



2025 TIAA Institute Theodore M. Hesburgh Award

For Leadership Excellence
in Higher Education

Honoring Mildred García
Chancellor, The California State University



“The California State University system’s 23 institutions are rated among the best in the nation on affordability and for promoting social mobility—and Chancellor García has played an enormous role in making that happen. The first in her family to earn a college degree, she has inspired countless students through her trailblazing career and visionary leadership.”

Surya Kolluri
Head of the TIAA Institute





Honoring Mildred García Chancellor The California State University

2025 Recipient of the TIAA Institute Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Leadership Excellence in Higher Education

Mildred García began her tenure as the California State University's 11th chancellor on October 1, 2023, becoming the first Latina in the nation to lead a four-year public higher education system. As chancellor, she has worked tirelessly to build partnerships across higher education sectors—including the University of California and the California Community Colleges—while charting the system's future at a time marked not only by great challenges, but also vast opportunities to expand access and success for California students, drive the state's economic prosperity, and make the CSU system a national model for educational excellence.

Shaping higher education's future

Before taking on her current role, Chancellor García served as president and CEO of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), where she was a strong and internationally renowned advocate for the association's 350 member institutions. At AASCU, she influenced federal policy on higher education and directed a strategic agenda focused on public college and university leadership for the 21st century.

Her accomplishments included spearheading the development of the association's five-year strategic plan; promoting the mission of AASCU institutions and their historic role in delivering affordable, high-quality higher education; creating professional development programs anchored in social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion; and involving presidents and chancellors in the development of AASCU's policies and priorities, assuring collaboration among diverse constituencies.

“I am deeply honored and profoundly humbled to receive this prestigious award. It is especially meaningful given that Reverend Hesburgh so wonderfully embodied the core values that I hold dear, and that I will continue to aspire to on behalf of the diverse and talented students I so proudly serve.”

CSU Chancellor Mildred García



Transforming institutions

Prior to being named chancellor, Mildred García had already made a meaningful and lasting difference at the CSU system, having served earlier in her career as president of both CSU Fullerton and CSU Dominguez Hills.

At CSU Fullerton, she served as the institution's first Latina president and led the university to record improvements in graduation rates, nearly tripled new philanthropic gift commitments, and completed the institution's first university-wide strategic plan. She also opened the first Dreamer Center in the CSU system and established over 300 partnerships and agreements with educational, governmental, business and community organizations worldwide.

At CSU Dominguez Hills—where she held the distinction of being the university system's and the institution's first Latina president—she dramatically increased retention rates for freshman and transfer students and eliminated a structural deficit of \$2.8 million. She also exceeded enrollment targets that had not been met for eight years, increased alumni donors by 400%, increased donor giving by 140%, and obtained the university's first endowed professorship.

Promoting student success

Chancellor García is laser-focused on helping CSU students complete a rigorous degree in a timely manner in preparation for a lifetime of achievement. Accordingly, she has marshalled the system's resources to improve graduation rates, reduce the time it takes to earn a degree, and make college more affordable to more Californians. CSU programs and policies to that end have centered on:

- Closing the digital equity gap by providing industry-leading technology to the CSU community.
- Addressing students' needs beyond academics, including helping them avoid food and housing insecurity.
- Supporting the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals who wish to enroll at the CSU.
- Providing incoming students of all backgrounds with equitable opportunities to succeed through academic preparation.

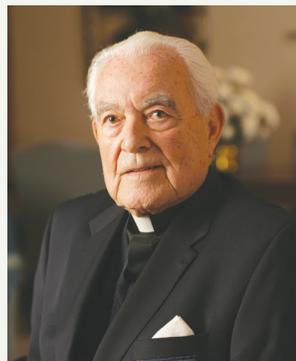
The California State University's students, faculty and alumni are living proof of the transformative power of higher education—and the breadth and impact of a remarkable leader.



About the award

The Hesburgh Award is named in honor of the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., past president of the University of Notre Dame and longtime member of the TIAA and CREF Boards of Overseers. A world-renowned educator and humanitarian, Father Hesburgh (1917-2015) was a lifelong champion of human rights, the cause of peace, and care for the poor. He received both the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

As a tribute to Father Hesburgh's lasting legacy, the TIAA Institute grants the Hesburgh Award to a current college or university president or chancellor who embodies Father Hesburgh's commitment to higher education and the world at large. The American Council on Education administers the award on the Institute's behalf, and recipients are chosen by an independent panel of judges.



Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh
Past President, University
of Notre Dame

About the TIAA Institute

Since 1998, the TIAA Institute has helped advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies and maximize opportunities for success. To learn more, visit tiaainstitute.org.

About TIAA

TIAA is a leading provider¹ of secure retirements and outcome-focused investment solutions to millions of people and thousands of institutions. It shared \$5 billion with participants in 2023, on top of the stated guarantees, and has \$1.4 trillion in assets under management (as of 9/30/2024).²

About The California State University

The California State University is the nation's largest four-year public university system, providing transformational opportunities for upward mobility to more than 460,000 students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. More than half of CSU students are from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, and more than one-quarter of undergraduates are first-generation college students.

1 As of June 3, 2024. Based on data in PLANSPONSOR's 2024 DC Recordkeeping Survey, #1 by total 403(b) assets and #1 by 403(b) ERISA plans.

2 As of September 30, 2024, assets under management across Nuveen Investments affiliates and TIAA investment management teams are \$1,400 billion.

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