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Ranking Medical Schools by Social Mission

Researchers used three criteria to determine medical schools' social mission scores.

Most rankings of medical schools, such as that provided by *U.S. News & World Report*, classify medical schools on the basis of research funding, reputation, and student selectivity. However, such rankings do not consider whether the school fulfills an important social mission (i.e., to train physicians to care for the national population). In this study, using data on graduates from 1999 to 2001, investigators ranked schools on three criteria: percentage of graduates choosing to practice in primary care, percentage of graduates choosing to practice in healthcare shortage areas, and proportion of underrepresented minority graduates.

The highest-ranked schools were historically black institutions, Morehouse College, Meharry Medical College, and Howard University, whereas the lowest-ranked schools were Vanderbilt University, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, and Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Public and community-based medical schools generally ranked higher than did private and non-community-based schools. Amount of National Institutes of Health funding was associated inversely with social mission score.

Comment: This study had a number of limitations as discussed by the authors, and their criteria for ranking medical schools by social mission certainly can be debated. Nonetheless, the study invites us to reconsider the underlying missions of medical schools and the appropriate balance between research agendas and the healthcare needs of the population.

— [Jamaluddin Mooloo, MD, MPH](#)

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