

# College rankings go under the microscope

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Parents, students and admissions officials have combed through college and university rankings for years. However, education researchers have largely ignored the controversial lists. That's about to change, according to a Boston College expert in educational measurement.

"Are rankings doing more harm than good or more good than harm?" said Lynch School of Education Professor Henry Braun, part of a panel focused on rankings today at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting.

"There is an appetite among parents and students for rankings because they believe that rankings can help them make good choices," said Braun, the Boisi Professor of Education and Public Policy. "University officials are less enthusiastic and offer many criticisms. This is a subject that deserves more scholarly attention, rather than just bashing rankings outright."

Braun, the director of the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy, said higher [education](#) experts are staking out a research agenda to better understand rankings methodologies, how consumers use them and whether institutions can put them to better use.

The rankings industry is a big business for organizations such as *U.S. News & World Report* and *Princeton Review*. The federal government is moving toward a ranking system for colleges and universities. Despite criticism, rankings exert a growing influence on college choice trends, prior studies have concluded.

Last fall, Braun and George Washington University Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development Michael Feuer hosted an AERA-sponsored conference for professors, administrators, and rankings providers to discuss a research agenda focused on rankings and their influence on both consumers and institutions. Today's panel expands on that discussion.

Provided by Boston College

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