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American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle NW
Washington, DC 20036

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Introduction

Higher education institutions outside the U.S. are actively seeking opportunities to collaborate with U.S. colleges and universities—and often find their interest strongly reciprocated by U.S. counterparts. While the motivations and activities of these partnerships vary substantially, their potential for success is always enhanced when collaborators have a mutual understanding of the national higher education landscape in which each of the partners operate. Because the U.S. higher education system is an anomaly—unique among national education systems worldwide—gaining a sense of the broad U.S. higher education landscape is an essential first step in establishing collaborative initiatives.

This guide provides the most important information non-U.S. institutions need in order to pursue and develop successful partnerships with U.S. colleges and universities. It may also be useful for people in the U.S. interested in learning more about the country’s higher education system.

To establish a shared understanding of definitions and provide a starting point for discussions with potential U.S. partners, the first section outlines common goals for international higher education partnerships—held by U.S. institutions and their international counterparts alike—and the specific types of collaborations such relationships typically entail. Next, key characteristics of the U.S. higher education system as a whole are presented, followed by more granular details related to institutional operations and the student experience.

Throughout the guide, Implications for Engagement boxes are included to explicitly explore the connection between international collaborations and partnerships, and the broader topics discussed in the corresponding sections. Related Resources boxes highlight ACE and other associations’ research, initiatives, examples, and tools that provide additional details and information about key topics.

This guide is an updated version of *A Brief Guide to U.S. Higher Education*, published by ACE in 2007. While it includes new original content, it also uses text and information from multiple ACE sources and publications, referenced throughout.

RELATED RESOURCES

MAPPING INTERNATIONALIZATION ON U.S. CAMPUSES

In order to understand internationalization trends and identify priorities going forward, every five years ACE administers its Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses Survey to colleges and universities around the country. Conducted first in 2001 and most recently in 2016, the Mapping Survey is the only comprehensive source of data on internationalization in all sectors of U.S. higher education. In terms of content and areas addressed, the survey is structured around the six pillars of ACE’s Model for Comprehensive Internationalization:



Partnership Fundamentals

The following material is adapted from [International Partnerships, Part One: Definitions and Dimensions](#), written by Jane Gatewood and Susan Buck Sutton, and published in 2016 by ACE.

International higher education partnerships are increasing in number, and expanding in the forms they take and the goals they address. Numerous studies, both in the United States and globally, indicate that colleges and universities increasingly understand international partnership development as a key element of their internationalization strategy—sometimes as a tactical move to further other objectives, sometimes as a goal in and of itself.

Goals

Institutional goals for international collaboration span the full breadth of the academic enterprise—teaching, research, service, and institutional development. Broad categories of partnership goals, and some of the specific objectives within each of these areas, include:

- **Academics and Reputation**

- *Enhance teaching and student learning.* Higher education institutions worldwide recognize that learning in a globalized world must include international engagement for students. This is critical both to develop a competent workforce, and to engender global dialogue and cultural understanding. To this end, institutions may develop cross-border partnerships for collaborative exchange, instruction, or degree-granting programs, all of which broaden opportunities for student global learning.
- *Build institutional reputation and prestige.* Many institutions around the world seek to achieve so-called world class status, which is typically defined by a favorable position in global ranking tables. Developing partnerships with elite or highly ranked institutions in other countries can be seen as a way to improve institutional prestige and reputation—a key metric in various ranking schemes.

- **Research and Funding**

- *Contribute to large-scale research.* Research is increasingly structured around large, interdisciplinary, international clusters of researchers and institutions. This is because current global research challenges—clean energy, health and wellness, educational access and equity, sustainable development, etc.—cannot be addressed by scholars at one institution alone. These challenges are too pressing and too expansive for a singular approach and require multiple institutions and facilities, as well as multiple global perspectives. Partnering allows institutions to increase their research capacity without significant investment in additional core facilities.
- *Respond to global shifts in funding sources.* While the United States still provides the largest total investment in research and development (R&D) worldwide, its share of global R&D expenditure has slipped and is quickly shifting toward Asia, specifically China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2018). To remain competitive in this shifting landscape, U.S. institutions seek collaborators abroad—often with encouragement from national funding agencies and foundations—which increasingly make international partnerships a condition for funding.

- **Institutional Development and Service**

- *Help meet increased demand for high-quality postsecondary education worldwide.* As global demand for higher education increases, institutions may seek partnerships as a means to tap into new markets and expand their student recruitment base—in many cases with the support of national governments that are looking to provide broader access to higher education in their respective countries. This type of cooperation sometimes is also the basis for enhancing curricular, research, and administrative capacities at one or both of the partner institutions.
- *Provide opportunities for internships, experiential learning, and community engagement.* There is growing interest in creating ways for students to apply their global learning, build their capacity for intercultural work, and develop a sense of global responsibility and citizenship. Partnerships can provide a trusted, locally embedded pathway into experiential learning abroad, as well as the opportunity for direct student-to-student collaboration across national boundaries.
- *Engage in people-to-people diplomacy.* A number of nations, including the United States, advocate for and support international academic partnerships as a means of increasing awareness and understanding among nations. In this way, partnerships can advance international diplomacy, cooperation, and peace-building. Institutions may see such contributions to the global common good as an aspect of their service mission.

The above list of goals is representative, but not exhaustive. As the overall mission and scope of higher education continue to expand—and public expectations surrounding its role in and contributions to society evolve—colleges and universities are leveraging international collaborations to accomplish new and emerging goals, and advance institutional strategies in previously unexpected ways.

While many partner relationships have multiple objectives, few will address the entire breadth of possibilities. However, an institution's suite of partnerships may touch on many or all of these areas, as well as the institution-specific goals set within them.

RELATED RESOURCES

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Given their broad membership base, higher education associations have access to a wide variety of institutional experiences and perspectives from the field. A number of associations have leveraged this access to gather information about how to optimize international higher education partnerships, compile examples of good practice, and provide guidance to institutions seeking to broaden their international engagement.

Resources include:

- Based on an analysis of standards of good practice set forth by organizations in the United States and around the world, ACE's 2015 publication *International Higher Education Partnerships: A Global Review of Standards and Practices* identifies key issues in developing and implementing sound international partnerships, and explores strategies for addressing them effectively.
- The *Internationalization in Action* (IIA) series features institutional strategies and good practices gathered from participants in ACE programs and higher education experts engaged in internationalization. Four installments of IIA addressed international

partnerships: *Part One: Definitions and Dimensions*; *Part Two: Strategic Planning*; *Part Three: A Hub and Spokes—Configuring Campus Stakeholders for Partnership Success*; and *Part Four: From Strategy to Implementation—Launching and Managing Individual Partnerships*.

- In spring 2016, ACE released a special edition of *Internationalization in Action* called *Connecting Classrooms: Using Online Technology to Deliver Global Learning*. Drawing on the experience of institutions that participated in the ACE-SUNY Center for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Internationalization Through Technology Awards Program, the installment features good practices and lessons learned for collaborative teaching via technology.
- The fall 2018 issue of the Institute of International Education's *IIE Networker* magazine, "*Interconnected Education: Building Bridges Through International Partnerships*," offers expert perspectives on innovative partnership models, including collaborations between governments; building new data bases; and using a core partnership to form a new institution.
- *Global Perspectives on Strategic International Partnerships: A Guide to Building Sustainable Academic Linkages* is an IIE book that examines building and managing strategic institutional linkages. The book includes advice from practitioners worldwide, case studies, as well as relevant theories, and discusses ways to develop and sustain successful international partnerships.
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators' 2012 publication *Public-Private Partnerships* examines international partnerships between higher education institutions and private sector entities. It addresses the definition of public-private partnerships and their functioning, including challenges and potential benefits they offer.
- The Association of American Universities' 2014 publication *Principles and Guidelines for Establishing Joint Academic Programs and Campuses Abroad* provides guidance for institutions managing issues that may arise in the development and implementation of collaborative academic initiatives. These include challenges related to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and nondiscrimination, among others.

Activities

As the goals for international partnerships have expanded and evolved over time, so too have the collaborative activities entailed in these arrangements. Like the goals, activities now span the full breadth of the academic enterprise. They include:

- **Student and faculty mobility (reciprocal and unidirectional).** Student and faculty mobility between partners can take many forms. It allows students to take courses or participate in experiential programs (sometimes for credit, sometimes not) and faculty to teach or conduct research at partner institutions. Although these arrangements can be unilateral or multilateral, often they are developed on the principle of reciprocity where "like is exchanged for like."

- **Cooperative development and institutional capacity-building projects.** Institutions seeking to develop or expand their academic and research capacity often pursue training and research opportunities with experienced partners abroad. They also invite partner staff and faculty to assist in planning new degrees and developing procedures, policies, resources, and infrastructure needed for institutional advancement. For the partner, access to specific environments, constituencies, or locales often makes the collaboration mutually beneficial.
- **Collaborative research and training.** Specialized research or centers of excellence often cannot be scaled or replicated, and core facilities are expensive to develop and maintain. To expand research capacity and provide training to students and early-career researchers, institutions may partner to create formal collaboration and training opportunities that investigate issues of global significance.
- **Cooperative and collaborative degrees.** Institutions worldwide increasingly collaborate through formalized partner agreements that facilitate one or more of the following degree arrangements: joint conferral, double/dual (two of the same type/level of degrees), or consecutive (bachelor's/master's, master's/doctoral, etc.). Students often obtain these degrees when they progress from one institution to the other in a compressed timeframe. In an increasingly global workforce, many institutions, students, and industry participants believe cooperative degrees are useful for cross-border degree recognition.
- **Collaborative teaching (face-to-face or online).** Global learning is predicated on enabling students to venture outside their own cultural setting and also to engage multiple perspectives on a particular topic. Having partner faculty co-teach a course (or segment of a course) is a particularly powerful way to facilitate intercultural encounters and expand a learner's intellectual lens. This is especially true if students are also encouraged to collaborate virtually and work on projects with their counterparts at the partner institution.
- **Collaborative academic operations.** Collaborative institutional relationships sometimes involve one of the partners developing an academic unit at the other institution, or the creation of a jointly established initiative that brings together faculty, curricula, and sometimes students from both institutions. In some cases, when institutions establish a branch campus in another country, they may share space or facilities with a host country institution while maintaining a separate identity and separate programs.
- **Projects involving organizations, businesses, and communities near one or more partners.** Academic partnerships can also be embedded in or form the basis of connections among various entities in the communities where the institutions are located. In some cases, these projects have a social or economic development component. Sister city relationships, multinational businesses, diasporic immigrant communities, and international nongovernmental organizations often frame such work.

While many international partnerships focus on a discrete activity, as institutions have sought to deepen their relationships with counterparts abroad and maximize the impact of collaborations, more institutions are pursuing multidimensional partnerships that include a variety of initiatives and projects. In some cases, multidimensionality is built into the relationship from the beginning; in others, the relationship expands over time to include new activities and focus areas.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

U.S. INSTITUTIONS' INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

The following material is adapted from ACE's Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses report published in 2017.

