Institution Classification Personal Reflection on Meredith College

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The ability to locate data to classify and compare higher education institutions in the United States is a valuable skill. I first looked up Meredith College on the Carnegie classifications. Then I compared the 2018 Updated Facts and Figures to understand what the categories and classifications meant. At first, I was surprised by how short the classification was, but after evaluating the facts and figures it was clear that the short report was a huge amount of information. I then looked up Meredith College’s ranking on the U.S. News and saw similar themes and information but in a much more user-friendly way.

The first category I evaluated in the Carnegie classification was Undergraduate Instructional Program. "Four-year colleges and universities are skewed, in number of institutions toward the Professional Plus Arts and Sciences (31%) and Professions Focus (30%). Enrollments in the four-year sector, are more normally distributed across this spectrum, with a skew toward the Professions Plus Arts and Sciences, and Professions Focus institutions". Meredith College is ranked as "Balances Arts & Sciences/Professions", a category that only 23% of institutions fell into in 2017. This suggests that Meredith is not focusing their attention, recruitment, or financial aspects on one departmental area of focus, but spreads its attention evenly between professional, artistic, and scientific program focus. (Carnegie classifications pg. 3-4)

This seems to be a theme among liberal arts colleges in comparison to larger universities. It will be interesting to investigate how neighboring universities such as North Carolina State University or University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill compare in their instructional focus Carnegie classification to the surrounding liberal arts colleges in the Raleigh research triangle area.

The student level mix is classified as “very high undergraduate” for Meredith college which is evenly distributed with exclusively undergraduate four-year at 18% and high undergraduate at 8%. Understandably this distribution is skewed towards institutions that are exclusively undergraduate two-year programs (34%) as these probably include institutions with higher accessibility such as community colleges.

Meredith College's undergraduate profile is unsurprising as they are a specialized institution. Many of the traditions that make up a student's experience are rooted in history and carried on to integrate the current students into this history on a personal level. Meredith's undergraduate profile includes the classifications of: Four-year, full-time (65%), selective (27%), lower transfer-in (30%) where the percentages refer to the category, they fall into versus all institutions ranked. Students are encouraged to graduate in a four-year time after being a full-time student because many of the activities that students are involved in are split into graduating classes. For example, the graduating class of 2015 will help and form alliances with the graduating class of 2017 while they compete against the classes of 2014 and 2016. This graduating class comradery surely influences the desire for a student to be full-time or part-time in class loads, but it also could influence the rates of transferring students whether it be in or out.

Along these same lines, Meredith being classified as being small (28%) and highly residential (34%) compared to the 2,576 other institutions that are classified is also unsurprising. Residential students are available to participate in many more on-campus events that non-residential students find inaccessible. Each event, whether traditional, educational, or just for fun, plays a part in the overall student experience. This experience is a large reason why students choose to attend Meredith college as it is unique and geared towards the specific goal of educating women. (Carnegie classifications pg. 4-6)

According the U.S. News & World Report, Meredith College is ranked as #148 in National Liberal Arts Colleges tying with 5 other colleges. This category puts, "focus almost exclusively on undergraduate education and award at least 50% of their degrees in the arts and sciences." Meredith is also ranked as #60 in Best Undergraduate Teaching (tie) and #113 in Top Performers on Social Mobility (tie). U.S. News provides clear information useful in comparing many colleges in order to help parents, students, or guidance counselors to choose the school that is the best fit. It provides a brief history of the institution including year founded, campus setting, endowment, and tuition and fees as well as providing a school mission and unique qualities that is provided to them by the institution. Overall the presentation of information is clear and unbiased. (How Does Meredith College Rank Among America's Best Colleges?)

All U.S. News rankings are determined by six categories: Outcomes (35%), Faculty Resources (20%), Expert Opinion (20%), Financial resources (10%), Student Excellence (10%), and Alumni Giving (5%). The most weighted category, outcomes, includes an additional breakdown of categories including "graduation and retention (22%), graduation rate performance (8%) and social mobility (5%)" (How we rank Outcomes). This category is interesting because it takes into account the institutions support of accessibility and success of Pell Grant recipients' success and performance. This forward-thinking ranking system is providing incentive for colleges and universities to support and give opportunities to students from lower socioeconomically standing. It also presents challenges to these institutions to take chances on students who have potential to be successful but may not be traditional students with high chances of success. (How U.S. News Calculated the 2020 Best Colleges Rankings)

There is a clear learning curve regarding understanding the Carnegie classifications. It took time to read through the categories and understand the comparisons of institutions and enrollment while the U.S. News does an excellent job presenting the data in a way that is familiar to the general public as it avoids using complex jargon. The methodology is also presented clearly for both sources with the Carnegie classifications being the standard. Both resources are valuable in presenting similar information about institutions while serving vastly different audiences. I look forward to spending more time with both classification systems to further analyze Meredith College’s standing and compare it with other institutions.

References

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