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Learn More: Additional information about ARRC and an interactive map related to this research study can be found at www.RegionalColleges.org.
Acknowledgements

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Regional public universities and colleges (RPUs) are public institutions that are vital postsecondary access points for many Americans. Research indicates that RPUs are leaders in promoting upward mobility, educating an estimated 47% of bachelor’s-degree-seeking students attending four-year public institutions. The research described in this report finds 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, 44% of Hispanic or Latino students, and 44% of multi-racial students attending four-year public institutions. RPUs additionally play an important role in educating first-generation college students and those receiving Pell grants; on average, 37% of RPU students are Pell grant recipients. RPUs are also vital anchor institutions that contribute to their regions.

Despite their crucial role in expanding educational opportunity throughout P-20 education and supporting regional wellbeing, foundational knowledge is lacking about how to identify and define RPUs and there is no official list of RPUs. As a result, sector-wide quantitative data and research are nearly nonexistent, and RPUs and their students experience ongoing invisibility in scholarly and policy discussions. This research study used cluster analysis, a statistical method for identifying groups of similar objects in datasets, to create a list of RPUs. This study also contributed a companion dataset to support future research about these important institutions. Finally, this research study provided key insights about the students that RPUs serve.
Key Findings

Our analysis identified 474 RPUs that enroll 3.8 million full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment students and 5.1 million students (inclusive of part-time students). The average FTE enrollment of RPUs is 7,796 and the average headcount enrollment is 10,987.

Twenty-nine percent of the RPUs identified in this report meet the enrollment thresholds for Minority Serving Institution status, and 49% are Rural-Serving Institutions as identified by ARRC. RPUs spanned nine Carnegie Classifications, including institutions designated as “mixed baccalaureate/associate’s” and “very high research activity.”

On average 26% of RPU students attend part-time as compared with 14% of non-RPU students. More than 21% of the degrees conferred by the PRU sector are graduate degrees. RPUs enroll a higher proportion of in-state students than non-RPUs on average, 85% of RPU students are state residents as compared with 72% of non-RPU students.

RPUs serve counties that have higher needs than those served by non-RPUs, including counties that are designated as having low education, low employment, and persistent poverty. RPUs are more likely to serve counties designated as having low education than non-RPUs.

Across revenue sources, RPUs have fewer resources with which to educate their students and serve their regions. On average, RPUs receive $1,091 less per FTE enrollment in state appropriations than non-RPUs, yet state appropriations represent a larger proportion of the RPU budget. On average, RPUs. The average RPU receives $9 million from the federal government in grants and contracts as compared with the $208 million that the federal government gives non-RPUs. RPUs also have fewer endowment assets than non-RPUs; on average, RPUs have $28,968 less per FTE in endowment assets than non-RPUs. As a result of these funding disparities, RPUs have, on average, fewer tenured faculty, full-time instructional, research, and public service staff per FTE than non-RPUs.

RPUs tend to be more affordable than non-RPUs; the average annual tuition and fees for RPUs is $8,896 as compared with $12,325 for non-RPUs.
Applications for the Field

**Policy applications.** With a list of RPUs and better understanding of the sector’s contributions to postsecondary access and regional wellbeing, policymakers have an opportunity to leverage policy and funding to better support the sector in achieving state and federal policy goals. Of key importance to ensuring that RPUs can support policy goals is addressing the significant funding disparities that they face.

**Research applications.** For far too long, RPUs have been under examined in qualitative and quantitative research due partly to the absence of a list of RPUs. Researchers may use this list and dataset to study the sector, which will promote greater understanding about RPUs and their students.

**Practice applications.** RPU leaders may use the dataset and interactive ARRC map to identify institutional peers, and use the findings from this report to advocate for better policy and funding for their institutions.

**Philanthropic applications.** Grant makers and philanthropists are often focused on supporting postsecondary institutions that promote college access and attainment and community wellbeing, and this report shows that RPUs share this mission. Funders may use this list to identify RPUs to fund.
Regional public universities and colleges (RPUs) are vital postsecondary access points for many Americans, and, in 2021, the sector enrolled 3.8 million full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment and 5.1 million students in terms of headcount. RPUs are leaders in promoting upward mobility.¹

The research described in this report finds that RPUs educate an estimated 47% of bachelor’s-degree-seeking students attending four-year public institutions. The research described in this report finds 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, 44% of Hispanic or Latino students, and 44% of multi-racial students attending four-year public institutions. RPUs additionally play an important role in educating first-generation college students and those receiving Pell grants; on average, 37% of RPU students are Pell grant recipients.

In addition to promoting postsecondary access, RPUs create jobs, strengthen civic life, provide arts and cultural experiences, contribute to public health, educate K-12 teachers, and support government agencies in addressing regional civic, social, and economic challenges.³ RPUs tend to emphasize teaching and student-centeredness, aligning academic initiatives and degree programs with the unique needs of their diverse student bodies.⁴ Considering the significant role that RPUs play in supporting regional wellbeing, scholars have characterized them as important anchor institutions for their communities.⁵

While recent research has begun to reveal the important characteristics and contributions of the RPU sector, practical and scholarly knowledge is lacking about how to identify and define RPUs and there is no widely accepted list of RPUs. In large part due to the absence of a list of RPUs and systematic way to identify and define them, until very recently, RPUs were largely absent from scholarly and policy discussions.⁶ As a result, sector-wide quantitative data and research are nearly nonexistent, and RPUs and their students experience ongoing invisibility.

