



**Pre-Reading for Board of Trustees Retreat
 November 10, 2014
 University Rankings Overview**

Chronicle of Higher Education

October 15, 2013 by Eric Hoover

How Much Do College Rankings Matter to Students?

Prospective college students don't care about college rankings nearly as much as their anxious mothers and fathers do, right? Maybe not.

According to the results of a survey released on Tuesday, 34 percent of college-bound students strongly disagreed, and 32 percent somewhat disagreed, with the statement that rankings "don't matter to me, but they matter to my parents." Meanwhile, just 6 percent strongly agreed, and 20 percent somewhat agreed, that rankings "don't matter."

The studentPoll survey, conducted by the Art & Science Group, a higher-education consulting firm, drew on responses from 846 high-school seniors. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they had considered rankings in deciding where to apply. Those with a 1300 or higher on the SAT were more likely to have done so than those with lower scores.

And nearly two-thirds agreed strongly or somewhat that rankings "are very important in trying to sort out the differences between colleges." (Because the survey was conducted last November and December, it doesn't reveal how the rankings might have influenced students' enrollment decisions this year.)

A dash or two of cynicism was also evident in the findings, however. Most students (83 percent) agreed strongly or somewhat with this statement about rankings: "Students who are interested in prestige and status care about them." More than half (53 percent) agreed strongly or somewhat that rankings "matter more to colleges than to students like me," which suggests plenty of applicants are paying attention.

With whom do students discuss rankings? More than half did so with parents and friends. But 29 percent said they hadn't discussed them with anyone. Perhaps they just, uh, meditated on them?

Anyway, according to a summary of the survey findings, the influence of rankings on college-going decisions has grown over the last decade. In 2002 a majority of students surveyed by the Art & Science Group said they hadn't looked at rankings. A quarter couldn't remember if they had.

Still, the summary says, the influence of rankings varies widely among students (wealthier ones tend to seek greater meaning in top-25 lists). In turn, their impact varies from college to college, depending on its market, its competition, and its "appeal."

So says Richard A. Hesel, a principal at the Art & Science Group. Although rankings may have become more influential, he writes in the summary, "we would argue against spending too much institutional time, money, and energy on hand wringing over rank per se and on attempts to improve it. ... In short, for most, trying to game the ranking numbers is a fool's errand."

Presidents and trustees, you wrote down that "fool's errand" part, right?

U.S. News & World Report

Oct. 31, 2013 by Robert Morse

Rankings Play Increasing Role in College Application Choices

A new poll shows students predominantly use the U.S. News rankings to help judge colleges.

New research shows the growing influence that college rankings are having with prospective students' college application decisions, with the U.S. News Best Colleges rankings playing the dominant role.

A report and poll released this month by higher education consulting firm Art & Science Group says that unlike previous research in 2002 that showed rankings had limited impact on student choice, their new research shows that has changed. The poll of 846 college-bound students conducted at the end of 2012 shows now rankings matter to a significant proportion of prospective college students.

The poll asked a lot of questions about the impact of rankings on the admissions and application process. The data was also broken down to show how the influence of the rankings varied by ethnicity or SAT score level. Some of those findings reported by the organization that have particular value to those interested in the U.S. News rankings include:

- Two-thirds of students surveyed said they had taken rankings into account in making decisions about college applications.
- Students with the highest SAT scores considered rankings more than lower-scoring students.
- Students most often used U.S. News & World Report's college rankings to help decide where to apply to colleges.
- Nearly two-thirds of students surveyed agreed that the rankings are "very important in trying to sort out the differences between colleges." The same proportion disagreed that the rankings "don't matter" and that they "don't matter to me, but they matter to my parents."
- Seventy-five percent of Asian students reported U.S. News & World Report as the rankings of greatest value to them in making application decisions. They were more likely to do so than Caucasian students, 53 percent; African-American students, 54 percent; and Hispanic students, 45 percent.
- Asians, at 69 percent, were more likely to report that they discussed college rankings with their parents than Caucasians, 54 percent; African-Americans, 53 percent; and Hispanics, 49 percent.

U.S. News would like to point out that UCLA's highly regarded annual survey of freshmen has consistently shown the rankings are far down the list of factors that are rated "very important" as reasons behind their decision to attend a particular college.

It's very important to point out that Art & Science warns colleges that despite the results of their own poll, it would be a mistake for the institutions themselves to pay too much attention to rankings.

The report's authors state, "We would argue against spending too much institutional time, money, and energy on hand wringing over rank per se and on attempts to improve it. For most institutions, it would be far better to focus on planning strategy that strengthens an institution's competitive position on a substantive basis: differentiation based on educational approach,

student experience, innovative teaching, and the like. In short, for most, trying to game the ranking numbers is a fool's errand."

U.S. News agrees that schools need to focus on educational policies that are best for their students and not what will help them in the U.S. News rankings. The Best Colleges rankings are not meant to be a management tool for college presidents. A school's rise in the rankings shouldn't be used as a basis for proving their policies are working.