Institutionalizing Community Engagement in Higher Education

Research Briefs from the 2024 Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research brief series draws on data from institutions successfully classified in the 2024 Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement (CECCE) to examine how community engagement is being formalized, supported, and sustained across diverse institutional contexts. Together, the three briefs offer an integrated picture of the current state of institutionalization of community engagement in U.S. higher education, highlighting both areas of maturation and opportunities for continued growth.

Collectively, the findings suggest that community engagement is increasingly viewed as a core institutional priority rather than a peripheral activity. A strong majority of classified institutions demonstrated a willingness to contribute to a national dataset, signaling trust in the Carnegie process and recognition of the value of shared evidence for advancing the field. At the same time, limited willingness to allow institutionally identifiable data shows the need for continued relationship-building, transparency, and incentives that encourage deeper participation in research and learning across institutions.

The briefs also reveal that institutional frameworks—particularly the presence of an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement—play a critical role in advancing institutionalization. Most successfully classified institutions have adopted a collaboratively developed, documented, and institution-wide definition, often catalyzed through the CECCE application process itself, strategic planning, or accreditation. These processes appear to serve as important leverage points for aligning community engagement with mission, values, and institutional priorities. Where centralized definitions are absent, institutions often operate intentionally through decentralized or mission-driven approaches, underscoring the diversity of pathways through which engagement is enacted.

Analysis of institutional types further demonstrates that community engagement spans a wide range of campuses, with strong representation among public institutions, doctoral universities, and urban campuses alongside meaningful participation from master's institutions, baccalaureate colleges, community colleges, and special-focus institutions. Importantly, the integration of the revised 2025 Carnegie Institutional Classification and particularly the addition of the Student Access and Earnings Classification adds a new equity-centered lens, illustrating that institutions recognized for community engagement also demonstrate significant value in expanding access and supporting positive post-attendance economic outcomes.

These findings must be interpreted within the broader context in which the data were collected and analyzed. Institutions submitted applications in 2023 during a period of unprecedented disruption shaped by COVID-19 recovery, shifting enrollment patterns, evolving instructional modalities, and economic instability. Concurrent organizational transitions within the CECCE host organization—combined with flexibility to reclassify in either 2024 or 2026—resulted in a smaller applicant pool in the 2024 cycle than is typical. Analysis for this series took place between November 2024 and October 2025, during a time of continued adaptation and significant political and policy shifts across higher education, including ongoing challenges to diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a result, the data may not fully reflect current organizational structures, terminology, or practices at participating campuses.

Taken together, these briefs underscore that the CECCE functions not only as a recognition mechanism, but also as an institutional change process. The findings point to a field that is maturing—moving toward greater coherence, evidence use, and alignment with institutional strategy—and also highlight the need for continued research, especially on underrepresented institutional types, organizational structures, and leadership models. As higher education navigates shifting political, economic, and social conditions, this body of work affirms community engagement as a critical dimension of higher education's public purpose and societal contribution. Looking ahead, we aim to continue this line of analysis across future Carnegie Elective Classification cycles, deepening the evidence base and contributing sustained insight into the evolving field of community engagement.

Brief #1: Institutional Research Engagement

This first brief provides in-depth analysis of the institutional engagement of the 2024 CECCE applicants who received classification. Specifically, this brief sheds light on which institutions provided access to their data and the degree to which institutions were willing to share identifiable data (e.g. use their institutional name). This brief is important to understanding both the potential and limitations of the current CECCE dataset.

DATA SOURCE

At present, institutional applicants for the 2024 CECCE can opt in to sharing their data for research with Carnegie. Both first-time and reclassification applicants were asked a specific question on data sharing:

> **Request for Permission to Use Application for Research and Training:**
>
> In order to better understand the institutionalization of community engagement in higher education, we would like to make the responses in the applications available for research and training purposes for the Carnegie Foundation, their administrative partners, and other higher education researchers. Only applications from campuses that agree to the use of their application data will be made available for research and training purposes. No identifiable application information related to campuses that are unsuccessful in the application process will be released to researchers. We encourage you to indicate your consent below to advance research on community engagement.

Applicants chose one of three responses:

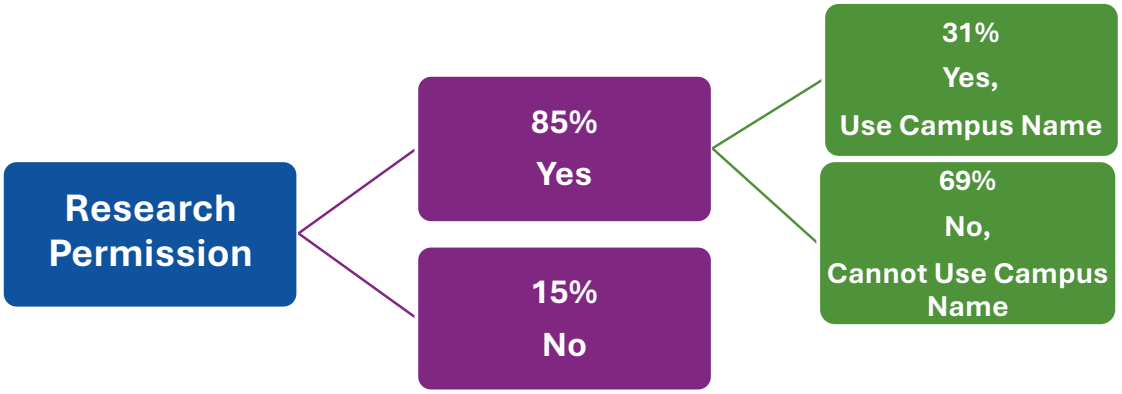
> **Please respond to A, B, or C below:**
>
> (A) I consent to having the information provided in the application used for the purposes of research and training application reviewers. In providing this consent, the identity of my campus will not be disclosed.
>
> (B) I consent to having the information provided in the application used for the purposes of research and training application reviewers. In providing this consent, I also agree that the identity of my campus may be revealed.

(C) I do not consent to having the information provided in the application used for research purposes and training application reviewers.

KEY FINDINGS

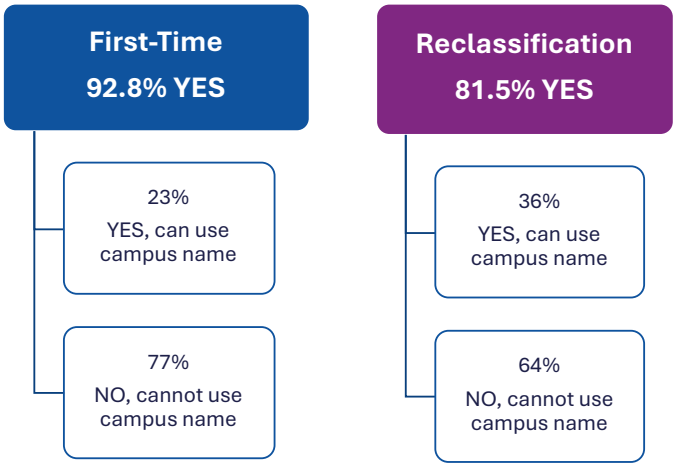
Overall, 85 percent of successfully classified institutions agreed to share their data for research purposes. This brief examines this data to gain a better understanding of institutional research engagement. Of these institutions, 31 percent gave permission to have institutionally identified data (e.g., use of their campus name in research).

