

Recently, the Brookings Institute published an in depth report called ***Laggards, labs, ladders? Which Public Universities contribute the most?*** The report is dedicated to determining whether higher education provides a good return on investment to tax payers in terms of social mobility and overall public benefit. According to the authors “In particular, universities act as ladders for social mobility, which makes for a more dynamic and fairer society. They are also laboratories for research, expanding our knowledge in directions that can improve the welfare of the broader population. A good case can be made for public support for institutions that act in one or both of these ways: as what we label either **ladders** or **labs**. But there are some institutions that cannot claim to be either mobility-boosters or knowledge-creators: these are the **laggards**. These institutions have a weaker claim on the public purse.”

The report features 342 selective, four-year, public universities. Based on this research, the authors highlighted three views higher education must be aware of:

The upper-middle class is substantially over-represented in American public universities; Public investment in higher education too often fails to produce either social mobility or socially beneficial research; and

The significant public subsidies spent on the education of the relatively affluent could be better spent elsewhere.

Six universities from the State University System of Florida are included in the research and deemed leaders i.e. institutions considered both ladders and labs. Why is this important? These institutions simultaneously provide access to a high quality education while serving a public good with research and advancements in a wide variety of areas. For the purpose of our summary, we placed laser focus on the regional aspect of this report which suggests investments in higher education ARE paying off for the Sunshine State.

At present talent at the post-secondary level is mission critical in the Sunshine State, need proof? According to the Jobs 2030 Report released in 2017 by the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the state of Florida will need to create over 2 million additional jobs by 2030 to keep up with the state’s expanding population growth. Many of these jobs will be

in the high-tech sector, healthcare, and other STEM focused careers. These jobs will almost all require a college degree or post-secondary certificate along with digital skills. It is important to note that the Florida Consortium member institutions, Florida International University, University of Central Florida and University of South Florida have diverse student populations and are also R1: Research Universities in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education which signifies highest research activity. They also account for over thirty thousand college graduates in the state university system that hail from Miami, Orlando and Tampa where job growth is strong and likely to continue to grow.

Higher education can and is helping to hone the talent needed to attract and fill high quality jobs in Florida and we can't lose sight of this because Florida currently ranks 40th in the nation on the Opportunity Index. The Opportunity Index is designed to help local communities connect economic, academic, civic and other factors that support increased opportunity and economic mobility. Unfortunately, at present only about 37% of Floridians hold a post-secondary certification or college degree. In order to meet the demands of this changing job market the state of Florida will need to raise that number to 60% or higher. The talent needs and economic indicators underpin the importance of investments in higher education and the direct correlation to both social mobility and public good in Florida.

>>>>>[Read the full report](#)

Source:

[Laggards, labs, ladders? Which Public Universities contribute the most?](#)

[The Florida 2030 Project – The Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#)