The Importance of Engagement Data and How They Can Be Used.

U.S.News & WORLD REPORT

Robert J. Morse, Director of Data Research,

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America's Best Colleges: The Editorial Philosophy Behind the Rankings

- To help prospective students and their parents make informed choices about...
  - expensive investment in tuition, room & board, etc., upwards of $160,000 in some cases
  - one-time career decision
- Provide the public and prospective students an understanding latest trends in higher education
- Give practical advice on many aspects of attending, financing and applying to college
- As one part of our ongoing reporting on educational issues

Why are the U.S. News Rankings Helpful to Consumers?

- ◆ Based on accepted measures of academic quality

- ◆ Provide comparable, easy-to-read and accessible statistical information on a large number of colleges

- ◆ U.S. News ranking process is independent of information produced by a college or university through view books or other materials that students receive in the mail

Appropriate Use of Rankings

- As *one tool* in college application process
- U.S. News stresses need to consider: cost, location, course offerings, alumni network, state of a school's facilities, placement success, visiting the school, faculty, input from counselors and parents, personal fit
- Research and feedback suggests this *is* how students use the rankings
  - Feedback to U.S. News indicates readers value the directory, college comparison and search on web
  - Studies show that applicants, in general, do use rankings appropriately: UCLA Freshman & Art & Science

Threshold questions about whether to include something in the Best Colleges rankings

◆ If U.S. News was to consider including comparative university engagement data in the America's Best Colleges rankings model…………

How and what would we look at?

Threshold questions about whether to include something in the Best Colleges rankings

Key Factors that must be considered.

- **<u>Universality:</u>** Data should exist on a comparably basis from all schools, not just at a small proportion.

- **<u>Uniform standards</u>** of measuring and common definitions of terminology should be used.

- **<u>Public data availability.</u>** It should be mandatory that results be reported and available publicly; not on a voluntary basis.

Threshold questions about including engagement data into the Best Colleges rankings

- Is measuring and comparing university engagement activities and outcomes more suited for analysis done when school's measure or compare themselves against their peer institutions?

- Will measuring and comparing engagement activities and outcomes fit into the America's Best Colleges ranking model whose primary purpose is to provide information for prospective students and their parents?
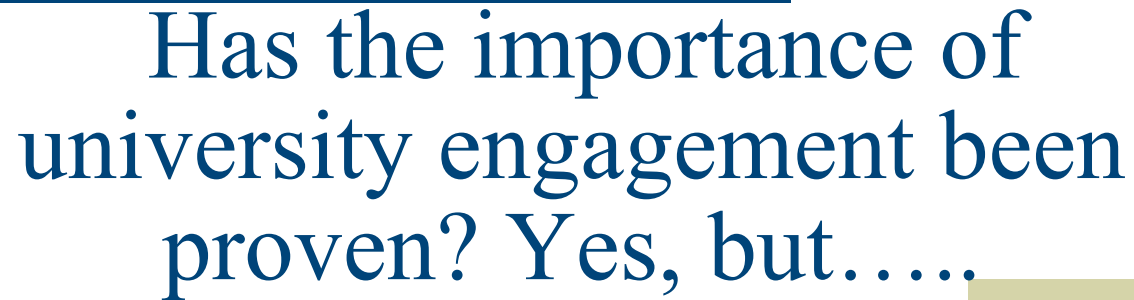
Engagement Data to be in the U.S. News ranking would need..

- Standard criteria, common definitions and universally accepted measures would have to be developed.

- Many of these measures would need to be related to the impact on students or show how university engagement has a positive impact on students by improving their educational outcomes.

Has the importance of university engagement been proven? Yes, but…..

- This conferences proves that if university engagement is to grow in importance, there is a need for colleges to develop more concrete evidence to show the public the scope of engagement activities and to prove that engagement makes a meaningful difference
- In terms of Best Colleges rankings, have university engagement activities been linked in ways that show that they enhance or lead to student success in the broadest terms?

If university engagement data isn't included in the U.S. News rankings..

U.S. News will still collect the data and publish it, if we believe it's valuable to prospective students, their parents and the public. We are all ready publishing types of engagement data now. Examples:

◆ National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

◆ Programs to Look For-academic programs that are believed to lead to student success.

Why NSSE is a success, but fails some of the U.S. News data ranking tests

- ◆ NSSE is a model of what works successfully in terms of a student survey, whose standardized questions (the same questions are used for all surveys) have been thoroughly tested, whose results are used internally by colleges to measure their own student engagement experience, to make comparisons between between peer institutions, or for state system requirements.

Why the National Survey of Student Engagement fails some of the U.S. News ranking tests

* Schools voluntarily participate in NSSE (473 this year) on the premise that their results will only be made public by the schools themselves, not by NSSE's administrators at IU-Bloomington.

* Therefore, from the U.S. News ranking data perspective, NSSE fails the Universality test and Data availability test, but passes the uniform standards test.

