

EDITED BY STEPHEN BURD
PREFACE BY RAJ CHETTY AND JOHN N. FRIEDMAN

MOVING ON UP?

What a Groundbreaking Study Tells Us about
Access, Success, and Mobility in Higher Ed

OCTOBER 2017

About the Editor



Stephen Burd is a senior policy analyst with the Education Policy program at New America. Burd has helped shape New America's work on higher education policy and on student financial aid issues.

He is the author of three volumes of the 'Undermining Pell' series, which examines how colleges' pursuit of prestige and revenue is hurting low-income students.

Other New America Contributors

Ben Barrett is a program associate with the Education Policy program at New America.

Kim Dancy is a senior policy analyst with the Education Policy program at New America.

Ernest Ezeugo is an administrative assistant with the Education Policy program at New America.

Clare McCann is the deputy director for federal higher education policy at New America.

Michael Prebil is a program associate with the Center on Education and Skills at New America

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank **Raj Chetty**, professor of economics at Stanford University; **John N. Friedman**, professor of economics at Brown University; and **Kelly Rosinger**, assistant professor of education at Penn State University and a research associate in the university's Center for the Study of Higher Education, for contributing to this report.

We would also like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for their generous support of this work. The views expressed in this report are those of its authors and do not necessarily represent the views of foundations, their officers, or employees.

About New America

New America is a think tank and civic enterprise committed to renewing American politics, prosperity, and purpose in the Digital Age. We generate big ideas, bridge the gap between technology and policy, and curate broad public conversation. We combine the best of a policy research institute, technology laboratory, public forum, media platform, and a venture capital fund for ideas. We are a distinctive community of thinkers, writers, researchers, technologists, and community activists who believe deeply in the possibility of American renewal. Find out more at newamerica.org/our-story.

About the Education Policy Program

New America's Education Policy program uses original research and policy analysis to solve the nation's critical education problems, serving as a trusted source of objective analysis and innovative ideas for policymakers, educators, and the public at large. We combine a steadfast concern for low-income and historically disadvantaged people with a belief that better information about education can vastly improve both the policies that govern educational institutions and the quality of learning itself. Our work encompasses the full range of educational opportunities, from early learning to primary and secondary education, college, and the workforce.

Our work is made possible through generous grants from the Alliance for Early Success; the Buffett Early Childhood Fund; the Annie E. Casey Foundation; the Foundation for Child Development; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; the Heising-Simons Foundation; the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; the Joyce Foundation; the George Kaiser Family Foundation; the JPMorgan Chase & Co.; the Kresge Foundation; Lumina Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; the David and Lucile Packard Foundation; the Siemens Foundation; the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation; and the Walton Family Foundation. The views expressed in this report are those of its author and do not necessarily represent the views of foundations, their officers, or employees.

Find out more at newamerica.org/education-policy.

Contents

Preface <i>by Raj Chetty and John N. Friedman</i>	2
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: What the Mobility Report Cards Tell Us About College Access and Success	8
1.1 College Access is Still a Problem <i>by Ben Barrett</i>	9
1.2 Even at Private Colleges, Low-Income Students Tend to Go to the Poorest Schools <i>by Stephen Burd</i>	12
1.3 Low-Income Students Succeed—When Given the Opportunity <i>by Clare McCann</i>	15
Chapter 2: What’s So Special About the Mobility Report Card Data?	20
2.1 Using Mobility Report Card Data to Understand What Works in Reducing Educational Inequities <i>by Kelly Rosinger</i>	21
2.2 Mobility Report Card Data Show Why We Need Greater Higher Ed Transparency <i>by Clare McCann</i>	23
2.3 Chetty Vs. Pell: What’s the Best Way to Measure a College’s Commitment to Low-Income Students? <i>by Ernest Ezeugo & Clare McCann</i>	25
2.4 New Data Reveal, For the First Time, Each College’s Share of Rich Kids <i>by Stephen Burd</i>	28
Chapter 3: The Mobility Report Cards’ Worst News: Declining Access at Public Universities	30
3.1 Nearly Two-Thirds of Selective Public Universities Enroll Fewer Low-Income Students Than They Did in the Late 1990s <i>by Stephen Burd</i>	31
3.2 High-Merit-Aid Public Flagships See Substantial Shifts to Wealthier Students <i>by Stephen Burd</i>	33
3.3 What’s Up With Stony Brook? <i>by Stephen Burd</i>	35
Chapter 4: What the Mobility Report Cards Tell Us—And Don’t Tell Us—About For-Profit Colleges	37
4.1 An Incomplete View of For-Profit Colleges <i>by Ben Barrett</i>	38
4.2 Started From the Bottom—and Still Here: Finding the Bad Apples in the Mobility Report Cards <i>by Michael Prebil</i>	42
Chapter 5: Can Chetty Explain the Gender Wage Gap?	45
5.1 Mind the Gap: How Higher Education Contributes to Gender Wage Disparities <i>by Kim Dancy</i>	46
Conclusion	49

PREFACE

By Raj Chetty and John N. Friedman



How can colleges help children from disadvantaged backgrounds climb the income ladder? Our recently released paper, “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility” (with Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, and Danny Yagan), on which New America’s *Moving on Up?* report is based, takes a step toward addressing this question using de-identified data from the Education and Treasury Departments to present new data on mobility rates at each college in the U.S.

Our paper uses these data to draw out several points on the relationship between higher education and upward mobility. First, children from low- and high-income families have very similar outcomes at elite colleges. But there are relatively few low-income children at such colleges, and the number has increased only slowly despite large changes in financial aid and outreach policies at many of these top schools. Second, certain colleges stand out with very high mobility rates, in that they both provide access for many poor students and lift a relatively large fraction of those poor students into the upper middle class. These colleges are potential “engines of mobility,” providing a possible channel for many low-income students to reach the top of the income distribution. Unfortunately, the data show that

these institutions—typically mid-tier public schools like many California State universities or the City University of New York—have enrolled fewer low-income students in recent years.

These results are just the beginning of what these new college-level data have to teach us. To facilitate further analysis, we made much of the college-level data publicly available. These statistics include not just the main statistics we focused on in our paper, but also a variety of alternative measures that provide opportunities to investigate a broad set of research questions. For instance, we focused on each child’s individual earnings in adulthood, but we also provide the same information for other measures of income, including household earnings or household income as an outcome. We also provide these statistics—as well as other outcomes, such as the fraction of students employed and the fraction of students who are married—separately for men and women.

Our hope is that these statistics will have a lasting impact beyond the paper itself, since other scholars can now use these measures to conduct their own explorations of outcomes across colleges. We also hope that colleges themselves may find our data useful, as they provide for the first time a set of

Our hope is that these statistics will have a lasting impact beyond the paper itself, since other scholars can now use these measures to conduct their own explorations of outcomes across colleges.

uniform statistics for all institutions, calculated using the same methods and the same data.

New America’s “Moving on Up?” series is an excellent early example of just the type of independent exploration for which we had hoped. Each of these interesting articles peels back another layer of the onion, advancing our understanding of higher education and mobility in the U.S. For instance, our original paper focused on the distribution of students from low-income families across colleges, but “New Data Reveal, For the First Time, Each College’s Share of Rich Kids” looks at the other end of the parental income distribution. As this post points out, federal statistics track the incomes of students who apply for financial aid. But the Mobility Report Cards’ data are the first to detail the college choices of the rich. It is not just researchers who can benefit from such an analysis; most colleges do not systematically track the incomes of students who do not apply for financial aid. Indeed, several college presidents have commented that these data provide unique insights into their own student bodies.

Another example of an analysis that takes our data in a new direction is “Mind the Gap: How Higher Education Contributes to Gender Wage

Disparities,” which makes use of the statistics for each college, split by gender, to explore differences between men and women. Especially when using average earnings levels (as opposed to average earnings percentile ranks), the gender gap between students at the same college is quite large. These comparisons are useful not just for understanding higher education, but also for helping assess the causes of continued gender imbalances in earnings and representation in certain sectors of the labor force.

Beyond research using the currently available data, there are still important and unanswered questions. Although our data provide a high-resolution picture of which colleges have the highest rates of upward mobility, they say almost nothing about the pathways that students at such colleges took to succeed. We therefore aim to build on this research to better understand how colleges currently foster upward mobility, and which policies (at the national, state, and institutional levels) can increase upward mobility for future generations.

We believe that the most promising paths forward are collaborations between colleges (which have much more detailed information on their students) and the type of large administrative databases we

used in our paper. Partnering with specific colleges and universities provides an excellent opportunity to understand how schools contribute to upward mobility, and to learn lessons that can be applied to other U.S. institutions. In particular, one can understand what it is that each school does well or can do better, and to identify scalable models that will replicate successful elements at other institutions. Such research can also be used to help partner institutions design new policies to further promote upward mobility for talented young people.

With such partnerships, we can answer two key questions that our current paper leaves open. First, to what extent do high-mobility schools stand out because of the students they attract versus the education they provide? Combining institutional and larger administrative data sources will allow researchers to control more thoroughly for the differences between students from low-income families who attend different schools, in order to identify the effect of attending each of these colleges.

Second, what are the critical pathways to success in college once students arrive on campus? For instance, certain majors, job training programs, or

mentorship opportunities may distinguish high-mobility institutions from their counterparts. Many colleges have innovative programs, some of which are evaluated, but too often these analyses occur in isolation and lack comparability across institutions. Collaborations could help situate the evaluation of these school-specific programs more broadly in the higher education landscape.

The “Moving on Up” series provides a starting point for these types of investigations and collaborations. We look forward to working with these and other researchers to accumulate much more knowledge about how to make higher education more effective in increasing upward mobility for all of our children.

Raj Chetty, professor of economics at Stanford University, and John N. Friedman, associate professor of economics at Brown University, are authors (along with Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, and Danny Yagan) of “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility,” which was released in January. Chetty and Friedman are two of the three leaders of the Equality of Opportunity Project, a research team studying social mobility in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION



In January, the Equality of Opportunity Project published a landmark study that offers a major step forward in our understanding of higher education and economic mobility in the United States. “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility” provides the best available evidence that higher education can help students climb the economic ladder, and it also identifies specific colleges and universities that are the most successful at giving low-income students a leg up.¹

At the same time, the research confirms that colleges heavily covet students from wealthy families, and help them excel further than their low-income peers. The Equality of Opportunity Project found that students from wealthy families were, on average, 29 percentiles higher in the wage distribution than their counterparts from low-income families. In many ways, higher education is reinforcing inequality rather than alleviating it.

These findings are among many insights the research team was able to isolate, the result of putting the right data in the hands of the right researchers, who are generating important new knowledge in the higher education sphere that has previously remained unavailable or incomplete because of limitations in data availability and access. In the study, the authors connected parental earnings data to information on college attendance and children’s earnings in early adulthood to

explore how college enrollment impacts students’ life trajectories.

At New America, we recognized how groundbreaking the study was as soon as it came out. But we also noticed that, besides some excellent columns on the research in *The New York Times*, it wasn’t getting the attention it deserved from higher education reporters and researchers.² The timing of the release was unfortunate, as it coincided with the ascension of President Donald Trump to the White House. Yes, we were all just a little preoccupied at the time.

To help raise awareness of the research, we decided to dig deeper into the Mobility Report Card data and publish a blog series.³ Our posts, versions of which are reprinted in this paper, found the following:

- Low-income students, when given the opportunity, are just as likely to succeed as their wealthier peers, even at selective colleges.
- For low-income students, undermatching appears to be a much bigger problem than overmatching. In other words, these students tend to do better when going to more challenging colleges.
- Much as they do in elementary and secondary education, low-income students generally go to the colleges with the least resources, be they

community colleges, regional state schools, or nonselective or barely selective private nonprofit colleges. These schools, as well as for-profit colleges that also enroll a substantial share of low-income students, generally have the worst outcomes, giving these students far less chance of succeeding than their wealthier counterparts have.

This series also highlighted ways in which the Mobility Report Card data are unique, including how they allow us to see for the first time the share of wealthy students each college enrolls. In addition, we explored what the study tells us—and doesn't tell us—about for-profit colleges. And we examined the data to see whether we could learn more about how higher education contributes to the wage gap between men and women. This paper contains versions of all the posts that were part of the series, which included an especially insightful one from Kelly Rosinger, a higher education researcher who now serves as an assistant professor of education at Penn State University.

Even after we finished the series, however, we weren't completely satisfied. So we decided to take an even deeper dive into the data to examine the state of equity and socioeconomic diversity in public higher education over time. What we found was startling and distressing.

Our analysis showed that since the late 1990s, nearly two-thirds of selective public universities reduced the share of students they enrolled from the bottom 40 percent of the income scale, and

nearly two-thirds increased the share of students they enroll from the top 20 percent. Most notably, at more than half of selective public institutions, the increase in affluent students came at the direct expense of low-income ones. In other words, these schools increased the share of students in the top 20 percent at the same time that they reduced the share from the bottom 40 percent.

This shift to a more well-to-do student body occurred at many big-name public flagship and research universities that are leading players in the so-called merit aid arms race—devoting large amounts of their institutional financial aid dollars to attract wealthy students.⁴ For example, one of the largest shifts has taken place at the University of Alabama, which annually spends over \$100 million in financial aid to students who lack financial need.⁵

But these disturbing trends are also happening at less prominent public institutions that have had long histories of lifting low-income and working-class students into the middle class and beyond, such as Stony Brook University in Long Island. As the report states, “In short, the colleges that offered many low-income students pathways to success are becoming less accessible over time.”⁶

These data should raise alarm bells throughout higher education and among policymakers. The doors of public universities are closing to the lowest-income students. Hopefully, the Mobility Report Cards study and data will serve as a wake-up call for all those who believe colleges should continue to give a leg up to those who are in most need of one.

