To Tell Your Story**, Friday, May 3, 2013. Washington, DC. The workshop was a cooperative effort the Association of Public Land Grant Universities and the American Association of Universities. Representatives of the BEA and this author, representing Iowa's public universities, conducted formal sessions designed to promote awareness of the issues and develop reliable procedures for measuring university economic contributions.

Persons with an interest in understanding the major issues associated with compiling credible university economic evaluations are encouraged to read Siegfried, John J., Allen R. Sanderson, Peter McHenry. **The Economic Impact of Colleges and Universities**. Economics of Education Review. 26 (2007) 546-558.

For a description of guidelines for conducting university studies, see Swenson, David. **Measuring University Contributions to Regional Economies: A Discussion of Guidelines for Enhancing Credibility**, Department of Economics, Iowa's public universities, 2013. Found here: <https://www.econ.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/papers/p13992-2011-08-08.pdf>

categories that stimulated attendance over the course of a typical university year. As that would be a very costly undertaking, no such data exist.<sup>2</sup> This study did look at characteristics of season ticket holders to university major sports, as those data are easily obtained. The vast majority of ticket holders, not surprisingly, were Iowa residents. Accordingly, though attendance at sporting events does in fact produce net gains to the state's economy because of out of state attendance, and net gains to the hosting schools because of visits by persons outside of the primary university economic territory, the lion's share of that spending would have occurred nonetheless in the state's economy. A brief evaluation of the potential economic impacts of Iowa universities' sporting events is the subject of another short study.<sup>3</sup>

## Data Sources and Basic Analytic Assumptions

All data on Iowa's public universities total spending were obtained from the Iowa Board of Regents. As it is important to properly classify several university spending categories when specifying the economic model, the university's annual comprehensive financial reports were also consulted. Information about employment, student attendance, and student housing was also obtained from the Iowa Board of Regents.

All economic analysis modeling for this study was done using the IMPLAN input-output system as well as its data sets for 2012. The territory of analysis for Iowa's public universities consisted of the summed counties that served as each school's primary economic region.

- The region of analysis for The University of Iowa consisted of Johnson County, where The University of Iowa is located, and the contiguous counties of Cedar, Iowa, Linn, Louisa, Muscatine, and Washington.
- The region of analysis for Iowa State University consisted of Story County, where Iowa State University is located, and the contiguous counties of Boone, Hamilton, Hardin, Jasper, Marshall, and Polk.
- The region of analysis for the University of Northern Iowa consisted of Black Hawk County, where the University of Northern Iowa is located, and the contiguous counties of Buchanan, Bremer, Brenton, Butler, Grundy, and Tama.

While it is the case that Iowa's public universities programs, services, and attendance extend to all counties in Iowa, the vast majority of their economic activities will occur in, and their employees will come from, the three designated economic regions; it is therefore not appropriate to assign the entire

---

<sup>2</sup> In this area, it may be tempting for analysts or university relations interests to conduct "convenience surveys" of, say, attendees at a handful of sporting events to discern their spending patterns while in the region. While a convenience survey may yield useful information, it does not provide the kind of information that allows for confident generalization to a wide range of reasons for which people utilize university services. Accordingly, unless a survey is conducted that incorporates all of the best practices of survey research, to include random sampling as well as adequate sample sizes across all key visitorship categories to properly measure the phenomenon to be studied, it should not be used to produce visitorship economic impact conclusions.

<sup>3</sup> Iowa's public universities athletic departments provided a listing of season ticket holders by sport by zip code for the most recent year.

state as the primary service territory for the three universities. Doing so would inflate the resulting multipliers and overstate the universities' economic contributions.

There is not a public universities sector in the IMPLAN model. Public universities are a component of the very large state and local government education sector in the modeling system.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, a distinct public university sector must be created. That is done by repurposing the Private Colleges and Universities sector of the model to reflect only Iowa's public universities. In so doing, that sector was modified to contain Iowa's public universities' actual fiscal 2012 operations expenditures, the amount of payroll that went to employees, as well as the other major expenditure components of the universities. This modification process yielded a sector in the model that closely described the expected relationship the universities would have within their regional economies.<sup>5</sup>

## University Spending, Employment, and Attendance

Table 1 shows the basic expenditures of Iowa's public universities for fiscal 2012. Combined, they had \$3.65 billion in expenditures. For modeling purposes, those expenditures were classified into payments to value added (wages, salaries, payments to investors), all other expenses, and those for capital and equipment. It is a standard practice in input-output accounting to separate current spending from capital accounts; accordingly, payments to capital and equipment are subtracted from the total to yield a final value of \$3.385 billion in initial output at the universities.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> In IMPLAN, the State and Local Education sector contains only data pertaining to employment and payments to workers. It does not contain itemized estimates of state and local education spending. For estimating university regional economic linkages, it is therefore necessary to appropriate and modify the private universities and colleges component to more completely describe public university economic relationships with the remainder of the regional economy.

