

The State of American Higher Education Outcomes for 2026

Where a student enrolls now predicts their economic outcome better than the prestige of the college they pick. In median earnings, the distance between the top state and the bottom runs 77%.

5,745

INSTITUTIONS ANALYZED

51

STATES + DC

\$41K

MEDIAN EARNINGS

1.7%

AVG MOBILITY RATE

American higher education is really fifty economies

Across 5,745 institutions, the median graduate earns **\$40,795** a decade after enrolling, up from \$35,500 at the six-year mark. That single national number is almost useless on its own. It buries a spread so wide that where a student enrolls shapes their earnings, their mobility, and their odds of finishing more than the ranking on any brochure.

The 2026 data keeps splitting in two. The **Northeast** pays its graduates the most. The **West** does the most to move low-income students into the top income quintile. Those are two different maps, and they barely touch. On the composite scorecard, Connecticut comes out first, with a A overall.

Put the patterns together and they trace what we have come to call **the hidden geography of economic mobility**: a map of where a degree still buys a better life, and where it quietly stopped. It looks almost nothing like the prestige order families get handed at seventeen, and that gap is the whole story of 2026.

HOW THIS DIFFERS FROM THE RANKINGS YOU KNOW

Most rankings still run on reputation. In the most influential one, about a fifth of a school's score comes from administrators rating each other. This report uses none of that. Every grade is a measured outcome pulled from federal data, which is why the leaders here do not match the prestige order. The states and schools that lift the most are rarely the ones that look the most impressive.

5,745

INSTITUTIONS
ANALYZED

51

STATES + DC

\$41K

MEDIAN EARNINGS

1.7%

AVG MOBILITY RATE

56%

AVG GRADUATION
RATE

\$17K

MEDIAN NET PRICE

The findings that matter most

- 01** **3.1%** **New York leads the nation in social mobility**
New York's institutions move bottom-quintile students into the top income quintile at a 3.1% rate, the highest of any state.

- 02** **\$58K** **Connecticut graduates out-earn every other state**
A decade after enrollment, Connecticut graduates post median earnings of \$57,516, first in the country.

- 03** **4.4x** **New Mexico delivers the strongest return on cost**
New Mexico returns 4.4x in graduate earnings for every dollar of net price, the best value-adjusted outcome in the country.

- 04** **\$9K** **New Mexico is the most affordable system in America**
New Mexico posts the lowest median net price in the country at \$8,706 after grants and aid.

- 05** **\$40,795** **The average graduate earns \$40,795 ten years out**
Across 5,745 institutions in 51 states, median earnings reach \$40,795 a decade after enrollment, against an average state mobility rate of 1.7%.

- 06** **+15%** **Earnings climb 15% between years 6 and 10**
Median graduate earnings rise from \$35,500 at six years after entry to \$40,795 at ten, a gain of 15%. The value of a credential keeps building well after graduation.

Best states for higher-education outcomes

A single Outcome Score (0–100) combines each state's national percentile on graduate earnings (30%), social mobility (25%), value (25%), and graduation (20%). Letter grades show how each state ranks on each dimension. A dash means too few institutions reported that measure to rank it.

