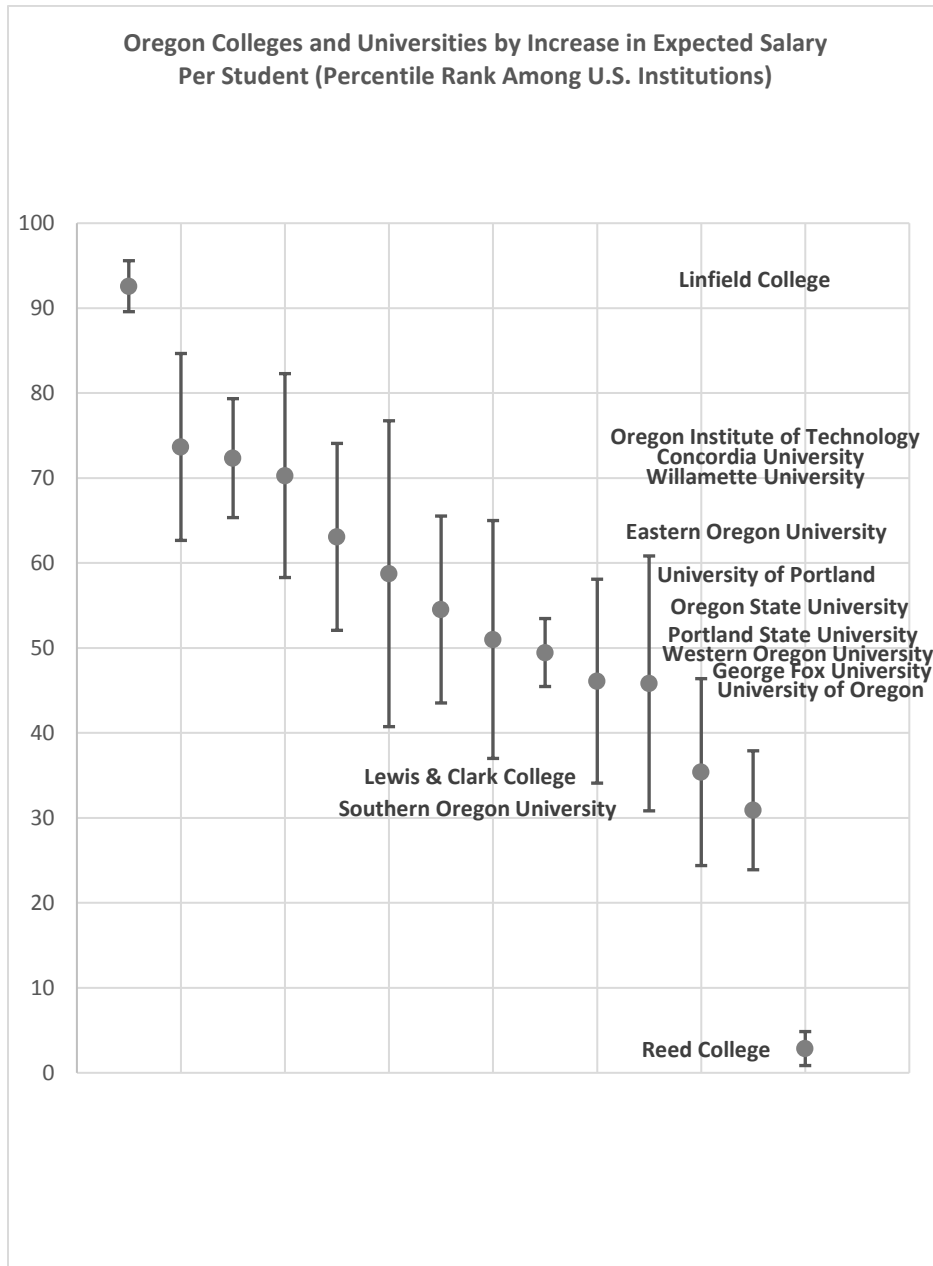


Oregon's Accessible Private Colleges and Universities Are the Best Value: OAS report

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For immediate release

Recent rankings of Oregon colleges and universities by three separate research projects show that accessible private colleges and universities in Oregon add more economic value to students than either public universities or elite liberal arts colleges, the Oregon Association of Scholars said today in a report.

“Accessible private institutions like Linfield College and Willamette University perform better than other institutions in the state when taking into account differences in student preparation and the choice of majors,” said OAS President Bruce Gilley.

Public universities in Oregon, he said, are adding about as much value to students as expected. The two elite liberal arts colleges in the state, Lewis & Clark College and Reed College, do far worse in improving the economic prospects of their students compared to what their choices of majors and pre-college preparation would predict.

