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Which California colleges help transform impoverished students into wealthy adults?

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It's a piece of the American Dream: An economically disadvantaged student goes to college, studies hard, graduates, lands a good job and eventually becomes wealthy. But how often does it happen in California? And which colleges are good at helping launch students from poor backgrounds into wealthy careers?

The answers to those questions can be found in a new study of millions of tax records by researchers at Brown, Stanford and Harvard universities. The study is part of The Equality of Opportunity Project, which aims to measure "upper-income mobility." That's the long-stated American ideal of children growing up to have a higher standard of living than their parents.

The researchers set out to determine which colleges were central to helping kids along that journey. They examined more than 30 million recent tax records showing individual earnings for Americans who attended college in the early 2000s. They looked for people who entered college relatively poor and emerged a decade later relatively wealthy.

The California college with the most success in helping transform students whose parents were relatively poor (bottom 20 percent of the income bracket) into adults who are relatively wealthy (top 20 percent of the income bracket) within a decade is the California Maritime Academy. About 85 percent of its students from relatively poor households in the early 2000s landed careers that a decade later made them relatively wealthy adults. The Maritime Academy offers only six majors, and a large proportion of its alumni work as engineers or business leaders. It consistently produces high-earning graduates.

The California college with the most success at transforming students from relatively poor backgrounds into very wealthy adults (top 1 percent of the income bracket) is Claremont McKenna College. Nearly 30 percent of relatively poor students at that college became very wealthy within a decade or so.

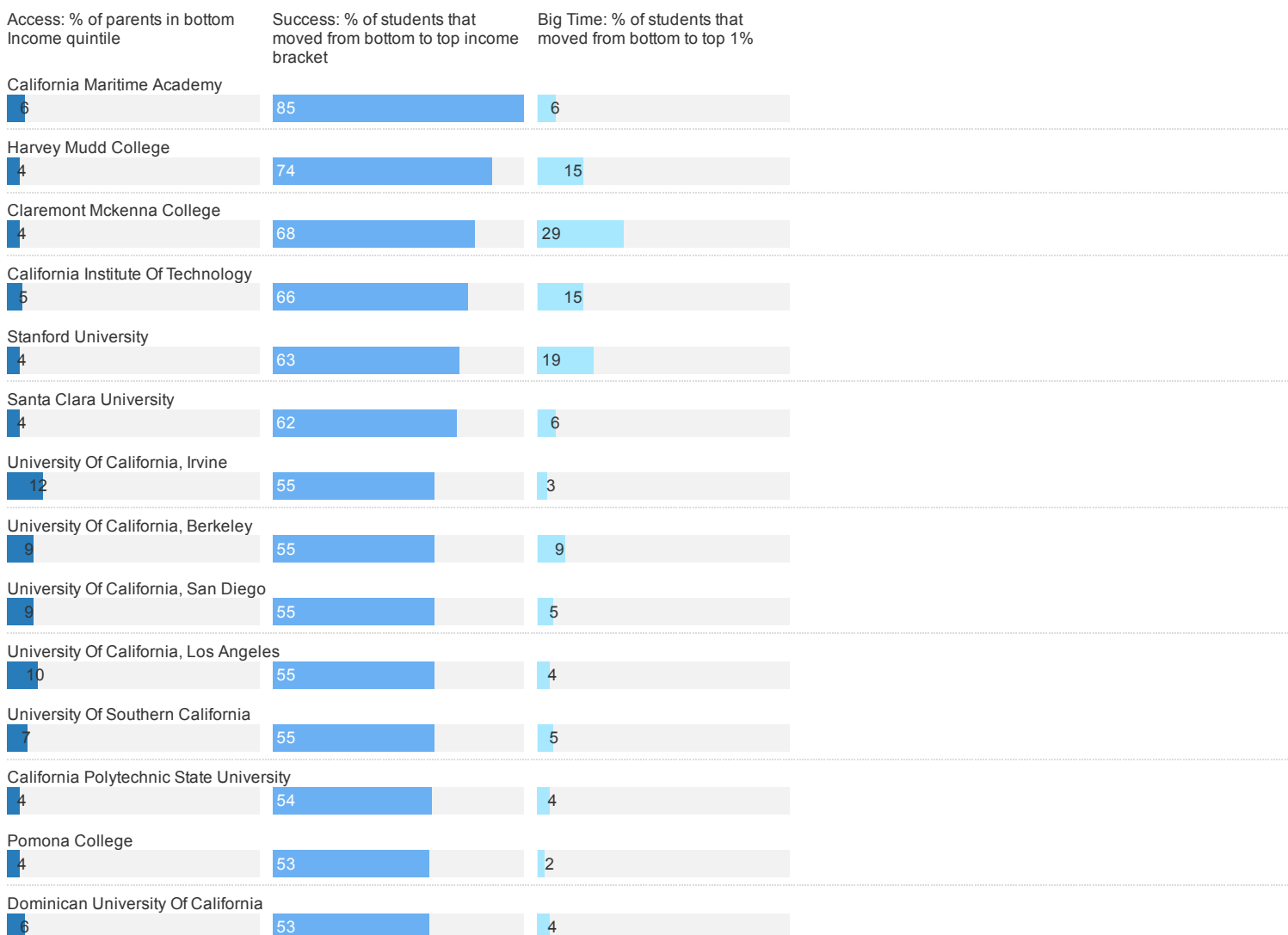
But those numbers don't tell a full story. That's because both the Maritime Academy and Claremont McKenna have a low percentage of students – less than 7 percent – who come from poor families. So while it's true that a large portion of their poor students were doing really well a decade after graduation, there weren't that many of them.