Figure 1.1: Research Engagement of 2024 Successfully Classified Institutions



In comparing first-time versus reclassified institutions, most first-time classified institutions were willing to share their data (92.8 percent). While there was a slightly lower percentage of reclassified institutions who agreed to share their data (81.5 percent), of those who wanted institutional participation in research, a higher percentage agreed to the use of their institutional name (36 percent of reclassified vs. 23 percent of first-time).

Figure 1.2: Data Sharing by 2024 Classification Type



In total, eleven institutions gave permission to use their institutional name. In this brief, only those institutions that gave permission to use their institutional name are identified.

Figure 1.3: Permission to Use Institutional Identity in Research (n=11)

First-Time	Reclassification
1. Wilbur Wright College of the City Colleges of Chicago (Community College) 2. University of California, Riverside 3. University of Wyoming	1. Boise State University (ID) 2. North Carolina Central University 3. Raritan Valley Community College (NJ) 4. Saint Louis University (MO) 5. Saint Mary's College of California 6. Tufts University (MA) 7. University of Central Florida 8. University of West Florida

Institutional Data Sharing Is Valued

Institutional willingness to share data by applicants illustrates there is strong value for a national dataset. Moreover, such a high participation rate (85 percent) suggests that institutions see a need and/or value for national research to advance practice in the field and have confidence that the American Council on Education (ACE) can lead this.

Room for Growth with Institutional Name Sharing

However, even though more than three-fourths of 2024 classified campuses gave permission to share their institutional data, about two-thirds of campuses did not want their institutional name revealed (64 percent for reclassification and 77 percent for first-time). There seems to be room for communicating better and building stronger trust with campuses to ensure that institutionally identifiable data and analysis will not negatively impact their campus.

Consider a Sustainable Incentive to Increase Institutional Data and Name Sharing

To increase the sharing of institutionally identifiable data, consider providing a one-time incentive for campuses to benefit from doing so. There are multiple possibilities here (e.g. institutional type analysis, peer analysis, etc.) that should be further explored. To make this sustainable in the future, after a pilot period consider providing this as a paid service in subsequent years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Field

1. **Move from Data Collection to Use:** Given that institutions are willing to share their data to contribute to a national dataset on community engagement, leveraging this data to advance the field is important.

   Macro Opportunities

   - **Systems Analysis (State-Level, Public Institutions, etc.):** In particular, if a system of higher education [re]classifies in a particular year, (e.g. University of California, a community college district, etc.), this dataset can be used to generate a system-wide analysis on community engagement process and outcomes.
   - **Institutional Type Analysis:** Similarly, this dataset also lends itself to examining types of institutions (e.g., minority serving institutions, religious institutions, research institutions, etc.). For example, research using this dataset could uncover the unique processes and outcomes

of community engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institutions, and/or dual designated institutions that enhance their institutional mission.

» **Regional Analysis:** Place-based community engagement has been steadily growing in our field in the last 10 years. In addition, the anchor institution mission has also developed. Both strategies focus on a particular region and across several types of organizations, including engaging with multiple colleges and professional/graduate schools. As such, this current dataset could be used to measure community engagement process and outcomes in a region across multiple institutional types.

Institutional Use

» **Peer Analysis:** Institutions may consider utilizing this dataset for analyzing their community engagement work in relation to peers. Such analysis could provide compelling comparative data to enhance community engaged research, teaching, and service resources on a campus.

» **Institutional Trends Analysis:** For campuses that reclassify, examining their own institutional data over time can provide meaningful information on the ways in which community engagement is maturing on their campus. Such data could be used to inform institutional approaches, strategic planning, and/or accreditation.

Brief #2: Institutionally Sanctioned Definition of Community Engagement

Delving further into the CECCE dataset, this second brief focuses on an important measure: campuses' institutional framework for community engagement (CE). Specifically, this brief examines the degree to which an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement is present and identifies institutional process outcomes for having a centralized definition of community engagement.

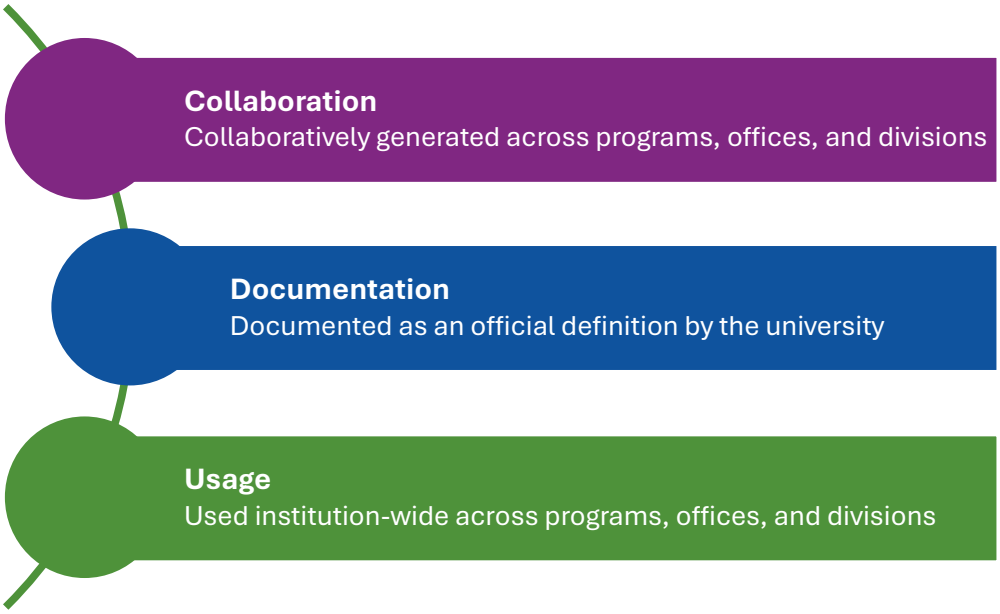
DATA SOURCE

A key indicator of institutionalizing community engagement on a university campus is having an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement—one that is collaboratively generated and used institution-wide (e.g., across programs, offices, and divisions). For the 2024 CECCE application, this question was open-ended:

> If your campus has an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement and related terms, provide them here. Describe the context for the creation of the definition, how it was approved, how it is used, and any evidence of its effectiveness in guiding community engagement on campus. If your campus does not have an institutional definition of community engagement but you are on a campus that has multiple definitions reflecting how different units and disciplines interpret community engagement, provide some description and examples here. If your institution does not have such a definition, please describe any work under way to adopt one.