ABOUT THE MOBILITY REPORT CARD DATA



The Mobility Report Cards combine public data about the higher education system with a trove of de-identified tax records from students and their parents. Starting from the family financial backgrounds of individual students, this data pairing not only shows what college-educated Americans earn once they hit their early 30s (when income growth for Americans tends to stabilize, whatever their education), but also how far they've come from the economic class of their birth. Building a sample of more than 30 million Americans who were born between 1980 and 1991 and attended colleges any time between 1999 and 2013, the researchers with the Equality of Opportunity Project codified three simple and effective metrics for determining how well a school does by its lowest-income students:

- **Access Rates:** The percentage of a school's students who came from the poorest 20 percent of Americans;
- **Success Rates:** The percentage of students from the bottom 20 percent who made it to the top 20 percent; and
- **Mobility Rates:** The percentage of an institution's *total students* who started from the bottom 20 percent and made it to the top.



**CHAPTER 1: WHAT THE
MOBILITY REPORT CARDS
TELL US ABOUT COLLEGE
ACCESS AND SUCCESS**

1.1 COLLEGE ACCESS IS STILL A PROBLEM

By Ben Barrett



Low-income students have consistently attended college at lower rates than those from high-income families. But over the last 30 years, the share of low-income high school students pursuing a degree immediately after graduation has almost doubled.⁷ Though this progress may encourage some to dismiss college access as a challenge of yesteryear, new research demonstrates that we are still a long way from declaring “mission accomplished.”

The research that Raj Chetty, John Friedman, and their colleagues conducted on social mobility in higher education confirms what many have already assumed to be true: While more low-income students are going to college, they are generally not attending the same schools as their well-off peers. The majority are enrolling in community colleges and for-profit institutions, where they tend to have lower graduation rates and diminished economic returns. Meanwhile, wealthier students are far more likely to attend elite public and private four-year universities and continue to ascend to the top rungs of the income ladder.

Because college enrollment by institution type is highly segregated by parental income, access rates for low-income students have an inverse relationship with selectivity and prestige. The

researchers found that students with families in the top 1 percent of the income distribution, annually earning at least \$631,000, are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League university than those students whose families have incomes in the bottom 20 percent of the income scale, with an annual income under \$20,000. Similar disparities exist at elite public universities, where only about 6 percent of students come from a family in the bottom income quintile.

This economic sorting of students based on parental income into different sectors of higher education comes with marked differences in earnings potential. For example, more than 13 percent of students from low-income families who attend an Ivy League school enter the top 1 percent of the income distribution—and over half enter the top quintile—by the age of 32. For their part, public flagship universities lift over a third of low-income students into the top 20 percent of earners, with annual incomes of anywhere between \$110,000 and more than \$3 million. However, since elite private and public universities enroll relatively few low-income students, the true engines of upward mobility—those that balance a significant low-income student enrollment with reasonable rates of economic success—are the less selective regional

One of the most significant discoveries that the researchers made was that low-income students do nearly as well as their wealthier peers after graduating from the same college.

universities. In fact, eight of the top 10 colleges in terms of moving low-income students up the income scale are regional public colleges and universities.

One of the most significant discoveries that the researchers made was that low-income students do nearly as well as their wealthier peers after graduating from the same college. As a result, the researchers argue there is no evidence of the Antonin Scalia theory of mismatch (otherwise known as overmatching): the idea that low-income students would be better off at less selective colleges because they are not prepared for more advanced coursework.⁸ On the contrary, the data seem to suggest that undermatching is a bigger problem. In other words, low-income students should try to go to the best colleges they can, as they will end up better off doing so. Policymakers need to help more low-income students enroll in selective four-year universities, where they can get extra guidance and improve their chances of graduating, as well as expand the support that students currently receive at open enrollment community colleges.

So why don't low-income students go to the most rigorous schools? One obvious factor is cost, but it's not the only one, considering that the most selective public and private colleges tend to offer the most generous financial aid packages.

Proximity to home is one of the biggest predictors of where a student decides to attend. The need to stay close to family prevents some from taking advantage of options that could help them achieve greater success. As a result, regional public universities

enroll a much higher share of low-income students than state flagship universities do—a difference of about 60 percent. But even larger shares of students from the lowest-income families attend open enrollment institutions, either public two-year community colleges or private for-profit schools.

Far too many low-income students are struggling to make their way through a tangled web of challenges. But on average, earning a college degree is still the best way to improve one's economic odds. The Mobility Report Cards research shows that about 16 percent of the lowest-income college-goers reach the top quintile of the distribution compared with only 4 percent of non-college-goers. While community colleges may not be lifting a large share of the low-income students they educate into the top echelons of wealth, they are steadily chipping away at income disparities more broadly. Community colleges propel over a quarter of their students from the bottom quintile into the middle one, a rate that is on par with regional public universities.

Open enrollment community colleges serve a vital role for students looking to retool or for those taking the first step in their college careers, and they deserve far greater public support. But policymakers also need to push elite public and private colleges to open their doors wider to academically qualified low-income students. In our segregated system of higher education, where outcomes differ tremendously, the meager number of low-income students at the nation's top schools remains a very serious challenge.

Table 1. How Different Types of Colleges Compare

	Access Rate (Student Enrollment from Bottom Income Quintile)	Success Rate (Percentage of Students with Families in Bottom Quintile who Enter Top Quintile)	Mobility Rate (Percentage of Entire Student Body with Families in Bottom Quintile who Enter Top Quintile)
Ivy Plus	3.70%	57.30%	2.10%
Other elite colleges (public and private)	3.80%	49.30%	1.90%
Highly-selective public	6.10%	44.90%	2.80%
Highly-selective private	4.20%	39.30%	1.60%
Selective public	10.90%	23.10%	2.30%
Selective private	7.80%	24.70%	1.70%
Nonselective 4-year public	15.60%	14.20%	2.10%
Nonselective 4-year private not-for-profit	11.70%	18.60%	1.90%
Two-year public	16.60%	10.90%	1.70%
Four-year for-profit	17.90%	11.20%	1.70%
Two-year for-profit	23.40%	9.90%	2.00%

Source: The average access, success, and mobility rates, as calculated from The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards.

1.2 EVEN AT PRIVATE COLLEGES, LOW-INCOME STUDENTS TEND TO GO TO THE POOREST SCHOOLS

By Stephen Burd



There's a widespread belief that private nonprofit colleges don't serve many low-income students.¹⁰ That's not true. Many four-year private institutions enroll a substantial number of students from economically disadvantaged families.¹¹ However, these schools tend to be the private colleges least equipped to serve these students well because they have the fewest resources.

As the Mobility Report Card data make clear, the private colleges that most low-income students attend do a poor job of helping them move up the economic ladder.¹² In contrast, the ones that do the best job of helping low-income students improve their economic fortunes serve very few of them.¹³

The private colleges that serve the largest share of low-income students are nonselective, meaning they admit most students who apply. At those institutions, about a quarter of students in the Class of 2013 came from families in the bottom 40 percent of the income scale—those with annual incomes below \$37,000. These students slightly outnumbered their peers who came from families

in the top income quintile (those earning more than \$110,000 annually). The average family income of students at nonselective private colleges was about \$91,000, while the median was just under \$70,000. Less than 1 percent came from extremely wealthy families.

Nonselective private colleges tend to be the poorest, with minuscule endowments. These institutions have a difficult time, both financially and academically, supporting the large numbers of low-income students they enroll. As a result, financially needy students are less likely to remain and graduate from these schools than their peers at richer institutions. The Mobility Report Cards data bear this out. The lowest-income students at private nonselective colleges had only a 7 percent chance of making it into at least the upper-middle class by the time they reach their early 30s.

Low-income students' chances of moving up the economic scale significantly improve as they attend more selective colleges. But the most selective schools are the least likely to enroll these students.

Table 2. Socioeconomic Diversity and Mobility at Different Types of Private Colleges

Type of Private College	Average Income	Median Income	% of Bottom 40%	% of Top 20%	% of Top 1%	Success Rate
Non-selective	\$90,980	\$69,900	24%	23%	Less than 1%	7%
Selective	\$112,168	\$84,650	17%	34%	Less than 1%	20%
Highly Selective	\$285,297	\$136,600	9%	61%	7%	28%
Elite Liberal Arts	\$446,753	\$171,800	8%	68%	14%	31%
Ivy PLUS	\$723,050	\$177,450	9%	68%	17%	42%

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards

For example, the lowest-income students who attended the 12 Ivy Plus universities had a 42 percent chance of making it into the upper-middle class or higher, and nearly a 10 percent chance of striking it rich and becoming a 1-percenter. However, only 9 percent of students in the Class of 2013 at these schools came from families in the bottom 40 percent of the income scale, and just 4 percent came from families making less than \$20,000 annually.

These institutions resemble wealthy country clubs, with more than two-thirds of the students coming from families that were in the upper-middle class or richer. The average family income of students in the Class of 2013 attending these institutions was about \$723,000, and the median was \$177,450. More than half of the students came from families in the top 10 percent, earning \$144,000 or more, and nearly one-fifth were from the top 1 percent with family incomes of at least \$631,000.

Part of the reason that low-income students attending Ivy Plus schools are six times as likely

to achieve social mobility as those at nonselective private colleges has to do with the students themselves. Low-income students who are admitted to an Ivy Plus school are academic stars who have defied the odds to make it into one the country's top colleges. Low-income students who attend nonselective colleges tend to be much less academically accomplished. In addition, Ivy League schools and other elite private colleges tend to provide students with a leg up in the job market. Employers in many white-collar professions are often attracted to job candidates who went to big-name schools. In addition, the most prestigious institutions offer their students networking opportunities that aren't available at nonselective schools.

But another big factor is money. Low-income students generally can't afford to go to a private college without receiving significant amounts of financial aid from the federal government and the schools they wish to attend. Ivy Plus universities are extraordinarily rich and generally can afford to meet

the full financial need of the low-income students they enroll. These universities, in other words, are able to provide these students with essentially free rides (although these students often have to deal with hidden costs they hadn't anticipated).¹⁴ In contrast, nonselective private colleges and those that are only minimally selective are often cash-strapped and struggling to keep their doors open. They tend to offer deep discounts to try to lure in affluent students who can pay full freight, while leaving low-income students with large funding gaps. As a result, financially needy students often have to take on large debt loads and engage in activities that could stymie their educational progress, like working full-time jobs and/or attending part-time.

Moreover, because of their fortunes, Ivy Plus schools are able to provide academic support services to struggling students that these poorer schools can only dream about. In addition, low-income students who take on full-time work probably don't have much time to take advantage of these types of services.

Much as they do in elementary and secondary education, low-income students who pursue a higher education tend to go to the colleges with the least resources, be they community colleges, regional state schools, or nonselective or barely selective private colleges. No wonder that the odds of moving up the economic ladder are so stacked against them.

Ivy Plus institutions resemble wealthy country clubs, with more than two-thirds of the students coming from families that were in the upper-middle class or richer

1.3 LOW-INCOME STUDENTS SUCCEED—WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY

By Clare McCann



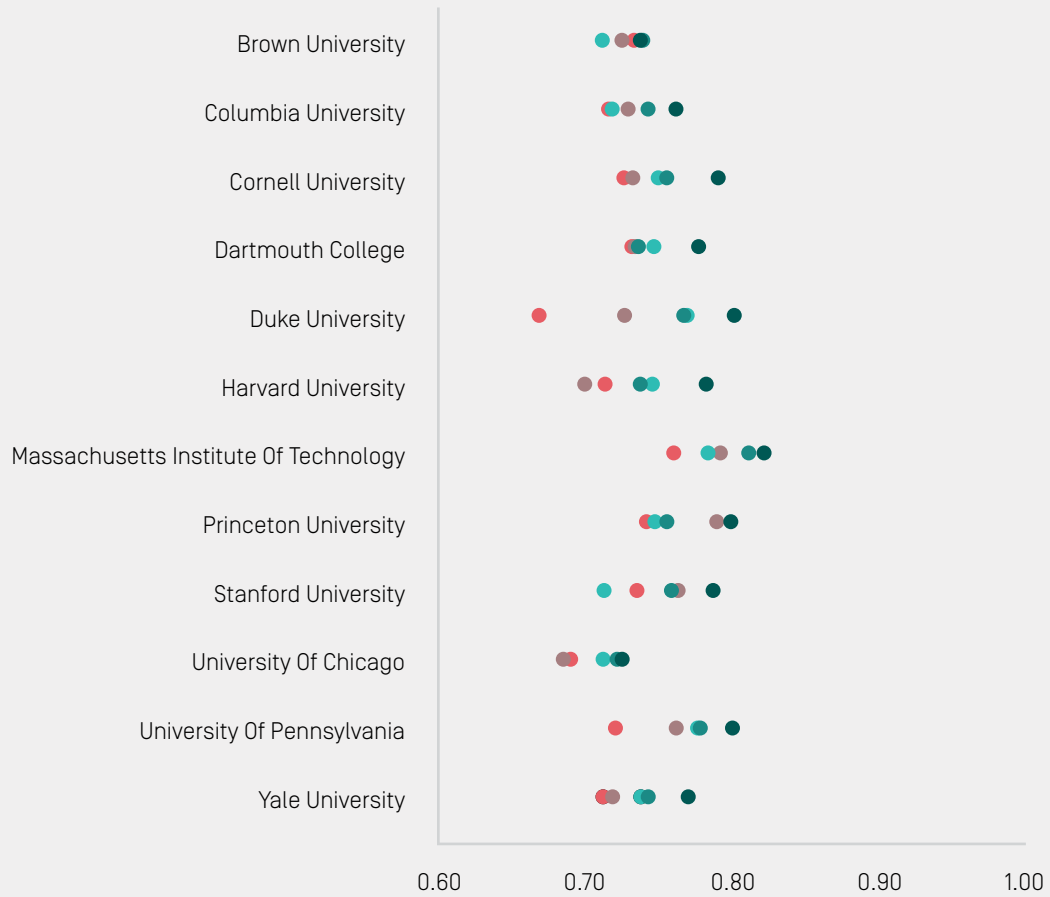
As my colleague Ben Barrett wrote in his essay, one of the most critical conclusions of the Mobility Report Card research is that, when given the chance, students from low-income families do just fine in selective colleges. The data show that, throughout higher education, students from low- and high-income families attending the same institution have similar post-college earnings. In other words, when the authors ranked all students within a particular college based on post-college earnings, low-income students fell within a few thousand dollars of their high-income peers. They were nearly as likely to succeed after college as rich students who went to the same school.

