

Moving Upward and Onward: Income Mobility at Historically Black Colleges and Universities



Robert A. Nathenson, Consortium for Policy Research
in Education, University of Pennsylvania Graduate
School of Education

Andrés Castro Samayoa, Boston College

Marybeth Gasman, Rutgers University–New Brunswick

RUTGERS
Graduate School of Education

Center for
MSIs



SAMUEL DEWITT
PROCTOR INSTITUTE
for Leadership, Equity & Justice

“Over the past few years, a number of researchers have begun to seriously look at mobility, specifically, those colleges and universities that are pathways to people from modest means to achieve the American dream. These studies have highlighted the awesome work of America’s HBCUs, a sector where over two-thirds of students are Pell Grant eligible, but as a sector has been able to achieve the greatest results in terms of mobility to the middle class and beyond. Dillard University has played a significant role in this work, always enrolling a high number of low-income students yet creating a campus culture, which supports them not only through college but leads them on a path to a new level of prosperity for their families.”

– Walter Kimbrough, President, Dillard University



Research Aims

Our key research aims are to (1) examine the intergenerational income mobility experienced by students who recently attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and (2) to examine variation across HBCUs, including on such measures as upward mobility into the top fifth of income earners.

Key Findings

- 01.** HBCUs enroll far more low-income students than PWIs.
- 02.** More students experience upward mobility at HBCUs than at PWIs.
- 03.** Nearly 70% of students at HBCUs attain at least middle-class incomes.
- 04.** Two-thirds of low-income students at HBCUs end up in at least the middle class.
- 05.** There is less downward mobility at HBCUs than at PWIs.
- 06.** HBCUs like Xavier University of Louisiana, Dillard University, and Tuskegee University are doing a particularly good job fostering upward mobility for their students.
- 07.** Children of affluent parents who attended PWIs were 50% more likely to stay affluent than children of affluent parents who attended HBCUs.

Ongoing Importance

Background

In recent years, federal and state officials have questioned the value of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), going so far as to cut funding streams and raise concerns over their constitutionality (Boland and Gasman, 2014). With this questioning in mind, we are interested in understanding HBCUs as a vehicle of social mobility.

We are aware of only a handful of quantitative studies in this area. Kim and Conrad (2006) found that the graduation rate for African Americans at HBCUs is comparable to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), despite HBCUs having substantially fewer institutional resources. While this work indicates that HBCUs may be performing exceptionally well with limited support, graduation rates are only one indicator of mobility, and one that is limited as it does not pertain to longer labor market outcomes. Both Fryer and Greenstone (2010) and Price, Spriggs, and Swinton (2011) compare the labor market earnings of graduates at HBCUs to non-HBCUs, but they find conflicting results. The data from each of these studies is also dated - Kim and Conrad's study is derived from a 1985 cohort of college freshman, Price, Spriggs, and Swinton study's latest sample is 1992, and the latest year in Fryer and Greenstone's study is 1997, twenty years ago. As the college landscape has and continues to change, the literature would benefit from a study using more recent data, which our study seeks to offer using data from Opportunity Insights (formerly the Equality of Opportunity Project).

Importantly, our work seeks to build on a recent research project in this area. The American Council on Education's (2018) report sheds a preliminary spotlight on upward mobility at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). The report examined mobility rates at a variety of four-year and two-year MSIs, including HSIs (Hispanic Serving Institutions), HBCUs, and AANAPISIs (Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions). The report presented aggregate national information by MSI type. The authors concluded that "income mobility by students who attended MSIs across the country exceeded mobility rates at non-MSIs" (Espinosa, Kelchen, and Taylor 2018, p. 17).

Higher education is most often a local decision and experience (Turley, 2009). For instance, the median commuting distance for students attending public institutions is 11 miles (Hillman, 2016). We, therefore, choose to focus on the localized higher education market instead of nationally, comparing mobility at HBCUs to PWIs within the same commuting area. We also take a more holistic approach of mobility by examining the proportion of students that experience any upward mobility. Lastly and critically, the ACE report does not condition their key outcomes on students' origin, i.e. the parents' income level. Far more low-income students enroll in HBCUs and other MSIs than PWIs. We believe that the most accurate measure of mobility also accounts for students' origins, i.e. the mobility trajectories of students with low-income parents. As detailed in Blau & Duncan's seminal *Status Attainment Model* (1967), parental

origin is a crucial component of the origin-education-destination mobility pathway.¹ In this study, we therefore also analyze students' conditional mobility outcomes in order to obtain what we believe to be the most candid examination of students' local mobility opportunities. For example, in Atlanta, the higher education market includes such HBCUs as Spelman College and Clark Atlanta University, as well as Georgia State and Clayton State, which are both PWIs.

Motivation

Our work focuses on understanding persistent educational and economic stratification and the role of institutions of higher education (IHE) in upward mobility. HBCUs are regarded as institutions that can address racial inequalities embedded within the educational system (Gasman, 2007; Gasman, 2011). For this study, we conceptualize HBCUs as vehicles for Black empowerment given their rich history, including as incubators for Black activism and protest during the Civil Rights Movement (Williamson-Lott, 2008). Tatum (1997) argues that HBCUs foster a shared experience and mutual understanding for their students. Price, Spriggs, and Swinton (2011) posit that HBCUs positively shape students' "identity, self-image, and self-esteem" (p. 106), which, they find, yields a wage premium in the labor market. Our work furthers this research by examining recent population-level data of income mobility at HBCUs and then unpacks variation in the mobility across institutions.

Research Aims

Our key research aims are to (1) examine the income mobility experienced by students who recently attended HBCUs and PWIs and (2) to examine the variation across HBCUs, including on such measures as mobility to the top income quintile and any upward mobility. We compare intergenerational income mobility at HBCUs to the mobility rates at PWIs within the same set of commuting zones. Doing so allows us to compare and contrast student outcomes at the localized institutional level, and to draw plausible generalizations about the tradeoffs students face when deciding which local institution to attend.



¹Origin modeled as father's education.

