

Washington State University

The 2023 U.S. News  
& World Report  
**Task Force  
Findings**

September 2023

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## Executive Summary

- Title:** 2023 U.S. News & World Report Best College Rankings Task Force Report
- Objectives:** WSU worsened in the U.S. News & World Report (*USNWR*) ranking over the past four years, causing concern for several audiences. The objective of the Task Force was to investigate data pertaining to the *USNWR* Best College Ranking. The investigation is intended to help guide WSU's approach to the ranking process. The task force was charged with (a) conducting an examination of the rankings, (b) providing recommendations, and (c) engaging in discussions with WSU leadership regarding the potential impact of input variables on future rankings. As a secondary charge, the Task Force was to collect information to help WSU with effective messaging to our audiences.
- Methods:** The Task Force engaged in three primary activities. First, a brief review of the literature surrounding the rankings was performed. Second, a data review and analysis of the WSU ranking data and *USNWR* data were conducted. Third, the Task Force engaged in conversations about the results and offered recommendations representing the diverse expertise and perspectives of the Task Force.
- Results:** *USNWR* rankings are complex, they lack empirical support for the intended use, and they are difficult to change; Metric reporting is standardized, consistent with other reports such as IPEDS, yet ever changing; WSU had more metric, score, and rank variability on key metrics compared to institutional peer groups in recent years; Several metrics had a negative change trend over several years. Enrollment is more complex and not only determined by rank. Recommendations are offered in the areas of (a) internal procedures and data reporting, (b) student support, (c) faculty retention and resources, (d) marketing and communication, and (e) understanding use and investment in rankings by WSU constituents.
- Dates:** June 1st to September 30th, 2023

# Acknowledgements

The Task Force on U.S. News & World Report Best College Ranking was appointed by Kirk Schulz, WSU President and Elizabeth Chilton, Provost and Executive Vice President. We acknowledge the President and Provost for requesting and supporting this report in response to questions raised in the Spring of 2023 by various WSU constituents about the WSU *USNWR* ranking.

We also acknowledge the Office of Institutional Research for their support with data review and data management and analysis. We also thank faculty for their time and expertise over the summer months. As seen below, this project was completed within a compressed timeline to allow for an expedited response for the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year. Last, we thank Becki Lande in the Office of Strategy, Planning, and Analysis for administrative support.

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## Task Force Members; Report Authorship

- Fran Hermanson, Executive Director, Institutional Research, Chair until Aug 1
- Stephanie Kane, Interim Executive Director, Institutional Research, Co-Chair
- Brian French, Regents Professor, College of Education, Co-Chair
- Doug Call, Regents Professor, Paul G. Allen School for Global Health
- Kim Christen, Associate Vice President for Research and Associate Vice Chancellor for Research
- Eric Shelden, Associate Professor, School of Biological Sciences and Faculty Senate Chair
- Phil Weiler, Vice President for Marketing and Communications

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## Task Force Timeline

Month	June	July	August	September
<b>Tasks</b>				
Rapid Review / Data Review				
Sensitivity Analysis/Data issues				
Recommendations				
Report writing				

# 1. Charge

The charge to the Task Force on the U.S. News & World Report (*USNWR*) Best College Ranking was given by Kirk Schultz, Washington State University President and Elizabeth Chilton, WSU Provost and Executive Vice President.

Changes in methodology, combined with drops in performance, resulted in a decline in some of WSU's scores in the *USNWR* 2022-2023 Best Colleges Rankings. These findings have caused unease among various stakeholders, including faculty members and alumni/ae, regarding the university's standing and reputation.

The Task Force was asked to conduct a comprehensive examination of the WSU *USNWR* Best Colleges rankings, provide recommendations, and engage in discussions with WSU leadership regarding the potential impact of input variables on future outcomes. Moreover, the Task Force was asked to provide any insights on how we might enhance the effectiveness of our messaging related to *USNWR* and other published rankings.

Following are the specific tasks requested:

- Using survey data from U.S. News Academic Insights, perform a sensitivity analysis on the ranking factors utilized for the Best Colleges rankings.
- Examine the availability and quality of the data used for reporting to understand if there are data elements that could be collected that are not currently or that require better governance to improve the precision and accuracy of the measure.
- Identify fundamental performance issues that influence the rankings.
- Recommend a plan for communicating our progress on metrics, including rankings, and our goals going forward.
- Compile a report outlining your discoveries and recommendations.

## 2. Context and Purpose of *USNWR*

The U.S. News & World Report (*USNWR*) began reporting annual rankings of colleges in 1983, as part of their for-profit news magazine. The activity of ranking higher education institutions was a valuable strategic business decision to overtake their competitors in the news space. In fact, for the past 40 years these rankings appear as top news stories in the majority of news outlets when rankings are released. This attention, positive and negative, has led *USNWR* to consistently change the metrics used in the ranking process. For the first several years, *USNWR* rankings were based only on the metric of institution reputation, whereas currently a suite of metrics involving enrollment, student success, finance, and staffing is now used in the ranking process. The *USNWR* rankings are now part of at least 17 international rankings and many more national rankings that use different variables and criteria to rank higher education institutions (Satelli et al., 2022).

Institutional rankings, especially *USNWR*, are thought to be important because they can provide families, parents, and students with critical information to make informed decisions about which college or university they will choose for their education. *That is, families and students purportedly use the rankings to select where to apply and enroll for higher education.* These rankings are purported to aid this complex decision (Kelly, 2013), and have been deemed a measure of institutional quality (Griffith & Rask, 2007). *USNWR* claims that the majority of individuals who visit usnews.com are prospective students, parents, and alumni. Their claim is that the rankings of institutions and the methodologies employed to produce the rankings are constructed with this audience in mind. Rankings are said to act as a marketing device for students and parents to signal successful universities and influence their decision, as they judge institution quality. *U.S. News* relies on institutions to accurately report their data, and claims to contact institutions about their data when accuracy is questioned. In fact, in 2022 *USNWR* claimed that over 100 indicator submissions from dozens of institutions had to be updated post data collection. They do claim that in general, less than 0.1% of rank schools report they had misreported data (Morse, 2023). The ranks may matter, but quality and accuracy issues arise constantly.

Recently, media coverage of the rankings has been growing. Much of this attention has been related to institutions reporting inaccurate and falsified data. In some cases, these inaccuracies were simple mistakes, whereas other inaccuracies were purposeful with intent to increase an institution's ranking (i.e., gaming the system). Such issues have led to recent debates about the merits of being involved in the ranking process. In fact, several institutions have decided to withdrawal from the *USNWR* ranking process for a variety of reasons. Moreover, there have been critiques showing that the rankings perpetuate privilege and are biased against institutions that support underserved student populations (Gladwell, 2021a; 2021b).

There has been substantial criticism of the *USNWR* process both in the academic literature and popular press. Issues about the rankings range from claims that (a) they encourage institutions to act in an unethical manner to improve their rankings, (b) the formulas can be gamed, (c) peer assessment, a subjective metric, is too heavily weighted, (d) they encourage student and family debt, and (e) they do not measure what matters to students. *USNWR* acknowledges these issues. When top tier schools withdraw from their system they claim to respond with methodological changes. For example, their methods for ranking law schools will change in 2023-2024 after 14 schools said they would leave the ranking system. Yale Law School serves as one example. Yale claims the ranking system was biased against programs that aim to boost socioeconomic diversity and support the pursuit of public service careers. This is in accord with claims that the preoccupation of rankings is likely higher in more affluent

households compared to their less affluent counterparts (e.g., The College Solution, n.d.). Yale stated they would not participate even with *USNWR* changes to their methods. Other law schools have followed, including Harvard, the University of California, Berkeley, Stanford University, and the University of Michigan. Nevertheless, institutions who select not to participate are still ranked by *USNWR*, often with penalties for lack of new information and are moved to “unranked” status (Morse, 2023).

Higher education institution ranks are quantitative metrics intended to aid an enrollment decision. Given the decisions involved have long-term implications for parents and students (e.g., finances, debt, and proximal and distal employment opportunities), these scores fall into the realm of “high-stakes” or major consequences use. This use deserves the same scrutiny that is given to other high stakes scoring systems (e.g., standardized testing), where intended use must be supported by empirical evidence. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the empirical data to demonstrate that a strong institutional ranking is aligned with outcomes of financial gain, employment, or most importantly, a student decision, which is the purported use and purpose (e.g., O’Connell, 2015; Satelli et al., 2022). What changes will be made by *USNWR* to address issues remains difficult to predict, but two things are more certain. Rankings are not disappearing soon, and changes will be continuous.

### 3. WSU Rankings: The past decade

Washington State University leadership has reported on *USNWR* rankings three times in the past decade (2012, 2015, 2020), with a fourth and current inquiry in 2023. It is important to note that WSU leadership has paid attention to various rankings and reviewed the recommendations made by the various committees. In 2012, it was concluded that WSU’s national rankings would remain the same or even improve without fundamental changes. The institutions that WSU benchmarked against at that time employed several strategies to increase their rankings. It was recommended that WSU change (a) reporting methodology, (b) institutional priorities, and (c) operational priorities. The critical areas that were mentioned included the domains of (a) peer assessment, (b) student/faculty ratio, (c) graduation and retention, (d) class size, (e) faculty resources, (f) recruitment, (g) financial resources, and (h) alumni giving. The extent to which recommendations were followed is not clear.

In 2015, it was noted that WSU rankings were declining while peers were improving. The rankings were to be monitored by the Institutional Effectiveness Council (IEC). Subgroups were suggested to focus on key aspects of the ranking domains including (a) reputation, (b) alumni giving, (c) retention, (d) selectivity, (e) graduation rate, (f) faculty resources, and (g) financial resources.

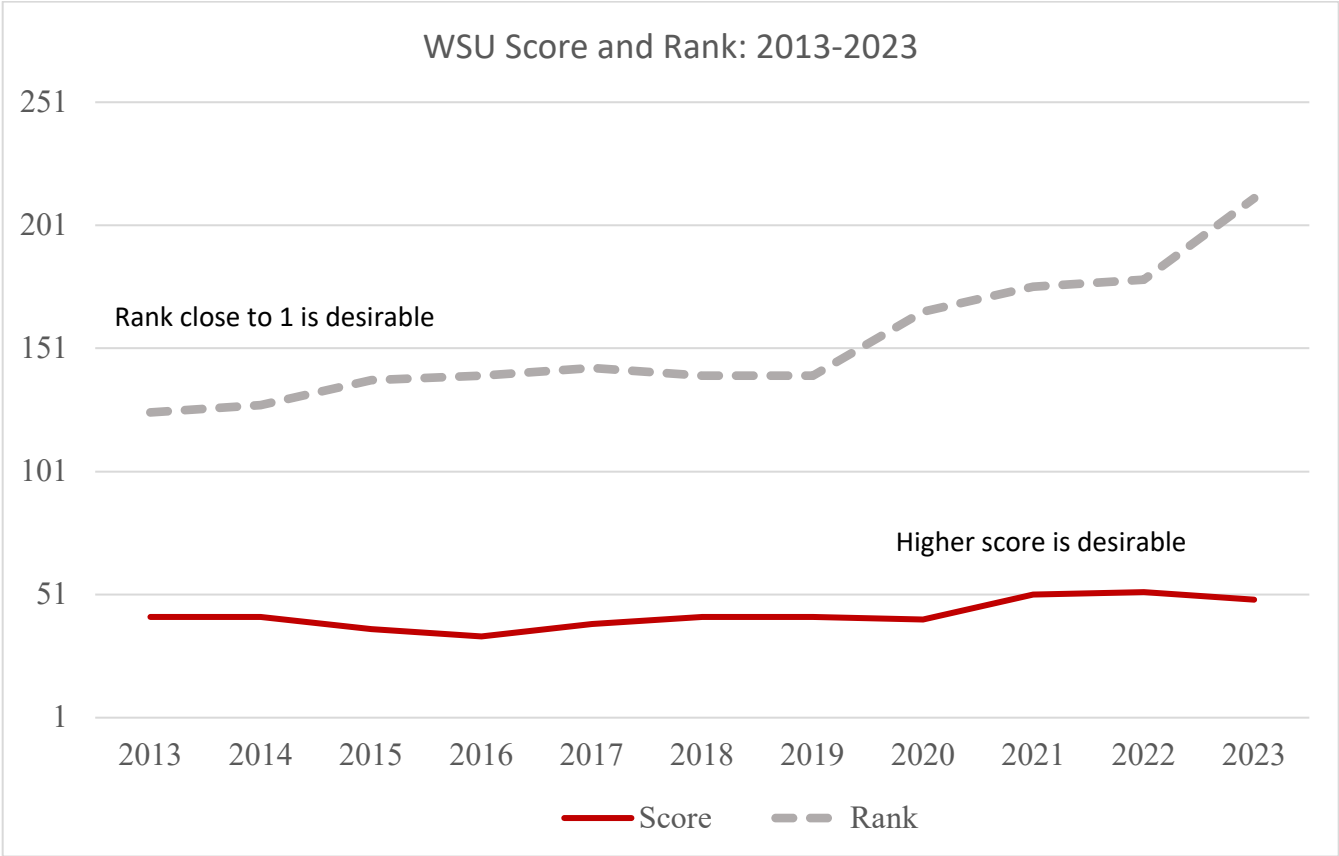
In 2020, it was noted that this was the third report since 2013 wrestling with the rankings issue, including the *USNWR* rankings. The 2020 report focused on rankings in general, and not only *USNWR*. The report offered 15 detailed recommendations ranging from working with database services and internal systems to have accurate data on productivity, resources, and student data, to increasing alumni giving, increase marketing of WSU, and improve our student retention and graduation rates.

