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Denver, CO – A groundbreaking study has created a list of Regional Public Universities (RPUs). Prior to this research, there was no official list of RPUs and knowledge was lacking about the RPU sector and the students and regions that it serves.

“In part due to the absence of a list of Regional Public Universities and systematic way to identify and define them, until very recently, RPUs were largely absent from scholarly and policy discussions,” explained Cecilia Orphan, Director of Partnerships for the Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges (ARRC) and Project Principal Investigator (PI). “This study contributes a dataset and interactive map that we hope will support future research and better understanding about these important institutions and their students and regions.” This study will also allow RPU leaders to identify peer institutions from which to learn and benchmark themselves.

This study shows that RPUs educate 58% of Black or African Americans, 47% of American Indian or Alaska Native students, 35% of Asian American students, 39% of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, and 44% of Hispanic or Latino students attending four-year public institutions. In addition to serving students of color, this research found that 37% of students attending RPUs are Pell grant recipients, a finding underscoring how critical the RPU sector is to generating upward mobility for low-income students.

This yearlong project identified 474 RPUs in 49 U.S. states and three U.S. territories (Northern Marianas, Guam, and Puerto Rico) that serve over five million students, or nearly half of all students attending four-year public institutions, demonstrating their significant contributions to postsecondary access and degree attainment nationwide. (Use [this weblink for an interactive map of RPUs.](#))

This research shows that RPUs are important educators of residents in their states and territories – on average, 74% of students attending an RPU are residents of their state or territory. In a time of skyrocketing college tuitions, RPUs are also more affordable than other four-year public institutions; the average annual tuition and fees for RPUs is \$8,896 as compared with \$12,768 for non-RPUs.

A third of RPUs identified met the enrollment thresholds required for Minority Serving Institution status and eight percent are also Historically Black Colleges and Universities. “This



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research shows how crucial RPUs are to degree attainment for students of color,” Orphan said. “Our research demonstrates that RPUs are transformational institutions that change the lives of their students and communities.”

This research further exposed how RPUs serve their regions and communities. In a prior study, ARRC designated nearly half of RPUs as Rural-Serving Institutions that are anchor institutions for rural communities. RPUs also serve counties that are federally designated as being medically underserved and experiencing low employment and persistent poverty.

Andrew Koricich, ARRC’s Executive Director, said, “This project underscores the deep connections that RPUs have to their communities and surrounding regions, and these connections are particularly crucial when considering the role these campuses play in rural places where they may be the only educational access point and a major contributor to the local economy.”

Despite how vital RPUs are to fostering postsecondary access and regional wellbeing, this research revealed that they face funding disparities when compared with other four-year public institutions that are not RPUs. RPUs receive less funding from their states and the federal government and have smaller endowments than other four year-public institutions. The report for this project includes policy recommendations to address these funding disparities so that RPUs are better positioned to serve their students and communities.

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The Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges is a research collaborative and resource hub with the mission of increasing appreciation for and understanding of regional colleges and their contributions to opportunity and community wellbeing.