



Guide to U.S. University Rankings

If you plan to study abroad in the United States, choosing a university requires plenty of research and planning. In your research, you will undoubtedly look at a range of factors, such as school location, degree programs offered, cost of tuition, and availability of financial aid. You may also find it useful to analyze how a university “ranks” against other, comparable schools. As you do so, it is helpful to have a clear understanding of what rank is and how it is calculated and interpreted.



WHAT ARE UNIVERSITY RANKINGS?

University rankings are ordered lists, based on research, that are put out by publications such as *U.S. News and World Reports*, *Forbes*, and others. These lists put the so-called “best” colleges and universities in order based on certain criteria.



WHAT CRITERIA ARE USED IN THE RANKINGS?

University ranking criteria are not standardized, meaning the criteria one publication uses to analyze schools can be completely different from another publication’s. For example, one guide might focus mainly on student experience, while another looks at factors related to the university’s economic value. This is the reason you will see differing lists of the “best” universities when reviewing a variety of rankings.

To help you make sense of the various rankings and determine which ones matter most to you, here is a guide to U.S. university rankings.



Types of schools they analyze: For the *Top Universities in the World Rankings*, 900 institutions were considered in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: QS uses six performance indicators to assess university performance in four main areas: research, teaching, employability, and internationalization.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Academic reputation
- Employer reputation
- Student-to-faculty ratio
- Citations per faculty
- International faculty ratio
- International student ratio

SUMMARY

QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) is one of the few publications that ranks colleges and universities around the globe- not just in the U.S. Its *World University Rankings* can be segmented by North America. The specific focus on international student-to-faculty ratio makes it especially relevant for foreign students. In addition to ranking info, QS also includes information on popular student cities, applications, costs, visas, and more.

The Economist

Types of schools they analyze: *The Economist's* ranking used a database of 1,275 four-year, non-vocational colleges and universities.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: *The Economist's* rankings focus on the idea that "economic value of a university is equal to the gap between how much money its students subsequently earn, and how much they might have made had they studied elsewhere." This ranking uses statistical software to produce an estimate of this return on investment for each college, taking into account factors such as students' SAT scores, areas of study, demographic makeup, and types of schools (public vs. private/city vs. rural).

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Students' median predicted post-enrollment salary
- Students' actual median earnings
- School's over or under performance

SUMMARY

Although maximizing earnings is not the only factor students consider when choosing a college, this ranking system provides specific data on graduate earnings, which is an important piece of the puzzle when evaluating universities.



Types of schools they analyze: *The Center for World University Rankings* (CWUR) analyzed 25,000+ global, degree-seeking institutions of higher education to produce a list of the world's top 1000 universities.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: The CWUR rankings measure the quality of education and training of students and the prestige of faculty members and their research. The rankings do not rely on surveys and university data submissions; instead the data is gathered through statistics, such as the number of university faculty who have won awards, the types of jobs alumni have gone on to obtain, and research publications by faculty.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Quality of education
- Alumni employment
- Quality of faculty
- Publications
- Influence
- Citations
- Broad impact
- Patents

SUMMARY

This Saudi Arabian based publication, that began ranking universities in 2012, takes a different approach than other organizations in that it ranks schools based on quality of student education and the achievement and prestige of faculty. If the credentials of faculty rate high on your list when selecting a university, this ranking publication may be helpful.



Types of schools they analyze: *Niche* ranked 1,647 four-year colleges and universities.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: *Niche* ranks schools based on a combination of academic, admissions, financial, and student life data from sources such as the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Census, along with millions of reviews from students, alumni, faculty, and parents.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Academics
- Value
- Professors
- Diversity
- Student life
- Overall student experience
- Campus
- Local area
- Safety

SUMMARY

Niche's combination of various government data sources and direct student and faculty feedback provides a well-rounded look at universities. In addition, their specific rankings, such as Best Value Colleges, Best by State, and Best by Major break the data down further.

