

2025 Carnegie Classifications Fact Sheet

On April 24, 2025, the Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education released the fully redesigned Carnegie Classifications as part of an ongoing effort to make the classifications more useful, relevant, and reflective of the nation's ever-evolving higher education landscape. **Updates include:**

- **A redesigned Institutional Classification**, formerly called the Basic Classification, that organizes institutions based on a fuller set of dimensions, including a wider look at the types of degrees they award, the subjects in which they award degrees, and the size of the institution. This redesign builds on February's release of the new Research Activity Designations, including the Research 1 and 2 institutions as well as the new Research Colleges and Universities.
- **A new Student Access and Earnings Classification** that examines the extent to which an institution is enrolling students who reflect the communities it serves and whether an institution's former students go on to earn competitive wages compared to peers in their area.
- **Identifying Opportunity Colleges and Universities**, which are higher access, higher earnings institutions that can serve as a model for studying how campuses can foster student success.

Institutional Classification:

The Institutional Classification better reflects and organizes the wide variety of institutional missions and organizational structures that exist today. There are 31 Institutional Classifications in the 2025 update.

The former Basic Classification, which had wide use in the field, relied on the highest degree an institution awards, even if that reflected only a small portion of the institution. The new Institutional Classification widens the scope of the degree profile and organizes institutions by multiple characteristics, including the types of degrees they award, the fields of study in which students receive their degrees, and their size. Institutions are grouped with peers who share similar characteristics across these dimensions.

These multidimensional groupings of peer institutions are designed to make the Institutional Classification more relevant and useful for policymakers, funders, researchers, and others who rely on the classification system for a comprehensive view of higher education in the United States. These dimensions include:

- **Award Level Focus:** The focus and mix of award levels at an institution; generally, this is where they award the most degrees. There are six categories:
 - **Associate:** Institutions that primarily award associate degrees.
 - **Associate/Baccalaureate:** Institutions that primarily award associate degrees but that also award a sufficient number of bachelor's and/or graduate degrees.
 - **Baccalaureate:** Institutions that primarily award bachelor's degrees and that do not have a significant graduate program.
 - **Undergraduate/Graduate-Master's:** Institutions that have both a graduate and undergraduate presence, with an emphasis on the master's degree, and that do not have a significant doctoral program.
 - **Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate:** Institutions that have both a graduate and undergraduate presence, with a sufficient focus on the doctorate.
 - **Graduate-focused:** Institutions that are mostly focused on graduate studies.

- **Academic Program Mix:** The fields of study in which institutions award 50% or more of their degrees. For most institutions, the classifications use data on undergraduate degrees only. For graduate-focused institutions, the classifications use data on graduate degrees only.
 - **Special Focus (11 categories):** Generally, the majority of degrees are awarded in a single academic area or field of study.
 - **Professions-focused:** The majority of degrees are awarded in fields that are classified as pre-professional or career-aligned.
 - **Mixed:** Fewer than 50% of degrees are awarded in any one defined focus area.
- **Size:** The size of an institution, as measured by its total 12-month headcount, including full- and part-time students, and including undergraduate and graduate students.
 - **Small:** Fewer than 4,000 students total
 - **Medium:** Between 4,000 and 20,000 students total
 - **Large:** At least 20,000 students total

The Carnegie Classifications do not consider elements like selectivity, admissions data, or other factors that may be used to identify certain types of campuses. The Institutional Classification is a reflection of institutional type, largely based on the degrees an institution awards, regardless of those other characteristics.

To learn more about the methodology for the Institutional Classifications, read the technical manual [available April 24].

Data sources:

In general, the classifications use a three-year average of the following data:

- IPEDS Completions Survey for academic years 2021, 2022, and 2023.
- IPEDS 12-Month Enrollment Survey for academic years 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Student Access and Earnings Classification:

The Student Access and Earnings Classification aims to spur collaboration and institutional improvement with a focus on how higher education can foster opportunities for student success. It examines the extent to which institutions are serving students using two measures:

- **Access:** Are institutions providing access to a student population that reflects the locations they serve? This measure looks at two data points: undergraduate students who receive Pell Grants and undergraduate students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Both data points are compared to the demographics for the areas that institutions serve.
- **Earnings:** After students leave an institution, how much are they making compared to peers in their job market? This measure evaluates former Title IV undergraduate students' earnings eight years after they entered the institution and compares the median value to the earnings of a similar population in the locations that students are from.