Take Ivy League and other extremely selective institutions, for example. When ranked by their

post-college earnings, low-income students who attended these institutions fell barely below students with high-income parents. At Harvard, for instance, low-income students were in the 71st percentile for post-college earnings while high-income students were in the 78th, which results in a difference of less than \$4,000 a year in total wages, using the most recently available data. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the range was from the 76th percentile for low-income students to the 82nd for high-income ones; at Princeton, low-income students ranked in the 74th percentile, while high-income students ranked in the 80th. Meanwhile, Brown's low- and high-income students were virtually indistinguishable in terms of earnings, according to the Mobility Report Card data.

The fact that students from low-income families performed nearly as well as their more affluent peers suggests that the most elite institutions could enroll more of them without suffering any decline in their outcomes

Figure 1. Ivy League Earnings Rank of Children, by Parents' Income Quintile

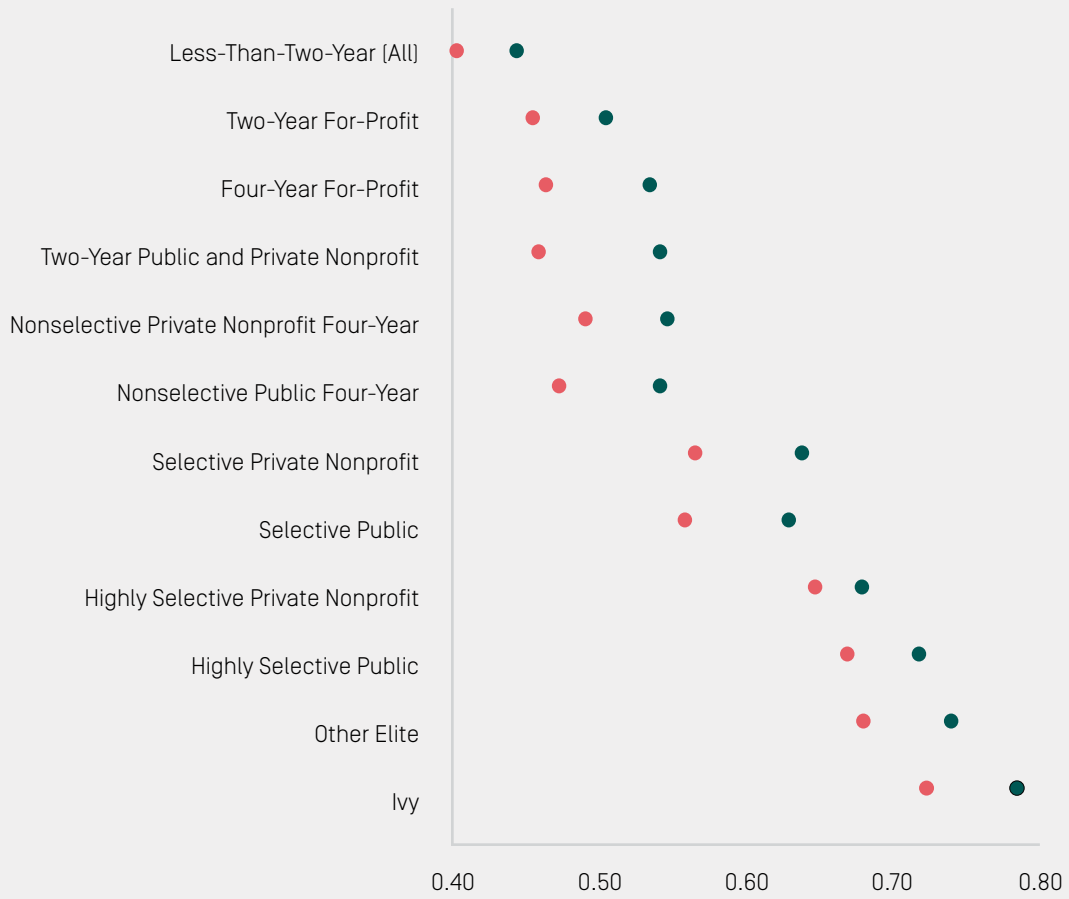


Legend

- Parents in Highest Quintile
- Parents in Quintile 4
- Parents in Quintile 3
- Parents in Quintile 2
- Parents in Bottom Quintile

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards

Figure 2. Typical Earnings Rank of Students from Low- and High-Income Families



Legend

- Median Earnings Rank, Parents in Highest Quintile
- Median Earnings Rank, Parents in Bottom Quintile

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards

The fact that students from low-income families performed nearly as well as their more affluent peers suggests that the most elite institutions—which tend to enroll only a small number of these students—could enroll more of them without suffering any decline in their outcomes. This finding lends credence to affirmative action policies designed to promote access for low-income students, particularly at institutions with endowments large enough to provide significant amounts of need-based aid. For instance, Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY, has made great progress in increasing its enrollment of low-income students.¹⁵ After moving to need-blind admissions in 2007, the share of freshman students receiving Pell Grants doubled in just five years, from 12 percent to 24 percent.¹⁶ Yet the Mobility Report Card study shows that over a decade, Vassar’s low-income and high-income students’ earnings are comparable within about \$3,000 when looking at annual earnings measures.

And that’s true not just at Ivy League institutions and elite private colleges, but throughout higher education. For instance, at highly selective public institutions like the University of Texas at Austin, Stony Brook University, and the University of

Florida, students from high-income backgrounds rank in about the 72nd percentile of post-college earnings; those from low-income backgrounds rank in the 67th. At selective private colleges like Brigham Young University, Catholic University, and Xavier University, the typical earnings of high-income students are in the 64th percentile, compared with earnings of low-income students in the 57th percentile. And at community colleges, high-income students earned in the 54th percentile, compared with the 46th for low-income students. At colleges across the board, the difference in the percentile earnings ranks of their high- and low-income students was in the single digits.

Yet across all colleges, the average low-income student’s earnings are much lower—by a full 29 percentiles, on average. So how can it be true that low-income students do just as well as their peers in the same school, but fare so much worse in the national average?

For the most part, it’s a dilemma of access, not ability. Low-income students are much less likely to enroll at the most selective institutions, where earnings trend higher. At selective institutions, students fall well above the 50th percentile in

Research from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation found that among college applicants with high academic ability in high school, nearly half of high-income students applied to the most competitive schools, while fewer than a quarter of low-income students did. In many cases, the most financially needy students rule out these colleges because they think the schools are financially out of reach, even though these institutions tend to provide the most generous need-based financial aid packages.

earnings. But the bulk of low-income students attend nonselective public and private colleges, community colleges, and for-profit institutions, where earnings for students typically top out at a point much lower on the scale.

Selective colleges take the students with the strongest academic backgrounds. Low-income students who apply to these institutions are at a tremendous disadvantage because they tend to live in financially distressed areas with underfunded high schools that offer few advanced courses. These students generally can't afford to take expensive SAT and ACT prep courses or to hire high-priced college application coaches. In addition, many aren't able to participate in the types of extracurricular activities college-admissions officers at selective schools tend to value because they are more likely to have to work long hours after school and weekends to help support their families.

Even for the highest-achieving, low-income students, highly selective colleges too often feel out of reach. Research from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation found that among college applicants with high academic ability in high school, nearly half of high-income students applied to the most

competitive schools, while fewer than a quarter of low-income students did.¹⁷ In many cases, the most financially needy students rule out these colleges because they think the schools are financially out of reach, even though these institutions tend to provide the most generous need-based financial aid packages. And they generally don't have college counselors in schools or college-educated parents at home who can help allay their fears and guide them through the application process.

The Mobility Report Card research proves that low-income students who have the opportunity to go to elite colleges can succeed. The problem is that few low-income students ever get that opportunity. As a result, colleges and society as a whole remain as stratified as ever.



**CHAPTER 2: WHAT'S
SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE
MOBILITY REPORT CARD
DATA?**

2.1 USING MOBILITY REPORT CARD DATA TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WORKS IN REDUCING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

By Kelly Rosinger



Higher education has long been viewed as a vehicle of upward mobility, a pathway into the middle- and upper-middle class, for students from less-advantaged backgrounds. But higher education is not as reliable as we might want for a vehicle that is supposed to transport students up the income distribution. College entry, choice, and completion are deeply embedded in students' economic backgrounds. In fact, the gap in college entry and completion rates between students from high- and low-income households continues to widen.¹⁸ These patterns become more troubling when we consider the types of colleges in which low-income students disproportionately enroll: less selective colleges, often with fewer financial resources and relatively poor graduation rates. When it comes to shuttling students up the income distribution, we're leaving many stranded on the side of the road.

The Mobility Report Card data give researchers a place to look to find out what works and what doesn't work in mitigating educational inequities, something like a user's manual for vehicle performance that can be used to improve upward mobility. For scholars like myself who study the impact of policies and interventions aimed at

expanding educational opportunities for students from less-advantaged backgrounds, these data provide the clearest picture we have to date of the role that colleges play in access, success, and upward mobility. In previous work, researchers have largely examined enrollment among students who receive Pell Grants, the federal government's largest source of student grant aid, to evaluate college access. The Pell Grant, however, is a rough proxy for low-income status. By contrast, the Mobility Report Card data provide a more complete picture of students enrolled at particular colleges across the entire income distribution.

Until the recent introduction of the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, there has been little publicly available information about students' earnings outcomes after leaving a particular college.¹⁹ The college mobility data additionally link students' earnings outcomes to parents' income, expanding our understanding of how particular colleges contribute toward upward mobility.

Importantly, the Mobility Report Card data provide a snapshot of student enrollment at most U.S. colleges over the first decade of the 2000s. This time frame

Until the recent introduction of the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard, there has been little publicly available information about students’ earnings outcomes after leaving a particular college

corresponds to a number of shifts in the higher education landscape. For instance, there have been significant changes in higher education finance at the federal and state levels, and growing concerns over college access and affordability amid rising tuition levels at many institutions. These shifts—as well as campuses’ responses to the changing landscape—are likely to influence the opportunities that students from various economic backgrounds have to attend particular colleges. Many of the nation’s most selective institutions, ones that appear to have particularly good earnings outcomes for low-income students but that enroll relatively few such students, have taken substantial steps over the last decade to alter admissions and financial aid processes in an attempt to expand access for students from less-advantaged backgrounds by, for example, making SAT or ACT test scores optional and replacing loans with grant aid.²⁰ The full impact of these and other admissions and financial aid efforts on enrollment patterns and upward mobility are still relatively unknown.

At the same time, we know less about how policies and programs at many of the campuses that Chetty and colleagues identified as high-mobility colleges, namely mid-tier public colleges, influence enrollment of students across the income distribution. This is particularly important given the declining shares of students coming from the lowest-income families that they document. For researchers, the Mobility Report Card data provide an opportunity to examine which policies, programs, and interventions can support low-income students and provide pathways to the middle and upper class.

To be sure, there are limitations to the Mobility Report Card data, many of which have been noted in

the New America report. One clear limitation is the exclusion of nontraditional college students from the data. This population of students represents a large and growing proportion of college students, and their exclusion means future studies using the data will offer little insight into how to support upward mobility for this population. The clustering of some colleges into one, a function of how some colleges report information to the Internal Revenue Service, creates an additional challenge. Nearly 1 in 5 students represented in the data were enrolled at a college that is grouped with other colleges, making it difficult to understand which policies and conditions support upward mobility within these clustered campuses.

Despite these limitations, the Mobility Report Cards offer a look under the hood—to carry through with the vehicle metaphor—into what works to mitigate educational inequalities and promote upward mobility. They also show where we might shift gears to improve outcomes for students, especially students from lower-income households who may be stuck in neutral.

Kelly Rosinger is an assistant professor at Pennsylvania State University’s Department of Education Policy Studies and a research associate in the university’s Center for the Study of Higher Education.

2.2 MOBILITY REPORT CARD DATA SHOW WHY WE NEED GREATER HIGHER ED TRANSPARENCY

By Clare McCann



The recent study by economists Raj Chetty, John Friedman, and their colleagues offers an important picture of socioeconomic diversity and economic mobility across thousands of colleges and universities. But nearly as interesting as the findings of the study are the data that made these findings possible.

To construct the Mobility Report Cards, the researchers worked with existing student data from the Department of Education and held in federal tax records to construct a near-universal data set of all traditionally aged students who attended college between 1999 and 2013.

The researchers first compared Social Security Administration data with 1098-T tax records in order to determine where students attended college.

Colleges file 1098-T forms with the IRS on all tuition-paying students to help the agency determine whether students' families qualify for tuition tax credits, such as the American Opportunity Tax Credit and the Lifetime Learning Credit.²¹ The forms list the students' qualified tuition and related

expenses and the amount of grant and scholarship assistance they have received.

But this information has some gaps because colleges are not required to complete 1098-T forms for students who receive tuition waivers. The researchers filled in these gaps by then comparing the Social Security data with the Education Department's Pell Grant data.

Using the matched IRS and Pell data, the researchers compiled a largely complete data set of more than 30 million students who attended college during the time period they were studying. This data set is more comprehensive than the Education Department can build today because in 2008 Congress banned the Education Department from developing a student unit record data system.²²

As a result, the Mobility Report Card data provide information on a much broader group of students than the limited data the Department of Education currently collects. The Department maintains data only for students who receive federal financial aid, like Pell Grants and federal student loans. But

nearly a third of all college students don't receive any federal aid, and nearly 2 of every 5 community college students pay their own way or cover costs with other forms of aid.²³ That means data on student outcomes, like the alumni earnings data the Education Department produced and published for the first time in 2015, don't tell the whole story because they include income data for only a subset of students. The ban on a student-level data network effectively prevents the Education Department from accessing data that would allow it to provide the most comprehensive information to students and accurately represent institutions' outcomes.

