

Seventh Annual Social Mobility Index Highlights Leadership of California and New York Institutions



Economic Disparity in the US Accelerates as the Pandemic Blocks Many Disadvantaged and Low-Income Students from Entering College

Portland, Or., November 19, 2020

https://collegenet.com/company/news/7thAnnual.html?utm_source=SMI&utm_medium=SMIPRlink&utm_campaign=SMIemailCNET

CollegeNET, Inc., a leading provider of web-based on-demand technologies for higher education, today released the 2020 Social Mobility Index (SMI), a data-driven analysis that ranks four-year US colleges and universities according to how effectively they enroll students from low-income backgrounds and graduate them into good-paying jobs. The 2020 SMI benchmarks 1,449 four-year schools.

The Top 20 SMI Schools for 2020

1. CUNY Bernard M Baruch College NY
2. California State University-Los Angeles CA
3. California State University-Fresno CA
4. California State University-Northridge CA
5. California State University-Long Beach CA
6. California State Polytechnic University-Pomona CA
7. California State University-San Bernardino CA
8. CUNY Queens College NY
9. CUNY Hunter College NY
10. California State University-Dominguez Hills CA
11. CUNY Lehman College NY
12. California State University-Fullerton CA
13. California State University-Sacramento CA
14. California State University-Bakersfield CA
15. CUNY Brooklyn College NY
16. San Jose State University CA
17. California State University-Stanislaus CA
18. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley TX
19. San Francisco State University CA
20. California State University-Channel Islands CA

Top Institutions Driving Social Mobility

The CUNY system in New York City placed five schools in the 2020 SMI Top 20, including Baruch College, which continues to hold its #1 ranking for the sixth consecutive year.

As in 2019, public universities in California — both the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems — also dominate the 2020 SMI rankings, accounting

for 70 percent of the Top 20 spots this year. Four of those schools (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; California State University, Fresno; California State University, Long Beach; and California State University, Stanislaus) have ranked in the Top 20 for seven consecutive years.

Founded in 1847 as the nation's first free public institution of higher education, CUNY declared its mission to provide a first-rate public education to all students, regardless of their means or background. The University of California was established in 1868 as a great university serving equally the children of immigrants and settlers, landowners and industrial barons.

Carol Christ, Chancellor at UC Berkeley, echoed the founding philosophy several months ago in her pandemic message to students. "We may all be in the same storm, but we are most certainly not all in the same boat," wrote Christ. "For this reason, we developed our plans for this semester through an equity lens to ensure we are doing everything in our power to provide for equity of experience to identify and mitigate disparities and inequities among the members of the campus community."

Disadvantaged Students Being Hit Hardest by Covid-19

The 2020 SMI is being released at a time when Covid-19 is [disproportionately affecting](#) low-income students, forcing them to abandon, delay or alter their pursuit of a college degree and the potential that degree provides for social mobility.

A recent [working paper](#), which surveyed students at Arizona State University, described how disruptive Covid-19 has been for low-income students. Dr. Marcheta P. Evans, President of Bloomfield College in New Jersey, also makes the point:

"One of the many silent killers of this disease is that it is taking higher education away from too many students," Dr. Evans [recently wrote](#). "Those affected the most have been first-generation college students and those who face tremendous economic and social challenges to begin with. Ultimately, we are seeing our own epidemic in higher education. Great students, students who in the process of creating generational change for themselves, are being robbed not only of an education, but the opportunity and the ability to create a better future for themselves."

Advancing Social Mobility Nationwide

Other notable schools advancing social mobility despite the pandemic include:

Winston-Salem State University, in North Carolina, (Top 30 ranking for six of the past seven years); Rutgers University, Newark (#21 ranking in 2020); Wichita State University (Top 10 percent ranking for four of the past six years); University of California, San Diego (Top 5 percent ranking in 2020); Old Dominion University (Top 10 percent ranking in 2020); New Mexico State University (Top 20 percent ranking in 2020); University of California, Santa Cruz (Top 10 percent ranking in 2020); University of California, Irvine (Top 5 percent ranking in 2020); and University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Top 10 percent ranking in 2020).

Redefining the Notion of Prestige in Higher Education

Founded on the principle that growing economic disparity in this country is the most pressing problem of our time, the SMI seeks to [redirect the attribution of "prestige" in our higher education system](#) toward colleges that are advancing economic opportunity and social mobility.

“Unlike other [college rankings](#) that are aimed primarily at helping students select a college,” says CollegeNET President Jim Wolfston, “the SMI helps families and policymakers determine which colleges are addressing the national problem of economic mobility. Administrators have a better chance to help strengthen US economic mobility and the promise of the American Dream if they can identify and learn from colleges that are skilled at doing this.”

“Given that the US is now the least economically mobile among developed nations,” says Wolfston, “it is irresponsible to say an education institution is ‘better’ because it has a huge endowment, or because it admits students with higher SAT scores — which are most tightly correlated to family income. It is irresponsible to say an institution is ‘better’ because it drives up admissions application counts, turns away more students and then boasts about ‘selectivity.’ In today’s world, where the American Dream is threatened, real prestige must accord to universities that educate and advance all motivated students, regardless of their economic background. This is the prestige that the Social Mobility Index acknowledges.”

Higher Education’s Vital Role in the Learning Age

“Higher Education is the most important asset in the Learning Age,” Wolfston explained in his [keynote address](#) at [Old Dominion University’s Social Mobility Symposium](#). “If we can distribute this vital asset across the economic spectrum, we can optimize our nation’s human capital development, prepare the next generation for citizenship and ensure social and economic opportunity. Most importantly, by rejecting the current trend toward on-campus economic homogeneity, a higher education institution can offer its students the chance to encounter a more challenging mix of people with diverse ideas, perspectives and backgrounds. Collisions with the unexpected and unfamiliar are what best sharpen and prepare innovative minds. Thus, economic inclusion is not only a solution to a social justice issue, it is an optimizing strategy for training tomorrow’s innovators.”

Programs That Acknowledge Institutional Excellence

[CollegeNET](#) recognizes schools that are advancing social mobility through various pro-grams. CollegeNET presents the [Social Mobility Innovator Awards](#) to student success leaders from US colleges and universities at the [Social Mobility Summit](#) — a forum on economic inclusion and best practices for student success held in Portland, Oregon. CollegeNET has also published an [e-book](#) that describes best practices from [student success professionals](#) who are pioneering innovative programs that support under-served and underrepresented students’ academic, personal and financial needs. Further, CollegeNET sponsors regional conferences to debate and discuss social mobility issues. On-campus events have been held at the University of California, Irvine; the University of California, Santa Cruz; the [University of California, San Diego](#); Wichita State University; and [Winston-Salem State University](#).

Media Contact:

Jill Thacker

jill@collegenet.com

503.973.5255