<sup>5</sup> The most accurate method for measuring university economic contributions is to use a "bill of goods" method. This involves a highly detailed itemization of all university spending by that which occurred within the specified region and that occurring outside of the region. This method is time-consuming and must depend on special data sets by university accounting departments. Studies by this author have found that a "hybrid" approach to modeling universities that accurately specifies employment, payments to workers, other payments to value added, as well as a university's major spending categories yields results that are very close to those resulting from more rigorous and time-consuming approaches. Accordingly, this model is a hybrid analysis that contains several major spending categories for Iowa's public universities, yet allows the model to estimate the likelihood the purchases were, in fact, made within the specified region.

<sup>6</sup> This study does not contain estimates of the short-term value of capital development associated with new construction or the equipping of that new construction. New construction enables an increment to output at a university that is captured in future evaluations, and the "worth" of using that construction annually is measured appropriately, again in future years, by properly accounting interest payments on indebtedness and asset depreciation.

Table 1

**Iowa's Public Universities Fiscal 2012 Expenditures and Modeled Output**

Total Fiscal 2012 Expenditures	\$ 3,649,612,588
All Value Added:	
Labor Payments to Employees	1,874,895,242
Debt Interest and Depreciation	230,937,332
All Other Operating Expenditures:	1,279,101,631
Less: All Capital Expenditures	264,678,383
Equals: Output to be modeled	\$ 3,384,934,205

Table 2 describes the employment at Iowa's public universities. In October of Fiscal 2012, the universities had 39,212 employees, nearly 48 percent of whom were student employees working part-time. Referring back to Table 1, we see that these university employees were paid \$1.87 billion in compensation in fiscal 2012.

Table 2

**Iowa Public Universities Employment**

<b>F.Y. 2012</b>	<b>Total</b>
Full-time academic, admin., & institutional	4,660
Full-time professional and scientific	7,284
General services staff	4,362
Part-time non-students	2,498
Part-time students	18,687
Temporary employees	1,721
Total employees	39,212

Table 3 informs us that Iowa's public universities had 74,811 students in attendance in fiscal 2012. The state of Iowa supplied 63 percent of the students, other states supplied 26 percent, and 11 percent came from other countries.

Table 3

**The Iowa Public University Student Origins**

Iowa	47,322
Other States	19,600
Foreign Countries	7,592
Total Students	74,811

Table 4 shows the housing characteristics of students at Iowa’s public universities. More than seven in ten students live off campus, with dormitories housing 23 percent of the students, and other university apartments housing the remainder.

Table 4

<b>Iowa Public University Student Housing</b>	
University Housing	
Dormitories	23%
Other university apartments	6%
All other housing	72%

The data in the previous tables are all important to properly measuring the overall economic worth of the universities and properly apportioning the economic activity. At the outset, it must be noted that the value of both student on-campus housing and student employment at the universities will be contained in the analysis of the values contained in Table 1 when they are modeled. Consequently, care must be taken to not double count economic activity associated with university operations and that associated with overall student spending in the regional economy.

## Understanding Impact Analysis Terminology

The overall value of Iowa’s public universities to the regional economy is measured using a properly specified input-output model (I-O) of their respective regions of primary influence. I-O models produce reams of useful information, but the most salient results for decision makers are (1) total industrial output, (2) labor income (3) value added, and (4) jobs. Total output for most industries is simply gross sales. For public institutions we normally define their annual expenditures, less capital and equipment purchases, as their annual output value. Labor income includes the wages and salaries of employees, along with normal proprietor payments for the management of their businesses. Labor income also includes the value of all employer-provided benefits. Value added is the most appropriate measure of regional economic value. It includes all labor income, plus returns to investors and indirect tax payments to government that are part of the production process. Value added is the same thing as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Jobs, the fourth measure, or employment, represent the number of positions in the economy, not the number of employed persons. As many people have more than one job, there are always more jobs in the economy than employed persons.