A consistent theme in the previous three reports is that rankings can be idiosyncratic, and it has been suggested that WSU should not use its limited resources chasing or moving our ranking. Instead, resources should be used to increase our performance on indicators that support WSU’s mission. This idea is in accord with other recommendations in higher education literature. Specifically, short-term gains using vital institutional resources to increase rankings comes at the expense of meaningful activities not captured in ranking metrics (e.g., serving

certain student populations). That is, appeasing a *USNWR* metric may be saying ‘no’ to a resource that is aligned with the university mission, creating a paradoxical effect in a given higher education institution (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012). Consequently, it is important to remain mindful of this paradox when acting on recommendations offered in this report. Balancing this idea will influence how WSU allocates resources to maintain and grow as an academic institution.

Figure 1 displays WSU *USNWR* scores and ranks for the years 2013-2023. The *USNWR* score for each institution is calculated from the combination of several metrics (e.g., graduation rate, faculty resources). These scores are then used to create the ranks. Each year, a higher score for an institution results in a lower, more desirable rank, but the relative relationship between score and rank varies between years. For example, for the data presented in Figure 1, WSU’s score in 2016 was not as good (score=34) with a rank of 140 (better), while in 2022 the score was better (score=52) but the rank was worse (179). One reason for this inverted relationship is that every year more institutions are added to the algorithm. If new institutions are added that have a better score than WSU, then the rank will worsen even if the score is unchanged. Details of these issues are provided in the Review section below.

Figure 1. WSU *USNWR* Scores and Ranks for the Years 2013-2023



## 4. Brief Review

This section provides a brief review of how the algorithm for *USNWR* scores and ranks has changed over time. Note that there are many articles that have examined ranks and debated the merits of ranks and associated issues over the years. Herein we provide a brief summary information for perspective.

### *USNWR Ranking Scores, Weights, Change and Corrections Vary Across Time*

It is helpful to understand how the scores and ranks are created, and how they have evolved over time. This provides insight to the complexity of the system that *USNWR* uses and highlights the fact that their system changes frequently in terms of metrics, weights given to the metrics, and adjustments to scoring formulas and routines. The different components of the *USNWR* system are not always transparent or disclosed to the public. In fact, the lack of clarity that surrounds the calculation of the scores and rankings make it difficult to duplicate, even when all data are available to the institution (e.g., Alsmadi et al., 2020; Bougnol & Dula, 2015).

The figure below documents how the composition of metrics and metric weights used in scoring and ranking change over time. The different colors in Figure 2 represent different metrics, and the vertical size of the colored area represents the weight given to that metric. In 1988, the far-left column shows that rankings were only based on peer reputation (100% weight). Between 1988 and 2023, the factors included and their relative weights change frequently. Table 1, for example, shows the weight for peer reputation (now labeled expert opinion) is reduced to 20%. These changes over time appear to be based on feedback, responses to criticisms, and the changing landscape of higher education, but it also makes it difficult to develop strategies to improve a rank because factor weights may change over time, and change can be significant from year to year.

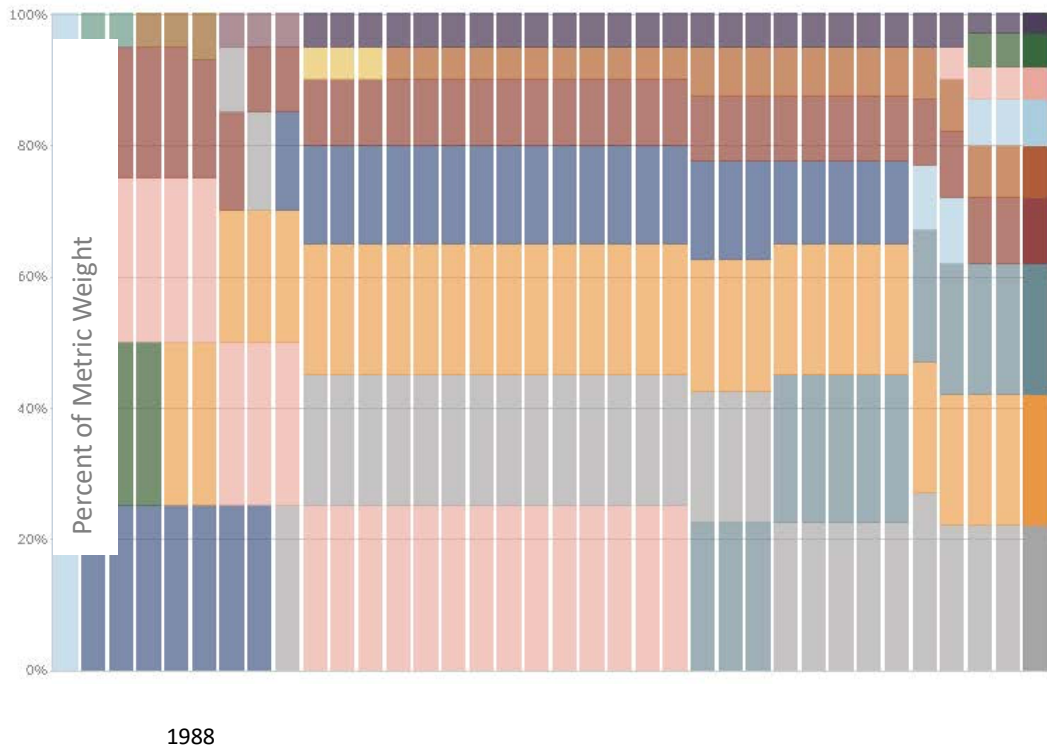
Table 1. *Example of Changes in Factors that are Included in U.S. News Rankings and Their Relative Weights for 2015 and 2023.*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>2015 relative weight</b>	<b>2023 relative weight</b>
Alumni giving	5%	3%
Graduation rate performance	7.5%	8%
Financial resources	10%	10%
Student selectivity	12.5%	
Faculty resources	20%	20%
Expert opinion	22.5%	20%
Graduation and retention rates	22.5%	22%
Graduation indebtedness		5%
Social mobility		5%
Student excellence		7%
Total	100%	100%

Figure 2. Ranking Methodology Weights and Changes Across Time.



**Methodology: Weights & Changes Over Time**



The *USNWR* employs a weighted sum procedure to produce an institution’s score. In step 1, a z-score is produced for every metric or indicator by calculating the number of standard deviations above or below the mean value for a ranking category across all institutions. In step 2, the z-scores are multiplied by the *USNWR* determined weights for that indicator. Step 3 involves summing the weighted z-scores. In step 4, the summed z-scores are rescaled by adding the absolute value of the lowest summed z-scores in the respective categories. This produces an overall score that is the institution’s summed, rescaled z-score divided by the highest such value among the institutions within their ranking categories. This composite and unitless score is then rounded and multiplied by 100 to create integers from 0 to 100. The number 1 ranked school’s score in each ranking category is equal to 100. Ranks with ties are assigned in descending order

of overall scores down to the lowest score. *USNWR* elects to only display the ranking range of the bottom 25% instead of the individual rank for these institutions.

*USNWR* documents how institutional scores are created in the materials housed within Academic Insights, a subscription-based tool that *USNWR* makes available to institutions (for a fee). However, *USNWR* has never published the exact formula nor the full datasets they use. This raises ongoing concerns and criticisms from those investigating the rankings (e.g., Alsmadi et al., 2020; Bougnol & Dula, 2015). Some researchers have successfully reproduced or reverse engineered the ranks and scores in methodological studies (e.g., Alsmadi et al., 2020), and these highlight the complexity and effort required to replicate institutional scores.

Additionally, rankings may be further misleading given that they are based on mostly self-report data. In fact, institutions such as Boston University, Temple University, and Bowling Green State University were among a list who have admitted to reporting inaccurate or false data with the intent to improve their rankings (e.g., Jaschik, 2019). These institutions had their ranks removed due to falsification. Notably, *USNWR* will remove an institution's rank if the institution asks *USNWR* to correct their submitted data. *USNWR* publishes a list of the offending institutions (e.g., Morse, 2023). Not all errors are purposeful, however (e.g., transposed digits in a number), and corrections continue each year when problems are discovered. For example, in 2023 several medical schools, a law school, nursing, and engineering programs had to make corrections to their data for various years going back to 2019. Even with these corrections, the rankings that stood from 2019 until 2023 may have been inaccurate, providing students and parents with misleading information, as those cohorts made critical decisions about their education. In contrast, the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) within the U.S. Department of Education for which all schools receiving Title IV are required to submit statistical information and metrics, allows institutions a grace period of one year to correct data submissions after initial reporting.

To understand the weights and how changes to metrics could influence scores and ranks, we attempted to replicate the WSU 2018 rank of 140 using the regression model from Alsmadi and colleagues (2018; Table 3). Note that the model contained 28 variables, but the authors only provided the resulting regression coefficients for 14 of the 28. Applying these weights to the 2018 WSU data, a rank of 122 was obtained, compared to the actual rank of 140. Despite reporting a correlation of 0.99 for observed and predicted ranks, given that 50% of the regression weights were unavailable, it is not a surprise that our estimate was far from the WSU observed value. Further complicating generalizability of this cursory example is the ever-changing weights and metrics. Notice that in Panel A, the sixth column from the right (2018) has a different shape in colors compared to last column on the right (2023). Thus, one could spend much time replicating weights and asking "what-if" questions about movement of metrics and influence on rank. However, adjusting WSU practices to move scores and ranks based on a six-year-old regression model becomes problematic from a generalizability and accuracy point of view. The same type of analyses could be done with more recent data but may be just as difficult as there will be additional changes to metrics in the coming year, and complete disclosure of weights associated with changes cannot be obtained from *USNWR*.

A major issue with *USNWR* is the constant methodological adjustments that lack transparency, and these changes continue. For the 2024 rankings (set to be released in September 2023 and the most recent data submission by institutions), *USNWR* is removing variables as standalone items within its rankings calculations including (a) Alumni giving, (b) Class size, (c) Faculty with terminal degrees, and (d) High school class rank. These four variables counted for 16% of the *USNWR* ranks last year. WSU IR staff report that at the 2023 AIR Forum, *USNWR* personnel stated that while high school class rank is not used as a standalone variable, it is used in computing the composite variable of Graduation Rate Performance. Consequently, it remains difficult to predict the extent to which this variable is important in the overall revised scoring rubric.

Such changes create challenges that are difficult to overcome. For example, in addition to the changes described above in the weighting variables, a major change to *USNWR* rankings for 2024 is that schools were explicitly instructed to report standardized test scores as they would for IPEDS for federal reporting. Schools that are not using tests scores for admissions should not report any scores they may receive. WSU did not report scores this year. Nevertheless, there is uncertainty how not reporting test scores, per *USNWR* instructions, will influence WSU's score and rank. *USNWR* methodology states, "U.S. News again ranks 'test blind' schools, for which data on SAT and ACT scores were not available, by assigning them a rankings value equal to the lowest test score in their rankings." Note that the potential exists for *USNWR* to change how this variable is used depending on the number of schools who continued or initiated standardized score reporting practices.

A second example of changes and uncertainty is with high school rank. WSU, as of 2019, has not reported high school rank. In the state of Washington, high schools are not required to rank students and a student's class rank is not reported on a student's transcript. For several years, the WSU IR office collected the high school rank directly from schools. Over time, however, an increasing number of schools disregarded WSU's request for student ranks. For schools that do not report rank, *USNWR* assigns one standard deviation less than category's mean (see Appendix A for further information).

### *Score Validity and Methodology*

The *USNWR* is in the business of producing scores and ranks to sell magazines and drive traffic to its website. Resulting consumer decisions can have high-stakes or major consequences for the individuals (i.e., students and parents) who use the ranks. For institutions, rankings may drive investments that are not consistent with an institution's mission (Ehrenberg, 2005). This practice is similar to how test scores have been used for decades for high stakes decisions, including in higher education (e.g., SAT/ACT/GRE scores for admission), certification for employment, or access to resources (e.g., driving test scores for driver's license). Regardless of the use, evaluation of score validity is critical to the interpretation of test score. Evidence must support the claimed use of rankings, just as professional organizations call for and demand for such evidence for other scores (e.g., AERA et al., 2014). Nevertheless, evidence for the validity of university rankings is sparse in the literature.

A fundamental assumption underlying the *USNWR* ranks is that they are based on a score that represents one idea: institution quality. In other words, the score is a unidimensional measure of quality that is derived from many metrics having different units of measure with completely different meaning. Despite the lack of information about the structure of their scoring process (e.g., Ehrenberg, 2005), *USNWR* has not responded with supporting evidence. To draw a parallel in higher education, a simple search will show there are hundreds of studies assessing the validity of SAT/ACT scores. It is difficult to find more than a handful of articles mentioning score validity for *USNWR* ranks. This is astonishing given how much attention the rankings are given, and their intended use.

