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**Diagnosis: California Ranked 4th in National College Affordability**

*College Affordability Diagnosis* shows that higher education has gone from expensive to unaffordable for most American families.

**Philadelphia, April 27, 2016** — California remains one of the top states in the nation for affordable postsecondary schooling. The Golden State is ranked 4th **in the *College Affordability Diagnosis***, a state-by-state comparison of the policies that affect families’ abilities to pay for college. The study — published by the Institute for Research on Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education (Penn GSE) — analyzes college costs in relation to family income level. The study reveals how higher education has gone from expensive to unaffordable for most low-and middle-income families nationally.

**California’s** widely praised community colleges form the backbone of its system, and the state provides above-average need-based financial aid. However, the state’s impressive performance may be straining under growing demographic and economic shifts.

A particularly bright spot is California’s public two-year institutions, which provide a rare story of *increasing* affordability. Sixty-four percent of all California higher ed students attend these public two-year institutions. The percent of family income required to enroll in these institutions has actually declined since 2008. However, other postsecondary institutions have become *less* affordable. Although the state’s public research universities have a relatively high affordability ranking nationally, working your own way through college is largely no longer possible, as in-state students would have to work more than full time to pay the annual educational costs to enroll. Also notable, California has increasingly begun to rely on out-of-state students who pay higher tuition, thereby eliminating berths for a rising number of the state’s residents.

Large degrees of income inequality and significant gaps in college attainment threaten the promise of affordable higher education for many Californians. The income of California families is sharply stratified, with 22 percent of the population making less than $30,000 per year and 27 percent making more than $110,000 per year. Nearly a quarter of young people live in poverty. Very large gaps exist in educational attainment between Whites and Hispanics, the largest minority population in California. By 2020, almost half of all high school students will be Hispanic.

* **Read the** [**California report**](http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/irhe/affordability_diagnosis/California_Affordability2016.pdf)

The complete *College Affordability Diagnosis —* by Penn GSE’s Joni Finney, William Doyle, associate professor of public policy and higher education at Vanderbilt’s Peabody College, Patrick Callan, president of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), and HEPI senior policy analyst Darcie Harvey — shows the potentially devastating effects on America’s economy and social fabric if states and colleges fail to make meaningful changes.

The full study includes affordability diagnoses for all 50 states; a map of college affordability by census tract and legislative district; a look at how student aid has dramatically changed in the last 20 years; a snapshot of student borrowing; and recommendations for policy makers.

* **Read the** [**College Affordability Diagnosis**](http://www2.gse.upenn.edu/irhe/sites/gse.upenn.edu.irhe/files/Natl_Affordability2016.pdf)
* **See the** [**Affordability Rankings**](http://www2.gse.upenn.edu/irhe/affordability-diagnosis/state_reports)
* **Visit the** [**interactive map**](http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/research/studies/affordability/index.php)

Among the national findings:

* Even in the best-performing states, college is less affordable than it was in 2008.
* Geography can determine opportunity. College costs, available aid, and institutional options vary widely by state, sometimes within the same region. For example, Pennsylvania is 49th in these rankings. Its neighbor Maryland is 6th.

Financial aid doesn’t go as far as it used to. Even though more aid is available, it hasn’t kept pace with rising educational expenses.

* Most community college systems, historically an entryway into higher education, can no longer be considered an affordable option.
* Students can no longer work their way through college in most states (or most types of institutions). In many states, even full-time wages would not cover the cost of full-time attendance.
* These economic barriers are a key reason the higher education attainment gap between Whites and minorities has persisted, and in some cases grown, even as the population continues to diversify.
* Every state is projected to fall short of having enough college graduates to meet their workforce needs by 2020. In many cases, they are not even close.

Together, these findings reveal a nation that is poorly positioned for the present, much less the future. Without changes to affordability policies, the researchers warn, higher education will become another mechanism for the further stratification of America.

“This study shows how the deck is stacked against low- and middle-income Americans when it comes to paying for college,” Finney said. “Without policy changes, the data point toward a problem that will only worsen. That paints a bleak picture for millions of Americans.”

Many decisions about the real cost of college — from the sticker price to financial aid options — are made at the state and institutional levels. If the country is to get serious about making college more affordable, the researchers find, this is where policy changes will need to occur.

“State leaders can craft policies that ensure everyone who can benefit from college can go—but in too many states they have allowed college costs to rise beyond the reach of families,” Doyle said.

**Institute for Research in Higher Education at Penn GSE**

The Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE), headquartered at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, conducts research relevant to policymakers and educational practitioners on higher education. Founded over 30 years ago, IRHE’s unique examinations of the policy forces that shape higher education, as well as the Institute’s ability to publish and disseminate new understandings of the impact of these forces, are widely respected nationally.