We also get detailed breakdowns of the aforementioned economic data subdivided into their direct, indirect, induced, and total economic effects. Direct effects refer to the operational characteristics of the firm or institution that we are studying; in this case it is Iowa’s public universities. Indirect effects measure the value of demands that the direct firm or institution place on supplying industries in the study region. Induced effects accrue when workers in the direct and indirect industries spend their earnings on goods and services in the region. Induced effects are also often called household effects. Total effects are the sum of direct, indirect, and induced effects. They are the total of transactions attributable to the direct activity that we are measuring.

The term multiplier is often employed when referring to economic values or economic impacts. A multiplier, simply, is the total effects divided by the direct effects. In the first instance it is a ratio that helps us to understand how strongly industries or institutions are linked with one another in a study region. In addition, a multiplier can help us to anticipate how much the overall economy is expected to change per unit change in the direct effects (a dollar of output, a dollar of personal income, a dollar of value added, or a job). Multipliers help us anticipate the potential change in the regional economy attributable to a change in direct activity in a particular industry or institution. Firms with strong linkages to area supplying firms or that pay relatively high earnings may yield high multipliers. Firms that are otherwise not connected strongly locally or that pay lower than average wages will have lower multipliers. Urban areas with their more developed economies have, on the average, much higher multipliers than rural areas.

It is conventional for many people to call the results of I-O analyses the “economic impacts.” In practice, however, when measuring public institutions like universities, it is advisable to reserve that designation for increments to productivity that exceed the universities’ primary mission of educating in-state students and conducting research and providing services that are beneficial to the state as a whole. Public universities produce increments to state productivity that otherwise would not have occurred when they educate (at a much higher price) out of state students, which then results in an export sale of educational services, or when they are able to attract research spending from federal or private sources. It is normally difficult to properly allocate the amount of economic activity that is genuinely net new productivity to the state due to research funding, other program sponsorships, or through attendance without conducting an extensive and detailed audit of universities’ labor allocations and the overall spending and the beneficiaries of that spending in their academic, housing, research, and all other support activities.

In lieu of determining Iowa’s public universities’ unique economic impact, this study measures their total economic contribution to the state economy by virtue of all spending and activity that would be expected from public institutions and that which represents increments to productivity due to the aforementioned factors. This total amount is often called the economic value, the economic effects, the economic contribution, or the economic footprint of the universities. The total amount will not be called the economic impact of Iowa’s public universities in this study.

## **The Economic Value of Iowa’s Public Universities**

### **University Operations**

Table 5 displays the economic contribution of Iowa’s public universities in fiscal 2012. Combined, they had \$3.35 billion in direct operational output, which required 39,212 workers making \$1.875 billion in labor income. The universities indirectly required \$748.2 million in inputs from regional suppliers, which in turn paid \$249.9 million in labor income to 4,937 workers. When the university workers and the supply sector workers converted their earnings into household consumption, they induced \$1.22 billion in additional output, which in turn required 10,640 jobholders earning \$417.2 million in labor income.

Combined, Iowa's public universities accounted for \$5.4 billion in industrial output, \$3.3 billion of value added (or GDP), and \$ 2.54 billion in labor income to a total of 54,789 jobholders in Iowa.

Table 5

**Iowa's Public Universities Total Economic Contribution, Fiscal 2012**

	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Labor Income</b>	<b>Value Added</b>	<b>Output</b>
Direct	39,212	1,874,895,242	2,105,832,574	3,384,934,205
Indirect	4,937	249,850,556	424,558,318	748,186,541
Induced	10,640	417,612,755	780,835,908	1,223,530,979
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,789</b>	<b>\$ 2,542,358,554</b>	<b>\$ 3,311,226,800</b>	<b>\$ 5,356,651,725</b>
<i>Total Multiplier</i>	<i>1.40</i>	<i>1.36</i>	<i>1.57</i>	<i>1.58</i>

The table also contains a row of multipliers, which are the total values divided by the direct values. An output multiplier of 1.58 means that for every \$1 of output at Iowa's public universities, \$.58 in output is supported in the rest of the state economy. A value added multiplier of 1.57 means that for every \$1 of value added generated in the universities, \$.57 in value added is supported in the rest of the Iowa. A labor income multiplier of 1.36 means that each \$1 of labor income paid at Iowa's public universities results in an additional \$.36 labor income elsewhere. And an employment multiplier of 1.40 means that for every job at the universities, there was 4/10<sup>th</sup> of a job in the rest of the economy.

