
Social Mobility: What Are We Trying to Measure?

2019 Social Mobility Symposium
Old Dominion University

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Topics

- Social mobility from an individual perspective
- Social mobility from an institutional perspective
- The challenges of measuring social mobility
- Concluding thoughts
- Questions and discussion

Social mobility and postsecondary education

- Roots in human capital theory:

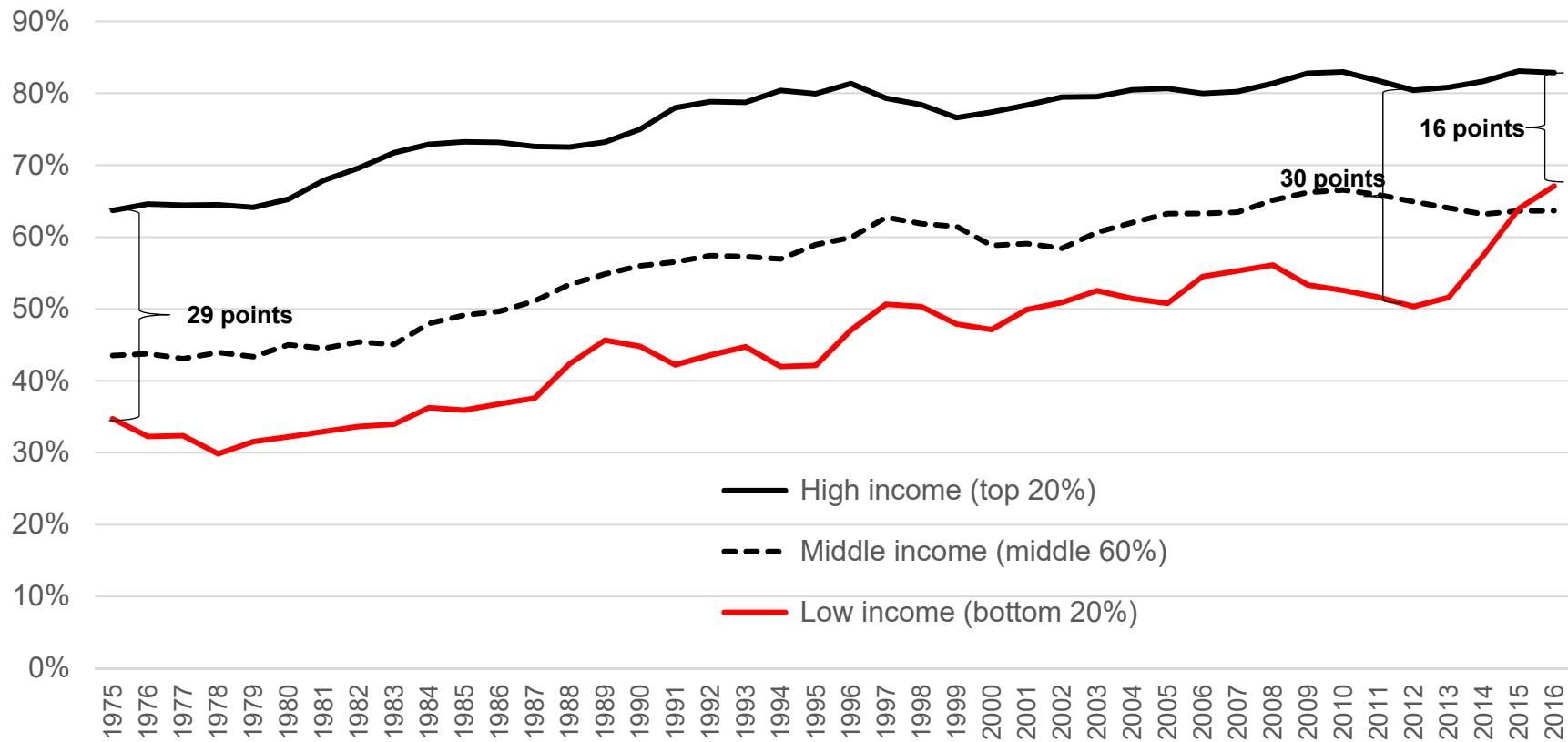
“. . .high school and college education in the United States greatly raise a person's income, even after netting out direct and indirect costs of schooling, and after adjusting for the better family backgrounds and greater abilities of more educated people.”

- Gary Becker, *Human Capital* (3rd ed.), p. 17

- *Ceteris paribus*, on average more education = higher earnings
- Education is only one contributor to social mobility – others include ability, health care, family formation, social capital, and informal education

