



University of Denver FACULTY FORUM

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Peer Institutions: Who Do We Think We Are and Who Would We Aspire to Become?

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

At different times and in various circumstances, every college and university, including the University of Denver, compares itself to selected peer institutions. Different comparison schools are chosen according to different criteria depending upon what type of analysis is being done. In some cases, efforts are made to select schools that we are most like. In other cases, institutions are selected on the basis of who we would aspire to become more like.

One recommendation by the NCA Accreditation team was for the University to reconsider its working lists of peer institutions with the goal of reconsidering the criteria for selecting comparison schools and perhaps consolidating lists. It seems reasonable that different sets of schools be used for undergraduate and graduate program comparisons. But, it also seems reasonable that some input about peer programs and institutions come from the academic side of the house. In January, we had a meeting with Provost Coombe to discuss how the Faculty Senate might contribute to this analysis process. Our idea was to help inform the faculty of those schools that have been and are being used for comparisons, and to offer input in the final analysis.

This issue of the Faculty Forum provides to you a few of the working lists of peer institutions. Are we being realistic in our comparisons? Have we selected institutions that are indeed most like us? Are there other schools that you would recommend for comparison? On the undergraduate side, what programs offer an academic and campus experience that is similar to the experience at the University of Denver? For faculty in our professional programs, do

the comparison schools represent those programs that we are most like? Who do we aspire to become more like? Which institutions have a legacy of success and strength of reputation that could help us learn what it takes to become and sustain a great university?

UNDERGRADUATE COMPARISONS

Sheila Wright, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Wellness, and Campus Life provided the information in tables 1 & 2. The schools are used for broad undergraduate program evaluation and planning. The first table lists peer institutions based upon undergraduate admit rates, persistence from first to second year (what has been called retention rate), and numeric profiles for academic reputation published by US News and World Report. The academic ranking values are based on a number of profile parameters and range from 1 to 5 (with 5 being highest).

Our programs, departments and the Vice Provost's office are to be commended for their efforts to bolster

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ADDRESS:

our sense of community and concern following the Sept 11th tragedy and during this past interterm. In Winter Quarter '02, student return rate was over 97% -- even better than what we have seen in past years! Undergraduate Studies is working to develop a plan to improve undergraduate persistence in coming years.

Table 1: Comparison Schools for Undergraduate Programming

University	Admit Rate	Persistence	US News Acad. Rep.
Rensselaer Polytech	73 %	91 %	3 . 6
Tulane University	73 %	85 %	3 . 5
Case Western Univ.	71 %	91 %	3 . 5
Yeshiva University	79 %	84 %	3 . 0
Univ. of San Fran.	80 %	84 %	2 . 9
American Univ.	72 %	86 %	2 . 9
Texas Christian Univ.	76 %	82 %	2 . 8
Loyola-Chicago	80 %	80 %	2 . 8
Univ. of Denver	78 %	84 %	2 . 6
Univ. of Tulsa	75 %	78 %	2 . 5
Univ. of Dayton	79 %	79 %	2 . 4

Source: Office of Undergraduate Studies

While it is informative to consider who we may be most like, it is also important to consider an aspiration group of schools that are more distinctive by accomplishment and reputation. Table 2 lists those schools selected by Undergraduate Studies as an aspiration group for undergraduate programming. These schools have lower admit rates (more selective admissions), higher persistence rates, and a stronger academic reputation.

Table 2: Aspiration Group for Undergraduate Studies

University	Admit Rate	Persistence	US News Acad. Rep.
Duke University	26 %	97 %	4 . 6
Dartmouth Univ.	21 %	96 %	4 . 4
Univ. of Richmond	42 %	92 %	4 . 3
Vanderbilt Univ.	55 %	92 %	4 . 1
Emory University	45 %	92 %	4 . 0
Santa Clara Univ.	61 %	92 %	4 . 0
Univ. of Rochester	50 %	94 %	3 . 4
Wake Forest Univ.	49 %	93 %	3 . 4
Pepperdine Univ.	36 %	87 %	3 . 1
Univ. of Denver	78 %	84 %	2 . 6

Source: Office of Undergraduate Studies

Important budgetary and planning decisions at University of Denver are also driven by comparisons to peer institutions. In each year's planning cycle, different possible rates of tuition increase are modeled. One goal of this tuition increase analysis is to keep DU in the middle range of a selected competitive market group at the same time that budget recommendations are projected to satisfy the real costs of running the university (actually paying the bills). Table 3 below shows the peer institutions that are used for this annual tuition analysis -- colleges and universities both in Colorado and nationally with which the University chooses to maintain a comparable market position. Realize that these are the published total costs for tuition, fees, room and board, not discounted rates (less scholarship and other financial aid).