ACE's *Mapping Internationalization* report indicates that international engagement and collaboration are garnering increased attention, energy, and support on many U.S. campuses. However, activity levels and the extent to which partnerships are well and intentionally planned still vary significantly among institutions developing relationships abroad. While higher education institutions continue to be the most common partners for U.S. institutions, as illustrated in the table below, many colleges and universities are also engaging with other entities.

PERCENTAGE OF INSTITUTIONS PARTNERING WITH ENTITIES OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Academic Institutions	73%
NGOs	34%
Foreign Governments	17%
Corporations	12%
Other	5%

In terms of geographic focus, China occupies the top spot—both for existing partnerships, and as a target for expanded activity. More broadly, as illustrated in the table below, European and Asian countries are at the forefront of current collaborations. Asia, along with Latin America, is also well represented among countries targeted by U.S. institutions for partnership expansion.

Existing Activity	Targeted for Expanded Activity
China	China
Japan	India
United Kingdom	Brazil
Germany	Mexico
France	Vietnam
South Korea	South Korea

A relatively small segment of U.S. institutions has pursued or intends to pursue collaborative degree programs in the near future. In 2016, 16 percent of institutions that responded to ACE's survey operated dual/double degree programs and 8 percent offered joint degree programs. Doctoral institutions are substantially more likely to offer such programs than institutions of any other type. Enrollment patterns in these programs indicate that the mobility facilitated by collaborative degree programs is mostly one-way, suggesting that such programs are largely serving U.S. institutions as a mechanism for international student recruiting.

Finally, in order to facilitate a range of partnership and programmatic activity, some institutions have established branch campuses or other foreign outposts. While such entities have garnered a fair amount of media attention in recent years, they are operated by a narrow segment of U.S. institutions, mainly in the doctoral sector. Administrative offices are the most common type of outpost, followed by study centers for U.S. students, and branch campuses. Numbers are small in all cases; however, the proportion of institutions operating each type of entity (with at least one full-time staff member abroad) hovers around just 5 percent.

RELATED RESOURCES

DISCIPLINE AND STATE-BASED INFORMATION

Institutions looking for a U.S. partner in a specific discipline may benefit from exploring various discipline associations and societies. Organizations listed here are not exhaustive, but provide a sample of sources for example disciplines.

All **resources below were compiled by the European University Institute** (n.d.) as part of their Academic Careers Observatory.

HISTORY

- [American Historical Association](#)
- [Association of Ancient Historians](#)
- [EUI virtual history library on the United States](#)
- [Organization of American Historians](#)
- [Society of American Historians](#)
- [Society of Architectural Historians](#)

ECONOMICS

- [American Economic Association](#)
- [American Law and Economics Association](#)
- [National Bureau of Economic Research](#)
- [National Economic Association](#)
- [Agricultural and Applied Economics Association](#)

LAW

- [American Bar Association](#)
- [American Law and Economics Association](#)
- [The Association of American Law Schools](#)

COMPUTER SCIENCE

- [International Association of Computer Science and Information Technology](#)
- [Association for Computing Machinery](#)
- [Computing Research Association](#)

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

- [American Political Science Association](#)
- [Social Science Research Council](#)
- [The American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy](#)

Organized by state, the [UnivSearch](#) website offers a list of all the public and private colleges and universities in the U.S. including links to institutional profiles—such as mailing address, important phone numbers, homepage address, and degrees and programs offered.

The U.S. Higher Education System

The U.S. higher education enterprise is large and diverse, with about 4,600 degree-granting institutions and more than 21 million students (NCES 2016a). Across the spectrum of higher education systems worldwide, the U.S. system is unique in multiple ways. Unlike most countries, the U.S. lacks a ministry of education or other central agency that holds overall responsibility for higher education nationwide. The federal government plays a limited role. Mirroring other U.S. governmental structures, the country's higher education system as a whole is decentralized. Public universities and colleges are under the purview of state, not federal government. Institutions have significant autonomy, and there is a wide range of institution types. Student populations vary significantly, and, unlike most systems around the world, several private—not public—institutions are considered the most prestigious.

Even the naming conventions of U.S. institutions stray from global norms. Many institutions called *universities* do not confer degrees beyond the master's level and some offer only a bachelor's degree. Some *colleges*, a term in many countries that refers to an undergraduate institution or advanced secondary school, offer doctorates. A few prestigious comprehensive research universities that offer bachelor's through doctorate degrees are known as *institutes* (e.g., California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology). In addition, there are some institutions called *colleges*, *universities*, or *institutes* that are not accredited but offer degrees and certificates.

Degrees Granted

No national laws govern the titles of degrees at either the undergraduate or graduate level, although each state typically regulates the level of degree that public institutions located within its borders can award. Each institution has the autonomy to determine its own program requirements, typically following broad degree guidelines set by the states or by specialized accrediting agencies.

TABLE 1: TYPES OF DEGREES

Associate Degree	Two-year colleges and a small number of four-year institutions grant undergraduate associate degrees, typically awarded after the completion of 60 semester credits. Associate degrees may represent a terminal degree in a vocational field or may prepare students to complete a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution.
Bachelor's Degree	The undergraduate bachelor's degree is the most commonly awarded degree type, preparing students for most jobs that require a postsecondary degree and is a prerequisite for further graduate study. Although the traditional bachelor's degree, which requires four years of full-time study, is in arts (BA) or science (BS), some colleges and universities award bachelor's degrees that identify the specific area of concentration. This is especially true in the case of professional concentrations, such as the bachelor of education, bachelor of nursing, or bachelor of social work. The bachelor of fine arts degree ordinarily indicates that the concentration has been in an area of performance (e.g., art, drama, dance).
Master's Degree	The graduate master's degree typically requires one or two years of study beyond the bachelor's degree depending on the field. It accounts for the majority of students enrolled in graduate programs across the country. Master's degrees usually include a long research paper, master's thesis, or some other piece of original work, though this is not always the case for some professional degrees. Professional degrees often require, in addition to or in lieu of a major original capstone research project, a practicum (practical experience) in the field. In addition to the master of arts (MA) and master of science (MS), many degrees are awarded in education (MEd), business administration (MBA), nursing (MSN), and fine arts (MFA). The MFA is generally considered the terminal degree in the field.
Doctoral Degree	The graduate doctoral degree is the highest academic degree awarded by universities in the United States and is considered the terminal degree in most fields. In research fields, the degree usually awarded is the doctor of philosophy (PhD). This degree requires at least two to three years of course work beyond the bachelor's degree, successful completion of comprehensive written and oral examinations, and a major research project in the form of a dissertation (often called a thesis in other countries) that is an original contribution to the field. In the field of education, students may earn a PhD or an EdD. The latter is less research intensive and more practice oriented. Doctorates are also awarded in medicine (MD), dentistry (DDS), law (JD), and divinity (DD), but these degrees denote intense professional preparation rather than scholarly research competence.

Institution Types

Understanding the array of U.S. institutional types is a complex task. However, it can be especially helpful for non-U.S. partners, as well as others who want to better comprehend the country's college and university network at large. Two key organizations are responsible for the most commonly referenced higher education categories: the [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#) and the [Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education](#). At the highest level, institutions are delineated as being public or private.

Public and private institutions in the U.S., as defined by the NCES (2018):

Public institution	An educational institution whose programs and activities are operated by publicly elected or appointed school officials and which is supported primarily by public funds.
Private institution	An educational institution controlled by a private individual(s) or by a nongovernmental agency, usually supported primarily by non-public funds, and operated by leaders other than publicly elected or appointed officials.

Among private institutions, NCES defines not-for-profit and for-profit as follows:

Private not-for-profit institution	A private institution in which the individual(s) or agency in control receives no compensation, other than wages, rent, or other expenses for the assumption of risk. These include both independent not-for-profit schools and those affiliated with a religious organization.
Private for-profit institution	A private institution in which the individual(s) or agency in control receives compensation other than wages, rent, or other expenses for the assumption of risk.

According to the NCES, *degree-granting* refers to postsecondary institutions that are eligible for [Title IV federal financial aid programs](#),¹ and that grant an associate or higher degree. For an institution to be eligible to participate in financial aid programs it must offer a program of at least 300 clock hours in duration, have accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, have been in operation for at least two years, and have signed a participation agreement with the Department (NCES 2018).

Degree-granting colleges and universities are frequently referred to as *two-year* or *four-year* institutions. *Two-year* institutions grant associate degrees and are community or technical/career colleges. *Four-year* institutions are colleges and universities that award bachelor, masters, and/or doctoral degrees. Although *two* and *four* refer to the typical duration of study for an undergraduate to receive the lowest level degree in either type of institution, these are conventional names that do not necessarily align with program and degree policies.

¹ Title IV financial aid programs include federal grants, loans, and work-study programs. Find more information on the U.S. Department of Education [Federal Student Aid](#) website.

FIGURE 1: DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS: NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS VS. NUMBER OF STUDENTS