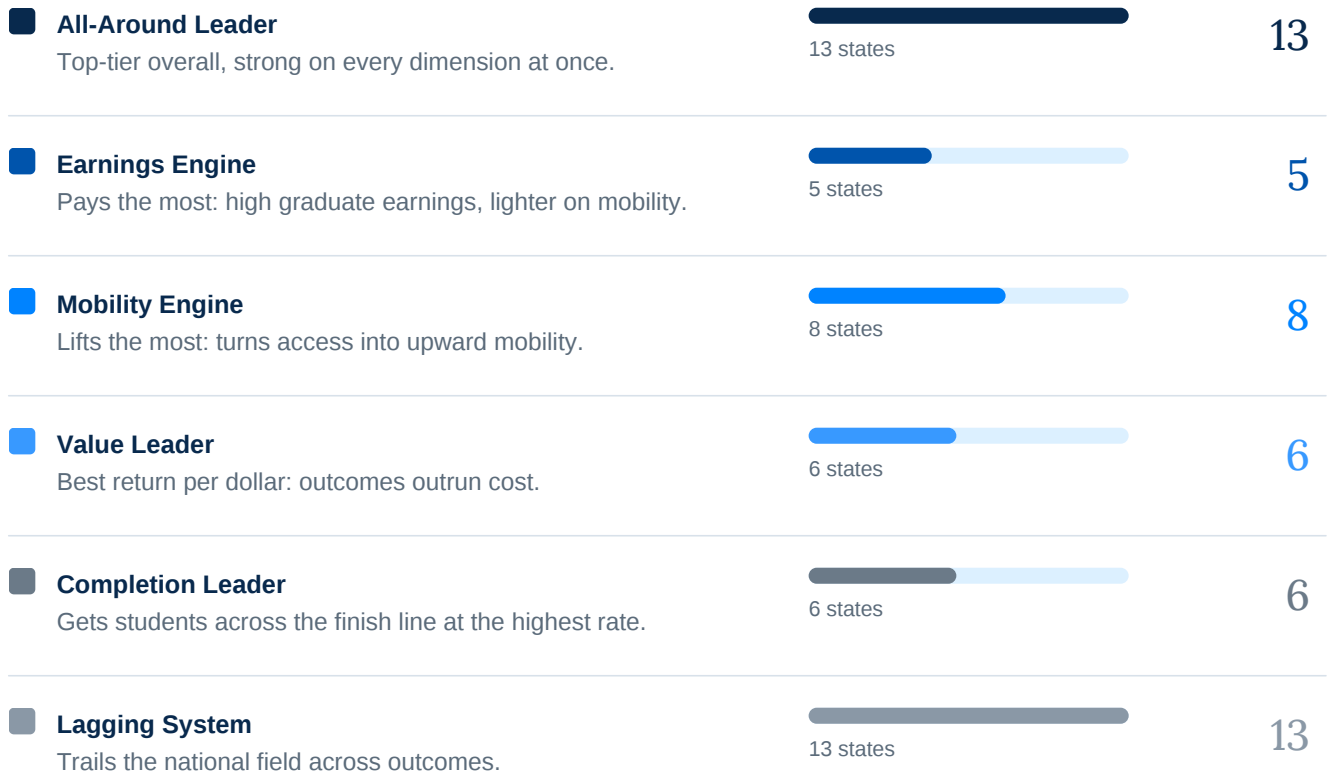
#	STATE	TYPE	SCORE	EARN	MOB	VAL	GRAD
01	Connecticut	All-Around Leader	84	A+	B+	A-	A+
02	New York	All-Around Leader	83	A	A+	A-	A
03	Pennsylvania	All-Around Leader	72	A+	B-	B	A
04	Massachusetts	All-Around Leader	71	A+	A-	C	A+
05	New Jersey	All-Around Leader	70	A-	A+	B	B
06	Rhode Island	All-Around Leader	69	A+	B	C-	A+
07	Alaska	Value Leader	68	A	—	A+	C-
08	North Dakota	All-Around Leader	67	B+	A+	A+	C-
09	District of Columbia	All-Around Leader	67	A+	A	C-	A
10	Nebraska	All-Around Leader	64	A	C+	A	B
11	Washington	All-Around Leader	63	A	B-	A+	C
12	Minnesota	Earnings Engine	62	A	C+	A	C+
13	Oklahoma	All-Around Leader	62	C	A	A	B
14	South Dakota	All-Around Leader	62	A-	B+	B+	C+
15	Hawaii	Value Leader	61	B	—	A+	C
16	Maine	All-Around Leader	61	B+	B	B	B
17	Wyoming	Value Leader	61	C+	A	A+	C-
18	California	Mobility Engine	59	B-	A+	C-	A
19	New Hampshire	Earnings Engine	59	A+	C-	A-	B-
20	New Mexico	Mobility Engine	59	C	A+	A+	C-
21	Vermont	Earnings Engine	59	A+	C	C	A+
22	Maryland	Lagging System	58	B+	B+	B+	C

