

## Princeton Heads U.S. News List Amid College Protest

By Matthew Keenan

Aug. 17 (Bloomberg) -- Princeton University retained its No. 1 rank among undergraduate schools on the annual list published by U.S. News & World Report after dozens of college presidents criticized the ratings as unfair.



Princeton, the top school for eight straight years, beat Ivy League rivals Harvard and Yale, Washington-based U.S. News said in a statement today. Williams College was named the top liberal arts school for the fifth consecutive year, ahead of Amherst and Swarthmore. Sixty-one college presidents, mostly from the Annapolis Group, an association of liberal arts schools, are protesting the 24-year-old ratings system. None of those officials, who pledged to boycott a key component of the survey, were from institutions ranked in the top 25, either overall or for liberal arts. A high rank from U.S. News influences applicants, said John Maguire, the former admissions dean at Boston College.

"It's more significant among families than people give it credit for, and it's more influential among schools than people give it credit for," said Maguire, 67, now chairman of Maguire Associates Inc., a consulting company in Concord, Massachusetts. U.S. News ranked 1,342 institutions, including 262 classified as national universities and 266 liberal arts colleges. All schools in the top 10 were among that group a year ago.

"These are big institutions and they don't change radically," Brian Kelly, the editor of U.S. News, said yesterday in an interview. "It's not the intention of the rankings to come up with radically new formulas every year."

### Military Schools

The service academies were ranked for the first time, after a change in classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The U.S. Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland, placed 20th among liberal arts schools. The U.S. Military Academy, in West Point, New York, was 22nd.

Among national universities, Princeton in New Jersey was one of four schools rated most highly by peer institutions, a score that accounted for 25 percent of its overall mark. Princeton also had the highest rate of donations by alumni, U.S. News said.

"We're gratified that Princeton continues to be recognized, not only for the overall quality of the education we provide, but also for our commitment to financial aid initiatives," Princeton said in a statement.

Stanford University, near Palo Alto, California, finished fourth. The California Institute of Technology in Pasadena and the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia tied for fifth. The University of California, Berkeley, in 21st place, is the highest-ranking public institution.

## 'Dig Deeper'

Rankings should be considered preliminary information in a high-school student's college search, said Katherine Cohen, the chief executive officer of IvyWise, a New York-based education admissions consultant.

"It's so important to dig deeper," said Cohen, who also heads ApplyWise, an online counseling Web site. Students should "look at college in terms of what are the best higher-education learning communities for them."

Williams, in Williamstown, Massachusetts; Amherst, also in Massachusetts; and Swarthmore, in Pennsylvania, have held the top spots in the liberal arts ranking every year since 1997. They were followed by Wellesley College, the women's school in Massachusetts.

U.S. News also ranked undergraduate business programs, selecting Penn's Wharton School first, followed by the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge and the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.

## Protests

During the more than two decades of U.S. News rankings, colleges have complained that the system is subjective and wields too much influence. The protests centered this year on the so-called peer assessments, which ask presidents and other officials to grade similar schools on their reputations.

"The rankings are good for colleges," U.S. News's Kelly said. "They bring attention to schools that wouldn't normally show up, they're helpful for parents and students. The rankings, it's been reaffirmed to me, serve a real good purpose."

The number of protesters increased fivefold after 12 college presidents issued a letter in May asking their schools to withhold cooperation from U.S. News's peer assessment. The movement gained momentum in June at a meeting of the Annapolis Group.

The letter signers also vowed not to promote their standing in rankings and to help develop alternative ways of comparing schools without resorting to numerical rankings.

## Peer Response Declines

The response rate to the peer assessment declined to 51 percent of the 4,269 college officials asked, from 58 percent in 2006.

Lloyd Thacker, the executive director of the Portland, Oregon-based Education Conservancy and an organizer of the rankings protest, claimed some credit for the change and said it raises new questions about the weight given to the peer survey.

College leaders are focusing on "changing attitudes and practices so that this system becomes more educationally relevant," Thacker said. The Education Conservancy is sponsoring a daylong conference at Yale on Sept. 25, on the development of a Web site that would help prospective students compare schools without numerical rankings.

## Pell Grants

Besides the peer assessment, the rankings provide details on freshmen-retention and six-year graduation ranks, which contribute 20 percent of a school's score.

Faculty resources, including salaries and class size, account for another 20 percent.

Selectivity, a measure comprising admission-test scores and acceptance rates, makes up 15 percent.

In addition, financial resources counted for 10 percent of the ranking; the alumni donation rate, 5 percent; and graduation performance, which measures the actual graduation rate against a forecast, 5 percent. The predicted rate formula for the first time accounts for low- and middle-income students eligible for federal Pell grants.

The Princeton Review, a New York publisher of test- preparation materials, will release results on Aug. 20 of a survey that ranks institutions in more than 50 categories, including toughest admissions, campus food and "party schools." The Review's results are based primarily on surveys of 120,000 students.

Below are tables showing the top 10 for universities, and for liberal arts colleges, for 2008, as determined by U.S. News.

### **U.S. News & World Report's Top National Universities, 2008**

Rank/University (Last Year's Rank)

1. Princeton University	Princeton, New Jersey
2. Harvard University	Cambridge, Massachusetts
3. Yale University	New Haven, Connecticut
4. Stanford University	Palo Alto, California
5. California Institute of Technology	Pasadena, California
5. Univ. of Pennsylvania	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
7. Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Cambridge, Massachusetts
8. Duke University	Durham, North Carolina
9. Columbia University	New York, New York
9. University of Chicago	Chicago, Illinois

### **U.S. News & World Report's Top Liberal Arts Colleges, 2008**

Rank/University (Last Year's Rank)

1. Williams College	Williamstown, Massachusetts
2. Amherst College	Amherst, Massachusetts
3. Swarthmore College	Swarthmore, Pennsylvania
4. Wellesley College	Wellesley, Massachusetts
5. Carleton College	Northfield, Minnesota
5. Middlebury College	Middlebury, Vermont
7. Bowdoin College	Brunswick, Maine
7. Pomona College	Claremont, California
9. Davidson College	Davidson, North Carolina
10. Haverford College	Haverford, Pennsylvania