

Forbes top colleges list critical of UI, WSU

Samantha Malott/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Washington State University and the University of Idaho were ranked among the worst colleges in their respective states on the Forbes' 2014 list of best colleges nationwide - behind institutions such as Brigham Young University-Idaho and Whitman College.

WSU was ranked No. 370 nationwide and last among the 10 schools listed in Washington, while the UI Moscow campus was ranked 456th overall and third in Idaho. The University of Washington was ranked second in Washington and No. 73 overall, and Boise State University was ranked fifth in Idaho and No. 636 overall.

The list includes 650 colleges and universities across the country and ranks them on five categories: student satisfaction, post-graduate success, graduation rate, student debt and academic success.

The two local campuses were ranked among the country's top research universities, where the UI ranked at No. 172 behind WSU at 144th.

Data to create the ranking list was collected by the Center for College Affordability and Productivity. The CCAP, according to its website, is dedicated to "researching the rising costs and stagnant efficiency in higher education."

The center uses a variety of sources to collect the data for the five categories, including RateMyProfessor.com as part of the student satisfaction category. The website allows students to post opinions and ratings of professors at their university for fellow students to read. Students often use the site to help decide future class schedules based on professors who have better ratings.

According to the site, the UI has 457 professors ranked with an average score of 3.72 out of 5 points. Professors are graded in three categories, including easiness, helpfulness and clarity. The CCAP excludes the "hottness" rating that RateMyProfessor.com does include in its overall scores. WSU has 1,739 professors currently scored on the website, with an average grade of 3.64 out of 5.

Retention and drop out rates are also used to calculate student satisfaction. According to institutional research generated by each school, the UI had a 21.4 percent drop out rate of the 1,580 students who enrolled in the 2012-13 school year after their first year as full-time students. WSU had similar numbers, with 80 percent of the full-time enrolled freshman class of 2012 still studying at the school a year later.

Along with the number of students staying in school, the list measured the number who graduate in a what is considered a reasonable amount of time. According to the article on Forbes

describing the ranking criteria, the CCAP chooses to assess the four-year graduation rate because a strict four-year graduation rate can save students significant amounts of money.

Robert Streng, assistant director for the WSU News Service, said in an email the standard graduation performance measure around the nation is recorded at six years. According to the data provided by Streng, the percentage of students who graduate from WSU in four years is 38.9 percent, while it goes up to 67.3 percent at the six-year mark. At the UI, 24 percent of students graduate after four years and 55 percent finish their program within six years, according to an email from Andrea Thomas, regional integrated communications officer at the UI.

Thomas said the UI's six-year graduation rate is in line with the nationwide average of 56 percent and is the highest of all public institutions in Idaho.

"Boise State University, by comparison, is 28 percent after six years," she wrote in her email.

Financial stability and debt was another factor taken into account by the CCAP for the list.

Of those students graduating from the UI, the average loan debt for undergraduates in 2013 was \$25,637. Streng reported 59 percent of WSU graduates in 2013 had an average debt of \$23,952 per student.

According to the university profile on the Forbes website, 94 percent of the UI's student body is receiving financial aid from the university, while 79 percent of WSU students do as well. Streng reported more than \$229 million was awarded to WSU students in the form of grants, scholarships, self-help, waivers and athletic awards, among others financial assistance opportunities during the 2012-13 year.

Thomas said the UI reported nearly \$43 million was given in grants and scholarships to its students during the 2013-14 school year.

The UI was also ranked No. 25 out of the top "best value" colleges. Multiple military academies such as the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Air Force Academy topped this list as they tend to cover nearly all schooling costs.

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