

## **Ranking**

Ranking of students is an issue that causes considerable discussion and contentiousness in independent secondary schools, since to rank students seems to place at a disadvantage all but the top quartile of a graduating class. This "disadvantaging" phenomenon occurs, it is argued, because the bottom quartile of a small senior class in an independent school offering a competitive academic program could in fact be stronger students than the second or even first quartile of a neighboring large public school. The disadvantage is exaggerated for state colleges and public universities that rely on pure formula for admitting students: GPA, Class Rank, SAT's, Course Load, etc.

The solution that many schools have come to is to refuse to rank its students (or at least to refuse to publish and disseminate school rank). Such a refusal seems not to have any deleterious effects on the college admissions record of the schools adopting such a policy. (It is only fair to add that even these schools make exceptions by determining and privately conveying class rank in certain circumstances, such as the requirement of a rank for admission to one of the service academies.)

ISACS recommendation is that any school poll the admissions deans of the ten most popular colleges in terms of the matriculation of the school's graduates to see what effect, if any, a refusal to rank seniors would have on admissions to those colleges and universities.

Recognition other than class rank can serve the function of identifying a school's academic elite: Honor Roll, Dean's List, National Honor Society, Cum Laude Society, etc.

For schools that continue to rank students, the topic of weighting of AP/Honors courses in figuring class rank becomes an additional conundrum. Although many schools do in fact weight honors courses, ISACS counsels against it for the following reasons:

1. It turns out students receive higher grades in honors courses anyway: check it out by comparing your school's honors grade averages with your regular course averages. You might say, "Well, that's because better students take honors courses," but I might reply, "Well, maybe it's that teachers think the students are smarter and therefore grade them higher." Regardless of the reason, the fact remains, the generally there is already a higher grade (read ranking) effect for enrolling in honors courses.
2. It turns out colleges often recompute GPA based on their own weighting system, so a school's weighting compounds the effect.
3. At least honors/AP courses should be academically pure: i.e., attracting those most qualified and interested, without any ersatz incentives such as weighting of grades.

The short version of this is that the system already is biased in favor of the strongest students, so we need not to enshrine the bias with additional perquisites.

See also: Grading

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