

Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours.

Students at elite colleges are even richer than experts realized, according to a [new study](#) based on millions of anonymous tax filings and tuition records.

At 38 colleges in America, including five in the Ivy League – [Dartmouth](#), [Princeton](#), [Yale](#), [Penn](#) and [Brown](#) – more students came from the top 1 percent of the income scale than from the entire bottom 60 percent.

38 colleges had more students from the top 1 percent than the bottom 60 percent

STUDENTS FROM ...	THE TOP 1% (\$630K+)	BOTTOM 60% (<\$65K)
1. Washington University in St. Louis	21.7%	6.1%
2. Colorado College	24.2	10.5
3. Washington and Lee University	19.1	8.4
4. Colby College	20.4	11.1
5. Trinity College (Conn.)	26.2	14.3
6. Bucknell University	20.4	12.2
7. Colgate University	22.6	13.6
8. Kenyon College	19.8	12.2
9. Middlebury College	22.8	14.2
10. Tufts University	18.6	11.8
50. Northwestern University	14.1	16.8
114. University of Chicago	10.0	24.5
173. Massachusetts Institute of Technology	5.7	23.4

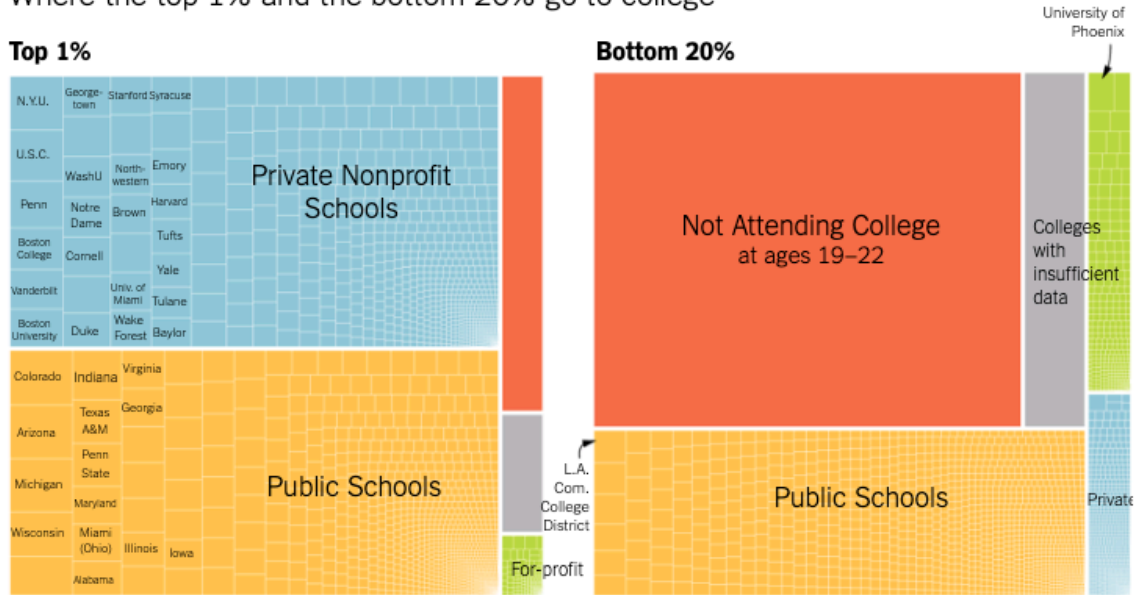
These estimates are for the 1991 cohort (approximately the class of 2013). Rankings are shown for colleges with at least 200 students in this cohort, sorted here by the ratio between the two income groups.

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Roughly one in four of the richest students attend an elite college – universities that typically cluster toward the top of annual rankings (you can find more on our definition of “elite” at the bottom).

In contrast, less than one-half of 1 percent of children from the bottom fifth of American families attend an elite college; less than half attend any college at all.

