

HIGHER EDUCATION'S SLIDE

Where are the stars?

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For decades, Oregon has consigned its universities to the back of the budgetary bus. Not surprisingly, the best and brightest are deciding not to climb aboard. While the Oregon University System has many first-rate faculty members and brilliant students, many more with marketable credentials are choosing to teach, conduct research and study elsewhere.

The accompanying table shows the number of members of the National Academy of Sciences, the number of major faculty awards and the number of National Merit and Achievement Scholars at a number of public universities. The University of Oregon and Oregon State University do not compare well. Oregon's low state spending per student, its relatively low faculty salaries and its poor performance on other measures of public support detailed in earlier parts of this editorial series have taken their toll.

Included in the chart are universities the OUS regards as the UO's peers. Because the UO is not really in the same league with any of them, the chart also includes public universities that are members of the Pac-10 athletic conference. The UO and OSU trail them as well.

Members of the National Academy of Sciences are the nation's most distinguished scientists; 72 new members are elected each year. The last UO faculty member elected to the academy is Brian Matthews, a specialist in biophysics and computational biology, who joined in 1986.

The chart is based on 2004 data; the NAS Web site lists only five current UO members: Matthews, Michael Posner (psychology), John Schellman (biophysics), Franklin Stahl (genetics) and Peter von Hippel (biochemistry). Posner, Schellman and Stahl are all professors emeritus; von Hippel has retired from teaching but continues his research. Students at the UO have a realistic chance of interacting with only one member of the NAS.

The category of major faculty awards includes 24 top honors for scholarship or research: McArthur Foundation grants, Guggenheim fellowships, National Humanities Center fellowships and the like. Oregon might find a silver lining in the fact that UO and OSU faculty receive relatively few of these honors, because winning one can be a ticket to a well-supported position at another

institution.

National Merit Scholarship semi-finalists are the 1 percent of high school students who score highest on standardized tests. Achievement Scholars are African-American students who score high on similarly competitive tests. Oregon had 181 semifinalists in 2006. The year before, only 22 from any state enrolled at the UO and OSU. Almost all of Oregon's semifinalists left the state to study elsewhere, and few came to Oregon from other states. The chart suggests a high correlation between the number of highly distinguished faculty and the number of most promising students.

All of this is a clear consequence of state policy. A state that underpays its faculty can expect those with the most marketable talents to leave, or never come in the first place - and they have, taking their research funding with them. A state that provides weak support to its institutions of higher learning can expect its brightest students to pursue opportunities out of state - and they do, creating a chronic brain drain. The numbers should embarrass all Oregonians, but the state's political leaders appear willing to continue encouraging academic stars to shine elsewhere.

Top performing faculty, students (at selected universities)

UO trails its peers in several measures of faculty and student achievement

	National Academy of Sciences members		Major faculty awards		National Merit and Achievement Scholars	
	Number	(rank)	Number	(rank)	Number	(rank)
University of Oregon	6	(49)	7	(56)	14	(54)
University of Washington	78	(4)	34	(6)	34	(29)
University Virginia	25	(21)	21	(18)	39	(25)
University of California (Santa Barbara)	24	(22)	9	(46)	10	(64)
University of Colorado (Boulder)	28	(19)	18	(22)	4	(80)
University of Iowa	20	(25)	13	(31)	26	(38)
University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	77	(5)	47	(1)	64	(16)
University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill)	36	(11)	30	(8)	153	(5)
Indiana University (Bloomington)	10	(38)	14	(27)	21	(43)
Oregon State University	5	(53)	11	(35)	8	(66)
Washington State University	8	(42)	10	(41)	3	(89)
Univesrity of Arizona	29	(15)	23	(12)	163	(4)
Arizona State University	7	(44)	6	(65)	76	(10)
University of California (Los Angeles)	64	(7)	37	(5)	116	(8)
University of California (Berkeley)	209	(1)	45	(2)	68	(13)

Note: Rankings exclude private universities

Source: The Lombardi Program for Measuring University Performance, University of Florida at Gainesville, 2004