

## Joseph I. Castro: Ranking doesn't tell whole story

The recent U.S. News and World Report rankings of "best colleges" provides an ideal opportunity for me to highlight the academic achievements and progress of California State University, Fresno.

The news is good, and the positive student impact is worth sharing.

Let's start with the numbers. Fresno State was ranked No. 11 among public (state-supported) universities in the Western region and No. 46 among all schools, public and privately supported. There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States and only 1,800 are included in this ranking. In the Western region, only 90 universities were ranked. We are proud to be considered among the best schools in the West.

Yet, Fresno State's ranking fell in this survey. The question is why?

We can't say why with absolute certainty. U.S. News uses and weights several factors: assessment by peer institutions (a subjective rating), faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources, retention and graduation rates and alumni giving. In most of these areas, our numbers didn't alter much from the last report, so perhaps in comparison, other universities just made stronger gains.

Fresno State was recognized last summer by another publication, Time magazine, as one of the top 25 institutions in the nation for access and affordability. We are making higher education more achievable for students in Central California and beyond. In fact, 71% of students are first-generation attendees — the first in their family to attend college. That figure is up dramatically from 46% in 2002. At the same time, a significant number of Fresno State students are second- and third-generation "legacy" students. We are — and will continue to be — a place of opportunity for academically eligible San Joaquin Valley students from all backgrounds.

A study released this week by the nonprofit organization New America finds that Fresno State's distribution of financial aid puts it among the top universities in California in reducing the net price that low-income students must pay. The average amount paid after grant and scholarship aid is deducted — the net price — for Fresno State students with family incomes less than \$30,000 is \$3,545.

Fresno State is designated by the U.S. Department of Education as both a Hispanic-Serving Institution and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. These distinctions recognize our commitment to students from these two growing communities in the Valley and nation.

Statistics from all sources show that Fresno State is doing an excellent job of attracting and serving the students of Central California. Upon successful completion of their studies, they graduate and become a vital part of the next generation of leaders.

Attending Fresno State is "transformational" for our students and families as well as for the communities where they reside. In fact, 80% of Fresno State alumni reside in the Valley, which means that our region's many unique communities are enriched by our graduates' energy, creativity and knowledge. To ensure our region's success, increasing graduation rates and the overall preparation for graduate training and/or professional careers is crucial.

Fresno State's graduation rate rose from 49% in the U.S. News review of 2012-13 to 52% in 2013-14. This is the largest single-year growth in our six-year graduation rate in the last decade. Because of the bold actions we have taken and will take in upcoming years, I am optimistic that we will achieve our campus goal to increase our six-year rate to 70% within the next 10 years.

The growth in our graduation rate speaks volumes about the character of our students, the scholarship of the faculty

who teach them and the caring staff, administrators, alumni and friends who contribute to their university experience.

Student success continues to be the highest priority of my presidency. Fresno State is proving every day that it welcomes students from diverse backgrounds representing our region and is dedicated to transforming their lives forever. Because of this, Fresno State's future — and the future of the Valley — are, indeed, very bright.

Joseph I. Castro, Ph.D., M.P.P., is president of California State University, Fresno. He welcomes Twitter followers at @JosephICastro and anonymous feedback about Fresno State at [www.fresnostate.edu/president/feedback](http://www.fresnostate.edu/president/feedback).

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