Nevertheless, some information is available in the peer-reviewed literature. Recent work demonstrates that the peer assessment or reputation score, the most subjective metric, incorporates rater bias (Brenneman, 2016; Larsen, 2003). Another validity concern is that *USNWR* creates scores based on metrics (a) that were never intended to serve as a single score or measure institutional quality, and (b) for which the aggregated score mixes individual student data with institutional level data. The latter calls into question the composition of the score and rank, as different sources and levels of variance are being aggregated without careful thought or empirical evidence, meaning that scores are produced without accounting for this multilevel data structure (e.g., Stapleton et al., 2016). Moreover, ranks are computed and used in the absence of research on each indicator and their associated weights (Farrell & Van Der Werf, 2007; Machung, 1998). In addition, the issue of multicollinearity of the metrics which are aggregated to form the institution score used in ranking may introduce bias in the rankings (Taylor, 2019).

More surprising is the lack of evidence supporting the intended use and outcomes of the ranks. That is, did students and parents think they made the correct decision using the ranks, are ranks related to student transfers, student persistence, and so on? These questions largely go unanswered in a score validity framework. *USNWR* encourages families not to make a decision based solely on the rankings (e.g., Morse & Brooks, 2021; Morse, 2022). That said, every educational test organization (e.g., ETS, ACT, Pearson) suggests the same action with their test scores, but such advice may be unheeded in practice. The take-home message is that there is a lack of validity evidence documented in the literature to support the intended (and unintended) use of the *USNWR* scores and rankings for the intended use.

The *USNWR* scores and rankings have been further criticized for the subjective nature of many elements that comprise them. Often cited is the inability for researchers and policymakers to reproduce the rankings using the same datasets that *USNWR* creates (Bougnol & Dulá, 2015). This is likely because the exact weights used in scoring are not discussed or disclosed for each metric. This lack of transparency in the process is in opposition to the basic principles of open science, whereby data and algorithms are shared, and open to exploration and verification.

Several studies have attempted to reproduce rankings, to understand the methodology *USNWR* employs and how changes in metrics influence the ranks. Alsmadi and colleagues (2020) provide an insightful methodological critique and show results from several models for 2018. They were able to reproduce these with some success. Results suggested, for example, that of the 28 metrics used in scoring and ranking, that graduation rate performance, six-year

graduation rate, and peer assessment metrics were the best predictors of overall *USNWR* ranking (Alsmadi et al., 2020). Graduation rate performance compares a school's six-year graduation rate of full-time, first-year bachelor's degree-seeking students against its predicted rate for that cohort. The larger the ratio between the former and latter, the better a school performs on the ranking factor. Other studies add support to these general findings, suggesting that peer assessment is a strong predictor of ranking (e.g., Lee et al., 2014). Nevertheless, results by Alsmadi and colleagues also question how influential the peer assessment score is across all models they tested, indicating mixed results.

These replication studies also suggest that a major investment would be required to simply move up or down by 4 ranks, which is also considered "noise" for ranking data (e.g., Gnolek et al., 2014). Gnolek and colleagues also concluded that trying to influence such metrics as peer assessment is a challenge and to have a large influence (0.8 points or 6 standard deviations) on this metric is unlikely (i.e., 0.01% probability) for institutions outside the top 20 ranked institutions. Using the 2018 weights available in Alsmadi and colleagues (2020) as an example, WSU could move 20 to 22 ranks toward a rank of 1 in 2018 data if the peer assessment score would have been a 4 instead of a 3. *This would be a substantial change.* However, WSU generally only changes .01 to .03 points on the peer assessment score in any given year, making significant changes unlikely.

Others have suggested and shown that the *USNWR* process may magnify insignificant, random changes in the metrics creating small differences in scores and hence in the overall rank (Sauder & Lancaster, 2006). This effect is seen below in the comparison of the University of Idaho and the WSU ranks in the past year. Generally, rankings are difficult to change quickly, and are stable, especially when reviewing institutions in the top ranked positions (e.g., Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Grewel et al. 2008). In fact, in the analysis in this report, this stability is evident when reviewing the WSU rank against two sets of benchmark peer institution groups. The WSU institutional peers who rank well-below 100 have stable ranks over several years, whereas WSU and others closer around the WSU rank display much more variability, as documented below.

This brief review summarizes how the *USNWR* methodology is ever changing and there is a lack of complete transparency regarding how ranks are produced. Furthermore, there is no data to validate the utility of these rankings, which are also subject to rater and statistical bias. Metric weights and the manner that they are combined changes annually. Nevertheless, despite these significant shortcomings, rankings are not likely to disappear from use in the near future.

## 5. Analysis

Several descriptive analyses were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the WSU *USNWR* rankings. First, we examined the *USNWR* methodological changes, and the potential influence on the WSU rank last year. Second, in response to concerns from several constituents, a comparison of WSU and University of Idaho rankings from 2021 to 2023 was conducted. Third, given the *USNWR* ranks are said to be used by parents and students for institutional

choice, we examined the claim that first-year enrollment is positively associated with a better national rank (Kelly, 2013) and contrast this with similar claims (e.g., athletic success leads to higher enrollment) to help demonstrate the complexity of enrollment outcomes. Fourth, WSU rankings are compared to the WSU Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) peer group and the WSU Strategic Plan peer group for several years. This allows us to see trends in the rankings both within and between WSU and these benchmark institutions. Fifth, data are presented to highlight some highly weighted metrics to help understand trends in WSU rankings, and specifically Peer Assessment. Together, the group of descriptive analyses provides a holistic view of the *USNWR* rankings and where WSU is currently situated among peers. This view assists in offering suggestions on how to move forward in this area. The primary data source for the analyses is from *USNWR* Academic Insights.

From the different analyses below, it was evident that *USNWR* rankings are complex, lack empirical support for intended use, and difficult to change. Metric reporting is standardized, consistent with other reports such as IPEDS, yet is ever changing. Enrollment is not tied only to rank. WSU had more metric, score, and rank variability on key metrics that comprise the institutional score compared to institutional peer groups in recent years. Some of WSU metric changes are related to how metrics are reported and calculated. Several metrics had a negative change trend over several years. Recommendations are offered in the areas of (a) internal procedures and data reporting, (b) student support, (c) faculty retention and resources, (d) marketing and communication, and (e) understanding use and investment in rankings by WSU constituents.

## **Review of *USNWR* Changes and Potential Influence on WSU Score and Rank**

Table 2 summarizes the *USNWR* changes to their ranking procedures as best that can be estimated given the documentation provided by *USNWR* in 2023 (for the rankings released in 2022). Note that these are different from changes for the 2024 reporting year.

Column 1 in the table contains the change and Column 2 summarizes the potential influence the change had on the rank and score for WSU. The first change was to increase the number of the national universities that are ranked from 391 to 440 (note that *USNWR* now ranks universities whether or not data was submitted). Of the 49 newly ranked universities, 10 had a higher rank compared to WSU. These included Fairfield, CSU Long Beach, James Madison, Bradley, CSU Fullerton, Xavier (OH), Stockton, CSU San Bernardino, La Salle, Springfield Coll (MA). This change was also associated with an increase in the pool of administrators (i.e., President, Provost, Admissions Director) who are asked to complete the institution reputation survey (i.e., peer assessment). Both changes likely led to a drop in the WSU rankings. The second change introduced 2-year averages of the Pell 6-yr graduation rate and the ratio of Pell to Non-Pell graduation rates. Given that the WSU metric was slightly lower this year, the averaging slightly helped the WSU ranking by showing a gain in graduation rates (i.e., 0.3%) and performance (1.1%). The third change was to use 2-year averages for student debt. These metrics include average federal debt upon graduation and percent of graduates with federal debt. WSU improved on both metrics and averages reduced a negative impact on WSU ranking. For example, in the past year, the debt load at WSU declined by \$1,299, and WSU had 2% fewer

students graduating with debt. The fourth change was the calculated terminal degree percent calculation. This is based on Faculty FTE, and not full-time faculty as in years past. The impact was likely minor even though WSU declined in both calculated metrics, FT -0.2%, FTE -0.5%. The last change was to no longer have a penalty for insufficient SAT/ACT response rate. This was removed, in large part, due to the pandemic-inspired test-optional movement and would have had a favorable impact for WSU because the university received significantly fewer test scores between 2020 (85%) and 2021 (11%). *USNWR* used the 2020 numbers instead given the lack of information in 2021.

Table 2.

*Changes to the USNWR 2023 Procedures and the Potential Influence on WSU Rank and Score*

<b>Procedure Change</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Potential Impact</b>
National Universities pool increased by 49 institutions	10 of the 49 ranked ahead of WSU; almost 150 additional participants in reputation surveys	Negative; Moderate
Introduced 2-year averages for Social Mobility	Averaging improves WSU's position slightly	Positive; Small
Introduced 2-year averages for Student Debt data	WSU improved on this metric	Positive; Small
Calculated Terminal Degree % based on Faculty FTE rather than FT Faculty	WSU declined on both metrics	Negative; Small
Stopped applying severe penalties for insufficient SAT/ACT response rate	WSU received significantly fewer test scores; Used WSU Fall 2020 data	Positive; Small

Table 3 summarizes some key metrics that are used in the calculation of the USNWR score and ranks. The second column comments on the metric as well as how WSU changed in the past year. The third column provides an assessment of the impact on the metric. This provides some insight into the WSU decline.

A clear example of influence on the WSU score and rank is the peer reputation metric. This is a heavily weighted metric by *USNWR*, is a subjective measure, and minor shifts in this metric can result in major shifts in an institution's score and rank. WSU has been stable with a score of approximately 3.1 for several years, and a high of 3.2 in 2022. A second example of a heavily weighted metric is graduation rate. This is a metric that, by its nature, is slow to change, and with a decline of 1.2% last year this likely had a large influence on the rank. A third example is the comparison with UI (see below). WSU dropped by 8.5% for the faculty salary metric last year due to the inclusion of career-track faculty salaries. These were not included in prior years because a well governed system of professor titles for faculty not on the tenure track was not fully implemented or consistently administered. Not all institutions are structured in the same way, and this metric does not account for variation in faculty title structures across universities. Finally, WSU typically has large undergraduate classes, greater than the favored size of 21 in the rating system. With growing class sizes, WSU declined in this metric and likely contributed to worsening the rank. As one moves

through each metric, it becomes clear that changes documented in this table and the table above provide a picture of the influence such changes have had on the WSU rank in the past few years.

Table 3.

*Changes in WSU Performance/Reporting Last Year Ordered by the Influence on WSU Rank*

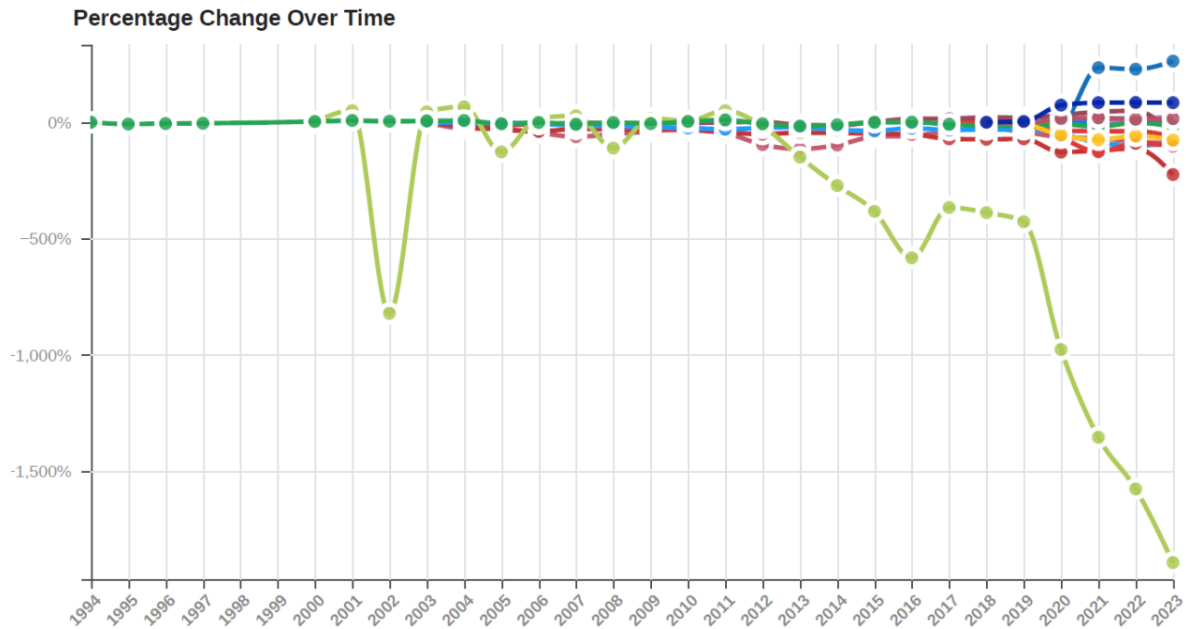
<b>Metric</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Potential Impact</b>
Peer reputation	Heavily weighted in the rankings; WSU generally stable across years	Negative; Large
Graduation Rate	Most heavily weighted single metric aside from peer reputation; Slow to move with policy and circumstance; WSU declined	Negative; Large
Average Faculty Salary	WSU included career-track salary in 2021 (rankings year 2023), WSU declined	Negative; Moderate
Class Size Index	Favors small classes < 21; WSU declined	Negative; Moderate
Graduation Performance	Metric is adjusted over time; Difference between actual 6-year graduation rate and <i>USNWR</i> 's predicted rate. 2015 cohort was strong; 2021 was -7%.	Negative; Small to moderate
Undergraduate Alumni/ae Giving	2-year average percentage of all undergraduate alumni/ae who donated to the institution that year; WSU declined.	Negative; Small
Class Rank in High School	WSU does not have data for a variety of reasons. 0 points on 2%.	Negative; Small

Perseveration on the exact details of how much change occurred within each metric may not be warranted for two primary reasons. First, WSU has little control, year-to-year, for several metrics. Second, metrics and their weights are adjusted by *USNWR* frequently and lack transparency in the exact calculations. We examined how WSU has shifted in the ranking for the past 30 years (Panel A) and 10 years (Panel B) in Figure 3. The last 10 years were selected to assist in showing that metrics are slow to move, even with institutional focus on these for the last decade, as documented in the previous WSU reports and recommendations on national rankings.