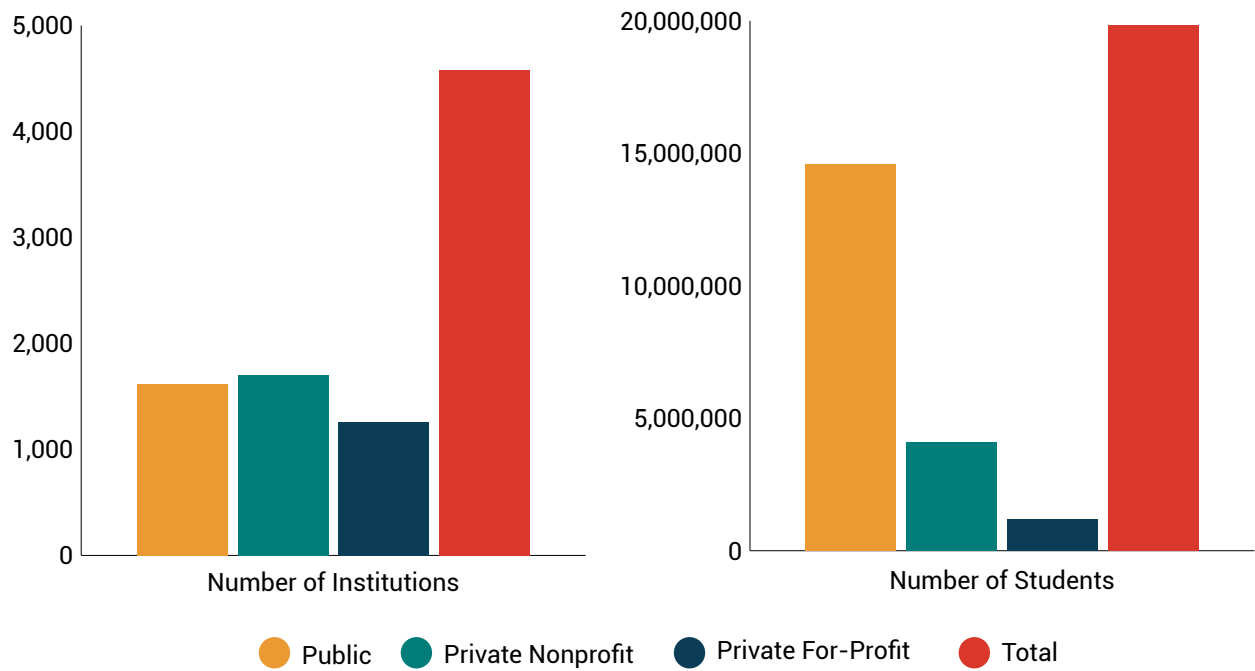
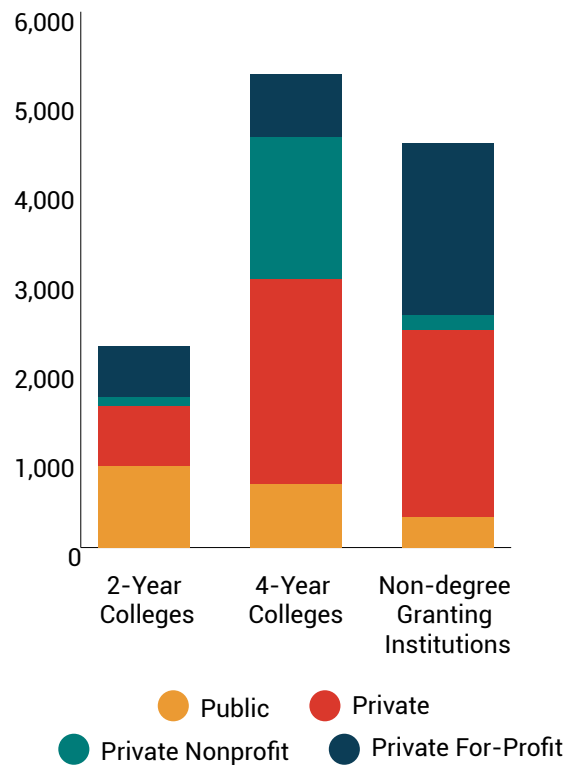


FIGURE 2: DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS, BY TYPE



Source: NCES 2016b

The [Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education](#) was established in 1970 for research purposes and has become commonly used in the United States. The Carnegie Classification system defines institutional categories as follows:

Doctoral Universities: Institutions that award at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees during the academic year and also institutions with below 20 doctoral degrees that award at least 30 professional practice doctoral degrees in at least two programs.

Master’s Colleges and Universities: Generally includes institutions that award at least 50 master’s degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees during the academic year.

Baccalaureate Colleges: Includes institutions where baccalaureate or higher degrees represent at least 50 percent of all degrees, but where fewer than 50 master’s degrees or 20 doctoral degrees are awarded during the academic year.

Baccalaureate/Associate’s Colleges: Includes four-year colleges (by virtue of having at least one baccalaureate degree program) that confer more than 50 percent of degrees at the associate level.

Associate’s Colleges: Two-year institutions at which the highest-level degree awarded is an associate degree. These institutions are often called community colleges, and they are sorted into nine categories based on the intersection of two factors: disciplinary focus (transfer, career, and technical or mixed) and dominant student type (traditional, post-traditional, or mixed).

Special Focus Institutions: Institutions where a high concentration of degrees is in a single field or set of related fields.

Tribal Colleges: Colleges and universities that are members of the [American Indian Higher Education Consortium](#).

TABLE 2: U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM, BY INSTITUTION TYPE

	N	%
Doctoral Universities	335	7%
Master’s Colleges and Universities	741	16%
Baccalaureate Colleges	583	13%
Baccalaureate/Associate	408	9%
Associate Colleges	1,113	24%
Other	1,484	33%
Total	4,664	100%

Source: NCES 2016b

Student Demographics

The U.S., like many countries today, is experiencing a rapid demographic change. Ninety-two percent of America’s population growth in the last decade occurred among communities of color, and demographic projections suggest that by 2050 these communities will be in the majority (National Equity Atlas 2018). Access to postsecondary education and training for all segments of American society is critical in order to ensure the country’s economic competitiveness, increase individual and family economic mobility, and maintain a robust democracy.

In light of these circumstances, the way that American colleges and universities approach the issues of access and success for students from both low-income families and communities of color, concepts commonly and collectively referred to as “equity and inclusion,” is becoming increasingly important. Institutions throughout the U.S.—public and private and of varying levels of selectivity—articulate the essential role student body diversity plays in their educational goals through their mission statements, campus programs and initiatives, the curriculum, and the demographics of faculty and staff they hire.

Diversity benefits cited by institutions are supported by research and affirmed by federal courts and agencies; they include student preparation for a knowledge economy workforce, civic participation, and improved teaching and learning.

U.S. STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

TABLE 3: UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT, BY GENDER AND RACE AND ETHNICITY: 1995–96 AND 2015–16

Year	Race and Ethnicity	Men	Women
1995–96	All racial and ethnic groups	43.2%	56.8%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	35.6%	64.4%
	Asian	48.0%	52.0%
	Black	36.6%	63.4%
	Hispanic	43.2%	56.8%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	N/A	N/A
	White	43.9%	56.1%
	More than one race	50.9%	49.1%
	International students	52.6%	47.4%
2015–16	All racial and ethnic groups	43.5%	56.5%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	47.0%	53.0%
	Asian	48.0%	52.0%
	Black	37.8%	62.2%
	Hispanic	42.1%	57.9%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	41.7%	58.3%
	White	45.0%	55.0%
	More than one race	40.6%	59.4%
	International students	50.0%	50.0%

Note: In 1995–96, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students was not an available category. These students were included in the category “Asian.”

Source: Data from U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 1996 and 2016, as published in *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*, page 44, table 3.1 (Espinosa et al. 2019).

TABLE 4: GRADUATE ENROLLMENT ACROSS SECTORS, BY AGE AND RACE AND ETHNICITY: 2015–16

Year	Race and Ethnicity	Men	Women
1995–96	All racial and ethnic groups	43.2%	56.8%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	35.6%	64.4%
	Asian	48.0%	52.0%
	Black	36.6%	63.4%
	Hispanic	43.2%	56.8%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	N/A	N/A
	White	43.9%	56.1%
	More than one race	50.9%	49.1%
	International students	52.6%	47.4%
2015–16	All racial and ethnic groups	40.7%	59.3%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	39.8%	60.2%
	Asian	42.6%	57.4%
	Black	29.8%	70.2%
	Hispanic	39.2%	60.8%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	41.5%!	58.5%
	White	38.9%	61.1%
	More than one race	37.9%	62.1%
	International students	62.1%	37.9%

Notes: In 1995–96, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students was not an available category. These students were included in the category “Asian.” |! Interpret with caution. Ratio of standard error to estimate is >30% but <50%.

Source: Data from U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 1996 and 2016, as published in *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*, page 77, table 4.1 (Espinosa et al. 2019).

RELATED RESOURCES

IMPROVING ACCESS AND ATTAINMENT

While U.S. higher education has made tremendous progress in improving postsecondary access for students of color over the last several decades, data show that persistent equity gaps still exist—especially for Black, Latina/o, American Indian, and Southeast Asian American students. In order to address this issue, ACE is conducting research and producing reports and policy briefs on a regular basis. Of primary significance is ACE's 2019 website and seminal report on the educational pathways of college students in U.S. higher education and the educators who serve them:

- ***Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report***

ACE's website and report examine more than 200 indicators on race and ethnicity in higher education, at the intersections of gender, age, and income. This work provides a data-informed foundation for those working to close persistent racial and ethnic equity gaps in U.S. higher education.

- Other ACE research on this topic includes:

- ***Pulling Back the Curtain: Enrollment and Outcomes at Minority Serving Institutions***
- ***The Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color: Cross-Sector Collaboration as a Model for Improving Educational Outcomes***
- ***Race, Class, and College Access: Achieving Diversity in a Shifting Legal Landscape***

With support from Lumina Foundation, ACE reached beyond national borders to convene an international learning community—the **Global Attainment and Inclusion Network** (GAIN)—in order to exchange knowledge about innovative policies and practices that increase postsecondary attainment and equity in higher education. The network focuses on identifying flexible, student-centered approaches that enable diverse student populations to navigate postsecondary education throughout their lifetimes in order to obtain knowledge, skills, and credentials.

Achieving more equitable outcomes for a changing student demographic has been a central goal of the project, which explores innovative modes of delivery, credentialing, credit recognition, and student support initiatives around the world. Outcomes thus far include a series of leadership thought papers, a set of case studies on comparative issues and practices, and facilitated data collection and shared knowledge amongst network partners.

Undergraduate students, sometimes referred to as first degree or first-cycle students in other countries, account for the majority of total U.S. postsecondary enrollment. Bachelor's degree programs are predominately attended by students under 25 years old who pursue their undergraduate studies full time. They are informally referred to as *traditional* students. That proportion is rapidly changing, however. Today, many of the students under 25 years old attend less than full time, and a growing population of students is 25 years or older. This group accounts for the majority of students enrolled in associate degree and non-degree certificate programs. Many of them work or support families while pursuing higher education and are commonly called *post-traditional* students.

The increasing number of older and part-time students reflects Americans' belief that learning is a lifelong process and that everyone should have access to postsecondary opportunities. This idea and the growing population of associate, non-degree, and certificate students also attest to the growing need for U.S. higher education to accommodate students who are maintaining employment or sustaining family responsibilities while they are enrolled.

Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid

U.S. higher education has an intricate tuition and fee structure. Students can choose from a wide range of institutions with significantly different educational offerings and different costs. Because tuition and fees vary by the type of college or university, the cost difference between a public and a private institution, or between an institution with highly selective admissions practices and one that is less selective, can be significant.

Undergraduate tuition for a year at a public community college might be as little as \$1,500. At a highly selective private institution, however, it could be as much as \$40,000 or more. If students attend a residential institution where they live on campus, their overall costs above tuition can also include room and board.

Public institutions generally charge lower tuition than private ones. At public institutions, however, residency status (whether a student has a permanent residence in or outside the institution's state prior to enrolling) places students in different tuition and fee brackets. Out-of-state students are often required to pay higher tuition rates because over time they or their families have not paid the state taxes that underwrite the cost of a public postsecondary education.