Still, the Mobility Report Card data have their own limitations. First, it's just a snapshot in time, providing information on cohorts of students born between 1980 and 1991. As a result, the latest information is on students who started college as part of the Class of 2013. Second, as discussed throughout this paper, the data are incomplete, as they include information on traditionally aged students only. As a result, they are of only limited use when looking at institutions that have large populations of adult students, such as community colleges and for-profit schools.

In addition, the Mobility Report Card data don't include students' programs of study, so it's impossible to say which programs within an institution provide low-income students with the best opportunities. That information is important given that some students don't have many options for colleges near them.²⁴ The data also don't tell us whether students have completed their degrees at the institution at which they started. Nor do we know how long it typically takes students to complete degrees at these institutions.

While the Mobility Report Card data don't answer all of our questions, they show us the promise and benefits of having more comprehensive data about colleges and their students. Now policymakers need to take the next step and, once and for all, end the ban on a student-level data network that has kept students and policymakers in the dark for too long.

While the Mobility Report Card data don't answer all of our questions, they show us the promise and benefits of having more comprehensive data about colleges and their students. Now policymakers need to take the next step and, once and for all, end the ban on a student-level data network that has kept students and policymakers in the dark for too long.

2.3 CHETTY VS. PELL: WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO MEASURE A COLLEGE'S COMMITMENT TO LOW-INCOME STUDENTS?

By Ernest Ezeugo and Clare McCann



Higher education researchers and journalists often use the percentage of Pell Grant recipients at a college as a proxy for the share of low-income students the school serves. But in actuality, the makeup of low-income students is more complicated than that.

Students' eligibility for Pell Grants is based on a range of factors: family income, benefits received, number of siblings in college at the time, and more. As a result, Pell Grants don't just go to the poorest of the poor; they also go to students whose families are typically considered to be at least lower-middle class. For example, a larger share of Pell Grant recipients who are under 24 and unmarried come from families making over \$30,000 (42 percent) than from families making less than \$20,000 (39 percent).²⁵ Those with higher incomes typically receive the minimum grant of \$592, one-tenth the size of the maximum possible award. So while colleges may serve a large population of Pell Grant recipients, it's been difficult for journalists and researchers to know—until now—how many come from the lowest-income families.

The Mobility Report Cards study gives the best picture yet of students' economic backgrounds, college by college. And the data provide a new window into how well schools are serving the lowest-income students.

Both Pell Grant data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Mobility Report Card data confirm what we already know: The nation's most selective colleges generally enroll a much smaller share of low-income students than their nonselective counterparts. But the Mobility Report Card data show that these elite schools do even a worse job than we thought serving students from the lowest-income families. For instance, while Pell Grant recipients make up, on average, 15 percent of the students at Ivy Plus colleges (the Ivies, plus a couple of other very selective schools the researchers tack on), the Mobility Report Card data indicate that just 4.7 percent of their students come from families in the lowest income quintile. Similarly, at highly selective colleges, Pell Grant recipients make up, on average, 18 percent of the student population, but just 3.6 percent of their students come from the lowest income quintile.

In our “Undermining Pell” series of reports, which evaluate colleges’ performance on access and affordability, we have highlighted elite private colleges that enroll a significant share of Pell Grant recipients and charge them a relatively low average net price (what students and their families are on the hook for after all grants and scholarships are taken into account).²⁶ But what stands out in the Mobility Report Card data is that even these otherwise-exceptional-among-their-peers colleges enroll students from the lowest income quintile at average rates. At Columbia University, which we highlighted in part because more than 20 percent of its student body receives Pell Grants, students from the lowest-income families make up just 5.1 percent of its population. At Amherst College, which was another top performer, nearly 1 of every 4 students are Pell Grant recipients, but only 4.7 percent of students come from the lowest income quintile. That’s only slightly better than the median among other elite colleges.

Grinnell College performs slightly better relative to its peers. Students from the lowest income quintile make up 6.3 percent of the student population at that school—nearly double the (admittedly meager) typical share for highly selective private colleges.

Public universities serve a larger share of Pell Grant recipients than elite private colleges do. But the most selective public colleges do only a slightly better job of enrolling the most financially needy students. At highly selective publics, Pell Grant recipients make up 29 percent of their student bodies, and at selective publics, 43 percent. But students from families in the lowest income quintile comprise just 4.5 percent of the student population at highly selective publics and only 8.1 percent at selective ones. The University of Texas at Austin, for instance, enrolls just over 6 percent of its students from the lowest income quintile. At the University of Michigan, the poorest students make up just 3.6 percent of the student body. Despite their public mission, these institutions are predominantly serving a much wealthier population.

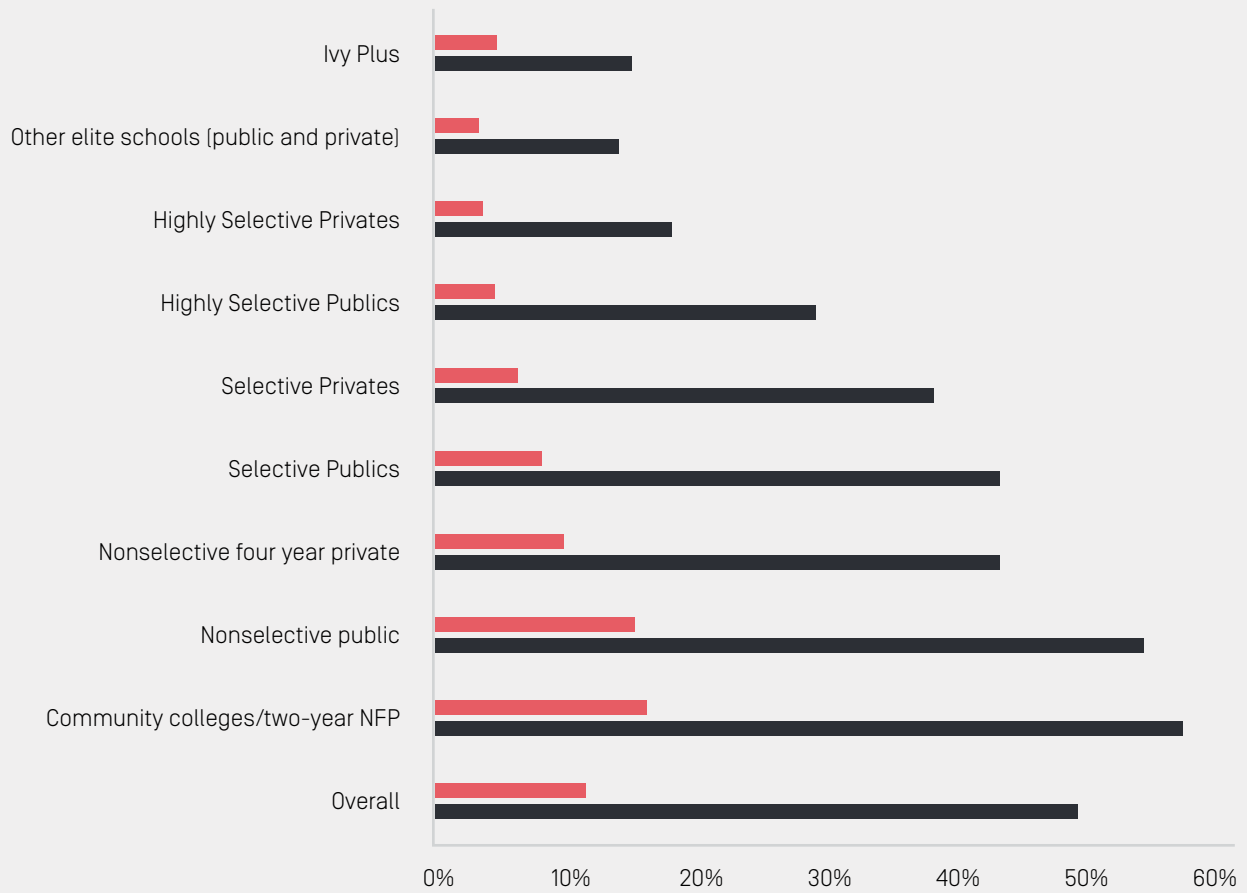
Both the Pell Grant and Mobility Report Card data make clear that nonselective colleges are doing the heaviest lifting in serving low-income students. One in 10 students at nonselective four-year private colleges is from the poorest background, and these students make up 15 percent of undergraduates at nonselective publics. Meanwhile, these schools serve a sizeable population of Pell Grant recipients—making up 43 percent of students at nonselective privates and 54 percent at publics. Both proportionately and in sheer numbers, nonselective colleges are clearly beating out their more selective counterparts in providing access to those with the most financial need.

And without question, community colleges are enrolling these populations in large volume, but the Mobility Report Card data don’t show the extent to which they are doing that. That’s because community colleges serve a significant proportion of adult students, who are not included in the data.

While the Mobility Report Card data are incomplete, they do provide a more nuanced picture of how committed colleges are to serving the lowest-income students. They allow us to answer not just the binary question of how many Pell Grant recipients an institution serves, but also which low-income students the school is enrolling. Too often, elite institutions enroll too few Pell Grant recipients, and the Mobility Report Card data prove that students from the lowest-income backgrounds are even rarer among them.

Policymakers should learn from the Mobility Report Cards and require colleges to report more detailed information about the range of federal financial aid recipients they serve. They could, for instance, mandate that colleges disclose the share of students at their institutions who receive the maximum Pell Grant, the share who receive at least the average Pell Grant in a given year, and those who receive the minimum award. That information could help policymakers, researchers, and the public better understand whether colleges are truly committed to helping those with the most financial need achieve socioeconomic mobility.

Figure 3. Typical Share of Low-Income Students Served



Legend

- Median Share of Students from Lowest Income Quintile
- Median Percent of First-Time, Full-Time Pell Grant Recipients

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards

2.4 NEW DATA REVEAL, FOR FIRST TIME, EACH COLLEGE'S SHARE OF RICH KIDS

By Stephen Burd



The College of William & Mary, the country's second oldest higher-education institution, is a top public research university.²⁷ But in many ways, the school is a lot more like an elite private liberal arts college than a sprawling public university. With just about 6,300 undergraduates, William & Mary's student body is slightly smaller than Duke's. Similar to many elite privates, the college boasts of a low student-to-faculty ratio of 12-to-1, and an impressive six-year graduation rate of 90 percent.²⁸

William & Mary resembles elite private colleges in another key way as well: it overwhelmingly serves an elite financial clientele. Nearly three-quarters of the college's Class of 2013 came from families with annual incomes between \$110,000 and more than \$3

million. The average family income of students that year was \$270,577 and the median was \$176,400, the highest amount of any public university.

More than half of the William and Mary students (56 percent) came from families from the top 10 percent of the income scale (making \$144,000 or more) and more than a third were from families in the top 5 percent (making at least \$189,000). Over 6 percent came from families in the top 1 percent, making at least \$631,000. Only six other public universities—the University of Michigan, the College of Charleston, the Universities of Virginia and Colorado, and Miami University—served more one-percenters in the Class of 2013.


Only 12 percent of William & Mary students came from families making less than about \$65,000, and 5 percent came from those with a family income below \$37,000. Just three other public universities served a smaller share.

On the other end of the spectrum, only 12 percent of William & Mary students came from families making less than about \$65,000, and 5 percent came from those with a family income below \$37,000. Just three other public universities—Christopher Newport and James Madison Universities, which are also located in Virginia, and the University of Delaware—served a smaller share (less than 2 percent) of the lowest income students, coming from families making under \$20,000.

How do we know all this? The Chetty data provide the clearest picture we've ever had of the family income breakdown of students at individual colleges. Education Department data don't give us any information on the share of students at colleges whose families are wealthy and pay the full freight. That's because colleges are required to report to the federal government only the family income data of students who receive federal financial aid. College officials have long argued that schools don't have any way of knowing how much students' families make if they pay their own way.

Chetty and his colleagues got around this limitation by working with the U.S. Treasury Department to get access to anonymized tax returns that they could link to college attendance records. By doing so, they were able to get family earnings data for nearly all traditional students (those between the ages of 18 and 22) who attended college anytime between 1999 and 2013.

As a result, the researchers were able to reveal data about colleges that their leaders and lobbyists have long tried to keep hidden.²⁹ Until now, we knew that the College of William & Mary was among the least socioeconomically diverse public universities in the country.³⁰ But we didn't know just how much of a bastion of privilege it really is.



**CHAPTER 3: THE
MOBILITY REPORT
CARDS' WORST NEWS:
DECLINING ACCESS AT
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

3.1 NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF SELECTIVE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES ENROLL FEWER LOW-INCOME STUDENTS THAN THEY DID IN THE LATE 1990S

By Stephen Burd



The Mobility Report Cards study contains good and bad news about Stony Brook University, a public research university in Long Island that is part of the State University of New York system.

According to the report, Stony Brook is a social mobility superstar, ranking third out of thousands of colleges in helping the large number of low-income and working-class students it enrolls get a leg up.³¹ A little more than half of the lowest-income students—coming from families earning less than \$20,000 yearly—who attended the school in the late 1990s made it into the top 20 percent (with annual salaries of at least \$110,000) by their mid-30s. And nearly 8 in 10 of these students reached at least the middle class.

That's the good news. The bad news is that Stony Brook, like many of the public universities at the top of the Mobility Report Cards, has become less accessible for low-income students in recent years. In fact, the share of Stony Brook students coming from families in the bottom 40 percent (those with

annual incomes below \$37,000) has dropped by 8.5 percentage points since the late 1990s. Where low-income students made up more than a third of the class back then, they now make up just a quarter.