Methodology

Data Sources

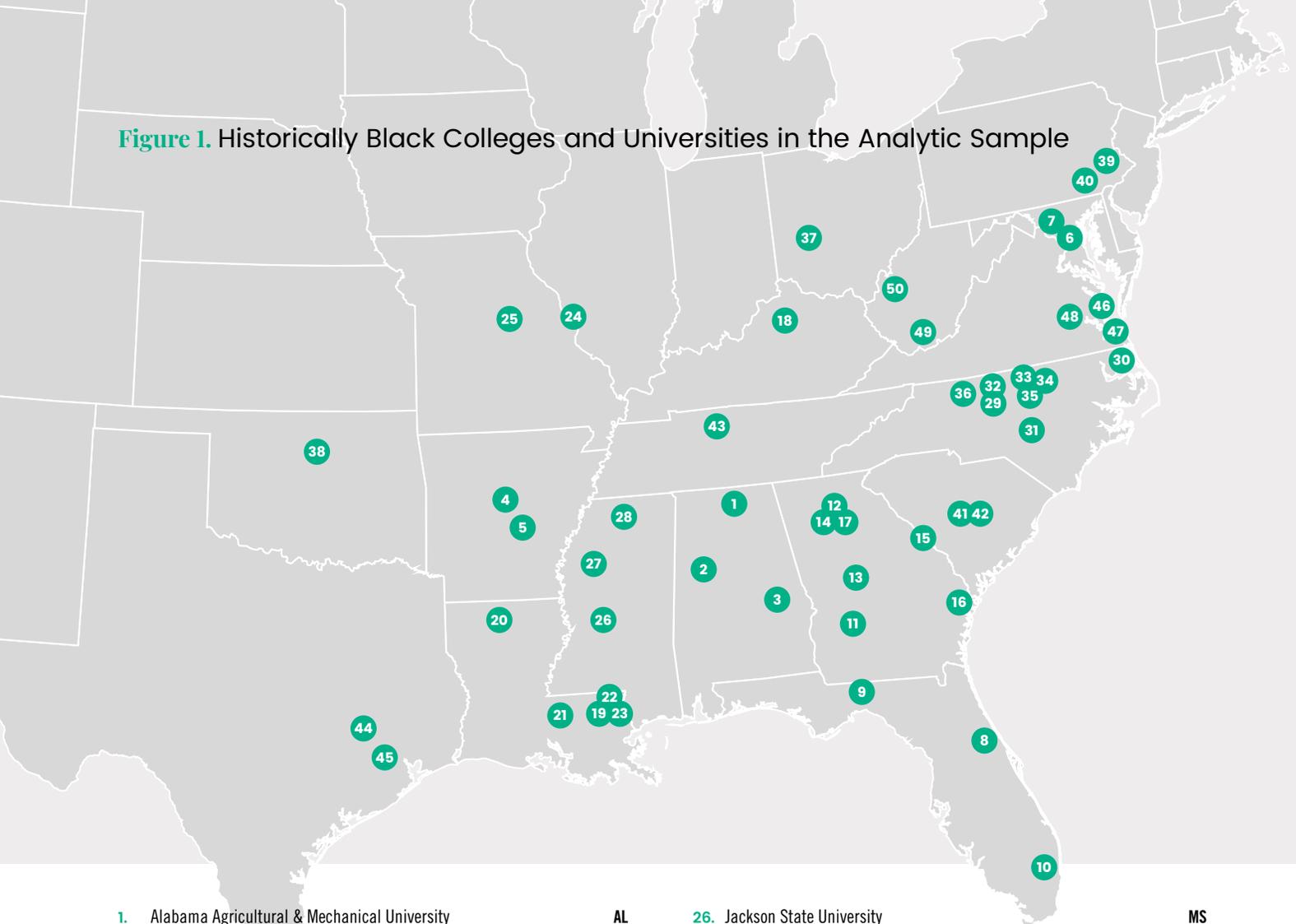
We use publicly available aggregate U.S. population-level intergenerational (parent linked to child) income information from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), with college attendance information from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). These data were created as a collaboration between U.S. government employees and researchers affiliated with Harvard's Opportunity Insights. The IRS data links parents and their children's reported income earnings for children born from 1980-1991. Opportunity Insights publicly released aggregated information by postsecondary institution after merging in key college demographic and institutional characteristics information from IPEDS. Institutions are identified and linked to IPEDS data through their unique Office of Postsecondary Education identifier (OPEID) assigned by the U.S. Department of Education.

Parents' household earnings are calculated as the five-year average when the child was age 15-19. Children's earnings are calculated as wage and self-employment earnings in 2014, when children were in their early to mid-thirties. Postsecondary institution is defined as the institution the child most often attended between the ages of 19 and 22. Income mobility by postsecondary institution is calculated as an aggregation of students and parents' income for children born in 1980, 1981, and 1982. Data on the 1983-1991 cohorts is also available, though there is less information on post-college outcomes for them as fewer years have passed since postsecondary exit.

Analytic Sample

Of the 101 postsecondary institutions classified as HBCUs within IPEDS, 50 four-year institutions are individually identified in the 1980-1982 cohorts (four others are classified as two-year institutions). All other HBCUs were part of a university system and therefore not individually identifiable or did not have sufficient data from 1980-1982 (i.e. enough students observed) to be included. While we acknowledge having data on only half of HBCUs as a potential limitation, we have information on a greater number of HBCUs than previous work in the area (i.e. Fryer & Greenstone, 2010; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Price, Spriggs, and Swinton, 2011) and the institutions for which we have data are geographically representative of all HBCUs. Figure 1 depicts the HBCUs contained in our analytic sample. The comparison PWIs are located within the same commuting zone of at least one of these HBCUs and are of similar institutional selectivity according to the Barron's Selectivity Index. We identify 115 PWIs, yielding an analytic sample of 165 institutions.