In interpreting the results in Table 5 it is often tempting to go with and convey the largest number, i.e., the total output value of \$5.36 billion, to describe the worth of Iowa's public universities to regional economic accounts. However, standard government economic tables do not report on regional economies in terms of gross output; they measure economies based on the consequences of producing that output. Accordingly, the preferred measure of the worth of the universities to their regional economies is that they contribute directly or indirectly to the \$3.3 billion in value added (or GDP), of which \$2.54 billion is in the form of labor income to 54,789 employed persons.

**Student Spending**

Iowa's public universities' students spend money at the universities in the form of tuition and fees, board and room costs, books and supplies, and for other casual spending purposes. All of that spending is accounted already in Table 5. But students consume a wide variety of regional goods and services, and more than seven in ten public universities students live off campus and obtain the lion's share of their necessary household goods from the area economy. This spending, then, represents the amount of area economic activity supported by student life after controlling for students' residences: those that reside in residence halls have one set of expected spending in the regional economy, students living in university apartments another set, and students living off-campus yet another.

Student spending patterns were estimated using the Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Expenditure Survey tables for 2012 for householders under age 25 across 25 major spending categories. Table 6

shows the amount of expected student spending during a typical nine-month school term in the regional economy and outside of the universities by residency situation. Average dormitory students are expected to purchase \$2,801 in goods and services from the area economy; an off-campus student would be expected to spend \$7,760 regionally. After multiplying through by each group, students were expected to spend \$489.05 million within their respective regional economies.

**Table 6**

**Estimated Iowa’s Public Universities Per-Student Spending by Housing Type**

	Dormitory	Campus Apartment	Off Campus	Average All Students
	\$ 2,801	\$ 4,610	\$ 7,760	\$ 6,327

Table 7 contains the input-output results of student spending at Iowa’s public universities. It will be immediately clear to a careful reader that estimated direct output of \$371.4 million is less than total spending of \$489.05 million described above. That is because a substantial fraction of student spending will be for retail goods, and the total value of the retail goods sold is not all counted as output in the regional economy.<sup>7</sup> So adjusted, Iowa’s public universities students generated \$371.4 million in direct output, which resulted in \$95.9 million in labor incomes to 3,611 workers in the sectors that supplied those services. Considering all suppliers to those businesses as well as the induced activity that occurred once all direct and indirect workers converted their labor incomes into household consumption, Iowa’s public universities students generated \$518.1 million in total regional output, of which \$339.9 million was value added (or GDP), and \$145.8 million was labor income 4,797 jobholders.

**Table 7**

**The Economic Contribution of Student Spending at Iowa Public Universities, Fiscal 2012**

	Employment	Labor Income	Value Added	Output
Direct	3,611	95,862,554	248,798,294	371,402,462
Indirect	586	27,488,430	50,700,747	82,964,247
Induced	600	24,638,705	45,905,584	72,401,644
Total	4,797	\$145,810,335	\$ 339,888,154	\$518,068,613
<i>Total Multiplier</i>	1.33	1.52	1.37	1.39

<sup>7</sup> Retail and wholesale goods are “margined” in the modeling structure. The cost of the good sold as well as all of its wholesaling and transport charges are apportioned to the areas in which they originate. Very few retail goods are made within the regions of study; consequently, most transportation and manufactured goods values are outside of the study region.

Table 7 also contains multipliers. Student spending yielded an output multiplier of 1.39. For every \$1 of direct output caused by the students, \$.39 in output is supported in the rest of the state economy. For every \$1 of value added, \$.37 in value added is supported elsewhere. For every \$1 in labor income to direct workers, \$.52 in labor income is supported in the remainder of the regional economy. And the job multiplier of 1.33 means that for every job supported directly by student spending, 33/100<sup>th</sup> of a job is supported in Iowa.

### Combined Economic Outcomes

As has already been mentioned, a portion of the induced values in Table 5 contain student employee spending, so adding all public university and student spending tables will result in a minor amount of double-counting. After adjusting for the overlap, Iowa’s public universities plus the spending of their students while in residence in the region account for \$5.82 billion in total industrial output. That output results in \$3.6 billion of value added (or GDP), of which \$2.7 billion is labor income to a total of 59,006 jobholders.

