
“Bet on Pennsylvania in 2025”

Thomas P. Foley, President, Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania (AICUP). January 2025.

We’re optimistic about the promise of 2025, and this new year, we’re betting on Pennsylvania. Here’s why: The state is on an upswing and benefiting from a stellar reputation as a magnet for talent. If that comes as a surprise to you, then here are facts and stories from 2024 you may have missed about how independent nonprofit higher education is transforming Pennsylvania and setting us up for success in the new year.

Pennsylvania is the second [most popular destination](#) in the USA for out-of-state freshman college students, and two in the three of those students move here to attend one of the state’s 85 independent nonprofit colleges and universities (called “[AICUP](#)”). Why are students choosing PA over alternatives like Florida or California? The Wall Street Journal found that Pennsylvania is home to the [third largest](#) number of “best colleges” in the country according to “[how well each college sets graduates up for financial success](#),” considering factors like salary after graduation and social mobility (AICUP-member schools make up all the top 10 and 19 of the top 20 in PA, according to the [WSJ](#)). PA even saw a net [increase of 51%](#) in the number of college-educated new residents. This all translates to a “[brain gain](#)” and “win-win” for all Pennsylvanians that adds to our talent pool, boosting industry and innovation.

At the local level, a college can “[anchor](#)” a community by bringing students to local shops, providing good jobs, adding to the tax base, and infusing new dollars into the economy. PA’s 85 independent nonprofit colleges and universities collectively generate [\\$24 billion](#) for the state economy, contribute [\\$1.1 billion](#) in state and local taxes, and support nearly [200,000 jobs](#).

PA’s residents and taxpayers can all agree then that having a college for a neighbor is an asset that benefits everyone. But what about at the individual level? Is a college degree even “worth it?” YES! And here are three ways Pennsylvania’s independent nonprofit colleges and universities are making a degree worthwhile, in terms of affordability, workforce preparedness, and social mobility.

Affordability: We’re told that college “costs keep going up,” and while that may be true in other states, the average net cost of a degree at one of Pennsylvania’s independent nonprofit schools has remained [flat](#) for a decade, even rivaling the cost of big state and state-related alternatives—who share \$1.6B in state supplied revenues. The independent nonprofit schools themselves offer the largest share of grants, scholarships, and discounts to their students, 10 times the financial aid from the federal/state governments, [saving PA taxpayers \\$1 billion](#) each year.

Workforce Preparedness: Despite repeated claims that “college isn’t worth it,” a college education will be increasingly necessary in an A.I.-driven tomorrow. [72% of jobs](#) in 2031 will require postsecondary education. AICUP-member schools already lead Pennsylvania in educating the most career-focused majors, producing far more [nurses, teachers, and STEM](#) professionals (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) than any other sector.

Social mobility: In addition to [The Wall Street Journal’s](#) 2024 report that found Pennsylvania’s independent nonprofit colleges and universities are leading the way in economic outcomes for graduates, the nonpartisan [Third Way Economic Mobility Index](#) found that AICUP schools are [20 of the top 25](#) colleges and universities in Pennsylvania for economic mobility, enrolling [47%](#) of PA’s low-income students. [More low-income](#) students in Pennsylvania are earning their degree at an independent nonprofit school than any [public alternative](#), and they’re doing that with better chances of [graduating on-time](#), with overall less debt and [lower rates of default](#).

Your local independent nonprofit college “neighbor” is helping the community thrive in many ways this new year. Colleges serve as an anchor and engine to their community, and their education and training helps PA to be competitive in a changing world.