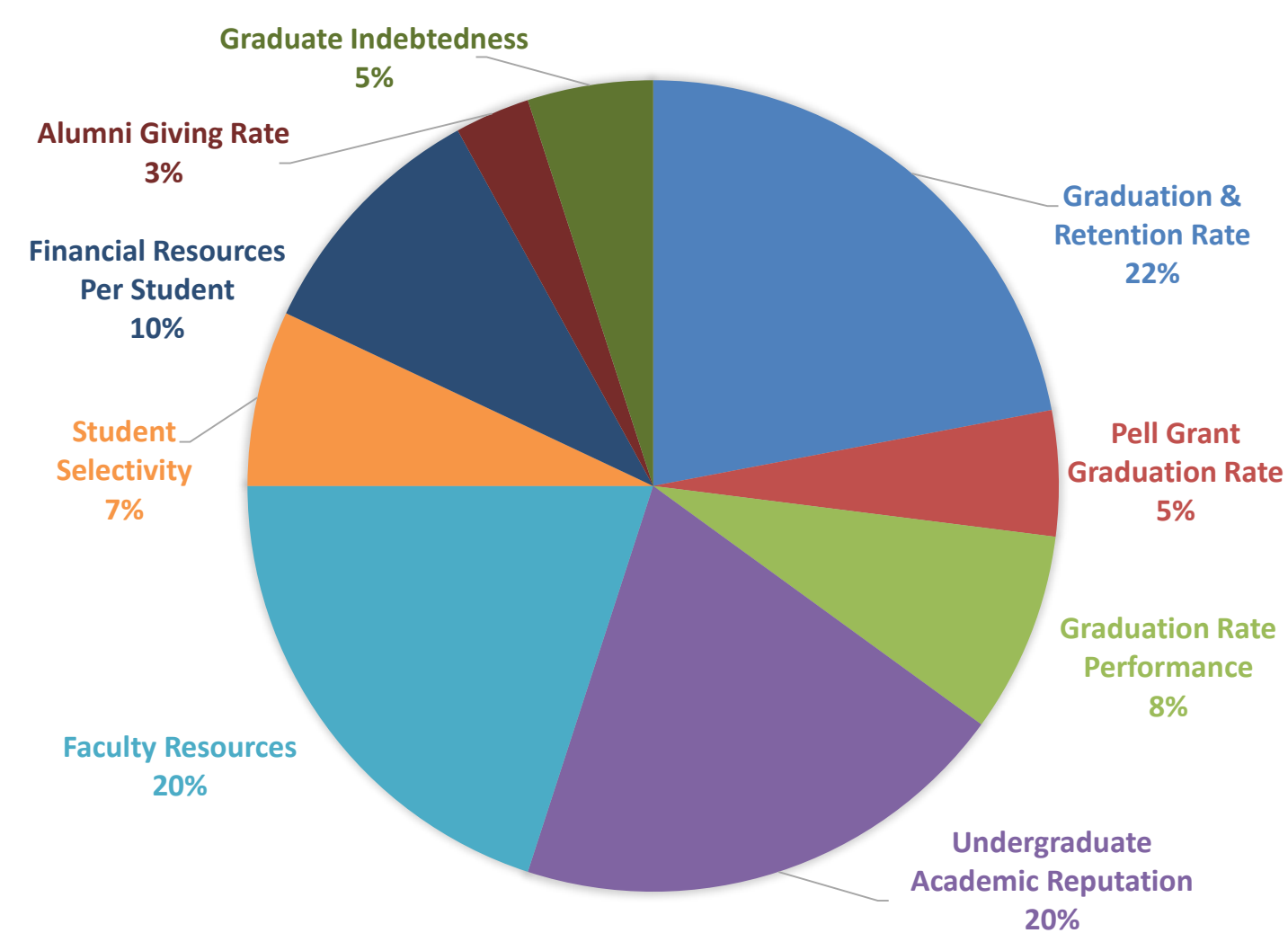


## HISTORY OF USNWR

The U.S. News' first college rankings were released in 1983, based solely on the opinions of about 1300 college presidents. In 1988, additional information was collected to create a more "statistical" model rather than relying solely on opinion. Once the rankings moved online in 1997, their popularity only grew as millions of viewers were able to access the rankings. Today, USNWR releases rankings for everything from the best online MBA to the best high schools. However, they have come under fire in the last decade or so for their ranking categories, weights, and methodology. Their practices, and their impact on higher education, cannot and should not be ignored.

