

U.S. News, 2011 Edition Best Colleges Rankings Analysis Report

August 2010

On an annual basis *US News and World Report's* America's Best Colleges issue is released in late August. Though often criticized this ranking system continues to receive a very high profile among both higher education insiders and prospective students and their families. In that light this report reviews the current state of how Drake compares to its peers on several key variables used in the *US News* rankings.

This year Drake maintained its position of tied for 3rd in the rankings of Regional Universities-Midwest (This is the new name US News has given the group previously designated as "Master's Universities." No change has been made to the membership criteria for the group.). This is Drake's second consecutive year at this rank (see table 1). The more detailed data found in the rest of this report indicate that Drake is more likely to slip back to 4th place than to move up to 2nd in the near term.

Table 1: 2002-2011 Drake Rankings in *US News*

Year	Ranking
2002	3
2003	5
2004	5
2005	4
2006	4 (tied)
2007	4
2008	4 (tied)
2009	5
2010	3 (tied)
2011	3 (tied)

The basic components of the *US News* rankings remain unchanged from past years. They include:

- Peer Assessment Rank: 2nd in region (25% of final rank)
- Graduation and Retention Rank: 6th in region (25% of final rank)
- Faculty Resources Rank: 29th in region (20% of final rank)
- Student Selectivity Rank: 4th in region (15% of final rank)
- Financial Resources Rank: 35th in region (10% of final rank)
- Alumni Giving Rank: 40th in region (5% of final rank)

Peer Assessment

This portion of the rankings is, as a single measure, the most heavily weighted at 25% of the total rank. It is subjective in nature, based on surveys of presidents, provosts, and deans of admissions

at all master's level institutions in our region; however, it does represent the prevailing sense of our reputation among this group of peers. Nationally, only 48% of those surveyed responded to the peer assessment survey, though it is unknown what the response was in our region specifically. The final peer assessment figure is an average of all responses (ranging from '1' for marginal to '5' for distinguished), minus the top two and the bottom two to mitigate rankings manipulations.

This year Drake matched its peer assessment rating of the prior year. Again, it is the 2nd highest of our region and tied for the 4th highest among all master's universities nationally. Table 2 displays the regional comparisons. National comparisons appear in table 3, though it is important to re-emphasize that ratings are given on a regional basis and those rating the Midwest region were not asked to rate any institutions from the other three regions.

Table 2: *US News* Regional Universities Peer Assessments-Midwest Region Top 10

Rank	Midwest Region	Peer Assess. Score (5.0 highest)	Peer Assess. Score Rank (2011)
1	Creighton	4.1	1
2	Butler	3.8	3
3	Drake	4.0	2
3	Xavier	3.7	6
5	Valparaiso	3.8	3
6	Bradley	3.8	3
7	John Carroll	3.6	7
8	Truman State	3.6	7
9	Hamline	3.5	9
10	Evansville	3.4	10

Table 3: *US News* Regional Universities Peer Assessment-National Top 10

Rank in region	National	Peer Assess. Score (5.0 highest)	Peer Assess. Score Rank (2011)
1-N	Villanova	4.2	1
1-W	Trinity (TX)	4.1	2
1-M	Creighton	4.1	2
3-M	Drake	4.0	4
2-S	Elon	4.0	4
1-S	Rollins College	3.9	6
2-W	Santa Clara	3.9	6
6-W	Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo	3.9	6
3-S	James Madison	3.9	6
7-N	Rochester Inst. Of Technology	3.9	6
3-W	Loyola Marymount	3.8	11
2-M	Butler	3.8	11
5-M	Valparaiso	3.8	11
6-M	Bradley	3.8	11

Graduation and Retention

The graduation and retention rank consists of two factors: a 3-year average of the six-year graduation rate (80% of rank) and a 3-year average of the first- to second-year retention rate for undergraduate students (20% of rank). Average six-year graduation rate has the second greatest impact of any single data point on the rankings. Drake has improved the average graduation rate to 73% this year (up from 66% in 2003). The other 20% of this ranking is the average retention rate which was up 1% from the prior year to 87%. Table 4 displays the results for the top 10 institutions in our region. Drake's position relative to its peers is unchanged from the prior year. Improvement in the graduation rate is an important objective for the institution in general that will have a positive side effect of improving this ranking as it is achieved.