Individual perspective

% of high school completers enrolled in PSE by following October*



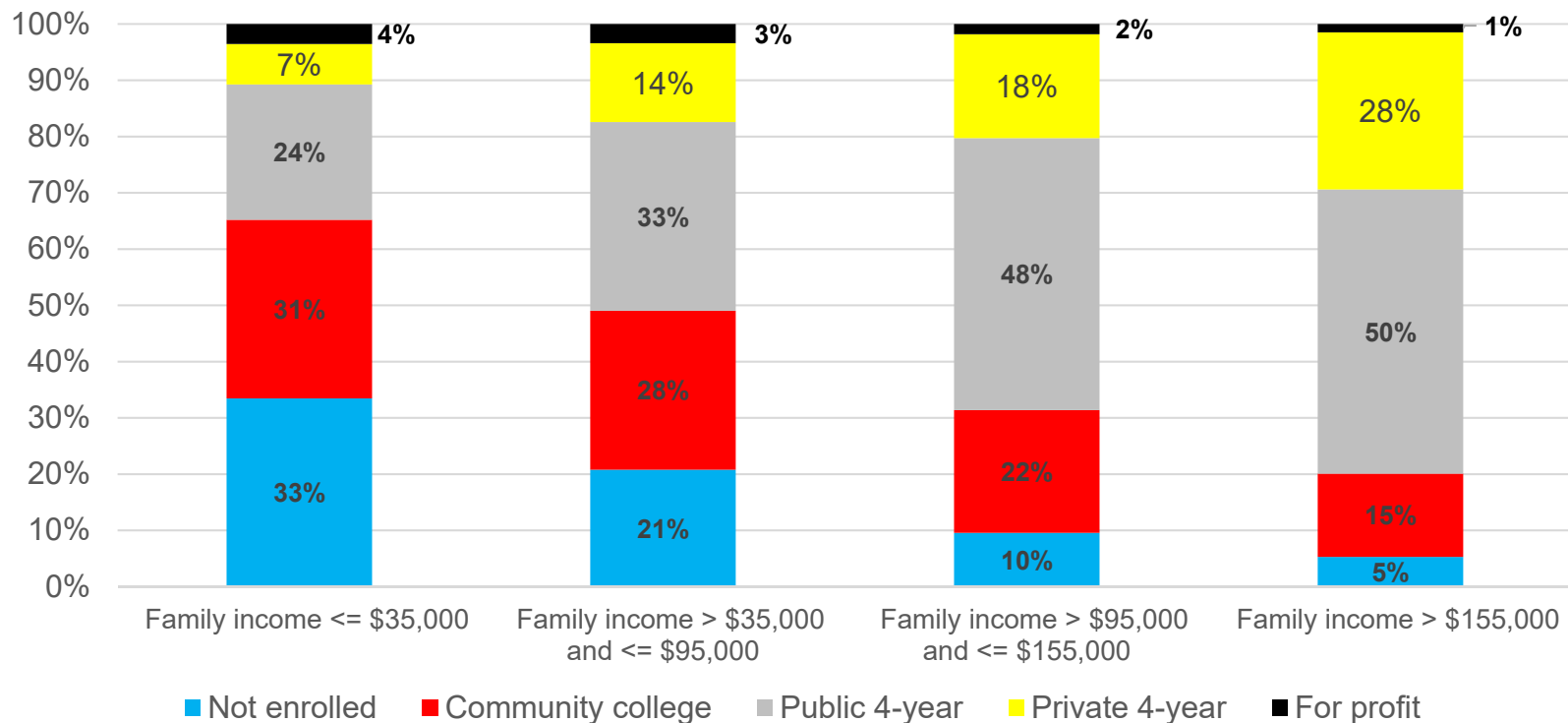
* 3-year moving averages

NCES, Digest of Education Statistics 2017, 302.30

Individual perspective

- What these data mask:
 - PSE enrollment is highly stratified

Postsecondary enrollment of 2009 9th graders by family income, as of November 2013

