KNOW YOUR NUMBERS: USING THE POSTSECONDARY VALUE COMMISSION’S EQUITABLE VALUE EXPLORER TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES AND PROMOTE EQUITY

Higher education should be a path to a better living and a better life. Recognizing the importance and potential of this investment, the Postsecondary Value Commission carefully developed a definition to understand “value,” a framework to measure how value is delivered, and an action agenda to promote the equitable delivery of value, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, Black, Latinx, Indigenous and underrepresented Asian American and Pacific Islander students, and women. The Equitable Value Explorer, an innovative diagnostic tool, operationalizes the commission’s define, measure, act approach, and enables institutions to understand whether their students are getting ahead, simply getting by, or falling behind. Equipped with this critical information, colleges and universities will be able to improve student outcomes and promote equity across their campuses and systems.

The innovative diagnostic tool, the *Equitable Value Explorer*, is designed to put the power of the Postsecondary Value Commission’s framework at your fingertips. The Explorer is built around publicly available data, including the College Scorecard, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), and is supplemented by more granular analyses provided by the University of Texas (UT) System. A full description of the Postsecondary Value Framework, measurement considerations, and data limitations is available in the technical documentation. For a visual exploration of the tool’s functionality, please see the video available here.

The Explorer allows institutional leaders, researchers, and policymakers to explore the economic value that colleges and universities deliver to students, and—when better data become available—which

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a To view the technical documentation, please visit https://equity.postsecondaryvalue.org/explainer/tech.pdf
demographic groups receive that value. Institutional leaders can leverage these analyses, combined with insights generated through their own internal data systems, to develop a detailed understanding of equitable postsecondary value at their schools. For support on how to use internal and public data sources to implement the Postsecondary Value Framework, institutions and states should consider participating in the Value Data Collaborative to be launched by the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

A key step to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to fully benefit from higher education is to understand whether postsecondary value is being delivered—and to whom—at individual colleges and universities. However, when using this data tool, there are three crucial considerations to keep in mind:

1. **Context matters.** While assessing institutional performance, users must consider an institution’s context, including the institutional mission, state policy and financial support, local and regional labor market conditions, and history. Some of these contextual factors are provided for users within the tool, including:
   - undergraduate student enrollment,
   - graduation rates,
   - percent of graduates in STEM fields,
   - cohort default rates,
   - per student instructional expenditures, and
   - minority-serving institution designation.

   These factors are important to understanding equitable postsecondary value but are not comprehensive. Institutional leaders will be best able to understand their own performance on the Postsecondary Value Framework, in light of their own specific context. For example, a leader at an open access institution that focuses on creating affordable education opportunities for low-income students may want to explore value at institutions with similar levels of diversity to understand how graduation rates and other contextual factors may affect the value they provide.

2. **The available data are incomplete.** This tool leverages the best available public data from the College Scorecard and other sources, but those data are incomplete, so results should be interpreted with great caution.

   For example, because an institution’s median earnings are not yet reported separately by gender and race in the College Scorecard, comparison of an institution’s median earnings for all students against subgroup-specific thresholds may **overstate** value for minoritized groups.

   Likewise, the Economic Value Index and Economic Value Contribution—two critical aspects of the Postsecondary Value Framework, which underscore the importance of access for all students in promoting equitable postsecondary value—cannot be calculated without disaggregated earnings data and are not yet shown in this tool as a result.

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c For more information about the limitations of publicly available data, please visit [https://equity.postsecondaryvalue.org/explainer/data.pdf](https://equity.postsecondaryvalue.org/explainer/data.pdf)
For recommended federal data improvements necessary to fully implement the Postsecondary Value Framework, including improvements to the College Scorecard, please see the July 2021 Postsecondary Data Collaborative letter on this topic.\(^d\)

3. **The Explorer displays outcomes but does not diagnose causes.** Due to data limitations, and the complexity of measuring postsecondary value, this data tool and the underlying data are designed to inform institutional improvement efforts, **not** to develop institutional rankings, penalize institutions, or make causal claims about value.

