

## Exploring College Rankings Measures December 2016

A variety of outlets publish college rankings, attempting to measure factors like college quality and value. Each uses different measures and methodologies, as shown in this snapshot comparison of several of the top publications.<sup>1</sup> Arguably the most well-known of the existing college rankings is “Best Colleges,” which was first published by *U.S. News and World Report* in 1983 and has been updated annually since 1985. In recent years, several other rankings have emerged, attempting to evaluate colleges in different ways.

Among the rankings are Forbes’ “America’s Top Colleges” (July 2016), Money’s “Best Colleges for Your Money” (July 2016), Wall Street Journal and Times Higher Education’s “Top U.S. Colleges” (September 2016), and Washington Monthly’s “National Universities” Rankings (September/October 2016). Other outlets, such as The Princeton Review, also release lists that evaluate colleges on a wide range of factors, from best campus food to best college radio station.<sup>2</sup> Some publications include multiple rankings lists, focusing on specific categories of schools (i.e., research universities, liberal arts colleges) or specific topics of interest (i.e., greatest value for the money, commitment to access for low-income students). Here, we have summarized the measures incorporated across several rankings.

### Overview of Measures Used in Five College Rankings Publications

	<u><a href="#">Forbes “America’s Top Colleges”</a></u> (Measures: Student Satisfaction, Graduation Rate, Post-Graduate Professional and Academic Success, and Student Debt)	<u><a href="#">Money “Best Colleges for Your Money”</a></u> (Measures: Quality of Education, Affordability, Outcomes, and Value Added)	<u><a href="#">U.S. News and World Report “Best Colleges”</a></u> (Measures: Undergraduate Academic Reputation, Retention, Faculty Resources, Student Selectivity, Financial Resources, Graduation Rate Performance, and Alumni Giving Rate)	<u><a href="#">Wall Street Journal/ Times Higher Education “Top U.S. Colleges”</a></u> (Measures: Engagement, Outcomes, Resources, and Environment)	<u><a href="#">Washington Monthly “National Universities”</a></u> (Measures: Social Mobility, Research, and Service)
<b>Access</b>				Percent of students receiving Pell; Percent of first-generation students; Student diversity: Likelihood of interacting with students of different races/ethnicities (Gini-Simpson calculation); Percent of international students	Percent of students receiving Pell; Percent of first-generation students

<sup>1</sup> This summary updates a 2014 analysis, available here: [http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/postsecdata/docs/resources/exploring\\_college\\_rankings\\_measures.pdf](http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/postsecdata/docs/resources/exploring_college_rankings_measures.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Princeton Review’s College Ranking Methodology, <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/ranking-methodology>.

	Forbes	Money Magazine	U.S. News and World Report	Wall Street Journal/ Times Higher Education	Washington Monthly (National Universities)
<b>Community Service</b>					Percentage of work-study funds used for community service; Student/staff/faculty/curricular involvement in community service; Proportion of students in ROTC programs
<b>Debt and Default</b>	Average federal student loan debt load; Student loan default rates; Predicted vs. actual percent of students taking federal loans	Student and parent debt; Student loan default risk; Value-added <sup>3</sup> student loan default risk and repayment rate; low-income student affordability; Five-year student loan repayment rate		Value-added <sup>3</sup> three-year student loan repayment rate	Five-year student loan repayment rate
<b>Expenditures and Wealth</b>			Per student expenditures on instruction, research, student services, and related educational expenditures	Per student expenditures on instruction and student services	Total research expenditures
<b>Faculty and Staff</b>	Student evaluations on ratemyprofessor.com	Student-faculty ratio; Career services staffing per 1,000 students	Faculty salary; Faculty educational attainment; Proportion of full-time faculty; Class size; Student-faculty ratio	Student-faculty ratio; Research output per faculty; Staff diversity; Student survey responses about student and faculty interaction	Proportion of faculty receiving prestigious awards; Proportion of faculty in National Academies

<sup>3</sup> Value-added measures take into account factors such as an institution's share of Pell Grant recipients, standardized test scores, and other student and institutional characteristics.

	<b>Forbes</b>	<b>Money Magazine</b>	<b>U.S. News and World Report</b>	<b>Wall Street Journal/ Times Higher Education</b>	<b>Washington Monthly (National Universities)</b>
<b>Graduation and Retention Rates</b>	Four-year graduation rate; Actual vs. predicted four-year graduation rate; First-year retention rate; Predicted first-year retention rate	Six-year graduation rate; Value-added <sup>3</sup> six-year graduation rate	Six-year graduation rate; Value-added <sup>3</sup> six-year graduation rate; First-year retention rate	Six-year graduation rate	Six-year graduation rate; Value-added <sup>3</sup> six-year graduation rate
<b>Post-college Outcomes (Employment and Service)</b>	Alumni earnings (payscale.com and College Scorecard data); Alumni appearance on "America's Leaders List"	Early and mid-career earnings; Major-adjusted earnings; Value-added <sup>3</sup> earnings; Value-added <sup>3</sup> earnings by major (STEM, Business, and other); Median earnings 10 years after entering college	Alumni giving rate	Value-added <sup>3</sup> median earnings 10 years after entering college	Proportion of alumni serving in Peace Corps; Median earnings 10 years after entering college vs. predicted earnings
<b>Price</b>		Net price of degree (considering only institutional aid; weighted by time-to-degree)			Annual net price for low-to middle-income students
<b>Reputation</b>		Yield (Percentage of accepted students who enroll)	Peer assessment of academic reputation; High school counselor assessment of academic reputation	Peer assessment of academic reputation; Student assessment of academic reputation	

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<b>Selectivity</b>		Standardized test scores (SAT/ACT)	Standardized test scores (SAT/ACT); Acceptance rate; Proportion of students from top 10 percent of high school class		
<b>Undergraduate Academic Quality/Rigor</b>	Rhodes, NSF, Fulbright, and other fellowship/scholarship recipients; Number of PhDs awarded			Number of accredited programs; Student survey responses about student engagement	Proportion of BA recipients who earn PhDs; Number of STEM and social science PhDs awarded