

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
MAGAZINE FOR
SCIENTISTS**

Published rankings and top tens of all sorts seem to be increasingly common — and many now go beyond best films or books to look at all aspects of people's lives. *Forbes* magazine, for example, runs rankings that range from the best places to get ahead, to the best cities for recent college graduates or the best places for businesses and careers.

Higher education is one of the major areas ranked. Numerous organizations draw up tables on universities and graduate programmes, although they tend to use varying criteria in their assessments. On page 1024 we analyse some popular rankings schemes for graduate programmes, examine their methodology and reveal some of the suggestions being made for improvement.

Rankings can suffer from biases and data limitations. But they have become big business for publications such as *US News & World Report* — to the displeasure of some observers. Last year for example, the Annapolis Group, an organization of US liberal arts colleges, objected to rankings that asked college presidents to gauge the reputations of other schools (see *Nature* **447**, 1139; 2007). The Education Conservancy, a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon, and another critic of current rankings, has ambitious plans to replace undergraduate rankings systems. It is planning a college 'information system' to assist prospective students. Colleges will be suggested based on students' priorities and a set of diagnostic exercises that help students determine the sort of college experience they are seeking. If the conservancy can raise the funds to develop the system and update it regularly, this could be an invaluable tool.

If all goes well, hopefully the feat can be repeated for graduate schools and, even more ambitiously, on an international level so that prospective graduate students can judge schools across borders — a key capability for a scientific enterprise and educational system that is increasingly global. Ideally, graduate students would have a better chance of finding the right fit, and institutions would worry more about education than about reputation.

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