Money

Types of schools they analyze: MONEY's ranking considers about 2,000 four-year colleges and universities.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: MONEY ranks schools in three main categories: quality, affordability, and alumni success. They also measure comparative value by assessing how well students did at each school vs. what's expected of students with similar economic and academic backgrounds.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Graduation rate
- Standardized test scores of entering freshman
- Instructor quality
- Net price of degree
- Student debt
- Affordability for low-income students
- Graduate earnings
- Alumni earnings
- Career services
- Meaningfulness of job after graduation

SUMMARY

MONEY's Best Colleges for Your Money rankings were one of the first to combine cost estimates with students' likely earnings after graduation. This ranking is most helpful to determine the "value" a college adds when compared to other schools with similar students.



Types of schools they analyze: CollegeNET Social Mobility Rankings (SMI) ranked four-year colleges and universities.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: The Social Mobility Index (SMI) focuses on factors that improve access, affordability and graduation rate, and that advance economic mobility for students.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Tuition
- Economic background of students
- Graduation rate
- Early career salary
- Endowment

SUMMARY

Less about prestige than about the "bottom line," the SMI measures how a college or university educates more economically disadvantaged students at lower tuition, so they can graduate and obtain well paying jobs. This ranking is best for review if college costs and return on investment are your top concerns.



Types of schools they analyze: *Washington Monthly* looks at 1,863 public, private nonprofit, and for-profit colleges in the U.S.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: *Washington Monthly* rates schools based on their "contribution to the public good" in three broad categories: social mobility (recruiting and graduating low-income students), research, and service (giving back to their country).

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Graduation rate (as compared to predicted graduation rate)
- Student diversity
- Affordability
- Students' economic outcomes
- Student loan repayment rate
- Research spending
- Number of science and engineering PhDs awarded
- Relative number of undergraduate alumni who have gone on to receive a PhD
- Relative number of faculty receiving awards
- Relative number of faculty in National Academies

SUMMARY

As an alternative to *U.S. News* and *Forbes* rankings, *Washington Monthly* provides a more student-focused approach to rankings, with particular emphasis on universities with a strong social conscience.



Types of schools they analyze: *U.S. News and World Report* has many different ranking categories, but their main two are Best National Universities and Best National Liberal Arts Colleges.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: *U.S. News*' rankings focus on academic excellence, with graduation and retention factoring heavily into a school's rank.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Student retention
- Faculty resources
- Student selectivity
- The university's financial resources
- Alumni donations to the university
- Student graduation rate

SUMMARY

If you are most concerned about a school's graduation rate and student retention statistics, *U.S. News and World Report's* rankings will be relevant to you.



Types of schools they analyze: For its list of "Top Colleges," *Forbes* ranks all national universities and liberal arts colleges.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: *Forbes'* ranking system is based heavily on what the student gets out of the experience.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Student satisfaction
- Student post-graduate success
- Student debt
- Graduation rate
- Student academic success

SUMMARY

If you're interested in rankings that put more focus on the student experience and "ROI" (return on investment) than on metrics like average SAT scores, then the *Forbes'* guide will be a good reference for you.



Types of schools they analyze: *The Princeton Review's* "Best 381 Colleges" looks at all national universities and four-year colleges.

General criteria used to analyze the schools: The results of *Princeton Review's* rankings are determined via student surveys. Students are asked to score their school by answering 80 questions about academics, life at college, their fellow students, and themselves.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Academics/administration
- Quality of life
- Politics
- Campus life
- Town life
- Social life
- Extracurriculars

SUMMARY

Princeton Review's rankings are different from others in that they are 100% based on survey results from the students themselves, and because the rankings focus heavily on lifestyle. Use the *Princeton Review* rankings if you're interested in seeing the school from the perspective of its students.



Types of schools they analyze: Unlike most others, *The Times* ranks universities worldwide (from 88 countries), not just in the U.S. Their focus is on research-oriented schools only. For their U.S. school rankings, they analyze over 1,000 universities and colleges.

General Criteria used to analyze the schools:

The Times analyzes research-intensive universities based on teaching, quality of research and global outlook.

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES ANALYZED:

- Research (volume, income and reputation)
- Interaction with business
- International outlook
- The teaching/learning environment

SUMMARY

If you want to attend a research-intensive school, this list will filter for those. Also, *The Times* list allows you to see how a U.S. university ranks within a broader, international context. It also aims to focus on criteria that matter to students and their families the most.



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Knowledge of U.S. university rankings is helpful as you research the right university to study abroad; however, this is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to choosing the right school for you! Contact BridgePathways for further assistance from an international admission advisor.



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