It is important to note that the economic benefits to individuals are only one aspect of the many ways postsecondary education can enhance the lives of students and improve their communities. Learning and personal growth, the development of skills, and enhanced well-being and sense of purpose are all tied to equitable postsecondary value, as are societal advances like improved health outcomes and increased civic engagement. The research of the Postsecondary Value Commission’s Research Task Force strongly demonstrates that these non-economic aspects of value are closely tied to economic benefits. In addition, the commission focused economic returns in the broader context of widening income and wealth inequality, especially by race.

Institutional leaders, policymakers, and researchers should leverage the Explorer to shed light on the ways in which equitable postsecondary value is being realized and to identify areas where there is still work to be done. Below we outline detailed instructions for how to fully leverage the data displayed in the Explorer, including the Explorer’s display and functionality.

Using College Scorecard Data to Evaluate Equitable Postsecondary Value Across Institutions

To navigate to the Explorer, click on the “Data Tool” buttons on either the bottom left or menu bar on the top of the landing page. On the Explorer landing page, you’ll find institutional performance on each economic value threshold, based on analyses of College Scorecard and ACS data.

Users can leverage the following tool features to explore the data:

- Hover over a data point to reveal summary information about that school.
- Click on a circle to highlight all schools with similarly diverse enrollment (see image below). In the case of “Typical University” the data show a school with relatively high Pell enrollment that provides economic value to their students that exceeds students’ total investment.
- Leverage the dropdown menus on the left-hand side of the tool to change the demographic data displayed on the vertical axis, select a different economic value threshold to explore, or restrict the data to only show a subset of institutions.
The dashboard also includes an “Advanced Search” option to show multiple institutions’ performance on the economic value thresholds (see image below), alongside factors like access, selectivity, net price, STEM enrollment, and completion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Overall Median Earnings</th>
<th>Earning relative to Threshold 0</th>
<th>Threshold 0 (Minimum Economic Return)</th>
<th>Earning relative to Threshold 1</th>
<th>Threshold Premium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical University</td>
<td>$32,732</td>
<td>$561</td>
<td>$32,170</td>
<td>$10,386</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Success</td>
<td>$43,501</td>
<td>$10,259</td>
<td>$33,246</td>
<td>$116</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State College</td>
<td>$41,812</td>
<td>$11,413</td>
<td>$30,399</td>
<td>$1,805</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public University</td>
<td>$49,308</td>
<td>$17,320</td>
<td>$31,969</td>
<td>$5,691</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Institute</td>
<td>$29,247</td>
<td>$2,585</td>
<td>$31,832</td>
<td>$14,370</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite College</td>
<td>$46,986</td>
<td>$12,561</td>
<td>$34,125</td>
<td>$3,388</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Excellence</td>
<td>$29,247</td>
<td>$4,423</td>
<td>$24,624</td>
<td>$133</td>
<td>$29,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>$35,160</td>
<td>$2,032</td>
<td>$33,128</td>
<td>$8,457</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Institute</td>
<td>$51,526</td>
<td>$14,432</td>
<td>$37,094</td>
<td>$7,908</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts College</td>
<td>$49,308</td>
<td>$13,476</td>
<td>$35,833</td>
<td>$5,691</td>
<td>$43,617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explore Equitable Postsecondary Value at a Single Institution

Users can access detailed views for each school through the “profile” button within the scatterplot or using the “Search Institutions” feature at the top of the page. The institutional profiles include the following data elements:

**Institutional Earnings Relative to Economic Value Thresholds**

This detailed institutional profile view shows a single school’s 25th percentile, median, and 75th percentile for overall earnings alongside each economic value threshold (see image below). The institutional profiles allow users to compare overall earnings for students ten years after initial enrollment at an institution with each of the economic value thresholds, detailed in chapter three of the report, *Equitable Value: Promoting Economic Mobility and Social Justice Through Postsecondary Education.*

For example, the median earnings at Typical University exceed the threshold for achieving a minimum economic return by nearly $11,000. This means that least 50 percent of students who attended that school earn at least that much more than that threshold amount.

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Disaggregated Thresholds for Some Institutions

In cases where a single race/ethnicity or gender subgroup makes up at least 50 percent of an institution’s enrollment, users will also see a disaggregated threshold, which is developed using ACS data on earnings for each subgroup. However, because the College Scorecard median earnings data is not currently disaggregated by race and gender, disaggregated thresholds are not displayed for institutions that serve low percentages of students from a particular group at this time.