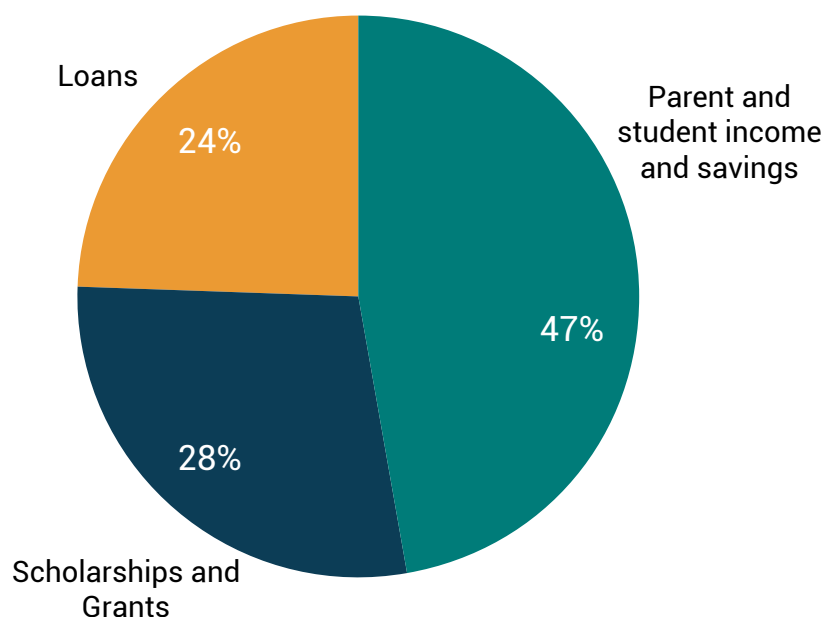
Overall, the U.S. higher education system is a high-cost, high-aid system, and financial aid structures are extensive and complicated. Financial aid is one of the few areas where the federal government plays a major role. The government provides funding, regulates and administers loans, and creates oversight policy that affects individual students, institutions, and states.

For domestic students, financial aid is a combination of *gift aid* and *self-help aid*. Gift aid is a form of financial support that reduces the cost of college and does not require repayment. It includes government, institution, and privately funded grants and scholarships. Grants are primarily offered based on a student's financial need, while scholarships are primarily based on a student's merit (academic, athletic, artistic, etc.).

Self-help financial aid refers to tools that enable students themselves to pay for college. These include:

- **Federal Work-Study.** Work-study allows students to have a part-time job on the college or university campus where they are enrolled. The resulting wages go towards covering the cost of tuition, fees, and living expenses associated with their postsecondary education at that institution.
- **Loans.** Students and their parents have access to federal and private loans. **Federal student loans, which have borrowing limits**, are either subsidized or unsubsidized. Subsidized loans are available to students with demonstrated financial need, and the U.S. Department of Education pays the accrued interest while the student is enrolled in postsecondary education. Unsubsidized loans have fewer restrictions, but the student pays interest throughout the loan period.
- **Tax benefits.** Multiple tax benefits are available for money spent on tuition or loan interest. Examples include tax credits for higher education expenses, tax protected education savings accounts, and qualified tuition programs.
- **Benefits for selected groups.** Additional aid is available for individuals who serve or have served in the **military**, spouses or children of military veterans, **AmeriCorps** participants, and youth who were in the **foster care system**.

FIGURE 3: SOURCES COVERING THE COST OF COLLEGE IN 2017



Source: Sallie Mae and Ipsos 2018

Altogether, the U.S. Department of Education offers \$120 billion per year in multiple forms of financial aid.² The rising cost of U.S. postsecondary education, however, has outpaced government and even private financial support. Policymakers, higher education professionals, and the public widely acknowledge that the federal financial aid system needs improvement, especially with regard to the application and evaluation process that qualifies students for assistance. While there are many sources of support, the financial aid system does not always fully serve domestic students with the highest need.

TABLE 5: AVERAGE ANNUAL PRICE FOR UNDERGRADUATE TUITION, FEES, ROOM, AND BOARD

	Total tuition, fees, room, and board			Tuition and fees		
	All institutions	4-year	2-year	All institutions	4-year	2-year
Public	17,237	19,488	10,091	6,817	8,804	3,156
Nonprofit	44,551	44,702	25,252	32,556	32,720	15,293
For-profit	25,431	25,532	25,027	14,419	14,423	14,397

Source: NCES 2016c

² For more information, see <https://studentaid.ed.gov>.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

FINANCIAL AID FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

For international students, U.S. higher education is a high-cost, *low-aid* system. With few exceptions,³ international students are not eligible to access federal aid. Instead, international students rely on other forms of assistance—from both U.S. and non-U.S. sources—to support their study at U.S. institutions. These include private scholarships, government scholarships, and private loans.

Data from **ACE's Mapping** study indicate that higher education institutions in the U.S. are increasingly providing targeted financial aid for international students (Helms and Brajkovic 2017). The chart below illustrates that, across all institutional types, the proportion of higher education institutions that offer international student scholarships or other financial aid has increased in recent years.

PERCENTAGE OF INSTITUTIONS THAT OFFER SCHOLARSHIPS OR OTHER FINANCIAL AID TO UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

	2001	2006	2011	2016
Doctoral	52	61	69	71
Master's	48	55	64	76
Baccalaureate	59	62	73	77
Associate	10	15	16	24
Special Focus	-	-	20	39
Total	35	37	38	49

Source: Helms and Brajkovic 2017

The **College Board Annual Survey of Colleges** suggests that both the number of higher education institutions and the total amount of financial aid awarded to international students have increased over time. In 2011–12, 701 institutions awarded a total of \$796 million. In 2014–15, 815 institutions—about a third of study respondents—awarded a total of \$1.16 billion. Private not-for-profit institutions are most likely to offer financial aid to international students. While 36 percent of international students at private not-for-profit institutions receive financial aid, this is true for only 13 percent at public four-year institutions (College Board 2018).

To date, the most comprehensive source of information on international student financial aid is the **Big Future** platform run by the College Board. In addition to helping potential students research and compare U.S. colleges and universities, it includes institutional data on financial aid made available to international students.

The following resources provide additional information about scholarship opportunities for international students to study in the U.S.: **Studying Abroad U.S.**, **Study in the USA**, **Fulbright Foreign Student Program**, and **Humphrey Fellowship Program**.

³ See <https://studentaid.ed.gov>.

Calendar, Credits, and Grading

While there are some similarities across U.S. colleges and universities, academic calendars and credit systems are determined by individual institutions. Some state legislatures establish guidelines for their public institutions, but overall, the systems used are largely individualized without government oversight or universal consistency.

Most U.S. higher education institutions operate on an academic year divided into two equal semesters lasting 15–16 weeks, with a winter break of two to three weeks in December and January, and a summer session of 10–12 weeks in June, July, and August, plus additional shorter breaks. A few institutions use a quarter system in which the year is divided into four sessions with breaks in between, or a trimester system where the academic year has three sessions and a 10–12 week summer break or time for specially offered courses.

CREDIT SYSTEM

A typical bachelor's degree program of study on a semester calendar requires students to accumulate at least 120 credit hours. Full-time registration is usually 15 credit hours per semester/30 credit hours per academic year, and shortfalls can be made up in summer sessions or through independent study. These credit hours translate into approximately 30–40 courses and represent at least 5,400 actual hours of dedicated academic work for a non-science or non-art concentration, and well over that total for graduates of programs in the sciences, engineering, fine arts, or performing arts. For traditionally enrolled full-time undergraduate students, this amounts to approximately four years elapsed time at most institutions (different than the common three-year duration of many programs outside the U.S.).

A typical master's degree program requires at least 33 credit hours and includes a research thesis or culminating project. This translates into over 4,000 hours of supervised and unsupervised (independent research) study and typically varies between one and two years elapsed time.

A doctoral program can incorporate 8,000 or more hours of advanced study and research beyond the master's degree. Most U.S. programs require a dissertation or thesis of substantial length at the end of a doctoral program, which represents a scholar's independent contribution to a discipline or field of knowledge. A few programs vary from this tradition to offer more practiced-based demonstrations of achievement or allow students to produce multiple published academic articles rather than a single thesis paper. The dissertation, however, remains the dominate project culminating doctoral programs and degree confirmation.

GRADING

Like academic calendars and credit systems, grading policies are also highly individualized and can vary significantly even within a single institution. Departments and even individual faculty within a department often have jurisdiction over grading scales in their programs and courses. Though exact points and percentages vary, most course-level grading falls into three categories: norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and pass-fail.

Norm-referenced grading systems (colloquially called “grading on a curve”) are based on a preestablished formula regarding the percentage or ratio of students within a whole class who will be assigned each grade or mark.

TABLE 6: NORM-REFERENCED GRADING (EXAMPLE)

A (Excellent)	= Top 10% of Class
B (Good)	= Next 20% of Class
C (Average, Fair)	= Next 30% of Class
D (Poor, Pass)	= Next 20% of Class
F (Failure)	= Bottom 20% of Class

Criterion-referenced grading systems are based on a fixed numeric scale, usually equated to a letter mark, from which the faculty assign grades based on the individual performance of each student.

TABLE 7: CRITERION-REFERENCED GRADING (EXAMPLE)

A (Excellent)	= 95-100	or	90-100
B (Good)	= 85-95	or	80-90
C (Fair)	= 75-85	or	70-80
D (Poor)	= 65-75	or	60-70
F (Failure)	= <65	or	<60

Pass-fail grading systems are used in some U.S. programs and institutions, especially when the student work to be evaluated is highly subjective (e.g., in the fine arts and music); there are no generally accepted standard gradations (e.g., with independent studies); or the critical requirement is meeting a single satisfactory standard (e.g., in some professional examinations and practica).

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT CREDIT AND GRADE CONVERSION TOOLS

The credit hour system in the U.S. differs from most systems around the world, which can have implications for student exchanges as well as establishing joint or dual-degree programs with non-U.S. institutions. Some U.S. institutions—such as the University of South Carolina (USC)—offer an **International Credit Conversion Guide** that serves as a tool for students and faculty to calculate USC credit earned through international study.

The U.S. Department of Education and **Studyportals** offer detailed information on the U.S. credit hours system, comparison with other systems worldwide, and guidelines for conversion.

The World Education Services (WES) website offers the **iGPA (international grade point average) Calculator**, which allows for grade comparisons on the 4.0 grading scale used in the U.S. Conversions are based on the most common grading scale used in a specific country.

Another useful resource is the **international GPA calculator**, a tool used to calculate the United States Grade Point Average (GPA)—a number derived from the grades earned during study at a U.S. university on a scale from 0.0 to 4.0—using university grades or points from almost any country in the world.

Role of Government

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Unlike most national governments with ministries of education, the U.S. federal government does not exercise general control over higher education or serve as its primary funder. It does, however, provide resources in two critical areas: student financial aid and research and development. Some institutions receive large amounts of federal funding through research grants (see “Research” below), as well as support for specific programs like access for students with disabilities, vocational education, and specific foreign language instruction. Over time, the role of the federal government in supporting students has expanded to include grant and loan programs for low- and moderate-income students. Today, the federal government is the primary financier of student financial aid.

While the federal government generally does not provide direct operational support to colleges and universities, special-purpose funding in the form of student financial aid is an extremely important revenue source and, in turn, has increased the federal government’s ability to influence colleges and universities in areas outside research. For example, in order for institutions to participate in financial aid programs, they must comply with a wide range of federal reporting requirements on topics ranging from teacher preparation to gender equity in intercollegiate athletics.

Despite the growing influence of the federal government, however, its role is still limited and has not yet encroached into core academic decisions, which are generally left to the institutions and, in the case of some public institutions, the states.

