



**The Center for the Study of Economic Mobility**

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Headline:

CSEM director takes part in national panel confronting inequities in education

CSEM Director Craig Richardson recently took part in a panel in Portland, Oregon, on the award-winning documentary film RIGGED ([riggeddocumentary.com](http://riggeddocumentary.com)). RIGGED lays bare a U.S. higher education culture in which wealth and influence remain the predominant values. CSEM is featured in the film as one of the nation's innovators in education, along with campus faculty who connect with students in ways that inspire them to succeed after college.

"I was honored to be asked to participate in the July 18 panel at CollegeNET's annual customer conference," Richardson said.

[CollegeNET](#), a Portland, Oregon-based company that sells class scheduling and **admissions software** to colleges and universities, produced the documentary.

"We were fortunate during the making of RIGGED to collaborate with CSEM and its leader, Craig Richardson," said Jim Wolfston, RIGGED executive producer and CollegeNET president.

The more than 350 people attending the conference enjoyed the opportunity to view the film and participate in a panel discussion and Q&A session examining and expanding on the issues presented in the film, organizers said. The panel featured business and education professionals experts who have dedicated their careers to supporting access and opportunity in higher education and creating paths for social mobility.

Richardson said, "The film is relevant now more than ever, in light of the recent

Supreme Court decision ending affirmative action as a tool to select students in our nation's academic institution."

"One unintended consequence of the Court's decision was to shine a bright light on so-called 'legacy admissions,' which give a much bigger advantage to children of alumni. This, in fact, is a type of affirmative action for the very wealthy, which creates an uncomfortable spotlight for how prestigious institutions select for their entering class of students," he noted.

"The panel gave us a chance to parse these types of questions among ourselves, and allow for engagement on somewhat different points of view on wisdom of this policy now versus in the past," he concluded.

Wolfston developed a [Social Mobility Index](#) (SMI) to "measure the extent to which a college or university educates more economically disadvantaged students (with family incomes below the national median) at lower tuition and graduates them into good paying jobs," according to the SMI website.

"It thus is a measure of social and economic mobility, and an alternative to the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, which has weightings heavily correlated with wealth of both the institution and the family wealth of the student attendee," Richardson said.

WSSU has ranked among the top-ten institutions on the SMI every year since the ranking's inception.

Wolfston moderated the panel. The other panelists included Jerry Anderson, the owner and founder of Impact Solutions of the Triad and founder and executive director of The Do School in Winston-Salem, a nonprofit organization that uses a hands-on approach to provide skills-training and sustained employment, specifically for residents in underserved communities.

Wolfston noted, "Dr. Richardson and CSEM helped inspire the creation of the Do School—a Winston Salem community project that builds valuable trade skills through home renovations that lift neighborhoods and enhance upward mobility."

He added, "One of the key challenges Dr. Richardson described in the film was overcoming the typical separation between a university and its community: 'Town and gown—never the twain shall meet.'"

The other panelists were:

- Dr. Eduardo Arellano, Associate Professor of Instruction in Higher Education Leadership at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). He is also the program coordinator for the University's Master's Degree in Higher Education Leadership.
- Dr. Carin Barber, Director of Strategic Projects in the Office of the President at California State University, San Marcos, and co-founder of the National Center for Social Mobility, which originated at Old Dominion University.

According to CollegeNET, RIGGED builds on the historical premise that growing economic imbalance ultimately leads to social unrest, political upheaval, and war. Through interviews with authors, historians, educators, and students, RIGGED shows how the value system underlying U.S. higher education constitutes a major risk factor for triggering these historic consequences and how this value system can be changed.

RIGGED includes compelling footage of innovative and courageous educators who are leading the movement to replace a value system that selects for wealth with one that meets genuinely motivated students where they are and advances them regardless of their economic background — a movement that could transform colleges and universities into new engines for education and social mobility.

RIGGED has more than a million views on You Tube and has received numerous film industry accolades, including the awards for Best Documentary Film at the Toronto Film Magazine Festival 2021, and Best Short Documentary at the Septimius Awards, the international film festival based in Amsterdam, in 2022, according to CollegeNET.

"After having a chance to see the film again, I was struck by the depth and rigor of the questions it raises around 'wealthism,' or having far more advantages by being rich in terms of getting a quality education," Richardson said. "In addition, despite its somber title, the film offers hope and an uplifting message during its last third, with a focus on three institutions, including WSSU, that are sidestepping these hurdles that RIGGED discusses."