**OPINION ESSAY:**

Word Count 565—Customize With About 200 Words in Middle Paragraphs

**Private Colleges and Universities Shape Lives and Anchor Our Communities**

If the last year has taught us anything, it’s the importance of community. As our world has been buffeted by a global pandemic, an economic downturn, an awakening to racial injustice, and unprecedented uncertainty, we have looked to the institutions that anchor our communities to provide the resources, stability, and leadership necessary to emerge on the other side.

Perhaps at no time in our history has the vital role and significant impact of America’s private, nonprofit colleges and universities been more important than today as the nation faces a myriad of challenges. The interwoven fabric of our American society is what holds us together and will get us through.

As economic engines in their communities and regions, the nation’s private, nonprofit colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to accelerate the revitalization of the U.S. economy as a result of the effects of the pandemic. With their resources, research and development, and community partnerships, these institutions are primed to invigorate — economically, culturally and socially — the areas hardest hit by the health and economic crisis.

A new report by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) documents that private, nonprofit colleges and universities annually contribute nearly $600 billion to our economy. These institutions also support and sustain 3.4 million jobs, including directly employing 1.1 million people; generate over $75 billion in local and state taxes; and contribute a total of $2.8 billion in charitable giving and volunteering.

But the contributions of private, nonprofit colleges and universities do not end there. These unique colleges and universities enrich our communities in countless ways. They improve quality of life by providing access to arts and culture, creating a vital stage for civic engagement, and infusing local schools, hospitals, and business with talented student interns, volunteers, and employees—many of whom decide to make a home in their college towns.

Rural, suburban and urban communities throughout the country benefit from the volunteer and philanthropic spirit embodied at many private, nonprofit colleges and universities.

**[INSTITUTION] in [LOCATION] brings the full value of private, nonprofit colleges and universities to life. [LOCATION] is a richly diverse community of about XX,XXX located [DESCRIBE LOCATION IN MORE DETAIL – CLOSE TO MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREA; OUTSIDE THE STATE CAPITAL; ETC.]**

**CUSTOMIZE CONTRIBUTIONS HERE—ABOUT 200-240 WORDS.**

**CONSIDER USING DATA FROM THE** [**REGIONAL REPORT**](https://www.naicu.edu/research-resources/enhancing-lives-and-anchoring-communities/report-resources#RegionalRpt) **FOR YOUR REGION**

America’s higher education ecosystem is uniquely complex with more than 5,300 institutions, including private, nonprofit colleges and universities, public flagship and land-grant universities, comprehensive regional colleges and universities, community colleges, and for-profit institutions. The highly diverse 1,700 private, nonprofit colleges and universities account for nearly 40% of all degree-granting institutions and educate more than 5 million students. While enrolling just 21% of students, these institutions confer nearly 30% of undergraduate degrees and 45% of both master’s and doctoral degrees.

Increased support of students and investment in private, nonprofit higher education will fuel the success and sustainability of college towns and communities across the country. Such investment is a tangible recognition of the vital role this sector plays in the development of human capital, the education of the future workforce, and the economic vitality of communities across the United States.

The impact of students graduating from private, nonprofit institutions ripples across the communities in which they settle, work and raise their families. Throughout their careers, the contributions of graduates to society are transformative and the story of the impact of a college education reaches far beyond the numbers, helping move entire generations out of poverty and fueling the nation’s workforce needs.

COVID-19 has given us an unexpected and unfortunate opportunity to see what happens to the college towns dotting the landscape when their student-driven economy comes to a halt. The interrelationships between private, nonprofit colleges and universities and the communities they call home are vital to moving our regions, states and nation from relief to recovery in a post-COVID world.