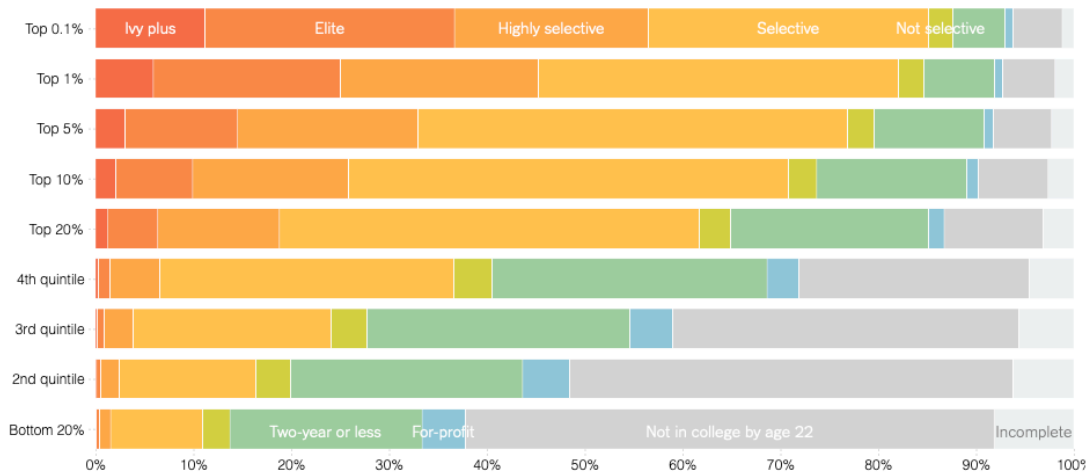
Where the top 1% and the bottom 20% go to college



Where today's 25-year-olds went to college, grouped by their parents' income

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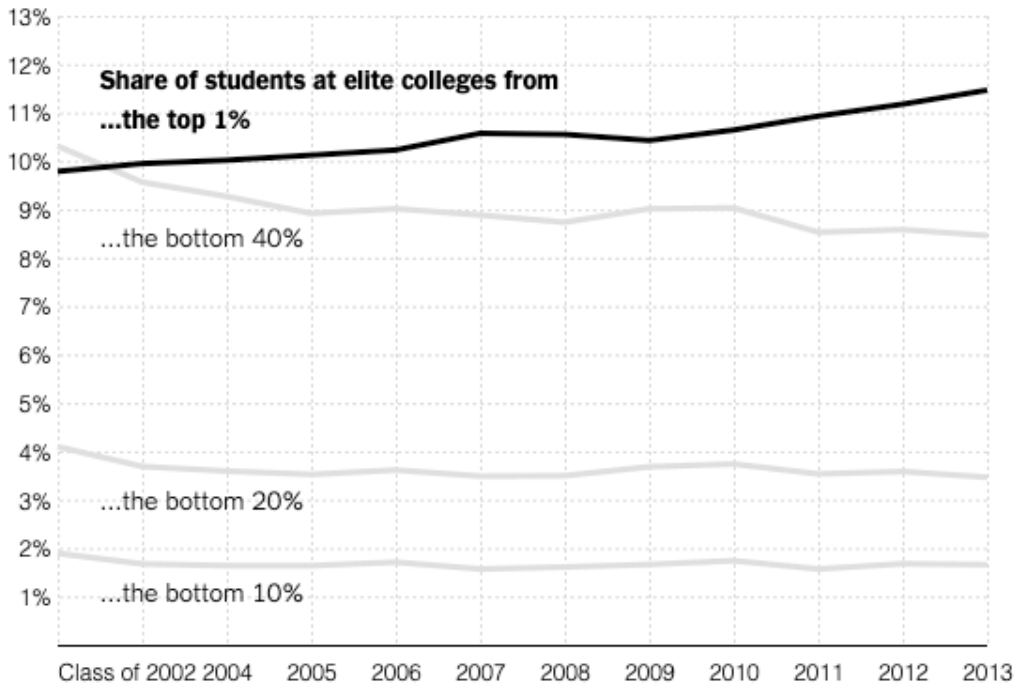
Colleges often promote their role in helping poorer students rise in life, and their commitments to affordability. But some elite colleges have focused more on being affordable to low-income families than on expanding access. “Free tuition only helps if you can get in,” said Danny Yagan, an assistant professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, and one of the authors of the study.

The study – by Raj Chetty, John Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner and Mr. Yagan – provides the most comprehensive look at how well or how poorly colleges have built an economically diverse student body. The researchers tracked about 30 million students born between 1980 and 1991, linking anonymized tax returns to attendance records from nearly every college in the country.

We’re offering detailed information on each of more than 2,000 American colleges on separate pages. See how your college compares – by clicking any college name like Harvard, U.C.L.A., Penn State, Texas A&M or Northern Virginia Community College – or search for schools that interest you.

At elite colleges, the share of students from the bottom 40 percent has remained mostly flat for a decade. Access to top colleges has not changed much, at least when measured in quintiles. (The poor have gotten poorer over that time, and the very rich have gotten richer.)