Figure 1. Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Analytic Sample



1. Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University	AL	26. Jackson State University	MS
2. Stillman College	AL	27. Mississippi Valley State University	MS
3. Tuskegee University	AL	28. Rust College	MS
4. Philander Smith College	AR	29. Bennett College	NC
5. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff	AR	30. Elizabeth City State University	NC
6. Howard University	DC	31. Fayetteville State University	NC
7. University of the District of Columbia	DC	32. North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University	NC
8. Bethune Cookman University	FL	33. North Carolina Central University	NC
9. Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	FL	34. Saint Augustine's University	NC
10. Florida Memorial University	FL	35. Shaw University	NC
11. Albany State University	GA	36. Winston-Salem State University	NC
12. Clark Atlanta University	GA	37. Central State University	OH
13. Fort Valley State University	GA	38. Langston University	OK
14. Morehouse College	GA	39. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania	PA
15. Paine College	GA	40. Lincoln University of Pennsylvania	PA
16. Savannah State University	GA	41. Claflin University	SC
17. Spelman College	GA	42. South Carolina State University	SC
18. Kentucky State University	KY	43. Tennessee State University	TN
19. Dillard University	LA	44. Prairie View Agricultural & Mechanical University	TX
20. Grambling State University	LA	45. Texas Southern University	TX
21. Southern University & Agricultural & Mechanical College at Baton Rouge	LA	46. Hampton University	VA
22. Southern University at New Orleans	LA	47. Norfolk State University	VA
23. Xavier University of Louisiana	LA	48. Virginia State University	VA
24. Harris-Stowe State University	MO	49. Bluefield State College	WV
25. Lincoln University of Jefferson City	MO	50. West Virginia State University	WV

Outcome Measures

Throughout the text, we often refer to students in the 1st/bottom quintile as low-income, the 2nd quintile as lower-income, the 3rd quintile as middle class, and also as median—students who come from households with close to the median income, the 4th quintile as upper-middle, and the 5th/top quintile as affluent/high-income.² We examine both the joint and conditional intergenerational (parent-child) income mobility distributions, what Chetty, Friedman, et al. (2017) call the ‘mobility rate’ and the ‘success rate,’ respectively. The mobility rate is defined as the percent of children who originate in a specific income quintile and end up as adults in a specific (often different) income quintile. The success rate is defined as the percent of children in a specific income quintile, conditional on their parent being in a specific income quintile. The former presents a holistic picture of the origin-destination income mobility patterns from parents to students (e.g. what percent of all students were in the top quintile and had parents with incomes in the bottom quintile). The latter details the income mobility of students given that their parents’ income was in a specific income bracket (e.g. of students who had parents in the bottom quintile, what percent of students achieved income in the top quintile). It is our emphasis on the success rate, specifically, that helps distinguish our work from other research in the area.

“It is our emphasis on the success rate, specifically, that helps distinguish our work from other research in the area.”



²Parental household income cutoffs (set to 2015 dollars) are as follows: \$25,000 for the 20th percentile, \$46,000 for the 40th percentile, \$74,000 for the 60th percentile, and \$111,000 for the 80th percentile. The median parental income is \$60,000 and the 99th percentile is \$512,000. Parental income cutoffs are derived from the pre-tax adjusted gross income of parents of children born in 1980 during the five years their child was 15-19 years old. For further information, see Chetty et al., “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility,” <https://nber.org/papers/w23618>.

Main Findings

Descriptive Comparisons

We first detail descriptive institutional and student characteristics for the HBCUs and PWIs contained in our analytic sample, which highlights similarities and differences across these institution types. We discuss various (unconditional) Mobility Rate measures and a number of (conditional) Success Rate measures. We discuss mobility variation within HBCUs and highlight HBCUs that are observed to be fostering particularly high rates of upward mobility. Lastly, we discuss inter-generational perpetuation of privilege at institutions of higher education.

Table 1 reports descriptive institutional and student characteristics at HBCUs and PWIs. By including information on the ways in which our set of HBCUs and PWIs are similar to each other and the ways in which they differ, we provide important context to our main findings. Descriptively, HBCUs have far fewer institutional resources per student than PWIs, with less than 1/3rd of the endowment per student at PWIs, though both types of institutions spend similar amounts on instruction. Far more HBCUs are public institutions than PWIs, and the average SAT scores of students at HBCUs are significantly lower than students at PWIs. The sticker price of attendance at HBCUs is lower than their PWI counterparts, but, critically, the net cost of attendance for the bottom fifth of students based on income profiles, a more accurate measure of the holistic cost of attendance, indicates that HBCUs are not significantly different than PWIs. Students at HBCUs are less likely to major in arts and humanities and multi/interdisciplinary studies, and more likely to major in STEM, social science, and public and social service fields. Fewer students graduate within 150 percent of normal time at HBCUs and, 10 years after enrollment, HBCU students' median earnings are approximately one-quarter (over \$10,000) lower than their counterparts at PWIs.



Table 1. Institutional and Student Characteristics at HBCUs and PWIs¹

	HBCU	PWI	
INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES (\$)			
Endowment Assets per Student in 2000	1,529	5,183	*
Average Faculty Salary, 2001	47,741	50,299	
Total Instructional Expenditures, 2000	5,380	4,753	
Total Instructional Expenditures, 2012	8,082	9,085	
INSTITUTIONAL SELECTIVITY			
Proportion of Selective Institutions from Barron's Selectivity Index ²	0.98	0.98	
Public University (vs Private)	0.64	0.38	**
Rejection Rate (One Minus Acceptance) from College Scorecard, 2013	0.50	0.35	***
Average SAT Scores, 2001 ³	900	1067	***
Average SAT Scores, 2013 ³	876	1057	***
COST OF ATTENDANCE (\$)			
Average Annual Cost of Attendance, 2000	4,959	9,790	***
Average Annual Cost of Attendance, 2013	10,670	20,435	***
Net Cost of Attendance for Bottom 20% Income Quintile from College Scorecard, 2013	13,712	15,470	
STUDENT BODY			
Total IPEDS Undergraduate Enrollment (Fulltime and Part-time), 2000	3,851	7,861	**
Total IPEDS Undergraduate Enrollment (fulltime and Part-time), 2013	3,390	7,869	**
Proportion of Undergraduate Student Body, 2000			
Black	0.86	0.14	***
Hispanic	0.01	0.03	***
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.00	0.02	***
Non-Resident Alien	0.02	0.03	
Proportion by College Major, 2000			
Arts and Humanities	0.06	0.10	*
Business	0.21	0.25	*
Health	0.08	0.08	
Multi/Interdisciplinary	0.05	0.10	*
Public and Social Services	0.09	0.05	***
Social Sciences	0.31	0.26	*
STEM	0.20	0.14	**
Trades and Personal Services	0.00	0.01	
COLLEGIATE OUTCOMES			
Percentage of Students Graduating within 150 Percent of Normal Time, 2002	0.38	0.50	***
Percentage of Students Graduating within 150 Percent of Normal Time, 2013	0.35	0.53	***
Median Earnings (\$) of Students who are Working and not Enrolled 10 Years after Entry from College Scorecard, 2011	31,658	41,301	***
N	50	115	