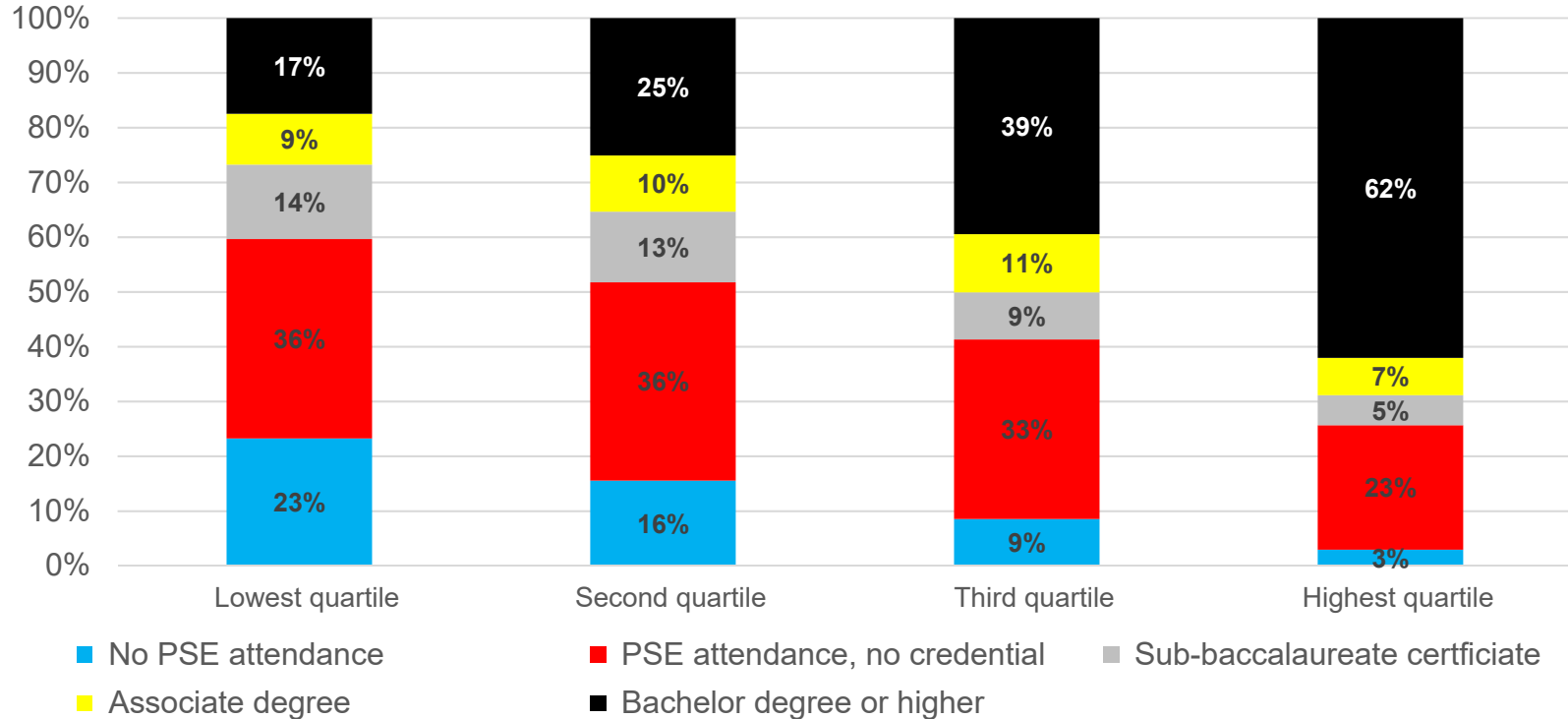


Author's calculations from NCES HSL:2009

Individual perspective

- What these data mask:
 - PSE *attainment* is also highly stratified

Postsecondary attainment of 2004 high school seniors by SES* quartile, as of 2012

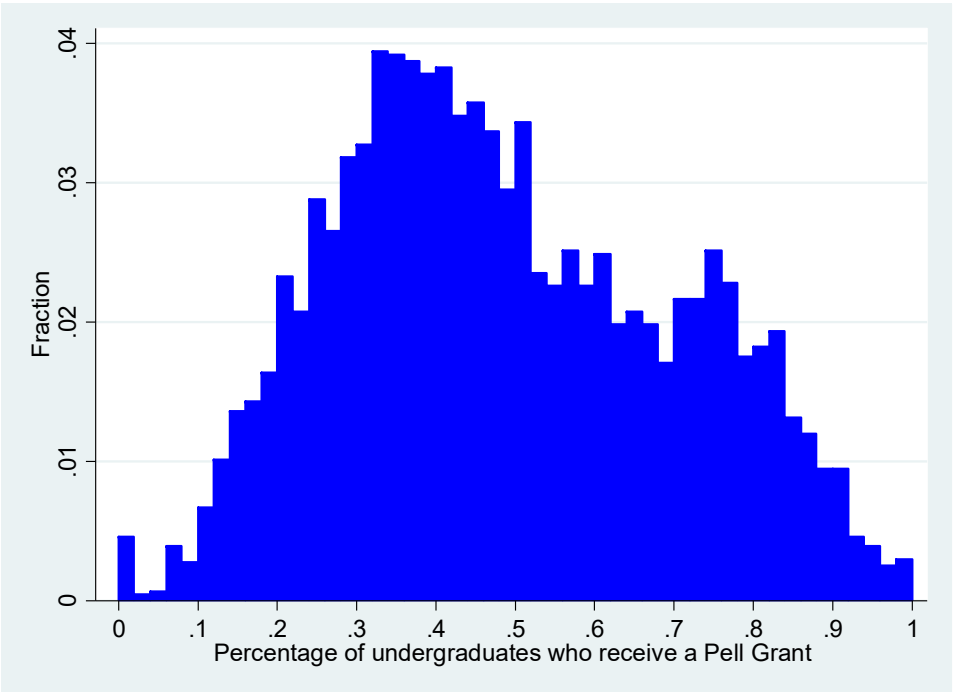
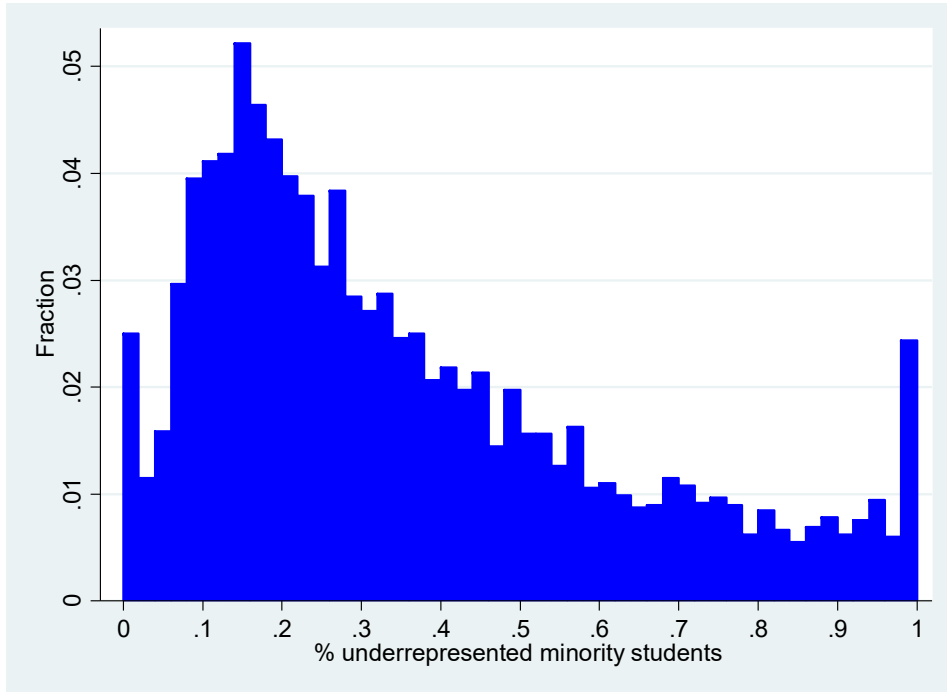