Absent foundational knowledge about how to identify RPUs and understand their contributions, the media, policymakers, and researchers often compare RPUs to flagship and elite universities, leading to the proliferation of deficit-based beliefs and misperceptions about the sector and its students.⁷ These misperceptions include the idea that all RPUs are financially struggling and at
risk for closure and that their students are difficult to educate.\textsuperscript{9} Quantitative research holds potential to end RPU invisibility, disrupt misconceptions and deficit-based beliefs, and address funding and policy disparities by demonstrating the sector’s contributions and expanding understanding about the students attending RPUs.

The research presented in this report used cluster analysis (a statistical technique that groups similar objects in a dataset) to identify, define, and examine the entire RPU sector and its students. Specifically, this research study identified RPUs by examining the shared traits and missions they exhibited, rather than by imposing preexisting beliefs and ideas about RPUs as a means of identifying institutions in the sector. This study also contributed a companion dataset to support future research about these important institutions. This project is motivated by a desire for greater visibility, understanding, and appreciation for RPUs and the students and regions that they serve; it also builds on the authors’ existing expertise about RPUs, prior research about the sector, prior research by ARRC, and the advice of RPU leaders and experts.

**How RPUs Have Been Identified and Defined in the Past**

Scholars, policymakers, and the media have frequently defined RPUs by what they are not – i.e., flagship research universities, private colleges, community colleges, etc. - instead of by the shared traits and missions that RPUs exhibit and the students that they serve.\textsuperscript{10} Another common way that scholars and the media have defined RPUs is by the challenges they face – including enrollment declines and funding inequities – rather than by the contributions that they make to educational equity and regional wellbeing.\textsuperscript{11} Because of this, policy solutions and funding tend to lag in supporting the RPU sector, and problematic misperceptions and deficit-based beliefs about the sector and its students persist.\textsuperscript{12}

Researchers tend to define RPUs as non-research universities.\textsuperscript{13} When RPU faculty members do research, scholars and the media often define RPUs as drifting from their original missions.\textsuperscript{14} However, other research demonstrates that many RPUs have robust research agendas, and the research that RPU faculty members conduct is often applied in nature and occurs in partnership with regional stakeholders including local government agencies, K-12 schools, and nonprofit organizations.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, RPU faculty and staff members commonly design research studies to meet the unique needs of their local communities, which is an embodiment of their campuses’ anchor institution mission.\textsuperscript{16} Scholars and commentators have also described RPUs as being “caught in the middle”\textsuperscript{17} of flagship and community colleges and as higher education’s “mushy middle”.\textsuperscript{18} These same commentators have asserted that campus leaders are unsure about their RPU’s mission and standing due to their institution’s supposed middling status.

Contrasting these deficit-based views, other research shows that many RPU leaders are effective storytellers who position their institutions as unique and irreplaceable contributors to educational equity, local communities, and the broader postsecondary landscape.\textsuperscript{19} Still other research demonstrates that many RPUs are
mission-centered and financially viable despite facing significant policy, funding, and status challenges, which contrasts beliefs that RPUs leaders are unsure of their institution’s mission or that RPUs are perpetually at risk.20

Arguably the most common way to define postsecondary institutions is by their Carnegie Classification. Researchers, when quantitatively studying RPUs, often identify RPUs as Carnegie-Classified “master’s colleges and universities,” which captures a segment of the sector.21 However, the current research study found that RPUs span nine Carnegie Classifications, with some classified as “mixed baccalaureate/associate’s colleges” and offering associate’s degrees and others classified as “high research universities” and offering professional doctorates.22 Throughout their histories, RPUs have continually adapted to meet the needs of their regions and students, and no two regions or student bodies require the same offerings. The nimble and responsive nature of the RPU sector means that RPUs are likely the most diverse postsecondary sector in the United States, with the different Carnegie Classifications they hold being just one indication of this institutional diversity. The creators of the Carnegie Classifications intended to taxonomize postsecondary institutions,23 and they used proxies for mission to define institutions including degrees awarded and research expenditures.24 The early Classifications identified RPUs as “comprehensives” and placed them in the taxonomy’s middle, below “high research universities,” and above “community colleges.”25 This positioning contributed to a narrative that RPUs and their students were caught in the middle of research universities and community colleges and academically weak.26

Scholars, in recognizing the shortcomings of using the Carnegie Classifications to identify and define RPUs and other broad-access postsecondary institutions (BAIs), have proposed alternatives. Researchers have developed typologies of Hispanic Serving Institutions, Rural-Serving Institutions (RSIs) and BAIs, many of which are RPUs, using variables related to enrollment, programmatic offerings, faculty composition, graduation rates, and institutional resources.27 For example, ARRC used exploratory factor analysis to identify rural BAIs and RSIs.28 Other scholars have collected data about students, geographic location, and selectivity, and they have used cluster analyses to identify and define HSIs and BAIs based on shared institutional traits. Graham Miller, in an ARRC white paper, used network analysis to categorize RPUs by their peer institutions listed in the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS).29 While these efforts resist inexact mission proxies, Miller identified RPUs that selected one another as peers on IPEDS which may exclude RPUs that do not list peers on IPEDS, and the BAI and HSI typologies did not exclusively explore the RPU sector. The current research study builds on prior efforts by using cluster analysis to empirically identify and define RPUs based on their institutional characteristics rather than preconceived notions about their mission and status. (Appendix B includes detailed information about the approach to identifying and defining RPUs used in this research study.)
List of RPUs and Sector Characteristics

Our analysis identified 474 RPUs (See Appendix A for the list of RPUs and the ARRC website for a map and complete dataset of all RPUs). The RPUs we identified span institutional types, which demonstrates the sector’s rich diversity. We found that 137 RPUs, or 29% of the sector, met the enrollment thresholds required to be designated as a Minority Serving Institution (See Table 1).

