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OSU ranked in nation's top public universities

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Ohio State is earning its rank as one of the elite universities after being ranked 19th among the nation's top 50 public universities, according to the U.S. News & World Report's 2008 edition of America's Best Colleges.

"Ohio State is about access to excellence and these rankings reflect our commitment to become one of the world's greatest public research and teaching universities," said interim OSU President Joseph Alutto.

Jay Hansen, spokesman for the Ohio State Alumni Association, said the rankings are also well-respected by the alumni who appreciate the value of their degrees.

"The response from alumni is great," Hansen said. "It helps the stature of the university when someone can say they obtained a degree from a top public university. It - no question - gives pride to Ohio State when we move up in the rankings."

While OSU seems to have embraced the accolades associated with the magazine's list, many schools have denounced the rankings by writing them off as meaningless and misleading information.

William Durden, President of Dickinson College, who labeled the lists as "silly and superficial" has taken a particularly objectionable stance to the rankings, not in terms of the information being provided, but in the numerical listing of schools from best to worst.

In a recent commentary he stated that you cannot say one school is better than another based upon a simplistic numerical ranking that does not provide enough valid information to ensure a good fit between the prospective student and the college or university.

"The U.S. News rankings are taking good info and putting it in a bad context," he said. "Isn't choosing an institution of higher learning worth more effort than leafing through a magazine that is manipulating publicly available data to build a numerical list for the purpose of selling more magazines?"

Alutto also said that although the rankings are an added benefit to the university, OSU would also be willing to participate if better alternatives were presented.

"The rankings are only a general indicator of quality," Alutto said. "OSU is very ambitious so we pay attention to them, but we don't do things just for or because of these rankings."

With or without the ranking system, Alutto said the only real way to gauge the quality of a school is to explore the university itself, through visiting, tours and personal research, which is one of the main supporting arguments of Durden's mission.

U.S. News & World Top 20 Public Universities

1. Univ. of California - Berkeley
2. University of Virginia
3. U. of California - Los Angeles
3. Univ. of Michigan - Ann Arbor
5. UNC - Chapel Hill
6. College of William and Mary (VA)
7. Georgia Institute of Technology
8. Univ. of California - San Diego
8. University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign
8. Univ. of Wisconsin - Madison
11. University of California - Davis
11. University of Washington
13. University of California - Irvine
13. U. of Calif. - Santa Barbara
13. University of Texas - Austin
16. Pennsylvania State U. - University Park
17. University of Florida
18. Univ. of Maryland - College Park
- 19. Ohio State Univ. - Columbus**
20. Rutgers, the State Univ. of New Jersey - New Brunswick
20. University of Georgia
20. University of Pittsburgh

A Better Alternative?

Durden, along with members of the Annapolis Group, an association of approximately 125 liberal arts colleges, have set out to offer alternative approaches to the numerical ranking system of the U.S. News and World Report.

On Sept. 25, the group - along with the Yale University Office of Undergraduate Admissions - will host a day-long invitational conference focusing on "developing a robust, voluntary, open-ended information system that families, students and counselors could use to obtain and compare educationally relevant information about colleges."

Durden said the actions of his group are not to boycott U.S. News and World Report, but to offer a more in depth source of information to aid in the college selection process.

"If we have an alternative, we can reduce frenzy and inappropriate hype," he said. "Some universities are claiming unbelievable things because of these rankings, like they actually have the best university since sliced bread, but that shouldn't be the message that we send out."

Durden said a university's main objective should be to place as much information into the public's hands without the added hype.

According to Education Conservancy, sponsor of the event, the meeting will address the growing role of commercial rankings and the need for colleges to effectively work together to provide reliable information to the public regarding their diverse strengths and capabilities.

With more than 60 colleges and universities joining forces with the group's efforts, Durden said he hopes more schools, particularly those dominating the lists, will begin to campaign for alternatives as well.

"Change is a very frightening thing for some institutions who have profited by allying with the media," Durden said. "You can criticize the U.S. News all you want, but you won't see any motion unless you can provide something that is better."

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