

The Seattle Times

Winner of a 2012 Pulitzer Prize

Local News

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Washington Monthly ranks UW 8th in U.S.

A nonprofit magazine based in Washington, D.C., included the University of Washington in its top-10 list of national universities, up from the 23rd spot last year, due in part to the school's affordability.

By Katherine Long

Seattle Times higher education reporter

A national magazine that ranks colleges according to how much good they do for the nation has put the University of Washington as eighth in the U.S. — up from 23rd a year ago.

Washington Monthly, a national nonprofit magazine that covers politics and culture, rates schools based on the degree to which they improve social mobility, produce research and promote social service. The D.C.-based magazine gave the UW a higher rating this year because it scored well on a new measure: the cost of attending school there.

"What it says is the UW-Seattle does a terrific job graduating the students that it gets, at a price they can afford," said Washington Monthly editor-in-chief Paul Glastris.

That might come as a surprise to Husky families who have had to absorb steep tuition increases since the beginning of the economic downturn. The UW's in-state undergraduate tuition has nearly doubled in just six years, largely because of legislative budget cuts that have shifted the cost to students and families.

But the UW also is generous with financial aid to cash-strapped families, bringing the net cost of tuition down, Glastris said.

And its graduation rate is strong, too. About 22 percent of the UW's undergraduates receive federal Pell grants for low-income students, yet the school does a much better job graduating students than those numbers would predict: About 80 percent of UW first-time, full-time undergraduates finish their degrees in six years. The predicted rate, when the number of students receiving financial aid and student SAT scores are taken into account, is 69 percent.

The No. 8 position is the highest national ranking the UW has ever achieved, aside from issue-specific rankings. (Sierra Magazine ranked the UW first for its sustainability efforts last year, and fourth this year.)

UW President Michael Young said the UW is delighted to be near the top of the list. "This is what we — especially public universities — should be doing for our students and their communities: providing accessible, affordable, high quality education that makes a difference," he said in a statement.

Washington Monthly has been on a decadelong campaign to raise questions about how colleges are ranked, with a particular focus on U.S. News & World Report's rankings, often considered the most influential national rankings — they'll be released Sept. 12. "That well-known list actually *rewards* colleges for spending more money, raising prices and shutting out all but the most privileged students," wrote Washington Monthly editors in the magazine's introduction.

Last year, U.S. News ranked the UW 42nd. Its top-20 list is usually stacked with private schools charging annual tuitions of \$40,000 or more. In contrast, the Monthly's top-10 list is largely made up of public research universities. Its number-one school? University of California-San Diego.

"While other publications try to rank schools based on what they can do for you, we rank them based on what they're doing for the country," Glastris said.

It's hard to know just how important national rankings are, but there's no denying that they're good for bragging rights, and a top ranking is often featured in student recruitment literature. "Maybe some fraction of students use these as barometers, or yardsticks," said UW spokesman Norm Arkans.

A few other Washington schools also did well on Washington Monthly's list, which is broken down by three categories: national universities, master's-degree-granting universities and liberal arts colleges. Whitworth University in Spokane was ninth on the list of schools that grant master's degrees, The Evergreen State College was 29th, Seattle University 42nd, Gonzaga University 66th, and Western Washington University, 71st.

Among liberal arts colleges, Whitman College ranks 30th; the University of Puget Sound, 133rd.

Washington State University, which is on the list of national universities, came in 147th.

Katherine Long: 206-464-2219 or klong@seattletimes.com. On Twitter @katherinelong.