REORIENTING HIGHER EDUCATION TO FOCUS ON ACCESS, EQUITY, AND SUCCESS

Reimagining the Carnegie Classification Systems to Recognize Institutions that Make Social and Economic Mobility a Reality

The American Council on Education (ACE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching are reinventing the Carnegie Classification to reorient the course of higher education by focusing on students' social and economic mobility.

Developed in the early 1970s, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is the leading framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity among colleges and universities. The Carnegie Foundation's decision to partner with ACE was informed by a desire to honor the legacy of the classifications in shaping the American higher education landscape, while also leveraging their full potential as a tool to respond to today's challenges and opportunities.

ACE is now leading a broad, multi-stakeholder effort to reimagine the Carnegie Classifications as a catalyst for incentivizing and recognizing institutional behavior that advances equitable outcomes and learner-centered solutions. This effort will result in sectoral transformation by spurring:

- Increased social and economic mobility for learners, especially for those who have faced systemic inequities
- Prioritization of improved learner access and outcomes
- Continuous improvement and knowledge sharing within and between institutions
- Transparent information about the success of individual institutions in supporting students' social and economic mobility

THE OPPORTUNITY: LEVERAGING THE CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATIONS TO SOLVE TODAY'S CHALLENGES

While the original Basic Carnegie Classification was designed to support researchers in studying and analyzing the higher education sector—and it has been successful in doing so—it also has achieved the unintended outcome of incentivizing institutions to intensify research operations. Consequently, many universities have competed for specific research classifications. This competition may contribute to undesirable outcomes, especially:

- Prioritization of research at the expense of other areas of potential impact, such as access, equity, and success for learners, particularly for low-income and students of color
- Dis-incentivizing innovative institutional designs, especially those that prioritize teaching

Additionally, many institutions are limited in their ability to use the classifications for determining their peer institutions, learning with and from other institutions, and pursuing aspirations and innovation in organizational structures and programmatic approaches beyond research. The classifications were created at a time when higher education was largely viewed in traditional pathways, with the attainment of a doctoral degree considered the ultimate aspirational goal. That view neglects to see the ways in which higher education can serve many—if not the majority—of today's learners. As a result, although there is tremendous innovation taking place, the current Carnegie Classification lacks

mechanisms for capturing and respecting much of this activity. For example, many community colleges are offering trade and professional certifications—recognizing that these credentials equip their learners to meet local and regional workforce needs. The current classifications are unable to capture this shift, much less which institutions are doing so to the benefit of their students.

It is evident that colleges and universities respond to the Carnegie Classifications—therefore, if the classifications evolve in what they measure, institutions will adapt, and the sector will transform. This effort also holds the potential to shift public discourse on higher education away from celebrating status and toward celebrating a more diverse set of institutional missions, including those institutions that are increasing access to higher education and advancing social and economic mobility for a diverse population of learners.

THE SOLUTION: REINVENTING THE CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATIONS TO ADVANCE EQUITABLE, LEARNER-CENTRIC OUTCOMES

Moving forward, the Carnegie Classifications will be leveraged as an intentional tool for incentivizing equitable outcomes and learner-centered solutions. To do so, ACE and the Carnegie Foundation will both revisit the current classification methodology and expand into social and economic mobility. Additionally, this project will take the classifications beyond their use as a research tool to consider how they can be instrumentally useful to convene and network institutions as communities of practice improvement. To do this work, ACE will engage educational leaders and innovators from across the sector and establish formal advisory groups, including a Governance Committee, Technical Review Panel, Institutional Roundtable, and Policy Insights Group, to inform updates and guide the project. The project includes four key areas.

Area 1: Revisiting the Existing Basic Classification and Developing a New Universal Classification Regime

The 2024 Carnegie Classifications will include an updated version of the Basic Classification in addition to a new Social and Economic Mobility Classification. This update to the Basic Classification will describe and classify an ever-evolving universe of institutions, with a particular focus on capturing the diversity of the community college sector and revisiting the research activity methodology. In the same way that the Basic Classification established research as a norm, the new Social and Economic Mobility classification will help colleges and universities to focus on both expanding access to students from a variety of backgrounds and on increasing learner outcomes in areas such as attainment, job placement, salary, and debt management.