Not only is a smaller share of low-income students going to Stony Brook, but the university has been seeking a more upscale clientele. Since the late 1990s, the share of students who come from families in the top 20 percent of income has grown by about 7 percentage points to nearly 40 percent in the Class of 2013. The bulk of that growth appears to be among students from families in the top 10 percent of the income scale, who have seen their share grow from 16 percent in the Class of 2002 to 22 percent in the Class of 2013. Meanwhile, the average family income of Stony Brook students increased 13 percent during this time period from \$94,422 to \$106,560.

Stony Brook is hardly alone in recruiting a wealthier student body. I conducted an analysis of the longitudinal data from the Mobility Report Cards and found that nearly two-thirds of the 381 selective

public universities included in the data set reduced the share of students they enroll from the bottom 40 percent.³² The average drop at these institutions was 4.6 percentage points.³³ And nearly two-thirds increased the share of students in the top 20 percent by an average of 5.4 percentage points.³⁴

Most notably, at 54 percent of selective public schools, the increase in affluent students came at the direct expense of low-income ones. In other words, 217 of these institutions reduced the share of students from the bottom 40 percent while increasing the share from the top 20 percent. At North Dakota State University, for example, the share of low-income students dropped by nearly 10 percentage points, while the share of affluent ones grew by about 17 percentage points.

The news wasn't all bad. About a quarter of selective public institutions increased the share of low-income students they serve at the same time that they reduced the share of wealthy ones. Georgia State University, which has received a lot of acclaim for its success in helping low-income students graduate, increased its share of students in the bottom 40 percent by 7.5 percentage points, to 31 percent, while decreasing its share from the top 20 percent by 8.5 percentage points, to 26 percent.³⁵

Still, the results confirm that the vast majority of selective public universities have become less accessible for the most financially needy students since the late 1990s. The beneficiaries of this shift have largely been students from upper-middle income and wealthy backgrounds, as the overall

share of middle-income students from these institutions has dropped as well.³⁶

Under the sway of enrollment managers—college officials and private consultants who develop admissions and financial aid strategies for recruiting students—many four-year colleges are engaged in an arms race for the students they most desire: the best and brightest and the wealthiest.³⁷ While these strategies have long been the province of private nonprofit colleges, selective public universities, stung by sharp budget cuts at the same time they are seeking greater prestige, are increasingly adopting them in their pursuit of wealthy out-of-state students and international students.³⁸ As a result, fewer institutional aid dollars and fewer seats are available at these institutions for in-state students who are from less-privileged backgrounds.³⁹

And as my analysis of the Mobility Report Card data show, this is not just happening at the most prominent public flagship and research universities. It is also occurring at less prominent public institutions that have had long histories of lifting low-income and minority students into the middle class and beyond. As the Mobility Report Cards study states, “In short the colleges that offered many low-income students pathways to success are becoming less accessible over time.” In this case, the news is only bad.

The results confirm that the vast majority of selective public universities have become less accessible for the most financially needy students since the late 1990s. The beneficiaries of this shift have largely been students from upper-middle income and wealthy backgrounds.

3.2 HIGH-MERIT-AID PUBLIC FLAGSHIPS SEE SUBSTANTIAL SHIFTS TO WEALTHIER STUDENTS

By Stephen Burd



Two-thirds of the 32 public flagship universities included in the Mobility Report Cards study enroll a more upscale student body than they did in the late 1990s.⁴⁰ These institutions increased the share of affluent students they serve at the same time that they reduced the proportion of low-income ones. Only three flagships—the universities of Michigan, Nevada, and Texas at Austin—did the reverse, becoming more accessible for low-income students while reducing their share of high-income ones.

Public flagships that are the biggest players in the merit aid arms race—those that devote the bulk of their institutional aid dollars to non-needy students—were among the most likely to see their student bodies go significantly upscale.

Take the University of Alabama, which spent over \$100 million on non-need-based aid in 2014-15 (the most of any public university that year), up from about \$12 million in inflation-adjusted dollars in 2000-01.⁴¹ Since the late 1990s, the university, which

devotes more than two-thirds of its institutional aid dollars to so-called merit aid, increased its share of students from families in the top 20 percent by nearly 13 percentage points, to 59 percent.⁴² At the same time, the share of students in the bottom 40 percent fell by nearly 6 percentage points, to about 11 percent of the Class of 2013. Overall, the average yearly family income of students at the University of Alabama grew by 50 percent, from \$152,000 to nearly \$230,000, from the class that entered college in 1999 to the one that graduated in 2013.

The shift to a more well-to-do student body at Alabama's flagship school is hardly surprising, given that the university has been aggressively recruiting wealthy, out-of-state students since 2003, when Robert E. Witt became the school's president.⁴³ The school has several dozen full-time admissions officers spread throughout the country. And they come armed with generous merit-based scholarship packages to lure affluent, high-achieving students to their school. Today, there are

The shift to a more well-to-do student body at Alabama's flagship school is hardly surprising, given that the university has been aggressively recruiting wealthy, out-of-state students since 2003.

more out-of-state students on campus than in-state ones—a strategy that helped the university weather large-scale budget cuts from the state.⁴⁴

The University of Alabama is one of a dozen public flagship universities that spend more than 50 percent of their institutional aid dollars each year on non-need-based aid.⁴⁵ Excluding flagships that were not included in my analysis, all but one of these schools have become less accessible to low-income students as they have set their sights on attracting wealthier ones.⁴⁶

The University of Wyoming, for example, devoted 92 percent of its \$17 million aid budget to non-needy students in 2014-15.⁴⁷ The school has increased its share of students in the top 20 percent by more than 15 percentage points since the late 1990s, from less than one-third of the student body to nearly half. In contrast, the share of students in the bottom 40 percent of the income scale fell by more than 7 percentage points, to only 9 percent of the Class of 2013.⁴⁸ The average family income of University of Wyoming students grew to about \$134,000, an increase of 13 percent.

Similarly, the University of Arkansas, which spent 63 percent of its \$23 million institutional aid budget on merit aid, increased the share of students in the top 20 percent by nearly 15 percentage points since the late 1990s, to 53 percent of the Class of 2013. The share of students in the bottom 40 percent declined by 8 percentage points during this time period, to just 12 percent of the student body. Meanwhile, the average family income of students rose by almost 40 percent, to over \$178,000.

On the other side of the spectrum, the three flagships that did the reverse—increasing the

share of low-income students while reducing the proportion of high-income ones—are much smaller players in the merit aid arms race.

In 2014-15, the University of Texas at Austin, for example, spent only 4 percent of its \$54 million institutional aid budget on non-need-based aid.⁴⁹ Since the late 1990s, the share of students in the bottom 40 percent at UT's Austin campus rose by 3.3 percentage points, to 15 percent of its student body. At the same time, the share of students from the top 20 percent fell by 2.5 percentage points, to 56 percent of its students.

Similarly, the University of Nevada, which spent just 12 percent of its aid dollars on the non-needy, experienced a 1-percentage-point increase in its share of low-income students and a 2-percentage-point decrease in its share of students in the top 20 percent over that time period.

The University of Michigan is a bigger merit aid provider than the other two schools, with about a third of its aid dollars going to non-needy students. Still, it has experienced a 1.8-percentage-point decrease in its enrollment of affluent students, while seeing a tiny increase of less-than-1 percentage point in its share of students from low-income families. There may be more significant shifts in the future, as the university's president Mark Schlissel has made increasing socioeconomic diversity a key goal of his administration.⁵⁰

Over the last decade, many public universities have been ratcheting up the amount of non-need-based aid they use to attract wealthy, out-of-state students. And it appears that these policies are working—to the detriment of low-income students.

3.3 WHAT'S UP WITH STONY BROOK?

By Stephen Burd



Like many flagships, Stony Brook University has increased its spending on non-need-based aid, from about \$5 million in 2011-12 to more than \$8 million in 2015-16.⁵¹ And the number of freshmen receiving merit aid has increased 32 percent during this time, from 399 to 525.⁵² That may play some role in helping the university attract a wealthier student body.

But the most significant difference appears to be in whom the university is targeting. Over the last decade, Stony Brook, like many other State University of New York schools and selective public universities in general, has ratcheted up its enrollment of wealthy foreign students and higher-paying out-of-state students to make up for state budget cuts and make it more prestigious.⁵³

Between 2008 and 2016, the state's share of SUNY's budget dropped from about 60 percent to one-third.⁵⁴ Since that time, the number of incoming international freshmen at Stony Brook each year has more than tripled, from 154 to 483.⁵⁵ And the share of international students in the freshman class rose

from about 5 percent to 17 percent.⁵⁶ Three out of five of the nearly 2,600 international undergraduates at Stony Brook in the fall of 2017 came from China.⁵⁷

At the same time, the share of freshmen coming to Stony Brook from other states has risen from 4 percent to 9 percent since 2004.⁵⁸ Full-pay out-of-state students pay an annual cost of attendance of about \$42,000, \$17,000 more than their in-state counterparts pay.⁵⁹

The substantial growth of international and out-of-state students has left fewer seats available for students from New York, whose share of the student body has fallen from 90 percent in 2004 to 74 percent today.⁶⁰ And as the Mobility Report Card data show, the decline has occurred mainly among those from the lower end of the income scale.

We probably wouldn't take notice of this trend if it was happening only at Stony Brook. But unfortunately, the Mobility Report Card data show declining accessibility at other high-mobility

Between 2008 and 2016, the state’s share of SUNY’s budget dropped from about 60 percent to one-third. Since that time, the number of incoming international freshmen at Stony Brook each year has more than tripled.

schools. For example, City College of New York, which has helped generations of low-income and working-class students get a leg up, has experienced a decline of nearly 16 percentage points in the share of students from the bottom 40 percent since the late 1990s.⁶¹ These students were mostly replaced by those from middle-income and upper-middle-income families.⁶²

Similarly, California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, another selective public institution with high mobility rates, has suffered a sharp decline in the share of students from the bottom 40 percent of the income scale of more than 12 percentage points.

At the same time, the proportion of high-income students grew by nearly 7 percentage points.

These data should raise alarm bells throughout higher education and among policymakers. They need to consider whether the cult of enrollment management, which has encouraged public and private colleges and universities to cater to affluent students, has gone too far and left low-income students in the lurch.⁶³

Table 3. Stony Brook University Profile

Years	Average Family Income	Median Family Income	Bottom 40%	Middle income	Top 20%	Top 10%	Top 5%
1999	\$94,422	\$75,100	34%	16%	33%	16%	6%
2013	\$105,560	\$88,300	25%	15%	40%	22%	8%

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project’s Mobility Report Cards

Notes: Top 5 percent make \$189,000 or more. Top 10 percent make \$144,000 or more. Top 20 percent make \$110,000 or more. Middle income make between \$37,000 and \$65,000. Bottom 40 percent make less than \$37,000 annually



**CHAPTER 4: WHAT THE
MOBILITY REPORT CARDS
TELL US—AND DON'T TELL
US—ABOUT FOR-PROFIT
COLLEGES**

4.1 AN INCOMPLETE VIEW OF FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

By Ben Barrett



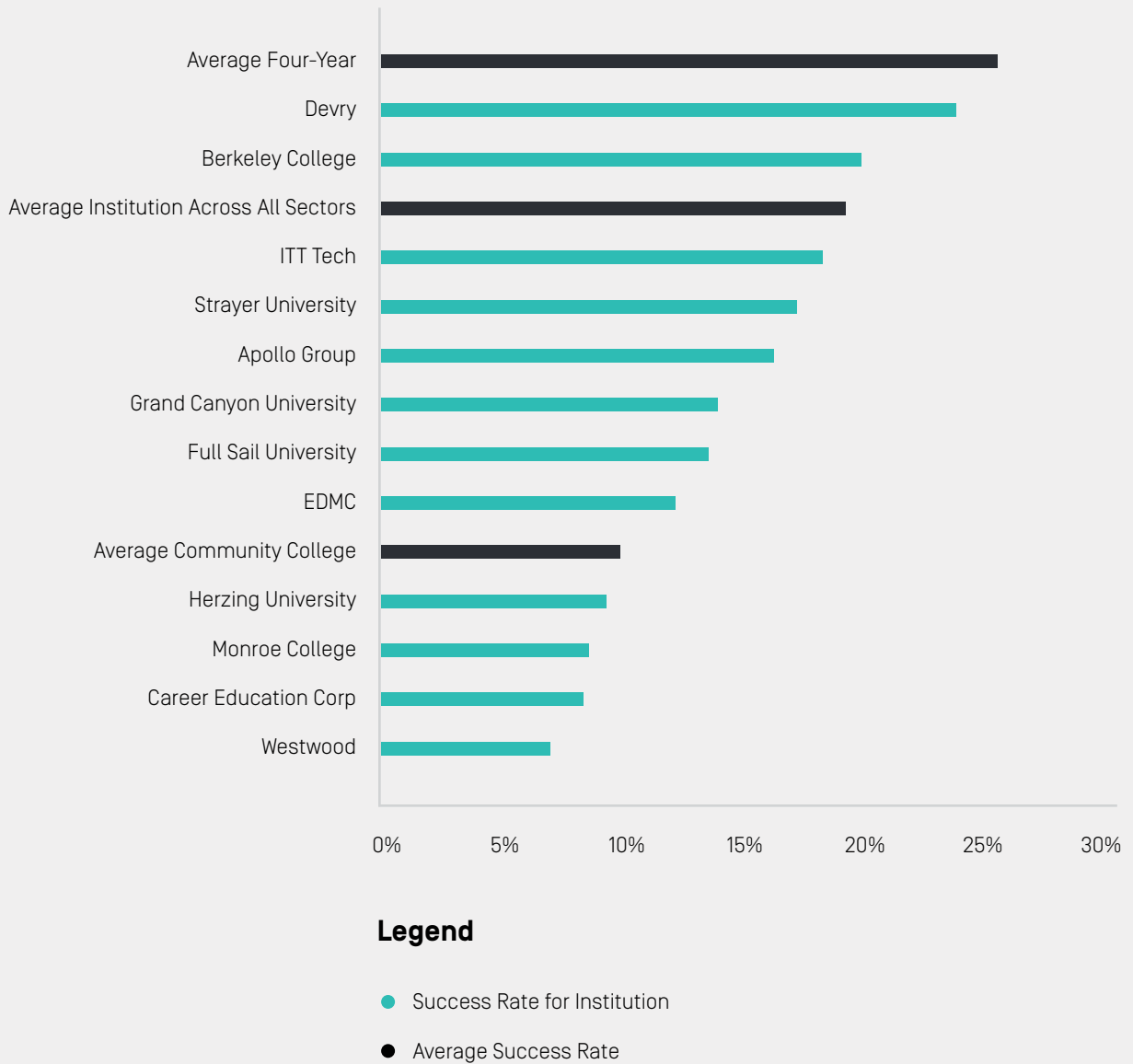
Last year, the large, publicly traded for-profit college corporation ITT Technical Institute closed its doors.⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Education sanctions, spurred by the chain’s deceptive marketing campaigns and falsified job placement rates, as well as actions taken by the colleges’ accreditor, proved insurmountable.⁶⁵ But ITT Tech was not an isolated incident. Many of the hundreds of for-profit colleges that operate in the U.S. leave students hamstrung, bearing large debt loads with a worthless degree.⁶⁶ Unprepared for the workforce as promised, maxed out on their federal student loans and devoid of any further grant eligibility, students are sometimes even unable to start anew elsewhere.