#	STATE	TYPE	SCORE	EARN	MOB	VAL	GRAD
23	Wisconsin	Earnings Engine	58	A-	C-	A-	A-
24	Montana	Value Leader	56	B-	A-	A	C-
25	Illinois	Lagging System	55	C+	B	B+	B
26	Delaware	Lagging System	54	B-	—	B+	B-
27	Kansas	Value Leader	54	B+	C	A	C
28	West Virginia	Value Leader	54	C	C+	A+	B+
29	Colorado	Lagging System	52	B	C+	B-	B+
30	Indiana	Earnings Engine	50	A-	C-	C+	A-
31	Iowa	Completion Leader	49	B	C-	C+	A-
32	Tennessee	Lagging System	47	C	C+	B	B+
33	Virginia	Lagging System	46	B	B-	C	C+
34	Texas	Mobility Engine	45	C	A+	C-	B-
35	Oregon	Lagging System	44	C+	B	C+	B-
36	Missouri	Completion Leader	43	B-	C-	C+	A-
37	Florida	Completion Leader	42	C-	B+	C-	A+
38	Ohio	Lagging System	42	B	C-	C+	B+
39	Mississippi	Mobility Engine	40	C-	A	B-	C-
40	Louisiana	Mobility Engine	39	C-	A+	C-	C+
41	Alabama	Mobility Engine	38	C-	A	B-	C-
42	Arizona	Mobility Engine	37	C+	A-	C-	C
43	Arkansas	Mobility Engine	37	C-	A-	B-	C-
44	Idaho	Completion Leader	34	C-	B-	C-	A+
45	Nevada	Completion Leader	33	C+	C	C-	A
46	Georgia	Lagging System	30	C-	B	C	C-
47	Utah	Completion Leader	27	C-	C-	C-	A+
48	Kentucky	Lagging System	26	C-	C	C	C
49	North Carolina	Lagging System	26	C-	C	B	C-

#	STATE	TYPE	SCORE	EARN	MOB	VAL	GRAD
50	South Carolina	Lagging System	25	C	C	C	C-
51	Michigan	Lagging System	21	C-	C-	C-	C+

Every state belongs to a type

We sort all 51 systems into six mutually exclusive types, set by where each state's measured strength actually sits. It is a fixed classification, not a loose editorial grouping, so no state can drift between buckets to flatter it.



The signals worth watching

The national leader on each measure, across all 51 state systems, straight from federal data.

STEEPEST EARNINGS CLIMB

+25%

Connecticut

Median earnings, 6 → 10 yrs after entry

LOWEST GRADUATE DEBT BURDEN

0.23×

Wyoming

Median debt vs. earnings (lower is better)

STRONGEST PUBLIC-UNIVERSITY ROI

6.4×

New Mexico

Public earnings per \$1 of net price

STRONGEST STUDENT RETENTION

81%

Rhode Island

First-year retention rate

BEST VALUE STATEWIDE

4.4×

New Mexico

Earnings per \$1 of net price

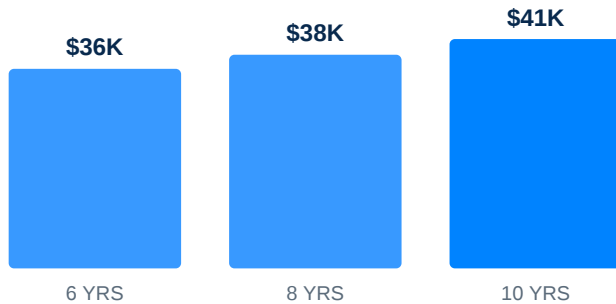
HIGHEST SOCIAL MOBILITY

3.1%

New York

Bottom quintile → top quintile

EARNINGS TRAJECTORY



+15%

Median earnings climb from \$35,500 at six years after entry to \$40,795 at ten, a gain of 15%. The payoff of a credential is not the starting salary. It builds. Where the ramp is steeper, employers are still bidding for those graduates years into their careers.

Where the data overturns the conventional wisdom

Three places where the common assumption and the federal record point opposite ways.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Prestige drives upward mobility.

THE DATA · ACCESS > PRESTIGE

Public universities out-mobilize elite privates

Public institutions move low-income students into the top quintile at a 1.8% average rate, ahead of private institutions at 1.7%. Mobility tracks access, not selectivity.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

The states that pay the most also lift the most.

THE DATA · TWO DIFFERENT MAPS

The earnings map and the mobility map barely overlap

Not one state appears in both the top five for earnings and the top five for mobility. The places that pay the most are rarely the places that lift the most.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

You get what you pay for.

THE DATA · ROI ≠ STICKER PRICE

Low-cost states quietly win on return

4 of the five best value-adjusted states also rank among the most affordable. The strongest returns come from modest net prices, not premium ones.