The qualitative responses from this question were analyzed and categorized into whether institutions had an institutionally sanctioned definition of CE utilizing the following criteria:

Figure 2.1: Components of an Institutionally Sanctioned Definition of Community Engagement

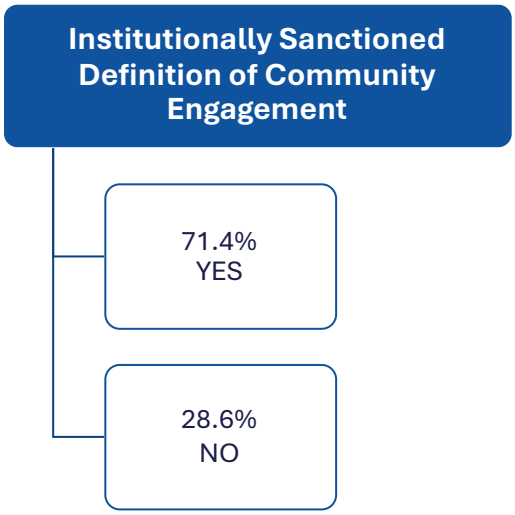


KEY FINDINGS

Institution-Wide Sanctioned Definition of Community Engagement Is Valuable

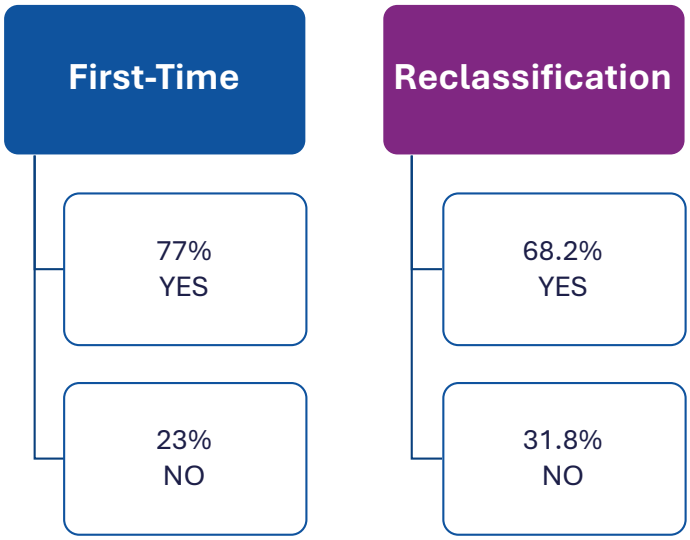
Having an institutionally sanctioned definition of CE is an indicator of pervasive CE. In 2024, 71.4 percent of successfully classified institutions (n=25) had an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement that was collaboratively constructed, included documented evidence of adoption by the university, and was used institution-wide.

Figure 2.2: Institutionally Sanctioned Definition of Community Engagement



First-time classified campuses had a slightly higher percentage of an institutionally sanctioned definition of CE (77 percent first-time vs. 68.2 percent reclassification).

Figure 2.3: Institutionally Sanctioned Definition of Community Engagement by Classification Type



There was no particular pattern of institutional types that had an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement. In fact, there was a wide variety among private and public institutions and a range of geographies (west coast, mountain, south, etc.).

Figure 2.4: Universities with an Institutionally Sanctioned Definition of Community Engagement

First-Time	Reclassification
1. University of California, Riverside	1. Boise State University (ID)
2. University of Wyoming	2. North Carolina Central University
	3. Saint Louis University (MO)
	4. University of Central Florida
	5. University of West Florida

Further review of the data surfaced interesting practices, including a particular community engagement definition and institution-wide processes and organizational structures influencing the institutionalization of community engagement.

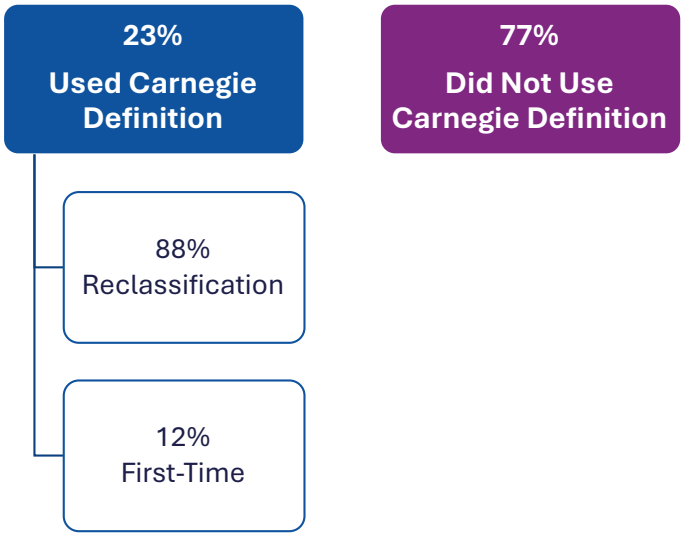
Usage of the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement Definition

The CECCE definition was adopted as the institutionally sanctioned definition of CE by 23 percent of institutions successfully classified in 2024. Carnegie defines community engagement as:

> ….collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

Institutions that reclassified used the definition more frequently (88 percent), and only one first-time classified institution utilized the Carnegie definition (12 percent). It is also important to note that one institution used the Carnegie definition for an office but did not adopt it institution-wide.

Figure 2.5: Carnegie Community Engagement Definition Usage



Institution-Wide Processes to Institutionalize a Definition

Three types of institution-wide processes most frequently contributed to creating an institutional definition of community engagement: applying for the CECCE, strategic planning, and accreditation.

Figure 2.6: Types of Institution-Wide Processes Used to Institutionalize a Community Engagement Definition

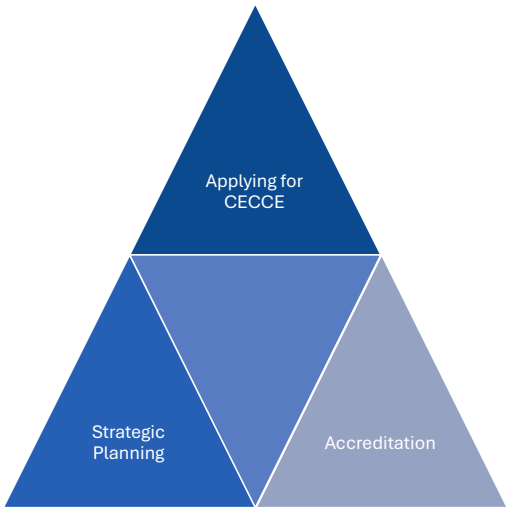
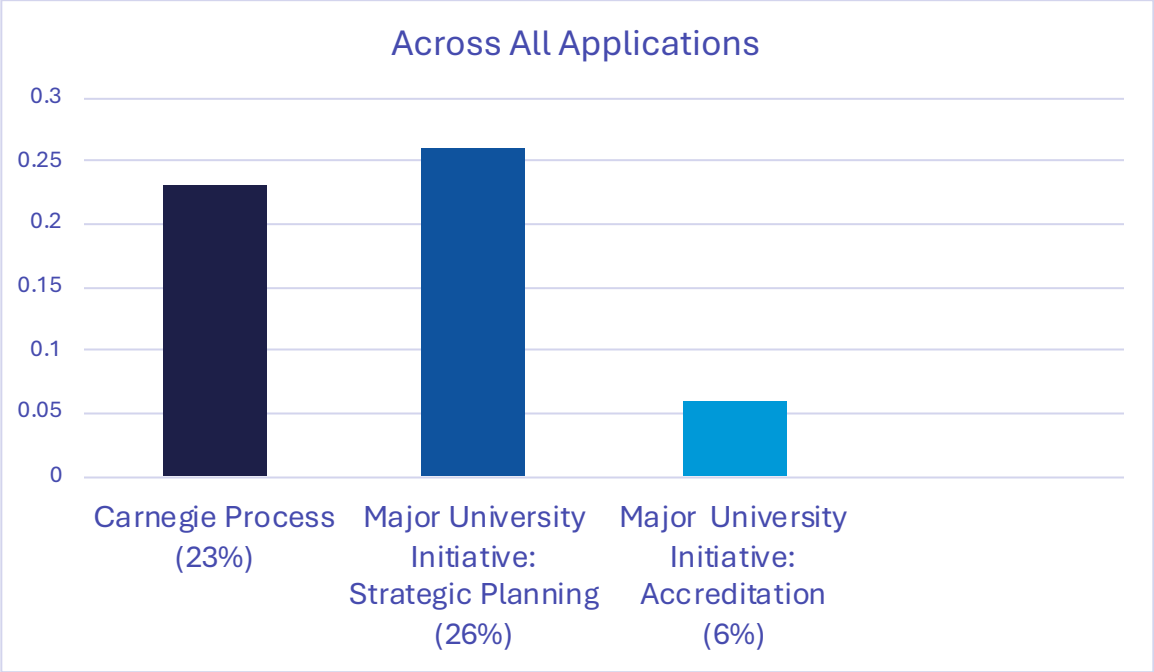


Figure 2.7: Institution-Wide Processes That Institutionalized a Community Engagement Definition



Applying for the CECCE

The process of applying for reclassification facilitated the creation of an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement for 23 percent of campuses that successfully classified.