Forty RPUs, or nine percent of the sector, are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), half of which are the 1890 land-grant HBCUs described above. Prior research demonstrates that RPU HBCUs are vital to promoting upward mobility, degree attainment, and college access among Black or African Americans.40 Forty-nine percent of the sector, or 232 RPUs, are Rural-Serving Institutions as identified by ARRC.41 RPUs on average have higher RSI scores than other non-RPUs (1.31 as compared with .82). RPUs may also hold multiple designations (e.g., an RSI that is also an HSI).

Table 1. Institutional Designations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>RPUs</th>
<th>Percent of Sector</th>
<th>Non-RPUs</th>
<th>Percent of Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Serving Institutions (RSIs)</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>48.95%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>18.78%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISIs)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.59%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8.44%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890 Historically Black Land Grant Universities</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.69%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862 Land Grant Institutions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (AANHS)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.84%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another way in which the sector’s diversity was evident in our data was in the Carnegie Classifications they hold. We found that RPUs span nine Carnegie Classifications (see Table 2). The most common Carnegie Classification held by RPUs was “master’s colleges & universities” of varying sizes (52% of the sector). Despite perceptions that RPUs do not, or should not, conduct research, we found that Carnegie classified 14 RPUs as having “very high research activity” and another 80 as having “high research activity” (the second most common Carnegie Classification in the sector), meaning that 20% of the sector is composed of research-focused RPUs.

Our analysis also identified a small group of RPUs that grant both bachelor’s degrees and associate’s degrees. We identified 35 institutions, or 7% of the sector, that hold the “mixed baccalaureate/associate’s colleges” Carnegie Classification.

Table 2. Carnegie Classifications Held By RPUs and Non-RPUs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>RPUs</th>
<th>Percent of Sector</th>
<th>Non-RPUs</th>
<th>Percent of Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.95%</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>88.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16.88%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral/Professional Universities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.12%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities: Larger Programs</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>30.17%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities: Medium Programs</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11.81%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities: Small Programs</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8.02%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts &amp; Sciences Focus</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.59%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13.08%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate/Associate’s Colleges: Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate’s</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7.38%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 2021 Carnegie Classifications.
As Figure 1 shows, our analysis revealed that there are RPUs in nearly every U.S. state – Wyoming being the only state with no RPUs. – and several territories, which demonstrates the sector’s broad and national reach.
County Traits of RPUs and Non-PRUs

We were particularly interested in the traits of the regions in which RPUs were located because these institutions have missions to serve their localities, and prior research demonstrates that RPUs are shaped by the traits, issues, and assets of their local communities. Interestingly, RPUs tend to be in counties with a higher metropolitan score on the USDA’s urban to rural continuum than the average county in the United States, and this is likely because they enroll students and employ staff that increase a region’s population size. As Table 3 demonstrates, the counties that RPUs serve on average have higher needs than those that non RPUs serve.

In fact, 20% of the sector, or one out of five RPUs, serve counties with persistent poverty as compared with just 8% of non-RPUs. RPUs are also important institutions in counties designated as being medically underserved – 439 RPUs, or 93% of the sector, serve counties with this designation.

Given that prior research shows that RPUs are leaders in educating public health professionals including nurses, physical therapists, and respiratory therapists, their locations in medically underserved counties is particularly important.

Table 3. County Characteristics for RPUs and Non-RPUs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RPUs</th>
<th>Percent of Sector</th>
<th>Non-RPUs</th>
<th>Percent of Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medically Underserved</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>92.62%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>96.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent Child Poverty</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>19.83%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Employment</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10.97%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent Poverty</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9.07%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Education</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.54%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers are even starker when examining poverty rates; 43 RPUs serve counties which have persistent poverty (9% of the sector). The USDA designates a county as experiencing persistent poverty if 20% or more of its residents were poor as measured by the 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial censuses. RPUs are twice as likely to serve counties with persistent child poverty as are non-RPUs.

Forty-eight percent of the United States population lives in a county with an RPU, and if it were possible to examine the complete service areas of all RPUs, this number would likely be much higher (since many RPUs serve more than a single county). This means that at least one out of every two people in the country lives in an RPU’s service area. While RPUs are more likely to serve counties designated as having low education, the percentage of the population over 25 with a college degree is marginally higher in RPU counties than in the rest of the United States, demonstrating their contributions to college attainment nationwide.
Another way to understand how RPUs contribute to regional wellbeing is to examine the Gini coefficient scores of their counties, which is a statistical measure that indicates the variation of inequality of a county (0 represented perfect equality and 1 represented perfect inequality). Counties with RPUs have lower levels of income inequality than the entire United States, with a Gini coefficient of 0.463 compared to the United States’ coefficient of 0.482.

**Enrollment**

RPUs vary widely in enrollment size. The smallest RPU, University of Puerto Rico-Utuado, enrolls 602 students (by headcount) and the largest RPU, Miami Dade College, enrolls 76,263 students (by headcount). RPUs also tend to enroll fewer students than non-RPUs. As Figure 2 shows, 267 RPUs or 56% of the sector, enroll between 1,000-9,999 students (by headcount). Sixty-six RPUs, or 14% of the sector, enroll more than 20,000 students, compared with 90 non-RPUs.

The average FTE enrollment of RPUs is also considerably smaller than non-RPUs – 7,796 compared with 30,501. It is important to use both headcount and FTE when examining the size of RPUs because per institution, on average, 26% of RPU students attend part-time compared with just 14% of non-RPU students. The average headcount for RPUs is 10,983. The smaller size of RPUs may allow them to serve their students better, as students benefit from smaller class sizes and close relationships with professors and instructors.