Access to top colleges has not changed much



At "elite" colleges, roughly 80 of the most selective colleges in the United States, as measured by a 2009 index created by Barron's.

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Previously, the most widely available data on the economic makeup of college students came from government statistics on Pell grants. Those grants typically go to students in the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution. The government data categorizes students as qualifying for Pell grants or not, but does not distinguish between students who just miss the cutoff and those whose families make much more money.

The Obama administration and Congress have expanded Pell eligibility, which caused the number of Pell recipients at many colleges to rise. Some elite colleges pointed to this increase as a sign that they took economic diversity much more seriously than in the recent past.

But the new estimates show that much of the increase in Pell recipients stems from the expansion of the program. The students at elite colleges, at least as of 2013, were not actually much more economically diverse than in the past, though there are some exceptions.

Elite colleges that enroll the highest percentage of low- and middle-income students

COLLEGE	PCT. FROM BOTTOM 40%
1. University of California, Los Angeles	19.2%
2. Emory University	15.9
3. Barnard College	15.3
4. New York University	14.3
5. Vassar College	13.8
6. Bryn Mawr College	13.7
7. Massachusetts Institute of Technology	13.5
8. University of Miami (Fla.)	13.1
9. Brandeis University	12.9
10. Wellesley College	12.5

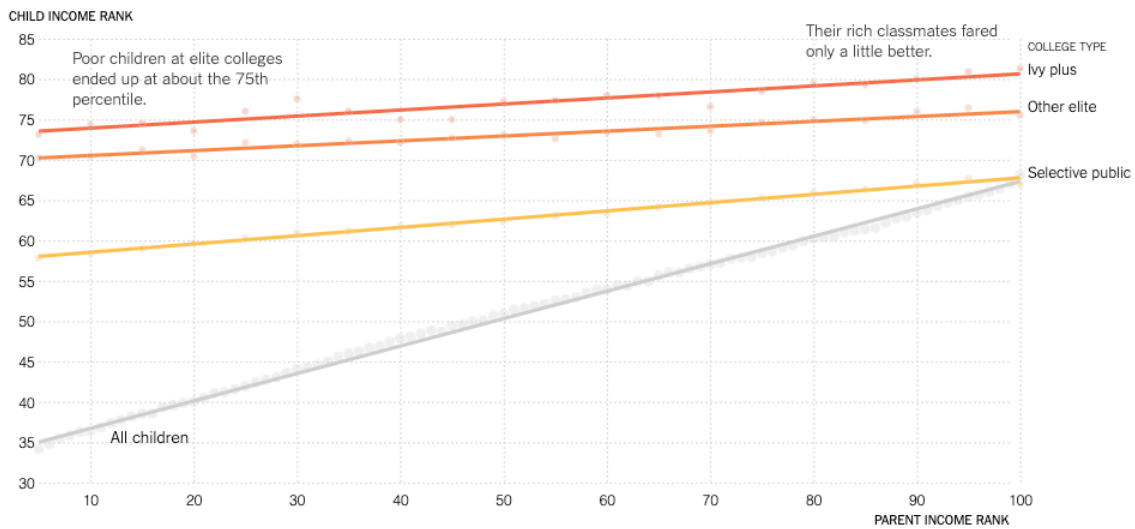
Rankings are shown for “elite” colleges only.

These patterns are important because previous research has found that there are many highly qualified lower-income students who do not attend selective colleges – and because the low- and middle-income students who do attend top colleges fare almost as well as rich students.

Even though they face challenges that other students do not, lower-income students end up earning almost as much on average as affluent students who attend the same college.

Look at the remarkably relative flatness of the colored lines below. An affluent student who attends one of 12 “Ivy plus” universities ([the Ivy League colleges](#), Duke, [M.I.T.](#), [Stanford](#) and the University of Chicago) ends up around the 80th percentile of the income distribution on average. A lower-income student who attends one of those colleges ends up around the 75th percentile. Lower-income students who attend less elite colleges also have outcomes similar to others from the same college.

Poor students who attend top colleges do about as well as their rich classmates



Data here comes from the 1980-82 cohort, roughly the college classes of 2002-4. By this stage in life, income ranks are relatively stable.

Poor children at elite colleges ended up at about the 75th percentile.

Their rich classmates fared only a little better.

Data here comes from the 1980-82 cohort, roughly the college classes of 2002-4. By this stage in life, income ranks are relatively stable.