In the Mobility Report Cards report, few of these poor outcomes are evident. Given the glut of negative press that for-profit colleges have received over the past decade, the new findings in the data have led some to question whether the for-profit sector has been unfairly scrutinized.

On the surface, the Mobility Report Cards’ study seems to suggest that for-profit institutions offer a viable path to the top rungs of the income ladder for students from low-income families (defined in the study as a college’s “success rate”). And as the charts below demonstrate, many of the large for-profit corporations even appear to perform better than, or at least on par with, the average public

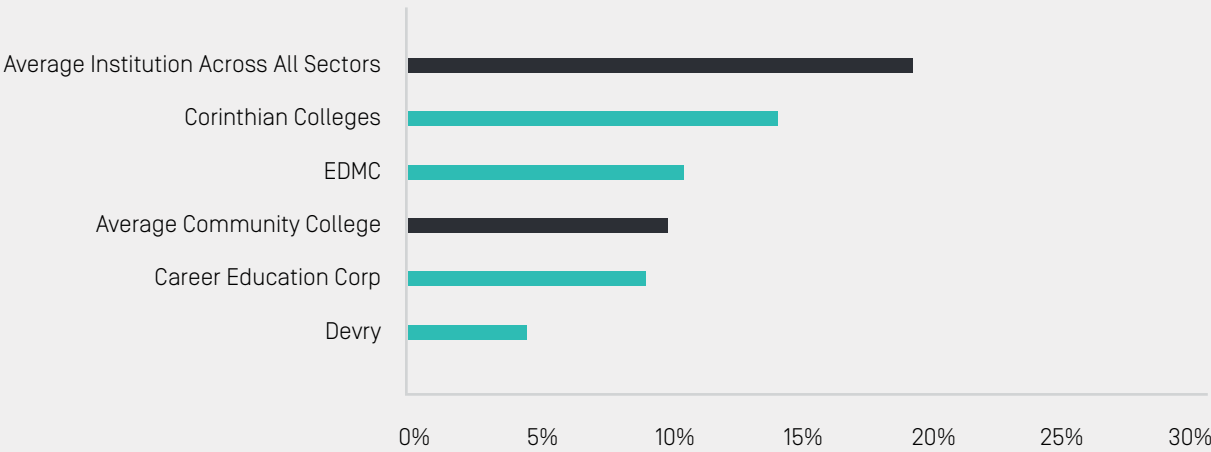
On the surface, the Mobility Report Cards study seems to suggest that for-profit institutions offer a viable path to the top rungs of the income ladder...Without a heavy dose of context, however, these findings could be largely misinterpreted.

Figure 4. Success Rates for Selected Four-Year Institutions



Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards

Figure 5. Success Rates for Selected Two-Year Institutions



Legend

- Success Rate for Institution
- Average Success Rate

Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project's Mobility Report Cards

community college in this regard.⁶⁷ Without a heavy dose of context, however, these findings could be largely misinterpreted.

While the study offers a helpful glimpse into how well four-year public and private nonprofit colleges and universities promote economic mobility, it falls prey to two major blind-spots with respect to open enrollment institutions like for-profits and community colleges. First, few of the students who attended open enrollment or nonselective for-profit colleges and community colleges were included in the study's preferred estimates. Like community colleges, for-profit schools tend to attract older, adult students. These students don't show up in the Mobility Report Card data, which only include outcomes for traditional-aged students who attended college anytime between 1999 and 2013. Since 60 percent of students at for-profits in 2000 were above the age of 22, only a sliver fell into this age group.⁶⁸ Needless to say, success rates hardly offer a full picture of how well for-profit colleges are serving many of their students.

To be sure, the data can still be used to identify some of the worst-performing institutions.⁶⁹ Traditional-aged students usually face fewer hurdles in pursuing a degree than their older peers do; so if a college fails to promote even those who are generally the easiest to educate, then more vulnerable, older students are probably not faring well either. But the reverse isn't true; it's hard to say that a school is serving its students well based only on an unrepresentative fraction, particularly when the students included are likely the highest-performing.

Recent findings from the U.S. Department of Education provide a more complete view of how well for-profit college graduates fare after leaving these institutions. The Department found that close to one-third of those who graduated from a for-profit certificate program earned less annual income than a full-time minimum wage worker did in 2015.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, only about 1 in 7 of those graduating with a certificate from a community college faced the same difficulties.⁷¹

The Mobility Report Cards study also doesn't provide much context about for-profit colleges, which tend to enroll more low-income students, charge higher prices, and result in greater levels of student indebtedness than traditional colleges.⁷² For example, the Mobility Report Card data show that the average success rates for traditional-aged students are similar at for-profit colleges and community colleges (See chart in Chapter 1.1, on p.11). However, community college students tend to graduate with much less debt than for-profit college students. As a result, their net income is higher than it would be if they were making larger (or any) loan payments every month. As this example demonstrates, two colleges with identical success rates in the Mobility Report Card data but with significantly different prices could have very different rates of economic mobility.

Despite their prices, defenders of the for-profit sector often argue that their institutions are doing a valuable service by educating low-income students. It's certainly true that these institutions primarily serve low-income students. The Mobility Report Card data show that the average two-year for-profit college takes in more students from the lowest economic quintile than any other sector of higher education. Meanwhile, according to Education Department data, nearly 75 percent of students at for-profit colleges receive a Pell Grant, 20 percentage points higher than those at community colleges.⁷³ However, the fact that so many low-income students are going to these institutions is not necessarily a good thing, given the long history of fraud and abuse in this sector and persistent allegations that many of these schools provide a substandard education.⁷⁴

In other words, while these institutions provide college access to low-income students, the question that must be asked is "access to what?" That answer cannot be found in the Mobility Report Cards.

4.2 STARTED FROM THE BOTTOM—AND STILL HERE: FINDING THE BAD APPLES IN THE MOBILITY REPORT CARDS

By Michael Prebil



The Mobility Report Cards study confirms the potential of American higher education to provide opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. But the data also reveal some of higher education's most devastating failures: when going to college means going nowhere, or moving down rather than up.

The report's mobility superstars, such as the City University of New York and California State University, welcome a sizable proportion of poorer students and do well at boosting their earnings potential. Name-brand schools like Harvard and Yale that are good in the sense of their educational quality and prestige don't necessarily score well in mobility. That's because these schools, which give their students a real leg up, enroll only a small number of low-income students. On the other hand,

some schools with low mobility scores do well in terms of providing access to the most financially needy students, but then leave them stuck in place or worse off—drowning in debt without the training they need to improve their lives.

Though the Mobility Report Cards report spends more time discussing the impressive mobility results of less-prestigious public institutions and the middling performance of the Ivy Plus elite private institutions, the Mobility Report Card data can also teach us a lot about the worst of the worst schools: those that utterly fail to live up to the equalizing ideal of American higher education.

In my estimation, the worst schools are the ones that tend to indebt their students while also failing

The Mobility Report Cards' study confirms the potential of American higher education to provide opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. But the data also reveal some of higher education's most devastating failures.

Table 4. The Mobility Report Cards' 15 Worst Schools

	Institution or group name	Home state	Success rate	Mobility rate	3-year repayment rate***	Net price [2013-14]
1	Prism Career Institute	NJ, PA	0%	0%	17.50%	\$23,081
2	Sunstate Academy	FL	0%	0%	25.90%	\$29,954
3	Fortis College (Richmond, VA)	15 states and online	0.56%	0.13%	19.50%	\$41,140
4	Dorsey Business Schools	MI	0.12%	0.02%	21.20%	\$21,142
5	International Career Development Center*	CA	2.75%	1.27%	12.40%	\$23,870
6	Southeastern College	FL	2.23%	0.62%	22.10%	\$21,868**
7	Brookline College	AZ, NM	3.78%	1.40%	10.40%	\$25,566
8	Salter College	MA	1.20%	0.36%	28.60%	\$26,025
9	Argosy University (EDMC)	13 states and online	1.29%	0.09%	22.70%	\$17,815
10	South University (EDMC)	9 states and online	5.20%	1.40%	19.00%	\$26,886
11	Wichita Technical Institute	KS	2.04%	0.57%	20.60%	\$22,034
12	Antonelli College	OH, MS	3.61%	1.18%	16.00%	\$21,412
13	Brightwood College (formerly Texas School of Business) (Education Corporation)	8 states and online	1.70%	0.50%	16.50%	\$22,052
14	National College (formerly National College of Business and Technology)	6 states and online	2.18%	0.64%	11.10%	\$20,258
15	Carrington College (Mesa)	8 states and online	2.36%	0.66%	27.50%	\$21,229
	Nationwide [median]		15.78%	1.51%	42.60%	\$15,118

* Closed institution. ** Net price was not available for this institution through College Scorecard. The stated figure is the 2013-14 net price retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator. *** For 2013-14 and 2014-15.

to move them up the earnings ladder. To reflect that, I have developed a ranking system incorporating the net price of enrollment that colleges charge, student loan repayment rates, and mobility indicators from the Mobility Report Cards. Beginning with the primary data file used for the Mobility Report Cards, I ranked each institution's success and mobility rates from best to worst, and assigned them a positive point value based on their rank.⁷⁵ I counted success and mobility for 30 percent each of the institutions' final rank.⁷⁶

The second two components of our rankings, net prices and three-year repayment rates, come from the College Scorecard, a consumer web tool that the Education Department developed to help students and their families make better-informed decisions when choosing colleges.⁷⁷

The three-year repayment rate, pooled from 2013-14 and 2014-15, is the proportion of student borrowers who have paid down at least a dollar of their loan balance and are not in default within three years of entering repayment. It's a good measure of whether an institution's graduates get on steady enough financial footing to pay down the debt they took out to study, and provides insight into how well an institution's programs and credentials are valued in the labor market. For our rankings, schools earned points for having higher repayment rates but lost them for charging a higher net price, which is the institution's cost of attendance minus any grant or scholarship aid a student receives. The net price data, measured for the 2013-14 academic year, approximates the amount students and their families pay for tuition and living expenses, either out-of-pocket or through loans. These two measures each made up 20 percent of an institution's final score.⁷⁸

After compiling the rankings, I sorted out the bottom 15—schools that are loading their students with debt but not providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to get jobs that move them up the economic ladder.

Although these 15 schools are spread across the country, they have two things in common. First, they are all for-profit colleges, several being subsidiaries of the same parent company or networks unto themselves.⁷⁹ And second, despite the “university” in some of their names, they're all vocational schools, providing training in fields like culinary arts, criminology, cosmetology, massage therapy, medical assistance, and entrepreneurship, with little emphasis on broader career skills and often without transferrable college credit.

Private, for-profit schools with occupationally focused programs that promise to lead straight to a job are over-represented among schools that harm or fail to help students' economic mobility. It's no surprise that such schools abound, despite their abysmal records. The private, for-profit school sector has grown faster than any other over the past two decades, and apart from an unresponsive accreditation system and the now-endangered gainful employment regulations (which the Obama administration introduced to penalize schools that leave students heavily indebted and without the training they need to be get good jobs), there's very little to keep such institutions or their programs accountable.⁸⁰

The U.S. needs musicians, veterinary care technicians, and security guards, but it doesn't need legions of Americans with college credentials in those fields stuck with \$20,000 or \$30,000 in debt. Borrowers with that kind of debt don't need it either. As long as higher education is the only game in town for career training, greater accountability is needed to help students steer clear of costly options that would leave them no better off, or even worse off, than before they enrolled.



