



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

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## Higher Education Institutions Need to Excel in the Ratings-Resistant Qualities of Innovation and Public Service

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As I sat in the auditorium at Innovation NJ's fifth-anniversary celebration on October 1<sup>st</sup> at AT&T in Bedminster, I applauded the speakers and their presentations, while also thinking "too bad." It was too bad that the creators of the ubiquitous college ranking lists and ratings systems were missing the message delivered by the panelists about the importance of collaboration and innovation.

The New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU), representing New Jersey's senior public institutions of higher education, is a founding member of Innovation NJ, a diverse coalition of businesses, government, and institutions of higher education to promote collaboration among those sectors and spur innovation. The fifth-anniversary celebration featured thoughtful discussions about the value of collaboration and innovation in the lives of all New Jerseyans and the important role that our institutions play in creating that value.

The most recent rankings and ratings flooding the media do not measure the value of an education that produces entrepreneurs, innovators, and community service leaders. Instead, they highlight the salaries of an institution's graduates. In the *Forbes* "best" list, for example, 32.5 percent of the ranking was determined by post-graduate "success," defined by the salary of alumni, as well as alumni representation on other lists such as "Thirty under Thirty." Even the new College Scorecard, produced by the U.S. Department of Education, has a category called "Salary After Attending," which reflects the median earnings of former students who received federal financial aid, at 10 years after attending the school.

The myopic focus on "return on investment" in graduates' salaries fails to recognize the quality of the education our graduates receive. To be sure, plenty of alumni from New Jersey's senior public institutions of higher education earn impressive paychecks. But the excellence of our institutions can be seen in how they foster "ecosystems of collaboration and innovation," a compelling lesson at the Innovation NJ celebration. Developing and nurturing a collaborative and innovative ecosystem for students and faculty is crucial to the success of graduates, the institutions, the State of New Jersey, and society overall.

In our market-driven society, which is so focused on rankings, how do you measure something, which the experts speaking at the Innovation NJ meeting labeled as

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[www.njascu.org](http://www.njascu.org)

*The College of New Jersey  
Kean University  
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University  
Ramapo College of New Jersey  
Rowan University*

*Stockton University  
Thomas Edison State College  
William Paterson University*

immeasurably beneficial? The benefits are even greater if you include how well an institution inspires public service.

While we congratulate all the institutions with prominent places on the recently released rankings – which include many of our member institutions – we also congratulate all the institutions that succeed year after year in producing alumni who excel in those ranking-elusive qualities of innovation and public service.

NJASCU on its website ([www.njascu.org](http://www.njascu.org)) is featuring alumni of the state's senior public higher education institutions who have those hard-to-measure qualities. They are New Jersey residents and renowned contributors to the wellbeing of New Jerseyans. In many cases, these individuals did not earn brag-worthy salaries after graduating, because they were busy creating and innovating in their chosen fields as artists, business and technology entrepreneurs, public servants, military personnel, teachers, and community and political activists. Some of the individuals now are earning substantial salaries, but they did not achieve that fiscal stability until many years after graduation.

Our institutions' alumni who are featured or about to be featured rank very high in the lives of their fellow New Jerseyans who are: living in affordable housing in Atlantic City; seeking leadership and career mentoring in East Orange; surviving the ravages of Superstorm Sandy and other emergency disasters; getting a quality education in the urban public school district of Asbury Park; breathing clean air in New Jersey; and navigating the challenges of business entrepreneurial ventures.

Ultimately, investing in a degree from one of New Jersey's senior public colleges and universities pays off. At New Jersey's public four-year institutions, the six-year graduation rate for the Class of 2013 was 67.2 percent, sixth best in the U.S. Reaching their educational goals in a timely way allows our graduates to make contributions to society that are priceless – and often resistant to being ranked.

*Pam Hersh is Director of Marketing and Communications for the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan higher education association. The Association's nine members are: The College of New Jersey, Kean University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Rowan University, Thomas Edison State College and William Paterson University.*