RELATED RESOURCES

ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The **U.S. Department of Education** manages and oversees the use of federal funds distributed or used at postsecondary institutions. Its primary roles are:

- Establishing policies for **federal financial** aid to students, administering and distributing the funds, and monitoring their use.
- Enforcing civil rights legislation, such as the **Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990**, which ensure equal access to higher education regardless of race, national origin, gender, disability, and age.
- Designing programs to encourage particular types of curriculum development, such as foreign language training and area studies programs.
- Monitoring the use of federal funds granted to higher education institutions through contracts and grants for research in a wide range of areas.
- Collecting **extensive data** on hundreds of items such as enrollment trends, student race and ethnicity, faculty promotion and tenure, and fields of graduate study, and undertaking research on most aspects of education.

STATE GOVERNMENT

In the U.S., all government functions not specifically designated as federal responsibility by the Constitution are the jurisdiction of the state governments. Education is among those functions. As a result, rather than the federal government, each of the 50 states is responsible for governing public colleges and universities. State systems include doctorate-granting universities, regional master's institutions, and in most states, community colleges. However, the degree of control by the states varies tremendously. In some states, a governing board appointed by the governor and/or legislature oversees all institutions, allocates funding, establishes accountability measures, develops policies, and approves new academic programs. In others, the state board plays only an advisory function and has little direct authority over institutions.

RELATED RESOURCES

U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION

ACE's *Internationalizing U.S. Higher Education: Current Policies, Future Directions* report takes stock of internationalization-related initiatives developed by key federal policy actors, including the U.S. Departments of State, Education, and Defense, as well as the National Science Foundation and other agencies. It categorizes their policies and programs according to the typology developed in the accompanying ACE report *Internationalizing Higher Education Worldwide: National Policies and Programs* in order to draw comparisons to similar activities around the world. Based on this analysis, the report considers what additional federal efforts are needed to further advance higher education internationalization on a national scale.

In terms of global comparisons, what is noticeably absent from the catalogue of U.S. policies and programs is a comprehensive national policy that draws together multiple initiatives across categories with a specific goal of furthering higher education internationalization. In the last decade, various organizations—including ACE—have called for such a broad initiative. A policy in this vein has not taken root, however. The current report asserts that given the decentralized structure of the U.S. government and the size and diversity of the higher education system, it seems unlikely that a single, overarching national policy would be truly effective in advancing higher education internationalization nationwide.

Instead, the report highlights the need for a broad, highly coordinated set of well-funded initiatives that support comprehensive internationalization of U.S. higher education. Toward this end, the report suggests, a focused effort is needed to better leverage existing U.S. federal government policies and programs in advancing higher education internationalization, address aspects of internationalization that are not currently well-supported, and ensure that all internationalization-related policies and programs—existing and new—are adequately funded.

Accreditation

Accreditation ensures the quality of higher education institutions and academic programs to students, the postsecondary education and industry communities, and the general public. The accreditation process aims to ensure that colleges and universities maintain academic standards appropriate for their missions, are adequately managed, and are eligible to participate in certain state and federal programs.

Whereas in most other countries accreditation (or quality assurance) is carried out by government organizations, in the U.S., accreditors are private, nongovernmental organizations created for the specific purpose of reviewing higher education institution and program quality. However, institutions must be accredited by an accreditor that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education in order to receive federal funds, and it is usually a prerequisite for funding from foundations or other external sources.

The designation of “recognized” means that the accreditor has been reviewed for quality by one of the following:

- U.S. Department of Education (ED)⁴
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)—CHEA is a national membership organization of colleges and universities; regional, national, and specialized accreditation associations; higher education commissions; and specialized groups that accredit specific disciplines and professions. Standards for recognition from CHEA are primarily focused on quality assurance and quality improvement. CHEA also coordinates research, analysis, and debate; collects and disseminates information about good practices in accreditation and quality assurance; and mediates disputes between higher education institutions and accreditors.⁵

CHEA and ED both maintain publicly accessible databases of accredited institutions. The CHEA database offers the option to search by “Accreditor Organization Name.” The ED database allows searches for “Accrediting Agency.” Both the CHEA and Department of Education websites provide additional information on accreditation in the United States.

There are two basic types of accreditation: institutional and specialized.

- Institutional accreditors set standards for and evaluate performance of institutions as a whole. There are 19 recognized institutional accrediting organizations. Six of these are CHEA-recognized [Regional Accrediting Organizations](#), which are responsible for accrediting most nonprofit two-year and four-year degree-granting and some propriety (private, for-profit) institutions in the U.S. Some of the regional organizations also provide accreditation for institutions outside the U.S.
- Specialized accreditors do the same for a program or unit within an institution. There are approximately 60 recognized programmatic accrediting organizations.

4 Browse the Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs at <https://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.aspx>.

5 Browse the CHEA database with over 8,500 accredited colleges, universities, and higher education institutions, and over 25,000 accredited programs at <https://www.chea.org/directories>.

RELATED RESOURCES

CHEA INTERNATIONAL QUALITY GROUP

The **CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG)** is a forum for addressing quality assurance and accreditation challenges in a global context. It assists institutions and organizations to enhance their capacity for improving academic quality; advances knowledge and understanding of international quality assurance issues; and provides research and policy recommendations.

In recent years, the question has arisen: *“Is accreditation really working as a guarantor of quality?”* With increasing pressures on accreditors, expectations for the role they should play in holding universities and colleges accountable are under discussion. Susan Phillips, a professor of educational leadership and policy and of counseling psychology at the University at Albany, and Kevin Kinser, the head of education policy studies at The Pennsylvania State University, explain the debate as follows:

The system of oversight of U.S. higher education has traditionally been framed as threefold, referred to as the ‘triad.’ In the triad—at least in theory—the federal government watches over issues of financial support and access, the states attend to matters of consumer protection, and accreditors guard the educational quality. This three-legged stool, however, turns out to be quite wobbly, with the federal leg requiring accreditation agencies to handle an increasing number of responsibilities and—given that states vary widely in their interest and capacity—accreditors are also pressured to pick up many consumer protection functions as well. (Kreighbaum 2018)

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

DIPLOMA AND ACCREDITATION MILLS

Students and governments in other countries often come across educational (online/hybrid) programs that are offered by an “American” provider. It is important to be able to recognize if the provider in question is a degree “mill”—an organization or company that poses as a higher education institution, but in fact provides illegitimate academic degrees, diplomas, or institutional accreditation services for a fee.

U.S. diploma and accreditation mills have become exports. They prey on students and governments outside the U.S. that might be vulnerable with limited information and experience by which to judge whether or not a U.S. operation is legitimate and of good quality or is a mill.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) created a series of questions to help determine whether a provider is a diploma or accreditation mill. If the answer to a majority of their questions is yes, students and the public should regard this as a highly suggestive indicator that the organization or company may be a mill. Please visit CHEA's website for the **list of questions**.

Higher Education Associations

The U.S. higher education sector includes various associations that have institutions or individuals (and sometimes both) as members. Often charged with multiple missions, these organizations can represent institutions as a group, administrative areas in higher education, or professional fields or academic disciplines.

For some associations, an important mission is to represent the interests of colleges and universities to the federal, and in some cases, state governments. Membership associations champion public policies that are in the collective best interest of all or some major segment of higher education. Many associations provide professional development programs and services to their members, as well as information on best practices in the field. Some organizations also serve as scholarly forums, publishing journals in their affiliated field; advancing academic topics, agendas, and leadership associated with the organization's discipline or other congregating identity; and holding conference meetings to bring interested parties together for discussion and collaborative work.

Membership in such associations is voluntary and usually involves paying dues to support infrastructure, programs, and publications. Most of these groups hold annual national or international meetings requiring a registration fee to attend. Some organizational business is transacted at these meetings, but most of the activity consists of speakers and issue forums, topic-focused discussion groups, and networking opportunities. These meetings allow people with common interests to exchange ideas and stay in touch with one another.

The [American Council on Education \(ACE\)](#) serves as the major higher education coordinating organization in the U.S. Its members and associates represent approximately 1,700 accredited, degree-granting colleges and universities and postsecondary-related associations, organizations, and corporations. Through consultation and consensus building with other higher education associations, ACE aims to speak for higher education nationally, especially to the federal government.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

CONNECTING WITH U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS

The [Washington Higher Education Secretariat \(WHES\)](#) represents a network of around 50 postsecondary associations. As a forum for chief executive officers of national higher education associations, the Secretariat offers collaboration and networking opportunities, and facilitates discussion of salient trends and issues facing higher education in the U.S. and worldwide.

The [WHES membership list](#) provides a useful starting point for institutions that are interested in learning more and connecting with the U.S. higher education associations.

Institutional Leadership and Operations

Relative to other countries, institutional autonomy is a defining feature of U.S. higher education. The degree of autonomy from government control, however, varies significantly among the higher education sectors, from state to state, between private and public colleges and universities, and even from institution to institution within a given state. Private institutions retain significantly higher levels of autonomy than public ones, since in most cases they do not receive direct funding from their state. As a result, institutional leadership structures and operations also vary based on institutional size, mission, and organizational culture.