* Composite of family income, and parental education and occupation

Author's calculations from NCES ELS:2002

Institutional perspective

- Institutions have very different student bodies

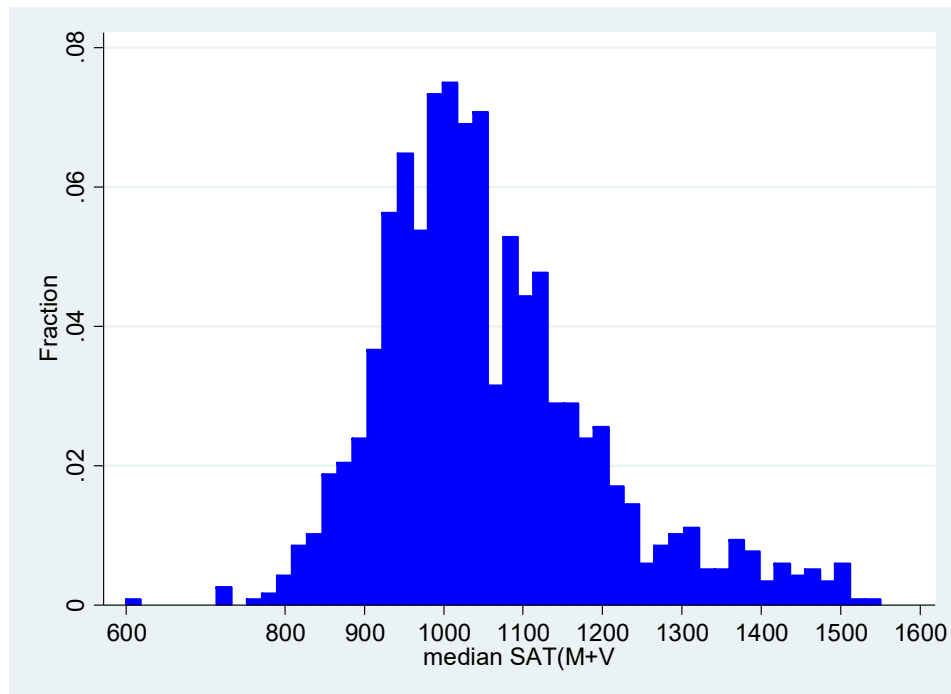


Institutions offering 2-year and 4-year degrees

Author's calculations from NCES College Scorecard & IPEDS data

Institutional perspective

- Institutions have very different student bodies

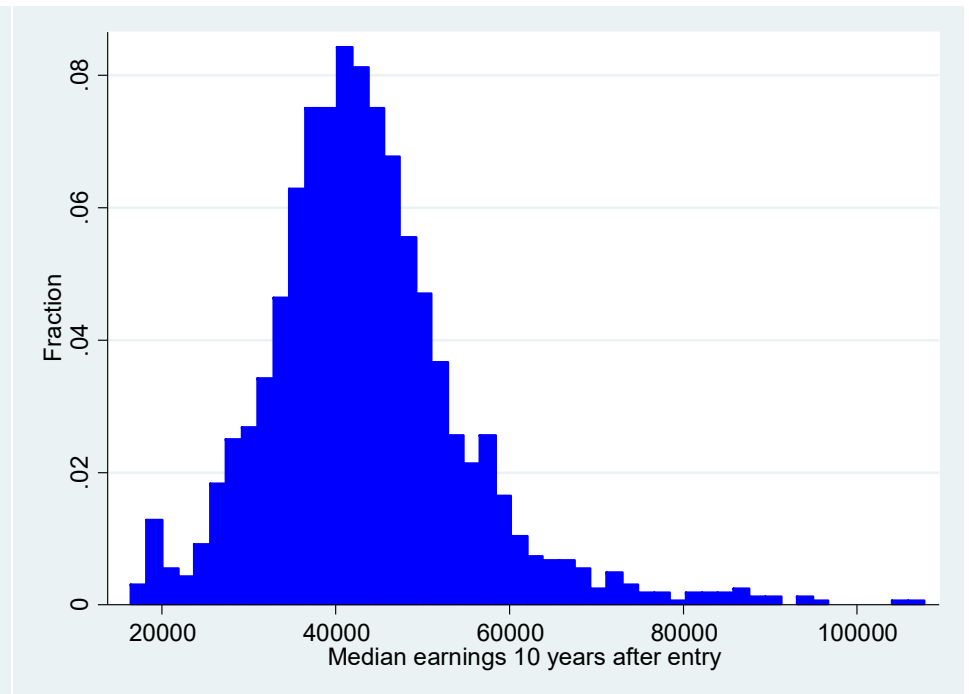
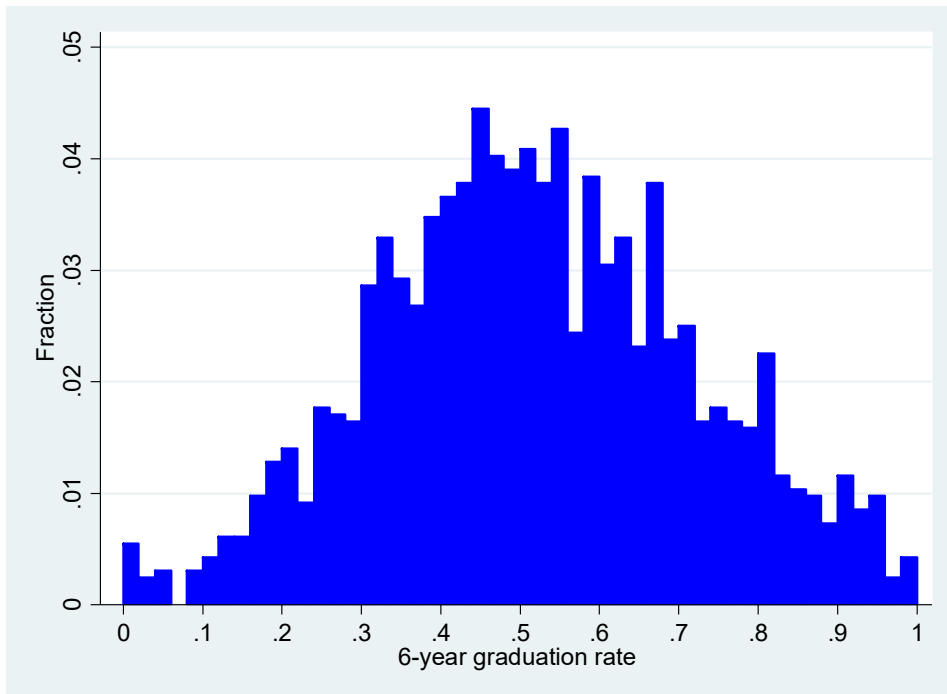