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

¹ Further information on these characteristics can be found in the Opportunity Insights data, <https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Codebook-MRC-Table-10.pdf>

² Virtually all institutions are classified as Selective according to the Barron's Selectivity Index. However, this category is the lowest Selective category, above only Nonselective schools and below Ivy Plus institutions, Elite institutions, and Highly selective institutions.

³ Defined as the mean of the 25th and 75th percentile of math and verbal SAT scores

Mobility Rates

MOBILITY MATRIX

Table 2 presents the full parent-child income quintile mobility matrix for HBCUs (Panel A) and PWIs (Panel B). The 25 cells in each panel of Table 2 sum to 100 percent, as they represent the percent of students in each parental income-child income pair. For instance, the average percent of students with low-income parents (quintile 1) and who stayed low-income as adults at HBCUs is 2.84%. We present these tables in their entirety to provide a complete profile of the Mobility Rates across institution types and to detail how our work expands upon research in the area. In Table 4 (Panels A and B), we discuss findings from the Success Rate in order to document students' mobility after conditioning for parental origin.

The income-origin profile of the student body populations at HBCUs and PWIs are quite different. Almost one-quarter (24%) of students at HBCUs are low-income ('Total' column, Table 2 Panel A), three times the rate at PWIs. An additional one-quarter (27%) of students at HBCUs originated in the second-lowest quintile (parents with incomes between the 20th and 40th percentile), indicating that more than half of all students who attend HBCUs come from households in the bottom 40% of the U.S. income distribution. At PWIs just over one-fifth of students originated in households with below-median incomes. The wealth dynamics are the reverse at the high end of the income distribution, with far fewer HBCU students coming from well-off (4th or 5th quintile) households and far more PWI students doing so (more than 60%).

Table 2. Mobility Rate

PANEL A. MOBILITY RATE, HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

		CHILD INCOME QUINTILE					TOTAL
		1	2	3	4	5	
PARENT INCOME QUINTILE	1	2.84%	5.57%	7.07%	5.56%	3.00%	24.04%
	2	3.08%	5.48%	7.69%	6.90%	4.10%	27.25%
	3	2.20%	3.63%	5.16%	5.56%	3.84%	20.38%
	4	1.62%	2.79%	4.13%	4.52%	3.65%	16.71%
	5	1.08%	1.74%	2.25%	3.09%	3.45%	11.62%
TOTAL		10.82%	19.21%	26.29%	25.64%	18.04%	100.00%

PANEL B. MOBILITY RATE, PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

		CHILD INCOME QUINTILE					TOTAL
		1	2	3	4	5	
PARENT INCOME QUINTILE	1	1.08%	1.43%	1.84%	2.07%	1.56%	7.98%
	2	1.58%	2.04%	2.88%	3.63%	3.03%	13.16%
	3	2.15%	2.61%	3.70%	5.16%	5.09%	18.70%
	4	2.71%	3.21%	4.74%	7.53%	8.03%	26.21%
	5	3.70%	3.92%	5.15%	8.67%	12.50%	33.94%
TOTAL		11.22%	13.21%	18.31%	27.05%	30.21%	100.00%

MOBILITY RATES

Prior scholars have used select information from these mobility tables to draw conclusions about the upward mobility rate at IHEs and MSIs specifically. Chetty et al. (2017) define their mobility rate as “the fraction of its students who come from the bottom quintile of the income distribution and end up in the top quintile,” (Chetty et al. 2017, p.2) which can be thought of as the American Dream rags-to-riches leap. We refer to it as the ‘Classic’ Mobility Rate. Espinosa et al. (2018) take a broader perspective on mobility, defining an ‘extended mobility rate’ as the share of students with parents in the 1st or 2nd quintile who move up to the 4th or 5th quintile as adults. Using a slightly different version of the Opportunity Insights data, they find that the mobility rate and extended mobility rate at HBCUs is 2.8% and 19.3%, respectively, higher than at non-MSIs (1.5% and 9.4%).³

While our classic mobility (3% vs 1.7%) and extended mobility (19.6 vs 10.9%) rates at HBCUs and PWIs are similar to other scholars, we argue that it is important to take a more holistic approach to mobility. The measures used by these researchers have a narrow focus on either a single or only four of the 25 cells in the mobility matrix, which risks missing broader patterns. The much larger share of students at HBCUs that are low-income also inflates the values they highlight. By reporting these select unconditional mobility rates, their findings reflect the skewed parental-income distribution at HBCUs, rather than any institution-based driver of income mobility.

In Table 3, we report several broader mobility measures in addition to the classic and extended mobility rates. We define ‘Upwardly Mobile’ as the share of students that moved into a higher income quintile. It is calculated by summing the ten cells above the matrix diagonal. ‘Middle Class+’ is defined as students that are in the top three quintiles.

More than half of all students at HBCUs experience some measure of upward mobility. Moreover, upward mobility is about 50% higher at HBCUs than PWIs, driven by PWIs enrolling far fewer lower-income students. Nearly the same number of students at both sets of institutions move up into the middle class, and at least 70% end up there.