Governance, Structures, and Staffing

GOVERNING BOARDS

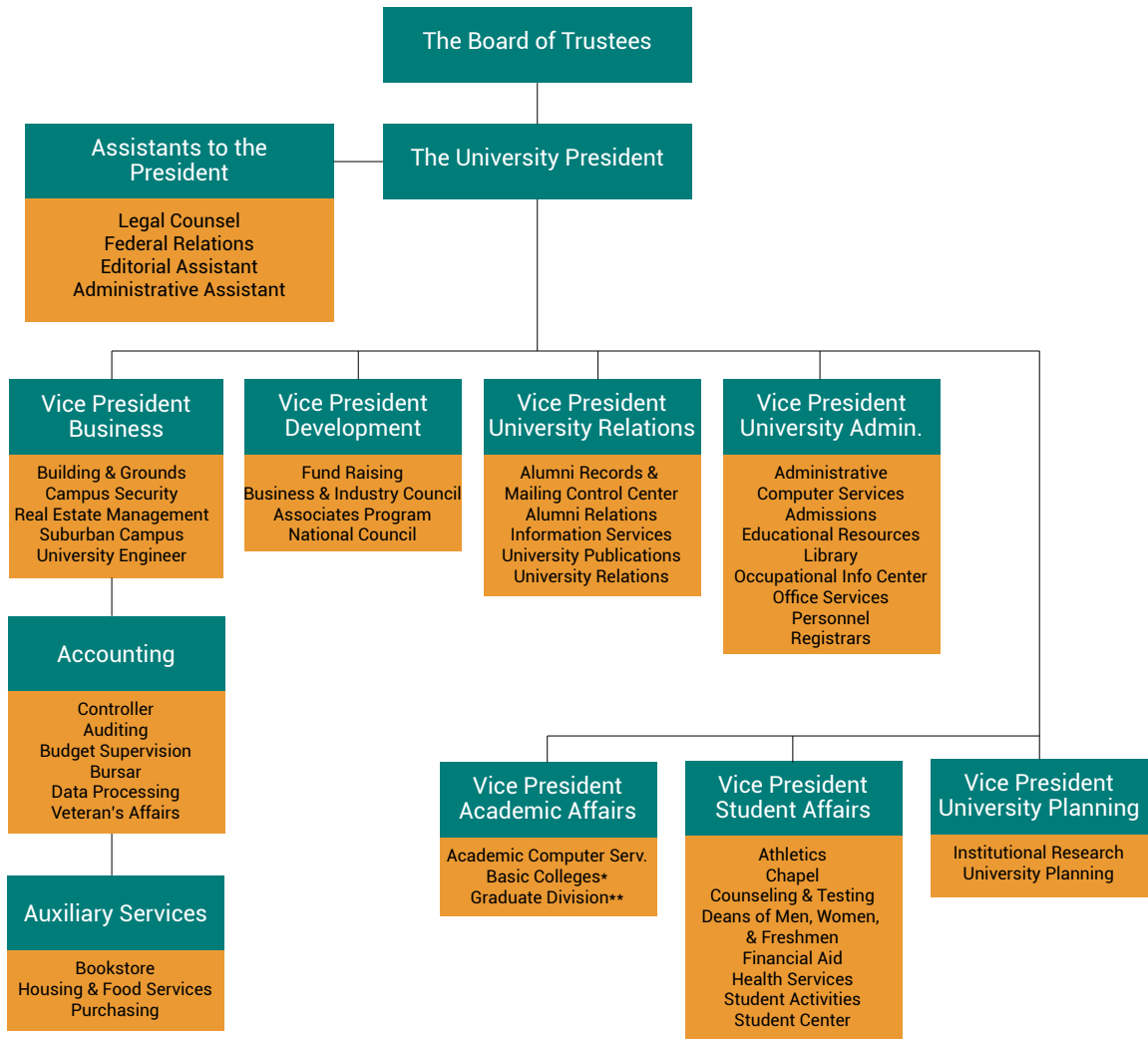
The highest level of institutional administration is the governing or policymaking body, typically called the board: board of regents, directors, trustees, or governors. Virtually all colleges and universities in the U.S. are governed by boards composed primarily of citizens rather than elected officials or government bureaucrats, though some are appointed by the state governor. Generally, governing boards are responsible for appointing the chief executive officer, usually called the president or chancellor. Working together, they set policies and priorities for the system as a whole, coordinate budgets, and advocate for the institutions under their jurisdiction. While boards are commonly an institution's highest authority, they share power and responsibility with the president, faculty and/or student senates, and other organizational entities.

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

While specific titles and structures vary by institution, the following roles make up the typical institutional leadership suite:

- **President:** As the highest-ranked institutional leader and administrator, the president's role is focused on strategic planning, financial sustainability, and the overall quality and performance of the institution.
- **Chancellor:** Some university systems in the U.S. are composed of several campuses. In such cases, the chief administrator of each campus is called the chancellor, and he or she reports directly to the university system president.
- **Provost/chief academic officer:** This position refers to a chief university administrator in charge of academic issues—curriculum, research, and faculty. For the most part, provosts are appointed from the tenured faculty ranks. A provost can also serve as an interim president during the process of selecting a new president. In addition to “provost” and “chief academic officer,” this role can be titled “vice president for academic affairs.”
- **Vice president:** A vice president is a senior role at a university, reporting directly to the president or chancellor. He or she can oversee various nonacademic functions of the institution, including finances, human resources, student affairs, development, and information technology. At many institutions, there is a vice president for each functional area.
- **Dean:** A dean leads an academic division of a college or university. As the chief administrator of that unit, the dean serves as a facilitator and liaison between faculty, department chairs, unit staff, students, and university leaders. Academic deans are usually appointed from the faculty ranks.
- **Department chair:** The base unit of academic organization in most institutions is the department (often clustered around a discipline, field, or group of disciplines) and is led by the department chair. The chair is a liaison between the dean and the department faculty members.

FIGURE 4: SAMPLE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION CHART



This diagram illustrates the administrative organization of a large university. The structure of most colleges is similar, but with a less diversified administration.

*Administrators usually have the title of Dean within this division.

**Administrators usually have the title of Graduate Dean within this division

Source: Eckel and King 2004, p. 13

RELATED RESOURCES

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

ACE's American College President Study 2017 (ACPS) is the eighth edition of the leading and most comprehensive study of the college presidency and the higher education leadership pipeline at all types of U.S. institutions, public and private, two- and four-year. The 2017 edition was produced by ACE in partnership with the TIAA Institute, and includes data on presidential demographics, search and selection processes, career trajectories, and the duties and responsibilities of college and university chief executive officers. For the first time, the report also examines the views of presidents in three key areas: diversity and inclusion, state funding and political climate, and areas of importance for the future.

The Art and Politics of Academic Governance: Relations Among Boards, Presidents, and Faculty, part of the ACE Series on Higher Education, outlines the roles that boards and other stakeholders play in shared governance, and offers strategies for creating and effectively implementing a shared governance plan.

Presidents: Caught in the Middle explores the challenges that presidents face in governing alongside boards and other stakeholders, and offers recommendations for setting clear policies, improving working relationships, and communicating with board members.

The Washington and Jefferson College Decision Matrix lists the levels of responsibility of the president, board, faculty, and other stakeholders for decisions in areas such as budgeting, making personnel decisions, and strategic planning.

Learn more about ACE's positions and activities around **Institutional Effectiveness**.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

INTERNATIONALIZATION LEADERSHIP AND IMPLEMENTATION

The following material is adapted from ACE's Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses report, published in 2017.

ACE's 2016 **Mapping** data clearly point to presidents and *senior international officers* (SIOs) as primary drivers of internationalization. Fifty-three percent of institutions in the survey reported having a full-time administrator who oversees or coordinates multiple internationalization activities or programs—a 13 percentage point increase since 2011 (Helms and Brajkovic 2017). The SIO plays a key role in aligning and mobilizing various university stakeholders to promote and contribute to the internationalization agenda of the institution.

While top leadership is important in advancing internationalization, other administrators also play key roles and are supported by professional development funding and programs. At

institutions with a high level of international engagement, for example, keeping track of and managing all the moving parts of international partnerships can be a full-time job. Reflecting this trend, in [ACE's 2016 Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses](#) Survey, 31 percent of institutions reported having staff whose primary focus was developing international partnerships (Helms and Brajkovic 2017). Such a position is often titled director of international partnerships or something similar; duties typically include developing and carrying out a strategy for international partnerships, facilitating relationships and collaborations, ensuring regulatory compliance and quality, and championing global engagement throughout the institution.

FACULTY (PROFESSORS)

In the U.S. context, the term “faculty” refers to college and university professors, and not—as it does in many other countries—to a school, college, or department within an institution. Faculty responsibilities typically fall into three basic categories: teaching, research, and service to the campus and/or community. However, faculty jobs are by no means uniform, and the time and attention that faculty devote to these three types of activities depend upon the mission of the institution at which they work, their academic discipline, and their rank and career stage. For example, faculty at community colleges more often tend to teach and be engaged in service activities, while many senior faculty at research universities spend more time engaged in research than in the other two areas.

Underpinning the traditional faculty role at U.S. institutions is the concept of tenure. Academic tenure is an indefinite academic appointment that can be terminated only under extraordinary circumstances, such as financial exigency or elimination of a specific academic program.

Tenure is considered a key means for defending the principle of academic freedom, a time-honored value in the U.S. higher education system. The purpose of academic freedom is to protect and legitimate the work of academics, maintain professional quality of their scholarship, promote civil discourse, and uphold an open exchange of ideas within the academic community.

The modern concept of tenure, as well as academic freedom in the U.S., originated in the [American Association of University Professors'](#) (AAUP) *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. The core protection of academic freedom is embedded in institutional policy, as well as in the contractual relationship between institutions of higher education and their academic employees—it does not encompass administrative staff at an institution. Even though the judicial courts may be involved in matters concerning the protection of academic freedom, and professional organizations like the AAUP also play a role, the day-to-day stewardship of academic freedom in the U.S. is primarily entrusted to the leadership of colleges and universities.

Over the last few decades, however, tenured positions have been declining with contingent faculty positions on the rise—these include both part- and full-time non-tenure-track appointments. The common characteristic of these appointments is that institutions make little or no long-term commitment to faculty holding them. As [reported by the AAUP](#) (n.d.), non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for over 70 percent of all instructional staff appointments in American higher education.

TABLE 8: FACULTY RANK AND TITLES, BY TENURE/NON-TENURE TRACK

	Tenured/Tenure-track	Non-tenure track
Full Time	Professor Associate Professor Assistant Professor Research Professor	Lecturer Instructor Professor of Practice Research Professor
Part Time	Professor Emeritus (a title of honor given to a retired faculty member still affiliated with the institution, who may or may not work part time)	Adjunct Professor Lecturer Instructor

Institutional Finance

Student tuition and fees cover only a portion of the revenue stream at U.S. institutions. Funding sources include:

- Tuition and fees from students
- Federal government
- State and local governments
- Endowment/private gift income
- Sales and other services
- Other sources

The importance of these revenue sources varies according to institutional type.

Federal funding is not provided as general institutional support, but impacts almost all types of institutions. While it does not contribute to postsecondary operating budgets, as noted previously, the federal government plays a primary role in disbursing financial aid, in the form of grants or loans, to students who use them to pay for college. Federal money is also awarded to institutions through competitive research proposals, grants, and contracts to develop specific projects at an institution.

State and local funding, conversely, *does* provide general institutional support, but is more central to public institutions than private. For example, state and local governments usually provide a large portion of direct operating support at public colleges and universities—more than 30 percent at many of them. That amount is diminishing, however, both as a share of state expenditures and as a percentage of institutional revenue. In response, state governments and public institutions have raised tuition, shifting the cost of postsecondary education from taxpayers to students.

At private institutions, state and local governments provide a smaller portion of direct support amounting to 2 percent or less of institutional revenue. Tuition and fees from students contribute significantly more income to private institutions. However, similar to public institutions, ongoing tuition increases have now significantly outpaced inflation and increases to student/family incomes, as well as the available government funding for financial aid. Many small private institutions are struggling to sustain themselves financially and a few have closed in recent years or merged with other institutions.

As government funding falls and tuition increases beyond the rates of inflation, institutions are forced to reduce the services they provide, improve efficiencies, or generate new revenue. U.S. colleges and universities are also pursuing many efforts to diversify and widen their revenue streams, such as developing online educa-

tion and niche-oriented degree and non-degree academic programs, expanding research capacities, engaging in licensing and sponsorship agreements, and pursuing auxiliary enterprises—for example, managing real estate and running conference centers.

Finally, private donations provide an increasingly critical source of revenue for U.S. colleges and universities that is unfounded in most other higher education systems. Donations originate from alumni, non-alumni individuals, foundations, corporations, other organizations, and, to a small degree, religious entities. Shrinking state funds for higher education are making private donations as critical to public institutions as they traditionally have been to private ones.

