

ISSUE SUMMARY:

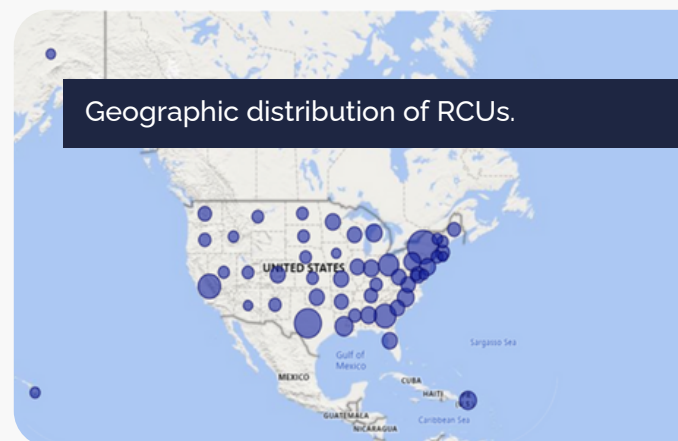
Regional Comprehensive Universities

There are 517 regional comprehensive universities (RCUs) in the United States across 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories that collectively educate 4.9 million increasingly diverse undergraduate students. They enroll a disproportionately higher percentage of the “new majority” in public four-year higher education, students who may be low-income, first-generation, of color, working adults, and/or veterans.

- RCUs mainly confer bachelor's and master's degrees and a few doctorates.
- An estimated 53% of bachelor's-degree-seeking students at public four-year institutions attend one of the nation's 517 RCUs.
- RCUs award 65% of public, four-year bachelor's degrees in education each year. These institutions emphasize teaching over research, but their work is predominantly focused on applied research over primary research.
- They are recognized as “stewards of place” for their commitment to service and focus on the communities around their institutions and thus serve as academic, economic, and cultural centers. RCUs are true engines of upper economic mobility for their students and regions.

RCUs are challenging to define since they represent a wide collection of unique institutions with a common beginning. There is no agreed-upon set of data about these institutions that identify them as such (as there may be for liberal arts colleges, institutions that emphasize basic research, or institutions that serve a large percentage of identifiable students).

The word “comprehensive,” in RCUs, is a direct result of the evolution of these colleges and universities that began as teacher schools, or normal schools, in many communities across the country that have evolved to meet the distinctive education/workforce needs of each of their regions.



- More than 40% of students at AASCU-member RCUs receive a Pell Grant, and carry a slightly higher amount of debt at completion of their degrees when compared with all public four-year institutions.
- These institutions enroll a slightly smaller proportion of full-time students and have a higher average of incoming transfers, mostly from community colleges, when compared with other public four-year institutions.
- More than 80% of students at RCUs originate from a 50-mile radius of the institution and often live, work, and remain within these regions upon graduation.

RCU OUTCOMES

RCUs enroll a higher proportion of in-state students and award upward of 50% of all undergraduate degrees annually.

However, trends in state disinvestments, changes in the number and the demographics of students, shifts in the technology required to teach, an increasing backlog in infrastructure maintenance costs, and a lack of direct federal investments in RCUs, compared with other parts of public higher education, have resulted in a challenging environment in terms of access and degree completion for these colleges and universities and their students.

- RCUs have a lower first- to second-year student retention rate and have a smaller average four-year graduation rate when compared with other public four-year universities.
- However, RCUs remain engines of upward mobility. The top 10 institutions on Third Way's Economic Mobility Index are RCUs.

MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS AT RCUS

RCUs comprise 220 public minority-serving colleges and universities.

- 90 Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs)
- 68 Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)
- 40 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs)
- 9 predominantly Black institutions (PBIs).
- 9 Native American Serving Non-Tribal institutions (NASNTIs)
- 4 Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions (ANNHSIs)

AMONG AASCU MEMBERS

<\$9K

Average yearly tuition for in-state, full-time undergraduates at AASCU institutions.

46%

Percentage of HSI-eligible institutions that are AASCU members.

42%

Percentage of public, four-year bachelor's degrees that are awarded by AASCU institutions each year.

3 million+

Number of students that receive an affordable, high-quality college education from AASCU institutions.

95%

Percentage of public HBCUs that are AASCU members.