Table 3. Mobility Measures

MOBILITY MEASURE	HBCU	PWI
Upwardly Mobile	52.93%	34.72%
Move into Middle Class+	60.50%	57.01%
End up in Middle Class+	69.97%	75.57%
‘Classic’ Mobility Rate	3.00%	1.56%
Extended Mobility Rate	19.57%	10.28%

We depict several of these measures in Figures 2 and Appendix Figures A1 and A2. Figure 2 shows students who come from households with below-median incomes but move into the top three quintiles. Appendix Figure A1 displays the rags-to-riches success rate by the proportion of low-income students and Appendix Figure A2 highlights the proportion of students who move into the top two quintiles who have parents with below-median incomes.

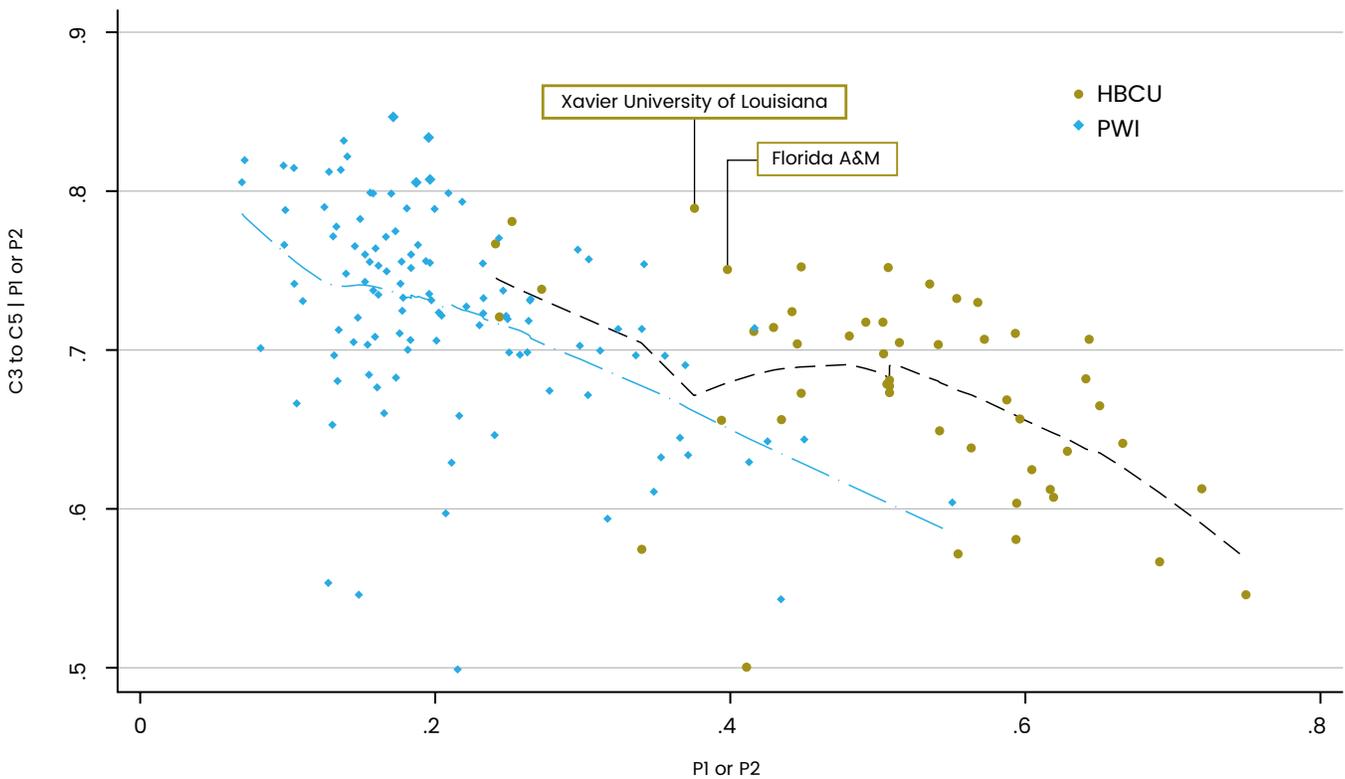
As described above, the vast majority of HBCUs enroll far more low-income students than PWIs. Although Morehouse, Spelman, and Howard, several of the most highly ranked HBCUs, do propel a similar proportion of low-income students into high-income careers as many PWIs (Appendix Figure

³Espinosa et al. utilize the 1983-1985 cohorts in their analyses, while we use the 1980-1982 cohorts, the primary data cohorts according to Raj Chetty and the other creators of the Opportunity Insights data.

A1), these schools enroll some of the lowest shares of low-income students at any of the HBCUs. Xavier and Tuskegee University enroll more low-income students while achieving a higher mobility rate than almost any other HBCU.

Our preferred measure of mobility (Figure 2) shows students who have moved up to reach incomes on par with at least the median U.S. earner. For both PWIs and HBCUs, at least two-thirds of students do so. Xavier University of Louisiana has the highest value of any HBCU, at nearly 80%, while schools like Florida A&M University achieve levels on par with the higher-end of the PWI distribution.

Figure 2. Proportion of Students who Move into the Top Three Quartiles



Success Rate

While the classic mobility and extended mobility rates reported above relate our work to the previous literature and the broader mobility measures provide a more holistic lens in which to view unconditional mobility at HBCUs and PWIs, we believe that the best approach to examine intergenerational mobility within higher education is to condition students on their origins. We, therefore, present the full Success Rate matrices (Table 4 Panels A and B), which distinguishes our work from other research in the area and, we feel, more accurately details students' mobility trajectories. Each row in Table 4 sums to 100 percent as the values represent the proportion of students who achieve a particular income in adulthood, conditional on their parents' income.

Of students with low-income parents (Row 1), 14% at HBCUs and 22% at PWIs leap into the top quintile. An additional 23.5% at HBCUs and 26% at PWIs move into the 4th quintile. These findings clarify that the higher (unconditional) mobility rate at HBCUs highlighted by other scholars and described in Table 2 above is driven by their much larger share of low-income students, and that fewer low-income HBCU students experience rags-to-riches type mobility than their PWI peers. Given the far greater institutional resources at PWIs, this is not altogether surprising.