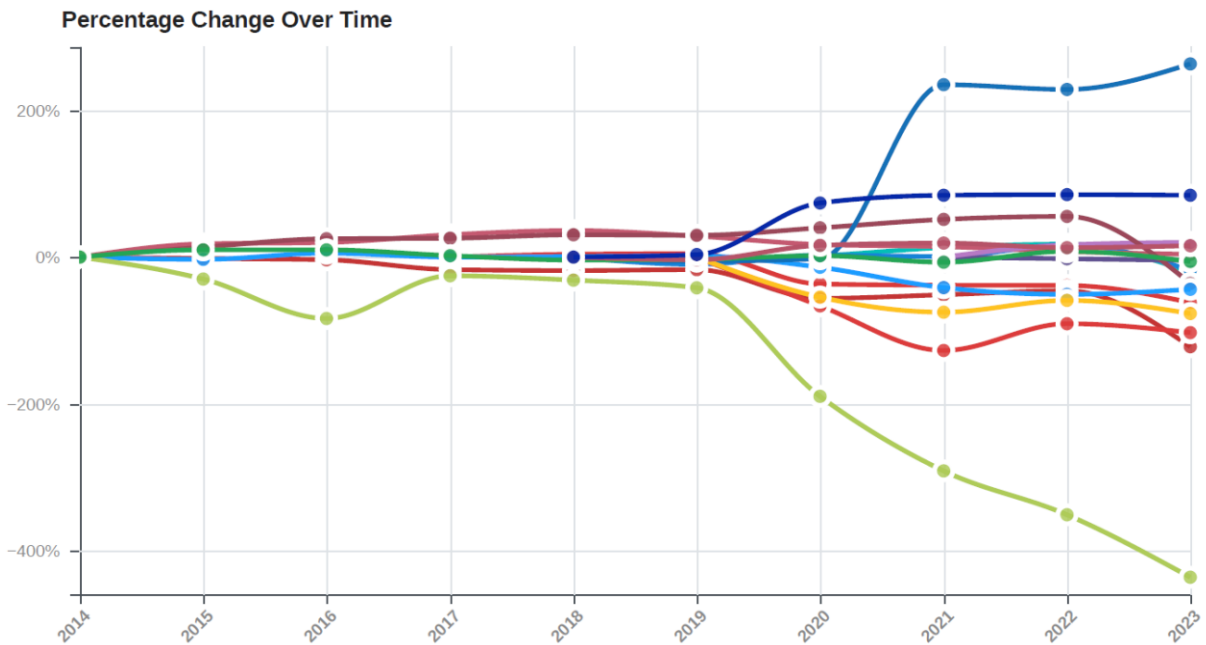
Panel A suggests generally stability on many metrics over a 30-year time horizon. Panel C contains the legend for the color-metric match and the 2023 rank for a given metric. Three trends at this time scale stand out. First, most of the metrics are stable over many years. Second, the lime green line shows a large change in 2002 and then a sharp change from 2013 to 2023. This line represents the change in the graduation rate performance rank. In 2012, the WSU rank

on this metric was **21** compared to a rank of **359** in 2023. Third, most changes in metrics appear within the last 5 years. Let us look at Panel B to observe recent changes.

Figure 3. WSU Percentage Change in Ranking Metrics for 30 (Panel A) and 10 (Panel B) Years with graphs from ai.news.com



Panel A



Panel B

% of faculty who are full-time rank*	Faculty resources rank*	Pell grant comparative graduation rate rank*
Score: 85 (2023)	Score: 364 (2023)	Score: 217 (2023)
% of full-time and part-time faculty with Ph.D. or terminal degree rank*	Faculty salary rank*	Pell grant graduation rate rank*
Score: 117 (2023)	Score: 201 (2023)	Score: 198 (2023)
% of graduates who took out federal loans rank*	Financial resources rank*	SAT/ACT rank*
Score: 171 (2023)	Score: 187 (2023)	Score: 260 (2023)
Alumni giving rank*	Graduation rate performance rank*	Student to faculty ratio rank*
Score: 101 (2023)	Score: 359 (2023)	Score: 210 (2023)
Average federal indebtedness of graduating class rank*	High School Class Standing Rank*	
Score: 137 (2023)	Score: 334 (2023)	
Class Size Index rank*	Peer Assessment Rank*	
Score: 411 (2023)	Score: 107 (2023)	

### Panel C

In Panel B, the lines begin to diverge or show more change moving from 2019 forward in time. Second, as seen in Panel A, graduation rate performance rank dropped from 95 in 2019 to 359 in 2023. This represents the largest change in WSU metrics over the past 5 years. The second largest change was in the high school class standing rank. These data were added to the calculations in 2018 with a WSU rank of 92, which was stable for two years. The rank was 334 in 2023. A third large change seen in the past year is represented in the third line from the top in Panel B. This is faculty salary rank. From 2019 to 2022, this improved from 104 to 66, respectively, yet changed to 201 in 2023. This is likely due to how WSU reported faculty salaries, which now includes the career track salaries in the calculation. Table 4 contains the metrics for the past 10 years that are used to calculate the percentage of change seen in Panel B. The rows in gray show negative change trends. Rows not shaded show more of a mixed change trend. Two other notable changes were with faculty resources and class size. The former hovered around 194 until 2020 when it was 256 and ended at 364 in 2023. The latter hovered around the 240s range until 2020, when it was 347, and ended at 411 in 2023. The trend in these more divergent lines in the past ten years coincides with the last row in the table which documents the change in the WSU National Universities rank from 128 in 2014 to 212 in 2023. Next, we will compare WSU to other institutions to understand the variation between institutions.

Table 4. *USNWR Ranks by Metric from 2014 to 2023.*

Metrics	Year									
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
% of faculty full-time	--	--	--	--	107	104	109	121	126	85
% of full and part-time faculty with Ph.D. or terminal degree	--	--	--	--	142	128	146	143	166	117
% of graduates who took out federal loans	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	179	175	171
Alumni giving	105	86	84	73	67	75	87	90	97	101
Average federal indebtedness of graduates	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	114	133	137
Class Size Index	--	--	--	254	244	242	347	351	352	411
Faculty resources	164	167	170	192	194	192	256	248	239	364
Faculty salary	148	128	111	110	103	104	89	72	66	201
Financial resources	130	134	123	130	129	128	148	184	196	187
Graduation rate performance	67	87	123	84	88	95	194	262	302	359
High School Class Standing	--	--	--	--	92	87	90	308	302	334
Peer Assessment	101	91	91	99	105	104	99	108	93	107
Pell grant comparative graduation rate	--	--	--	--	--	107	178	243	204	217
Pell grant graduation rate	--	--	--	--	--	112	173	196	178	198
SAT/ACT	--	--	--	--	225	217	261	268	254	260
Student to faculty ratio	--	--	--	--	114	118	198	210	211	210
<b>National Universities</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>212</b>

Note – indicates data not used in calculations. Gray rows indicate a negative change trend.

### Comparison of Washington State University and University of Idaho Metrics

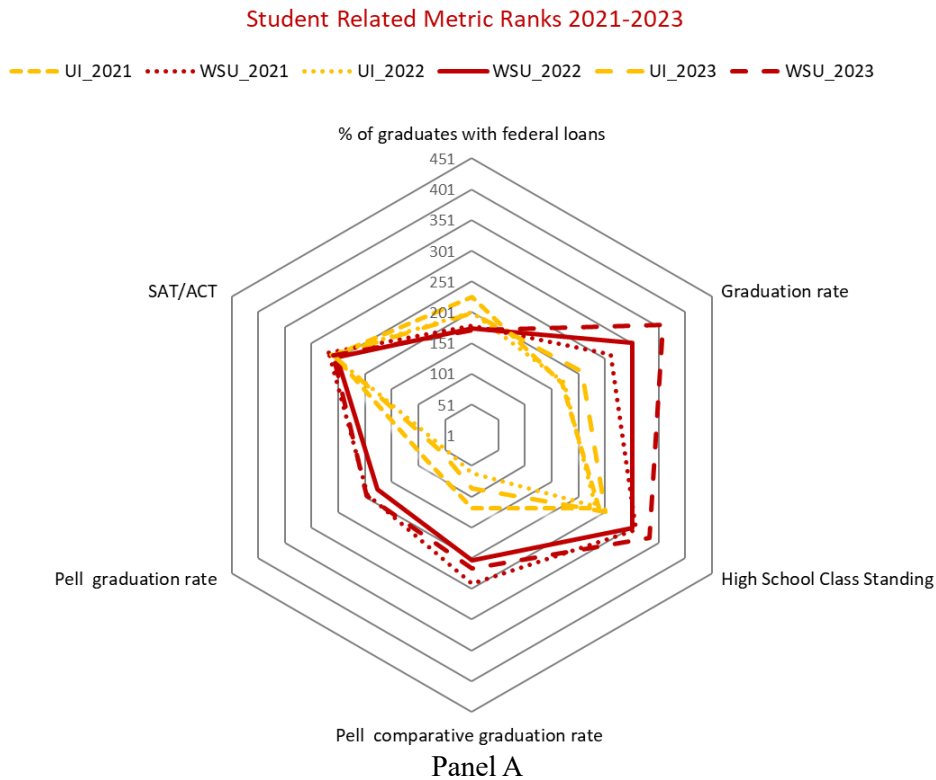
WSU’s performance in rankings compared to the University of Idaho’s (UI) performance has drawn local attention and the following information is provided to address concerns. It is important to keep in mind, however, that UI is not a benchmark school for WSU, nor is it included in the WSU lists for COACHE or Strategic Plan Peers.

The most recent UI *USNWR* metric total score was 53, compared to a total metric score of 49 for WSU. This score is useful as an illustration of the tight clustering of institutions at this score range in the scores and associated rankings. This 4-point difference could be considered noise (Gnolek et al., 2014) in the rankings by many who review these data. Nevertheless, these scores translated into rankings of 176th and 212th for UI and WSU, respectively, among national universities, and 87th and 107th for UI and WSU, respectively, among public national universities (Table 5).

Radar plots of the student (Panel A) and faculty and institutional related (Panel B) metric ranks for WSU (crimson lines) and UI (gold lines) for the three-year period are provided (Figure 4). The center of each plot represents a rank of 1 (a desirable rank) on a given metric, whereas the far edges represent a rank far from 1 on a given metric. Radar plots allow us to visualize how

the two institutions are similar and different on these metrics at a holistic level. The general trend is for both universities to maintain their respective ranks on most metrics across the time horizon, indicating stability across metrics. This is seen where the same color of line overlaps, compared to where the separate to show change across years. Panel A suggests that UI has ranks closer to 1 on many student-related metrics compared to WSU. In 2023 WSU had greater changes on two student related metrics compared to the two previous years. Specifically for WSU, the graduation rate (GR) and high school class standing rank moved farther from 1. The GR metric is the difference between the actual 6-year graduation rate compared to the *USNWR* predicted rate. The *USNWR* predicted rate is based on a model developed by *USNWR* each year for a given entering class nation-wide, associating measures of selectivity and resources with expected graduation rates.

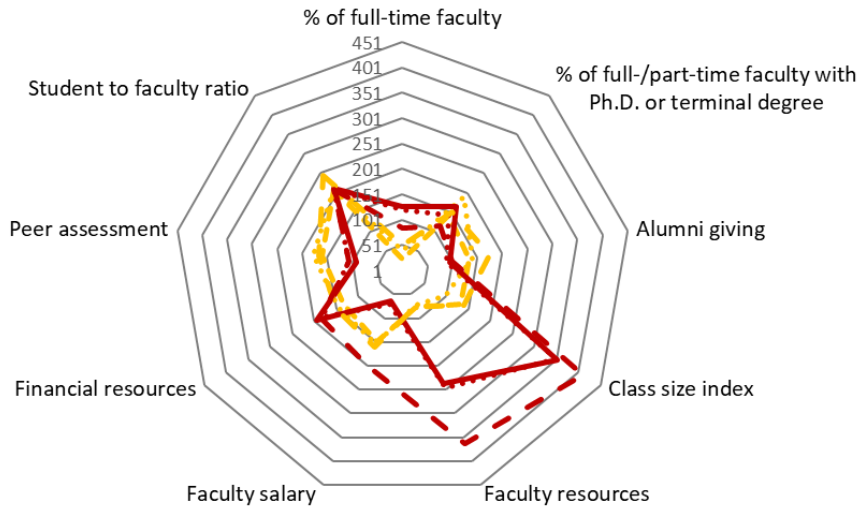
Figure 4. Radar Plots Comparing WSU and UI on Student Related (Panel A) and Faculty and Institutional Related (Panel B) Metric Ranks from 2021 to 2023.



The details of these models are not available for review and there is no indication that *USNWR* modified their model to adjust for COVID or other intervening variables in the past three years. Recall from above that WA OSPI does not rank students. Thus, WSU has not responded to this item since Fall 2017 (for the 2019 *USNWR* edition). Other WA universities ask this of students and data are not verifiable. In a conversation with IR director at UI, Idaho high schools include the class rank on the transcript and thus, UI is able to report this metric. Recently, *US News* has indicated that class rank will not be a ranking indicator. However, we do not know if class rank is a factor in the graduation rate metric.