RPUs play an important role in granting graduate degrees – more than 21% of the degrees RPUs granted in the 2020-2021 academic year were master’s or doctoral degrees. The average graduate student headcount per institution is 1,808 and, on average, 18% of the degrees individual RPUs grant are graduate degrees. RPUs enroll a higher proportion of in-state students than non-RPUs – on average 85% of students attending an RPU are in-state as compared with 72% of students attending a non-RPU. While there is variation across the sector, on average 9% of students attending an RPU are transfer students which is marginally higher than the on average 6% of non-RPU students who are transfers.
This makes sense given that many RPUs are broadly accessible and accept 80% or more of applicants. Indeed, 69 RPUs, or 15% of the sector, have open enrollment admissions policies, making them vital postsecondary access points for many people.37

Student Characteristics

RPU students tend to be more diverse than non-RPU students in terms of race and income status. As Figure 3 demonstrates, RPUs are important destinations for students of color. On average, 13% of students attending an RPU are Black or African American as compared with just 7% of students attending a non-RPU. RPUs also tend to enroll higher proportions of Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students. RPUs are additionally important educators of adult learners (defined as students who are older than 25). Eleven percent of RPU students are between the ages 25-64, while only 5% of students at non-RPUs are in that same category.

RPUs play an outsized role in educating Pell recipients – on average, 37% of students attending an RPU receive Pell grants as compared with just 21% of non-RPU students.

Staffing & Financials

Despite the important role that RPUs play in advancing racial and income equity for their students and regions, they face several funding disparities. As Figure 4 demonstrates, across revenue sources, RPUs have fewer resources with which to educate their students and serve their regions. On average, RPUs receive $1,091 less per FTE enrollment in state appropriations than non-RPUs, yet state appropriations represent a larger proportion of the RPU budget.

This means that RPUs are more reliant on state appropriations than non-RPUs, and any cuts to this funding source carry significant financial ramifications.38 RPUs also receive much less support from the federal government in the form of operating grants and contracts than non-RPUs.
On average, RPUs receive $9 million from the federal government in grants and contracts as compared with the $208 million that the federal government gives non-RPUs. Put another way, RPUs receive on average $1,190 per FTE in federal operating grants and contracts as compared with $6,771 per FTE that non-RPUs receive.

This figure is significant because institutions use a portion of all grant money to pay for operational costs. It is important to note that RPUs are often ill-equipped to pursue federal grants and contracts due to staffing shortages and other structural barriers.

These funding disparities are further reflected in the different staffing levels of RPUs and non-RPUs. Tenured faculty represent a slightly larger share of full-time instructional staff at non-RPUs than RPUs (42% versus 41%). Due to funding disparities, though, RPUs have fewer tenured faculty members per student than non-RPUs. When considering full-time instructional, research, and public service staff, though, RPUs have far fewer staff resources than non-RPUs. RPUs have, on average, 18 FTE students per instructional, research, and public service staff members compared to non-RPUs that have 12 FTE students per staff member.

RPUs also tend to have smaller endowments than non-RPUs. RPUs have on average $28,680 less per FTE enrollment in endowment assets than non-RPUs. This is a significant disparity because endowments provide additional revenue sources that institutions can use to address revenue losses in other areas while maintaining continuous funding for student financial aid programs and community outreach efforts (depending on the endowment source and its restrictions). Given the fact that RPUs tend to serve regions with higher needs than non-RPUs (as described above), their constrained financial resources create implications for their ability to serve their communities. Additionally, because RPUs enroll higher proportions of students of color and low-income students, who often benefit from more robust educational supports to be successful, chronic underfunding affects RPUs’ ability to serve their students.

RPUs are often more affordable than non-RPUs; the average in-state tuition and fees of RPUs is $8,896 per FTE student compared to $12,325 among non-RPUs. This is a significant financial commitment that RPUs make to fostering affordable postsecondary access despite the funding disparities they face.
That said, as a result of having lower tuitions, RPUs also generate less per-FTE, in-state tuition and fees revenue than non-RPUs (see Figure 4). RPUs generate average of $7,272 net tuition and fees per FTE enrollment while non-RPUs generate $12,794 net tuition and fees per FTE enrollment. When considering average tuition costs of RPUs and the counties that they serve, additional evidence arises of their affordability. The median household income in RPU counties is $58,664 and the annual in-state tuition is approximately 15% of that total. By contrast, the median household income of counties served by non-RPUs is $66,126 and the average tuition as a percentage of median income is 19%.

Figure 4. Average Revenue Across Sources (per FTE)
Applications for Field

For far too long, RPUs and their students have experienced relative invisibility when compared with the attention paid to community colleges, private colleges, and land-grant and flagship universities. Yet, as our results demonstrate, RPUs are vital postsecondary access points for Pell grant recipients, students of color, adult learners, and transfer students. By providing the field with a list of RPUs, new avenues for research, funding, policy, philanthropy, and media coverage become possible. We hope the research in this report, and the list of RPUs it generated, will help end the invisibility that the sector and its students experience and improve policy and funding. The results from this research study have multiple applications for the field of higher education; we describe the applications for research, policy, practice, the media, and philanthropy in the sections that follow.

Research Applications

In recent years, RPUs have received greater scholarly attention after long being under examined. Most of this research has been qualitative and, importantly, helps us understand how select RPUs enact their missions and navigate the challenges and opportunities they face. With our study, quantitative, sector-wide studies are now possible that will promote better understanding of how RPUs navigate funding and policy challenges while serving their students and communities. Our research also makes possible future research that can examine the entire sector. We hope that researchers will use the RPU list and companion dataset to research the sector’s history, funding circumstances, administrative leadership, and student outcomes, among other important topics. Such analyses could elucidate best practices that exist within the sector for student access and success and regional service.

