Preparing for changes to the R1 Carnegie Classification

Achieving the R1 university designation granted by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is a strategic goal for many colleges and universities. It can help raise a college or university's profile and the ability to attract and retain faculty, research funding, and students.

Now, the qualifications for the R1 status are changing.

Calls for a revised classification system

The R1 designation currently places a premium on research spending and granting doctoral degrees; it also caps the number of named institutions. As a result, the system has been faulted for creating unintended competition for limited R1 positions and even influencing colleges and universities to promote investments in research over other mission goals.

Once in place, the revised "classification categories will be expanded to more accurately describe the richness and multifaceted nature of today's colleges and universities and capture additional aspects of institutions' missions."

The cap on the number of R1 designations will also be lifted, making room for additional colleges and universities to be recognized for other critical contributions to their students and communities.

IN BRIEF

- The American Council on Education (ACE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) are making changes to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

- Revisions include updated criteria for "very high" research colleges and universities, also known as R1s and the introduction of a new Social and Economic Mobility classification.

- In light of these changes, institutions should evaluate the potential impact of the new criteria, understand current research investments, and engage directly with ACE and the CFAT on the new Social and Economic Mobility measures.

Key considerations for the research enterprise

While ACE and CFAT are still finalizing the revisions, here are six considerations higher education leaders should evaluate to help prepare for the changes.

- **Determine how to best proceed.** Some R1 institutions would move to the R2 tier if the new criteria were applied today. Conversely, those currently on the cusp of R1 could achieve it. Colleges and universities need to

determine how to best retain or obtain the R1 classification — and the path they will take to either reach the new classification or stay there.

- **Assess your current strategy and investments.** Understanding the impact of the changes on an institution's investments and funding opportunities is critical for research enterprise leaders. Now is the right time to understand the current strategy and planned investments in the research infrastructure and evaluate the extent to which a change in Carnegie designations might warrant revisiting those decisions.

- **Explore new opportunities.** One of the most significant changes is the introduction of a Social and Economic Mobility classification, which is designed to showcase how colleges and universities contribute to students' long-term success. This new lens provides the opportunity to elevate the profile of individual institutions and the value of higher education overall.

- **Report optimally and accurately.** The new bar for R1 status will be set at $50 million in total research and development spending and 70 doctoral research degrees. CFAT will use a three-year rolling average or the most recent year data from the National Science Foundation (NSF) Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey for the former. For the 2025 classifications, that most recent year will be the 2022-2023 academic year, which institutions must report to NSF by late January 2024. Any institution on the threshold between R1 and R2 should be especially careful to capture the entirety of its research activities within the definitions allowed by the NSF HERD survey.

- **Be collaborative and transparent.** Bring together the right research and institutional leadership to discuss the implications of the changes and any associated strategic plans and investments. Develop a clear communication plan for all stakeholders, including students, faculty, alumni, and donors, to increase engagement and support for the institution's path forward.

In a class by itself

The Carnegie Classification system is the standard for categorizing colleges and universities by determining the number and type of degrees granted, research funding and activity, faculty profiles, and academic offerings.

The classification system was designed to help researchers, the academic community, and students evaluate higher education institutions more objectively using a defined set of criteria.

Some groupings and labels, such as the basic classification, are assigned using publicly available information. Elective classifications, such as R1 or Social and Economic Mobility, are granted only upon application.

The highest research designation, or R1, is assigned to doctoral institutions that have the highest research activity. These include some of the nation's most elite, selective colleges and universities.

- **Stay informed and engaged.** So much related to the revised Carnegie Classification system remains to be seen, including which institutions will make the cut, what short- and long-term modifications colleges and universities may make to become or stay contenders, and how ranking entities such as U.S. News & World Report will be affected. ACE and CFAT are seeking feedback and suggestions from the field about the proposed changes, and all higher education institutions are encouraged to participate in this process.

Moving forward, it will be important for research and institutional leaders to keep informed and work collaboratively to achieve goals.

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