### Faculty and Institutional Related Metric Ranks 2021-2023

--- UI\_2021    ..... WSU\_2021    ..... UI\_2022    ——— WSU\_2022    ——— UI\_2023    - - - WSU\_2023



Panel B

Panel B contains ranks for faculty and institutional related metrics. WSU had higher ranks compared to UI on many, but not all, of these metrics. For example, we see in Panel B that WSU had a rank far from 1 for the class size index metric across the 3 years, whereas UI had a rank much closer to 1. Some changes in the class size index may be a result of COVID effect. For example, UI did not close their campus during the pandemic whereas WSU did during that time. This could, in part, explain why WSU had greater change compared to UI. The opposite was the case for the peer assessment rank, where WSU ranked closer to 1 compared to UI across the 3 years. Panel B also displays where WSU had rapid changes for some ranks in 2023 compared to previous years within and across universities. For 2023, WSU had changes for the class size index, faculty resources, and faculty salary ranks that appeared inconsistent with 2021 or 2022 ranks. For example, class size index rank was 351, 352, and 411 for 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively for WSU. WSU also saw large changes in the faculty salary metric. This change is likely a result of now including career track faculty salary data in the metric. These metrics were also greater than what was seen with UI rankings for the same metrics. WSU experienced more within and between variability for these metrics compared to UI. This holistic view gives some insight to the within and between institution rank changes across the time horizon.

Table 5 contains the metric rank data for completeness and reviewing the table helps demonstrate the tight clustering in the ranks. For example, WSU declined 3 points in the overall score from 2022 to 2023, yet this was associated with a major change in ranks for public and national universities. With the rank associated with these scores, WSU went from 88<sup>th</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> to 107<sup>th</sup> and 212<sup>th</sup> for Public and National university ranks in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Review of the individual metrics show where some of those major changes occurred as well, which were highlighted in the radar plots.

Table 5. *Ranks on Metrics for WSU and UI from Years 2021, 2022, and 2023. Higher values are considered worse for rankings.*

Metrics	University of Idaho			Washington State University		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
% of faculty full-time	24	41	50	121	126	85
% of full and part-time faculty with Ph.D. or terminal degree	143	190	152	143	166	117
% of graduates who took out federal loans	226	201	199	179	175	171
Alumni giving	135	140	176	90	97	101
Average federal indebtedness of graduates	182	205	225	114	133	137
Class Size Index	133	99	140	351	352	411
Faculty resources	79	75	77	248	239	364
Faculty salary	150	154	162	72	66	201
Financial resources	135	147	152	184	196	187
Graduation rate performance	171	173	208	262	302	359
High School Class Standing	240	232	251	308	302	334
Peer Assessment	162	179	167	108	93	107
Pell grant comparative graduation rate	120	63	87	243	204	217
Pell grant graduation rate	85	49	56	196	178	198
SAT/ACT	259	263	260	268	254	260
Student to faculty	210	211	245	210	211	210
Overall Rank Score	52	52	53	51	52	49
Public Universities Rank	83	88	87	87	88	107
National Universities Rank	170	179	176	176	179	212

## WSU Enrollment Trends Over Time by Single Variables: Rank and the Flutie Effect

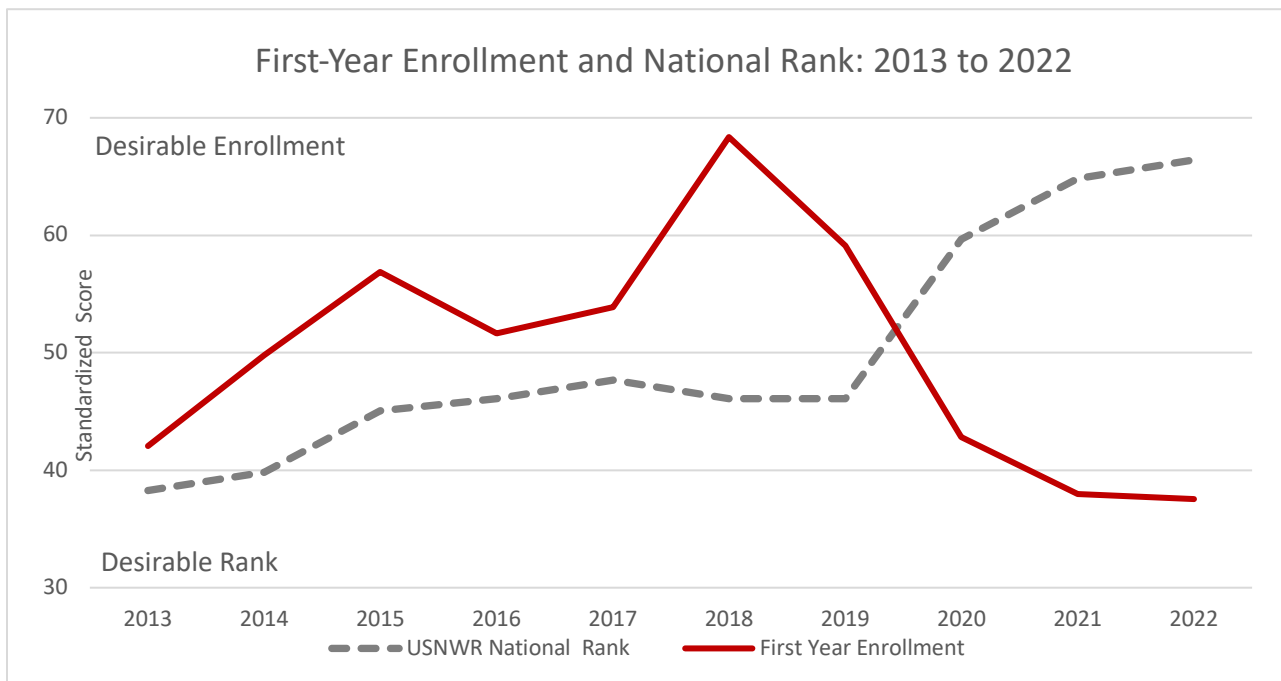
### *A Primary Example of First-Year Enrollment and Rank*

The stated purpose of the *USNWR* rankings publication is to assist parents and students when selecting a higher education institution, and a university rank could be used to guide such decisions. In this case, it is a decision with high potential for lasting consequences (e.g., debt, future employment) for the families and the individual student. Some evidence suggests that students who are able to pay full tuition prefer highly ranked schools (Griffin & Rask, 2007), and pay attention to ranks, at least in the top 50 schools. In our case, the question is “Does use of the WSU *USNWR* rank meet distal goals for increasing student and family decisions to initially enroll at Washington State University?” The associated inference to evaluate is: *the use of USNWR WSU rank is positively associated with initial first-year enrollment numbers at WSU.* Evidence to support this inference requires longitudinal data (AERA et al., 2014). We can

evaluate this inference by examining the last decade of data for the WSU national rank and first-year enrollment.

We found no conclusive evidence that WSU’s national rank was related to enrollment. Under the assumption that families rely on rankings to inform decision making, it would be expected that as a university’s rank increases (i.e., closer to 1), more students would select that university the following year (a lagged effect) or perhaps a few years later because an institution with a better rank is more desirable to the student and family. This implies that as WSU achieves a rank moving towards 1, enrollment of first-year students should increase the next academic year. And conversely, as the rank moves away from 1, a decline in the number of first-year students would be expected. Figure 5 plots the WSU national rank in the dotted line and first-year enrollment numbers in the solid line from 2013 to 2022.

Figure 5. WSU First-Year Enrollment and National Rank from 2013-2022 in Standardized Scores.



Note that the two metrics have been placed on a standardized metric (Mean = 50; SD = 10) for comparability. As such, a negative standardized score for rank is desirable (i.e., closer to rank of 1) and a positive standardized score for enrollment is desirable (e.g., higher enrollment). WSU’s best rank (i.e., closest to 1) was in 2013 with a rank of 125. The highest first-year enrollment occurred in 2018, associated with a rank of 166. Given the possibility of lagged effects, this highest enrollment, if tied directly to rank, could be said to be associated with WSU having a median rank of 140 from 2016-2019. A signal of relative stability in rank during these years, and perhaps an appeal to first-year students and families with this stability in rank, assuming they were attending to and using *USNWR* ranks. There was a slight decline in enrollment in 2019. This is likely directly related to the large class in 2018 and the WSU policy

decisions made for enrollment in 2019. For example, the 2018 class place stress on WSU resources (e.g., classrooms, laboratories, housing). Thus, there was a decision to reduce enrollment and have a waitlist from the 2019-2020 year to relieve the pressure on a resource constrained system. The 2019 year was one of the only years in recent history in which WSU placed students on a waiting list in order to set a limit on class size.

In 2020, WSU decreased 26 rank positions (140 to 166), the largest one-year change in the previous five years (since 2015, WSU moved no more than 3 rank spots). The figure shows that from 2020 to 2021, as the rank continued to move away from 1, enrollment declined as well. As a point of reference, the first-year enrollment in 2020, associated with a rank of 166, was about the same as in 2013, associated with a rank of 125.

The decline in 2020 to 2022 must also be interpreted with the influence of the COVID pandemic. Despite rank, WSU was among many universities that saw declining enrollments. There were also WSU policies during this time that would have influenced enrollment. For example, the WSU system saw many enrollment cancellations when announcements of an only on-line experience was made to handle health and safety concerns of students, faculty, and staff. In fact, a number of socio-political factors that could impact enrollment decisions and could be more salient than a single ranking for a student and their family. For many families, cost is a consideration, and decisions regarding higher education may take into account the total amount of federal, state, and institutional aid. Other families may consider distance to be a factor, and students may prefer to stay closer to home. There are policy changes and decisions about waivers and test score use, for example, that had an influence on enrollment during this period. These were not within the control of the student, but likely influenced student enrollment.

Enrollment is difficult to associate with any one variable. Changes in enrollment can be due to institutional policies related to admissions and financial aid, demographics of college aged students within the state or region, and factors external to the institution or state, such as the policies of other states, admissions decisions of other institutions, and decisions by the U.S. government related to determinations on visas awarded to international students. For example, other states, such as California, have set records with admitting in-state students, who may have gone out of state otherwise (Burke, 2022). As the figure displays, there are peaks and valleys for first-year enrollment numbers, with a general increasing trend until after 2019. The important variable related to enrollment during the last few years is the pandemic. First-year enrollment appeared to increase for several years despite the rank moving from 125 (2013) to 143 (2017). This does not support an inference that the WSU national rank translates directly to more students and families selecting WSU for initial enrollment. And the decline in enrollment as rank worsened is confounded with the influence of the pandemic. To understand how students and families use rank to make institutional selection decisions, direct querying of applicants is advised.

### *A Secondary Example of First-Year Enrollment and the Flutie Effect*

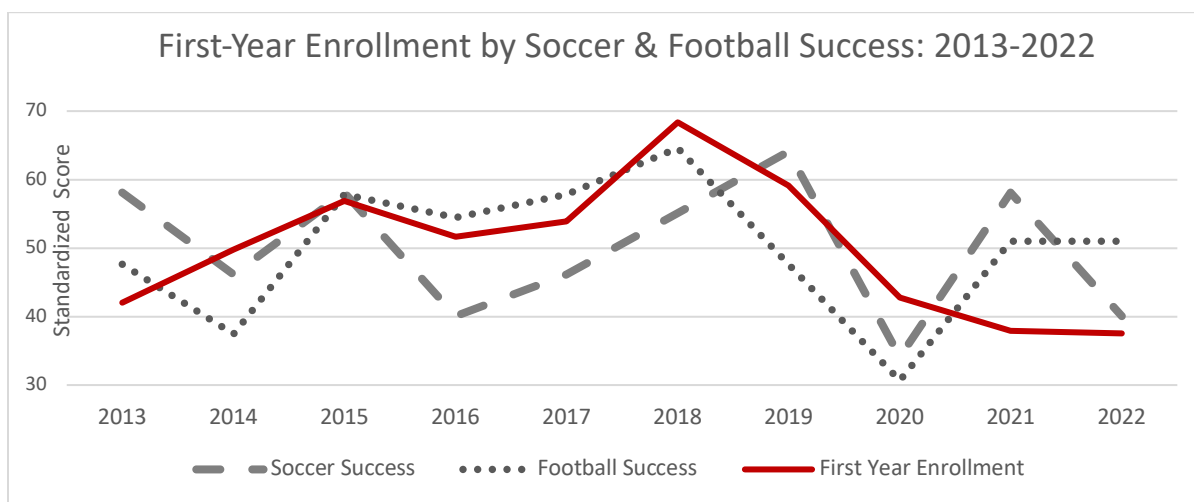
A claim that is often made about student and family choice to initially enroll in a given institution is, in part, related to university athletics. We examine this claim briefly, as it is part of

the higher education enrollment literature and helps demonstrate the risk of selecting one metric and attributing influence over enrollment. The argument is that when an institutions' athletic teams perform well, it raises institutional visibility. As a result, more applications and enrollments occur the following year. This is also known as the Flutie Effect, after Boston College's Doug Flutie who completed a game winning pass in a 1984 football game (e.g., Eggers et al., 2019). Boston College credited an increase in applications the next year due to this single and highly visible event.