We also invite scholars to use other methods to identify and define RPUs, as Miller did when he identified RPUs using network analysis. We do not offer our list and typology as the final say in how to identify and define RPUs; instead, we offer it as one approach that identifies and defines RPUs in an inductive, data-driven, and mission-focused way, rather than by relying on preexisting assumptions and biases. Future research has the potential to continue centering RPUs and their students in consequential scholarly conversations, which will aid in ending their invisibility.

Policy Applications

RPUs often navigate policy contexts in which they are largely invisible, yet RPUs represent a diverse and robust sector that educates people who represent the rich diversity of the United States. Policymakers at the state and federal levels often identify goals to address educational opportunity gaps for these very students, yet the creation of policy solutions to support RPUs as institutions that primarily serve these students have lagged. Moreover, as our research shows, RPUs receive less funding per-student than non-RPUs from...
the federal government and states. There is an urgent need to design public policy and funding strategies at both the federal and state levels to support RPUs in enacting their vital missions.

**Federal Policy Applications.**

Where federal legislation exists that directs aid and policy attention towards Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), land-grant universities, and community colleges, there is no comparable federal legislation focused on RPUs. Quite often, federal and state policy and funding directed to public higher education emphasize the roles that colleges play in workforce and economic development, which is important; however, these policies ignore RPUs' broader community development work. Our federal policy recommendations address this gap in federal legislation. Since the Great Recession, state appropriations for public higher education have declined, which has caused significant financial stress for many RPUs. While states have begun reinvesting in public colleges and universities, since 2001, there has been a trend towards disinvestment. To mitigate the financial impacts to state budgets created by the COVID 19 pandemic, Congress passed two major relief packages that directed funding to education, which required that states must continue funding public postsecondary institutions. This proved to be an effective strategy as states maintained some level of funding while RPUs were given additional funding to weather the COVID 19 pandemic. What the success of the federal relief packages shows is that the federal government has a role in partnering with states to fund and support RPUs - we hope to see future state/federal partnerships of this kind.

The federal government should establish a trust or grant program that would allocate funding directly to RPUs. This funding should require that states continue or increase their current funding for RPUs. Because RPUs often have less well-developed grants and research offices due to staffing shortages, the federal grant program should be allocated as direct aid rather than competitive funding for which RPUs must apply. If such a program is created, the federal government could consider a model whereby RPUs are eligible for funding during alternating years. Grant funding levels could be based on a variety of factors including enrollment size measured by headcount, student composition, geographic location, and degree offerings. This funding should be earmarked to support campus regional service efforts such as aligning degree offerings with local industry needs, creating or maintaining small business incubation and support programs, directing service and research of benefit to K-12 schools, supporting regional public health, and maintaining nonprofit leadership development continuing education programs, among other campus-based community service initiatives. Recently legislation that would target funding to RPUs serving distressed communities was proposed which is a promising step in addressing the invisibility RPUs experience in federal legislation. One final way in which the federal government could better support RPUs is through simplifying the research and development grant programs intended to improve
national infrastructure so that RPUs would be better positioned to apply for them given the staffing shortages that they face.

**State Policy Applications.**

States and territories have long been funders and supporters of RPUs. Since the 2008 Recession, though, the strain placed on state and territory budgets by other mandates such as K-12 schools, transportation, and public health has meant that RPUs have received less funding. Yet, RPUs are important components of the civic, economic, and public health infrastructure of their states. RPUs often exist in state systems wherein non-RPUs receive more funding and policymaker attention.

However, non-RPUs increasingly enroll larger shares of students from outside of their states and have national rather than regional portfolios of work. We urge state policymakers to recognize the assets that they have within their state’s RPU sector, as research demonstrates that RPUs align degree offerings with state economic and public needs and enroll higher shares of in-state residents. States should prioritize funding for RPUs to ensure they are positioned to continue serving their regions and students.

State policymakers and State Higher Education Executive offices also have roles to play in maintaining a diverse, differentiated system for higher education. A recent trend has seen non-RPUs, particularly land-grant and flagship universities, opening branch campuses in the service areas of RPUs. For example, the University of Oregon and Oregon State University (non-RPUs) now operate Portland campuses, which are within Portland State University’s (RPU) service area, and Colorado State University (non-RPU) recently announced that it would be
offering degree programs in Denver, which is Metropolitan State University of Denver’s (RPU) service area. By allowing non-RPUs to encroach on the enrollment markets of RPUs, state policymakers are complicit in exacerbating the enrollment challenges facing some RPUs. We recommend that policymakers place greater restrictions on non-RPUs expanding within RPU enrollment markets.

**Practice Applications**

This research can also inform the institutional practices of RPU leaders. Campus leaders often identify peer institutions from which to learn how to adopt best practices and address challenges, and are invited to consult the list of RPUs we created when examining trends within the broader sector. RPU leaders can also identify fellow RPUs in their states with which to network and join in alliance to advocate for better funding or policy at the state or federal level. National associations such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and other organizations can use this list to understand sector-wide trends that could assist in their lobbying and advocacy efforts on behalf of RPUs.

**Media Applications**

The media has an important role to play in ending the relative invisibility that RPUs experience. Too often, media reporting in general, and education press reporting specifically, tends to center on a select group of non-RPUs that have garnered considerable prestige and national or international fame, yet a majority of United States residents attend RPUs or community colleges. More media attention should be given to the RPUs we identified; such attention would support better policymaker and public understanding of the sector.