Best against worst

Connecticut graduates out-earn Louisiana by 77%

A decade after enrollment, the median Connecticut graduate earns \$57,516, 77% more than the median graduate in Louisiana (\$32,503). Same country, two different economies.

New Mexico delivers 162% more return per tuition dollar than Nevada

Every dollar of net price returns 4.4x in graduate earnings in New Mexico, against 1.7x in Nevada. Where you enroll now decides whether a degree compounds or stalls.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The Northeast leads the nation on graduate earnings; the West leads on mobility and value.

REGION	EARNINGS	MOBILITY	VALUE	GRADUATION	INSTITUTIONS
Northeast	\$51K	1.8%	2.5x	61%	1,120
Midwest	\$44K	1.3%	2.6x	56%	1,294
South	\$38K	1.7%	2.4x	53%	2,003
West	\$41K	1.8%	2.8x	54%	1,197

AI resilience, state by state

As AI eats into entry-level work, what protects a graduate is less the name on the diploma than whether their state's colleges feed fields AI cannot easily automate. The AI-Resilience Index scores each state by its degree mix. National average: 66.

MOST AI-RESILIENT SYSTEMS

01	Wyoming	Health Professions	71
02	South Dakota	Health Professions	70
03	Alaska	Health Professions	69
04	Maine	Health Professions	69
05	Kentucky	Health Professions	69

MOST AI-EXPOSED SYSTEMS

01	New Hampshire	Business & Marketing	62
02	District of Columbia	Business & Marketing	62
03	California	Humanities	62
04	Oregon	Humanities	63
05	Hawaii	Business & Marketing	63

The AI-Resilience Index is a CollegeRanker model. Each college's program mix (College Scorecard fields of study) is weighted by field-level exposure to AI augmentation against displacement, then aggregated by enrollment to the state level. It is directional, not a forecast.

All fifty states and DC

01 Connecticut 84
 All-Around Leader · Northeast

Yale anchors a small but mighty state where elite private institutions drive outsized research and graduate earnings.

EARN **A+** MOB **B+** VAL **A-** GRAD **A+**

\$58K **1.8%** **2.7x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

02 New York 83
 All-Around Leader · Northeast

New York has the nation's largest public university system (SUNY), plus Columbia, Cornell, and NYU — a market unlike any other.

EARN **A** MOB **A+** VAL **A-** GRAD **A**

\$48K **3.1%** **2.8x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

03 Pennsylvania 72
 All-Around Leader · Northeast

Penn State and the PASSHE network, plus elite private universities like Penn and Carnegie Mellon, create a uniquely rich higher ed landscape.

EARN **A+** MOB **B-** VAL **B** GRAD **A**

\$51K **1.4%** **2.5x** **68**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

04 Massachusetts 71
 All-Around Leader · Northeast

Massachusetts has the highest concentration of elite universities in the world — Harvard, MIT, and dozens more — driving top-tier research and graduate earnings.

EARN **A+** MOB **A-** VAL **C** GRAD **A+**

\$53K **1.9%** **2.2x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

05 New Jersey 70
 All-Around Leader · Northeast

Princeton, Rutgers, and NJIT give New Jersey a dense network of research universities despite its small size.

EARN **A-** MOB **A+** VAL **B** GRAD **B**

\$46K **2.4%** **2.5x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

06 Rhode Island 69
 All-Around Leader · Northeast

Brown University anchors Rhode Island's compact but high-quality mix of private and public institutions.

EARN **A+** MOB **B** VAL **C-** GRAD **A+**

\$55K **1.5%** **2.2x** **64**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

07 Alaska **68**
 Value Leader · West

Alaska's vast geography demands flexible, regional delivery — the University of Alaska system anchors access across the state.

EARN **A** MOB — VAL **A+** GRAD **C-**

\$48K — **3.5x** **69**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

08 North Dakota **67**
 All-Around Leader · Midwest

North Dakota's small public campuses and online programs keep college accessible across one of the most rural states in the country.

EARN **B+** MOB **A+** VAL **A+** GRAD **C-**

\$44K **2.4%** **3.5x** **67**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

09 District of Columbia **67**
 All-Around Leader · South

Georgetown, GW, and Howard make the District a dense cluster of elite institutions despite its geographic size.

EARN **A+** MOB **A** VAL **C-** GRAD **A**

\$49K **2.1%** **2.1x** **62**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

10 Nebraska **64**
 All-Around Leader · Midwest

The University of Nebraska system — led by UNL — delivers affordable, high-quality education across the state.