Several studies have used complex models to test for this effect with mixed results (e.g., Eggers et al., 2019; Hanson, 2011). For example, while there is some relationship between athletic teams' success and first-year enrollment, there is also evidence that students with lower-than-average SAT scores tend to have a stronger preference for institutions with athletic success, whereas students with higher SAT scores have a greater preference for academic quality (Chung, 2013). Many student outcomes have been studied in this area (Lindo et al., 2012; Lindo et al., 2018; Hernandez-Julian & Rotthoff, 2014; White et al., 2019). Here, the intent is to demonstrate the complexity of first-year enrollment and choice, and the causal danger of relying on a single variable to understand student enrollment decisions.

Data are presented for the same time period as above. Success (i.e., number on wins) of two Fall sports, in place of rank, are plotted with first-year enrollment. Women's soccer and men's football were selected because they are highly visible Fall sports and are most likely to have the Flutie effect. Variables were standardized for comparability.

Figure 6. WSU First-Year Enrollment and Soccer and Football Success for 2013-2022.



In Figure 6, observe that the wins of the two sports have peaks and valleys, as seen with enrollment. There is some correlation between women's soccer and men's football wins and enrollment the following year. However, there is little to no evidence of a Flutie effect. If this would have occurred, the two likely years would have been in 2019 and 2020. WSU's men's football's best year in the past decade was in 2018. This year was marked by 11 wins, a bowl game win, which was one of two wins in nine bowl appearances since 2013. In 2019, WSU

women's soccer had an outstandingly successful year with 16 wins and a 4-1-0 record in the NCAA tournament, reaching the semifinals. However, there was no associated spike (Flutie effect) in enrollment in the Fall of 2019 or 2020 (the latter being confounded with the pandemic).

The peaks and valleys in the data point to the complexity of enrollment, and that student and family decisions about attending WSU are likely not driven by a rank, a win record, or a single event, or successful year. That is, a single metric likely is not used in the decision process. Multiple factors, scores, or indicators must be considered when such a high-stakes decision is made (AERA et al., 2014).

### **Comparisons to WSU Strategic Plan and COACHE Peers**

Washington State University aims for excellence. In doing so, WSU compares performance for a number of metrics with two sets of institutional peers. These peers provide points of reference, for setting goals, assessing purposes, and for institutional planning. Data are presented from 2019 to 2023. These years are selected given WSU saw the largest change in national universities rank from 2019 (140) to 2020 (166).

The first set of peers were identified in the development of the 2020-2025 strategic plan (i.e., Strategic Plan peers). This list was created by the Institutional Effectiveness Council steering committee and includes doctorate-granting universities with very high research activity (see <https://ir.wsu.edu/strategic-plan-peers/> for additional information). The peers include Colorado State University-Fort Collins, Iowa State University, Louisiana State University and A&M, Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University Raleigh, Oregon State University, Purdue University-Main, University of Georgia, University of Maryland-College Park, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and Virginia Tech.

The second set of peers comes from the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) and includes Iowa State University of Science and Technology, North Carolina State University, Purdue University-West Lafayette, University of California-Davis, and University of Missouri.

To better understand our *USNWR* ranks, it is helpful to see WSU trends over time in comparison to WSU peers. This allows us to understand how WSU is performing on the metrics over time, or within institution variance, as well as understand how WSU compares to WSU peers, or between institution variance. The results demonstrate that WSU, compared to our two peer groups, had larger changes for metrics in the past two years and had more variability for these metrics over the past five years. Our peers ranked 100 or better tended to have more stability in their rank across time compared to WSU and similar ranked institutions to WSU.

### **Strategic Plan Peers Comparison**

Figure 7 contains the National Universities Rank from 2019 to 2023 for WSU and each institution in the WSU Strategic Plan Peer (SPP) group. The Y-axis is the national rank, and the X-axis shows the year. WSU is highlighted by the dotted line. Three trends stand out quickly

when viewing the figure. First, since 2019, WSU has been outranked by the majority of the peer group. Noticed that WSU had the same rank as Colorado State University in 2019 (i.e., 140) and 2020 (i.e., 166). Since that time, only Mississippi State University (MSU) has had a worse rank than WSU, but WSU surpassed MSU for the lowest spot in 2023 (i.e., 212 vs. 194).

Second, WSU has a less desirable decreasing trend across these years, compared to our peers; only Louisiana State University also decreased. In fact, WSU has had more variability in rankings across these years compared to our SPP group. The standard deviation (SD) of WSU ranking is approximately 26, whereas the peer group SD range was from 1.4 to 13.3 (their rankings were more stable).

Third, there are institutions in the peer group who remain well under a rank of 100 across this time horizon. These include North Carolina State University, Purdue University, University of Georgia, University of Maryland, and Virginia Tech. The remaining peers in this group remain above a rank of 100 with what appears to be more variability in ranks across time in comparison to this lower group. To better understand some of the change in WSU's rank, it may be helpful to view changes in the individual metrics from 2022 to 2023 and compare this, on average, to the SPP group. These two years are selected, as it is when the largest change in WSU national rank occurred.

Figure 7. National University Rank for WSU and the Strategic Plan Peer Group from 2019 to 2023.

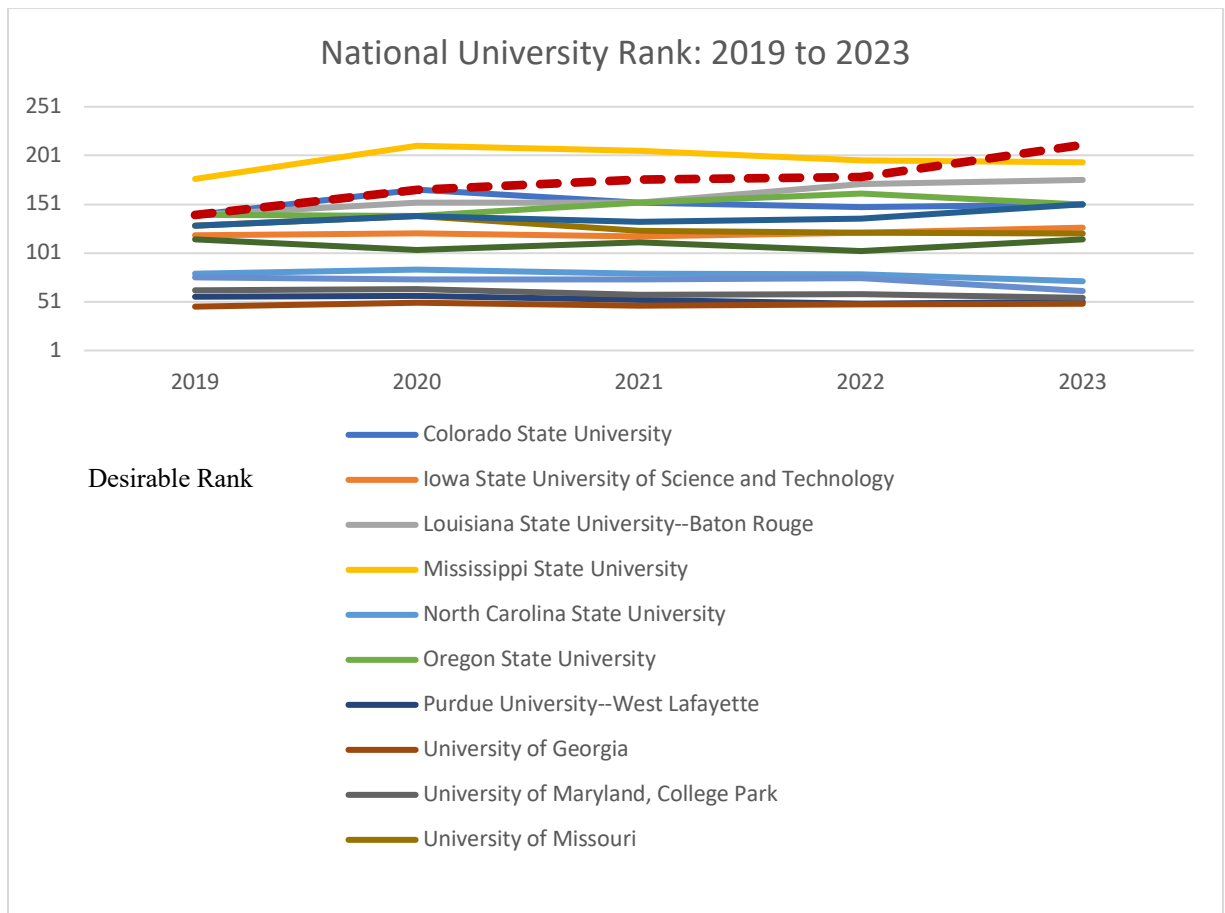


Table 6 displays the primary metrics used in creating scores and then ranks for WSU and the SPP group. The second and fourth columns present the WSU and the SPP group ranks, respectively, for 2023. Columns three and five provide the percentage of change from 2022 to 2023. The positive value indicates a change to a more desirable rank, whereas a negative value indicates a less desirable change in rank (i.e., farther from 1). Note that the values for the WSU SPP group is an average rank and change is based on the group of schools.

Four rows appear in bold to draw attention to change that was large for WSU compared to the SPP group. Notice that WSU had a large and positive percentage change on the metric of % of faculty full-time compared to the SPP group (i.e., 48% vs. - 4%), and a 15% change on the peer assessment metric compared to no change for the SPP group. Perhaps the most notable change was for the faculty resources and faculty salary metrics. The SPP group was essentially stable on these two metrics, whereas WSU saw a -34% and -67% change for faculty resources and salary, respectively. These decreases were directly related to WSU procedural changes in including career track faculty salaries in the calculations. Other large changes were observed but they were more comparable to the SPP group. The table also helps observe which metrics WSU is higher and lower on compared to the SPP group average and provides insight to the trend lines in the figure above.

Table 6. Rank and Percent Change in Rank by Metric for WSU and Strategic Plan Peers from 2022 to 2023.

Metric	2023 WSU Rank	WSU % Change 2022-2023	2023 SPP Rank	SPP % Change 2022-2023
<b>% of faculty full-time</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>-4%</b>
% of full and part-time faculty with Ph.D. or terminal degree	117	42%	84	68%
% of graduates who took out federal loans	171	2%	127	-8%
Alumni giving	101	-4%	90	3%
Average federal indebtedness of graduates	137	-3%	134	-4%
Class Size Index	411	17%	357	16%
<b>Faculty resources</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>-34%</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Faculty salary</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>-67%</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>-1%</b>
Financial resources	187	5%	148	-5%
Graduation rate performance	359	19%	178	18%
High School Class Standing	334	-10%	145	-2%
<b>Peer Assessment</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>0%</b>
Pell grant comparative graduation rate	217	6%	332	16%
Pell grant graduation rate	198	11%	288	17%
SAT/ACT	260	-2%	102	4%
Student to faculty ratio	210	0%	278	-15%

SPP = Strategic Plan Peers

## COACHE Peers

Figure 8 contains the National Universities Rank from 2019 to 2023 for WSU and each institution in the COACHE Peer (CP) group. WSU is highlighted by the red dotted line. The Y axis contains national rank and the X axis contains the year. The trends observed in this figure are similar to the trends seen with the SPP group. First, since 2019 WSU has been outranked by all universities in this group with a trend line away from a lower, more desirable, rank across these years. As before, WSU had more variability in rankings across these years compared to the CP group. For example, the standard deviation (SD) of WSU ranking is approximately 26, whereas the CP peer group range was from 0.54 to 7.4. To better understand some of the change in WSU's rank, it may be helpful to view changes in the individual metrics from 2022 to 2023 and compare this change to the CP group. Again, these two years are selected, as it is when the largest change in WSU national rank occurred.

Figure 8. National University Rank for WSU and COACHE Peers from 2019 to 2023.

