



THE BEST COLLEGES FOR FUTURE LEADERS

TIME and Statista have named 100 colleges
shaping U.S. leaders

How TIME and Statista Determined the Best Colleges and Companies for Future Leaders

A degree from an elite university doesn't guarantee success. But in U.S. society, success is a good indicator you went to an elite university.

TIME and Statista analyzed the resumés of 2,000 top leaders in the U.S.—politicians, CEOs, union leaders, Nobel winners, and more across sectors—to assemble a list of the universities and colleges where they received their degrees. The list, which is weighted for school size, is led by so-called Ivy Plus schools, with Harvard University dominating the field. Many top schools training future leaders also have notable business and law programs, or are large research universities.

What distinguishes these schools, experts say, is not necessarily that they teach students to be better leaders, but that alums receive more opportunities, and many companies have a vested interest in hiring them. Whatever a student may have learned at school, an elite diploma signals at least two things to prospective employers: survival of a difficult admissions process, and a high likelihood of intelligence. Elite students aren't the only bright young people in the world, but elite degrees offer a shortcut for finding talent, and make people stand out when they're being evaluated by people who don't know them, like in a job interview, says David Deming, a professor of political economy at Harvard Kennedy School.

"I'm sure [hiring managers] could find more than a couple of good students at Big State Universities. But they can also find 30 of them at Harvard," he says. "I think that people who went to Harvard or schools like it are much more likely to be given a chance."

Institutions that train many eventual leaders, including elite law firms and academia, are especially likely to winnow applicants based on their resumes. Lauren Rivera, a professor of management and organizations at Northwestern Kellogg, notes that top consulting firms often choose who they interview based on *alma mater*, and even have quotas for individual schools. Universities themselves are far more likely to hire staff who attended elite schools. According to one 2022 study published in *Nature*, 80% of domestically trained U.S. faculty were trained in just 20% of universities, especially UC Berkeley, Harvard, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Stanford, all of which rank in the top 30 of TIME's list.

Experts say the rapid rise of elite students in U.S. society isn't even solely a matter of their choices. Students at elite schools are aggressively recruited on campus early in their college careers by companies that host flashy events to "hoover up all the students interested in working for them," says Amy Binder, professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University, a process that she calls a "career funnel." This leads many elite students to choose careers right out of college in finance, tech, or consulting—top careers for gaining societal leadership positions. A poll by the Harvard Crimson found that over half of the students entering the workforce from the class of 2023 planned to work in those fields after graduation.

Rivera calls these firms a "golden doorstep." "These firms market themselves as incubators for high-achieving people," she says. Students arrive on campus with diverse dreams, but the career funnel convinces high achievers that these jobs are the next step for people like them, says Ryan Cieslikowski, a recent Stanford University graduate and an organizer for Class Action, a grassroots organization working to redirect students from career funnels to social impact work. "Once you get into these schools, it's the next status competition," says Cieslikowski.

As the list makes clear, however, the Ivy League isn't the only route to power. While those schools dominate fields like law, the media, and academia, production fields like engineering, agriculture, and aerospace recruit from schools that are more likely to offer technical skills like engineering, says Steven Brint, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Riverside. The University of Michigan, for instance, is a well-known career pathway to leadership in Detroit's auto industry, while the University of Texas and Texas A&M—which pop up at 14 and 23 in the ranking—are well known for

producing oil and gas leaders. Many of these schools are also geographically closer to the places these companies operate.

“I think that those are probably not the industries that the kids going to elite private institutions are thinking about,” says Brint. “I just don’t think they’re in the same cultural frame.”

If leaders’ resumé’s are any indicator, the following colleges and universities may be the clearest launching point to leadership. — *Tara Law*

Correction, Nov. 29

The original version of this article misstated Amy Binder’s professional affiliation. She is now at Johns Hopkins University, not the University of California San Diego.

TIME Best Colleges for Future Leaders



Rank	College	Leadership score
1	Harvard University	100
2	Stanford University	90
3	University of Pennsylvania	89
4	Columbia University	87
5	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	87
6	Yale University	86
7	Princeton University	86
8	Northwestern University	85
9	University of Michigan	85
10	University of Chicago	84
11	University of California, Berkeley	84
12	Georgetown University	84
13	New York University	83
14	University of Texas at Austin	83
15	Cornell University	83
16	Dartmouth College	83
17	University of Virginia	83
18	Duke University	83
19	Brown University	83
20	Arizona State University-Tempe	82
21	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	82
22	University of Notre Dame	82

23	Texas A&M University	82
24	Vanderbilt University	82
25	University of Southern California (USC)	82
26	University of Minnesota	82
27	Indiana University	82
28	Boston College	82
29	University of Wisconsin-Madison	82
30	Emory University	82
31	Boston University	82
32	Purdue University	82
33	University of California, Los Angeles	82
34	University of Missouri-Columbia	82
35	Miami University	82
36	Pennsylvania State University	82
37	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	81
38	Iowa State University	81
39	Johns Hopkins University	81
40	Baylor University	81
41	George Washington University	81
42	The Ohio State University, Columbus	81
43	Syracuse University	81
44	United States Military Academy (USMA)	81
45	University of Alabama	81
46	University of Georgia	81
47	Washington University in Saint Louis	81
48	Michigan State University	81

48	Michigan State University	81
49	Santa Clara University	81
50	University of Iowa	81
51	University of Pittsburgh	81
52	Carnegie Mellon University	81
53	Rutgers University	81
54	University of Washington	81
55	Lehigh University	81
56	Auburn University	81
57	University of Utah	81
58	Louisiana State University	81
59	University of Arkansas	81
60	Brigham Young University	81
61	William & Mary	81
62	Trinity University	81
63	Villanova University	81
64	University of Colorado Boulder	81
65	University of Maryland	81
66	Tufts University	81
67	Tulane University	81
68	University of Florida	81
69	Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science	81
70	Drexel University	81
71	Bradley University	81
72	Wake Forest University	81
73	Georgia Institute of Technology	81

74	Pepperdine University	81
75	The California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	81
76	University of Rochester	81
77	Middlebury College	81
78	University of Kentucky	81
79	Western Michigan University	81
80	University of Oregon	81
81	University of Nebraska, Lincoln	81
82	United States Naval Academy	81
83	University of Connecticut	81
84	Clemson University	81
85	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	81
86	Temple University	81
87	North Carolina State University, Raleigh	81
88	University of Houston	81
89	Claremont McKenna College (CMC)	81
90	Rice University	81
91	Case Western Reserve University	81
92	Amherst College	81
93	Davidson College	81
94	University of Vermont	81
95	Mount Holyoke College	81
96	Kansas State University	81
97	Smith College	81
98	James Madison University	81

99	Colgate University	81
100	Wayne State University	81
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Table: TIME and Statista • Source: Statista