**Fundraising Applications**

While states have begun re-investing in public higher education, there is no telling when and if funding levels will be restored to pre-recession levels. This reality creates an imperative for RPU leaders and staff to leverage all potential revenue streams including gifts and donations. Our research demonstrates that RPUs have much smaller endowments than non-RPUs, and other research has documented the following barriers that RPU leaders face when cultivating donor bases. Potential donors are often unmoved by state funding cuts to give to RPUs, and RPU
alumni are more likely to work in lower-paid professions and possess less intergenerational wealth, factors affecting their ability to give. RPU leaders also report that, due to staffing shortages, they have been unable to establish robust and coordinated fundraising efforts.48

Many donors give money with the goals of fostering postsecondary equity and access, and community transformation, and the mission of RPUs is to pursue these goals as well. Yet, the wealthiest postsecondary institutions that are often non-RPUs tend to garner the largest gifts and donations.49 Donors interested in supporting low-income students and students of color and fostering community wellbeing should consider giving to RPUs and are invited to consult our list when identifying institutions to fund.

While we acknowledge the very real staff and other limitations that many RPUs face, we believe more can be done within the sector to attract gifts. RPU leaders should professionalize their fundraising efforts and learn from institutions that have experienced success in this area. Leaders can also become more strategic in documenting their campus’s contributions to economic and community development and upward mobility for students. Beyond the numeric data documenting RPUs’ contributions to their students and communities that we have described herein, institutional fundraisers and friend raisers could share student stories and testimonials, photos from campus-community events, and local media reporting touting the campus’s contributions to place.
RPUs are crucial contributors to postsecondary access, upward mobility, educational equity, and national and regional well-being. Yet for far too long, RPUs have been ignored and undervalued. Our hope is that by creating a list of RPUs and examining the students and communities that they serve, broader understanding and attention will grow that will lead to more positive policy and funding that will benefit the sector and its students. It is equally imperative that additional research is produced that exposes how RPUs navigate the challenging circumstances they face while advancing their critical missions. Put simply, RPUs are anchor institutions for their communities and for the nation, and their continued ability to serve in these roles hinges on improved policy, research, understanding, and funding.
Appendix A: List of Regional Public Universities and Colleges

