

Greater Philadelphia 2020 College Rankings

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Summary

The current global pandemic has shifted the landscape for nearly every sector imaginable. We have heard the phrase “new normal” ad nauseam, without any concrete concept of what this state of modern normalcy actually resembles. Our pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) economic structures, political landscapes, and business models have all been thrown into flux and in response we are all adapting to a new normal. Academic institutions also are beginning to shift their models, if not reimagine these models in entirety amid COVID-19.

When the *Social Innovations Journal* first published our [“Greater Philadelphia College Rankings”](#) in 2018, we sought to nudge the higher education conversation towards an increasingly elusive topic: value. What institutions best help students move up the economic ladder? Which schools provide the greatest return on investment? Which schools are particularly effective at taking students facing the most disadvantages and support their climb to the highest rungs of societal achievement?

By the directive of our advisory board, we focused our [2020 Greater Philadelphia Social Innovations Awards](#) in the Higher Education Category around Social Mobility. While our ranking criteria and methodology remains largely the same from 2018, our world has shifted considerably since that time. Although we updated our key indicators for 2020, the institutions that strategically focused on social mobility in 2018 remain rock steady and still rank high in that category, serving as a model for other institutions looking to survive societal turbulence and remain steadfast in their commitment to demonstrate unparalleled value to students. Years, not months, are required to place social mobility, racial equity, and long-term economic returns for students at the core of a college, university, or trade school’s mission. These institutions are driven by these goals and serve as a hopeful horizon for any academic leader, trustee, alumnus, student, or parent seeking to chart a new path forward for the higher education journey of students.

We have learned that the best correlation for individuals to earn family sustainable wages is either a higher education degree or a vocational certificate tied directly to a trade. Without a higher education degree or vocational certificate, we have learned that individuals are often “stuck” in the cycle of poverty due to the fact that if they successfully increase their earning potential their public benefit subsidies decrease at the same rate thereby keeping them poor. In a recent study, we learned that in order to move out of poverty an individual with dependents needs to earn the equivalent of \$22-\$25 per hour. Yet, persons earning between minimum wage and \$22-\$25 per hour for the most part continue to be impoverished because as their wages increase their public subsidies decrease. Once a person earns above \$22-\$25/hour they can transition from being reliant on the

system to becoming an independent contributor to society. Upon researching jobs that pay \$22-\$25 per hour we learned that most require a higher education degree or vocational certificate.

Why College Rankings

Understanding the above facts, we concluded that one of the most effective and sustainable models to address poverty is by helping individuals obtain a college degree. However, given that most impoverished or low-income individuals experience significant barriers to attending college we ranked Greater Philadelphia's colleges based on criteria that most impact low-income individuals' access to higher education including: affordability; social mobility; graduation/retention; and class size. We weighted each criteria by importance as follows: affordability with a 35% weight; social mobility with a 30% weight; graduation/retention with a 25% rate; and class size with a 10% weight. Publicly available data has allowed us to develop this new set of indicators to rank colleges more effectively based on criteria that matter most to the average Greater Philadelphia resident who is looking to ascend the economic ladder. Colleges have a vital role to play in addressing inequality, and colleges that prioritize the following performance categories will play a vital role in addressing poverty in Philadelphia. Affordability data includes indicators such as annual tuition, average loan per student per year, and average annual net cost of attendance (including financial aid). Social mobility data includes indicators related to a student's ability to increase their income above their parents' income, median early career income, and the percentage of low-income students attending a particular college/trade school.

Why Social Mobility

Recent research from the Equal Opportunity Project, led by economist Raj Chetty, utilizes "big data" to demonstrate how well (or how poorly) colleges promote social mobility. Additionally, new social-mobility-focused rankings have emerged, and data science startups are finding new ways to measure college affordability, mobility, quality, and access. We used indicators made available from the aforementioned publicly available data, including the percentage of students in the top 80% of income earners whose parents were in the bottom 20%, the percentage of students moving up two income quintiles (or increasing their income 40% above their parents), median career salaries, and the percentage of low-income and Pell-eligible students.

We have included the top three schools based on the four aforementioned categories. However, our focus in this edition is Social Mobility, which comprises a much longer list. Aside from an increasingly apparent moral imperative, focusing of social mobility could serve as a competitive advantage for institutions of higher education in the post-COVID era.

GREATER PHILADELPHIA 2020 COLLEGE RANKINGS: OVERALL

- 1. Temple University**
- 2. University of Pennsylvania**
- 3. Peirce College**

GREATER PHILADELPHIA 2020 COLLEGE RANKINGS: SOCIAL MOBILITY

- 1. University of the Sciences**
- 2. Peirce College**
- 3. Lincoln University**
- 4. University of Pennsylvania**
- 5. Temple University**
- 6. Community College of Philadelphia**
- 7. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania**
- 8. Drexel University**
- 9. Holy Family University**
- 10. Automotive Training Center**
- 11. Prism Career Institute**
- 12. Gwynedd Mercy University**
- 13. Arcadia University**
- 14. Cabrini University**
- 15. Ursinus College**
- 16. Manor College**
- 17. La Salle University**
- 18. Neumann University**
- 19. Swarthmore College**
- 20. Widener University-Main Campus**
- 21. Thomas Jefferson University**
- 22. Art Institute of Philadelphia**
- 23. Rosemont College**
- 24. Villanova University**
- 25. Delaware Valley University**
- 26. West Chester University of Pennsylvania**
- 27. University of Valley Forge**
- 28. Bryn Mawr College**
- 29. Haverford College**
- 30. Moore College of Art and Design**
- 31. Harcum College Satellite**
- 32. Harcum College**
- 33. Chestnut Hill College**
- 34. Immaculata University**
- 35. Empire Beauty School of Philadelphia**
- 36. Saint Joseph's University**
- 37. Bucks County Community College**

38. Montgomery County Community College

39. Eastern University

40. The University of the Arts

41. Cairn University

- [1] www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/
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