



## SENATE RESEARCH CENTER

**July 11, 2008**

**TO: Warren Von Eschenbach, Subcommittee on Higher Education**

**FROM: Amanda Austin, Research Associate**

**SUBJECT: Criteria for a "Tier 1" University Ranking**

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You requested information regarding the definition of a "Tier 1" university used by various organizations, the criteria an institution must meet to be ranked as a "Tier 1" university, and the difference between a "Tier 1" university and a flagship university. The following is provided in response to that request.

There is no formal definition of a "Tier 1" university in statute or defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and each organization that ranks institutions of higher education has a unique definition. Some organizations rank universities by the caliber of specific programs, such as engineering, medical, or business programs. However, the most widely cited ranking systems favor universities that have rigorous research programs and receive a large amount of federal dollars for research.

### **The Center for Measuring University Performance (center)**

Each year, the center publishes a report that identifies the top research institutions of higher education in the United States (U.S.). To be considered in the Top American Research Universities ranking system, institutions must have received at least \$20 million in federal research expenditures for the academic year. In this ranking system, institutions are ranked in each of the nine categories: (1) total research expenditures, (2) federal research expenditures, (3) endowment assets, (4) annual giving, (5) National Academy members, (6) faculty awards, (7) doctorates awarded, (8) postdoctoral appointees, and (9) the median of students' SAT or ACT scores. To be considered a "Tier 1" university in this system, an institution must be ranked in the top 25 in each category.

The center also publishes the Top 200 Institutions annually that includes all institutions, regardless of federal research expenditures. This ranking system uses the nine categories described above, in addition to an indicator for National Merit and Achievement Scholars.

The 2007 report for both ranking systems can be found at <http://mup.asu.edu/research2007.pdf>.

## U.S. News and World Report

The *U.S. News and World Report* is perhaps the most widely recognized report for ranking universities. This system compares institutions of varying size by using a variety of indicators that are weighted in the following manner:

- Peer Assessment (25 percent of the total score) – University presidents, provosts, and deans are asked to assess peer institutions on subjective indicators, such as faculty dedication.
- Retention (20 percent of the total score for national universities and liberal arts colleges and 25 percent of the total score for master's programs and baccalaureate colleges):
  - Average six-year graduation rate (80 percent of the retention score); and
  - Freshman retention rate (20 percent of the retention score).
- Faculty Resources (20 percent of the total score):
  - Proportion of classes with fewer than 20 students (30 percent of faculty resources score);
  - Proportion of classes with 50 or more students (10 percent of faculty resources score);
  - Average faculty pay plus benefits (35 percent of faculty resources score);
  - Proportion of professors with the highest degree in their field (15 percent of faculty resources score);
  - Student to faculty ratio (five percent of faculty resources score); and
  - Proportion of full-time faculty (five percent of faculty resources score).
- Student Selectivity (15 percent of total score):
  - SAT and ACT test scores (50 percent of student selectivity score);
  - Proportion of:
    - Freshmen at national universities and liberal arts colleges who were in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class (40 percent of student selectivity score); or
    - Freshmen at master's programs and baccalaureate colleges who were in the top 25 percent of their high school graduating class (40 percent of student selectivity score).
  - Ratio of students admitted to applicants (10 percent of student selectivity score).
- Financial Resources (10 percent of total score) – Average spending per student on instruction, research, student services, and related educational expenditures.
- Graduation Rate Performance (five percent of total score for national universities and liberal arts colleges only) – Difference between predicted and actual six-year graduation rate for each class.
- Alumni Giving Rate (five percent of total score) – Average percent of living alumni who gave in a given academic year.

Each year, the *U.S. News and World Report* publishes the results of the ranking system for each type of institution. Results can be viewed at [http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex\\_brief.php](http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex_brief.php).

## **Others**

There are hundreds of other ranking systems that highlight specific programs, certain types of students, and rank universities alongside institutions in other countries. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has compiled a comprehensive list of such ranking systems that can be accessed at <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankings.htm>.

## **"Flagship" Universities**

There is no formal definition for a "flagship" university but it is generally understood to mean one of two things: (1) That the university is the oldest campus in the system, or (2) that it is a larger, better-known campus in the university system.

The Morrill Act of 1862 helped to establish the state university system by giving a certain amount of federal land to each state for the purpose of improving and expanding the higher education system in the U.S. Many universities were established at that time and now known today as "flagship" universities.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact me at 512.463.0087 or at [amanda.austin@senate.state.tx.us](mailto:amanda.austin@senate.state.tx.us).

cc: SRC file

**HIGHERED: UNIV**