



# AASCU on the Hill

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Delivering America's Promise

## Regional Comprehensive Universities (RCUs)

There are 517 Regional Comprehensive Universities (RCUs) in the United States across 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories and they 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 517 RCUs. 65% of public, four-year bachelor’s degrees in education are awarded by RCUs 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

### Geographic Distribution of RCUs



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 who emphasize basic research, or 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.

41 percent of students at AASCU member RCUs receive a Pell Grant when compared to all public four-year institutions and carry a slightly higher amount of debt at completion of their degrees. 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 to other public four-year institutions. More than 80 percent of students at RCUs originate from a 50-mile radius of the institution and often stay within these regions upon graduation.

## RCU Outcomes

RCUs enroll a higher proportion of in-state students and award upwards of 50 percent 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 lack of a direct federal investments in RCUs, compared to other parts of public higher education, have resulted in a challenging access and degree completion environment for the 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 to other public four-year universities. However, RCUs are engines of upward mobility. The top 10 institutions on Third Way's Economic Mobility Index are RCUs.

## Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) at RCUs

**RCUs comprise 220 public minority-serving colleges and universities.**

- 90 Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs).
- 68 Asian-American and Native American-serving institutions (AANAPISIs).
- 40 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).
- 9 predominantly Black institutions (PBIs).
- 9 Native-American Non-Tribal serving institutions (NANTSIs).
- 4 Alaska-Native and Native Hawaiian serving institutions (ANNASIs).