Methodology:

- Both dimensions operate by examining an institution's data in relation to a calculated comparison value to understand in context whether the raw data is higher or lower than could be expected. This comparison value is based on the location(s) that an institution serves using data from the U.S. Census.
- In doing so, the classification creates ratios, with a value of 1 meaning an institution's data perfectly aligns with the comparison value. Values greater than 1 indicate an institution's data is higher than the comparison value. Values less than 1 indicate an institution's data is lower than the comparison value. For example, an

earnings ratio of 1.5 would mean that an institution's median earnings are 50% above the median earnings of the comparison group.

- Based on their two ratios, institutions fall into one of the following categories:
 - **Opportunity Colleges and Universities (Higher Access, Higher Earnings):** Institutions whose access ratio is at or higher than 1 and whose earnings ratio is at or higher than 1.5 (for baccalaureate and higher institutions) or 1.25 (for primarily associate colleges).
 - **Higher Access, Medium Earnings:** Institutions whose access ratio is at or higher than 1 and whose earnings ratio is between 1 and 1.5 (for baccalaureate and higher institutions) and 1 and 1.25 (for primarily associate colleges).
 - **Higher Access, Lower Earnings:** Institutions whose access ratio is at or higher than 1 and whose earnings ratio is less than 1.
 - **Lower access, Higher Earnings:** Institutions whose access ratio is less than 1 and whose earnings ratio is at or higher than 1.5 (for baccalaureate and higher institutions) or 1.25 (for primarily associate colleges).
 - **Lower Access, Medium Earnings:** Institutions whose access ratio is less than 1 and whose earnings ratio is between 1 and 1.5 (for baccalaureate and higher institutions) and 1 and 1.25 (for primarily associate colleges).
 - **Lower Access, Lower Earnings:** Institutions whose access ratio is less than 1 and whose earnings ratio is less than 1.
- To determine the location that an institution serves, the methodology uses the top three states from which students migrate. The comparison formula is based on a weighted average of data from those states, with the balance coming from data that reflects the full U.S. population. For regional institutions and schools that primarily grant associate degrees, the institution's core-based statistical area (or, for rural campuses, the rural portion of the state) is used.

To learn more about the methodology for the Student Access and Earnings Classifications, read the technical manual [available April 24].

Data sources:

- **Source for access data:** Institutions reported the degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate student race/ethnicity demographic data as part of the IPEDS 12-month Enrollment Survey for 2022-23. Degree/certificate-seeking Pell Grant enrollment rates are based on data institutions reported on the IPEDS Student Financial Aid Survey for 2022-23.
- **Source for earnings data:** Earnings data are from the College Scorecard and represent the median earnings of all entering undergraduate students who received Title IV financial aid, including full- and part-time students and transfer or other non-first-time students, eight years after their entry at that institution. Students who were enrolled in school after eight years or who did not report any income data were not included.
- **Source for student location/migration data:** For the access ratio, the data used were reported as part of the IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey for 2020 and 2022 (mandatory reporting years). If an institution completed this information for 2021, that data was averaged with the other data. For the earnings ratio, the data used were reported as part of the IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey for 2012 (mandatory reporting year) and 2013 (if available). This data was used to determine the geographical context for an institution. Regional institutions were identified by the Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges. Associate Colleges and Associate/Baccalaureate colleges were identified from the Institutional Classification.
- **Source for comparative data:** Access data were compared to data from the U.S. Census Bureau for adults ages 25+ who had a high school degree. Earnings data were compared to data from the U.S. Census Bureau for adults ages 22-40 who had a high school diploma or higher credential. Additional data reported through the IPEDS 12-month Enrollment Survey in 2011-12 and 2012-13 were also included in the earnings formula to incorporate institutions' student body demographic context during the time that students entered the institution.

Future Classification Updates:

The Carnegie Classifications are updated every three years, with the last release finalized in February 2022. The next release of the Carnegie Classifications is planned for spring 2028. Future methodology, including data sources, will be determined closer to release.