

TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

There are over 3,000 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. Over time, different formal classifications systems have been developed, utilizing various methodologies, resulting in different category names and frameworks. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has one of the most recognized classification systems (<http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/>). Below you will find a list of institution types that reflect general categories that are often used colloquially – these do not reflect the specific language of any one classification system.

Institution Type	General Characteristics
Research University	Public or private. Faculty are expected to have both a robust research agenda (and publications) and a track record bringing in grant money. Faculty teach students at the bachelors, masters and Ph.D. levels & may have teaching and research assistants (e.g., Michigan State University, University of Arizona, UCLA, Yale, Columbia)
Comprehensive University	Mostly public. Faculty are expected to produce scholarship and increasingly are being asked to bring in research money. Faculty mostly teach bachelor's degree and master's level students, although some comprehensive universities do have doctoral programs (e.g., Central Michigan University; Eastern Carolina University).
Liberal Arts College	Mostly private. These institutions are known for their size (smaller) and their emphasis on rewarding faculty for their teaching accomplishments. Faculty mostly teach undergraduates, although some liberal arts colleges have a few masters programs. The institutions within this category are diverse – some have very high research expectations and value a faculty member's role in including undergraduates in their research programs (e.g., Hope College, Calvin College, Swarthmore College, Amherst College).
Community College	Public and Private. These institutions are plentiful across the country and play an important role in providing access to higher education for large groups of people. Faculty mostly teach students in associate's degree and technical certificate programs (although many community colleges are now offering some bachelor's degrees). More and more students are entering community colleges to take courses that satisfy their general education requirements prior to transferring to four-year institutions. Career preparation is a large part of the community college mission (e.g., Lansing Community College, Mott Community College).
Minority-Serving Institution	Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) were founded initially to provide education to underrepresented minority group members. There are a set of historically Black and Hispanic institutions, along with Tribal Colleges, that continue to play an important role in the U.S. education system. These institutions include research and comprehensive institutions, liberal arts colleges and community colleges (e.g., Howard University, Florida A&M University, California State – Fresno, Arizona Western College, Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College, College of the Muscogee Nation).
For-profit Institution	There are an increasing numbers of for profit institutions – both traditional “brick and mortar” and on-line -- offering an array of certificate and degree programs. Many faculty in these institutions work in industry and teach on a part-time basis (e.g., University of Phoenix, Strayer University, ITT Technical Institute).