ACE, the Carnegie Foundation, and project partners will conduct outreach to colleges and universities to help them to understand the purpose and metrics of the classifications so that institutional leaders can design strategies for transformation. ACE will also redesign the Carnegie Classifications website to increase accessibility and to publish research data and reports, generating and communicating new knowledge of institutional experiences, the impact of the Carnegie Classifications, and methods for leveraging classifications to realize positive outcomes.

Area 2: Ongoing Development of Elective Classifications

Currently, the Carnegie Classification has two elective (opt-in) classifications that institutions can pursue: Community Engagement, which includes more than 350 institutions, and Leadership for Public Purpose, which will debut in 2024. Collectively, the elective classifications provide the opportunity to recognize and respect significant contributions of the higher education sector to important aspects of its public purpose in service to society. There is significant potential for incentivizing institutional commitments to and investments in a wider range of public purposes through new elective classifications. These elective classifications could recognize diverse missions and unique forms of impact, such as indigenous-serving institutions and through sustainability efforts, among other areas critical to the needs

of students and the broader society. ACE will carry out exploratory work to enable the development of new elective classifications and engage colleges and universities early in this process to obtain feedback. Additionally, ACE will seek to expand participation, particularly among underrepresented institutions.

Area 3: Data & Policy Ecosystem Transformation

Increasing policymakers' awareness of new and revised Carnegie Classifications and proactively engaging them to improve alignment between classifications and policy will be critical to reshaping the landscape of supports and incentives that motivate institutional behavior. ACE's Policy Insights Group will convene to discuss the current uses of the Carnegie Classifications in state and federal policy, as well as in private grantmaking. Because numerous policy mechanisms use Carnegie Classification data, these discussions are critical for understanding the potential for different types of data to enable policy solutions and stimulate outcomes such as social and economic mobility. Throughout this initiative, we will engage policymakers and philanthropies to raise awareness of the limitations of existing funding mechanisms, drive advocacy to improve federal and state data, and capitalize on opportunities for design of new solutions that stimulate institutional transformation to achieve improved learner outcomes.

Area 4: Building Stakeholder Capacity for Engagement

There is strong potential for the Carnegie Classification to act as a tool for engagement with communities of practice in higher education beyond researchers. With an eye for transparency and inclusiveness, ACE will develop a simplified data platform that allows researchers, education administrators and leaders, and the public access to classification data. ACE will publicize the platform across its network and launch and support intentional learning communities, which will collaborate to advance their performance in the areas that serve as the foci of the classifications. This activity will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices within and between institutions of higher learning and enable continuous improvement in advancing social and economic mobility and other outcomes measured by the Carnegie Classifications.

THE PATH FORWARD: REDESIGNING THE CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATIONS

As part of its role as stewards of the classifications, ACE and the Carnegie Foundation are already engaging stakeholders across the higher education landscape, as well as establishing two of the key advisory groups that will shape the revised classifications: the Technical Review Panel and Institutional Roundtable. ACE and the Carnegie Foundation will also host a visioning convening on the future of the elective classifications, launch a new website, and begin planning for learning communities that can help ACE and Carnegie achieve the fuller vision of the classifications as a tool for institutional change.

In 2023, ACE will publish the draft framework for the new Carnegie Classifications and expand engagement with institutions on the planned updates, as well as establish the ongoing Governance Committee and Policy Insights Group, to ensure the new classifications are understood and can be effectively leveraged for institutional change.

In late 2024, the revised classifications—including both the updated Basic and new Social and Economic classifications—will be released for public review and finalization, maintaining the triannual timeline the classifications have had since 2015. As part of the new website and data portal, ACE will share transparent methodology updates, including plans for future classifications. With the launch of the new classifications, ACE's and Carnegie's work to create effective communities of practice will fully get underway, with institutions having new opportunities to see and learn from peers across a variety of new measurements.

If you have ideas and feedback on how the Carnegie Classifications can be reimagined to better support students given the opportunities and challenges they face today, please do not hesitate to share those with us at carnegie@acenet.edu. We will post updates and additional information on this project at our website, www.carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/.