> "After SLU was initially classified, we began sharing the Carnegie Foundation community engagement definition. With the creation of the new Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, faculty and staff worked together to define additional terms framing the division's work, including connected communities, culture, cultural diversity, equity, inclusive excellence, social change, transformative change, and universal accessibility."
>
> —Saint Louis University
>
> "Prior to the self-study for this application, UCF did not have a single definition of community engagement. Various definitions have been applied and appear on websites at the university, each unique to the goals, objectives, and constituent partners of each unit. Throughout the self-study process, task force leaders have engaged multiple campus and community stakeholders in discussion about the importance of and values surrounding the university's community engaged efforts. The result is a university-wide definition:
>
> UCF is a public research university that unleashes the potential within every individual, organization, and community by investing in innovative and mutually beneficial partnerships for the public good. By leveraging the diversity found in our campus, local, and global communities—and with a commitment to inclusion—we aim to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; propel broad-based prosperity; and develop sustainable solutions to critical societal issues."
>
> —University of Central Florida

Major University Initiatives

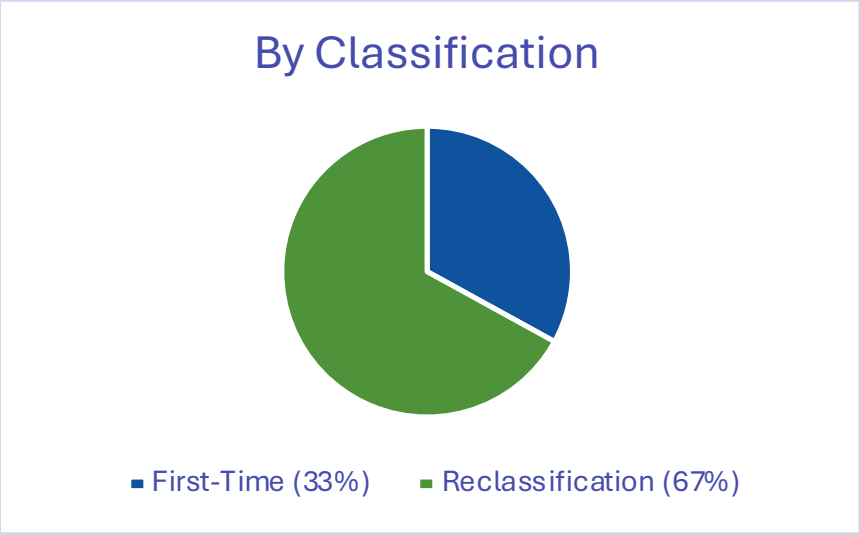
For 32 percent of campuses that successfully classified, the definition formed during the process of other major university initiatives.

Strategic Planning

Twenty-six percent of campuses shared that strategic planning helped them form an institutional definition of community engagement. Of these campuses that named a major university initiative as being influential, the majority (82 percent) noted that engaging in strategic planning facilitated an institution-wide definition of community engagement. Two-thirds of these institutions were reclassifying (67 percent), whereas only one-third (33 percent) were first-time applicants.

> "UC Riverside developed the following definition of community engagement in 2010, through strategic planning work with campus and community stakeholders: "As the only land grant public research university in the region, UC Riverside bears a responsibility to engage with its communities in ways that maximize the impact of its contributions, advance the social good, and solve pressing problems." This continues to serve as a general guiding definition for our work, though the campus and our various ways of supporting and partnering in the community have multiplied in the intervening years."
>
> —University of California, Riverside
>
> "The University of Wyoming's (UW) vision, mission, and values shape its definition of community engagement, which centers around the institution's land-grant commitment of service to the state of Wyoming. This was embodied directly in UW's strategic plan, Breaking Through: 2017–2022, which prioritized Impacting Communities (Goal 3 of 4 total), a call to 'Improve and enhance the health and well-being of our communities and environments through outreach programs and in collaboration with our constituents and partners.' This goal shaped the community engagement missions of each college and school."
>
> —University of Wyoming

Figure 2.8: The Strategic Planning Process Institutionalized a Definition of Community Engagement



Accreditation

Accreditation was another influential major university initiative (6 percent). Of these campuses that named a major university initiative of being influential, 18 percent shared that accreditation processes influenced their formation of an institutionalized definition of community engagement. Accreditation as a process to inform an institutional definition was limited to reclassifying institutions (n=2)—zero first-time institutions shared that accreditation activities facilitated an institutional definition of community engagement. Self-study during the accreditation process was noted as the most frequent part of the accreditation process where an institutional definition of community engagement was formed.

> "After our 2015 Carnegie reclassification, the North Carolina Central University (NCCU) Office of University Accreditation prepared and initiated their [Accreditation] Self-Study Report and determined that although the Office of Community Engagement (OCES) had been an important leader in the field and instrumental across campus, the need to go from policy to regulation was essential. The regulation and its definitions were approved by the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and the Academic Planning Committee, made up of various stakeholders within the university's Academic Affairs unit."
>
> —North Carolina Central University

No Institutionalized Definition: Mission, Institutional Type, and Organizational Structure of Community Engagement

There were three specific areas that emerged that should be further explored for campuses that did not have an institutionalized definition of community engagement. Two are centered on institutional mission and intentionality, and the third is focused on the degree to which the institution [de]centralizes community engagement.

Mission

One institution specifically mentioned that they take a decentralized approach to community engagement because of their religious mission.

> "While no single working definition of community engagement is shared across the entire campus community, different units define community engagement through the lens of their given fields and disciplines. For example, Mission and Identity defines engagement as serving individuals on the margins of society by working for justice, building peace, and being stewards of creation…Our communal worship experiences and call to justice are not two separate parts of a whole but one continuous cycle."
>
> —Successfully reclassified campus

Intentionality

Three institutions noted their decentralized approach to community engagement as being intentional. These three institutions range from being a liberal arts college, large private, and large public institution. Further research should be conducted in this area—especially with liberal arts institutions—to ascertain whether institutional type may hinder a centralized approach.

> "[Large Public Institution] is a highly distributed and entrepreneurial institution; engagement is interpreted differently in different places."
>
> —Large Public Institution

> "While no single working definition of community engagement is shared across the entire campus community, different units define community engagement through the lens of their given fields and disciplines… [Private Religious Institution's] nine schools highlight community engagement in their missions, visions, core values, and programming and curriculum structures."
>
> —Private Religious Institution

Organizational Structure

For campuses who did not have an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement, many indicated that they used an office/center-based definition (14.3 percent of campuses). These campuses did not have an institution-wide division/unit of community engagement or chief engagement officer at the senior leadership level, thereby illustrating a more decentralized leadership approach to community engagement. There was a small difference (20 percent) between reclassifying institutions (60 percent) compared to first-time institutions (40 percent). In addition, three campuses that did not have an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement specifically highlighted how community engagement was centered in an office (not in a stand-alone division or unit).