EARN **A** MOB **C+** VAL **A** GRAD **B**

\$48K **1.3%** **2.9x** **66**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

11 Washington **63**
 All-Around Leader · West

The University of Washington anchors a state where tech giants and a strong public system produce a massive STEM workforce.

EARN **A** MOB **B-** VAL **A+** GRAD **C**

\$48K **1.4%** **3.4x** **65**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

12 Minnesota **62**
 Earnings Engine · Midwest

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities leads a strong public system paired with one of the nation's best community college transfer pathways.

EARN **A** MOB **C+** VAL **A** GRAD **C+**

\$48K **1.4%** **2.8x** **68**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

13 Oklahoma **62**
 All-Around Leader · South

Oklahoma's low cost of living and below-average tuition create affordable pathways through the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State systems.

EARN **C** MOB **A** VAL **A** GRAD **B**

\$38K **2.1%** **3.1x** **66**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

14 South Dakota **62**
 All-Around Leader · Midwest

South Dakota's small, distributed public campuses provide essential access to higher education across a sparsely populated state.

EARN **A-** MOB **B+** VAL **B+** GRAD **C+**

\$47K **1.8%** **2.6x** **70**
 EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

15 Hawaii 61

Value Leader · West

Hawaii's University of Hawai'i system serves a distributed island population with culturally grounded programs and strong community college links.

EARN **B** MOB — VAL **A+** GRAD **C**

\$43K	3.2%	3.6x	63
<small>EARNINGS</small>	<small>MOBILITY</small>	<small>VALUE</small>	<small>AI INDEX</small>

16 Maine 61

All-Around Leader · Northeast

Maine's University of Maine System stretches across a rural state, combining small campuses with online reach.

EARN **B+** MOB **B** VAL **B** GRAD **B**

\$44K	1.7%	2.5x	69
<small>EARNINGS</small>	<small>MOBILITY</small>	<small>VALUE</small>	<small>AI INDEX</small>

17 Wyoming 61

Value Leader · West

Wyoming's single public university system leverages low in-state tuition to serve one of the nation's most rural populations.

EARN **C+** MOB **A** VAL **A+** GRAD **C-**

\$41K	1.9%	4.3x	71
<small>EARNINGS</small>	<small>MOBILITY</small>	<small>VALUE</small>	<small>AI INDEX</small>

18 California 59

Mobility Engine · West

California's three-tier public system — UC, CSU, and community colleges — is the world's largest higher education network.

EARN **B-** MOB **A+** VAL **C-** GRAD **A**

\$41K	2.4%	2.0x	62
<small>EARNINGS</small>	<small>MOBILITY</small>	<small>VALUE</small>	<small>AI INDEX</small>

19 New Hampshire 59

Earnings Engine · Northeast

Dartmouth College anchors a small but high-performing state with strong public options through the University System of New Hampshire.

EARN **A+** MOB **C-** VAL **A-** GRAD **B-**

\$51K	1.0%	2.8x	62
<small>EARNINGS</small>	<small>MOBILITY</small>	<small>VALUE</small>	<small>AI INDEX</small>

20 New Mexico 59

Mobility Engine · West

New Mexico's low tuition and the University of New Mexico's broad reach make higher ed accessible across a rural state.

EARN **C** MOB **A+** VAL **A+** GRAD **C-**

\$39K	2.5%	4.4x	66
<small>EARNINGS</small>	<small>MOBILITY</small>	<small>VALUE</small>	<small>AI INDEX</small>

21 Vermont

Earnings Engine · Northeast

59

Vermont's small colleges and University of Vermont system serve a rural population with strong programs in environmental science and the liberal arts.

EARN **A+** MOB **C** VAL **C** GRAD **A+**

\$54K **1.2%** **2.2x** **68**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

22 Maryland

Lagging System · South

58

Home to Johns Hopkins — the nation's largest research university — plus the University of Maryland system anchoring College Park and Baltimore.

EARN **B+** MOB **B+** VAL **B+** GRAD **C**

\$45K **1.8%** **2.6x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

23 Wisconsin

Earnings Engine · Midwest

58

The University of Wisconsin system — anchored by Madison and Milwaukee — combines national research with broad in-state access.