For colleges that serve large proportions of students of color or women, the disaggregated thresholds better convey the value provided to the students they serve and better account for the labor market discrimination their graduates experience. For example, at “Typical Historically Black University”, a hypothetical HBCU, where Black students make up the majority of student enrollment, median earnings exceed the overall minimum economic return threshold by about $3,000. However, median earnings exceed the same threshold for black students by $6,000. Comparing these students’ earnings only to the overall threshold, and not the disaggregated thresholds for Black students, would fail to account for the labor market discrimination their graduates face and understate the value the college is delivering to the students they serve.

Contextual Factors

The institutional profiles also include several contextual variables (see image below). These factors—undergraduate enrollment, admissions rates, instructional expenditures, percent of students pursuing STEM fields, cumulative net price, completion rates, time to credential, and student loan default rates—each have a direct role in how an institution performs against the Postsecondary Value Framework. For instance, institutions with higher graduation rates and lower cumulative net prices tend to produce graduates with higher earnings potential.
Accounting for Access and the Need for Disaggregated Earnings Data

The Postsecondary Value Commission included several additional measures to reflect the importance of access in promoting value. The Economic Value Index combines measures of access and success to show the percentage of students from specific subgroups who complete their credentials and experience at least a minimum economic return. Likewise, the Economic Value Contribution measures the total earnings generated by an institution overall and for each subgroup beyond the minimum economic threshold to show their financial contribution to society for serving diverse student populations well.

Unfortunately, these measures cannot be calculated reliably with current College Scorecard data and are not shown here (except for the UT System institutions as noted below). Instead, we include placeholders for these values to underscore the importance of considering access in measures of value, and to highlight the need to improve data availability to generate these estimates. These indices could be calculated for women and students from low-income backgrounds if the College Scorecard published median (instead of mean) earnings for these groups; the indices should be calculable for students of color in the near future with the recent addition of race/ethnicity to the underlying College Scorecard data set.

The University of Texas System Data Enables More Robust Evaluation of Value

The University of Texas System has provided robust, nuanced data to demonstrate the full utility of the Postsecondary Value Framework, available by clicking on “UT System” in the navigation bar. The more granular UT analyses should serve as a roadmap for institutional leaders hoping to use internal data to supplement publicly available information to improve their understanding of equitable value generated by their schools. The functionality of the UT portion of the Explorer is similar to that of the main data tool but provides additional detail. Median earnings and the percentage of students passing each threshold are reported separately by program, completion status and for each demographic subgroup, and are available one, three, five, 10, and 15 years after students leave the institution.
Each economic value threshold, as well as EVI and EVC measures, are available for the University of Texas System at the institution and program level. This requires disaggregated median earnings outcomes by race/ethnicity, income, and gender, as sample sizes allow, for each institution or program offered, and the percentage of students in each category that meet each threshold. The percentage of students by race/ethnicity, gender, and income meeting Threshold 0 allows for the production of a precise EVI for each subgroup. Similarly, disaggregated post-college earnings estimates for completers allows for a more precise estimate of EVC.

For example, at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP; see image below), a slightly greater proportion of White graduates pass T0 compared with Latinx graduates (67 percent vs. 64 percent). The school performs very well on access and completion for Latinx students—86% of completers are Latinx. As a result, UTEP has a high EVI and EVC for Latinx students: 55% of UTEP completers are Latinx and surpass T0, compared to only 34% of completers in the UT System overall. Indeed, Latinx graduates at UTEP contribute $18.6 million to the economy annually. Both EVI and EVC are available at the institution and program level for graduates three years after leaving school.
Conclusion

Thank you for your interest in the *Equitable Value Explorer*. A key step to ensuring all students can make the most of the opportunity higher education can provide is to understand how postsecondary value is being delivered and whether that value is being delivered equitably. We hope you find this tool informative and engaging and will leverage the value definitions and measures to take action in improving equitable postsecondary value.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The final content of the Equitable Value Explorer does not reflect the positions of individual members of the Postsecondary Value Commission or the organizations they represent.