Institutions offering 2-year and 4-year degrees

Author's calculations from NCES College Scorecard & IPEDS data

Institutional perspective

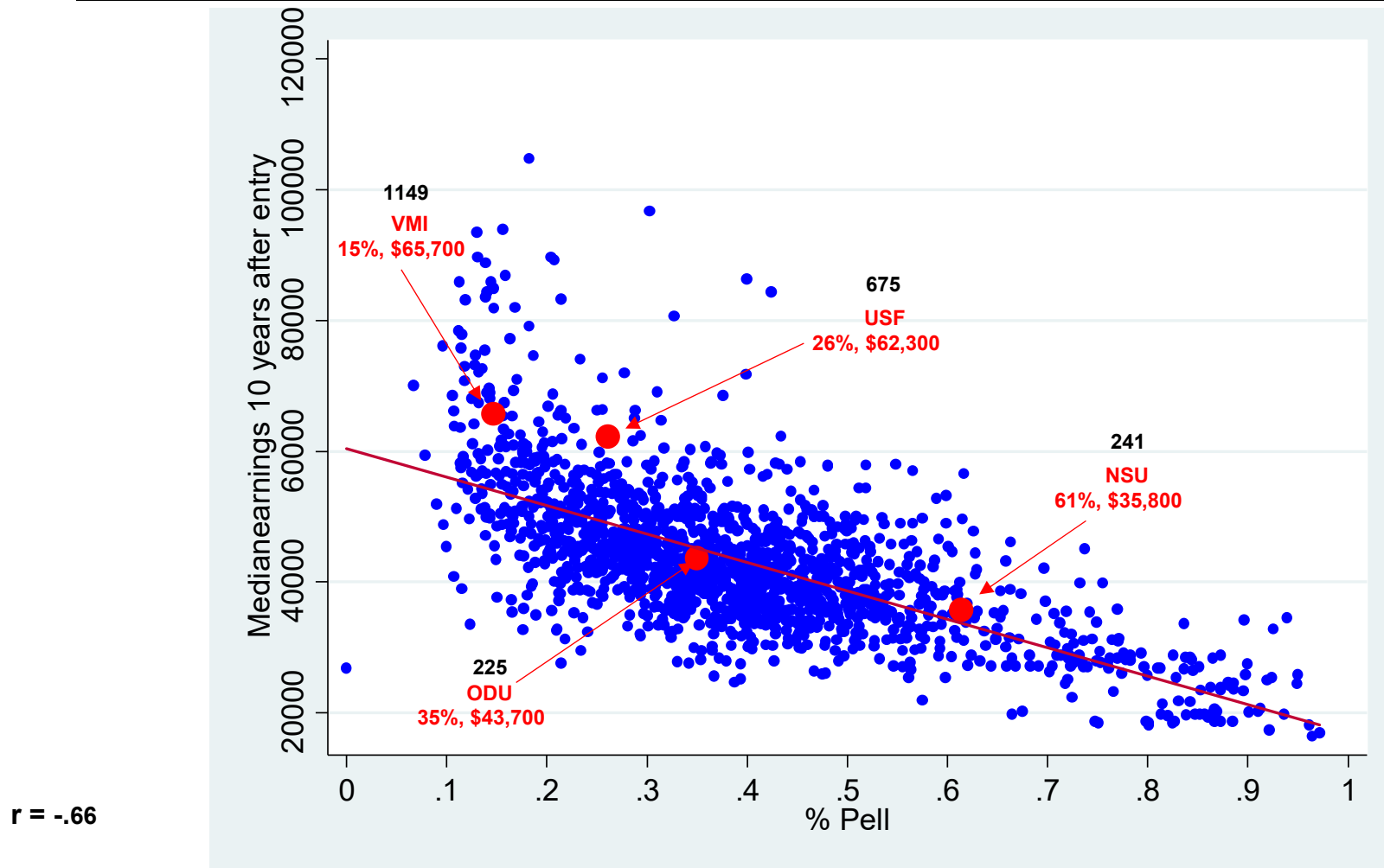
- Institutions have very different outcomes as well



