

# Local colleges rank high

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**POUGHKEEPSIE** – Marist College officials are happy about being ranked in the top 10 percent of colleges in the country – but they say there's more to it than that.

"The rankings play little to no role in helping us to fulfill our mission," Sean Kaylor, vice president of admissions and enrollment planning, said. "We try not to get hung up on the rankings."

Marist was named one of the Best 357 colleges in the nation by the Princeton Review. In addition, U.S. News and World Report ranked it 18 out of 166 colleges in the northeast that offer a complete range of graduate and undergraduate programs.

Kaylor said while it is nice to be included, he knows it's not the only things students look at when choosing a college. He said Marist's commitment to providing stronger academic programs, better facilities and technology is probably one of the reasons it was ranked so high.

Marist is among only five percent of colleges across the country that admit less than 50 percent of their applicants.

"It's a pretty competitive environment," he said. "We're probably one of the more competitive schools in the northeast."

Another one of the schools in that five percent is SUNY New Paltz. They had an acceptance rate of 38 percent for the new freshman class.

David Eaton, vice president for enrollment management, said selectivity is not something a college can achieve on its

own.

"Selectivity isn't a strategy," he said. "It's a by-product of popularity."

Eaton said the real measure is retention, and Eaton said the number of students who come to New Paltz and stay shows the college if and how it is meeting the needs of its students.

"Retention tells you a lot about who you are as an institution," he said. "You bring in good students and you need to provide them with a good experience inside and outside the classroom."

U.S. News and World Report ranked New Paltz the 10th best public university in the north of colleges with master's programs. When private colleges are included, New Paltz ranks number 50.

The Princeton Review ranked New Paltz as one of the top 151 colleges in the northeast. More than 700 schools were surveyed in the region.

"It's always good when you're listed," Eaton said. "We're fortunate that many of the things they say are good."

Eaton said retention and graduation rate are big factors in the rankings.

"Those are things that you are always striving and struggling to improve," he said.

Like Kaylor, he agreed that the rankings are just a third-party endorsement of what the college already feels it is doing right. He also said students look beyond these rankings when choosing a school.

"I think most students and parents are very savvy about the college selection process," he said.

Eaton said when students start looking at colleges they pay close attention to what the college is like. What majors are offered, the campus and the overall academic environment all play a big role in their decisions.

But there is one recommendation that tops all others.

"Nothing will match word of mouth," he said. "Nothing comes even close. That's probably the most accurate marketing that you can get."

Eaton said this is part of the reason the college has become so selective. As retention increases, more students are staying and are saying positive things about the college to their friends. That increases the number of applications the college receives.

"If you have good retention, when [the students] go home, they're saying good things," he said. "That's the cycle."

Marist received about 7,300 hundred applications for this year. Less than half were chosen and as students chose their college, this year's freshman class of 970 was formed. Kaylor said about 80 of those students are from Dutchess, Orange and Ulster counties with about 50 traditional commuters and about 30 choosing to live on campus.

"We would love to attract more of these [local] students," he said.

Doing what the rankings said they were doing, providing a good education and college experience for all of their students, will continue to be Marist's first priority.

"Any time you can get some outside affirmation of a third-party endorsement that you're doing things well," Kaylor said, "it obviously doesn't hurt."