



## 10 Things You Should Know About the 2016 US News College Rankings

Despite the newly revised federal [College Scorecard](#) released this weekend along with [new data elements](#) for evaluating schools, [US News College Rankings](#) probably isn't too worried about losing its fan base. After all, you can't find out what THE BEST college is in the nation with just a click. And let's face it, everyone loves a horse race--no one cares what the trainers are actually doing. But for those who might actually be interested in how the schools achieved their rankings, you should be aware of the following:

1. The number of full-time undergraduates at the schools that rank in the top 50 of US News College Rankings for National Universities and National Liberal Arts Colleges represent just under 10% of all full-time undergraduates. If being in the top 10% is important to you, attending one of these schools could meet your status needs.
2. Academic reputation counts for 22.5% of the rankings on the national lists and is probably the most [difficult score to change](#). Not that people aren't trying. According to the [methodology](#), "In order to reduce the impact of strategic voting by respondents, we eliminated the two highest and two lowest scores each school received before calculating the average score." Does anyone really believe that colleges don't care about their rankings?

Even if "presidents, provosts and deans of admissions" aren't trying to game the system, are they really in a position to "account for intangibles at peer institutions, such as faculty dedication to teaching?" It would be a bit like asking all of the high school principals in a state to rank how good the teaching is at other high schools in the state. And they're only to consider the intangibles, so by definition it shouldn't be anything that can be measured.

So why include it, much less give it so much weight? How else can you ensure that the "expected" colleges show up in the top ten [year after year](#)?

3. The [four-year graduation rates](#) for the top 50 National Liberal Arts Colleges ranged from 60% to 93% and 51% to 90% for National Universities. I excluded two schools' graduation rates. Georgia Tech as a predominately engineering schools has a lower four-year rate of 41% but its five-year rate is 72%. Northeastern doesn't report a four-year rate, probably because it has an extensive coop program. It has a five-year rate of 79%.

There are 329 schools that aren't in the top 50 that have a four-year graduation rate of 51% or better. Of these, 253 don't show up in the top 100 of the national rankings. By the way, US News College Rankings uses the six-year graduation rate—how long were you planning on taking to graduate?

4. You can spend some serious cash applying to the schools. 82 have application fees of \$50 or more, 42 charged \$70 or more with \$90 being the highest (last year's fees). Eleven public schools are included in the group charging \$70 or more. Excluding the three military academies, only two state schools charged less than \$50 to apply.

5. The only [public schools](#) in the top 50 Liberal Arts Colleges rankings are the military academies.

6. As in [past years](#), four states dominate the top 50 rankings: California, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania. A total of 28 National Liberal Arts Colleges and 25 National Universities are from these four states. Now this isn't necessarily surprising since three of the states have the most total number of colleges to begin with. But there are three states with more colleges than Massachusetts, Florida, Texas, and Ohio, that have a combined total of five schools on the top 50 list.

7. It's a good thing few students pay the full-sticker price since the average total cost of attendance for the private schools ranked in the top 50 averaged \$60,116 compared to the average of \$41,216 for all private schools. Public schools in the top 50 seem to have a price tag premium as well with an average of \$28,506 for total cost compared to \$21,328 average for all public institutions.

Just as an FYI, US News College Rankings avoids confusing students by showing only the tuition and fees in the data table for the rankings. You have to look up the individual school and add the room and board fees back in to get the total cost of attendance. (Yes, that's sarcasm.)

8. While the schools in the top 50 tend to be known for their generous financial aid, they aren't exactly admitting a lot of students that really need it. Among the top 50 on the National University and National Liberal Arts College rankings, 57 schools had less than 16% of freshman receiving Pell Grants.

Why did I pick 16%? That's the number that the [Education Trust](#) proposes as the minimum performance standard for colleges. Below 16% represents the bottom five percent of all colleges. The average for private schools in the top 50 was 12.4% compared to 41.2% for all private schools with the top 50 average for National Universities at 24.1% compared to 43.9% for all public schools.

9. It's not as if the schools in top 50 are hurting for money. The average endowment per student for private schools was \$388,542, over 10 times the average of \$33,140 for private schools not in the top 50. Among the public schools, the top 50 average of \$59,598 was seven times the average of \$8,448 for all public institutions.

10. Seven of the top 50 had admission rates of 50% or better, three on the Liberal Arts Colleges list and four on the National Universities list. Another 13 had 40% or better acceptance rates. Of the 74 schools that had acceptance rates of less than 30%, 54 were in the top 50 (National or LAC). Among the 20 remaining schools, none were in the top 100 of the national rankings.

#### Where the Data Comes From

All of the data comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) available for downloading as of January 2015. It's based on four-year colleges with 500 or more full-time undergraduates. Five colleges are missing because they had fewer than 500 full-time undergraduates or do not report data to IPEDS (Hillsdale). All of the data (except the rankings) is available in the [DIY College Search Spreadsheet](#).

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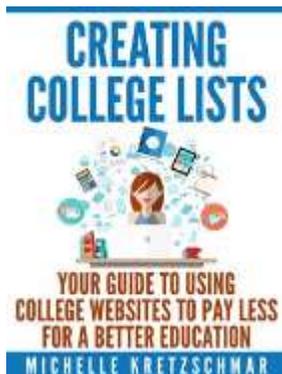
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[Free spreadsheet](#) to track your college application deadlines. Includes a financial timeline.

### 50-50 PDF College Listing

Listing of all colleges by state that have at least a 50% acceptance rate and 50% graduation rate in a [PDF format](#).

### Don't have any idea of where to go to college?



Here's how to start making your list of colleges. If you're willing to step away from the rankings spotlight, you can find some impressive programs at great values. All it takes is a little time and a visit to one of the most ignored resources in creating a college list: the college website. [Find out more.](#)