**CHAPTER 5: CAN THE
MOBILITY REPORT CARDS
EXPLAIN THE GENDER
WAGE GAP?**

5.1 MIND THE GAP: HOW HIGHER ED CONTRIBUTES TO GENDER WAGE DISPARITIES

By Kim Dancy

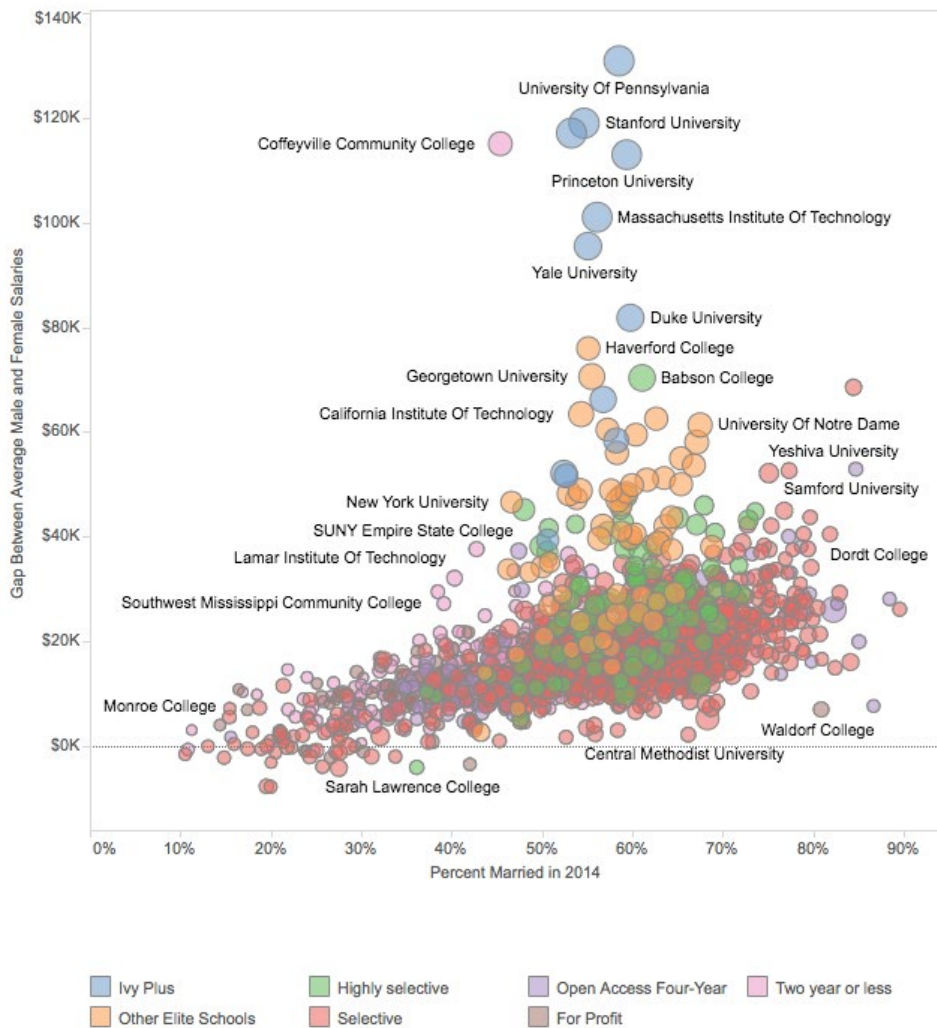


Support for the notion that systemic gaps exist between men’s and women’s earnings tends to fall along ideological lines. The American Association of University Women has estimated that women get paid 23 percent less than their male colleagues, while the conservative American Enterprise Institute has called the idea a “statistical fairy tale” promoted by a “feminist propaganda machine.”⁸¹ Yet, the Mobility Report Cards study shows that there are significant gaps in the earnings between men and women who attend the same colleges, raising new questions about higher education’s contribution to wage inequality between the sexes.

For example, do earnings gaps stem from women at certain schools having a greater preference for leaving the workforce after they get married to raise children? Or are these gaps the result of differences in women’s major choices, with some schools more effectively encouraging women to pursue high-paying but traditionally masculine fields like business and engineering? And to what extent is labor market discrimination a factor? We can explore these questions using alternative measures of income from the Mobility Report Cards, which separate the average earnings of female students from those of their male peers—measured in their

Do earnings gaps stem from women at certain schools having a greater preference for leaving the workforce after they get married to raise children? Or are these gaps the result of differences in women’s major choices, with some schools more effectively encouraging women to pursue high-paying but traditionally masculine fields like business and engineering?

Figure 6. Gap Between Average Male and Female Salaries vs Percent Married



early 30s—and report on marriage behavior among former students at different institutions.

In doing so, we see clearly that the size of the earnings gaps between men and women is strongly associated with the selectivity and prestige of the institution, with more elite schools showing larger gaps between the sexes. In general, schools whose former students earn more also have higher gender gaps. This effect is most pronounced within the prestigious universities that the researchers classified as Ivy Plus schools. At the low end,

University of Chicago students of both genders had average earnings of around \$92,000 and a gap of around \$39,000. In contrast, the average earnings of University of Pennsylvania students were over \$172,000, while the gap between male and female students was around \$131,000.

Because the difference in the share of students at these schools who are married is relatively small (51 percent at the University of Chicago, and 59 percent at the University of Pennsylvania), it's unlikely that these gaps emerge as a result of women choosing to

leave the labor force after they tie the knot. Instead, it appears that the degree mix across genders could explain the variation in earnings gaps at these institutions. Discrimination in the labor market is also a possibility, though it seems unlikely that individuals' experience of discrimination would hinge on whether they attended one elite private university instead of another.

Across all Ivy Plus schools, female students earn \$85,000 less than their male peers by the time they reach their early 30s, on average. The wage gap is significantly smaller among those who attended two- and four-year for-profit schools, where students of both genders earn much less, at around \$30,000 per year. Women who went to these schools earn about \$10,000 less than men each year.

Across less-selective institutions, it appears that some of the variation in earnings that occurs is the result of women leaving the labor force once they are married. In general, colleges with higher percentages of former students who are married tend to experience higher gaps in earnings, even at institutions with similar levels of prestige and selectivity. For example, at Brigham Young University–Idaho, an open access, four-year college, 85 percent of former students are married, and the average gap between male and female students is around \$53,000. On the other side of the spectrum, only 10 percent of former students from Atlanta Metropolitan State College, another open-access, four-year school, are married, and the average pay is higher for female students.

The less selective the schools are, the stronger the relationship between marriage rates and earning gaps tends to be. That these gaps are correlated with marriage rates likely indicates a preference among female students who marry to leave the labor force to take on more traditional roles. In contrast, at Ivy Plus and other elite schools, the relationship appears to fade away. The marriage rates for students at top colleges and universities are fairly consistent across institutions, but the earnings gaps are large.

As policymakers increasingly move to use post-graduate earnings as a marker of institutional quality, it's important to keep these gender pay disparities in mind and to evaluate why they exist.⁸² For example, if women are earning less because they are choosing to leave the labor market to raise a family, policy interventions are likely not an appropriate solution. On the other hand, if women are feeling discouraged from pursuing male-dominated fields, schools could develop ways to directly address the concerns of these women, such as by actively recruiting and celebrating women in STEM.⁸³

While focus on the wage gap has become something of an ideological football, understanding the context behind how these patterns evolve has important implications for how we think about equity between the sexes. We cannot identify outright employer discrimination from these data alone, but we can shed light on the societal factors that may be limiting women's choices even when discrimination is not present. For instance, if women are choosing lower-paying fields because of harassment or hostility in disciplines where they otherwise would have excelled, that's a problem for both women and the economy as a whole.⁸⁴ Similarly, if financial factors like the lack of available child care are leading women to choose to leave promising careers after they marry, it could be that they would be better off in the long-run by working instead.

Women and men alike should be able to make the decisions that are best for themselves and their families, and should be unconstrained by both pay discrimination and the societal pressures at hand.

CONCLUSION



As higher education researcher Kelly Rosinger writes in this paper, the Equality of Opportunity Project’s Mobility Report Card data “provide the clearest picture we have to date of the role that colleges play in access, success, and upward mobility.”

There’s some very good news in the Mobility Report Cards study. First and foremost, there are four-year colleges that are doing an excellent job of providing social mobility to the low-income students they enroll. Some less prominent public universities are real workhorses, enrolling a substantial number of low-income students and propelling a significant share of them into the top 20 percent of the income scale. Ivy League and other extremely selective institutions don’t enroll many low-income students. But they tend to do a tremendous job with those they do enroll, helping hoist them to the top of the ladder.

Meanwhile, the study clearly shows that when low-income students are given the opportunity to attend rigorous colleges, they do at least as well as their more affluent peers. This study should put an end to the dangerous myth that even the most highly qualified, low-income students can’t hack it at top colleges.

And although this paper sounds the alarm about declining access at public universities, our analysis shows that about a quarter of these institutions are becoming more accessible by enrolling more low-income students and fewer high-income ones than they were in the late 1990s.

Still, there is also a lot of bad news in the Mobility Report Card data. Just as in elementary and secondary education, low-income undergraduates are most likely to attend the schools with the least resources and worst outcomes, putting them at a huge disadvantage to their wealthier counterparts. And the news that the overwhelming majority of selective public universities are becoming less accessible—including those that have historically given low-income students a leg up—is extremely alarming.

So what should be done?

First, we need even better data about students and colleges. The Mobility Report Cards are unfortunately incomplete. They don’t tell us anything about a huge group of students: those who enter college as adults. As Clare McCann argues in this paper, we need a student-level data network that would allow the U.S. Department of Education

“to provide the most comprehensive information to students and accurately represent institutions’ outcomes.”

We also need a better way to measure a college’s commitment to serving low-income students than simply reporting the percentage of Pell Grant recipients they enroll. As Ernest Ezeugo and McCann write, the federal government should “mandate that colleges disclose the share of students at their institutions who receive the maximum Pell Grant, the share who receive at least the average Pell Grant in a given year, and those who receive the minimum award.” These data “could help policymakers, researchers, and the public better understand whether colleges are truly committed to helping those with the most financial need.”

At New America, we have offered multiple proposals to make college more accessible for low-income students. In our “Undermining Pell” reports, we’ve proposed that the federal government provide Pell Grant bonuses to financially strapped four-year colleges that serve a substantial share of Pell Grant recipients and graduate at least half their students—with the aim of having these schools use this money to boost their institutional aid budgets and reduce the net prices they charge the most financially needy students.⁸⁵ We’ve also proposed that the government require colleges that enroll a relatively

small share of low-income students but charge them high net prices to match at least a portion of the Pell Grant dollars they receive.

In “Starting from Scratch,” we offered a far more ambitious plan that would replace the country’s federal financial aid system with a new federal-state partnership program that would eliminate unmet financial need for all students.⁸⁶ Instead, the price they would pay would be limited to their Expected Family Contribution, the amount the government determines a household can afford to contribute toward the education of their children.

We don’t pretend we have all the answers. Plenty of higher education researchers and groups have offered their own proposals to make college more affordable and accessible for low-income students.

But first federal and state policymakers need to take notice of the major problems we have highlighted. Catching their attention appears to be our biggest challenge. The amazing work that the researchers at the Equality of Opportunity Project have done should serve as a wake-up call to them. Are they listening?

Notes

- 1 Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, and Danny Yagan, *Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility*, (The Equality of Opportunity Project, January 2017), http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/papers/coll_mrc_paper.pdf.
- 2 David Leonhardt, “America’s Great Working-Class Colleges,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/opinion/sunday/americas-great-working-class-colleges.html?mcubz=0&r=0>; and Gregor Aisch, Larry Buchanan, Amanda Cox, and Kevin Quealy, “Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/18/upshot/some-colleges-have-more-students-from-the-top-1-percent-than-the-bottom-60.html?mcubz=0>.
- 3 The whole series can be found at <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/higher-education/moving-on-up/>.
- 4 Stephen Burd, *The Out-of-State Student Arms Race: How Public Universities Use Merit Aid to Recruit Nonresident Students*, (Washington, DC: New America, May 2015), <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/3120-out-of-state-student-arms-race/OutOfStateArmsRace-Final.b93c2211cdfb4c3da169d668fbb67cc1.pdf>.
- 5 Stephen Burd, “The Troubling Use of ‘Merit Aid’ at Public Flagships and Research Universities,” *The Hechinger Report*, April 27, 2016, <http://hechingerreport.org/troubling-use-merit-aid-public-flagships-research-universities/>.
- 6 See page 5 of *Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility*, http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/papers/coll_mrc_paper.pdf.
- 7 “Percentage of Recent High School Completers Enrolled in 2-year and 4-year Colleges, by Income Level: 1975 through 2015,” Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_302.30.asp.
- 8 Libby Nelson, “Why Justice Scalia Thinks Affirmative Action Hurts Black Students, and Why He’s Wrong,” Vox, December 10, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2015/12/10/9885594/scalia-affirmative-action-mismatch>.
- 9 Krista Mattern and Jeff N. Wyatt, “Student Choice of College: How Far Do Students Go for an Education?” *Journal of College Admission* (Spring 2009): 18-29, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ838811.pdf>.
- 10 Alexandria Walton Radford, “‘No Point in Applying’: Why Poor Students Are Missing at Top Colleges,” *The Atlantic*, September 16, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/no-point-in-applying-why-poor-students-are-missing-at-top-colleges/279699/>.
- 11 “Quick Facts About Private Colleges,” National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://member.naicu.edu/about/page/quick-facts-about-private-colleges#aid>.
- 12 Tamara Hiler, Lanae Erickson Hatalsky, and Megan John, *Incomplete: The Quality Crisis at America’s Private Non-Profit Colleges*, (Washington, DC: Third Way, May 26, 2016), <http://www.thirdway.org/report/incomplete-the-quality-crisis-at-americas-private-non-profit-colleges/>.
- 13 Paul Fain, “Poverty and Merit,” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/12/high-achieving-low-income-students-remain-rare-most-selective-colleges/>.
- 14 Angela Pupino, “The Hidden Costs Colleges Don’t Want You to Know About,” *Quartz*, June 22, 2016, <https://qz.com/712990/the-hidden-costs->

[colleges-dont-want-you-to-know-about/](#).

15 Stephen Burd, *Undermining Pell: How College Compete for Wealthy Students and Leave the Low-Income Behind*, (Washington, DC: New America, May 2013), <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/undermining-pell/>.

16 Catharine Hill, “Become Need-Blind? For Colleges, That’s the Wrong Question,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 10, 2012, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Become-Need-Blind-For/136191/>.

17 Jennifer Giancola and Richard D. Kahlenberg, “True Merit: Ensuring Our Brightest Students Have Access to Our Best Colleges and Universities,” (Lansdowne, VA: Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, January 2016), http://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/JKCF_True_Merit_Report.pdf.

18 Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, “Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion,” (working paper 17633, National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2011), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17633.pdf>.

19 School-by-school average earnings data are included in the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard, available at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>.