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Adams State University
Alabama A & M University
Alabama State University
Albany State University
Alcorn State University
Angelo State University
Appalachian State University
Arkansas State University
Arkansas Tech University
Athens State University
Atlanta Metropolitan State College
Auburn University at Montgomery
Augusta University
Austin Peay State University
Ball State University
Bemidji State University
Black Hills State University
Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania
Bluefield State College
Boise State University
Bowie State University
Bowling Green State University-Main Campus
Brazosport College
Bridgewater State University
California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo
California State Polytechnic University-Pomona
California State University Maritime Academy
California State University-Bakersfield
California State University-Channel Islands
California State University-Chico
California State University-Dominguez Hills
California State University-East Bay
California State University-Fresno
California State University-Fullerton
California State University-Long Beach
California State University-Los Angeles
California State University-Monterey Bay
California State University-Northridge
California State University-Sacramento
California State University-San Bernardino
California State University-San Marcos
California State University-Stanislaus
California University of Pennsylvania
Cameron University
Castleton University
Central Connecticut State University
Central Michigan University
Central State University
Central Washington University
Chadron State College
Charter Oak State College
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania
Chicago State University
Chipola College
Christopher Newport University
 Citadel Military College of South Carolina
Clarion University of Pennsylvania
Clayton State University
Cleveland State University
Coastal Carolina University
Colegio Universitario de San Juan
College of Central Florida
College of Charleston
College of Coastal Georgia
College of Staten Island CUNY
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<th>University Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado Mesa University</td>
<td>Eastern Oregon University</td>
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<td>Colorado Mountain College</td>
<td>Eastern Washington University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado State University Pueblo</td>
<td>Edinboro University of Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbia Basin College</td>
<td>Elizabeth City State University</td>
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<td>Emporia State University</td>
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<td>Fashion Institute of Technology</td>
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<td>CUNY Brooklyn College</td>
<td>Fayetteville State University</td>
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<td>CUNY City College</td>
<td>Ferris State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY Graduate School and University Center</td>
<td>Fitchburg State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY Hunter College</td>
<td>Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Florida Gulf Coast University</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY Lehman College</td>
<td>Florida Polytechnic University</td>
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<td>CUNY Medgar Evers College</td>
<td>Florida SouthWestern State College</td>
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<td>CUNY New York City College of Technology</td>
<td>Florida State College at Jacksonville</td>
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<td>CUNY Queens College</td>
<td>Fort Hays State University</td>
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<td>Fort Lewis College</td>
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<td>Framingham State University</td>
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<td>Francis Marion University</td>
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<td>Delaware State University</td>
<td>Frostburg State University</td>
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<td>Delta State University</td>
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<td>Grambling State University</td>
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<td>Granite State College</td>
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<td>Maine Maritime Academy</td>
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<td>Indian River State College</td>
<td>Mansfield University of Pennsylvania</td>
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<td>Indiana State University</td>
<td>Marshall University</td>
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<td>Indiana University of Pennsylvania-Main Campus</td>
<td>Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts</td>
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<td>Massachusetts Maritime Academy</td>
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Murray State University
Nevada State College
New College of Florida
New Jersey City University
New Mexico Highlands University
Nicholls State University
Norfolk State University
North Carolina A & T State University
North Carolina Central University
North Dakota State University-Main Campus
Northeastern Illinois University
Northeastern State University
Northern Arizona University
Northern Illinois University
Northern Kentucky University
Northern Marianas College
Northern Michigan University
Northern New Mexico College
Northern State University
Northern Vermont University
Northwest Florida State College
Northwest Missouri State University
Northwestern Oklahoma State University
Northwestern State University of Louisiana
Oakland University
Ohio State University-Lima Campus
Ohio State University-Mansfield Campus
Ohio State University-Marion Campus
Ohio State University-Newark Campus
Ohio University-Main Campus
Oklahoma Panhandle State University
Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology
Old Dominion University
Oregon Institute of Technology
Pennsylvania College of Technology
Peru State College
Pittsburg State University
Plymouth State University
Polk State College
Portland State University
Prairie View A & M University
Purdue University Fort Wayne
Purdue University Northwest
Radford University
Rampam College of New Jersey
Rhode Island College
Rogers State University
Rowan University
Rutgers University-Camden
Rutgers University-Newark
Saginaw Valley State University
Saint Cloud State University
Salem State University
Salisbury University
Sam Houston State University
San Diego State University
San Francisco State University
San Jose State University
Savannah State University
Shawnee State University
Shepherd University
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
Sonoma State University
South Carolina State University
South Dakota State University
South Georgia State College
Southeast Missouri State University
Southeastern Louisiana University
Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Southern Arkansas University Main Campus
Southern Connecticut State University
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale
Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville
Southern Oregon University
Southern University and A & M College
Southern University at New Orleans
Southern Utah University
Southwest Minnesota State University
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
St Petersburg College
St. Mary's College of Maryland
State College of Florida-Manatee-Sarasota
State University of New York at New Paltz
Stephen F Austin State University
Stockton University
Sul Ross State University
SUNY at Fredonia
SUNY at Purchase College
SUNY Brockport
SUNY Buffalo State
SUNY College at Geneseo
SUNY College at Old Westbury
SUNY College at Oswego
SUNY College at Plattsburgh
SUNY College at Potsdam
SUNY College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill
SUNY College of Technology at Alfred
SUNY College of Technology at Canton
SUNY College of Technology at Delhi
SUNY Cortland
SUNY Empire State College
SUNY Maritime College
SUNY Morrisville
SUNY Oneonta
SUNY Polytechnic Institute
Tarleton State University
Tennessee State University
Tennessee Technological University
Texas A & M International University
Texas A & M University-Commerce
Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi
Texas A & M University-Kingsville
Texas A&M University-Central Texas
Texas A&M University-San Antonio
Texas A&M University-Texarkana
Texas Southern University
Texas State University
Texas Woman's University
The College of New Jersey
The Evergreen State College
The University of Montana
The University of Montana-Western
The University of Tennessee-ChATTanooga
The University of Tennessee-Martin
The University of Texas at Tyler
The University of Texas Permian Basin
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
The University of Virginia's College at Wise
The University of West Florida
Thomas Edison State University
Towson University
Troy University
Truman State University
University of Akron Main Campus
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Alaska Anchorage
University of Alaska Fairbanks
University of Alaska Southeast
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
University of Arkansas at Monticello
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
University of Arkansas-Fort Smith
University of Baltimore
University of California-Merced
University of Central Arkansas
University of Central Missouri
University of Central Oklahoma
University of Cincinnati-Clermont College
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
University of Guam
University of Hawaii at Hilo
University of Hawaii-West Oahu
University of Houston-Clear Lake
University of Houston-Downtown
University of Houston-Victoria
University of Idaho
University of Illinois Springfield
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Louisiana at Monroe
University of Maine at Augusta
University of Maine at Farmington
University of Maine at Fort Kent
University of Maine at Machias
University of Maine at Presque Isle
University of Mary Washington
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
University of Massachusetts-Boston
University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth
University of Memphis
University of Michigan-Dearborn
University of Michigan-Flint
University of Minnesota-Crookston
University of Minnesota-Duluth
University of Minnesota-Morris
University of Missouri-Kansas City
University of Missouri-St Louis
University of Montevallo
University of Nebraska at Kearney
University of Nebraska at Omaha
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
University of New Hampshire at Manchester
University of New Orleans
University of North Alabama
University of North Carolina at Asheville
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
University of North Carolina Wilmington
University of North Dakota
University of North Florida
University of North Georgia
University of North Texas at Dallas
University of Northern Colorado
University of Northern Iowa
University of Pittsburgh-Bradford
University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg
University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown
University of Puerto Rico-Aguadilla
University of Puerto Rico-Arecibo
University of Puerto Rico-Bayamon
University of Puerto Rico-Carolina
University of Puerto Rico-Cayey
University of Puerto Rico-Humacao
University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez
University of Puerto Rico-Ponce
University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras
University of Puerto Rico-Utuado
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma
University of South Alabama
University of South Carolina Aiken
University of South Carolina Beaufort
University of South Carolina-Upstate
University of South Dakota
University of Southern Indiana
University of Southern Maine
University of Southern Mississippi
University of the District of Columbia
University of the Virgin Islands
University of Toledo
University of Washington-Bothell Campus
University of Washington-Tacoma Campus
University of West Alabama
University of West Georgia
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Flex
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
University of Wisconsin-Parkside
University of Wisconsin-Platteville
University of Wisconsin-River Falls
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
University of Wisconsin-Stout
University of Wisconsin-Superior
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Utah Valley University
Valdosta State University
Valley City State University
Vermont Technical College
Virginia Military Institute
Virginia State University
Washburn University
Wayne State College
Wayne State University
Weber State University
West Chester University of Pennsylvania
West Liberty University
West Texas A & M University
West Virginia State University
West Virginia University at Parkersburg
West Virginia University Institute of Technology
Western Carolina University
Western Colorado University
Western Connecticut State University
Western Illinois University
Western Kentucky University
Western Michigan University
Western New Mexico University
Western Oregon University
Western Washington University
Westfield State University
Wichita State University
William Paterson University of New Jersey
Winona State University
Winston-Salem State University
Winthrop University
Worcester State University
Wright State University-Lake Campus
Wright State University-Main Campus
Youngstown State University
Appendix B