> "[Public University] definitions of community engagement vary widely in the terminology: community engagement, community service, service-learning, or public service. Examples of the various understandings of community engagement or service are community-based research, cocurricular or academic service-learning, and community development. In general, [the Public University] offers an inclusive, flexible, and responsive mindset of community engagement and/or service for both the institution and the community."
>
> —Public University
>
> "We do not have an institutionally sanctioned definition of community engagement; rather, [Liberal Arts College] espouses a largely decentralized approach to community engagement (CE), embedding these practices across multiple curricular and cocurricular areas of the institution. Depending on the departments and programs where these activities occur, they are defined and structured in distinct ways with their own missions, visions, and values."
>
> —Liberal Arts College

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Field

1. **Use of an Institution-Wide Definition Signals Advances in the Institutionalization of CE in the Field:** The findings from this brief suggest that more campuses are institutionalizing their definition of community engagement. As such, the field of community engagement is maturing from singular offices and decentralized units that support students, faculty, and community partners to integrate more deeply into the fabric of the institution. While the CECCE is likely not the only factor for the increase in institutionalization of community engagement, there is evidence to suggest that the application process facilitates this for an increasing number of campuses.
2. **CE as a Priority in Institution-Wide Planning Processes Can Facilitate Successful Classification:** The findings from this brief highlight the processes that lead to deeper institutionalization of community engagement on a campus. Strategic planning and accreditation are two processes that facilitated an institutional definition of CE and, subsequently, a successful classification process for a variety of

campuses. Further inquiry into complementary institutional practices in this area would enhance our understanding of common higher education practices that facilitate institutionalization of CE and reclassification as well as advance our field knowledge.

3. **Additional Research on Organizational Development in CE Is Needed—Specifically Stand-Alone Divisions/Units and Chief CE Officers:** As there is a rise in the centralization of community engagement on college campuses, more research on chief CE officers and the formation of stand-alone CE divisions/units is needed. Some recommended areas of further research include:
    - What does organizational development look like to create a stand-alone division/unit of CE?
        - How can the CECCE classification team support a needs assessment and/or asset mapping as more campuses form divisions/units of CE and/or hire chief engagement officers?
        - How does applying and/or [re]classifying facilitate the development of a stand-alone/unit of CE on a campus?
        - How does having a stand-alone/unit of CE facilitate a successful planning process for CECCE [re]classification?
    - What are the purposes and unique benefits of having a chief CE officer?
        - Does having a division/unit of CE or a chief CE officer indicate pervasiveness of CE on a campus?
        - What does a CE portfolio look like and how does it shape the institutionalization of community engagement on a campus?
        - What does the reporting structure of an effective chief CE officer look like (e.g., reporting directly to a president/chancellor vs. provost or dean-level administrator)?
        - How does having a chief CE officer facilitate a successful planning process for CECCE [re]classification?

Brief #3: Institutional Type Analysis

This final brief takes a deeper dive into institutional type representation within the CECCE dataset utilizing campus-level Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. There are two areas of analysis for this brief: (1) institutional demographic data (e.g. institutional type, size, student type, and location) and (2) institutional analysis utilizing the revised 2025 Carnegie Institutional Classification areas (e.g. institutional class, professions focus, and access and earnings).

DATA SOURCES

A key strength of the CECCE data is the ability to understand trends at the national level. This brief will focus on institutional type engagement in the CCEEC. In addition, institutional type analysis will be conducted utilizing the 2025 Carnegie Classification data (referenced in this brief as the Institutional Classification), which provides a more complete picture of institutional types as well as a new equity area: Access and Earnings.

Two data sources were analyzed for this brief:

1. Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement: IPEDS data
2. 2025 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Institutional)

The CECCE data is institutional, self-reported data that is also submitted to IPEDS for federal reporting and compliance purposes. The timing of the release of the 2025 Institutional Classification data provided a unique opportunity to then do a national analysis of institutions that successfully applied for the CECCE to better understand how the new classification would capture institutional representation in new and more complex ways—especially in the area of institutional value with access and earnings. Only institutions that opted in to institutional sharing of their CECCE data are included in this report.

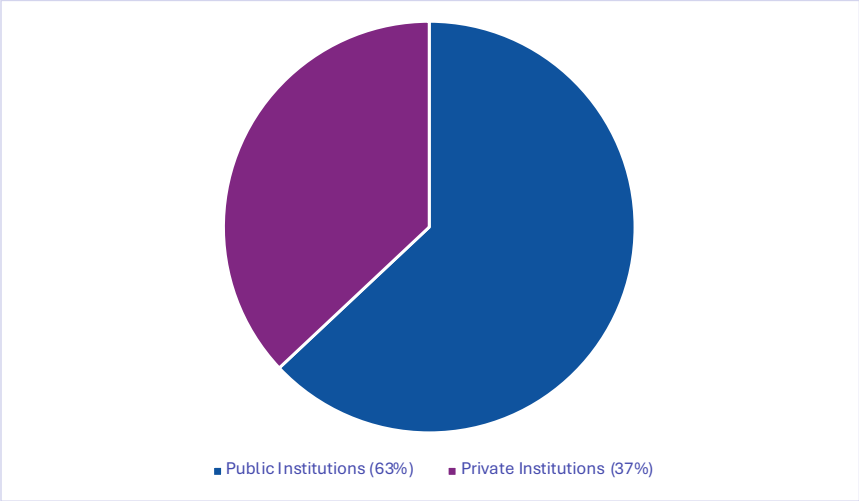
KEY FINDINGS

Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement | IPEDS

Public Institutions Are Well Represented

More than half of the institutions classified in 2024 were public institutions (63 percent), which included two community colleges and one Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Thirty-seven percent were private institutions. Of the private institutions, private religious institutions (23 percent) represented the largest sector of this group, which included six Catholic institutions, one Methodist affiliated, and one Reform affiliated.