While salary is not the only consideration in the role of higher education, Gilley said, the rankings provide a useful baseline of comparison for students, faculty, administrators, and the public.

“Oregon colleges and universities should constantly be asking themselves how their students fare in the professional world even as they keep broader objectives like citizenship and the expansion of knowledge in mind,” he said.

The rankings are based on the outcome (salary) measures of performance produced by three separate models developed by the *Economist* Group, Georgetown University, and the Brookings Institution. Because the ratings depend on a time lag between enrollment and later salary, they mostly reflect institutional performance in the early to mid-2000s. Thus, they should be taken as a baseline to judge whether colleges and universities in Oregon have undertaken reforms to their educational models in the last 10 years.

Oregon’s Best and Worst Colleges by Value-Added

Linfield College, a small liberal arts college in McMinnville, uses the slogan “the power of a small college”. That seems apt in light of its consistently high ranking in all three models used here. Within the 67% confidence interval chosen here, it is the unquestioned best value institution of higher education in Oregon.

It is notable that private universities Concordia University and Willamette University are also significant overperformers along with the University of Portland. George Fox University is an average performer.

The three main public universities – University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and Portland State University – perform as expected in creating economic value for their students. Among smaller state schools, the Oregon Institute of Technology is a strong overperformer while Southern Oregon University is a significant underperformer. Among comprehensive state universities, Eastern Oregon University is a notable overperformer.

Both of the elite liberal arts colleges in the state are significant underperformers. Lewis & Clark College is a modest underperformer. The other elite liberal arts college, Reed College, is the unquestioned worst performer in the state. Compared to other colleges and universities with equally well-prepared students

taking a similar mixture of subjects, Reedies make far less money in their professional lives. One explanation may be the highly politicized campus environment, which may attract less career-oriented students and also undermine educational outcomes. Yet in the one model that controls for this factor – the *Economist* constructs a “Marx and Marley” index that does this – Reed still fares poorly. Thus while it is easy to attribute Reed’s poor performance to its illiberal campus environment, it may suffer from more basic problems of educational delivery.

Background on Value-Added Rankings

Value-added approaches to higher education are one way to measure the performance of a college or university. They involve first constructing a national average for a student’s post-graduation salary after some number of years given their pre-college preparation and their choice of major. The actual salaries of students from each institution are then compared to this predicted value. Institutions whose graduates do better than expected have percentile rankings above 50 percent (the higher the better) and those whose graduates do worse than expected have percentile rankings below 50 percent (the lower the worse).

The three models used to construct an average percentile ranking for each institution in this report vary in how they approach the question. Since the percentile rankings vary, the graphic shows a range within which there is a significant degree of confidence that the value lies (in this case the 67% confidence range is chosen). The estimates vary most widely for the University of Portland, hence its larger confidence bar, while the estimates vary the least for Reed College (hence its smaller bar).

The three value-added rankings differ mainly in how they calculate a student’s expected salary before college (background factors); how they calculate a student’s expected salary at a given type of college (mediating factors); and how they calculate a student’s expected salary within a certain external economic context (external factors).

The [Brookings Institution’s](#) measure uses ethnicity, family income, and college entrance exam test scores as background factors. It uses the level of degrees an institution offers as a mediating factor, and it uses the institution’s location as an external factor.

The [Economist’s](#) more complex measure uses average SAT scores, gender ratio, family income, and race breakdown as background factors. It uses college size, whether a university is public or private, the mix of subjects students chose, whether a college is affiliated with the Catholic Church or a Protestant Christian denomination, whether it has a ranked undergraduate business school, whether it is a liberal arts college, and its degree of political leftism (which attracts students less intent on future salaries) as mediating factors. It then adds two external factors: the wealth of the state and prevailing wages in the locality of the institution.

The [Georgetown University](#) model uses average ACT scores as a background factor. It then uses the composition of majors at an institution as a mediating factor. It adds as an external factor whether students also go on to earn graduate degrees.

The percentile scores for each institution and the average score are shown below.

Institution	Economist	Georgetown	Brookings	Average Percentile
Linfield College	98	92	88	93
Oregon Institute of Technology	56	69	96	74
Concordia University	70	86	61	72
Willamette University	50	93	68	70
Eastern Oregon University	83	45	61	63
University of Portland	23	72	81	59
Oregon State University	41	46	77	55
Portland State University	44	31	78	51
Western Oregon University	57	49	42	49
George Fox University	25	68	45	46
University of Oregon	69	16	53	46
Lewis & Clark College	53	13	40	35
Southern Oregon University	27	22	44	31
Reed College	2	1	6	3

The Oregon Association of Scholars is the Oregon chapter of the National Association of Scholars, a nationwide association of scholars and researchers committed to upholding the classic values of liberal education and inquiry. For more information, see www.oregonscholars.org

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