20 Andrew S. Belasco, Kelly O. Rosinger, and James C. Hearn, “The Test-Optional Movement at America’s Selective Liberal Arts Colleges: A Boon for Equity of Something Else?” *American Educational Research Association’s Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 206-223, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0162373714537350>.

21 “Form 1098-T,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, 2017, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1098t.pdf>.

22 Clare McCann and Amy Laitinen, “College

Blackout: How the Higher Education Lobby Fought to Keep Students in the Dark,” (Washington, DC: New America, March 2014), <https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/college-blackout.pdf>.

23 Executive Office of the President of the United States, *Using Federal Data to Measure and Improve the Performance of U.S. Institutions of Higher Education*, updated January 2017, <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/assets/UsingFederalDataToMeasureAndImprovePerformance.pdf>.

24 Nicholas Hillman and Taylor Weichman, *Education Deserts: The Continued Significance of “Place” in the Twenty-First Century*, (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2016), <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Education-Deserts-The-Continued-Significance-of-Place-in-the-Twenty-First-Century.pdf>.

25 A student is considered to be dependent on their families unless they meet one of the following criteria: They are 24 or older; an orphan or a ward of the court; a veteran; a graduate student; an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or at risk of being homeless; or married or have children.

26 Stephen Burd, *Undermining Pell: Volume III—The News Keeps Getting Worse for Low-Income Students*, (Washington, DC: New America, March 2016), <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12813-undermining-pell-volume-iii/Undermining-Pell-III-3.15bba9018bb54ad48f850f6f3a62a9fc.pdf>.

27 “History & Traditions,” College of William & Mary, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.wm.edu/about/history/>.

28 “Cool Facts,” College of William & Mary, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.wm.edu/about/history/coolfacts/>; and “Student Achievement,” College of William & Mary, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.wm.edu/sites/sacscoc/student-achievement/index.php>.

29 Clare McCann and Amy Laitinen, *College Blackout: How the Higher Education Lobby Fought to Keep Students in the Dark*, (Washington, DC: New America, March 2014), <https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/college-blackout.pdf>.

30 Stephen Burd, *Undermining Pell: Volume III—The News Keeps Getting Worse for Low-Income Students*, (Washington, DC: New America, March 2016), <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12813-undermining-pell-volume-iii/Undermining-Pell-III-3.15bba9018bb54ad48f850f6f3a62a9fc.pdf>.

31 Only California State University at Los Angeles and Pace University in New York ranked higher than Stony Brook. The other top 10 institutions that had the highest mobility rates were Technical Career Institutes, University of Texas at Pan American, the City University of New York system, Glendale Community College, South Texas College, California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, and the University of Texas at El Paso.

32 Selective public universities include public colleges that Chetty et al. include among other elite schools, as well as highly selective publics and selective publics. I included only schools that had data specific to the individual institution, rather than entire systems. In addition, I left out schools that didn't include data for the 1991 birth cohort who were part of the Class of 2013. Data came from "Online Data Table 3: Baseline Longitudinal Estimates by College and Child's Cohort," available at <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/data/>.

33 The average 4.6-percentage-point drop is from the 245 selective public universities that reduced the share of students they enrolled from the bottom 40 percent. Overall, the 380 institutions experienced an average reduction of students from this group of 1.6 percentage points.

34 The average 5.4-percentage-point increase is from the 243 selective public universities that boosted the share of students they enrolled from

the top 20 percent. Overall, the 380 institutions experienced an average increase of students in this group of 2.2 percentage points.

35 Martin Kurzweil and D. Derek Wu, *Building a Pathway to Student Success at Georgia State University*, (New York: Ithaka S+R, April 23, 2015), <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/publications/building-a-pathway-to-student-success-at-georgia-state-university/>.

36 Overall, the 380 institutions experienced an average reduction in the share of students in the third quintile (with family incomes between \$37,000 and about \$65,000 in current dollars) of 0.8 percentage points.

37 Matthew Quirk, "The Best Class Money Can Buy," *The Atlantic*, November 2005: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/11/the-best-class-money-can-buy/304307/>.

38 Stephen Burd, *The Out-of-State Student Arms Race: How Public Universities Use Merit Aid to Recruit Nonresident Students*, (Washington, DC: New America, May 2015), <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/3120-out-of-state-student-arms-race/OutOfStateArmsRace-Final.b93c2211cdfb4c3da169d668fbb67cc1.pdf>.

39 Ozan Jaquette, Bradley R. Curs, and Julie R. Posselt, "Tuition Rich, Mission Poor: Nonresident Enrollment Growth and the Socioeconomic and Racial Composition of Public Research Universities," *Journal of Higher Education* 87, no. 5 (September 1, 2016): 635-673, <https://arizona.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/tuition-rich-mission-poor-nonresident-enrollment-growth-and-the-s>.

40 I included only flagships that had data specific to the individual schools. In 18 states, the Mobility Report Cards study wasn't able to disaggregate data for a specific institution, but instead included data for an entire state public university system—or even multiple unaffiliated public universities in a state. For that reason, I didn't include data from Alaska,

Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

41 Stephen Burd, “The Troubling Use of ‘Merit Aid’ at Public Flagships and Research Universities,” *The Hechinger Report*, April 27, 2016, <http://hechingerreport.org/troubling-use-merit-aid-public-flagships-research-universities/>.

42 Ibid.

43 Chris D. Hutt, Nathaniel J. Bray, Jennifer L. Jones, Kelly Leach, and Jerome Ward, “Enrolling the Tide: A Case Study of Purposeful Campus Enrollment Increases,” *American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers’ College and University* 85, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 10-17, https://aacrao-web.s3.amazonaws.com/files/mjL2tlReRYqLI2tD6sly_CUJ8504.pdf.

44 Melissa Brown, “Out-of-State Students Outnumber Alabama Residents at the University of Alabama,” *The Huntsville Times*, September 17, 2014, http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2014/09/fewer_alabama_residents_attend.html.

45 Besides the University of Alabama, these schools include: the University of Montana (96 percent went to non-need-based aid in 2014-15), the University of Wyoming (92 percent), University of Utah (82 percent), University of Idaho (76 percent), West Virginia University (74 percent), the University at Buffalo (69 percent), the University of Arkansas (63 percent), the University of South Carolina (59 percent), Indiana University (56 percent), the University of Iowa (55 percent), and Rutgers University (54 percent).

46 Only the University of Utah doesn’t fit the pattern, as it has brought in a slightly larger share of low-income students since the late 1990s. To see which states had flagships that were excluded from the analysis, see FN 40.

47 Stephen Burd, “The Troubling Use of ‘Merit Aid’ at Public Flagships and Research Universities,” *The Hechinger Report*, April 27, 2016, <http://hechingerreport.org/troubling-use-merit-aid-public-flagships-research-universities/>.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Stephen Burd, *Undermining Pell: Volume III—The News Keeps Getting Worse for Low-Income Students*, (Washington, DC: New America, March 2016), <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12813-undermining-pell-volume-iii/Undermining-Pell-III-3.15bba9018bb54ad48f850f6f3a62a9fc.pdf>.

51 Merit aid data come from Section H of Stony Brook University’s Common Data Set reports: http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/irpe/fact_book/common_data_set/index.

52 Ibid.

53 Simran Gupta, “International Students an Asset to University,” *Stony Brook University’s The Statesman*, September 4, 2014, <https://www.sbstatesman.com/2014/09/04/international-students-an-asset-to-university/>.

54 Bethany Bump, “State Aid Called Key to SUNY Cost Issue,” *Times Union*, February 8, 2016, <http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/State-aid-called-key-to-SUNY-cost-issue-6816486.php>.

55 Stony Brook reports data on first-time, full-time freshman fall enrollment to the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

56 Ibid.

57 Data on the share of international students at Stony Brook from China came from the university’s “Fact Book (2017-18),” looking at five-year trends in fall enrollment: <http://www.stonybrook.edu/>

commcms/irpe/fact_book/data_and_reports/files/enrollment/FallProfileTrend.pdf.

58 Data that Stony Brook reports on first-time, full-time freshman fall enrollment to IPEDS.

59 Cost-of-attendance data are from the U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator: <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=stony+brook&s=all&id=196097#expenses>.

60 Data that Stony Brook reports on first-time, full-time freshman fall enrollment to IPEDS.

61 David Leonhardt, "America's Great Working-Class Colleges," *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/opinion/sunday/americas-great-working-class-colleges.html?mcubz=0&r=0>.

62 Since the late 1990s, the share of students in the third quintile at City College of New York has grown by 6.2 percentage points, the fourth quintile by 3.4 percentage points, and the fifth quintile by 6.3 percentage points. However, the share of students in the top 10 percent of the class has grown by less than 2 percentage points.

63 Matthew Quirk, "The Best Class Money Can Buy," *The Atlantic*, November 2005: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/11/the-best-class-money-can-buy/304307/>.

64 Ashley A. Smith, "The End for ITT Tech," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 7, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/07/itt-tech-shuts-down-all-campus>.

65 Letter from U.S. Department of Education to Kevin M. Modany, CEO, ITT Educational Services, Inc., August 25, 2016, <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/itt-letter-08252016.pdf>.

66 "Cumulative Debt of Bachelor's Degree Recipients by Sector over Time," *Trends in Student Aid 2016*, College Board, <https://trends.collegeboard.org/>.

collegeboard.org/student-aid/figures-tables/cumulative-debt-bachelors-recipients-sector-time.

67 Methodology: The success rates for large for-profit college corporations were constructed by assigning individual institutions to the companies that operate them. We created a weighted average for each company using the success rate and the student count for the individual institutions they own. Calculations of total student enrollment above the age of 22 were derived from the 2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS).

68 Authors' calculations using NPSAS: 2000.

69 See the next entry in this collection: Michael Prebil, "Started From the Bottom – and Still Here: Finding the Bad Apples in the Mobility Report Cards."

70 "Education Department Releases New Graduate Earnings Data for Career College Programs," U.S. Department of Education press release, November 17, 2016: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/education-department-releases-new-graduate-earnings-data-career-college-programs>.

71 Ibid.

72 Information on the prices for-profit colleges charge can be found in College Board's *Trends in College Pricing 2016*. And information on student indebtedness at for-profit colleges can be found in the College Board's *Trends in Student Aid 2016*. Both are available at <https://trends.collegeboard.org/>.

73 "Percentage of full-time and part-time undergraduates receiving federal aid, by aid program and control and level of institution: 2007-08 and 2011-12," Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_331.90.asp?current=yes.

74 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,

Labor, and Pensions, *For Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success*, 2012, https://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/Contents.pdf.

75 The college access, success, and social mobility data that are used to compile the rankings come from the Mobility Report Cards Online Data Table 1 on the Equality of Opportunity program's resource page: <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/data/>.

76 To reward institutions that selectively improved access among lower-income students in the net price component of the ranking, institutions were ranked by the product of: (overall net price) * 1+(low-income net price/overall net price), where low-income net price represents the College Scorecard estimate of the average price paid by students from families earning less than \$30,000 per year.

77 "College Scorecard," U.S. Department of Education, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>.

78 Coordination of the College Scorecard and Mobility Report Cards data sets was accomplished using the research team's identifier crosswalks (Online Data Table 11 of the Mobility Report Cards resource page), which allowed them to match individual campuses with the larger institutional groups sometimes used for financial reporting.

79 The results for these schools may even be worse than they look because most of these institutions primarily serve older students. As Ben Barrett wrote in "An Incomplete View of For-Profit Colleges," the Mobility Report Cards data include information on only traditional-aged students, who tend to "face fewer hurdles in pursuing a degree than their older peers do." As a result, "if a college fails to promote even those who are generally the easiest to educate, then the most vulnerable, older students are probably not faring well either."

80 For more on the for-profit college sector's growth, see "Undergraduate Enrollment," *The Condition of Education*, National Center for Education Statistics, last updated May 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp. For a critique of the accreditation system, read Kevin Carey, "Asleep at the Seal," *Washington Monthly*, March/April 2010, <http://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/marchapril-2010/asleep-at-the-seal/>. To learn more about the Trump administration's efforts to kill the gainful employment rule and reduce oversight of for-profit colleges, read Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, "Trump Administration's Delay of Rule to Regulate Career-Training Programs Sparks Protest," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/03/22/delay-of-rule-to-regulate-career-training-programs-sparks-protest/?utm_term=.95518981f661.

81 Mark J. Perry, "Some Thoughts on Equal Pay Day and the 23% Gender Pay Gap Myth," *AEIdeas* blog, American Enterprise Institute, April 11, 2016, <http://www.aei.org/publication/some-thoughts-on-equal-pay-day-and-the-23-gender-pay-gap-myth/>.

82 School-by-school average earnings data can be found in the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>.

83 Christianne Corbett and Catherine Hill, "Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing," (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women, March 2015), <http://www.aauw.org/research/solving-the-equation/>.

84 Liza Mundy, "Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?," *The Atlantic*, April 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/04/why-is-silicon-valley-so-awful-to-women/517788/>.

85 The net price is the amount students are charged after all grants and scholarships are taken into account.

86 Ben Barrett, Stephen Burd, Kevin Carey, Kim Dancy, Manuela Ekowo, Rachel Fishman, Alexander Holt, Amy Laitinen, Mary Alice McCarthy, and Iris Palmer, “Starting from Scratch: A New Federal and State Partnership in Higher Education,” (Washington, DC: New America, February 2016), <https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12616--463/Starting-From-Scratch.78d72818d45e4cf18327b0ff2bd8f85b.pdf>.



This report carries a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, which permits re-use of New America content when proper attribution is provided. This means you are free to share and adapt New America's work, or include our content in derivative works, under the following conditions:

- **Attribution.** You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

For the full legal code of this Creative Commons license, please visit creativecommons.org.

If you have any questions about citing or reusing New America content, please visit www.newamerica.org.

All photos in this report are supplied by, and licensed to, [shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com) unless otherwise stated. Photos from federal government sources are used under section 105 of the Copyright Act.

