

Subject: Information Paper – Annual College Rankings

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the various college rankings. There are a number of agencies that rank colleges and universities on a variety of measures. The agencies discussed in this paper are:

- a. U.S. News and World Report
- b. Forbes
- c. Princeton Review
- d. American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)
- e. Other College Rankings

2. U.S. News & World Report (Published annually in September)

<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges>

These rankings have been compiled since 1983 and are widely regarded as the most influential of all college rankings. The rankings are based upon data which *U.S. News* collects from each educational institution either from an annual survey or from the school's website. It also considers opinion surveys of university faculty and administrators outside the school.

The U.S. News ranking factors, with their relative weights in parentheses, are:

- Faculty resources: average class size, faculty salaries, faculty degree level, student-faculty ratio, and proportion of full-time faculty (20%)
- Retention: six-year graduation rate and first-year student retention rate (22.5%)
- **Assessment of Excellence:** based on the combined assessment of Peers and Guidance Counselors (22.5%)
- Peer assessment: a survey of the institution's reputation among presidents, provosts, and admissions deans of other institutions (15%)
- Student selectivity: standardized test scores of admitted students, proportion of admitted students in upper percentiles of their high school class, and proportion of applicants accepted (12.5%)
- Financial resources: per-student spending (10%)
- Graduation rate performance: difference between expected and actual graduation rate (7.5%)
- Guidance Counselor assessment: a survey of the institution's reputation among approximately 1,800 high school guidance counselors (7.5%)
- Alumni giving rate (5%)

*U.S. News* determined the relative weights of these factors and changed them over time. The National Opinion Research Center reviewed the methodology and stated that the weights "lack any defensible empirical or theoretical basis". The first four of the listed factors account for the great majority of the ranking, and the peer assessment, or "reputational measure" (which surveys high-level administrators at similar institutions about their perceived quality ranking of each college and university) is especially important to the final ranking.

USMA falls under the U.S. News institutional category of National Liberal Arts Colleges. These schools focus almost exclusively on undergraduate education, and award at least 50 percent of their degrees in the arts and sciences. U.S. News also includes USMA in the sub-category of public institutions among the national liberal arts colleges.

**U.S. News & World Report annual ranking results for USMA:**

Category	AY17	AY16	AY15	AY14	AY13	AY12	AY11
National Liberal Arts Colleges - Top Public	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
National Liberal Arts Colleges - Overall	19	22	24	17	18	14	16

3. Forbes (Published annually in August)

<http://www.forbes.com/top-colleges/list/>

Since 2008, Forbes Magazine has been publishing its annual list, prepared by the *Center for College Affordability and Productivity*. In contrast to *U.S. News & World Report*, which focuses primarily on input (student admissions qualifications, faculty resources, etc.), Forbes focuses more on school output, or the graduate return-on-investment. These rankings use the following factors, with their relative weights in parentheses

- Student satisfaction: RateMyProfessor.com, freshman-to-sophomore retention rate (25%)
- Post-graduate success: salary of alumni, number graduates on America’s Leaders List (32.5%)
- Student debt: federal student loan data (25%)
- Four year Graduation rate (7.5%)
- Academic Success: Nationally competitive awards- Rhodes, NSF, Fulbright scholarships, alumni receiving Ph.D. (10%)

The ranking’s reliance upon post-graduate success, student debt, and graduation rate in particular largely explain why USMA consistently ranks very high every year.

Forbes also ranks by categories.

**Forbes annual ranking results for USMA:**

Category	AY16	AY15	AY14	AY13	AY12	AY11	AY10	AY09	AY08
Overall	14	11	9	7	7	3	4	1	6
Public	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Northeast	11	9	7	3	*	3	*	*	*
Top 25	*	1	1	*	3	3	*	*	*
Baccalaureate	6	5	4	3	*	2	*	*	*

\* Note: Ranking of ‘\*’ means USMA was not ranked in that given category.

4. Princeton Review (published annually in August)  
<http://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings.aspx>

Unlike typical college ranking systems, these ‘rankings’ do not compare colleges overall against each other. Instead, this system compares colleges in each of 62 categories that relate to the following nine general areas: Academics/Administration, Quality of Life, Politics, Campus Life, Town Life, Social Life, Extracurricular activities, Social Scene and Schools by Type. Princeton Review uses a *student survey*, consisting of 80 questions, for feedback to make its rankings.

The Princeton Review reports the top 20 schools (i.e., of the 378 total for its 2014 edition) in each of the 62 different ranking list categories, but it does not report ranks beyond the top 20 in any category (i.e., schools ranked 21 to 378). The total list of schools (in this case, 378) was selected by their collecting data on more than 2,000 schools, meeting with or talking to hundreds of college administrators, obtaining feedback from students, parents, educators and their own staff at Princeton Review locations across the country, and by consulting with their 35-member National College Counselor Advisory Board.

**Princeton Review annual ranking results for USMA\*:**

Category	AY16	AY15	AY14	AY13	AY12	AY11	AY10	AY09
Most Accessible Professors	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	1
Best Classroom Experience	12	5	14	11	4	1	4	8
Best College Library	2	3	3	6	2	8	10	*
Best Athletic Facilities	*	16	6	10	1	3	*	18

\* **Note:** Ranking of ‘\*’ means USMA fell outside of the top 20 schools rated in a given category.

5. American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) (published annually in September)  
[http://www.goacta.org/publications/what\\_will\\_they\\_learn\\_2015\\_16](http://www.goacta.org/publications/what_will_they_learn_2015_16)

In 2009, the ACTA began their *What Will They Learn?* Project. Starting with the institution’s own stated rationale for its general education or core curricular requirements, the *What Will They Learn?* Project carefully evaluates the extent to which the actual requirements match the school’s stated beliefs and principles. Thus, the ACTA rates colleges, not against each another but individually, based on whether the institution requires seven core subjects: Composition, Literature, Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural or Physical Science. The college’s rating, a grade of ‘A’ through ‘F’, is based on a detailed examination of the latest publicly-available online course catalogs at the time of review.

**ACTA Ratings for USMA\*:**

AY16	AY15	AY14	AY13	AY12	AY11	AY10	AY09
A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

USMA rates an ‘A’, as it meets the criteria for six of the seven core subjects. Fewer than 2% of the more than 1,000 institutions evaluated earned an A grade. USMA only falls short on Foreign Language, as it requires two semesters of study, short of the ACTA minimum standard of three.

**Other College Rankings:**

College Choice website: Best Engineering Programs #16

Startclass website: #46

Niche website: Overall letter grade "A"

College Raptor: Overall "unranked", Academic Ranking #9, Academic U.S. #39, and Academic NY #5

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