

U.S. News, 2012 Edition Best Colleges Rankings Analysis Report
 10 October 2011

The *US News and World Report's* America's Best Colleges issue was released on September 13, 2011 (about 3 weeks later than its typical release date). Past critiques of the rankings remain relevant, but the high profile nature of the ranks, and the centralized access to comparison data that their publication provides makes them noteworthy. This report reviews Drake's relationship to its peers on several key variables used in the *US News* rankings.

In the 2012 edition Drake is 3rd in the rankings of Regional Universities-Midwest. 2012 marks the third year at this rank, but the first of those years that Drake was the sole institution in 3rd (see table 1). Detailed data contained throughout this report help explain how Drake moved up, but also indicate that to move higher than 3rd is unlikely in the near term.

Table 1: 2002-2012 Drake Rankings in *US News*

Year	Ranking
2012	3
2011	3 (tied)
2010	3 (tied)
2009	5
2008	4 (tied)
2007	4
2006	4 (tied)
2005	4
2004	5
2003	5
2002	3

The basic components of the *US News* rankings remain unchanged from past years, though Drake's rank within these sub-categories changed in Peer Assessment, Faculty Resources, and Student Selectivity. The sub-categories, Drake's rank, and each categories weight is below:

Peer Assessment Rank:	3 rd in region	(25% of final rank)
Graduation and Retention Rank:	6 th in region	(25% of final rank)
Faculty Resources Rank:	7 th in region	(20% of final rank)
Student Selectivity Rank:	2 th in region	(15% of final rank)
Financial Resources Rank:	35 th in region	(10% of final rank)
Alumni Giving Rank:	40 th 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 regional peers. Nationally, only 43% of those surveyed responded to the peer assessment survey-a decrease of 5% from last year; it is unknown what the response was in the Midwest 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.

Drake’s peer assessment rating dropped from 4.0 in 2011 to 3.9 in 2012. This is the 3rd highest rating in the Midwest region and is in the top 10 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 (2012)
1	Creighton	4.1	1
2	Butler	4.0	2
3	Drake	3.9	3
4	Valparaiso	3.8	4
4	Xavier	3.7	5
6	Bradley	3.6	7
7	John Carroll	3.6	7
8	Truman State	3.7	5
9	Evansville	3.4	9
10	Drury	3.1	17

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 (2012)
1-N	Villanova	4.3	1
1-W	Trinity (TX)	4.1	2
1-M	Creighton	4.1	2
2-M	Butler	4.0	4
2-S	Elon	4.0	4
2-S	Santa Clara	4.0	4
7-W	Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo	4.0	4
7-N	Rochester Inst. Of Technology	4.0	4
5-S	The Citadel	4.0	4
3-M	Drake	3.9	10
1-S	Rollins College	3.9	10
3-S	James Madison	3.9	10

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's average graduation rate is 73%, the same as last year (up from 66% in 2003). The other 20% of this ranking is the average retention rate which was also the same as the prior year at 87%. Table 4 displays the results for the top 5 institutions in our region. While Drake's retention rates have been steady on average in the past few years, graduation rates have gone up. However, the position relative to our peers is unchanged as some of them are also showing small gains in one area or the other. A continued internal emphasis on improving the graduation rate is critical for our students, and 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 (2012)
1	Creighton	75%	88%	3
2	Butler	74%	89%	4
3	Drake	73%	87%	6
4	Valparaiso	75%	84%	6
4	Xavier	79%	86%	1

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 2010 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 more effective learning environment.

2012 marks a major improvement in this ranking to 7th in the region, from 29th the prior year (see table 5). Factors in this significant change include a move in Fall 2010 to restrict enrollment in FYS sections to a maximum of 19 students. This change was made with the intent of improving the *US News* score in this area while understanding that there was no negative pedagogical impact. In reviewing data to report % of classes with 50 or more students, it was discovered that a number of graduate level Pharmacy classes were included in past years. Excluding those courses resulted in the reduction from 9% to 6% of classes with 50 or more students.

Finally, over the past several years Drake has been able to increase faculty compensation and the number of full-time faculty at a time when many institutions are holding even or instituting furloughs.

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 (2012)
2012	51%	6%	13/1	84%	7
2011	40%	9%	13/1	85%	29
2010	36%	9%	14/1	86%	24
2009	48%	8%	14/1	83%	10
2008	49%	9%	14/1	83%	6

Table 6*: *US News* 2012 Faculty Resources Rank, Regional Universities-Midwest

Rank		% Classes under 20	% Classes over 50	Student-Faculty Ratio	% Faculty Full-time	Faculty Resource Rank (2012)
1	Creighton	48%	5%	11/1	88%	4
2	Butler	57%	5%	11/1	87%	9
3	Drake	51%	6%	13/1	84%	7
4	Valparaiso	50%	5%	13/1	87%	10
4	Xavier	44%	1%	12/1	75%	6

*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 2nd in the 2012 rankings. 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 2010 entering student data).

ACT scores comprise 50% of this sub-rank, class rank comprises 40% and acceptance rate is 10%. The lowering of the acceptance rate to 65% for Fall 2010 and the increase in the 75th percentile of ACT scores from 29 in for the Fall 2009 cohort to 30 for the Fall 2010 cohort drove the ranking in this category (see table 7). All but one of the top 10 institutions lowered their acceptance rates, and this is a national trend. The consistency of the test scores and class ranks at Drake and other institutions indicate that little variation should be expected in this category over time, but any institution actively seeking to increase its selectivity will make the biggest rankings difference by enrolling students with higher test scores.

