

Top U.S. Medical Schools for 2007 Are Named, But Does Ranking Really Matter?

By Brooke Heath

U.S. News & World Report has released its listing of the top medical schools in America for 2007. While the listing is helpful to get a sense of which medical schools are considered some of the best in the nation, many current and prospective medical students may ask whether these rankings really matter. There are many successful physicians who did not graduate from an Ivy League medical school. However, there is no doubt that top schools carry a certain prestige that follows its graduates throughout the course of their careers. This article will examine the top schools to provide a better sense of what makes them great.

Categories for Rankings

The *U.S. News & World Report* rankings are determined by categories such as peer assessment score (on a 5.0 scale), assessment by residency director (on a 5.0 scale), National Institutes of Health research grants, faculty to student ratio, selectivity, tuition and fees, and more.

The schools were ranked in two different categories: medical schools in research and medical school for primary care.

Top 10 Medical Schools in Research

1. Harvard University
2. Johns Hopkins University
3. University of Pennsylvania
4. University of California – San Francisco
5. Washington University in St. Louis
6. Duke University
7. Stanford University
8. University of Washington
9. Yale University
10. Baylor College of Medicine

For an exhaustive list of the top-ranked medical schools in research, go to http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/med/brief/mdrrank_brief.php

1. Ranked Medical School in Research: Harvard University

Harvard University was ranked number one for research. This private institution, based in Boston, Massachusetts, was founded in 1782. According to the school's 2005-2006

statistics, its student acceptance rate was 5.2%, with an average composite MCAT score of 11.7. The tuition costs at Harvard for the 2006-2007 school year were \$40,279. In 2006, there were 771 students enrolled in Harvard Medical School's M.D. program. With over 9,000 living alumni, Harvard is one of the most sought-after medical schools to attend.

2. Johns Hopkins University

Ranked number two in medical school research, Johns Hopkins University is a private school located in Baltimore, Maryland. Named for its Quaker founder, Johns Hopkins opened in 1876 as America's first research university. In 2006, tuition and fees were over \$35,000. The acceptance rate in 2005 was 5.9% with an average composite MCAT score of 11.5.

3. University of Pennsylvania

The first and only medical school in the thirteen original American colonies, the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine was founded in 1765. Located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, it has 718 students enrolled. In 2006, tuition and fees for this medical school totaled almost \$40,000. Also a private institution, the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine's acceptance rate was 4.8% in 2005, averaging a 11.6 composite MCAT score.

Top 10 Medical Schools in Primary Care

1. University of Washington
2. University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill
3. Oregon Health and Science University
4. Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine
5. University of Massachusetts - Worcester
6. Duke University
7. East Carolina University (Brody)
8. University of Colorado-Denver and Health Sciences Center
9. University of Wisconsin – Madison
10. University of California – San Francisco

For a complete list of the top-ranked medical schools in primary care, go to:
http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/med/brief/mdprank_brief.php

1. Ranked Medical School for Primary Care: University of Washington

The University of Washington is ranked number one for primary care. According to its website, the University of Washington has been ranked number one as the nation's medical school for primary care for thirteen years. Located in Seattle, Washington, this

school is a public institution founded in 1946. According to the 2005-2006 statistics, the acceptance rate for the University of Washington is 7.2%, with in-state tuition running at \$14,459 and out-of-state tuition costing \$34,297.

2. University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Coming in at number two, the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill was established in 1879. As a public university, UNC-Chapel Hill offers a considerably affordable tuition for in-state students, totaling less than \$10,000 in 2006. Its out-of-state tuition costs come in around \$34,000. Its acceptance rate for 2005 was 7.1%, with the average composite MCAT score at 10.6.

3. Oregon Health and Science University

Located in Portland, Oregon, the Oregon Health and Science University is also a public school. It boasts of being one of only twenty medical schools in the nation not affiliated with a larger university. Total costs for the medical school during the 2006-2007 school year were \$30,277 for resident students, and \$40,675 for non-resident students. Founded in 1887, its admissions rate was at 6.2% in 2005, with the average MCAT composite score at 10.3.

Do these rankings really matter?

The big question is whether these rankings mean anything. After all, you can obtain the exact same M.D. degree at any of the nation's 125 medical schools. Some highly ranked schools claim that by attending their school, you can be offered placement into top residency programs while developing a network of prestigious contacts that will enhance your career throughout your life.

For medical schools that do place near the top of the annual rankings, the listings mean a lot. Making this prestigious list not only gives the schools bragging rights, but more importantly, assists them in receiving donations and grants. These monetary gifts allow for more scholarships and grants for their students, as well as money to further their research and medical studies.

However, critics of the rankings argue that the rating system is a poor indication of quality in both the research and primary health categories. In their article, *America's Best Medical Schools: A Critique of the U.S. News & World Report Rankings*, William C. McGaghie, Ph.D. and Jason A Thompson conclude that the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of American medical schools have no practical value as they are ill-conceived, unscientific, poorly conducted and ignore medical school accreditation. They also consider it short-sighted to judge a medical school's quality from a narrow, elitist perspective. The authors note that the rankings do not consider social and professional outcomes in program quality calculations.

The Cost of Attending a Ranked Medical School

The truth is that medical school will be an expensive venture to take on regardless of the school you choose to attend. But are the costs involved with attending a nationally ranked medical school higher than that of unranked schools? And does attending a highly ranked medical school just mean more accrued student loan debt upon graduation?

According to its website, Johns Hopkins University, ranked second in medical research, boasts that “the average debt load for Hopkins graduates is lower than for students at other private schools and even some public schools.” Even with a lower debt load, the majority of medical students need some kind of outside assistance to compensate for the huge costs associated with attending medical school. Of the 718 medical students at the University of Pennsylvania, 80% of those students receive some kind of financial aid, according to the school’s website. Depending on the school, grants and scholarships can be scarce, so a majority of the financial aid that medical students receive will likely come in the form of student loans.

The average debt for a Harvard Medical School student upon graduation is \$110,587. As mentioned previously, Harvard is a private school and private schools tend to have higher tuition costs. Compare Harvard’s annual tuition costs to a non-ranked public school like the University of Mississippi’s resident tuition for medical school and you will see a huge difference: \$40,279 and \$9,649 respectively. You can see why a Harvard medical graduate’s debt is so high.

Lift the Student Debt Burden with Consolidation

The good news is that regardless of what medical school you choose to attend—ranked or unranked, private or public—**Medical School Loans** is here to help you reduce your student loan debt burden. By consolidating your medical student loans with Medical School Loans, you can literally save thousands of dollars over the life of your student loans.

As a leader in the consolidation industry, Medical School Loans is dedicated to assisting medical school students and physicians with managing their educational loans. Medical School Loans only offers our services to physicians and medical school students. By concentrating our efforts on only those in this influential field of study, we are able to put forth a higher standard of service, therefore, setting the bar for the loan and consolidation industry.

You be the judge

Are medical school rankings important? We’ll let you be the judge. The important thing is that you are bettering yourself by furthering your education.