

2025 Research Activity Designations Fact Sheet

On February 13, 2025, the Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education released the first phase of the redesigned Carnegie Classifications to more fully recognize the amount of research underway at institutions. This new approach better accounts for and reflects the multifaceted research landscape within U.S. higher education. **Updates to the methodology include:**

- **A clear and transparent Research 1 (R1) threshold** of \$50 million in total annual research spending and awarding 70 research doctorates annually to define the highest research designation. The threshold for Research 2 (R2) classification is unchanged. More information on the prior methodology for defining R1, which was introduced in 2005, is below.
- **A new designation known as Research Colleges and Universities (RCU)** identifies colleges and universities that have built research enterprises but that do not offer many or any doctoral degrees, including baccalaureate-only institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and others.
- **A separation of the Research Activity Designations from the 2025 Institutional Classification** (historically known as the Basic Classification), meaning that research activity will no longer be the exclusive driver for how institutions are classified, and now all types of institutions could receive a Research Activity Designation if they meet the criteria.

These updates are just the first part of a series of significant changes to the Carnegie Classifications to better reflect the multidimensional nature of higher education in the United States. The full 2025 Carnegie Classifications, including the Institutional Classification and Student Access and Earnings Classification, will be released in April 2025.

Criteria for the 2025 Research Activity Designations:

- **Research 1: Very High Spending and Doctorate Production** — On average in a single year, these institutions spend at least \$50 million on research & development and award at least 70 research doctorates. 187 institutions have been classified as R1 in 2025.
- **Research 2: High Spending and Doctorate Production** — On average in a single year, these institutions spend at least \$5 million on research & development and award at least 20 research doctorates. 139 institutions have been classified as R2 in 2025.
- **Research Colleges and Universities** — On average in a single year, these institutions award at least \$2.5 million on research & development. Institutions that are in the R1 or R2 categories are not included. 218 institutions have been classified as RCU in 2025.

These thresholds and methodologies are subject to change for future releases, including the next update scheduled for 2028. The Carnegie Classifications will review data trends in determining how and whether to revise cutpoints.

Data sources:

The following data was used to determine the 2025 Research Activity Designations:

- **Research expenditures** as reported by institutions through the National Science Foundation HERD Survey for the years FY2021, FY2022, and FY2023, reflecting the total research expenditures reported.
- **Research doctorates** as reported by institutions on the IPEDS Completions Survey for the 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 academic years.

Context on the Carnegie Classifications:

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is the leading framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education developed the classification in 1973 to support its program of research and policy analysis, and it was updated in 1976, 1987, 1994, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2018, and 2021 to reflect changes among colleges and universities. It will next be updated in April 2025, with subsequent updates every three years.

Historic methodology:

In the historic Carnegie Classifications, institutions have been organized primarily based on the highest degree that they award. Among doctorate universities, institutions have been further organized by some measure of research. There have been four main approaches to the research classifications prior to the 2025 changes, which will include not only revisions to the research methodology but to the overall structure of the Carnegie Classifications.

- **1973 and 1976:** Research 1 institutions included the top 50 institutions in terms of federal financial support of academic science. Research 2 institutions were the next 50 on the list. To be in either category, institutions had to award at least 50 Ph.Ds in a single year.
- **1987 and 1994:** R1 and R2 were identified through dollar-amount thresholds, provided they awarded at least 50 doctorates. In 1987, the R1 threshold was \$33.5 million in federal research awards received annually and R2 was \$12.5 million. In 1994, the R1 threshold was raised to \$40 million, and the R2 threshold was raised to \$15 million in total federal research funding received.
- **2000:** No research dollars were considered, and the R1 and R2 labels were officially dropped. Instead, institutions were organized solely by doctorate production, with larger volumes of doctorate production across more fields being labeled as “extensive” and more targeted doctorate production being labeled as “intensive.”
- **2005 to 2021:** The classifications moved to a more complex process for eligible institutions. To be considered, institutions had to award at least 20 research doctorates and, starting in 2015, spend at least \$5 million annually on research and development. Among those institutions, the classifications looked at 10 different variables, used a principal component analysis, and created two indices to evaluate research activity. Institutions were divided into two or three groups of the same size under the labels “Very High Research Activity” (commonly referenced as R1), “High Research Activity” (R2), and in 2005 and 2010 “Moderate Research Activity.” Because the goal of the process was to create equally sized groups, the line dividing Very High Research Activity institutions from High Activity Institutions changed each cycle and was not determined until the data was analyzed.