Public and private NFP, non-special focus institutions offering 4-year degrees

Author's calculations from NCES College Scorecard & IPEDS data

The relationship between proportion of Pell students and alumni earnings

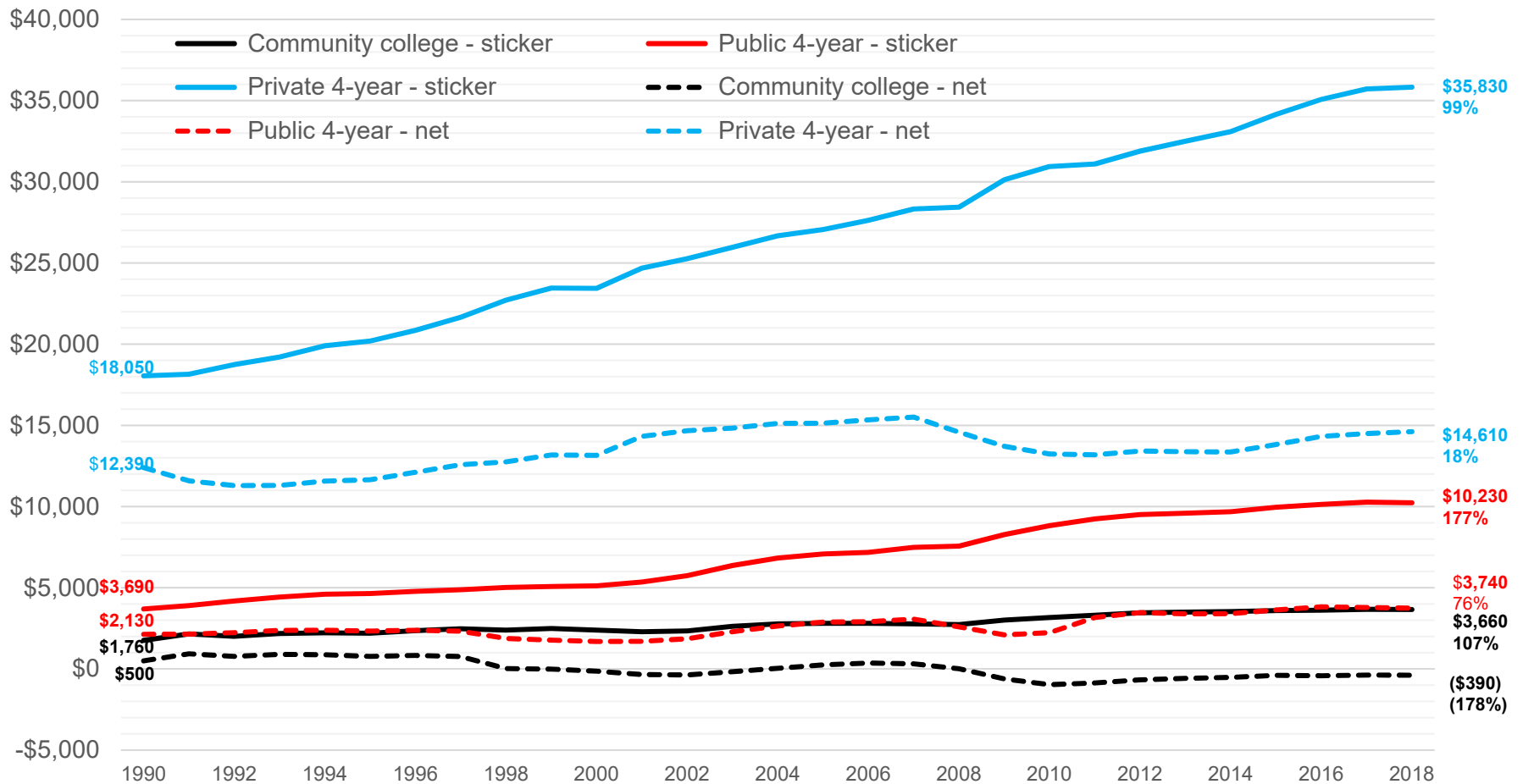


* Public and private NFP, non-special focus institutions offering 4-year degrees

Author's calculations from NCES College Scorecard data

Challenges of measuring social mobility

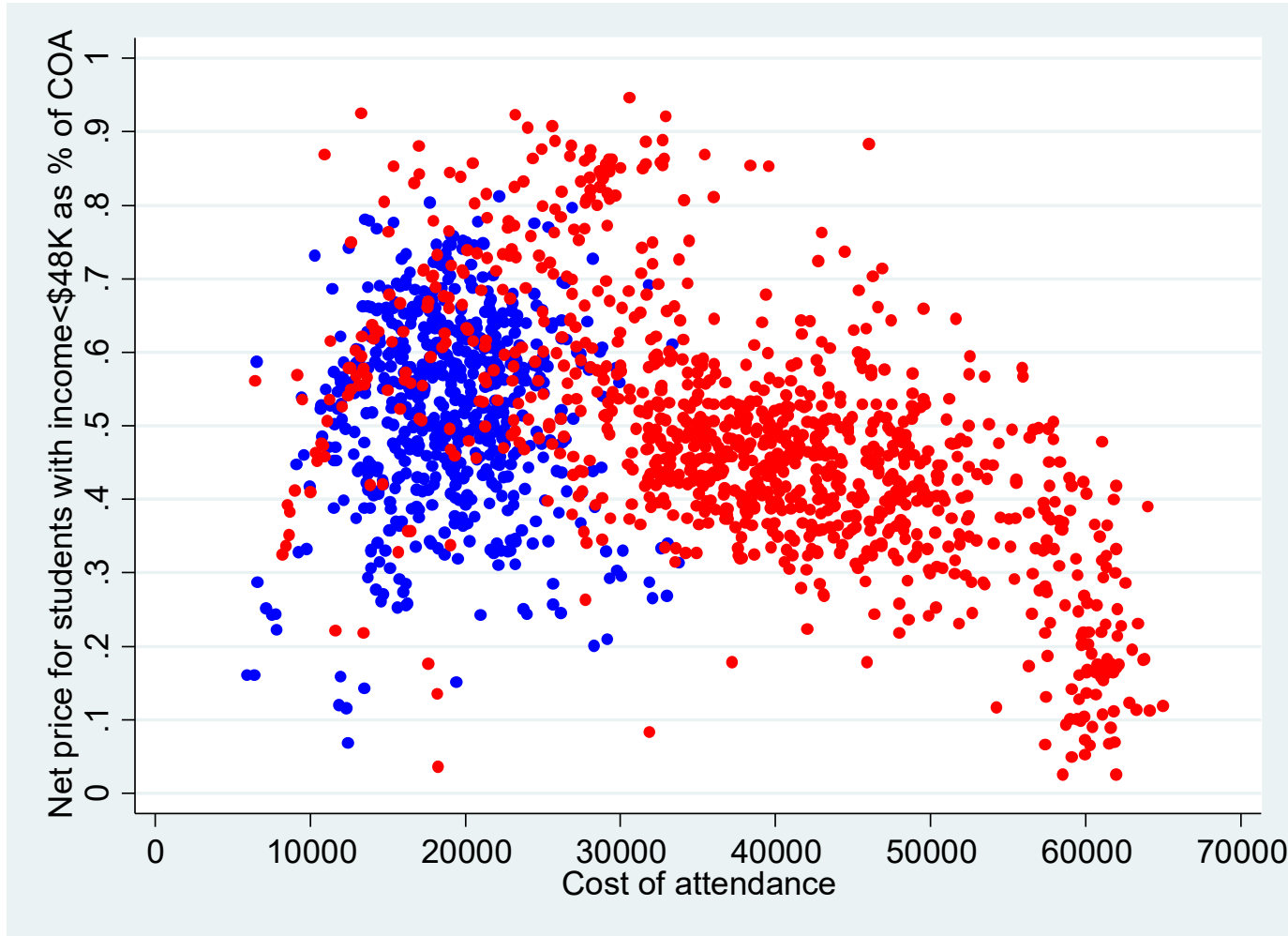
Sticker and net* tuition prices (in 2018 \$) by sector



* After grant aid and tax benefits

College Board, *Trends in College Pricing*

Challenges of measuring social mobility



Blue = public, red = private NFP (non-special focus institutions)

Author's calculations from NCES College Scorecard data

Challenges of measuring social mobility

College Scorecard

- Pulls income data from tax forms
- Consistent definition of income
- Cohort-based data
- Limited to Title IV recipients

PayScale

- Self-reported data from self-selected respondents
- Dependent on respondent interpretation of income definition
- Varying coverage, depending on institution - # of respondents, all years, all degrees
 - USF: 1,134
 - Oberlin: 20
 - ODU: 2,630
- Funky matching algorithm

Challenges of measuring social mobility

University of San Francisco (USF) Job Listings

Senior Associate Director of Admission for Access and Inclusion Apr 27
University of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA, US
The **University of San Francisco (USF)**, a Jesuit Catholic **university** located in the heart of **San Francisco**, announces its search for a Senior Associate Director of Admission for Access and Inclusion ...
[View more details](#)

Term Professor, Engineering May 6
University of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA, US
The **University of San Francisco** College of Arts and Sciences seeks candidates for an open term ... Term faculty at **USF** serve in a teaching capacity on multi-year renewable contracts, and are ...
[View more details](#)