Endowments, closely related to these donations, are private funds given to an institution that provide ongoing support into the future. In most cases, the donor will stipulate that funds be invested and that only the income from those investments be spent, sometimes with a specific purpose. While public attention often focuses on the relatively small number of colleges and universities with large endowments, most institutions have only modest ones or no endowment at all.

Research

As noted previously, the U.S. higher education landscape encompasses nearly 5000 degree-granting institutions. As of 2018, however, only about 270 of these were categorized as research universities according to the [Carnegie Classification \(n.d.\)](#). Research institutions are a subset of doctoral degree-granting institutions, and are further divided into the following two categories:

- *R1 or Research 1 Institutions:* About 130 institutions that reach a very high level on two measures—research activity and per capita resources for research activity; and
- *R2 or Research 2 Institutions:* Approximately 139 institutions that also reach a high level on *one* of these two measures—meaning they either lack research facilities or do not have many faculty members or other staff conducting research at their respective institutions.

Research universities are the most elite group of institutions in the U.S. as well as worldwide. Many occupy top spots in various national and global university rankings. As a group, they serve as the primary source of scientific discovery and technological innovation that fosters global economic and social development.

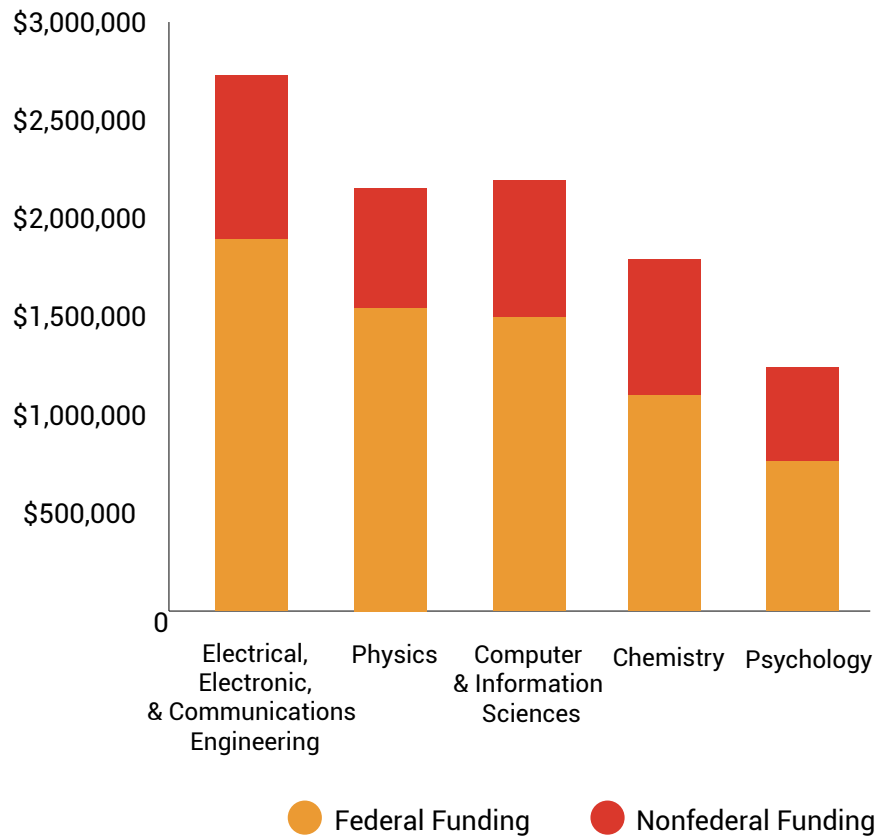
Typically R1 and R2 universities have a vice president or a similar top leadership position responsible for managing the institution's research portfolio. Conducting research represents a key piece of faculty members' work at these universities, and research output features prominently as a criterion in obtaining promotion and tenure.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR RESEARCH

Historically, the U.S. federal government has played a major role in funding university research. As reported by the [American Association for the Advancement of Science \(AAAS\)](#), the government funded a majority of university research and development since the middle of the twentieth century, reaching as high as 73 percent in the late 1960s. This proportion declined over the last several decades and it remains around 60 percent today (AAAS n.d.).

Meanwhile, the share of total research support from industry increased from less than 3 percent in the 1960s to 6 percent today. The support from universities themselves also increased in recent decades—from less than 10 percent in the late 1960s to more than 20 percent today. According to the latest data from the [National Science Foundation \(NSF\)](#), “total university-performed R&D now surpasses \$55 billion a year in inflation-adjusted dollars, with universities themselves accounting for roughly \$12 billion” (AAAS n.d.).

FIGURE 5: TOP FIVE FIELDS WITH HIGHEST SHARE OF FEDERAL FUNDING IN FY 2017



Source: NSF, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, *Higher Education Research and Development* series, based on national survey data.

RELATED RESOURCES

A SNAPSHOT OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

Most universities with R1 status in the **Carnegie Classification** have an office or a unit that is charged with managing large-scale research grants, institution-wide initiatives, interdisciplinary research endeavors, compliance and regulatory procedures, and other research-related issues. An example of such a unit is the **Office of the Vice President for Research** at **Penn State University**.

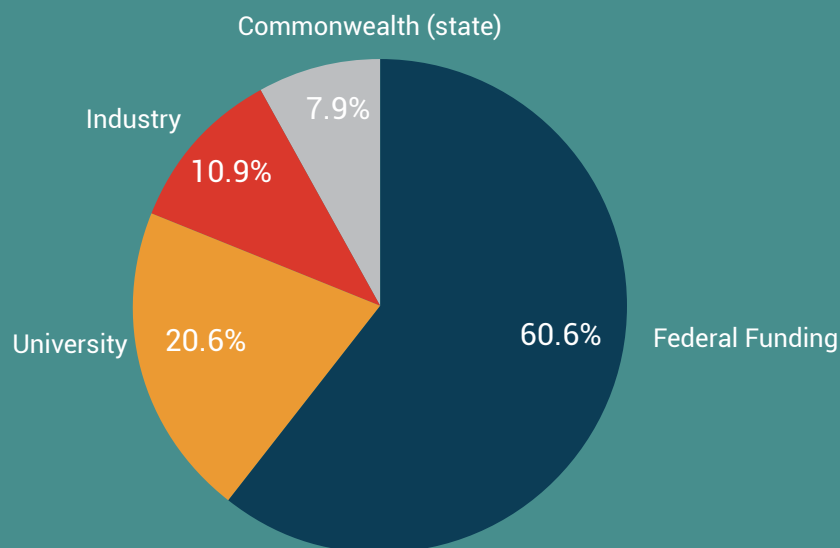
It is “responsible for:

- The effective administration of sponsored programs which provide the financial support for a substantial share of the research activity at the university;
- Serving as the university’s advocate and spokesperson on research issues, and as a representative in activities that may produce major new programs and facilities for research;
- Facilitating strong programs for interdisciplinary research;

- Regulatory research compliance including appropriate standards for the protection of human and animal subjects;
- Serving as a catalyst for economic growth and transformation through development of the Innovation Park;
- Sponsorship of cooperative initiatives to enhance technology utilization;
- Transfer of university-developed technologies for commercialization, thereby providing benefits to researchers, the university, and the citizens of the Commonwealth [of Pennsylvania]; and
- Seeking to inform its internal and external constituents of research accomplishments in collaboration with the Office of University Relations and through popular reporting on faculty and student research in the magazine *Research/Penn State*" (Penn State Office of the Vice President for Research 2019).

The University Research Council and the Administrative Committee on Research also provide advice and assistance to the Office of the Vice President for Research in the development and administration of research policies, programs, and procedures.

SOURCES OF RESEARCH FUNDING AT PENN STATE



Source: Penn State Office of the Vice President for Research 2018

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Overall, most institutions participating in the **ACE's 2016 Mapping Survey** reported that developing international research collaborations has not been a high priority for their campus during the past three years—only 6 percent of institutions selected this as one of top three internationalization priorities. Not surprisingly, however, research collaborations feature much more prominently at doctoral institutions than at other types of colleges and universities (Helms and Brajkovic 2017).

Institutions ranking 'international research collaboration' as their highest campus internationalization priority in the last three years:

	Doctoral	Master's	Baccalaureate	Associate	Special Focus	Total
International research collaborations	34%	5%	4%	1%	11%	6%

The Student Experience

The American view on the student experience is that it does not only happen in a classroom and through an official academic curriculum. As stated by **NASPA** (2018), the leading association for student affairs administrators, the opportunities for teaching and student development exist everywhere on campus, and “it is the responsibility of student affairs professionals to seize these moments and promote positive interactions.” This belief, which has led to the development of a student affairs profession, was first envisaged in the 1937 ACE publication *The Student Personnel Point of View*. Since then, over the last seven decades student affairs professionals have aimed to demonstrate strong support for the idea that the responsibility of higher education is to nurture and facilitate development of a “whole person”—helping students to reach their full potential and become individuals capable of contributing to a better and more just society.

While holistic student development continues to be the cornerstone philosophy of education, the variety of U.S. institutions and undergraduate program configurations (including those offered in the evening, on weekends, or online), combined with the expanding demographic student profile, mean that the student experience increasingly varies. A 45-year-old parent studying for an undergraduate degree through an online program while caring for a family and working full time, will have a very different experience than a traditionally aged 19-year-old student living on campus attending a highly selective four-year college.

For similar reasons, the graduate student experience is more difficult to generalize. It varies extensively depending on the student's program, field of study, employment status while enrolled, on- or off-campus living arrangements, and each individual's personal family, financial, and geographic circumstances.

Curriculum

The undergraduate curriculum typically consists of three components—general education, the major field of study (“the major”), and electives. General education is delivered predominately through either a core curriculum, in which all undergraduate students at a given institution take the same courses, or a distribution format, in which students choose courses from a pre-specified list representing a range of topics from across the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. General education requirements typically constitute between one-quarter and one-half of a student’s courses depending on the institution and student’s program of study. The other courses are focused on the student’s major.

Students usually choose their major upon enrolling or by the end of their second year of studies, depending on institutional policy. Students may change their majors if their interests change and keep most of their credits earned toward their degree. Depending on the general education and major credit requirements, students may also take courses in any field or department for which they qualify.

Undergraduate curricula are frequently structured in a way that builds to some sort of culminating experience that validates a student’s learning and achievement. Seldom does that summative activity take the form of an examination. More often, it is a research paper, a complex group project, an extended period of service in the community related to the major, or an interdisciplinary seminar in the major field. A growing practice is to ask students to submit an electronic portfolio of their best work in prior courses and non-classroom activities.