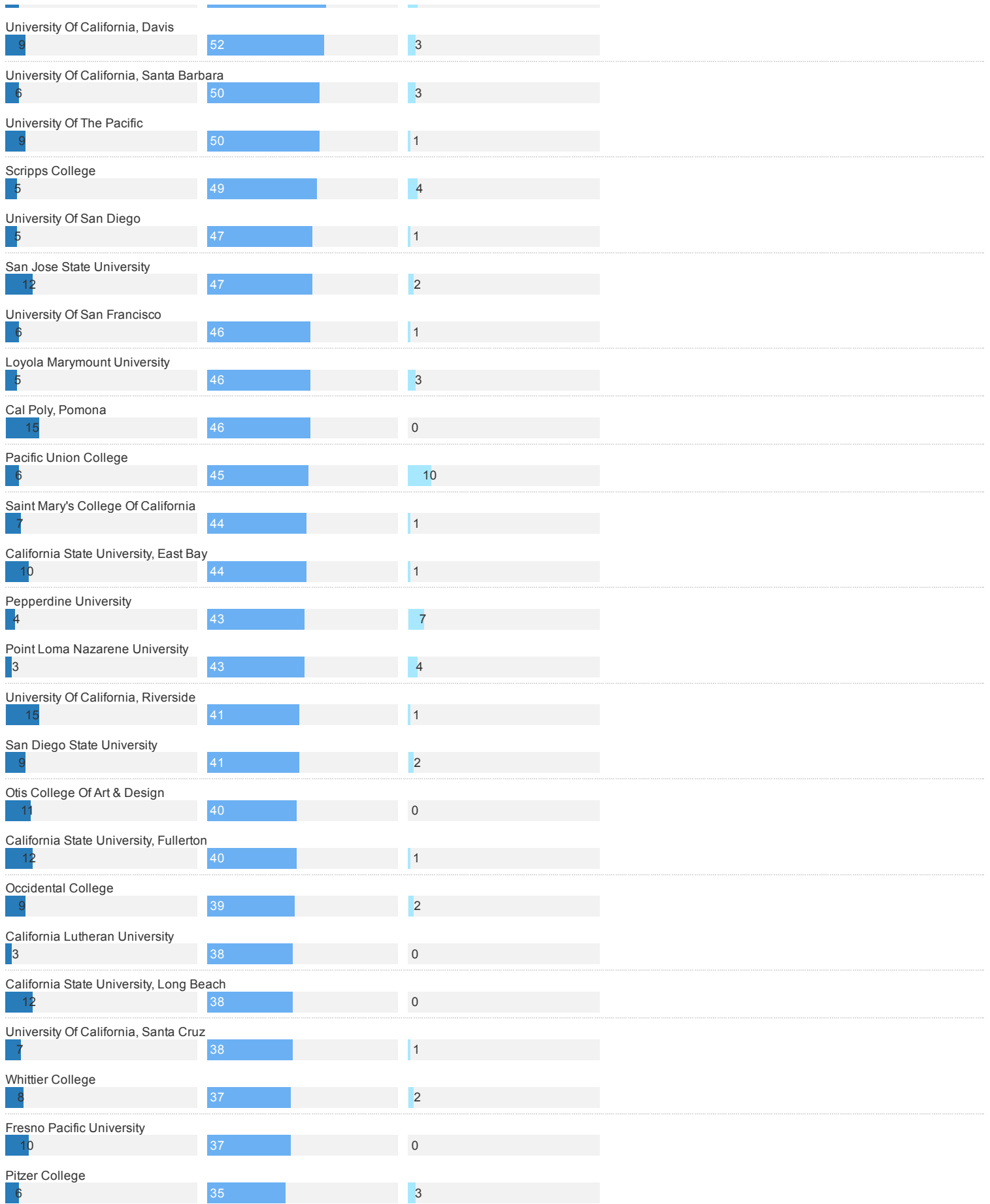
The researchers did another calculation to spotlight schools that took in a large proportion of low-income students and helped transition a solid portion into careers that made them wealthy. At the top of that metric is California State University-Los Angeles. One third of students at that school were relatively poor, and three out of every 10 of them eventually become relatively wealthy.