TOP THREE QUINTILES

Yet, few American children experience such a steep bottom-to-top leap. Instead, a far greater share of students will experience, broadly, some form of upward mobility from their parents. The final column in Table 4 describes the share of students, by origin, that end up in one of the top three quintiles (i.e. the ‘Middle Class+’). Two-thirds of low-income students at HBCUs move into at least a middle-class income quintile. The proportion is very similar at PWIs (70%). While the share increases with parental income, the gap is never more than 5 percentage points between PWIs and HBCUs.

Table 4. Success Rate

PANEL A. SUCCESS RATE, HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

		CHILD INCOME QUINTILE						
		1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	TOP 3
PARENT	1	11.83%	22.15%	28.25%	23.46%	14.31%	100.00%	66.02%
	2	11.21%	19.76%	27.53%	25.43%	16.08%	100.00%	69.04%
INCOME	3	10.86%	17.93%	25.36%	27.18%	18.67%	100.00%	71.21%
	4	9.85%	17.11%	24.99%	27.06%	20.99%	100.00%	73.04%
QUINTILE	5	9.62%	16.21%	22.43%	27.31%	24.44%	100.00%	74.18%

PANEL B. SUCCESS RATE, PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

		CHILD INCOME QUINTILE						
		1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	TOP 3
PARENT	1	13.63%	16.56%	21.25%	26.18%	22.39%	100.00%	69.82%
	2	11.70%	14.72%	20.86%	27.79%	24.93%	100.00%	73.59%
INCOME	3	11.28%	13.74%	19.20%	27.32%	28.46%	100.00%	74.98%
	4	10.32%	12.30%	17.99%	28.56%	30.83%	100.00%	77.38%
QUINTILE	5	11.22%	12.10%	15.90%	26.12%	34.66%	100.00%	76.68%

Table 5. Mobility Measures, Ranked by Top 10

PANEL A. HBCUs				
	C5 P1		C3, C4, C5 P1	
HBCU AVG	--	0.14	--	0.66
1	Howard University	0.37	Xavier University Of Louisiana	0.79
2	Morehouse College	0.36	Spelman College	0.76
3	Spelman College	0.35	Hampton University	0.75
4	Xavier University of Louisiana	0.31	Morehouse College	0.74
5	Tuskegee University	0.28	Dillard University	0.74
6	Hampton University	0.27	Elizabeth City State University	0.74
7	Bennett College	0.21	Tennessee State University	0.73
8	Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	0.21	Howard University	0.73
9	Dillard University	0.20	Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	0.72
10	Clark Atlanta University	0.19	Prairie View Agricultural & Mechanical University	0.72
PANEL B. PWIs				
	C5 P1		C3, C4, C5 P1	
PWI AVG	--	0.22	--	0.70
1	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University	0.48	Hood College	0.94
2	Westminster College of Fulton, MO	0.46	Belhaven University	0.86
3	Hood College	0.44	Fontbonne University	0.83
4	La Salle University	0.43	Oglethorpe University	0.83
5	Philadelphia University	0.43	Old Dominion University	0.82
6	Saint Louis University	0.42	Millsaps College	0.82
7	Saint Joseph's University	0.41	Embry Riddle Aeronautical University	0.81
8	Christian Brothers University	0.40	Lindenwood University	0.81
9	Southern Polytechnic State University	0.39	University of Dayton	0.80
10	Catholic University of America	0.38	La Salle University	0.80

TOP 10 HBCU VS PWI

Table 5 displays the top ten HBCUs (Panel A) and top 10 PWIs (Panel B), ranked by two conditional mobility measures—the Classic Mobility Rate and the proportion that move into the Middle Class+. Some of the most highly ranked HBCUs, such as Howard University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College, propel more than one-third of their low-income students into the top-fifth of income earners. Other HBCUs with far larger shares of low-income students also foster large leaps in these students’ upward mobility. For instance, 16.7% of the student body at Xavier University of Louisiana is low-income (nearly twice as much as at Morehouse) and almost one-third of these students move into the top fifth of income earners. Tuskegee University, Bennett College, Florida A&M University, Dillard University, and Clark Atlanta University also do a particularly good job fostering upward mobility for their large share of low-income students.

Xavier University also is the top-ranked HBCU for fostering mobility into at least the middle-class. Approximately 80% of their students attain middle class status. Other HBCUs, such as Prairie View A&M University, Elizabeth City State University, and Tennessee State University also create middle class opportunities for more than 70% of their students.

Privilege Perpetuation

If intergenerational mobility were truly random, there would be no relationship between children’s income as adults and that of their parents. Social scientists have long documented how parental education (Blau & Duncan, 1967) and other forms of capital (e.g. social, cultural, economic) are fundamental factors in predicting children’s outcomes—parents are invested in fostering the best possible lives for their children. Recent work by Annette Lareau shows how middle class and wealthy families can even unconsciously facilitate greater access to opportunity for their children, sometimes to the exclusion of less well-off households (Lareau, 2014). The Opportunity Insights data allow us to directly observe the intergenerational perpetuation of privilege, what we call an ‘affluence floor,’ for the children of well-off parents.

Overall, 57% of students end up in the top two income quintiles at PWIs, while 44% do so at HBCUs (First row, Table 6). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of students at PWIs in these top two quintiles originated there, whereas approximately one-third of such students at HBCUs had upper-middle-class or high-income parents.⁴ Additionally, 75% of PWI students who ended up in the same quintile as their parents did so because they started and stayed in the 4th or 5th quintile.

