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## The New Carnegie Classifications

If you want to know how influential the Carnegie Classifications are, consider that there are still college administrators all over the country who talk about turning their institutions into “Carnegie I’s” — even though that category (once considered the “top” ranking for research universities) hasn’t existed for years.

For those who want to aspire to actual classifications, they will be posted today on the Web site of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching — with significant changes not only in who is where, but in the categories themselves. In the first update since 2000, research institutions are evaluated in a new way; for the first time ever, community colleges are not lumped together; and in a move that is raising tempers on more than a few campuses, the foundation has made it much more difficult for colleges to qualify for exceptions in which they are listed in one category even though they meet the criteria for another.

The classifications were first published in 1973, designed for researchers who sought to compare similar institutions or foundations that wanted to support a particular sector. While some institutions have always complained about not being in one category or another, the Carnegie system has been well respected. Carnegie never set itself up to be kingmaker among colleges, but the rankings have grown in influence as other groups, less well respected in the education world, have piggybacked off the rankings.

For example, the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings — obsessed over by many colleges though they are generally viewed as educationally dubious — are based on Carnegie’s classifications. And while *U.S. News* will keep the status quo for its next set of rankings, even the chance that colleges might find themselves in new *U.S. News* groupings has some admissions officers terrified.

Carnegie has pushed over the years, with mixed success, to have the classifications used in ways that are consistent with the foundation’s philosophy. For instance, the foundation is a leader among those in higher ed for arguing that traditional research alone is not the best measure of quality, but its classifications have been used by many to imagine a pyramid of the thousands of colleges and universities with the most prestigious few dozen research universities on the top. In its current revisions, the foundation is trying a number of approaches to discourage superficial use of the system.

In a largely cosmetic change, the foundation has changed the order of its categories so that they are based on enrollment. As a result the associate degree categories lead the lists. More substantively, the foundation in November released an entirely different categorization system to operate alongside the traditional system. The traditional system, now called the “basic” classifications, is the update being

Hall said that, on the whole, the new system seems to be an improvement, doing a better job at making clear “the diversity of higher education.” He said he was particularly pleased to see new tools for understanding community colleges. With regard to research universities, he said that he was satisfied that the system counts non-science funds and the number of postdocs — categories that he said help an institution like Albany and that provide “a fuller and better picture of who is doing what.”

The biggest problem with the new system for research universities, he said, was that in striving to include more measures it has also become “more complicated than its predecessors to digest.” Previous systems were “readily understood” and struck many people as “intuitively correct,” so there is a danger in having a complex system, he said.

McCormick of Carnegie acknowledged that flaw and said it was something that foundation officials were continuing to think about. “The virtue of what we did in the past was that it was very transparent and very straightforward,” he said.

While other research university officials shared that concern, officials at several of what are widely considered top institutions applauded the shifts. Many believed that the 2000 system rewarded quantity over quality in doctoral programs, and may even have had the impact of encouraging institutions to expand Ph.D. programs that shouldn’t have been expanded.

Over all, here is how the institutions in the research university categories in 2000 fared in 2006 (with the caveat that a few institutions continue to appeal their status, providing new or corrected data to Carnegie). The category numbers don’t add up for 2006 because a few institutions are still being classified or have moved out of the research university category.

#### **Number of Institutions by Carnegie Category, 2000 and 2006**

<b>2000 Category</b>	<b>2006 ‘Very High’</b>	<b>2006 ‘High’</b>	<b>2006 Doctoral/Research</b>	<b>Total</b>
Doctoral/research “extensive”	91	56	3	151
Doctoral/research “intensive”	3	44	47	108

Another major change for the classifications was the use of subdivisions with community colleges. As community colleges have grown in number, enrollments and complexity, many educators have considered it unfortunate that Carnegie provided no ways to group them.

The system Carnegie decided to use is based largely on the work of Stephen G. Katsinas, director of the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, and David E. Hardy, director of research at the center.

The system divides institutions based largely on size and location (where not otherwise noted, categories are for public institutions):

#### **Associate Degree Categories in New Carnegie System**

He said that he thought the revised system could be used to group similar institutions well, but he said that he was disappointed not to find a good way to divide community colleges by their relative emphasis on pre-transfer vs. vocational programs. "I think the lack of data we have there is probably the single biggest gap on available information and we know that community colleges vary on that spectrum," he said.

Sara McPhee, a research associate at the American Association of Community Colleges, said that she applauded the move to having multiple categories for two-year institutions. "Small rural community colleges do end up having different missions and different offerings from large urban community colleges," she said.

McPhee said she was also pleased that Carnegie included in the community college categories institutions that are primarily two-year institutions, but offer a few four-year degree programs. (The cutoff used by Carnegie is 10 percent of degrees — institutions that exceed that total would go in a bachelor's category.) The issue is an important one for community colleges nationally as the question of offering four-year degrees has become controversial. Those institutions that have done so have generally offered a relatively small number of degrees, so the Carnegie system will not "bump them" from the associate area, McPhee said.

Another change made by Carnegie — largely for reasons of fairness — is generating controversy. This change makes it much more difficult for institutions to be listed in one category even though they meet the criteria for another category. In the 2000 classification, there were more than 100 institutions with exemptions — with the largest number of these institutions being places that "identified strongly as undergraduate liberal arts colleges, but had appreciable graduate education," McCormick said. At the research university level, institutions want to move "up," but for places whose image revolves around being a liberal arts college, moving "up" to a master's category is not seen as a promotion at all.

McCormick said that he understood the colleges' desire to remain identified in one way, but that it creates a problem to have "published criteria" that don't apply to all institutions. He also noted that more liberal arts colleges were in fact adding master's programs and that the value of a classification system depends on it reflecting such a trend.

This year, only about a dozen exemptions are being made — although lobbying to gain exemptions was going on Friday and will continue (Carnegie typically makes some adjustments after the release of classifications, when institutions present arguments based on such facts as errors in data reviewed). For liberal arts colleges with selected master's programs, McCormick said that the classification system was applied with only a few exceptions, such as when colleges could show that their graduate programs took place at a different campus.

With the stricter enforcement of the rules, institutions such as Bryn Mawr and Smith Colleges, and Wesleyan University — all of which formerly appeared in baccalaureate categories — find themselves in master's categories. Middlebury College escaped such a fate on Friday, arguing that its graduate programs are either in the summer or off-site.

Robert Morse, who directs data research at U.S. News, said that the Carnegie revisions are too late to use for the next rankings from his magazine, which will be published in August. He said that there was a "significant likelihood" that the magazine would use the new Carnegie system for future editions, but that no decision could be made until the magazine's staff could study the revisions. Morse said he had heard about the concerns of some liberal arts colleges, and that U.S. News believed the end of Carnegie's exemptions could have a real impact in that category. But Morse said that the colleges had