Table 4: Graduation and Retention Rank and Components

Rank		Average grad. rate	Average Reten. rate	Grad./Reten. Rank (2011)
1	Creighton	75.0%	87.2%	3
2	Butler	73.0%	88.0%	6
3	Drake	73.0%	87.2%	6
3	Xavier	77.8%	86.8%	1
5	Valparaiso	76.0%	83.5%	5
6	Bradley	76.0%	87.8%	2
7	John Carroll	76.3%	84.5%	3
8	Truman St.	69.3%	85.5%	10
9	Hamline	66.8%	80.2%	16
10	Evansville	61.8%	80.5%	21

Faculty Resources

The Faculty Resources Rank is 20% of the overall ranking and consists of measures of class size (% under 20 and % over 50), student/faculty ratio, percent of faculty that is full-time, faculty salary average (a 2-year average adjusted for cost of living), and the percent of professors with the highest degree in their field, all based on Fall 2009 data. *US News* considers these factors indicative of an institution's commitment to teaching. Research supports that smaller class sizes and greater proportion of the faculty full-time is related to a better learning environment.

Drake has consistently dropped in this ranking area down to 29th after peaking at 6th in 2008 (see table 5). The years of improvement are primarily attributed to efforts directed at raising faculty salaries to better match peer institutions. The change in the last two years is primarily the result of a decreased percent of courses under 20 students. The large size of the entering classes in 2007 and 2008 created the need to increase the size of smaller courses, and as those students have entered their junior and senior years, some traditionally very small seminars have had to grow somewhat to accommodate them. Table 6 shows that both Creighton and Butler have significantly more classes with fewer 20 students, and fewer classes with more than 50.

On a more positive note, the lowering of the student-faculty ratio is a good sign, though the difference from last year to this year is less than might be perceived. For 2010 the ratio was 13.7-to-1 and for 2011 it was 13.4-to-1. In the future an increase in classes under 20 is likely as well. FYS sections for Fall 2010 have had class size capped at 19, a factor that is consistent with good pedagogical practice and can positively affect this ranking in the future.

Table 5: Five-year History of Drake's Faculty Resources Rank

Year	% Classes under 20	% Classes over 50	Student-Faculty Ratio	% Faculty Full-time	Faculty Resource Rank
2007	44%	9%	14/1*	84%	15
2008	49%	9%	14/1	83%	6
2009	48%	8%	14/1	83%	10
2010	36%	9%	14/1	86%	24
2011	40%	9%	13/1	85%	29

Table 6*: US News 2011 Faculty Resources Rank, Regional Universities-Midwest

Rank		% Classes under 20	% Classes over 50	Student-Faculty Ratio	% Faculty Full-time	Faculty Resource Rank (2011)
1	Creighton	45%	5%	11/1	89%	4
2	Butler	58%	4%	11/1	88%	4
3	Drake	40%	9%	13/1	85%	29
3	Xavier	41%	2%	13/1	76%	9
5	Valparaiso	44%	5%	14/1	86%	18
6	Bradley	47%	4%	13/1	84%	21
7	John Carroll	45%	0%	15/1	81%	13
8	Truman St.	37%	2%	16/1	98%	52
9	Hamline	56%	4%	12/1	63%	24
10	Evansville	56%	2%	14/1	91%	7

*Faculty with highest degree in field not available and faculty salary information not available.

Student Selectivity

A consistent strength for Drake is the student selectivity rank (15% of the total rank) where we moved from 4th last year to 3rd this year. Student selectivity is defined as SAT/ACT scores (25th and 75th percentile), % of entering students in top 25% of high school class, and the acceptance rate for new students (all with Fall 2009 entering student data).