Table 7: *US News* 2012 Student Selectivity Rank, Regional Universities-Midwest

Rank		SAT/ACT 25th-75th percentile	Freshmen in top 25% of HS class	Acceptance rate ('10)	Student Selectivity Rank (2012)
1	Creighton	24-29	73%	78%	4
2	Butler	25-30	78%	73%	3
3	Drake	24-30	74%	65%	2
4	Valparaiso	23-29	65%	85%	9
4	Xavier	22-28	55%	69%	20
6	Bradley	23-228	63%	72%	9
7	John Carroll	22-26	52%	81%	32
8	Truman St.	25-30	77%	74%	1
9	Evansville	1030-1230	72%	84%	7
10	Drury	23-29	68%	68%	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 (FY2009 and FY2010). 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. As in the past, 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 due to its status as an Auxiliary. Of the top 10 Master’s institutions in the Midwest, only three do not classify athletics as a Student Service¹ (see Table 8).

Drake’s Financial Resources rank is steady from last year with a rank of 35th in 2012 (see Table 9). The gulf from Creighton and Butler to Drake in this area indicates the challenge of moving higher in the overall *US News* rankings. Having more resources to spend permits an institution to rise in this sub-ranking, but only if those resources are spent on instruction, research, or student services. Tuition is, of course, the primary funding source, so the tuition philosophy is an important element in understanding constraints in the Financial Resources rank.

Finally, this sub-rank, along with all other factors in the *US News* rankings, gives no consideration for efficiency of resource usage. Institutions spending less to achieve outstanding results (as evidenced for Drake in the graduation and retention area and the student selectivity area), does not result in a positive rankings outcome.

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. While this issue has been raised to the attention of the *US News* staff by the Director of Institutional Research, and they requested all the documentation and evidence available, the rank continues to be calculated in the same way.

Table 8: *US News* 2012 Financial Resources Rank and Athletics Financial Classification

Rank		Financial Resources Rank	Athletics in Student Services
1	Creighton	3	No
2	Butler	7	Yes
3	Drake	35	No
4	Valparaiso	9	Yes
4	Xavier	14	Yes
6	Bradley	18	No
7	John Carroll	14	Yes
8	Truman St.	71	Yes
9	Evansville	18	Yes
10	Drury	4	Yes

Table 9: Drake History, Financial Resources Rank

	Rank
2012	35
2011	35
2010	31
2009	27
2008	26

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 13% of living bachelor's degree recipient alumni contributing to the institution over the course of the fiscal year (2010). There was no change in the rank from last year (40th).

Table 10: *US News* 2012 Alumni Giving Rank, Regional Universities-Midwest

Rank		Alumni Giving Rank	Alumni Giving Rate
1	Creighton	8	20%
2	Butler	3	22%
3	Drake	40	13%
4	Valparaiso	9	19%
4	Xavier	4	21%
6	Bradley	41	12%
7	John Carroll	21	16%
8	Truman St.	59	11%
9	Evansville	27	15%
10	Drury	35	14%

Drake has consistently ranked poorly against our peers in this area. There has long been concern about how different institutions calculate this rate, though since the data is self-reported, there is no way to audit or ensure the data are (or are not) comparable. Irrespective of this reality, the progress on goals set for *distinctly* Drake is probably a better gauge of the health of our alumni giving status. In addition, the resurgence of the Student Alumni Association in the last few years may provide a base from which to grow the annual giving of young alums which could have a long term positive impact on this sub-ranking 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 went from 7th in 2011 to 9th in this listing in 2012 rankings (see table 11). Relevant factors are displayed in table 12, though the formula for the ranking is unknown.

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

Great Schools, Great Prices Ranking History	
2012	9
2011	7
2010	6
2009	8
2008	5
2007	7
2006	8
2005	3
2004	n/a
2003	6

Table 12: *Great Schools, Great Prices* factors, 2012

Rank		% receiving grants based on need	Average cost after grants for need	Average Discount from total cost
1	Creighton	51%	\$23,920	45%
2	Valparaiso	73%	\$22,752	44%
3	Evansville	71%	\$20,316	50%
4	John Carroll	76%	\$22,560	46%
5	Butler	65%	\$26,895	39%
6	Bradley	73%	\$23,712	35%
7	Truman St.	23%	\$18,409	22%
8	Baldwin-Wallace	77%	\$20,636	32%
9	Drake	59%	\$24,971	47%

Other Listing

A+ Schools for B Students

For the second time Drake appeared on an unranked 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 *US News* has 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 3.7). All of the top 10 Midwest Regional Universities appear in the list, as well as our peers in other regions.

The Big Picture

The rankings found in *US News and World Report*, as well as in other venues, are consistently under attack for their validity in reflecting quality as they purport to do. There are data-based reasons to question the validity, as well as the reality of a quarter of the overall ranking being based on subjective judgments of biased individuals.

Nonetheless, the rankings stand as a high-profile method by which prospective students and our peers assess Drake University. The university must continue to closely monitor data reported to *US News* to use for benchmarking purposes with our peers. In addition, Drake must sustain a solid understanding of where the flaws lie in both the data and the interpretation of the data as promulgated in the rankings. Indeed, finding other high profile opportunities to highlight critical areas ignored or distorted by the rankings is one way to ensure we better inform constituents.