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**ECONOMIC MOBILITY INDEX OF PUBLIC R1 UNIVERSITIES
IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST**

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PURPOSE:

This fact sheet presents data on public R1 higher education institutions¹ in the Mountain West from the “Economic Mobility Index,”² crafted by higher education researchers at the think tank, *Third Way*. We summarize the rankings of eleven Mountain West R1 institutions in Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.

ABOUT THE DATA:

Michael Itzkowitz’s report for *Third Way*, “Out With the Old, In With the New: Rating Higher Ed by Economic Mobility,” ranks 1,320 bachelor’s degree granting institutions in the United States. The original report uses a metric developed to account for the enrollment “proportion of students from low- and moderate-backgrounds” and the “return on their education investment.”³ *Third Way* used a Price-to-Earnings Premium (PEP) metric to determine how long “it takes students to recoup their education costs based off the earnings boost they obtain by attending an institution.”⁴ Low income students are defined as those with families making \$30,000 or less upon college enrollment.

To account for the proportion of low-income students enrolled at a college or university, researchers included Pell Grant recipients in the “Economic Mobility Index.” This contextualizes the relatively high PEPs at selective colleges and universities, which provide high returns on educational investment for students, but generally do not serve large populations of lower- to moderate-income students. A combination of PEP and Pell Grant data allows for comparison of how colleges and universities fare in providing students with access to economic mobility.

The “Economic Mobility Index” is “designed to give policymakers, researchers, and consumers a better way to assess which colleges are delivering on [the promise of economic mobility] for low- and moderate-income students—and which ones are falling woefully short.”⁵ The data reveal that, “institutions that provide the most economic mobility do so for two main reasons: 1) they offer a quick return on investment for low-income students, and 2) they enroll mostly low-and moderate-income students as part of their overall student body.”⁶

Only 146 universities in the U.S. are recognized with the Carnegie Classification of “R1,” signifying that they have “very high research activity.”⁷ There are 11 public R1 higher education institutions in the Mountain West; two in Nevada, two in Arizona, four in Colorado, one in New Mexico, and two in Utah. Of the 1,320 colleges and universities included on the “Economic Mobility Index,” the 11 Mountain West institutions rank between 95th (Arizona State University, Tempe) and 764th (University of Colorado, Boulder) in economic mobility.

¹ American Council on Higher Education, “The Carnegie Classification of Institutes of Higher Education,” July 2022 (<https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/index.php>).

² Michael Itzkowitz, “Out with the Old, In with the New: Rating Higher Ed by Economic Mobility,” January 2022 (www.thirdway.org/report/out-with-the-old-in-with-the-new-rating-higher-ed-by-economic-mobility).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ American Council on Higher Education, “The Carnegie Classification of Institutes of Higher Education: Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity,” July 2022 (https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/lookup/srp.php?clq=%7B%22basic2005_ids%22%3A%2215%22%7D&start_page=lookup.php).

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Among Mountain West public R1 higher education institutions, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) has the highest percentage of Pell Grant recipients (37.20%), or 9,403 out of 25,282 students.
2. Three Mountain West public R1 universities rank in the top 200 for economic mobility: Arizona State University, Tempe (95th), University of Nevada, Las Vegas (108th), and Utah State University (166th). These institutions rank in the top 15% in the nation for economic mobility.
3. Arizona State University, Tempe has the largest number of Pell Grant recipients (32,097) among its 89,888 students, equal to 35.7%.
4. Price to Earnings Premiums, or the number of years it takes for a student to recoup their education costs based off the earnings boost they obtain by attending an institution, range from a high of 3.18 years at the University of New Mexico, Main Campus to a low of 1.10 years at the Colorado School of Mines.

Table 1 displays economic mobility metrics for the 11 Mountain West public R1 higher education institutions. Arizona State University, Tempe has the highest “Economic Mobility Index” ranking (95th), number of Pell Grant recipients (32,097), and the highest total number of undergraduates (89,888). The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) has the highest percentage of Pell Grant recipients (37.2%). Colorado has four public R1 higher education institutions listed on the “Economic Mobility Index Rank,” with Colorado School of Mines (719) having the lowest total number of undergraduates amongst the Mountain West. University of New Mexico-Main Campus has the highest Price-to-Earnings Premium (PEP) amongst the public higher education institutions that are R1 in the Mountain West.

Table 1: Economic Mobility Rankings for Public R1 Higher Education Institutions in the Mountain West

State	Institution	Economic Mobility Index Rank	Low-income PEP Rank	Price-to-Earnings Premium: Years to Pay Down Total Net Cost	Low-income PEP Percentile Rank	Economic Mobility Index	Pell Grants Recipients	Total number of undergraduates	Percent Pell
AZ	Arizona State University, Tempe	95 th	124 th	1.24	90.7%	32.4%	32,097	89,888	35.7%
NV	University of Nevada, Las Vegas	108 th	218 th	1.89	83.6%	31.1%	9,403	25,282	37.2%
UT	Utah State University	166 th	247 th	2.10	81.5%	27.4%	8,362	24,880	33.6%
AZ	University of Arizona	212 nd	189 th	1.73	85.8%	25.1%	10,089	34,547	29.2%
CO	University of Colorado, Denver / Anschutz Medical Campus	257 th	115 th	1.21	91.4%	23.8%	4,279	16,443	26.0%
UT	University of Utah	278 th	145 th	1.44	89.1%	22.9%	6,360	24,743	25.7%
NM	University of New Mexico, Main Campus	292 nd	460 th	3.18	65.4%	22.4%	8,483	24,737	34.3%
NV	University of Nevada, Reno	295 th	191 st	1.73	85.7%	22.3%	4,665	17,930	26.0%
CO	Colorado State University-Fort Collins	505 th	327 th	2.53	75.5%	17.5%	6,029	25,962	23.2%
CO	Colorado School of Mines	719 th	102 nd	1.10	92.4%	13.9%	744	4,952	15.0%
CO	University of Colorado Boulder	764 th	244 th	2.09	81.7%	13.1%	4,828	30,159	16.0%

* Adapted from “Top Boomtowns in America - 2019 Edition”. *SmartAsset*. <https://smartasset.com/mortgage/top-boomtowns-in-america-2019>