CHOOSING A SCHOOL

PROGRAMS TO LOOK FOR

This is the fourth year that U.S. News is publishing a list of schools with outstanding examples of academic programs that are believed to lead to student success. With the help of education experts, including staff members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, we identified eight such program types. We then invited college presidents, chief academic officers, and deans of admission to nominate up to 10 institutions with stellar examples of each kind of program. Colleges and universities that were mentioned most often are listed here, in alphabetical order.

At Amherst College, WRITING AND RESEARCH programs earn high marks.

(*Public)

INTERNSHIPS / CO-OPS

Schools nominated in this category require or encourage students to apply what they’re learning in the classroom to work in the real world—through closely supervised internships or practicums, or through cooperative education, in which one period of study typically alternates with one of work.

Alverno College (WI)
Antioch College (OH)
Berea College (KY)
Cal Poly–San Luis Obispo*
Drexel University (PA)
Elon University (NC)
Georgia Institute of Technology*
Kettering University (MI)
Northeastern University (MA)
Portland State University (OR)*
Reed College (OR)
Southern Illinois U.–Edwardsville*
Swarthmore College (PA)
Truman State University (MO)*
University of Chicago

SENIOR CAPSTONE

Whether they’re called a senior capstone or go by some other name, these culminating experiences ask students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and synthesizes what they’ve learned. The project might be a thesis, a performance, or an exhibit of artwork.

Allegheny College (PA)
Alverno College (WI)
Carleton College (MN)
College of Wooster (OH)
Duke University (NC)
Elon University (NC)
Harvard University (MA)
Massachusetts Inst. of Technology
Portland State University (OR)*
Princeton University (NJ)*
Reed College (OR)
Southern Illinois U.–Edwardsville*
Swarthmore College (PA)
Truman State University (MO)*
University of Chicago

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCES

Orientation can go only so far in making freshmen feel connected. Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other academic programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis.

Alverno College (WI)
Amherst College (MA)
Appalachian State University (NC)*
Arizona State University*
Augsburg College (MN)*
Ball State University (IN)*
Beloit College (WI)
Bowling Green State University (OH)*
Brevard College (NC)
California State U.–Long Beach*
College of the Holy Cross (MA)
Drury University (MO)
Duke University (NC)
Eckerd College (FL)
Elon University (NC)
Evergreen State College (WA)*
Grinnell College (IA)
Indiana University–Bloomington*
Indiana U.-Purdue U.–Indianapolis*
J James Madison University (VA)*
Kalamazoo College (MI)
Kennesaw State University (GA)*
Lawrence University (WI)
North Carolina State U.–Raleigh*
Ohio State University–Columbus*
Portland State University (OR)*
Princeton University (NJ)*
Valparaiso University (IN)
Wagner College (NY)
William Jewell College (MO)

Note: Survey conducted by Synovate.
In learning communities, students typically take two or more linked courses as a group and get to know one another and their professors well. Some learning communities are also residential. Independently or in small teams, and mentored by a faculty member, students do intensive and self-directed research or creative work that results in an original scholarly paper or other product that can be formally presented on or off campus.

In service-learning programs, required (or for-credit) volunteer work in the community is an instructional strategy. What's learned in the field bolsters what happens in class and vice versa.

These colleges typically make writing a priority at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum. Students are encouraged to produce and refine various forms of writing for a range of audiences in different disciplines.