



# University Rankings

Top-ranked article on University Rankings.

By Ross Jennings

**H**arvard! Stanford! Almost every student wants to get into a top-ranked university. How can you tell which university is really the best? And how do you know which school is the best for you? Here are seven things to consider in using rankings to help you make your university choice.

## 1. Rankings matter.

Whatever the exact ranking, a degree from a top university will be useful for your career, your reputation and your social life. Who doesn't want to hire a Harvard grad, or marry one? Despite what they may say, universities themselves work hard to "game" the system and raise their rankings as high as possible. Yes, rankings matter.

## 2. Rankings differ.

Ranking systems measure different things. For example, the most famous ranking system for American universities, US News, highly values small class size and a low acceptance rate. On the other hand, Shanghai Jiaotong University, the best-known world ranking system, favors prize-winning faculty and overall reputation. US News also ranks majors, which further complicates things. Here is an example:

University	USN National	SJU World	USN Undergraduate Business
U of Pennsylvania	7	15	1
UC Berkeley	21	3	3
U of Washington	42	16	25
U of Texas	47	39	5

Based on the rankings above, which would you choose if you were admitted to Penn and Berkeley in business? Texas and Washington? If

you get into Penn and Berkeley, you're a winner either way; the ratings are about the same.

## 3. Rankings don't matter if you can't get in.

Be realistic about matching your ambitions with your abilities. Everyone would like to get into Harvard, but not everyone is Harvard material; your chances are about 1 in 1,000. If you can't get into your dream school, there are 3,500 other colleges and universities in the US from which to choose. A lot of them are pretty good.

## 4. Don't worry too much about comparisons.

Most of us have a cousin, a friend or a sibling who got into a better university than we did. So what? Don't lose sleep if Cousin Lee gets into Yale and you're "only" going to Wisconsin. You'll live. Besides, you're the "Cousin Lee" of your friend who only got into Eastern Iowa. There's always someone better and someone worse than you in everything. That's life.

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## 5. Rankings aren't everything.

Rankings are not the word of god. Every college and university has its own unique merits. A less selective university might offer better internships, more personal contact with professors, better sports, a scholarship, proximity to friends, a more interesting location or a more relaxed academic and social environment than a "name" university. Choose a university on what is most important to you, not just the ranking.

## 6. There's always transfer or grad school.

Third-year (junior) transfer or graduate admission to top universities can actually be easier than first-year (freshman) admission. This is especially true for applicants who overcome adversity or do something significant outside school to prove their interest and capacity. If you didn't get into the school of your dreams as a freshman, try again as a junior transfer or graduate student.

## 7. Character & performance count the most.

You got an MBA from Stanford? Terrific! Many doors will open for you. Now comes the hard part – you have to actually perform. Ultimately, a top performer from Fresno State will do better than a slacker from Stanford. Your university degree might get you in the door, but hard work and character will take you the rest of the way. Work hard and build character and good things will happen, regardless of your university's ranking. 🍀

Ross Jennings is the Vice President of International Programs at Green River Community College near Seattle, WA, USA. He earned a BA from UC Santa Barbara and masters degrees from Stanford, Washington and Oklahoma. The "top ranking" in the title of this article is based solely on Ross's opinion, suggesting that you should regard all ranking systems, including his, with a healthy degree of skepticism.