

Keep an Eye on These Schools

These colleges and universities may not be at the top of the rankings (yet), but they're leading the pack in improvements and innovative changes

College rankings tend not to vary much from one year to the next. In many ways, there's virtue in such consistency. But how to identify colleges and universities that have recently made striking improvements or innovations—schools everyone should be watching?

This spring, for the second year in a row, *U.S. News* asked the experts who respond to its annual peer assessment survey to identify schools that fit this profile. The 77 colleges and universities that received the most nominations range from household names such as Arizona State University to Wagner College, a 2,000-student private college on Staten Island, and Claflin University, a historically black school in Orangeburg, S.C.

For prospective applicants, we believe the schools on this list offer the reassurance that whatever their historical reputation (or lack of it), they're firmly focused on improving the job they're doing today—at least in the judgment of their peers.

As happened last year, two midsize schools, Elon Universi-



ty in North Carolina and Belmont University in Tennessee, were cited most often by their peers. Both appear regularly in one of our most useful resources for college applicants, our list of A-plus schools for B students. In all, 39 of the 77 up-and-coming schools are on this year's A-plus list. In addition, many of the colleges and universities in this list appear on the opposite page in our new list of schools with a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching. ●

Top Up-and-Coming Schools

These 77 colleges and universities were singled out as schools that have recently made the most promising and innovative changes in academics, faculty, students, campus, or facilities. They are ranked against other schools within their categories in our rankings (Pages 88-119).

National Universities

1. Univ. of Md.—Baltimore County*
2. George Mason University (VA)*
2. Northeastern University (MA)
4. Drexel University (PA)
5. Arizona State University*
5. University of Central Florida*
7. Ind. U.—Purdue—Indianapolis*

8. University of Denver (CO)
8. Univ. of Southern California
8. University of Vermont*
11. Clemson University (SC)*
11. Emory University (GA)
11. Rice University (TX)
11. University of S.C.—Columbia*

15. N.C. State University—Raleigh*
15. Ohio State U.—Columbus*
15. Univ. of California—San Diego*
15. University of Cincinnati (OH)*
15. University of North Texas*

*Public

A Strong Commitment to Teaching

We asked schools to tell us which of their peers do the best job of teaching undergraduates. Some of the names they mentioned might surprise you

It's a *Simpsons* classic. Searching for an insult to hurl at a rival college at a Springfield tailgating party, Carl Carlson yells: "Your superstar professors treat undergrads like an afterthought!" In fact, some schools do a much better job than others of teaching their undergraduate students. If you're applying to college, you'll want to know which they are.

To see how colleges and universities measure up, in spring 2009 *U.S. News* asked the experts who respond to its annual peer assessment survey to identify schools where the faculty has an unusually strong commitment to undergraduate teaching—schools that emphasize this aspect of academic life.

Apples to apples. Schools are ranked against their peers within the categories we use for our regular rankings. That means, for example, that we compare liberal arts colleges with other liberal arts colleges. That is only fair, since by definition those schools emphasize undergraduate education as opposed to postgraduate research. Schools that fall outside our national universities and liberal arts categories were surveyed regionally.

When we asked administrators at schools on our list to explain what made their approach successful, the common theme was a productive, caring faculty. "People here would say teaching's in the water, it's so much part of peer expectation," says Andrea Lee, president of St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn. When it comes to tenure decisions, she says, "if you're not highly rated as a teacher, you're not even in the running."

Marvin Krislov, president of Oberlin College in northeast Ohio, says Oberlin's commitment to teaching undergraduates runs through the entire faculty. "Were you to come here, what you'd find is a comfort among students and faculty that I find quite remarkable," he says. "These are relationships that often continue for years afterward. There's a sense that the students are treated as peers."

And Freeman Hrabowski, president of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, says his school leverages its connections with employers such as NASA to steer students into research (the university sponsors two creative journals, one of which focuses on cutting-edge undergraduate research). "UMBC is a place where the research comes to life," says Hrabowski, who stresses its importance in his first address to each incoming class. "Freshmen are learning from older students that it is the UMBC way to be seriously engaged in research early." ●

More information, including methodology, at www.usnews.com/college

A Focus on Undergrads

These 80 colleges and universities were singled out most often when experts were asked to identify schools where the faculty has an unusual commitment to undergraduate teaching. Schools are ranked against others within their categories as listed in this guidebook.

National Universities

1. Dartmouth College (NH)
2. Princeton University (NJ)
3. Yale University (CT)
4. Stanford University (CA)
4. Univ. of Md.-Baltimore County*
6. Brown University (RI)
6. Coll. of William and Mary (VA)*
8. Duke University (NC)
8. Miami University-Oxford (OH)*
8. University of Notre Dame (IN)
11. Bowling Green State U. (OH)*
11. Howard University (DC)
11. Rice University (TX)
11. U. of California-Berkeley*
11. University of Chicago
11. U. of Michigan-Ann Arbor*
11. University of N.C.-Chapel Hill*
11. University of St. Thomas (MN)
11. Wake Forest University (NC)

*Public

Programs to Look For

For the eighth consecutive year, *U.S. News* is publishing a list of schools with outstanding examples of academic programs that are commonly linked to student success. With the help of education experts, including staff members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, we identified eight such program types. We then invited college presidents, chief academic officers, and deans of admissions to nominate up to 10 institutions with stellar examples of each kind of program. Colleges and universities that were mentioned most often are listed here, in alphabetical order.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH/ CREATIVE PROJECTS

Independently or in small teams, and mentored by a faculty member, students do intensive and self-directed research or creative work that results in an original scholarly paper or product that can be formally presented on or off campus.

- California Institute of Technology
Carnegie Mellon University (PA)
College of Wooster (OH)
Dartmouth College (NH)
Duke University (NC)
Elon University (NC)
Furman University (SC)

- Georgia Institute of Technology*
Hamilton College (NY)
Harvey Mudd College (CA)
Hope College (MI)
Johns Hopkins University (MD)
Massachusetts Inst. of Technology
Princeton University (NJ)
Stanford University (CA)
Swarthmore College (PA)
Truman State University (MO)*
University of California-Berkeley*
University of California-Irvine*
Univ. of California-Los Angeles*
U. of Maryland-Baltimore County*
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor*
U. of North Carolina-Asheville*
U. of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*
Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison*
Washington University in St. Louis
Williams College (MA)

*Public