EARN **A-** MOB **C-** VAL **A-** GRAD **A-**

\$46K **1.0%** **2.8x** **68**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

24 Montana

Value Leader · West

56

Montana's vast rural landscape makes the Montana University System a critical lifeline for widely dispersed communities.

EARN **B-** MOB **A-** VAL **A** GRAD **C-**

\$41K **1.9%** **3.1x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

25 Illinois

Lagging System · Midwest

55

Illinois is home to world-class research institutions — UChicago, Northwestern, UIUC — that drive innovation across the Midwest.

EARN **C+** MOB **B** VAL **B+** GRAD **B**

\$41K **1.5%** **2.6x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

26 Delaware

Lagging System · South

54

Delaware's compact size and single public university system keep costs manageable while maintaining strong graduate outcomes.

EARN **B-** MOB **—** VAL **B+** GRAD **B-**

\$41K **0.8%** **2.6x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

27 Kansas

Value Leader · Midwest

54

KU and Kansas State anchor a public system that delivers solid, affordable education across the state.

EARN **B+** MOB **C** VAL **A** GRAD **C**

\$45K **1.3%** **3.0x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

28 West Virginia

Value Leader · South

54

West Virginia University and the state's community colleges serve a rural population with accessible, career-focused programs.

EARN **C** MOB **C+** VAL **A+** GRAD **B+**

\$38K **1.3%** **3.8x** **64**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

29 Colorado

Lagging System · West

52

Colorado's combination of research universities and a thriving tech economy produces a strong pipeline of STEM graduates.

EARN **B** MOB **C+** VAL **B-** GRAD **B+**

\$42K **1.4%** **2.4x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

30 Indiana

Earnings Engine · Midwest

50

Purdue and Rose-Hulman anchor a state that produces a disproportionately high share of engineering and computer science graduates.

EARN **A-** MOB **C-** VAL **C+** GRAD **A-**

\$46K **1.0%** **2.4x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

31 Iowa

Completion Leader · Midwest

49

Iowa State and the University of Iowa drive strong STEM and agriculture programs that feed into the state's manufacturing economy.

EARN **B** MOB **C-** VAL **C+** GRAD **A-**

\$43K **1.2%** **2.4x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

32 Tennessee

Lagging System · South

47

Vanderbilt and the University of Tennessee produce a disproportionate share of healthcare workers, anchored by Nashville's medical industry.

EARN **C** MOB **C+** VAL **B** GRAD **B+**

\$39K **1.3%** **2.5x** **64**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

33 Virginia 46

Lagging System · South

UVA, Virginia Tech, and VCU anchor a state with one of the highest concentrations of research universities in the South.

EARN **B** MOB **B-** VAL **C** GRAD **C+**

\$44K **1.4%** **2.3x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

34 Texas 45

Mobility Engine · South

Texas's multi-system public network — UT, A&M, Texas Tech, UH — educates over a million students and drives the state's booming economy.

EARN **C** MOB **A+** VAL **C-** GRAD **B-**

\$38K **2.4%** **2.1x** **64**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

35 Oregon 44

Lagging System · West

The University of Oregon and Oregon State anchor a system known for strong environmental and health sciences programs.

EARN **C+** MOB **B** VAL **C+** GRAD **B-**

\$40K **1.4%** **2.3x** **63**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

36 Missouri 43

Completion Leader · Midwest

Washington University and the University of Missouri both rank among the nation's top research institutions.

EARN **B-** MOB **C-** VAL **C+** GRAD **A-**

\$41K **1.2%** **2.3x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

37 Florida 42

Completion Leader · South

Florida's State University System — anchored by UF, FSU, and UCF — combines scale with steadily rising graduation rates.

EARN **C-** MOB **B+** VAL **C-** GRAD **A+**

\$36K **1.9%** **1.8x** **64**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

38 Ohio 42

Lagging System · Midwest

Ohio State anchors a strong public system complemented by a dense network of private colleges and community colleges.

EARN **B** MOB **C-** VAL **C+** GRAD **B+**

\$41K **1.1%** **2.3x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

39 Mississippi

Mobility Engine · South

40

Mississippi offers some of the lowest net prices in the country, anchored by Mississippi State and Ole Miss, making college unusually accessible.

EARN **C-** MOB **A** VAL **B-** GRAD **C-**

\$33K **2.3%** **2.5x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

40 Louisiana

Mobility Engine · South

39

Louisiana's low cost of living and below-tuition public system produce some of the most affordable degree options in the South.