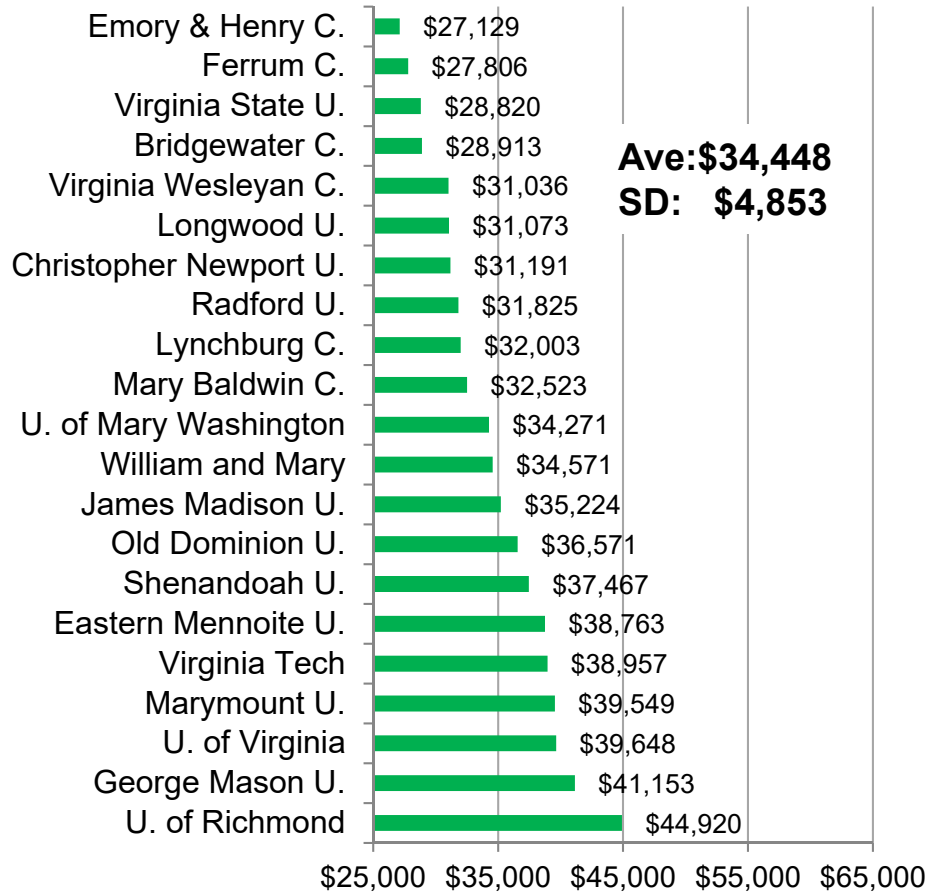
Join University of California in Beautiful San Francisco Bay Area! May 29
UCSF Health
Anchorage, AK, US
Join **University of California** in Beautiful **San Francisco** Bay Area! We're Growing Primary Care

- Funky matching algorithm

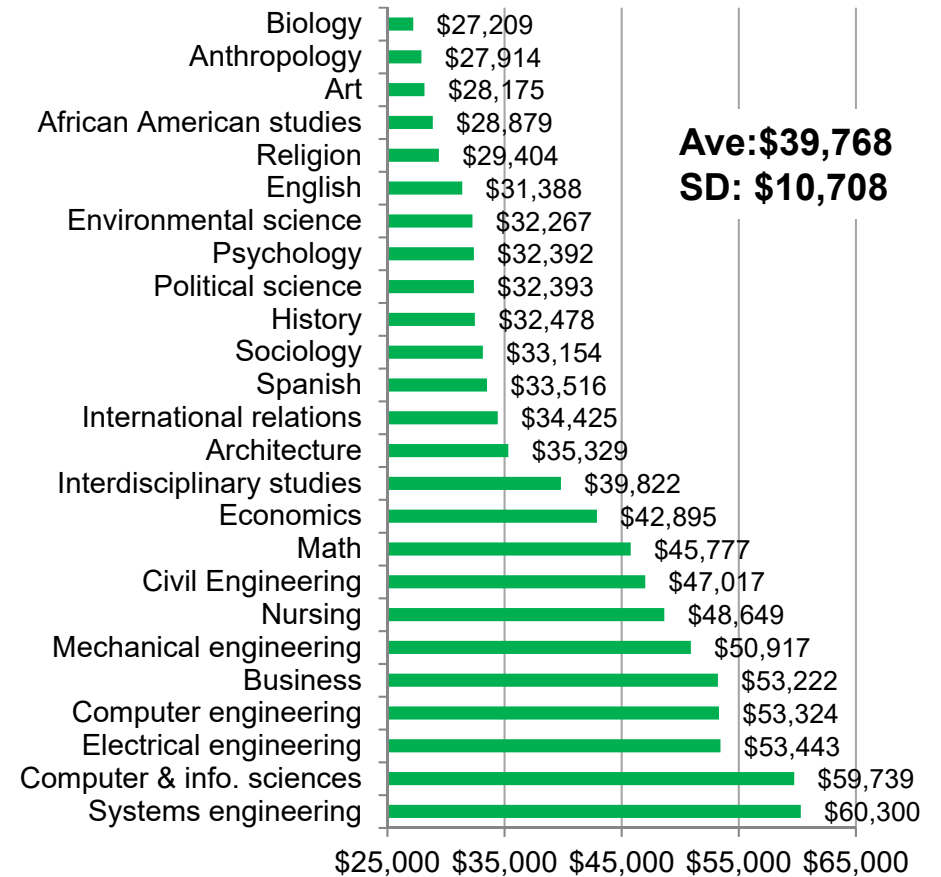
One last comment about earnings data

Average earnings in first year after receiving bachelor's degree

Average by institution, Virginia



Average by major, U. of Virginia



Author's calculations from CollegeMeasures.org, 2015

Concluding thoughts

- Social mobility is complex, and affected by many factors – institutional and individual
- Whether a college student is able to rise in social class is dependent as much on what he or she does, as what the institution does
- Ranking institutions on their contributions to social mobility is fraught with challenges, and tends to place an inordinate amount of focus on pecuniary returns to college
- The best way to measure social mobility is with unit record data
- Even given all this, there **are** differences in outcomes across institutions, and we need to identify and implement best practices

Questions and discussion