* Interesting historical point about NSSE-It was originally conceived as a counterpoint to the U.S. News rankings. It was to provide the public more meaningful information than the U.S. News rankings.

National Survey of Student Engagement..bottom line

- U.S. News will not use the NSSE data as part of the America's Best Colleges ranking model.

- The 115 schools that voluntarily returned part of their 2003 NSSE data to U.S. News make up 26% of the colleges that participated in NSSE that year.

- However, that 115 only accounts for 8.8% of 1362 schools that U.S. News ranks in the America's Best Colleges

- U.S. News now largest publisher NSSE data; data collection again in 2005 of 2004 NSSE survey participant schools. So far, response rates is about the same percent from the 473 2004 NSSE survey schools.

Programs to Look For

2006 Best Colleges will be the 4th consecutive year that U.S. News will publish a list of schools with outstanding examples of academic programs that are believed to lead to student success. With the help of education experts, including staff members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, we identified eight such types of programs. Some of them have been mentioned at this conference as being part of university engagement activities.

Programs to Look For..more

President & Provost asked to make nominations all 4-yr schools up to 10 programs. <u>Not</u> part of the overall ranking. **Alphabetical list with most nominations.**

- First-year Experiences
- Service Learning
- Study Abroad
- Senior Capstone or Culminating Academic Experiences
- Writing in the Disciplines
- Undergraduate Research/Creative Projects
- Learning Communities
- Internships, Cooperative Education, or Practica

Service Learning

- **Alverno College (WI)**
- **Bates College (ME)**
- **Bentley College (MA)**
- **Berea College (KY)**
- **Boston College**
- **Brown University (RI)**
- **California State University–Monterey Bay ***
- **Defiance College (OH)**
- **DePaul University (IL)**
- **Earlham College (IN)**
- **Elon University (NC)**
- **Goshen College (IN)**
- **Indiana U.-Purdue U.–Indianapolis ***
- **Pitzer College (CA)**
- **Portland State University (OR)***
- **Stanford University (CA)**
- **Trinity College (CT)**
- **University of California–Berkeley ***
- **Univ. of Maryland–College Park ***
- **University of Michigan–Ann Arbor ***
- **University of Pennsylvania**
- **University of Utah ***
- **Vanderbilt University (TN)**
- **Warren Wilson College (NC)**

Academic Programs: Internships / co-ops

Alverno College (WI)

Antioch College (OH)

Berea College (KY)

Cal Poly–San Luis Obispo *

Drexel University (PA)

Georgia Institute of Technology *

Northeastern University (MA)

Portland State University (OR)*

Rochester Inst. of Technology (NY)

University of Cincinnati *

Warren Wilson College (NC)

* denotes a public school

Future of U.S. News Rankings

- Rankings are here to stay
- Higher education community will remain highly interested in the U.S. News rankings
- Primary U.S. News audience will continue to be the consumers of higher education: prospective students, parents and alumni

Academic Programs: Senior capstone

Allegheny College (PA)
Alverno College (WI)
Carleton College (MN)
College of Wooster (OH)
Harvard University (MA)
Massachusetts Inst. of Technology
Portland State University (OR)*
Princeton University (NJ)
Reed College (OR)
Swarthmore College (PA)
Truman State University (MO)*
University of Chicago
U. of North Carolina–Chapel Hill *
Univ. of South Carolina–Columbia *
Worcester Polytechnic Inst. (MA)
* denotes a public school.

Is university engagement important?

◆ There seems to be little disagreement with the premise that society is better off when institutions enhance their relationships with their external communities.

National Survey of Student Engagement

- Why U.S. News is trying to collect NSSE data?
- Universe was unduplicated count of 437 schools participated in the 2003 NSSE survey. Schools asked to report 18 of the NSSE student response questions out of 69 assessment questions. Around 115 sent data, the rest are No and/or non-response.
- NSSE data published only on usnews.com. Schools grouped Carnegie group, listed alphabetically/national average for question.
- U.S. News now largest publisher NSSE data; data collection again in 2005 of 2004 NSSE survey participant schools. So far, response rates is about the same percent from the 473 2004 NSSE survey schools.

U.S. News rankings:
Impact

- A factor in spread of the assessment movement in U.S.; the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

- Part of the accountability movement that meant colleges/grad schools have increasingly had to account for and/or explain actions undertaken, funds expended and how students and graduates perform and learn.

- Influences admissions other academic policy decisions made by schools. How real are claims?

- Prospective applicants and enrolled students have become active consumers and have been given much more information to make independent judgments.

U.S. News rankings: Impact …more

- Created a competitive environment in higher education that didn't exist before. Competition makes everyone better and helps students.
- Annual public benchmark for academic performance-moving up the rankings has become a goal of some college presidents/boards/deans. Promotes quality in higher education.
- This public benchmark helps schools, that are not top ranked, move up and show that they have made "real measurable progress."
- Created a "new class of elite schools" (Robert Samuelson). The "old elite" schools, the "Ivys" still exists.
- Has led to the "commoditization" of college data in U.S.