The conditional mobility values (bottom portion of Table 6) provide further indication of an affluence floor, and that it’s substantially higher at PWIs. Approximately 60% of PWI students with well-off parents remain in the top two quintiles as adults. At HBCUs it’s closer to 50%, 10 percentage points lower. Put another way, the odds ratio of a middle-class student maintaining their privileged status at a PWI is 50% higher than an student at an HBCU.⁵

Table 6. Privilege Perpetuation

	HBCU	PWI
MOBILITY MEASURE		
In 4 th or 5 th Quintile - Overall	43.68%	57.26%
From 4 th or 5 th	14.72%	36.73%
Share from 4 th or 5 th	0.34	0.64
Don't Move ('Static' Mobility) - Overall	21.45%	26.85%
Share that Start and End Up in 5 th	0.16	0.47
Share that Start and End Up in 4 th or 5 th	0.37	0.75
CONDITIONAL MOBILITY MEASURE		
Started in 4 th , End Up in 4 th or 5 th	48.05%	59.39%
Started in 5 th , End Up in 4 th or 5 th	51.74%	60.78%



⁴ For instance, 64% is calculated by dividing the share of PWI students from the 4th or 5th quintile and who end up in the 4th or 5th quintile (36.73%) by the share that end up in the 4th or 5th quintile (57.26%).

⁵ Odds ratio calculated as the ratio of the privilege perpetuation odds of a student at a PWI as compared to the odds of a student at a HBCU. The odds of a student at a PWI staying in the 4th or 5th quintile as compared to moving down into the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd quintile is approximately 60%/40% = 1.5. At a HBCU it is approximately 50%/50% = 1. The odds ratio is therefore 1.5/1 = 1.5 (or, precisely, 1.51 when averaged across the two quintiles).

TOP 10 HBCUs VS PWIs

To further explore privilege perpetuation, we describe the same conditional mobility measures in Table 6 at the institutional level for the top 10 ranked HBCUs (Table 7 Panel A) and PWIs (Table 7 Panel B). Similar to the upward mobility findings, Xavier University is ranked exceptionally high. At least 70% of Xavier University students that come from more affluent backgrounds replicate this status more than a decade later. Approximately two-thirds do so at the most highly ranked HBCUs—Spelman College, Howard University, Hampton University, and Morehouse College. Other HBCUs, such as Florida A&M University, Southern University and A&M College at Baton Rouge, Clark Atlanta University, Virginia State University, Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, North Carolina A&T University, and Dillard University, also foster intergenerational retention of upper-middle-class status.

As to the PWIs (Table 7 Panel B), many institutions help maintain the upper-middle-class origins for a large proportion of their students. For instance, the proportion of students staying in the 4th or 5th quintile as adults at the University of Dayton is at least 72% and nearly 80% at La Salle University.

It is critical to note that many of these PWIs do not have widespread name recognition—recall that the analytic sample consists of PWIs and HBCUs in the same commuting zone. Institutions like Embry Riddle Aeronautical and Ursinus College do not carry the same level of recognition as Morehouse or Spelman. And yet, these institutions, on average, have an inter-generational maintenance of relative affluence that is 10 percentage points higher than at HBCUs, including HBCUs with acclaimed national reputations. This simultaneously suggests that while the odds are 50% greater than children at PWIs will experience similar or higher incomes than their parents as compared to substantially lower than their parents, the underlying mechanisms facilitating such perpetuation of privilege are not as strong for students at HBCUs. Children of upper-middle class and affluent parents at HBCUs are no more likely than the flip of a coin to end up in a similar income bracket as compared to moving down to the median or below. These findings suggest that forces outside of the institution, including systemic racism in society, continue to have a strong influence on children's outcomes. Other recent work from Opportunity Insights finds similar results, with African American men who grew up in high-income households being far less likely to maintain that level of income as adults than white men (Chetty et al. 2019; Badger et al. 2018).

“At least 70% of Xavier University students that come from more affluent backgrounds replicate this status more than a decade later.”

Table 7. Privilege Perpetuation, Ranked by Top 10

PANEL A. HBCUs				
	% IN 4TH OR 5TH QUINTILE, FROM 4TH		% IN 4TH OR 5TH QUINTILE, FROM 5TH	
HBCU AVG	--	0.48	--	0.52
1	Xavier University of Louisiana	0.70	Spelman College	0.72
2	Spelman College	0.68	Xavier University of Louisiana	0.70
3	Howard University	0.67	Howard University	0.69
4	Hampton University	0.65	Hampton University	0.68
5	Morehouse College	0.64	Tuskegee University	0.68
6	Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	0.58	Lincoln University of Pennsylvania	0.65
7	Southern University And Agricultural & Mechanical College at Baton Rouge	0.57	Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	0.64
8	Clark Atlanta University	0.56	Morehouse College	0.62
9	Virginia State University	0.56	Dillard University	0.62
10	Tuskegee University	0.55	North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University	0.59
PANEL B. PWIs				
	% IN 4TH OR 5TH QUINTILE, FROM 4TH		% IN 4TH OR 5TH QUINTILE, FROM 5TH	
PWI AVG	--	0.59	--	0.61
1	Embry Riddle Aeronautical University	0.80	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University	0.82
2	La Salle University	0.78	La Salle University	0.78
3	Ursinus College	0.78	Ursinus College	0.78
4	Saint Joseph's University	0.77	Saint Joseph's University	0.78
5	University of Dayton	0.75	Mount Saint Mary's University	0.77
6	Saint Louis University	0.72	Saint Louis University	0.76
7	Christian Brothers University	0.72	Randolph-Macon College	0.76
8	Gwynedd Mercy University	0.72	University of Dayton	0.75
9	Rowan University	0.71	Southern Polytechnic State University	0.74
10	Philadelphia University	0.71	Richard Stockton College of New Jersey	0.74

Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

HBCUs are doing an admirable job fostering the upward mobility of their students, especially considering the large share of their students that come from lower-income backgrounds. Taking a broader lens, HBCUs are furthering upward mobility of their student population, which is drawn from the lower economic rungs than the general college-going population at PWIs. Specific schools are doing a particularly good job, including Xavier University of Louisiana, Dillard University, Tuskegee University, Florida A&M University, Prairie View A&M University, Spelman College, and Clark Atlanta University.

Recommendation: Researchers interested in the long-term sustainability and impact of HBCUs should examine the student success strategies at these particular institutions with attention toward low-income students.