By contrast, the steeper gray line shows outcomes for the entire American population. Most students who grow up poor remain poor as adults, and most students who grow up affluent remain affluent.

The data above covers children born between 1980 and 1982, who are around 35 years old today. Most Americans remain in a similar place on the income distribution from their late 30s [through the end of their careers](#), previous studies have found, so the highest-earning 36-year-olds are likely to become the highest-earning 60-year-olds, at least on average.

Even though most lower-income students fare well at elite colleges, there are relatively few of them there, so less elite colleges may be more important engines of social mobility. The researchers developed a new statistic they call a college’s mobility rate,

which combines a college’s share of students from lower-income families with its success at propelling them into the upper part of the distribution.

Success rate measures the percent of lower-income students who ended up in the top 40 percent. Data here comes from the 1980-82 cohort, roughly the college classes of 2002-4. By this stage in life, income ranks are relatively stable.

Colleges with the highest mobility rate, from the bottom 40 percent to the top 40 percent

COLLEGE	PCT. FROM BOTTOM 40%	SUCCESS RATE	'MOBILITY'
1. Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology	66.0%	66.4%	43.9%
2. City College of New York	60.5	62.9	38.1
3. Texas A&M International University	60.7	62.4	37.9
4. Lehman College	64.6	57.0	36.8
5. Bernard M. Baruch College	52.3	69.2	36.2
6. California State University, Los Angeles	59.6	60.0	35.7
7. Crimson Technical College	55.4	64.1	35.5
8. University of Texas-Pan American	64.0	53.5	34.2
9. New York City College of Technology	66.2	50.9	33.7
10. John Jay College of Criminal Justice	54.4	61.1	33.2

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The mobility rate captures the share of all students at a given college who both came from a lower-income family and ended up in a higher-income family. The top of this list is dominated not by elite colleges, but by mid-tier public ones, including the colleges that make up the [City University of New York](#).

A separate column looks at working-class colleges in more detail.

Selectivity tiers used here are based on a 2009 index created by Barron’s. “Ivy plus” colleges include the eight colleges of the Ivy League in addition to Stanford, the University of Chicago, Duke and M.I.T. “Other elite colleges” represent colleges with a selectivity index of 1 excluding the “Ivy plus” colleges. “Highly selective” colleges represent those with a selectivity index of 2; “selective” colleges represent those with a selectivity index from 3 to 5; “nonselective” colleges represent those with a selectivity index greater than 5 or unlisted in Barron’s.

These estimates cover only colleges that participate in Title IV federal funding, which excludes the military academies and certain other colleges.

Source: “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of [Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility](#)”, The Equality of Opportunity Project

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/opinion/sunday/americas-great-working-class-colleges.html>

America's Great Working-Class Colleges

Jan. 18, 2017 David Leonhardt

The heyday of the colleges that serve America's working class can often feel very long ago. It harks back to the mid-20th century, when City College of New York [cost](#) only a few hundred dollars a year and was known as the "Harvard of the proletariat." Out West, California [built](#) an entire university system that was both accessible and excellent.

More recently, these universities have seemed to struggle, with unprepared students, squeezed budgets and high dropout rates. To some New Yorkers, "City College" is now mostly a byword for nostalgia.

It should not be.

Yes, the universities that educate students from modest backgrounds face big challenges, particularly state budget cuts. But many of them are performing much better than their new stereotype suggests. They remain deeply impressive institutions that continue to push many Americans into the middle class and beyond — many more, in fact, than elite colleges that receive far more attention.

Where does this optimistic conclusion come from? The most comprehensive study of college graduates yet conducted, based on millions of anonymous tax filings and financial-aid records. [Published Wednesday](#), the study tracked students from nearly every college in the country (including those who failed to graduate), measuring their earnings years after they left campus. The paper is the latest in [a burst of economic research](#) made possible by the availability of huge data sets and powerful computers.

To take just one encouraging statistic: At City College, in Manhattan, 76 percent of students who enrolled in the late 1990s and came from families in the bottom fifth of the income distribution have ended up in the top three-fifths of the distribution. These students entered college poor. They left on their way to the middle class and often the upper middle class.

The equivalent number at the University of Texas, El Paso, is 71 percent. At California State University in Bakersfield, it's 82 percent. At Stony Brook University, on Long Island, it's 78 percent, and at Baruch College in Manhattan, it's 79 percent. [\(You can look up data for any college here.\)](#)

“We are the engine of the ability to be socially mobile,” Baruch’s president, Mitchel B. Wallerstein, said. Most Baruch graduates, he added, are making more money than their parents as soon as they start their first post-college job.