Table 8

<b>Combined Iowa Public University and Student Spending Economic Contributions, Fiscal 2012</b>				
	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Labor Income</b>	<b>Value Added</b>	<b>Output</b>
Direct	42,823	1,970,757,796	2,354,630,868	3,756,336,667
Indirect	5,523	277,338,986	475,259,065	831,150,788
Induced	10,660	419,321,834	784,060,131	1,228,867,121
<b>Total</b>	<b>59,006</b>	<b>\$2,667,418,616</b>	<b>\$3,613,950,064</b>	<b>\$5,816,354,575</b>

### Other Regional Economic Contributions: Visitor Effects

Universities are centers for cultural, entertainment, and recreation, as well. They host conferences and workshops, continuing education activities, and provide a range of “camps” and schools for children and adults alike. Universities produce concerts, plays, and recitals. Most notably, university sports activities entice large numbers of regular visits to the host community. And not to be overlooked, students’ family members and friends visit them while they are in residence

There are localized, and to a lesser extent, a statewide economic impacts associated with all of this visitorship provided the visitors come from outside of the primary service area of the universities.<sup>8</sup> The impact occurs because the visitors purchase goods and services from area providers while attending university activities or functions. Most commonly, these purchases take the form of dining and drinking, room accommodations, motor fuels, and some retail sales.

---

<sup>8</sup> By definition, a visitor must come from outside of the primary service region. An area resident is not a visitor. Persons within the primary service territory would have nonetheless made entertainment or cultural enhancement expenditures in the region. Accordingly, they do not account for any new regional spending, and there is no increment to regional productivity.

The amount spent by visitors varies tremendously by the type of activity attended. Professional visitors for conferences or workshops will have different requirements than, say, persons driving in for an evening basketball game. The spending made by summer math camp visitors, too, will also differ markedly from visitors attending a university stage production. Accordingly, without a comprehensive and scientifically valid survey of a wide range of visitors over the course of an entire year, it is not possible to estimate the full visitorship economic impact of our universities. And even if universities were to measure just their highest profile activities like sports, it would still take an extensive and no-less rigorous survey instrument administered over an entire academic year to arrive at reliable and generalizable conclusions about visitor spending and the potential economic impacts they would explain.

No visitorship impacts are measured in this study, nor can they be until a valid evaluation of visitor spending is conducted.

## Appendix – Describing Input-Output Results Properly

Measuring the multiplied through value of public spending using input-output models often creates misperceptions of the overall value of public spending to the state. Very large fractions of public spending originate from state own-source revenues: i.e., taxes, charges and fees. Public university funding structures are, however, much more complicated than typical state of local government services. First, a hefty portion of university funding comes from the tuition and fees paid by students. This money comes from a mix of family savings, scholarships and grants, and from borrowing. Next, the federal government directly or indirectly supports students through Pell Grants and student loan guarantees. The state of Iowa makes appropriations for general education and service purposes, and non-student consumers of university services and recreation opportunities purchase those goods directly from the university.

Iowa's public universities exist to educate and serve, firstly, the state of Iowa. A very large fraction of their annual economic output, as well as the multiplied through consequences, are therefore intrinsic components of the Iowa economy. This is the expected "footprint" of the universities as Iowa institutions. As public dollars, family savings, as well as student spending have value wherever they are spent in the Iowa economy, there would always be sets of linkages and multiplied through outcomes in the Iowa economy from that spending.

Iowa's public universities, however, generate net new increments to productivity for the state of Iowa in these areas mainly:

1. They export education services to out-of-state students
2. They, via winning competitive grants from federal, private, or institutional sources, engages in research and service provision that would not otherwise have occurred were it not for the ability of university researchers and service providers
3. They, via their many cultural, educational, and athletic offerings, entice spending in the state of Iowa that otherwise would not have occurred
4. Finally, student family members make trips to visit students

In terms of generating incremental impacts for the state as a whole, the first two categories produce the largest amounts of the net gains to the state's economy. The overall impact of university cultural or athletic activities to the state are, in the main, relatively small because the overwhelming majority of sports and other cultural or educational sales are to Iowa citizens, and the number of out-of-state family visitors of students is, in the main, small.

---

Iowa State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, or status as a U.S. veteran. Inquiries can be directed to the Director of Equal Opportunity and Compliance, 3280 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-7612.