RANKING CRITERIA BY WEIGHT, 2022

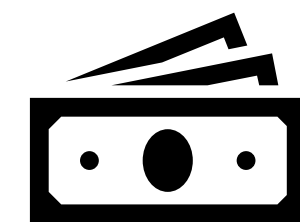


Institutions trying to improve their rankings can find themselves in questionable situations. For example, Baylor University came up with a plan to improve its rankings by 2012. Baylor was able to climb up 20 places in the rankings but also raised tuition by 155% to support its new initiatives like increased faculty pay. In 2021, a dean from Temple University was sentenced to 14 months in prison after being convicted on fraud charges related to phony data for USNWR between 2015-2018. Trying to get "ahead" in the rankings can have some disastrous effects. However, even participating in the rankings "correctly" can still be questionable due to their impact on student access.

## PROBLEMS WITH RANKING CRITERIA

The bulk of the criterion used to rank institutions prioritizes institutional wealth and privilege over student access or success.

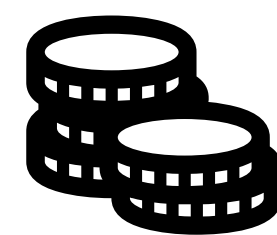
Prioritization of institutional wealth, resulting in increased tuition costs for students:



### Faculty Resources (20%):

includes data points such as class size (8%) and faculty salaries (7%). A 2014 report found that one of the best ways to increase rankings was to increase faculty salaries.

**Financial Resources (10%):** Looks at how much the institution spends per student on research, student services, and other educational expenditures. Institutions are therefore rewarded for spending more, even if it doesn't actually increase student success.



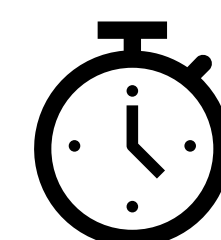
Prioritization of students from privileged backgrounds, reinforcing a broken class system:



