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How important are those college rankings?

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Soon we will be bombarded by press reports about the latest U.S. News and World Report college rankings. The media will concentrate on who is up and who is down in these rankings. As with many other annual rankings, these rankings will be based on opinions, surveys, and data that are collected in a very specific way. How these rankings are done and what they measure is important to understand because these rankings can be quite misleading.

Interestingly, one of the best ways to understand the quality of instruction at a college is to ask individual students. To that end, students and their parents should ask those potential college destinations questions such as: Will students be successful as a person and as professionals after graduation? How much notoriety for these rankings? Many university rankings exist, but they don’t necessarily relate to the quality of education that students receive.

The rankings are also based upon opinion surveys of university faculty members and alumni who do not belong to the schools being ranked. There has also been a move among many institutions not to participate in this “reputation survey” which will determine 25 percent of the ranking for these institutions. So what are the biases of those and other rankings? The media will concentrate on who is up and who is down in the latest U.S. News and World Report college rankings.

Another fundamental problem with those rankings is that they create the illusion that they are a fair measure of educational quality. In fact, they are opinions of college students that do not necessarily relate to the quality of education that students receive.

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