2023 BEST COLLEGES RANKINGS REVIEW – *U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT*

October 2022

In the following report, Hanover Research reviews *U.S. News & World Report's* 2023 National Universities and Liberal Arts Colleges rankings.

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METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

2023 CHANGES

U.S. News and World Report (USNWR) regularly tweaks its methodology with the goal of improving it. It considers variables that are on the minds of prospective students and their families when making enrollment decisions. While USNWR did not modify the weights of existing indicators or add new ranking indicators for the 2023 edition, it did make some changes to the methodology.

The most significant change to the 2023 rankings includes how SAT/ACT scores are handled for institutions that report scores for less than half of new entrants in consecutive years (i.e., SAT/ACT scores are not used to calculate rank in such cases). Notably, the weights of two other ranking factors – average graduation rate and high school class standing – increased instead. Additionally, in earlier rankings, only full-time instructional faculty were considered while looking at the percentage of faculty with a terminal degree. However, in the current rankings, part-time instructional faculty also are included due to their growing presence on college and university campuses.

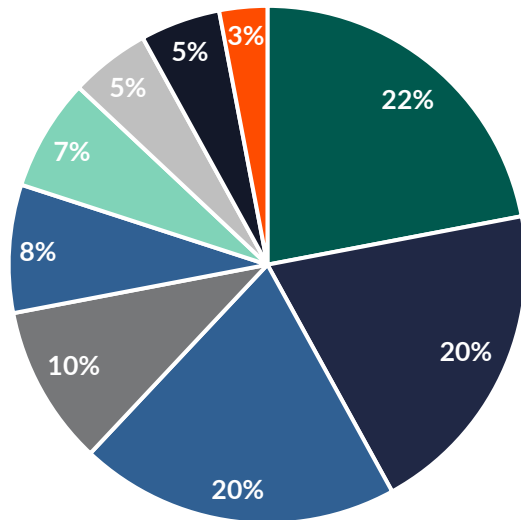| SAT/ACT Ranking Indicator	Faculty with Terminal Degrees	Faculty Compensation
For schools that reported fall 2021 SAT/ACT scores on fewer than half their new entrants, USNWR used their "pre-pandemic" fall 2020 scores as long as they were reported on more than half of new entrants	In previous rankings, USNWR based the proportion of terminal degree faculty ranking factor only on full-time instructional faculty with terminal degrees.	Average faculty salaries and class size ranking indicators only use 2021-2022 academic year data instead of being based on two-year averages.
For schools with less than 50% of their fall entering class having SAT/ACT scores in both fall 2021 and fall 2020, USNWR reallocated the 5% weight of the test score indicator to the average six-year graduation rate and high school standing ranking factors.	For the 2022-2023 ranking, the proportion of faculty with terminal degree ranking factor was determined by using both full-time and part-time instructional faculty with terminal degrees.	Faculty compensation cost of living adjustments use their state non-metropolitan averages instead of the national non-metropolitan averages if they reside outside a core-based statistical area (CBSA) metro area.

Source: USNWR

RANKINGS VARIABLES

The largest components of the 2023 USNWR rankings are Graduation and Retention, Undergraduate Academic Reputation, and Faculty Resources. These three categories account for more than 60% of an institution's rank. In contrast Student Selectivity and Alumni Giving Rate combine to account for just 10% of the ranking.

- ■ Graduation and Retention
- ■ Academic Reputation
- ■ Faculty Resources
- ■ Financial Resources Per Student
- ■ Graduation Rate Performance
- ■ Student Selectivity
- ■ Social Mobility
- ■ Graduate Indebtedness
- ■ Average Alumni Giving Rate

Source: USNWR

Rankings Criteria	National Rankings Weights
Graduation and Retention Rates	**22%**
Average Six-Year Graduation Rate	17.6%
Average First-Year Student Retention Rate	4.4%
Social Mobility	**5%**
Pell Grant Graduation Rates	2.5%
Pell Grant Graduation Rate Performance	2.5%
Graduation Rate Performance	**8%**
Undergraduate Academic Reputation	**20%**
Peer Assessment Survey	20%
Faculty Resources for 2021-2022 Academic Year	**20%**
Class Size	8%
Faculty Compensation	7%
Percent Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty with Terminal Degree in Field	3%
Percent Full-Time Faculty	1%
Student-Faculty Ratio	1%
Student Selectivity for Fall 2021 Entering Class	**7%**
Math and Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Portion of the SAT and the Composite ACT Scores	5%
High School Class Standing in Top 10%	2%
High School Class Standing in Top 25%	0%
Financial Resources Per Student	**10%**
Average Alumni Giving Rate	**3%**
Graduate Indebtedness	**5%**
Graduate Indebtedness Total	3%
Graduate Indebtedness Proportion with Debt	2%

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OVERVIEW

Despite methodology changes, the top National University rankings remained largely consistent between 2022 and 2023. Though there was some jockeying for position within this group, the top 10 remain largely the same with some minor variations. Yale University and Stanford University moved up from their respective rankings of 5 and 6 to tie with Harvard University at 3. Harvard University moved down one spot from its previous ranking.

Among the schools in the top 100, the University of California – Santa Cruz made the largest improvement, moving up 20 spots from a tie at 103 to a tie at 83. In part, this change was related to a large improvement in its Graduate Indebtedness rank, which moved from 107 in 2022 to 87 in 2023. The State University of New York at Stony Brook also saw a significant jump, moving up 16 places to 77. While slipping in some categories, Stony Brook received a small boost in its Peer Assessment score (3.3 to 3.4) as well as more significant improvements in its Faculty Resources and Faculty Compensation ranks.