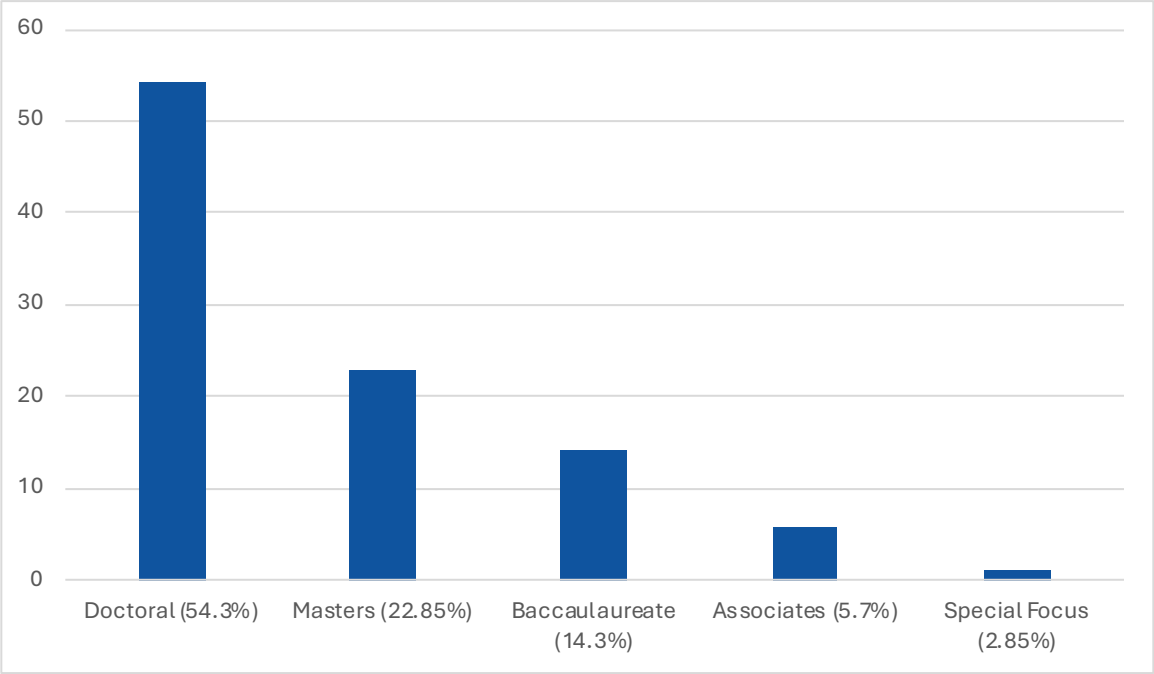
Figure 3.1: Public vs. Private Institutional Type



Most Represented Institutional Degree Type: Doctoral Institutions

Whether an institution offers one or more types of advanced degrees can shape the ways in which it engages with the community. A little more than half of the institutions were doctoral institutions (54.3 percent), with 34.3 percent identifying as High Research Activity followed by Very High (14 percent) and Doctoral/Professional focus (6 percent). Master's institutions were the next most common institutional type (22.8 percent). This group was overwhelmingly Larger Master's institutions (17 percent) followed by Medium (2.9 percent) and Smaller-sized (2.9 percent) campuses. Baccalaureate campuses represented 14.3 percent of institutions, with 9 percent of campuses having an Arts and Sciences focus. Associates (5.7 percent) and Special Focused: Other Health Professions (2.9 percent) rounded out the remainder of campuses.

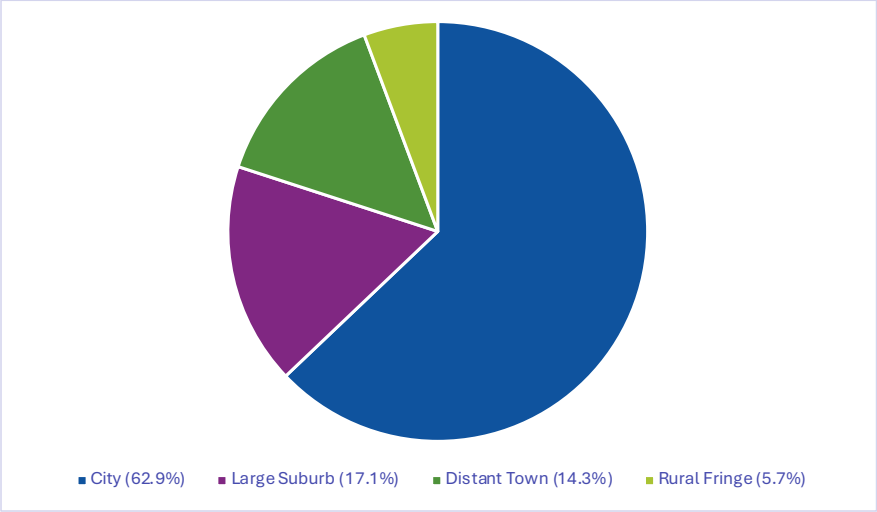
Figure 3.2: Institutional Type by Degree Type



Most Common Location: City

Geographic location often contributes to the resources, opportunities, and challenges with engaging in the community. City locations were most common (62.9 percent), with larger cities (37.2 percent) being well represented followed by midsize (17.1 percent) and small (8.6 percent). Large suburbs (17.1 percent) and distant towns (14.3 percent) were the next most frequent location type. Rural fringe (5.7 percent) had the smallest representation.

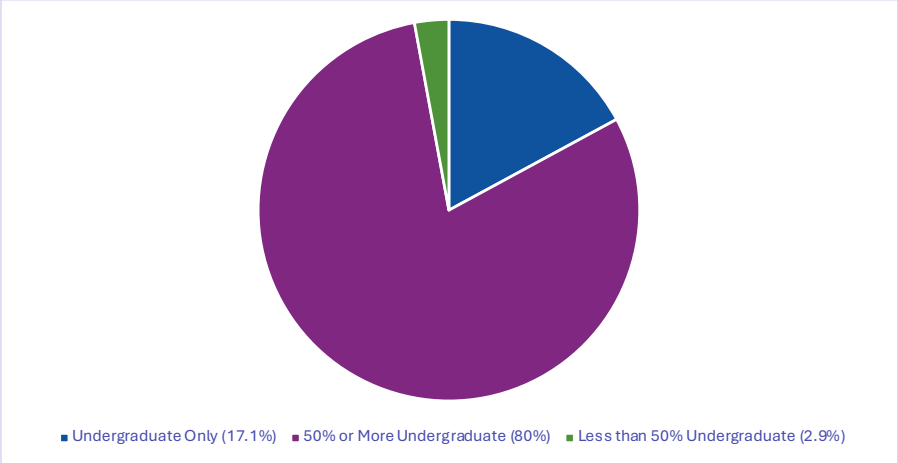
Figure 3.3: Institutional Type by Location



Student Type: Overwhelmingly Undergraduate

The type of students an institution serves contributes to their community engagement opportunities and focus. Institutions that serve undergraduates represent the majority of campuses who were classified. Eighty percent of institutions were comprised of 50 percent or more undergraduate students. Of these institutions, 17.1 percent served undergraduates exclusively, and only 2.9 percent were less than 50 percent undergraduate in composition.

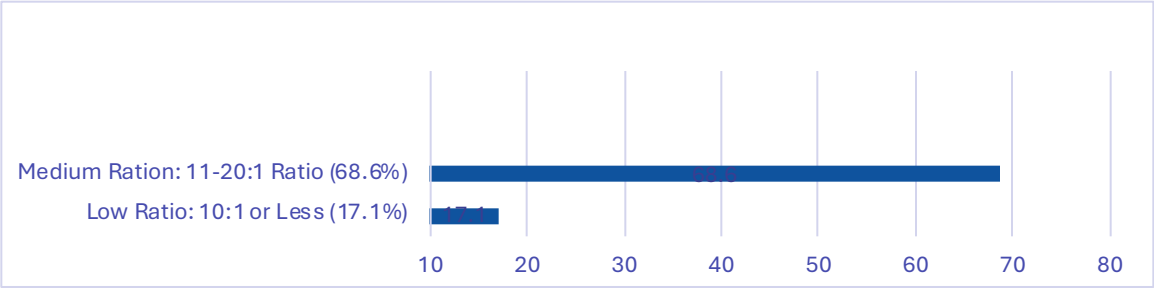
Figure 3.4: Institutional Type—Student Composition



Most Represented Faculty-to-Student Ratio: Moderate (11–20: 1)

Faculty engagement is important to the institutionalization of community engagement, especially regarding service-learning, community-based research, and other course-based opportunities. Not surprisingly, a significant percentage of institutions had a moderate faculty-to-student ratio—68.6 percent had a 11–20: 1 ratio, and 17.1 percent of institutions had an even smaller ratio (10:1 or less). It is interesting to note that none of the institutions that successfully received the 2024 CECCE had the highest ratio (21+:1). Not all institutions reported a ratio.