Graduate curriculum varies widely, but compared to U.S. undergraduate curricula, it is more tailored to both the student’s selected field or subfield, and individual goals and interests. While programs in the same field may have some similar course content across institutions, studies for a master’s or doctoral degree will be different between literature, biochemistry, economics, and computer science, for example. Different from U.S. undergraduate programs, all of the course work in graduate education focuses on or is directly related to the student’s selected field of study. During the one to three years of graduate course work, some courses will be required, but a large number are typically elected by the student to fit their particular professional or research aspirations. Master’s degree curricula are predominately course-based, but, as noted previously, often culminate with a capstone project, research paper, or practicum experience. Doctoral curricula usually involve two to three years of required and elective course work, followed by one to several years of independent research to complete a dissertation as well as written and oral examinations.

Teaching and Learning

Current principles of good practice emphasize active learning as opposed to the more passive modes associated with listening to lectures. Active learning keeps students engaged by periodically posing questions, inviting discussion, and sometimes requesting student input through smartphones or laptops. In discussion sections and even in large lecture classes, students are assigned to work in small groups ad hoc in the classroom or on more extensive assignments in work outside of class.

Active learning also extends beyond the classroom. Undergraduate students often have an opportunity to work with faculty on research projects, either as part of a team or independently. Large research universities, as well as selective liberal arts colleges, are especially likely to make research experience available to students during their undergraduate studies.

Increasingly, instructors are including student work in local communities as part of their course design. The work might take place in cooperation with a local social service agency or relevant business where students collaborate on projects that are academically enriching and of practical use to the organization. This *service learning* is followed by class discussion and often personal reflective writing. Service learning strives to bring classroom learning to life in a community context, give students experience with the environments in which they may be working, and instill habits of just citizenship.

In many doctoral programs, graduate students take on apprentice instruction responsibilities as part of their graduate training and education funding. These students work for faculty as teaching assistants (TAs) leading courses or sections of courses, and occasionally have an opportunity to develop and teach their own courses. The magnitude of support and pedagogical training for TAs varies between campuses and between fields within a campus. However, programs helping TAs learn how to teach and better understand their students are growing in prevalence and are often located in campus teaching and learning centers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

SHORT-TERM FACULTY-LED STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Data from the 2018 *Open Doors report* show that short-term study abroad programs with a duration of eight weeks or less are by far the most popular of all the different types of U.S. study abroad programs. Among all U.S. students who studied abroad in the 2016–17 academic year, 54.4 percent participated in short-term programs with a duration of less than eight weeks (35.6 percent during the summer plus 18.8 percent during the academic year). Of the programs taking place during the academic year, there is a growing trend toward very short programs with a duration of fewer than two weeks (Baer et al. 2018).

Although not specified by *Open Doors*, it is likely that an important percentage of these short-term programs are faculty-led programs.

For universities outside the U.S. looking to establish or strengthen partnerships with U.S. institutions, these trends imply that partners may be requested to organize (submit proposals for) customized short-term and faculty-led study abroad programs. These programs present an opportunity to increase the number of incoming international students—albeit for (very) short periods. Having students from partner institutions study at the host university can be enriching for both campus climates. In the case of faculty-led programs it also implies exchanging or receiving faculty on the host university campus, which could potentially lead to other kinds of educational and research collaboration and thus deepen the partnership.

International partnerships that involve short-term study abroad agreements should be equitable and based on mutually beneficial academic interests for both parties. However, non-U.S. partners who also serve as short term study abroad hosts can be at risk of becoming merely “service providers.” Rather than a mutually enriching academic partnership, the relationship can be onerous for the non-U.S. institution even when it receives financial compensation. When designing partnership and study abroad programs, non-U.S. host institutions can help to ensure the equitable viability of their agreement by advocating for synergistic interests and involving their faculty, students, and a breadth of staff when programs are developed and delivered. All parties should avoid customer-provider relationships, and instead promote healthy collaboration focused on shared recognition of both institutions’ academic interests.

Following sections on co-curricular activities, support and services, and athletics are adapted from the 2004 ACE publication An Overview of Higher Education in the United States: Diversity, Access and the Role of the Marketplace.

Co-curricular Activities

In addition to traditional student learning in the classroom, the U.S. collegiate experience is strongly shaped by co-curricular activities, which can be defined as the initiatives designed to supplement the curricular or main academic activities. They are not graded, and students typically do not earn academic credit. However, these activities represent a very important aspect of U.S. educational institutions' holistic approach to student development as well as strengthening and complementing classroom learning.

Categories and examples of co-curricular activities at U.S. colleges and universities include:

- Academically focused groups or clubs—National Society of Black Engineers or the Public Relations Student Society of America
- Cultural and religious associations—Muslim Student Society or Association of Asian Students
- Social organizations—a familiar type of student social organization is the Greek-lettered fraternity or sorority
- Student government—the formal, recognized student advocacy body on campus

Co-curricular programming is comparatively minimal for graduate students since many of them do not live on campus. Activities tend to be academic or professionally oriented, and depend largely on whether an institution has allocated administrative and financial resources that prioritize graduate student development.

Support and Services

Most American four-year colleges and universities provide housing for students during the academic year. These residence halls, in addition to providing food service and sleeping rooms, provide programming to students on a variety of topics, both academic and social, such as improving study skills, building intercultural competencies, or learning about dangers of alcohol abuse.

Additionally, institutions provide a range of student support services including, but not limited to:

- Personal counseling
- Career placement and advising
- Recreation and physical fitness
- Child care
- Transportation
- Banking
- Health care
- Tutoring

Most large institutions provide some housing for a small number of graduate students, though residential programming is rare. Regardless of whether they live on- or off-campus, most graduate students enrolled full time, and often those enrolled only part time, have access to the university's support services noted above.

Athletics

Student life at American colleges and universities often includes institutionally sponsored athletics, which play a major role on many—but not all—campuses. At institutions with large, high-profile sports programs, the athletics budget can reach millions of dollars, dwarfing those of academic departments. Coaches of men's basketball and football teams are frequently the university's highest-paid employees. These revenue-generating sports tend to be highly commercialized, garnering national television coverage and corporate athletic endorsement contracts.

The role of athletics on U.S. campuses is sometimes considered a double-edged sword, both favorable and unfavorable. Proponents note that sports can promote institutional unity and enthusiasm, and help instill key values among participating undergraduate student-athletes (teamwork, perseverance, etc.). Others contend that college and university athletics have become an unstoppable “arms race” exemplifying a winner-take-all attitude, spurring scandal, perpetuating academic dishonesty, promoting excessive commercialization, permitting unjust allowances that harm undergraduate student-athletes, and encouraging distraction from the institution's academic priorities.

Alumni Engagement

As part of promoting a life-long connection and engagement with their students, many U.S. universities have an Office of Alumni Relations. These offices collect data on alumni, track their professional accomplishments, share news with the larger university community, and cultivate an alumni network for fundraising, marketing, and promoting the university brand.

Maintaining alumni relationships involves both traditional practices of reaching out through direct mail campaigns, phone calls, and student reunions, as well as new digital media; podcasts; webinars; and social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter. These new venues allow institutions to engage with their alumni on a more consistent basis and through contemporary mediums.

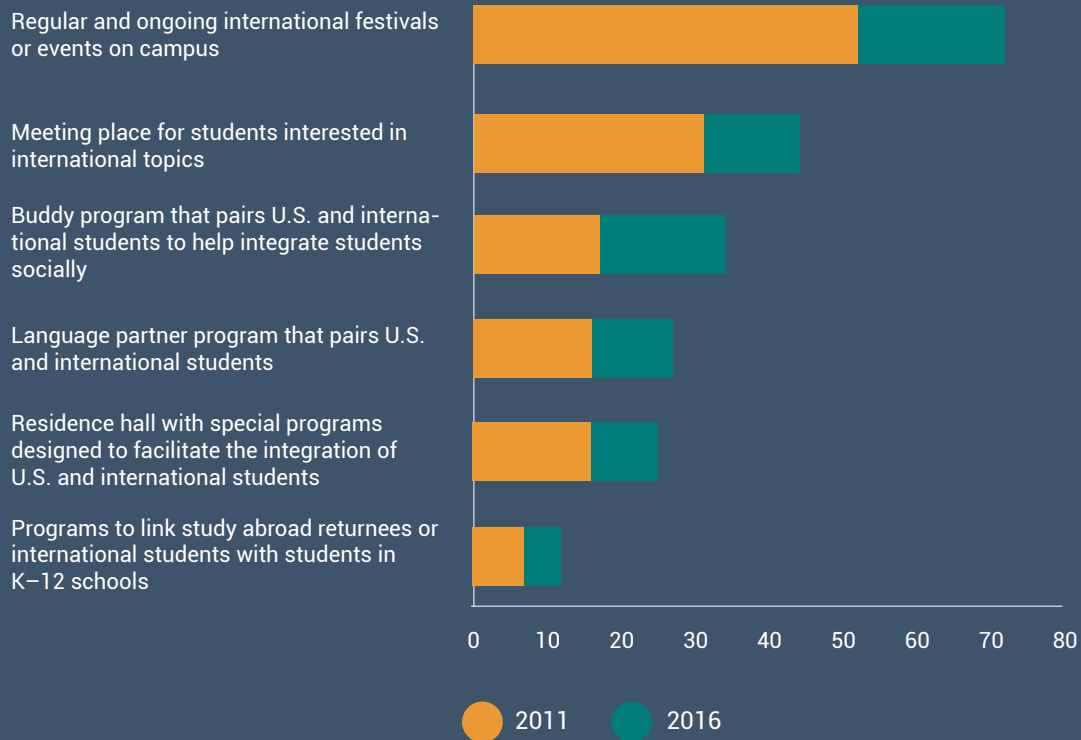
Even though building and maintaining networks with their U.S. alumni has become a standard practice for most institutions, keeping track and connecting regularly with their international alumni still poses quite a challenge for many universities; obtaining and updating their information requires much more work. Some institutions organize alumni events for their former students in countries with a larger population of alumni, or organize meetings with university leaders when they travel to specific countries or regions. However, given the cost of such practices, a limited number of institutions are able to organize these international events on a regular basis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT INTEGRATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THROUGH THE CO-CURRICULUM

The following material is adapted from ACE's Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses report published in 2017.

The most recent **Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses** Survey found that an increasing percentage of institutions are implementing co-curricular policies and programming for international students (Helms and Brajkovic 2017).

PERCENTAGE OF INSTITUTIONS OFFERING CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



While an increased number of programs for international students is a generally positive development, the co-curriculum data point to an important caveat: in 2016, as in 2011 and previous years of the ACE Mapping Survey, the most ubiquitous co-curricular programs (e.g., international festivals and events and a meeting place for students interested in international topics) are ones that in and of themselves, do not necessarily entail sustained and intensive intercultural engagement for students. Ongoing programs and those with a more intensive or explicit educational component, though offered by an increasing proportion of institutions, are still much less common.

Focusing internationalization efforts on the co-curriculum is essential for the kind of deep, transformational learning that international education promises. ACE has produced a three-part *Internationalization in Action* series focused on student learning that takes place outside the classroom:

Integrating International Students (Part 1)

Global and Intercultural Education in the Co-curriculum (Part 2)

Internationalization and Student Affairs (Part 3)

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