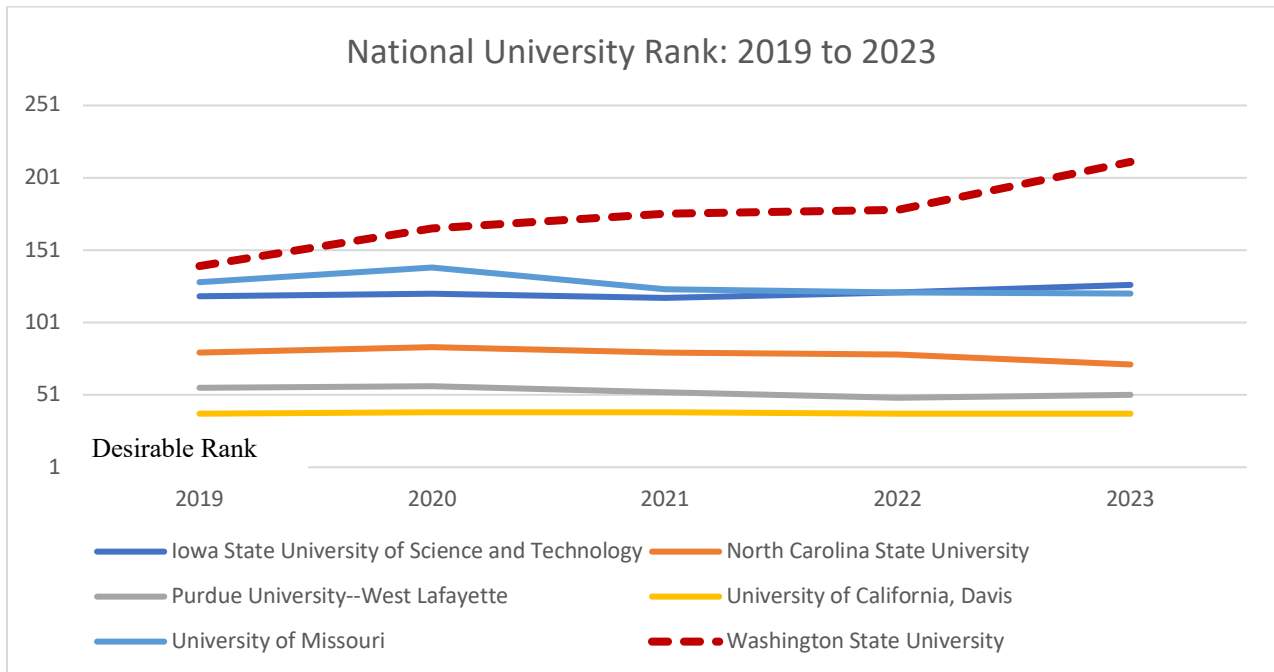


Table 7 displays the primary metrics used in creating the ranks from WSU and the CP group. The second and fourth columns present the WSU and the CP group ranks, respectively, for 2023. Columns three and five provide the percentage of change from 2022 to 2023. Interpretation is the same as with the SPP group. Four rows appear in bold to draw attention to change that was large in comparison to the CP group. Notice that WSU had a large and positive percentage change on the metrics of % of faculty full-time compared to the CP group (i.e., 48% vs. 25%), and a 42% change on the % of faculty with a Ph.D. or terminal degree, although, on average, the group had a 75% change. Again, the most notable change was for the faculty resources and faculty salary metrics. The CP group declined on these two metrics as well, but not

as steep of a decline as WSU. Other changes can be seen. However, these were more comparable to the CP group. The table also helps observe which metrics WSU is higher and lower on compared to the peer group average.

Table 7. Rank and Percent Change in Rank by Metric for WSU and COACHE Peers from 2022 to 2023.

Metric	2023 WSU	WSU %	2023	COACHE %
	Rank	Change	COACHE	Change
		2022-2023	Rank	2022-2023
<b>% of faculty full-time</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>% of full and part-time faculty with Ph.D. or terminal degree</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>75%</b>
% of graduates who took out federal loans	171	2%	130	-3%
Alumni giving	101	-4%	102	-7%
Average federal indebtedness of graduates	137	-3%	121	-8%
Class Size Index	411	17%	387	20%
<b>Faculty resources</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>-34%</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>-17%</b>
<b>Faculty salary</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>-67%</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>-27%</b>
Financial resources	187	5%	131	-2%
Graduation rate performance	359	19%	169	10%
High School Class Standing	334	-10%	144	-4%
Peer Assessment	107	15%	74	3%
Pell grant comparative graduation rate	217	6%	271	14%
Pell grant graduation rate	198	11%	243	19%
SAT/ACT	260	-2%	122	1%
Student to faculty ratio	210	0%	274	-12%

### Comments on Metrics across Groups

Table 8 provides a comparison across the peer data presented above, as well as a comparison with the neighboring University of Idaho. A “W” in a table cell indicates where WSU had a substantially worse rank in 2023 compared to the peer groups. A “B” in a cell table indicates where WSU had a substantially better rank in 2023 compared to the peer groups. The rows in bold indicate metrics where WSU was worse in rank compared to all three groups. These metrics included faculty resources, faculty salary, graduation rate performance, and high school class standing metrics. WSU had better rank on the Pell grant comparative graduation rate and the Pell grant graduation rate metrics compared to the SPP and CP groups. There was a trend for a worse rank on the SAT/ACT metric for WSU compared to the SPP and COACHE peers. However, that WSU does not require these test results, there is likely no action to be taken here (see above). In addition, performance on the faculty salary metric, commented on above, is likely related to the change in how this was reported in the past year. The metrics of faculty resources and graduation rate performance and high school class standing can be examined for accuracy in

how this is reported given the *USNWR* instructions. Again, many of these metrics follow a standard reporting protocol used for *USNWR* and organizations like IPEDS. However, one subjective metric for future analysis is with the peer assessment metric. WSU ranked better than UI in the peer assessment and did not appear too differently compared to the SPP and CP peers. A closer look at differences within WSU may be enlightening.

Table 8. *Metric Comparison across Comparison Groups*

Metric	UI	SPP	COACHE
% of faculty full-time			
% of full and part-time faculty with Ph.D. or terminal degree			W
% of graduates who took out federal loans			
Alumni giving	B		
Average federal indebtedness of graduates	B		
Class Size Index	W	B	
<b>Faculty resources</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>
<b>Faculty salary</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>
Financial resources			
<b>Graduation rate performance</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>
<b>High School Class Standing</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>W</b>
Peer Assessment	B		
Pell grant comparative graduation rate	W	B	B
Pell grant graduation rate	W	B	B
SAT/ACT		W	W
Student to faculty ratio		B	

Note: UI = University of Idaho, SPP = Strategic Plan Peers, COACHE = COACHE Peers; **W** = WSU had a worse rank, **B** = WSU had a better rank. Bold indicates trend across all three groups. Empty cells suggest a not substantial difference.

Also of note in the metrics, the forthcoming 2024 formulas used for rankings will increase weights on factors measuring the benefits of education to students, including students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. It is not clear exactly how this will look given current *USNWR* documentation. In May of 2023, *USNWR* was announced that the following metrics will be dropped from the 2024 methodology: alumni giving, class size, faculty with terminal degree, and high school class standing. These data will be collected and will be available for students to review but presumably will not be included in the ranking formula. The dropping of class size (8% of faculty resources) and the terminal degree of faculty (3% of Faculty resources) will influence the faculty resources metric, as these were 2 of 5 metric comprising that score. *USNWR* claims that removal of these metrics from the formula will result in greater change in year-to-year ranking of a given institution, and the influence will be determined by past performance of an institution on these metrics. WSU has had much variability in year-to-year rankings in the past few years. This could continue as these methodological changes occur. Given there was no clear trend in WSU's performance across the

peer groups examined here, the influence may be difficult to predict relative to the peers, and given it is not clear what other metrics will enter the formula and at what weight. As mentioned before, chasing certain metrics that are standardized is difficult given the constant change in methodology.

### Peer Assessment Metric

The Peer Assessment metric is arguably the most subjective metric used in the *USNWR* scoring system. In 2023, this score had a weight of 20% in the scoring system to produce rankings. *USNWR* claims that this metric is important because it captures academic reputation that is not captured in the other metrics. In theory, this may seem fine, but it assumes that the presidents, provosts, and deans of admissions that are surveyed have knowledge of such characteristics *in other institutions* sufficient to provide an accurate rating. And given the subjectivity of the metric, it has been argued that it is one that an institution could influence. Below is information about the assessment and some key highlights to consider moving forward with actions. We also target this metric because WSU appeared to trend below the CP and SPP peer groups from 2019 to 2023, as seen in the previous section.

Figure 9 provides an overview of the raters and regions for the peer assessment survey. The left side of the figure shows the percentages of raters by their academic position. The right side of the figure shows the regions where raters are located. Table 9 provides the number of raters by their position and region. The response rate for the 2023 ratings was 44%, with a range of 41% to 54% in the past decade. The North and South regions had more raters compared to the other two regions. These regions were also more heavily weighted by provost and president ratings compared to the West and Midwest. This difference, especially in the North region may have a differential influence on the WSU ratings. This is discussed below.

Figure 9. Percentages of Raters by Position and Region of the U.S. with Graph From ai.news.com

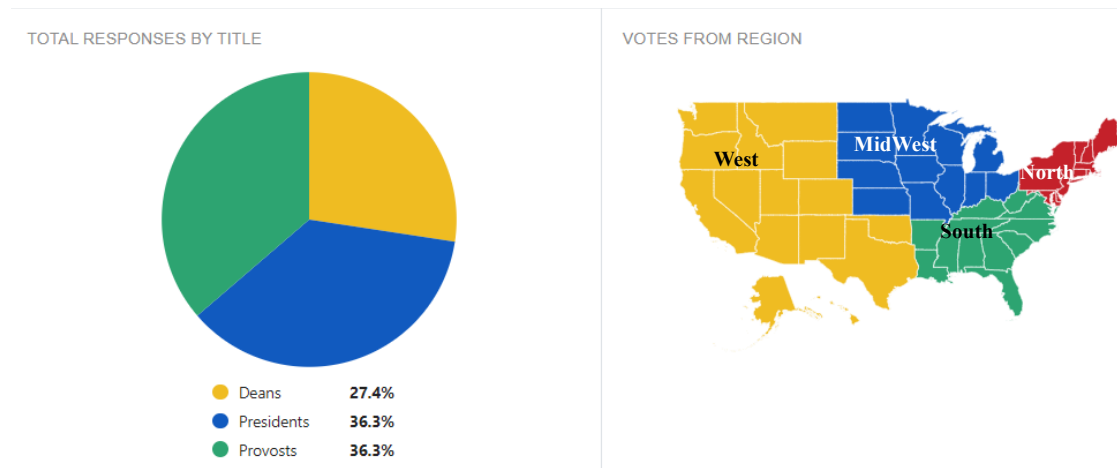


Table 10. Number of Raters for Peer Assessment by U.S. Region and Academic Position

Rater	West	Midwest	South	North
Dean	19	20	17	20
President	25	21	27	28
Provost	21	22	29	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>78</b>

Figure 10 displays the peer assessment scores from 2019 to 2023. This time horizon was selected due to the change in WSU rankings from 2019 to 2023. There are three trends that can easily be seen in the figure. First, over time, there are some fluctuations in the ratings by all leadership positions across the regions. These fluctuations do not appear extreme, possibly due to a restriction in range given the scale. The second trend is that WSU peer assessment scores are lowest or worst for deans, provosts, and presidents from the North region, with the lowest ratings coming from the presidents in that region. Third, ratings by Midwest presidents appear to decline or worsen over time.

Figure 10. Peer Assessment Score for WSU by Rater and Region from 2019 to 2023.

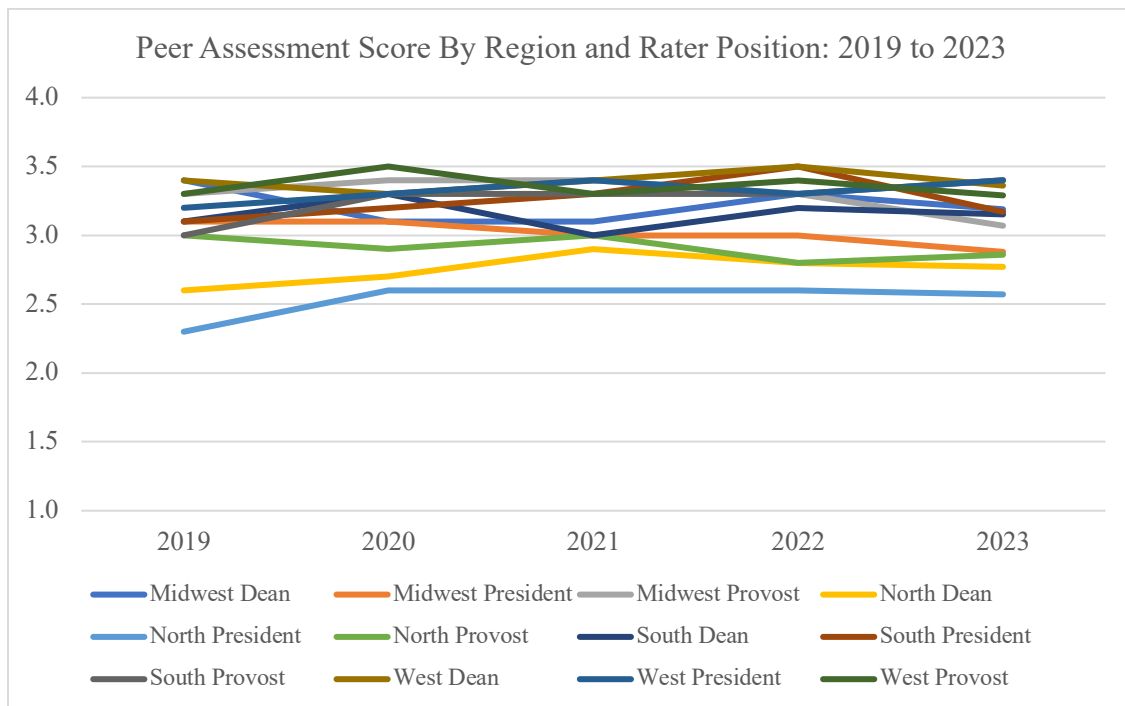


Table 11 provides the average ratings by rater group and region. Please note that the values *USNWR* produces are means on ordinal level variables, not medians, and thus, could be skewed by extreme scores (raw data or medians were not available for examination). Nevertheless, this type of information may inform WSU marketing and communication

strategies. Purposeful communication about the excellent work at WSU may be strategically tailored to certain regions of the country where WSU is less known. Past marketing efforts by WSU in 2008 were correlated with an overall increase in the peer assessment score in 2010 and 2011, with approximate increases in 5% and 11%, respectively. This translated into a 0.1-point increase in scores for each year with the highest score in 2010 (3.1). WSU’s highest score in the past decade was 3.2 (2022). Recall from the analysis presented that this metric can translate into rank movement but substantial movement is needed to have a large influence.

