



Flagler College earns its highest ranking in U.S. News & World Report

By Stuart Korfhage
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Flagler College received its highest recognition in the U.S. News & World Report's 2017 Best Colleges guide that was just released.

The St. Augustine college was ranked second in the Best Regional Colleges in the South category, moving up from sixth last year. High Point University in North Carolina claimed the top spot in the same category.

This year's honor marked the third time Flagler has ranked in the top 10 in the college guide.

U.S. News defines regional colleges as those focusing on the undergraduate experience and offering a broad range of programs in the liberal arts in fields such as business, nursing and education. U.S. News measures academic quality by gathering data in a number of categories: assessment by administrators at peer institutions and high school guidance counselors, how well schools perform at retaining and graduating students, the quality of and investment in the faculty, student selectivity, financial resources and the state of alumni giving. A rank is arrived at after calculating weighted scores for each school.

"I feel it's a tremendous honor for the institution, especially I think it's a great honor and a great tribute to our wonderful and very talented faculty and staff," Flagler President William Abare Jr. said. "Because they ultimately are the ones responsible for these kinds of awards."

Other schools in the top 10 include University of the Ozarks, Catawba College, University of South Carolina-Aiken, Coker College, Blue Mountain College, University of Mobile, Bennett College and Belmont Abbey College. There were 56 colleges and universities included in the first tier of the South rankings.

Abare said Flagler's focus is obviously on serving the students' needs rather than rankings, but he said the positive recognition is always welcome.

"The rankings have a lot of subjectivity, and there's some intangibles I'm sure that are involved," he said. "But, nonetheless, we are very proud of it, and we think it's a reflection of the quality of our institution and the programs that we offer."

In August, the college was also named one of the nation's best institutions for undergraduate education in The Princeton Review's "The Best 381 Colleges" guide. Only about 15 percent of America's 2,500 four-year colleges are included, and Flagler has made it into the book since 2003.

There are a variety of factors that keep Flagler popular with prospective students. One of which is the relatively low tuition. Flagler's tuition this year is about \$17,500. According to The College Board, the average rate of tuition for private colleges in the United States is more than \$32,000.

"We try to be as affordable as we can be without compromising the quality of our academic programs," Abare said.

And possibly the biggest draw of all is St. Augustine itself.

"We have one thing that a lot of other schools do not have, and that is location," Abare said. "We are blessed to have the location that I think is unsurpassed. St. Augustine is an ideal community. There's just a lot of great things associated to where we are."