Figure 3.5: Institutional Type—Faculty-to-Student Ratio



2025 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education

Institutional Classification

The 2025 Institutional Classification uses a more multidimensional approach, organizing institutions by multiple characteristics to create groups of similar institution types. There are three dimensions to the new classification: award level focus, academic program, mix and size (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: 2025 Institutional Classification Dimensions

Award Level Focus	Academic Program Mix	Size
The focus and mix of award levels at an institution—generally, this is where they award the most degrees. There are six categories: 1. **Associate:** primarily award associate degrees 2. **Associate/Baccalaureate:** primarily award associate degrees but also award a sufficient number of bachelor's and/or graduate degrees 3. **Baccalaureate:** primarily award bachelor's degrees and do not have a significant graduate program 4. **Undergraduate/Graduate-Master's:** have both a graduate and undergraduate presence with an emphasis on the master's degree and do not have a significant doctoral program 5. **Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate:** have both a graduate and undergraduate presence with a sufficient focus on the doctorate 6. **Graduate-focused:** mostly focused on graduate studies	The fields of study in which institutions award 50 percent or more of their degrees—for most institutions, the classifications use data on undergraduate degrees only, but for graduate-focused institutions, the classifications use data on graduate degrees only: 1. **Special Focus:** Generally, the majority of degrees are awarded in a single academic area or field of study (11 categories) 2. **Professions–focused:** The majority of degrees are awarded in fields that are classified as preprofessional or career-aligned 3. **Mixed:** Fewer than 50 percent of degrees are awarded in any one focus area	The size of an institution, as measured by its total 12-month headcount, including full- and part-time students and undergraduate and graduate students: 1. **Very Small:** <500 students 2. **Small:** 500–4,000 students 3. **Medium:** 4,000–20,000 students 4. **Large**: 20,000–40,000 students 5. **Very Large:** >40,000 students

Figure 3.7: Academic Program Mix

Mixed Types (57.2%)	Mixed U/G 1. Doc Types: 34.3%	a. Medium: 25.7% b. Large: 8.6%
	Mixed U/G 2. Master's Types: 14.3 %	a. Large/Medium: 11.4% b. Small: 2.9%
	3. Undergrad only: 8.6%	a. Mixed Baccalaureate: 5.7% b. Associate Medium: 2.9%
Professions-Focused (31.4%)	1. Mixed U/G: Doctoral: 22.85%	a. Medium: 14.3% b. Large: 5.7% c. Small: 2.85%
	2. Master's Large/Medium: 2.85%	
	3. Undergrad: 5.7%	a. Small: 2.85% b. Medium: 2.85%
Special (11.4%)	1. Arts and Sciences: 5.7% 2. Other Health Professions: 5.7%	

Special Focus

The Special Focus category had the smallest representation (11.43 percent) in only two areas. The Special Focus: Arts and Sciences comprised 5.7 percent of the institutions, and The Special Focus: Other Health Professions represented the other 5.7 percent in this category.

Professions-Focused

The second largest institutional class type was the Professions-Focused category (31.43 percent). Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate—Doctorate institutions made up 22.85 percent, including 14.3 percent Medium, 5.7 percent Large, and 2.85 percent Small institutions. Undergraduate Professions-Focused institutions represented 5.7 percent of the institutions in our sample, with an equal percentage of Small (2.85 percent) and Medium institutions (2.85 percent). Master's Large/Medium institutions were the smallest group within the Professions-Focused category at 2.85 percent.

Mixed Types

Mixed Types represented the largest institutional class type (57.2 percent). Within this group, there was a large variety of types. There were two main types of doctoral institutions, with Doctorate Medium comprising 25.7 percent and Doctorate Large representing 8.6 percent. The master's types were the next most common—representing 14.3 percent—with Large/Medium comprising 11.4 percent and Small institutions making up a smaller percentage (2.9 percent). Of the mixed types, 8.6 percent were Undergraduate Only, with two Mixed Baccalaureate institutions (5.7 percent and one Associate Medium campus (2.9 percent), Wilbur Wright College of the City Colleges of Chicago.

Research Activity Designation

The research activity designation is new and uses the higher of either a three-year average (2021, 2022, 2023) or the most recent single-year data (2023). Specifically, "the 2025 Carnegie Classifications include research designations as separate listings from the Institutional Classification. There are three research designations, all of which are set by a threshold. Thresholds may be changed in future years; updated methodology will be shared ahead of each release." There are three designations:

- **Research 1: Very High Spending and Doctorate Production:** On average in a single year, these institutions spend at least $50 million on research and development and award at least 70 research doctorates.
- **Research 2: High Spending and Doctorate Production:** On average in a single year, these institutions spend at least $5 million on research and development and award at least 20 research doctorates.
- **Research Colleges and Universities:** On average in a single year, these institutions spend at least $2.5 million on research and development. Institutions that are in the R1 or R2 categories are not included.

Not all institutions have a research designation, including 40 percent of the institutions in the dataset. Twenty-one of the 35 institutions in our dataset received a research designation in 2025 (60 percent), including the eight institutions named below (see chart). Thirteen institutions that chose to remain anonymous also received a research designation, including four first-time institutions and nine reclassifying institutions.

Figure 3.8: Institutions That Received the Research Activity Designation (n=21)

Institution	Classification Type
1. Boise State University (ID)	Reclassifying
2. North Carolina Central University	Reclassifying
3. Saint Louis University (MO)	Reclassifying
4. The University of West Florida	Reclassifying
5. Tufts University (MA)	Reclassifying
6. University of California, Riverside	First-Time
7. University of Central Florida	Reclassifying
8. University of Wyoming	First-Time
9–18. Ten Anonymous Institutions	First-Time
19–21. Three Anonymous Institutions	Reclassifying

Of the institutions that received a designation, most were designated as Research 1 (42.9 percent) or Research 2 (42.9 percent). Only a few institutions were designated as Research Colleges and Universities (14.2 percent).

Figure 3.9: Type of Research Activity Designation (2=21)

Designation Type	Percentage	Institutions
Research 1 Very High Research Spending and Doctorate Production	42.9%	• Saint Louis University (MO) • Tufts University (MA) • University of California, Riverside • University of Central Florida • University of Wyoming • Four Anonymous Institutions
Research 2 High Research Spending and Doctorate Production	42.9%	• Boise State University (ID) • The University of West Florida • Seven Anonymous Institutions
Research Colleges and Universities	14.2%	• North Carolina Central University • Two Anonymous Institutions

Student Access and Earnings Classification

A new classification that aims to advance our understanding of the value of a college degree is the Student Access and Earnings Classification (SAEC). This classification "identifies the extent to which institutions provide access to students from lower socioeconomic and historically underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds along with the degree to which the institution's students go on to earn competitive wages in the context of their geographic location."

