

# Are You Ready for Changes to the Carnegie Classifications?

**Mushtaq Gunja** serves as executive director of the Carnegie Classification systems and senior vice president at the American Council on Education (ACE), where he oversees running and reimagining the Carnegie framework.

Earlier, Gunja served as assistant dean in academic affairs at Georgetown University Law Center, where he was in charge of academic policies for the law school, including on accreditation, teaching methods, and new programs related to increased educational outcomes. He also serves as an adjunct professor at Georgetown Law and previously taught at the University of Maryland School of Law and Washington Adventist University.

Gunja served as the chief of staff to the under secretary at the U.S. Department of Education under President Obama, where he provided strategic advice in the development and implementation of policies pertaining to access and affordability, college completion, increased innovation, the borrower experience for students with federal loans, and fair treatment for all students of higher education. He also served in the Obama administration as deputy associate White House counsel.

Before moving to Washington, he was an assistant U.S. attorney in Baltimore.

Gunja graduated from Harvard Law School and from Brown University with a bachelor's degree in political science and diplomatic history.

## What do you think the impact of the revised Carnegie classifications will be on higher education?

The current Carnegie Classifications system runs on two tracks. The Basic category organizes all U.S. colleges and universities into peer groups by the highest degree they offer. The Elective categories, for which colleges can apply, recognize additional institutional missions and priorities.

The current Basic Classification is one way of sorting institutions, but it doesn't recognize the wide range of missions that institutions have. This degree-based classification became hierarchical over time, and as a result many institutions believed the sole path to achieving a desired classification was to offer doctoral and master's degrees and to pursue research in the quest for very high research activity (R1) or high research activity (R2) status.

The revised classifications system could have a tremendous impact on higher education because it will shift the framework

from a focus on degrees and research to a broader consideration of student-needs and outcomes. We're also planning to expand the suite of Elective Classifications beyond the current Community Engagement and Leadership for Public Purpose classifications. The reimagined Carnegie Classifications will recognize institutions for a more diverse range of missions and priorities.

## What should trustees of colleges and universities know about the classifications as they plan strategically for the future?

The revised classifications will recognize institutions for being student-centric—that is, focusing on educating, supporting, and graduating students. Trustees will, within their strategic planning work, be able to pursue the most appropriate mission for their institution and its students without having to worry that the institution will find itself confined to a narrowly defined and ill-fitting



category. We know many colleges and universities are preparing significant numbers of first-generation students, under-resourced students, and learners of color for success in their careers and in their lives. We want to design a classification system that helps institutions flourish in fulfilling these missions.

The reimagined classifications will create more transparency and appropriate peer groupings for collaboration and study. The updates also will better equip funders—federal and state governments and private philanthropies—to account for and reward student-centric activity.

## When and how will the new classifications be available to leaders?

A couple things will happen before the revised classifications are released. In fall 2023, we plan to announce new elective categories. During the next year, we plan to share a glimpse of the direction for the revised classifications, including the methodology for the revised Basic Classifications and the framework for the new Social and Economic Mobility category.

The classifications are traditionally updated every three years, and we are on schedule to release the new set of classifications by late 2024 or early 2025. We will keep higher education leaders, trustees, and stakeholders informed of updates and our timeline on the new, comprehensive Carnegie Classifications website (<https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/>). ■

—Carol Schuler