While colleges and universities across the nation struggle to meet enrollment goals, Georgia College’s Graduate School has broken records across the board.

For the fall 2020 semester, 1,282 students enrolled in graduate programs at the university—the largest number in history. That number has been steadily rising since fall 2016 when 888 students were enrolled.

Interim Associate Provost and Director of the Graduate School Dr. Holly Roberts attributes the growth to Georgia College’s reputation as an institution of higher education and the innovation to offer programs that meet the needs of professionals in our state.

U.S. News & World Report ranked several Georgia College master’s degrees in the “Best Online Graduate Programs” for 2020. The graduate nursing programs were recognized as 28th in the country and first in Georgia. Online Master’s in Business programs began to move online in 2016 and are now open to all students.

“Growth is happening in many of our graduate programs with the largest being in the College of Education—specifically in our Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program,” said Roberts. The program provides initial educator preparation at the master’s degree level for people who already have a bachelor’s degree with a major in a specific content field. It’s primarily for those people looking to change careers to become a teacher.

“Part of it is, in people are losing their jobs, they decide to go into teaching. If they already have a bachelor’s degree, they can be in the classroom, start teaching and get certified,” said Dr. Joe Peters, chair of the College of Education.

Since 2015, graduate programs in the College of Education have grown 412 percent, said Peters. He attributes that growth to the College of Education’s online MAT programs being one of the first in the state and meeting the needs of professionals already in the workforce.

“With the MAT program, students can focus in middle grades, secondary or special education,” Peters said. “In the College of Education, we also have a teacher leadership specialist degree and a curriculum and instruction master’s degree. We just started both a few years ago, and they also have record enrollment,” Peters said.

Most graduate programs at the university are online, making for easier access to students across the state. With many already committed to a working profession, online learning brings more flexibility and options as people look to pursue an advanced degree. That’s why the College of Education plans to continue to offer more programs online to meet the need.

“Next summer we’re going to do early childhood and middle grades master’s degree. 100 percent online for the first time, as well as special education master’s and specialist degrees,” Peters said. The university also offers certifications online in education and other fields. It’s one more way to help prepare Georgia’s existing skills or develop new areas.

The Graduate School is looking to expand offerings across the university to address the needs of professional learners with interest in education and non-education fields.

“Certificates are non-degree seeking,” Roberts said. “They are a series of classes that build on each other to enhance knowledge and skills in a specific area.”

“We are planning to offer several new certification coming out of health sciences and business,” said Roberts. “Although they’re in the early stages, options could include information systems data analytics, IT auditing, web development, nutrition, nursing simulation education and more.”

Meeting the current workforce needs is key to the growth and development of the Graduate School.

“The goals looking forward are to foster student success, cultivate engaged graduate community and focus our recruitment efforts,” said Roberts.

Whether in education, business, health sciences or humanities, Georgia College will continue to prepare graduate learners that be accessible and prominent. For more information, visit gcsu.edu/graduate.