Conversely, Brigham Young University – Provo saw the biggest drop among the top 100, slipping 10 points from 79 to 89.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The top 50 National Universities resemble the previous year's rankings, with nearly all such institutions moving up or down by six or fewer spots. Columbia University is an outlier with a sixteen spot drop due to inaccuracies in prior data submissions.

NOTABLE IMPROVEMENTS AND SETBACKS

+ 20 **University of California – Santa Cruz**
2022 – 103
2023 – 83

+ 16 **Stony Brook University – SUNY**
2022 – 93
2023 – 77

– 10 **Brigham Young University - Provo**
2022 – 79
2023 – 89

NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES: ADDITIONAL RANKINGS CHANGES

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Though most universities were not able to achieve the large rankings gains of UC Santa Cruz or Stony Brook University, there were still a good number that moved up by a half-dozen spots or more. Here are some of the colleges and universities that saw some of the biggest improvements in the rankings among *USNWR*'s top 100.

Largest Ranking Improvements among the top 100 National Universities

Institution	2022 Rank	2023 Rank	Change
Virginia Tech	75	62	+13
Rutgers University – New Brunswick	63	55	+8
North Carolina State University	79	72	+7
American University	79	72	+7
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	47	41	+6
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	68	62	+6
Michigan State University	83	77	+6
New Jersey Institute of Technology	103	97	+6
Clark University	103	97	+6
University of South Florida	103	97	+6
University of Illinois Chicago	103	97	+6

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

There is no single formula for improving in the rankings. Some institutions emphasize the preparation of their incoming class, which improves Selectivity scores and is associated with stronger Retention and Graduation outcomes in the future. Others market their strengths among experts in an effort to drive up Peer Assessment scores.

American University demonstrates the power of incremental change across the more heavily weighted variables. American's rank increased from 79 to 72 this year, and it also ranked 41 among the Best Colleges for Veterans. American University achieved this overall improvement through multiple variables. For example:

- Outcomes rank from 139 to 127.
- Graduate indebtedness rank from 213 to 198
- Faculty compensation rank from 138 to 102
- Classes with Fewer than 20 Students from 58.9% to 58.4%

USNWR's methodological changes also appear to have benefited American University to a degree. In comparison to institutions that were ranked similarly last year but did not see a similar improvement, American's Graduation and Retention Rank is markedly better. American ranks 99 in the 2023 Graduation and Retention Rank as opposed to Fordham University which ranks 192 in the same variable. Notably, both institutions are tied with an overall rank of 72.

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LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES: RANKINGS CHANGES

OVERVIEW

The institutions represented among the top 25 rankings for National Liberal Arts Colleges are the same as last year, though there was some movement within the top group, with many institutions gaining or losing between one to four spots in the rankings. Within the top 25 Vassar College also experienced a notable jump, moving from 22 to 13. Just one institution, United States Military Academy at West Point, newly cracked the top 10.

The ranking's largest overall improvement came from outside the top 100. Specifically, Saint Vincent College in Pennsylvania climbed 26 spots to tie at 120. To achieve this feat Saint Vincent demonstrated improvement in a number of areas, including Percentage of Full-time Faculty, Peer Assessment score, Average Debt of Graduating Class.

Notably, the largest setback was Millsaps College in Mississippi, which saw its position fall from 114 to 136. Millsaps had slight declines in its Graduation and Retention rates and received a lower Peer Assessment score. Still, with consistency in its Social Mobility scores and associated indicators, Millsaps is likely poised for a return up the rankings next year.

NOTABLE IMPROVEMENTS AND SETBACKS

+ 26

Saint Vincent College
2022 – 146
2023 - 120

+ 2

United States Military Academy
2022 – 11
2023 – 9

— 22

Millsaps College
2022 – 114
2023 – 136

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OVERVIEW

While there was little movement in the top 25 liberal arts rankings, some of the other top 100 institutions show some notable fluctuations. Washington College and Southwestern University both moved up 13 spots each, from a tie at 98 to 85.

Graduate indebtedness seems to remain an influential differentiator in rankings outcomes. Some institutions, such as Berea College, which show very low graduate indebtedness continue to improve in the rankings. Conversely, some institutions with relatively higher levels of graduate indebtedness have dropped in the overall rankings, including Transylvania University and Ohio Wesleyan University.

TRINITY UNIVERSITY

Trinity University, previously unranked, successfully petitioned the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education for reclassification as a Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institution, which resulted in it being moved to the National Liberal Arts category in the UNSWR rankings for 2023. The institution believes that the new classification better reflects the core of Trinity's mission and positions it for greater national recognition. It ranks 55 in the present rankings.

Largest Ranking Improvements among the top 100 Liberal Arts Colleges

Institution	2022 Rank	2023 Rank	Change
Washington College	98	85	+13
Southwestern University	98	85	+13
St. John's College (NM)	75	63	+12
Earlham College	92	81	+11
St. John's University (MN)	105	94	+11
Allegheny College	85	76	+9
Stonehill College	98	89	+9
Vassar College	22	13	+9
Principia College	59	51	+8
Knox College	79	72	+7
Trinity College	46	39	+7
New College of Florida	82	76	+6
St. John's College (MD)	67	61	+6
Trinity University	--	55	--