Given the consistency in the academic profile of our incoming students, the acceptance rate is a key factor in Drake's rank in this category. The recent shift in number of applicants is permitting the Office of Admissions to admit a lower percent of students. This trend should remain stable for Drake in the near future. The relationship this holds to our rank in this category is largely dependent upon how much other institutions are pursuing a similar strategy or having similar

results. Creighton’s acceptance rate is even with what was reported last year (82%), whereas Butler’s went up 7% (from 72% to 79%) and Drake’s went up 5% (from 69% to 74%). At the same time, Xavier, with whom we are tied in the overall rankings, decreased its acceptance rate from 76% to 73%. Four other institutions in the top 10 were able to decrease acceptance rates last fall (Bradley, Truman State, Hamline, and Evansville).

Table 7: *US News* 2011 Student Selectivity Rank, Regional Universities-Midwest

Rank		SAT/ACT 25th-75th percentile	Freshmen in top 25% of HS class	Acceptance rate ('09)	Student Selectivity Rank (2011)
1	Creighton	24-29	73%	82%	4
2	Butler	25-29	79%	79%	3
3	Drake	24-29	70%	74%	4
3	Xavier	23-28	58%	73%	16
5	Valparaiso	22-29	58%	91%	22
6	Bradley	21-27	60%	74%	9
7	John Carroll	21-26	50%	81%	45
8	Truman St.	25-30	95%	72%	1
9	Hamline	21-27	50%	75%	28
10	Evansville	1020-1238	70%	86%	7

Financial Resources

The Financial Resources rank accounts for 10% of the overall ranking and it is comprised of an average per student spending figure averaged across two fiscal years (FY2008 and FY2009). The combination of expenditure categories (instruction, research, students services and related educational expenditures) into a single per student spending average gives the Financial Resources rank the third highest impact of any single factor in the rankings. The *US News* methodology section continues to state that “spending on sports, dorms, and hospitals doesn’t count” in this rank; however, the data used in this calculation does include athletics at some institutions if they classify these expenses within the IPEDS category of Student Services. At Drake, athletics is excluded from the Financial Resources calculation as it is classified as an Auxiliary. Most of the top 10 Master’s institutions (Midwest) do classify athletics as a Student Service¹ (see Table 8).

Drake’s Financial Resources rank has steadily worsened over the last several years, declining from 26th to 35th (see Table 9). It is unlikely that the athletics spending issue accounts for this entire difference, especially when noting that Bradley also excludes athletics but is ranked 18th in financial resources. One interpretation is that the institution exhibits great efficiency in achieving high marks in retention, graduation and selectivity in the face of more limited

¹ Note: The classification of athletics in either Student Services or Auxiliaries for financial recordkeeping is an institutional decision with either practice being appropriate under Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) and accepted by the federal government for reporting purposes.

resources than our peers. By extension, the institution has limited opportunity to reach greater efficiencies or performance without a broadened resource base.

Table 8: *US News* 2011 Financial Resources Rank and Athletics Financial Classification

Rank		Financial Resources Rank	Athletics in Student Services
1	Creighton	2	No
2	Butler	6	Yes
3	Drake	35	No
3	Xavier	13	Yes
5	Valparaiso	8	Yes
6	Bradley	18	No
7	John Carroll	12	Yes
8	Truman St.	64	Yes
9	Hamline	18	Yes
10	Evansville	16	Yes

Table 9: Drake History, Financial Resources Rank

	Rank
2008	26
2009	27
2010	31
2011	35

Alumni Giving

US News considers alumni giving to be an indicator of student satisfaction, hence the alumni giving rate accounts for the final 5% of the overall rank. Drake decreased by 1% this year to reporting 14% of living alumni contributing to the institution over the course of the fiscal year (2009). The impact on rank was from 33rd last year to 40th this year.