I’ll admit that the new data surprised me. Years of reporting on higher education left me focused on the many problems at colleges that enroll large numbers of poor and middle-class students.

Those [problems](#) are real: The new study — by a team of economists [led by Raj Chetty of Stanford](#) — shows that many colleges indeed fail to serve their students well. Dropout rates are high, saddling students with debt but no [degree](#). [For-profit](#) colleges perform the worst, and a significant number of public colleges also struggle. Even at the strong performers, too many students fall by the wayside. Improving higher education should be a national priority.

But the success stories are real, too, and they’re fairly common. As I thought about the new findings in light of the other evidence pointing to the value of education, they became less surprising. After all, the earnings gap between four-year college graduates and everyone [else](#) has soared in recent decades. The unemployment rate for college graduates [today is a mere 2.5](#) percent.

Those college graduates have to come from somewhere, of course, and most of them are coming from campuses that look a lot less like Harvard or the University of Michigan than like City College or the University of Texas at El Paso. On these more typical campuses, students often work while they’re going to college. Some are military veterans, others learned English as a second language and others are in their mid-20s or 30s.

“There are a lot of people who would not go to college at all, and would not get an education at all, if they had to go through some selective criteria,” said Erik Pavia, a 2010 graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso, known as UTEP. “UTEP opens the doors to people from all walks of life.”

Pavia grew up in Canutillo, a poor neighborhood in El Paso, the son of a construction worker and house cleaner. He did well enough in high school to attend many colleges but — as frequently happens with low-income students — was not willing to leave home at age 18 for an unfamiliar world. “I just didn’t feel like I was ready to go out to college on my own,” he said. “So I decided to stay home and save money.”

After college, he went to law school, and today is a business manager at a technology start-up called Knotch. Twice a year, he returns to UTEP to teach an intensive two-week class on business and law. Pavia’s story is the classic story of the American dream.

Lower-income students who attend elite colleges fare even better on average than low-income students elsewhere — almost as well, in fact, as affluent students who attend elite colleges. But there aren't very many students from modest backgrounds on elite campuses, noted John Friedman of Brown, one of the study's authors. On several dozen of campuses, remarkably, fewer students hail from the entire bottom half of the income distribution than from the top 1 percent. (A separate article looks at elite colleges in more detail.)

“There is a real problem with the elite privates and flagship publics in not serving as many low-income students as they should,” John B. King Jr., President Obama's education secretary, told me. “These institutions have a moral and educational responsibility.”

Because the elite colleges aren't fulfilling that responsibility, working-class colleges have become vastly larger engines of social mobility. The new data shows, for example, that the City University of New York system propelled almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all eight Ivy League campuses, plus Duke, M.I.T., Stanford and Chicago, combined.

The research does come with one dark lining, however — one that should motivate anyone trying to think about how to affect government policy in the age of Donald Trump. The share of lower-income students at many public colleges has fallen somewhat over the last 15 years.

The reason is clear. State funding for higher education has plummeted. It's down 18 percent per student, adjusted for inflation, since 2008, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The financial crisis pinched state budgets, and facing a pinch, some states decided education wasn't a top priority.

“It's really been a nightmare,” said Diana Natalicio, UTEP's president and herself a first-generation college graduate. “The state does not recognize — and it's not just in Texas — the importance that the investment in public education has for the economy and so many other things. Education was for me, and for many of the rest of us, the great opportunity creator.”

Obviously, colleges don't deserve all the credit for their graduates' success. But they do deserve a healthy portion of it. Other research that has tried to tease out the actual effects of higher education finds them to be large. And they're not limited to money: Graduates are also happier and healthier. No wonder that virtually all affluent children go to college, and nearly all graduate.

The question is how to enable more working-class students to do so. “It's really the way democracy regenerates itself,” said Ted Mitchell, Obama's under

secretary of education. The new research shows that plenty of successful models exist, yet many of them are struggling to maintain the status quo, let alone grow. It's true in red states as well as in many blue and purple states, and it's a grave mistake.

There is a reason that City College and California's universities evoke such warm nostalgia: They fulfilled the country's highest ideals — of excellence, progress and opportunity. Many of those same colleges, and many others, still do. They deserve more than nostalgia.