Table 3: Undergraduate Comparison Schools for Tuition, Fee, Room and Board Rates

University	Total Costs 2001-2002	Acad. Rep.
Northwestern Univ.	\$ 33,591	4 . 4
Vanderbilt University	\$ 33,826	4 . 1
Washington Univ.	\$ 35,141	4 . 1
Emory University	\$ 33,792	4 . 0
Colorado College	\$ 30,736	3 . 9
Univ. of Southern CA	\$ 33,610	3 . 8
Boston University	\$ 34,978	3 . 4
Lewis & Clark College	\$ 29,260	3 . 2
Regis University	\$ 26,040	3 . 1
Southern Methodist	\$ 27,851	3 . 1
Univ. of Puget Sound	\$ 28,285	3 . 0
Univ. of Denver	\$ 28,783	2 . 6

Source: Office of the Provost

Comparison sets in the tables above are not necessarily the schools with which DU competes for admissions. To our knowledge, we do not have data available to evaluate who we compete with for graduate or professional programs. But we do have admissions data available to evaluate undergraduate admissions. Table 4 below lists comparison schools with the most cross admits for our undergraduates. These are the other institutions to which undergraduate admits are also admitted. Not surprisingly, undergraduates who apply to DU are also interested in other Colorado institutions as well as public and private institutions from coast to coast.

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Table 4: Comparison Schools for Most Undergraduate Cross Admits

University	Location	US News Acad. Rep.
Colorado College	CO Springs, CO	3 . 9
University of Arizona	Tucson, AZ	3 . 7
University of Colorado	Boulder, CO	3 . 7
Boston University	Boston, MA	3 . 4
University of Oregon	Eugene, OR	3 . 4
Regis University	Denver, CO	3 . 1
Colorado State Univ.	Fort Collins, CO	3 . 0
Univ. of Puget Sound	Tacoma, WA	3 . 0
University of Vermont	Burlington, VT	3 . 0
University of Denver	Denver, CO	2 . 6
Univ. of Northern Colo.	Greeley, CO	2 . 3

Source: *Office of Admissions*

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM COMPARISONS

Most peer institution comparisons at DU have focused on comparing undergraduate program information. Even the tuition comparison group is selected with any eye to examining undergraduate tuition trends. Table 5 (see back page) presents another list of comparison schools used for faculty salary analysis in the recent North Central Accreditation report, along with profile data that the Faculty Senate office was able to pull from each institution's web page. While the NCA process focuses on undergraduate accreditation, these schools are all Universities delivering an undergraduate program and a constellation of graduate and professional programs.

As you can see, most of these institutions have Business and Law schools, whereas other graduate programs, such as Professional Psychology, Social Work, and International Studies may find that direct comparisons are few. It may be useful for faculty in the professional schools to consider what national institutions might provide the most useful comparisons, both in terms of current comparability and in terms of our aspirations.

CLOSING COMMENTS

We understand that the Provost has instructed Deans to ask their groups to recommend comparison programs and schools. The Faculty Senate supports this effort, and we ask all faculty members to consider the comparison institutions that might best support our academic planning. As you think of your academic unit, what comparison schools best describe your peer group? What comparison schools best describe your aspiration? This input is essential in supporting the Faculty Senate's efforts to collaborate with Provost Coombe and the higher administration to examine our current comparison process and construct the most useful set of comparisons to guide our academic and fiscal planning. ❖

-- Susan E. Sadler, President

-- Cathryn Potter, Chair
Financial Planning Committee



References: *U.S. News & World Report* academic reputation rankings, available online at:

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/cosearch.htm>

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