

## Why Selectivity Matters in Your College Decision

What is the real difference between the quality of education at highly selective colleges and universities versus less selective institutions? Can't a bright, hard-working student learn just as much and succeed in life by getting a bachelor's degree from a less selective public university instead of a state flagship or a private liberal arts college? The answer is, for the most part, yes. But research shows that highly selective colleges and universities offer real advantages—especially for lower-income students. While the “rankings” may be just one factor in finding a college that is a good fit for you, the research summarized here suggests that selectivity is actually a complex indicator of other factors that may have important implications for your college experience and your future.

- **GRADUATION RATES.** In general, highly selective colleges and universities do better at making sure that their students graduate. For high-achieving students from lower-income backgrounds, the disparity between graduation rates at more highly selective and less selective institutions is striking: Around 90% of high-achieving students at the nation's 146 most selective colleges and universities graduate within six years of starting college, compared to only 70% of equally high-achieving students at less selective schools and 56% at non-selective schools. While the causes for these differences in graduation rates are complicated—related to a variety of factors such as class size, financial aid availability, spending per student, peer support networks, campus culture, on-campus resources, etc.—in general, more selective institutions tend to have the resources and/or policies necessary to ensure their students' success.
- **GRADUATE SCHOOL ACCESS AND SUCCESS.** The most selective colleges and universities also seem to better promote graduate education among their students. While nationally only 21% of college graduates go on to pursue a post-bachelor's education, more than 35% of graduates from the most selective colleges and universities do so.
- **EARNING POTENTIAL.** Evidence suggests that there may be a limited benefit to attending more selective schools that appears in the wages graduates earn in the years immediately after graduating. Research on this “wage premium” on degrees from highly selective colleges is complicated by the characteristics of students who choose higher paying careers, the majors students choose while in college, and their geographic locations. Less equivocal, however, is the fact that more selective colleges and universities are generally able to offer more intensive career counseling, access to internships and summer jobs, and recruiting opportunities on campus—all factors which help students at those colleges get an edge in the job market.

### References:

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