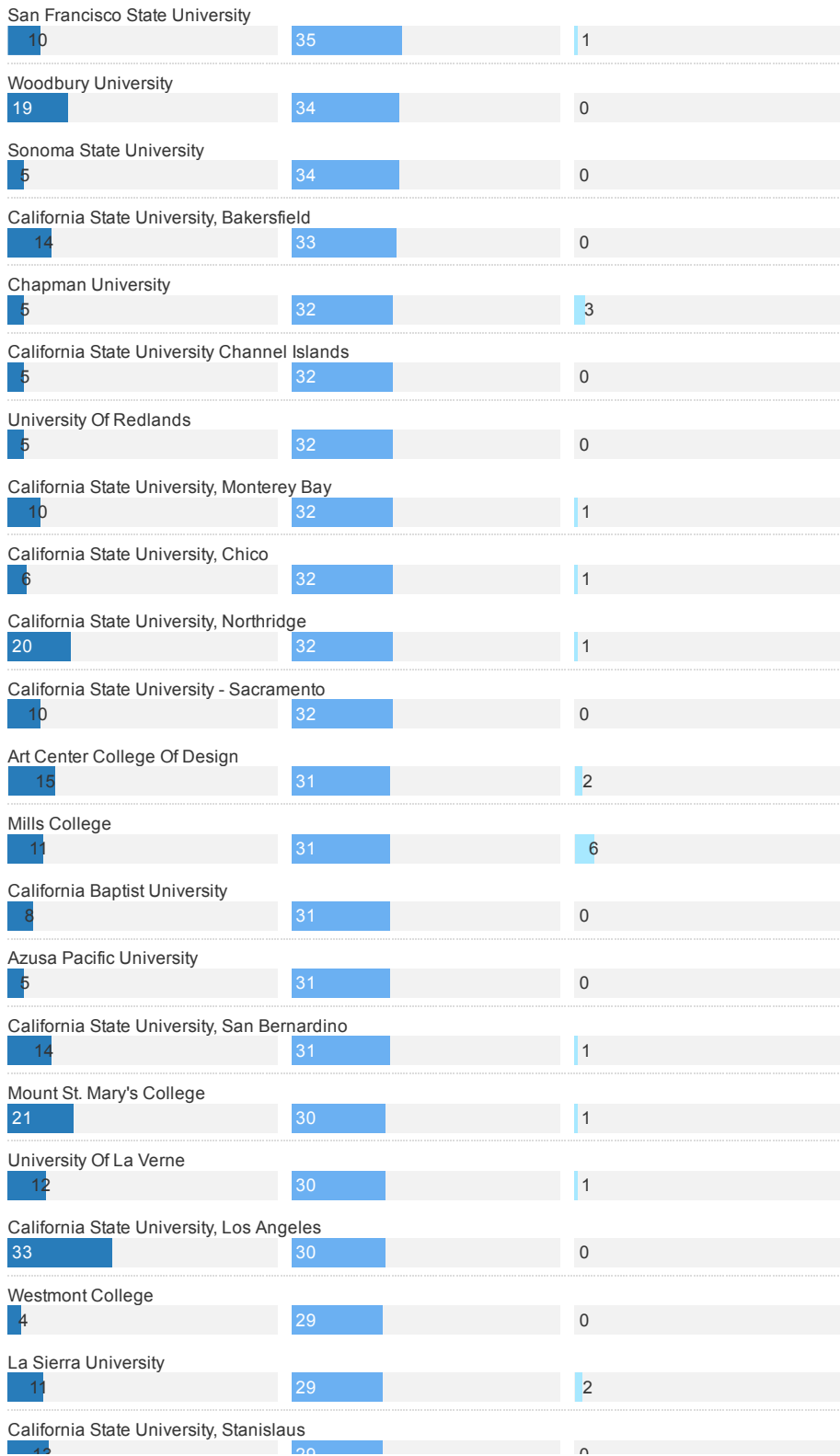
Locally, both UC Davis and Sacramento State had income-mobility rates higher than the state average. About half of students at UC Davis who came from poor families became relatively wealthy as adults. The same was true for about one third of students at Sacramento State.

This chart shows income mobility for students at four-year colleges in California who attended school during the early 2000s.

How many students who started out poor become wealthy after college?







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