Table 11. *Average (Means) Peer Assessment Scores by Rater and Region for 2019 to 2023*

Rater by Region	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Midwest Dean	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.2
Midwest President	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.0	2.9
Midwest Provost	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.1
North Dean	2.6	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.8
North President	2.3	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6
North Provost	3.0	2.9	3.0	2.8	2.9
South Dean	3.1	3.3	3.0	3.2	3.2
South President	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.2
South Provost	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4
West Dean	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.4
West President	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.4
West Provost	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.3

Note: Shaded rows point to lowest ratings over time.

## 6. Recommendations

In the final analysis, despite the many flaws of rankings such as those promulgated by *USNWR*, they are not going to disappear, nor is the anxiety associated with declines in rankings. WSU could position itself to improve metrics when such efforts are consistent with our institutional mission, goals, and values without sacrificing resources. We respectfully make the following recommendations.

### Internal Procedures and Data Reporting

- 1) Support the Institutional Effectiveness Council steering committee to continue to monitor metrics, data reporting, and forecasting for rank changes related to how WSU data change from year to year (Rankings | Office of Strategy, Planning, and Analysis | Washington State University (wsu.edu)).
- 2) Continue data-informed conversations with the IEC to identify areas for enhancement with metrics in mind.

- 3) Track the *USNWR* changes to metrics assessing the benefits of education to students, including students from different socioeconomic backgrounds to understand this metric as it is implanted into the ranking system. This could be a strength of WSU.
- 4) Continue to monitor changes to *USNWR* metrics and evaluate if WSU systems and procedures need to change in how data are reported to adapt to changes. This past year, WSU had a change in how Faculty Salary was reported. This likely had a major impact on the ranking. Understanding this before such changes occur allows WSU to communicate these concerns a priori to our audiences.
- 5) Understand the substantial differences between WSU and peer institutions on the metrics of Faculty Salary, Faculty Resources, and Graduation Rate Performance. WSU performed substantially worse on these across all three groups.

### **Student Support**

Given some of the metrics that are weighted most heavily focus on student success, including retention and graduation rates, continuing to improve support for student advancements should be considered. Furthermore, doing so is consistent with WSU values.

- 1) Invest in programs targeting student retention. Improving WSU graduation rates and targeting student success over time should improve heavily weighted metrics on graduation rates. In fact, the graduations rate metric was the largest change in WSU metrics over the past five years.
- 2) Invest in programs targeting time-to-degree and degree completion. This would improve heavily weighted metrics and support students. Decreasing time-to-degree may also reduce student debt burdens.
- 3) Continue to enhance student support services from advising, housing, and dining to mental health.
- 4) Invest in supporting students in the campus environment with a vibrant campus life to encourage student engagement. Consider how daily operating procedures influence students' decisions to engage and persist at WSU. For example, post COVID, many front staff and faculty in college level offices work remotely part of the workweek, leaving students with uninviting and unwelcoming experience with closed doors and dark hallways in many buildings.

### **Faculty Retention and Resources**

High quality faculty are essential to WSU's success in its reputation in research, teaching and research. Efforts should focus on recruiting and retaining high quality and productive faculty.

- 1) Continue to address the inequities in salaries for faculty across the system, and in salary gaps relative to peer institutions and the market.
- 2) Invest in research-active faculty. This may increase reputation scores. WSU faculty already produce at a high per capita rate, therefore retaining these faculty and recruiting new faculty in these research-intensive areas supports WSU's research mission while simultaneously increasing outputs.
- 3) Develop a systemwide plan to address decreasing faculty resources. This includes investing in infrastructure for research and teaching.

## **Marketing and Communication**

- 1) Develop a marketing and communication plan about WSU that is strategically disseminated among potential raters in the peer assessment process, especially areas of the country where ratings have declined.
- 2) Develop a marketing and communication plan that spans 2-5 years that is dynamic to respond to higher education and WSU changes during that time, especially with changes on metrics.
- 3) Evaluate the current marketing plan to potential students and families and adjust if needed to account for *USNWR* rankings.
- 4) Engage in public relations activities to highlight faculty and student achievements.
- 5) Encourage media coverage and engage with influential educational journalists.
- 6) Add the links to Malcolm Gladwell's podcasts (Lord of the Rankings; The Dillard Project) on the WSU ranking website and possible to the Faculty Senate website to provide easy access to interesting examples and information from the two podcasts.

## **Understanding Use and Investment in the *USNWR* Ranks by WSU Constituents**

The following recommendations would provide insight into the effort needed to address the issues associated with the *USNWR* ranks ranging from communication with different audiences to educational efforts for clear understanding of the purpose and use of *USNWR* ranks.

- 1) Understand the extent to which students and parents applying to WSU use *USNWR* rankings when deciding to apply and attend the university.
- 2) Understand the extent to which faculty and staff care about the *USNWR* rankings.
- 3) Determine if faculty and staff understand the *USNWR ranking's* intended purpose and use.
- 4) Understand if WSU stakeholders (e.g., donors, employers, alumni/ae) are aware and concerned about the WSU *USNWR rank*, and if they understand the intended purpose and use the *USNWR* ranks.

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## 8. Appendix A

### US News Best Colleges Survey 2023 – Ranking Questions

- #49 Full-time Enrollment (Matches IPEDS fall enrollment)
- #50 Part-time Enrollment (Matches IPEDS fall enrollment)
- #51 Total Enrollment – all undergraduates (Matches IPEDS fall enrollment)
- #52 Total Enrollment – all graduates (Matches IPEDS fall enrollment)
- #53 Grand Total Enrollment (Matches IPEDS fall enrollment)
- #66 First Generation Students
  - full-time first year undergraduates
  - all full-time undergraduates
- #71 First-year (Freshman) Acceptance Rate (Matches IPEDS admissions)
- #140 High School Standing and GPA (WSU did/does not report)
- #153 How many first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who enrolled submitted SAT scores? (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #154 What percent of first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who enrolled submitted SAT scores? (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #155 How many first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who enrolled submitted ACT scores? (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #156 What percent of first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who enrolled submitted ACT scores? (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #157 Average Test Scores
  - Please enter average test scores for all full- and part-time, first-year (freshman) students enrolling in the fall of 2021, including students who began studies during the summer, international students/nonresident aliens, and students admitted under special arrangements.
  - (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #158 SAT Percentiles: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing & Math
  - Include all enrolled first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who submitted SAT scores
  - (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #159 ACT Percentiles: Composite Score
  - Include all enrolled first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who submitted ACT scores
  - (WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))
- #166 Were test scores of the following groups of students who provided test score information included in the calculation of SAT and ACT scores for first-time, first-year (freshman)

degree-seeking students who enrolled in fall 2021? (Yes, no, not applicable, or no answer)

- All international students
- All minority students
- All student athletes
- All legacy/children of alumni admits
- All special admission arrangements
- All student who began studies in summer 2021

(WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))

#167 Were test scores of the following groups of students who provided test score information included in the calculation of SAT and ACT scores for first-time, first-year (freshman) degree-seeking students who enrolled in fall 2020? (Yes, no, not applicable, or no answer)

- All international students
- All minority students
- All student athletes
- All legacy/children of alumni admits
- All special admission arrangements
- All student who began studies in summer 2020

(WSU does not report starting for the 2024 edition (data submitted in summer 2023))

### **Faculty: Counts**

#195 2021 Instructional Faculty Members

#197 Report the Fall 2021 ratio of full-time equivalent students (full-time plus 1/3 part-time) to full-time equivalent instructional faculty (full-time plus 1/3 part-time). In the ratio calculations, exclude both faculty and students in stand-alone graduate or professional programs such as medicine, law, veterinary, dentistry, social work, business, or public health in which faculty teach virtually only graduate-level students. Do not count undergraduate or graduate student teaching assistants as faculty.

### **Faculty: Salaries**

Please report the salaries of full-time instructional faculty members for the 2021-2022 academic year. The grid conforms to Form 2 from the American Association of University Professor (AAUP) data collection.

#### **Whom to Include:**

- Full-time faculty members who are on the payroll of the institution as of November 1, 2021 and working 9-, 10-, 11-, or 12-month contracts.
- Full-time “Primarily Instructional” and “Instructional/Research Public Service” faculty members whose regular assignment has an instruction component (including release time for research), regardless of whether they are formally designated as “faculty” and irrespective of tenure status.
- Faculty who are working on a reduced load (e.g., 0.75 FTE) but who are still considered full-time in the institution’s HR/payroll system. In this case, report their projected annual salary expenditures by determining what their base salary would be for a full load (e.g., salary/FTE).

- Full-time faculty members who are on sabbatical or leave with pay. In this case, report their regular salaries even though they may be receiving reduced salaries while on sabbatical or leave.
- Replacement faculty for those on sabbatical or leave without pay, but only if the replacement faculty are employed full-time.
- Full-time instructional faculty with “clinical” job titles.

**Whom to Exclude:**

- Faculty who are not employed on a full-time basis irrespective of tenure status.
- Faculty who are working less-than-9-month contracts.
- Clinical or basic science faculty, medical faculty, and/or military faculty paid on a different scale from civilian employees.
- Faculty on sabbatical or leave without pay.
- Replacement faculty for those on sabbatical or leave with pay.
- Faculty on courtesy appointments and other faculty members whose services are valued by bookkeeping entries rather than by full cash transactions, unless their salaries are determined by the same principles as those who do not donate their services.
- Contributed service personnel, or administrative officers with titles such as Provost, Dean, Associate or Assistant Dean, Librarian, Counselor, Registrar, or Coach, even though they may devote part of their time to classroom instruction and may have faculty status.

**Academic Rank:**

Report ranked faculty, including ranked teach faculty (e.g., associate teaching professor), at their named rank at the institution, irrespective of tenure status.

If your institution does not have a faculty ranking system, for example if all faculty members are referred to as “instructors”, report all full-time faculty in just one of the rows.

**Length of Contract:**

Data for faculty whose base contract requires 9 or 10 months of instruction (e.g., two semester, three quarters, or two trimesters) should be reported regardless of whether the pay period extends over 12 months. Data for faculty working 11- or 12-month contracts should be reported regardless of the number of installments.

**Number of Faculty:**

Report an unduplicated headcount of faculty members in each cell. Do not report full-time equivalent (FTE) figures. Note that projected annual salary expenditures should be adjusted, if necessary, for faculty working on reduced load (see below).

**Total Contracted Salaries (Faculty Salary Outlays):**

Report the projected annual expenditures for full-time contracted salaries excluding extra loads, summer teaching, stipends, or other forms of remuneration. For faculty working on a reduced load (e.g., 0.75 FTE), adjust their projected annual salary expenditures by determining what their base salary would be for a full load (e.g., salary/FTE).

For full-time instructional faculty serving as department or program heads and having no other administrative title, report only their base instructional salary (i.e., excluding administrative stipends), adjusting their projected annual salary expenditures if

appropriate by determining what their base salary would be for a full instructional load (e.g., salary/FTE).

#200 Full-time Instructional Faculty Salaries – 2021-2022 Academic year:

After reviewing the above definitions, adhere to the following guidelines:

- Report counts of faculty and their corresponding total contracted (e.g. cumulative) salaries, using guidance above. This means do not average salaries.
- Include salaries for non-tenure-track faculty members who are full-time instructional faculty.
- Report all projected annual expenditures on an actual basis (no conversion). If reported, salary expenditures for faculty working 11- or 12-month contracts will be annualized by U.S. News.
- Report salary figures based on what faculty members were actually paid. If your institution has implemented temporary salary reductions due to COVID-19, the salary figures should reflect the pay cut.

#202 Undergraduate Class Size

#204 Graduation Rates – 2015 Cohort. (Matches IPEDS)

Please read all instructions before completing.

The following questions ask for information needed to calculate the six-year graduation rate for the cohort of full-time, first-time, bachelor's (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered your institution in the Fall of 2015.

**The graduation and retention figures below must align with what your institution reported to IPEDS, unless your institution reported inaccurate information that is being corrected.**

Include students who entered your institution during the Summer term preceding Fall 2015.

Students are to be considered to have received a grant or loan if they received it for the period used for determining cohort-fall term.

#206 Historical six-year graduation rates (Matches IPEDS)

#211 First-year (freshman) retention rate (Matches IPEDS)

#212 Historical first-year (freshman) retention rates (Matches IPEDS)

### **Alumni Giving:**

Undergraduate Alumni Giving: Please enter information on undergraduate alumni giving, as defined below. As noted, exclude former students who earned only graduate degrees and undergraduates who didn't graduate from your institution. Additionally, exclude all student giving (e.g., senior class gift) unless you count the entire senior student body in the alumni of record total.

Please follow the standards set by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), and used for reporting to CAE for the Voluntary Support of Education Survey when answering these questions. If you do not break down undergraduates-only giving for the CAE survey, please do so for this report. For individual donations from households with multiple (e.g. two) alumni, report each as separate donors if possible.

#217 What was the number of undergraduate alumni of record at your institution 2020-2021? (Alumni of record are former full- or part-time students with an undergraduate degree

from your institution and for whom you believe you have a valid address or other way to make contact (telephone, email, etc.)

- #219 What was the number of undergraduate alumni donors for your institution in the following years? Alumni donors are alumni with undergraduate degrees from your institution who made one or more tax-deductible gifts from either themselves or their legal spouse/partner for either current operations or capital expenses during the specified fiscal year.) Exclude all soft-credit only contributions – only report on IRS reportable gifts.
- 2020-2021?  
2019-2020?