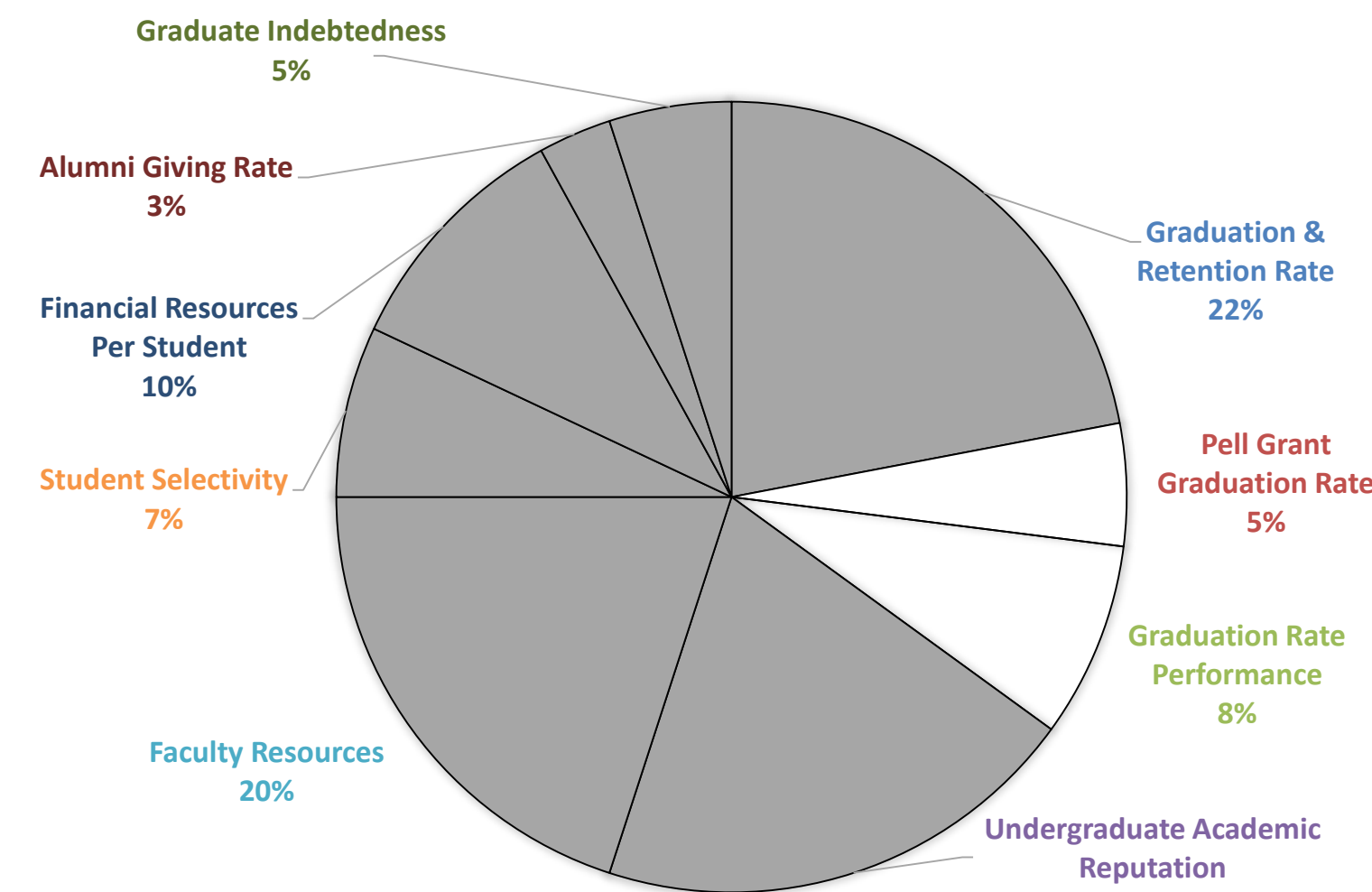
**Student Selectivity (7%):** Category is predominantly representative of student standardized test scores, which best correlate with a student's SES rather than college ability.

### Graduation & Retention Rates (22%):

Based on individuals who are full-time, first-year bachelor's degree-seeking students (excluding part-time and transfer) who complete their degree within 6 years. This is problematic because white students tend to graduate within this timeframe about 64% of the time, compared to Black students at 40% or Hispanic students at 54%.



RANKING CRITERIA BY IMPACT ON STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY



The shaded regions above represent categories that actively work against college access. The two unshaded categories were only recently added within the last few years due to people's concerns with the inequity the rankings perpetuate.

## ADDITIONAL ISSUES

In addition to problems already presented with the criterion themselves, there are other issues with how the data are collected and used.

### Data is self-reported by institutions.

- There are few (or no) definitions for various data points requested.
- There are few (or no) requirements to ensure data collection and presentation by institutions are valid and reliable.

### USNWR is a for-profit company.

- USNWR does not openly share how its algorithms work, so there is no way to verify or truly question its methodology.
- USNWR also makes money by hiding additional data points behind paywalls such as College Compass.

### The end-users of the rankings take them as legitimate sources of information.

- 15% of students in 2018 said the rankings strongly influenced the schools they were considering.
- The people who are most likely to take these rankings into consideration are first-generation college students.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

While schools like Harvard and Yale have pulled out of the USNWR Rankings, this remains an unlikely possibility for the majority of institutions without their level of prestige. However, there are small things institutions can do to help counter the influence of USNWR.

1. With the same energy we promote our USNWR rankings, we can also promote more holistic ranking options, such as the US Department of Education's College Scorecard.
2. Host college info nights for prospective students and their families, including information on how to more accurately compare and contrast institutions.
3. Look to institutions that are challenging the status quo. For example, Georgia State University still participates in the rankings but does not align its institutional priorities to USNWR demands. Instead, they have focused on data-backed practices such as ditching ACT/SAT scores and providing micro-grades to keep students enrolled. For more info, consider reading the book *Won't Lose This Dream*.
4. Conduct critical research in opposition to USNWR Rankings, and always remember **impact over intentions**.

