

HOW WE RANK THE Best Colleges



Outcomes: 35%

Graduation and retention rates; social mobility; graduation rate performance.

Social mobility evaluates the percentage of Pell Grant students graduating at a school compared with non-Pell Grant students. The proportion of students receiving Pell Grants is an indicator of economic diversity.

Graduation rate performance measures how well schools are graduating their students based on U.S. News predictions, which consider school spending, test scores and the proportion of students receiving Pell Grants. Retention measures the percentage of first-year students returning to campus and eventually graduating.



Faculty Resources: 20%

Class size; student-faculty ratio; proportion of full-time faculty; percent of full-time faculty with the highest degrees in their field; and faculty salary.

The more satisfied students are with their professors, the more they will learn, studies show.



Expert Opinion: 20%

The opinions of presidents, provosts and admissions deans. National Universities and National Liberal Arts Colleges also include high school counselor opinions.

These experts are in the best position to judge a school's undergraduate academic quality.



Financial Resources: 10%

The average spending per student on things that go directly toward educating undergrads, such as instruction, research and student services.

Spending on dorms, food services, sports and other noneducational areas don't count.



Student Excellence: 10%

ACT/SAT scores; proportion of first-year students who were in the top 10% of their high school classes for National Universities and National Liberal Arts Colleges, or in the top 25% for Regional schools.

To put more emphasis on outcomes, U.S. News dropped acceptance rate from the methodology in the 2019 edition and removed yield rate starting with the 2004 edition.



Alumni Giving: 5%

Percentage of living alumni with bachelor's degrees who gave to their schools during a given year.

This is an indirect measure of graduates' satisfaction and continued engagement with their schools.



[Click here to read more about how U.S. News calculated the Best Colleges rankings »](#)