

With FedEx's help, U of M plans to become largest university in state

By [Jason Bolton](#) – *Memphis Business Journal*, Sept. 5, 2018

At the Sept. 5 University of Memphis trustees' meeting, the board heard that the U of M may surpass the flagship of the [University of Tennessee](#) system in enrollment numbers. And, as with most things in Memphis, FedEx will play a big role.

“[We] believe the U of M will challenge the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for the largest [university] in the state and U of M Global is a big part of that,” said U of M president [M. David Rudd](#).

U of M Global is the university's online degree program; under a collaboration with FedEx, Memphis hub employees can earn a college degree without paying tuition. A total of about 60 graduate and undergraduate programs are offered through U of M Global.

Rudd noted that the FedEx/U of M Global partnership has been well-received. Roughly 11,000 local FedEx employees are currently eligible for the free-tuition degree program, and it will expand to FedEx hubs in Indianapolis and Oakland, California, over the next few months.

As part of Rudd's presentation to the board, one of his slides said: “Don't be surprised if U of M is the largest university in Tennessee in 24 months.” For the **Fall 2017 semester, the U of M had approximately 21,500 students** enrolled compared to about 28,000 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

According to the U of M's provost [Karen Weddle-West](#), five of U of M Global's programs are recognized by *U.S. News and World Report* as “best online” in the country, including nursing, criminal justice, and a graduate education degree. She also noted that U of M Global is the only online public university ranked by that publication.

“We continue to focus ... in that completely online world, which will certainly dominate the growth of the future,” Weddle-West said.

An emphasis of STEM was also cited as a key area of growth. Rudd cited plans for the U of M on that front, including:

- An expanded research investment of \$5 million over the next 5 years
- A FedEx Innovation investment of \$2.25 million
- A planned \$40 million STEM research and classroom building
- Pursuing expanded funding for independent research in the Tennessee legislature this session
- The creation of the University Research Council

The U of M initiatives related to STEM are part of a “concerted effort to achieve Carnegie I [research] status,” Rudd said.

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education’s “R1” is deemed its highest research classification and includes doctoral-level universities that grant at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees.

“We have a lot of momentum here at the University of Memphis,” said Alan Graf, U of M Board of Trustees chairman and FedEx CFO.