There are two dimensions to this classification as noted by ACE:

- **Access:** To measure access, the classification evaluates whether institutions are enrolling a student population that is representative of the locations they serve. To do this, we used the enrollment of undergraduate students by Pell grant status and underrepresented race/ethnicity. Those data were contextualized based on the location that students are from using IPEDS migration data.
- **Earnings:** To measure economic outcomes, the classification compares median post-attendance earnings as reported by the College Scorecard to earnings of people in their area ages 22–40 who hold a high school diploma or higher. Recognizing that student data is variable based on geographic location and race/ethnicity, earnings data was analyzed based on the geographical and racial/ethnic composition of the student body.

There are six typologies from this classification as noted in Figure 3.10 below.

Figure 3.10: Student Access and Earnings Typology

Higher Access	**Higher Access, Higher Earnings** (Opportunity Colleges and Universities)	Institutions whose access ratio is at least 1 and whose earnings ratio is at least 1.5 (for baccalaureate and higher institutions) or 1.25 (for primarily associate colleges)
	Higher Access, Medium Earnings	Institutions whose access ratio is at least 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 least 1 and whose earnings ratio is less than 1
Lower Access [Selectivity]	**Lower Access, Higher Earnings**	Institutions whose access ratio is less than 1 and whose earnings ratio is at least 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

It is important to note that not all institutions participate in this part of the classification (e.g. incomplete data); all institutions in our dataset received this classification. Five of the typologies were represented; Lower Access, Lower Earnings was not represented.

Access: A Range of Representation

Slightly more than one-half of institutions were selective receiving a Lower Access classification (51.4 percent), and 48.6 percent were Higher Access institutions. Within the Lower Access institutions, it was evenly split: 25.7 percent were Medium Earnings, and 25.7 percent were Higher Earnings. Within the Higher Access Institutions, 28.5 percent were Medium Earnings and one institution was a Lower Earnings Institution (2.9 percent). The Opportunity Colleges and Universities (Higher Access and Higher Earnings) were well represented at 17.1 percent.

Figure 3.11: Percentages by Access Category

	Type	Percentage	Institutions
Higher Access (48.6%)	**Higher Access, Higher Earnings** (Opportunity Colleges and Universities)	17.1%	• University of Central Florida
	Higher Access, Medium Earnings	28.5%	• Wilbur Wright College of the City Colleges of Chicago • North Carolina Central University • University of California, Riverside • The University of West Florida
	Higher Access, Lower Earnings	2.9%	• Raritan Valley Community College (NJ)
Lower Access (51.4%)	**Lower Access, Higher Earnings**	25.7%	• Saint Louis University (MO) • Saint Mary's College of California • Tufts University (MA)
	Lower Access, Medium Earnings	25.7%	• Boise State University (ID) • University of Wyoming
	Lower Access, Lower Earnings	0%	

Earning Analysis: Medium and Higher Earnings Are Well Represented

The majority of the institutions were categorized as Medium or Higher Earnings (97.14 percent), indicating a strong value for earning a degree. Examining the institutional data by earnings provides another lens in which to understand the value of higher education from a monetary return standpoint. Medium Earnings institutions made up 54.28 percent, followed by 42.86 percent being classified as Higher Earnings. Only one institution (2.86 percent) was classified as a Lower Earnings institution.

Figure 3.12: Percentages by Earnings Category

	Type	Percentage	Institutions
Higher Earnings (42.9%)	**Higher Earnings, Higher Access** (Opportunity Colleges and Universities)	17.1%	• University of Central Florida
	Higher Earnings, Lower Access	25.7%	• Saint Louis University (MO) • Saint Mary's College of California • Tufts University (MA)
Medium Earnings (54.28%)	**Medium Earnings, Higher Access**	28.5%	• Wilbur Wright College of the City Colleges of Chicago • North Carolina Central University • University of California, Riverside • The University of West Florida
	Medium Earnings, Lower Access	25.7%	• Boise State University (ID) • University of Wyoming
Lower Earnings (2.86%)	**Lower Earnings, Higher Access**	2.86%	• Raritan Valley Community College (NJ)
	Lower Earnings, Lower Access	0%	

Within the Higher Earnings category, there were slightly more Lower Access institutions (25.7 percent) than Higher Access institutions (17.1 percent). Within the Medium Earnings category, there was very little difference between the Higher Access (28.5 percent) and Lower Access (25.7 percent) categories.

The data reveals that the Student Access and Earnings Classification provides new insight into the institutional value of colleges and universities that successfully received the CECCE. In particular, the findings suggest that regardless of whether an institution is selective or not, the colleges and universities that classified provided a stronger value for their degree compared to their peers (Medium or Higher Earnings). This is an area that is ripe for further research to understand the depth and breadth of community engagement's ability to add financial earnings value to their collegiate experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Field

1. **Future Directions for Research:** As the field continues to mature, more research and engagement of diverse students and institutional types are needed to get a fuller and more comprehensive picture of community engagement at the national level. The 2025 Institutional Classification and research designations (Research Activity and Student Access and Earnings) offer an opportunity to examine student and institutional type engagement in more inclusive ways. Analysis from this brief suggests the following areas for future research to enhance the field:
    a. **Research Activity Designations:** The updated Research Activity Designations allow for a more nuanced look at research engagement, which can expand our understanding of the types of policies, practices, and community partnerships that are utilized to support community engagement, especially regarding community engaged research opportunities and outcomes. In addition—as the field continues to develop—additional research in the following areas will add more depth and breadth to our understanding of higher education community engagement:

- More graduate orientated institutions and institutions with larger faculty-to-student ratios
- A larger variety of institutional classes, such as community colleges, mixed (Associate/Baccalaureate and Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Small), and professions focused (Baccalaureate Medium, Undergraduate/Graduate-Master's Small, and Associate/Baccalaureate)
- Special Focus Institutions

b. **Student Access and Earnings Classification:** The 2025 updates to the Carnegie Classification also introduced the Access and Earnings Classification. This is an area ripe for further research, especially for institutions to be able to link community engagement inputs and outcomes with advancing equity and the value of the degree for a wide variety of stakeholders. As the analysis from this brief indicates, there is a strong representation of institutions (42.9 percent) that received the CECCE that have higher earnings, including the University of Central Florida, Saint Louis University, Saint Mary's College of California, and Tufts University, and very few institutions that received classification that have lower earnings (2.86 percent). Additional research in this area to identify the policies, practices, and engagement strategies at these high-earning campuses will continue to advance our field and perhaps help the field understand the connections between community engagement and post-college earnings.

c. **Under-Researched Institutional Types:** More than one-half of our sample received a research designation, and all of the institutions in our dataset received a SAEC designation. However, there are a number of institutional types that continue to be under-researched and underrepresented:

- **Community Colleges:** While there was some community college representation in our dataset, this institutional type continues to be under-researched in the field of community engagement. To have a comprehensive understanding of higher education as a sector, it is important to be inclusive of the experiences of community college students, faculty, staff, and community partners in the community engagement field. As community college participation in the CECCE grows, this dataset will be helpful in advancing our understanding of this important component of higher education. Because most first-generation students, low-income students, veteran students, and students of color begin their journey in higher education at a community college, understanding student experiences in community colleges is significant to getting a more comprehensive understanding of equity and inclusion within the field.
- **Graduate and Professional Education:** The field of community engagement has historically been centered on undergraduate students and outcomes. However, for a deeper understanding of community engagement, there is a need to understand it in graduate and professional education both within an institution—for a more comprehensive institution-wide portrait—and for stand-alone graduate and professional schools. The CECCE offers some questions that address graduate education, and more research utilizing this dataset will help advance the field.

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