Our Approach

To create the list of RPUs, we used cluster analysis, which identifies natural groups of observations (in the current case, institutions) based on their similarities and relationships in a dataset.\textsuperscript{51} We were attracted to cluster analysis which inductively identifies RPUs by how they cluster along shared or similar institutional characteristics – unlike Carnegie, which uses proxies for mission. By doing so, we resisted defining RPUs by what they are not or using proxies for mission and instead grouped these institutions using their own institutional features.

We collected IPEDS data for 128 variables for all four-year public institutions for 2020-2021. We used silhouette analysis to identify the best number of clusters and found that the dataset contained two clusters of observations. This matched our theoretical assumption that there were two groups of four-year public institutions: RPUs and non-RPUs (primarily flagships and/or land-grant institutions). We then confirmed that variables we used were not multicollinear by measuring the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of variables and excluding those with values over 10, and that the sample was representative. We then performed agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis on the complete dataset and used Ward’s algorithm, minimizing within-cluster variation using absolute dissimilarities.

To validate the cluster solution, we randomly split the dataset into two groups and performed the cluster analysis on the two groups. We then compared the two groups and arrived at similar cluster solutions with subsets of the data. We also performed a “leave-one-out” cross validation that repeatedly removed one observation and performed the cluster analysis again. We also presented the results to several experts on RPUs to ensure that the results were consistent with their understanding of the sector, further validating the results.

Next we performed descriptive statistical analyses (presented in the “Results” section) for the RPUs and non-RPUs, comparing the means for the two groups along a variety of variables (e.g., enrollment size, student composition, financial resources, etc.). Finally, we performed descriptive analyses on the counties for the RPUs and non-RPUs (presented in the “Results” section) to understand their county traits using data from the U.S. Cen-
sus, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Health Resources and Resources Administration (HRRA).

**Limitations and Cautions**

While our approach was rigorous, it includes a few cautions and limitations. First, we excluded some public colleges from our analysis. Pennsylvania State University branch campuses report data to the flagship, making institutional-level analyses via cluster analysis impossible; as such, we removed these campuses. We would have preferred to include these campuses because other scholars have identified them as RPUs, and their stated missions indicate a commitment to fostering postsecondary access and regional wellbeing – traits that research demonstrates RPUs exhibit. A few campuses had a high degree of data missingness which also made cluster analysis impossible. We additionally removed the five United States military service academies (the U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, and U.S. Coast Guard Academy) and Tribal Colleges and Universities because they are federally and/or tribally funded and are distinctly different RPUs, flagships, and land-grant universities. We also removed global campuses, which do not have a physical presence or campus and, as such, do not have a regional service mission typical of RPUs.

RPUs frequently maintain lists of counties that institutional leaders see themselves as serving. Currently, there is no national dataset with the service areas of RPUs, so we are unable to fully understand the characteristics of each RPU’s identified service area. To address this limitation, we examined the counties in which RPUs are located and compared them with the counties in which non-RPUs are located. Five RPUs – all located in U.S. territories – were in counties that did not report Census data (Northern Marianas College, University of Guam, University of Puerto Rico-Bayamon, University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez, University of the Virgin Islands). As a result, our analysis of the traits of the counties RPUs serve are missing data from these five institutions. These five institutions are therefore excluded from county-level descriptive analyses.

Our cluster analysis yielded some surprising results. We intentionally used a data-centered, mission-centered approach with the goal to identify RPUs that exhibited similar traits and characteristics. As a result, we identified some land-grant universities and mixed baccalaureate colleges that share traits with other institutions that many people would commonly identify as RPUs. Through repeated cluster analyses using various mixtures of variables, 29 land-grant universities clustered as RPUs, including all nineteen 1890 land-grant HBCUs and nine 1862 land-grant universities. We interpret these results as meaning that 1890 land-grant HBCUs have regional service and access missions which is why they clustered as RPUs. The nine land-grant universities likely clustered as RPUs because they enroll large shares of Pell recipients and in-state students. Our analysis also identified 35 Carnegie Classified “baccalaureate/associate’s colleges: mixed baccalaureate/associate’s” institutions. We pulled data for all four-year public institutions, as identified by IPEDS, and this included these associate’s degree-granting institutions. Due to these shared traits and missions, we include them in our list, and we believe they can reasonably be classified as RPUs. Nonetheless, we invite researchers wishing to study RPUs that specifically are
not also land-grant universities or mixed baccalaureate/associate's colleges to remove these institutions when performing further analyses. Finally, we used 2018 Carnegie Classifications data during our analyses. Since our analyses concluded, the 2021 Carnegie Classifications were released and a few institutions in our dataset have changed Carnegie Classification which may affect their inclusion in the RPU list. Table 2 uses the 2021 Carnegie Classifications.


32. Maxim & Muro (2021); Orphan (2018); Orphan & McClure (2019).

33. McClure et al. (2021).


35. Crisp et al. (2021).


38. (Taylor & Cantwell, 2021).


45. Orphan (2020a).


47. McClure & Anderson (2020).


49. Korich et al. (2022); McClure et al. (2021).


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