EARN **C-** MOB **A+** VAL **C-** GRAD **C+**

\$33K **3.1%** **2.1x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

41 Alabama

Mobility Engine · South

38

Alabama's below-average net prices and above-average mobility rates make it one of the most cost-effective states for a college degree.

EARN **C-** MOB **A** VAL **B-** GRAD **C-**

\$37K **2.0%** **2.4x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

42 Arizona

Mobility Engine · West

37

Arizona State University leads one of the nation's largest public systems, enrolling tens of thousands and driving the state's talent pipeline.

EARN **C+** MOB **A-** VAL **C-** GRAD **C**

\$39K **1.9%** **1.9x** **66**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

43 Arkansas

Mobility Engine · South

37

Arkansas keeps net prices below the national average while producing solid earnings outcomes for graduates across the state.

EARN **C-** MOB **A-** VAL **B-** GRAD **C-**

\$35K **1.9%** **2.5x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

44 Idaho

Completion Leader · West

34

Idaho's low net prices and steady completion rates make it an underrated option for cost-conscious students.

EARN **C-** MOB **B-** VAL **C-** GRAD **A+**

\$33K **1.4%** **1.8x** **64**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

45 Nevada 33

Completion Leader · West

Nevada's UNLV and UNR systems serve a fast-growing population across a geographically challenging state.

EARN **C+** MOB **C** VAL **C-** GRAD **A**

\$39K **1.2%** **1.7x** **69**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

46 Georgia 30

Lagging System · South

Georgia's HOPE scholarship and strong technical college system create one of the strongest upward mobility pipelines in the South.

EARN **C-** MOB **B** VAL **C** GRAD **C-**

\$37K **1.6%** **2.2x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

47 Utah 27

Completion Leader · West

Utah's low cost, high completion rates, and a tech economy anchored in Silicon Slopes make it a STEM powerhouse.

EARN **C-** MOB **C-** VAL **C-** GRAD **A+**

\$36K **0.9%** **1.9x** **67**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

48 Kentucky 26

Lagging System · South

Kentucky's below-average net prices combined with targeted scholarship programs keep college within reach despite below-average state funding.

EARN **C-** MOB **C** VAL **C** GRAD **C**

\$36K **1.3%** **2.2x** **69**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

49 North Carolina 26

Lagging System · South

The Research Triangle — Duke, UNC Chapel Hill, NC State — makes North Carolina one of the most research-intensive states in the nation.

EARN **C-** MOB **C** VAL **B** GRAD **C-**

\$36K **1.2%** **2.5x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

50 South Carolina 25

Lagging System · South

South Carolina's public system — anchored by USC and Clemson — keeps prices manageable while producing solid graduate earnings.

EARN **C** MOB **C** VAL **C** GRAD **C-**

\$38K **1.2%** **2.3x** **65**
EARNINGS MOBILITY VALUE AI INDEX

51 Michigan

21

Lagging System · Midwest

The University of Michigan anchors a state with strong public universities — MSU, Wayne State — and a deep community college network.

EARN C- MOB C- VAL C- GRAD C+

\$36K
EARNINGS

1.2%
MOBILITY

2.1x
VALUE

65
AI INDEX

How the numbers are built

This report grades all 51 states and DC on four outcome dimensions, each normalized to a national percentile: graduate earnings (median 10 years after entry), social mobility (the rate at which bottom-quintile students reach the top quintile), value (earnings returned per dollar of net price), and graduation (completion rate). The composite Outcome Score weights earnings 30%, mobility 25%, value 25%, and graduation 20%.

State figures aggregate the 5,745 institutions in our database. Earnings, net price, and completion come from the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard; the earnings trajectory uses Scorecard's 6-, 8-, and 10-year cohort measures. Social-mobility data comes from the Opportunity Insights Mobility Report Cards, built on anonymized federal tax records.

Coverage thresholds. A state is ranked on a metric only when at least five of its institutions report that measure. This keeps a thin sample from topping a national ranking. A state with two schools reporting mobility still sees its own figure, but it stays out of the mobility leaderboard. Dimensions below the threshold show as a dash instead of a grade.

No reputation surveys, and no weighting we will not show you. Every grade traces back to public, reproducible federal data.

Please cite: CollegeRanker, The State of American Higher Education Outcomes for 2026. collegeranker.com/states