The perpetuation of economic privilege is not as strong for students at HBCUs as compared to PWIs. In other words, being born into a relatively affluent African American family does not provide the same sort of class safety net as does being born into a white family. Even children of upper-middle-class and affluent families at HBCUs (4th or 5th quintile) are as likely to fall down into the 3rd quintile or below as they are to stay in the 4th or 5th quintile. They have a 50/50 chance. For children at PWIs, it's 60% stay versus 40% fall down. The odds, therefore, of a student maintaining their privileged status at a PWI are 50% higher than for a student at an HBCU. College attendance is not a panacea. HBCUs are doing a great deal while students are enrolled, but upon postsecondary exit students still need to enter the workforce and lead lives as adults in the United States. Our study suggests that entering the workforce and moving forward in one's career is still harder to do for African Americans than for whites.

Recommendation: Researchers interested in understanding the outcomes for African Americans must look at their overall life experiences after college rather than isolating higher education experiences and institutions.

Nearly 70% of students at HBCUs attain at least middle-class incomes and there is less downward mobility at HBCUs than at PWIs.

Recommendation: Researchers should examine the practices of HBCUs in comparison to PWIs. PWIs could learn from HBCUs in terms of furthering the experiences and outcomes of their African American students.

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Methodological Appendices

Institutional Characteristics

Institutional characteristics and student body demographics are derived from IPEDS and have previously been linked to the IRS data. Variables include total undergraduate enrollment, tuition and fees, average faculty salary, instructional expenditures per student, rejection rate, endowment assets per student, and net cost for the bottom income quintile (a proxy for financial aid).

Student Characteristics

While the data does not contain individual student-level characteristics, it does include aggregate student demographic information. To help describe variation in students' peers across institutions, we highlight such information as the percent of students graduating with 150 percent of normal time, average SAT score, share of the student body by race/ethnicity, and share of college major by discipline (e.g. business, social sciences). These demographics also come from merged IPEDS data.

Downward Mobility

The reverse side of upward mobility is downward mobility, that some children will become less affluent than their parents. This is of increasing concern as real-wage income growth for middle-income earners has stagnated over the last several decades (DeSilver, 2018). Appendix Table A1 reports several downward mobility measures.

One-quarter of children at HBCUs experienced downward mobility, which is one-third less than students at PWIs. This suggests that for most students attending an HBCU improves their long-term economic outlook.

Table A1. Downward Mobility

	HBCU	PWI
MEASURE		
Downwardly Mobile	25.62%	38.44%
End up in 1 st or 2 nd Quintile	--	--
Overall	30.03%	24.43%
Excluding P1->C2 ¹	24.47%	23.00%
Excluding starting in P1 or P2	13.07%	18.30%

¹ Parent in first quintile, child in second quintile

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Figure A1. Classic Mobility Rate

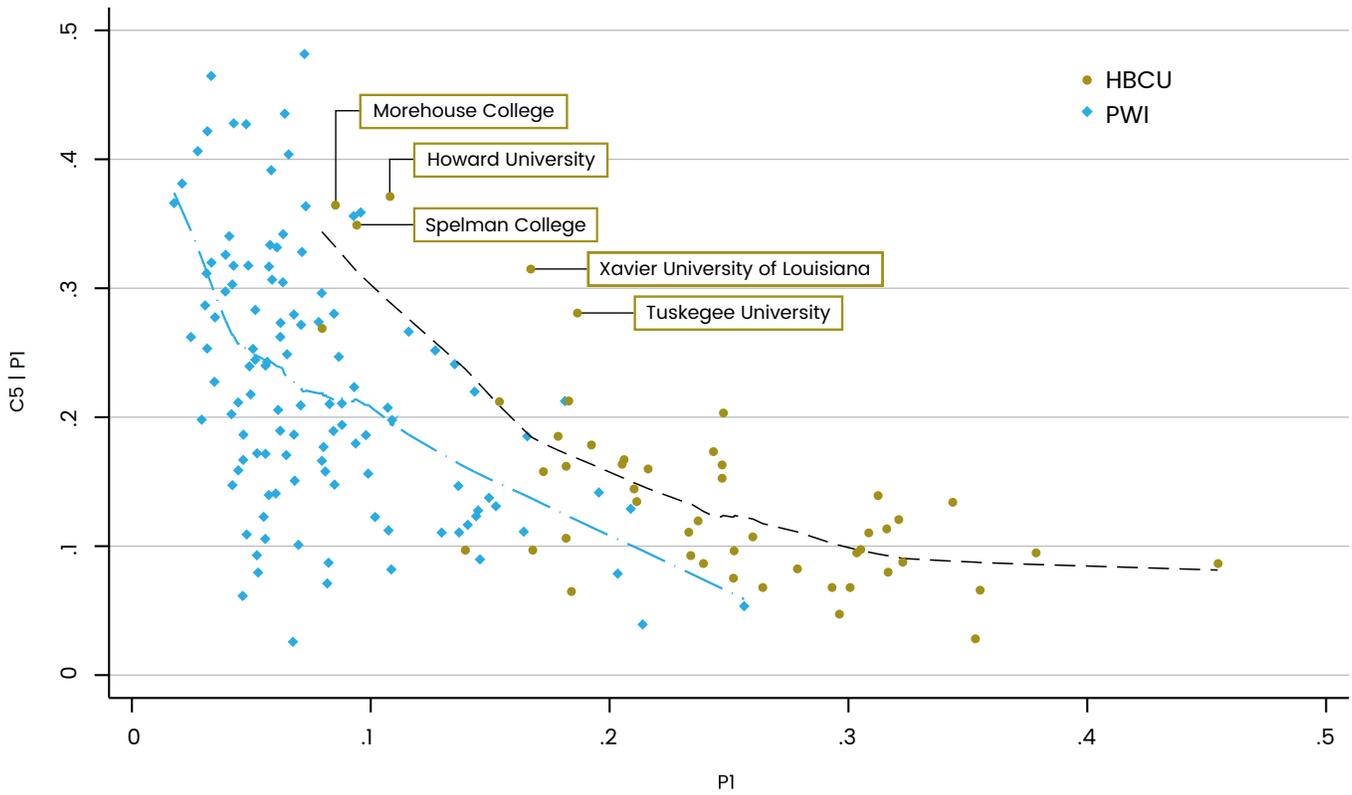


Figure A2. Extended Mobility Rate