Table 10: *US News* 2011 Alumni Giving Rank, Regional Universities-Midwest

Rank		Alumni Giving Rank	Alumni Giving Rate
1	Creighton	5	22%
2	Butler	5	22%
3	Drake	40	14%
3	Xavier	4	23%
5	Valparaiso	10	19%
6	Bradley	26	16%
7	John Carroll	34	15%
8	Truman St.	53	12%
9	Hamline	13	18%
10	Evansville	24	16%

There is great volatility within the Alumni Giving category as different institutions undertake major campaigns at different times making a change of rank of a few places in either direction not terribly meaningful; however, it is clear that Drake falls outside the majority of top institutions in this category.

Great Schools, Great Prices

Using both an institution’s position within the rankings and the net cost to students receiving the average aid package, *US News* calculates which institutions could be considered a “a better deal” to students. Drake is consistently among the top eight in this list (table 11). The publication also included a list of three relevant factors in calculating the net cost (table 12). Compared to the rest of the top eight ranked schools, Drake has the second lowest number of students receiving grants for need, the second highest average cost, and the second lowest discount rate (all using Fall 2009 figures).

Table 11: Drake History, *Great Schools, Great Prices* Rank

Great Schools, Great Prices Ranking History	
2003	6
2004	n/a
2005	3
2006	8
2007	7
2008	5
2009	8
2010	6
2011	7

Table 12: *Great Schools, Great Prices* factors, 2011

Rank		% receiving grants based on need	Average cost after grants for need	Average Discount from total cost
1	Creighton	49%	\$22,661	46%
2	Aquinas	82%	\$12,363	61%
3	Evansville	71%	\$19,288	50%
4	Valparaiso	71%	\$23,420	40%
5	Bradley	68%	\$22,582	36%
6	Muskingum	82%	\$15,980	47%
7	Drake	56%	\$23,922	37%
8	Butler	63%	\$26,036	38%

Other Listings

In addition to the sections noted above, Drake appears on a few other lists created by *US News* that receive much less attention.

Best Undergraduate Teaching

Respondents to the spring 2010 peer assessment survey were also asked to write-in institutions in their region at which they believed faculty have an unusually strong commitment to undergraduate teaching. Drake ranked 6th on this list, tied with Creighton and Valparaiso, but behind Butler which is ranked 3rd. Like the peer assessment scores, this category is based entirely on subjective impressions of leaders at our regional peer institutions, and as a result is an indicator that Drake's reputation for undergraduate education is quite positive within this group.

Most Merit Aid

In a listing of the top institutions nationally for percent of students receiving merit aid, Drake was in the top 50 with 36%. This is a complicated factor because the initial financial awards given to new students are entirely based on merit, however, when those awards also satisfy need, we must report them as aid that met need. Nonetheless, to have still risen to the top 50 nationally is noteworthy since all institutions should be reporting on that same basis.

A+ Schools for B Students

Drake appeared for the first time on a list entitled "A+ Schools for B Students." The general premise of the list is that all students are not qualified for the most selective institutions nationally, so they have isolated what amounts to a list of selective schools with an average gpa for incoming students that fall between 3.1 and 3.8 (Drake's is 3.6). All of the top 10 Midwest Regional Universities appear in the list, as well as our peers in other regions.

The Big Picture

The picture painted by this report is quite similar to that of a year ago. Drake continues to be held in high regard among its peers and continues to draw a high quality of undergraduate students. Our graduation and retention rates continue to rise and are competitive with the best in our region. Unfortunately, in the areas relating to institutional resources over the past year Drake's position has weakened relative to our peers. Faculty resources, primarily in the way of class sizes, are a critical part of the educational experience of our students. Even with the flaws in the financial resources ranking system, it is clear that Drake's peers are spending more on student instruction and services. In addition, the giving rate of alums is comparatively quite low. Whether this is a better indicator of resource availability or loyalty is not clear, but it does foreshadow the difficulty in building an endowment sufficiently large to provide great financial flexibility.

In spite of the general perception that *US News* rankings are meaningless, Drake should continue to take advantage of the annual opportunity to review our position among our peers in several of the areas highlighted here and to do a self-examination of how we can improve the institution and Drake experience for students.