U.S. News Ranks Best Graduate Schools
The 2012 rankings have been released. Find out which graduate schools are on the rise.
By Brian Burns
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These are unsettling times for anyone pondering grad school. Economic turmoil and the effects of healthcare reform have altered not only the job market for new J.D.s, M.B.A.s, and M.D.s, for example, but also many of the time-honored methods used to train them.

The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania is one of many business schools reshaping their curriculum around a global model; medical schools nationwide are increasingly focused on primary care, given the nation's imminent shortage of family physicians. Harvard Medical School, for instance, opened a $30 million center dedicated to primary care practice and instruction late last year. And with newly frugal law firms demanding first year hires who can actually practice rather than merely provide research and support as they acclimate to the legal world, Northwestern University Law School, for one, seeks students with substantial work experience and offers them the option of a degree in just two years.

It's important for those considering graduate school to be mindful of the significant changes being made at graduate programs nationwide as they seek a school that best fits their needs and puts them in place to succeed with their diploma in hand. U.S. News's 2012 rankings of Best Graduate Schools, released today, are a tool to help prospective grad students do just that.

The rankings highlight the top programs in business, law, medicine, education, and engineering, among numerous other specialties. Rankings for health programs like public health, veterinary medicine, and physician assistant, where Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University, and Duke University ranked first, respectively, were also updated.

Business: With significant changes in technology and curriculum afoot at business schools nationwide, a shift has taken place at the pinnacle of the business school rankings. Last year, Stanford University was tied with Harvard University for the top spot amongst business schools. This year, however, Stanford has surpassed Harvard, claiming sole possession of the top spot. The University of Pennsylvania also moved up from a fifth-place tie last year to a third-place tie this year with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The University of Minnesota made one of the largest jumps among the top 25 programs, moving up three spots to 21st, taking the place of now 25th-ranked Ohio State University.

Medicine: While the top spots in the rankings of medical schools remained constant, a pair of elite schools were knocked down several spots. Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Johns Hopkins maintained their respective rankings as the top three medical schools. Stanford jumped to fifth this year from 11th overall last year, and the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor fell from sixth to 10th.
With a shortage of primary care physicians causing alarm in the medical community, more students are being incentivized to follow that path by government loan repayment assistance and forgiveness programs for family and internal physicians. U.S. News ranks primary care programs in addition to the aforementioned research-centric rankings of medical schools. The University of Washington, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Oregon Health and Science University maintained the top three spots in the primary care rankings.

Law: Yale University continued its long run atop the rankings of Best Law Schools, and the top five schools from the previous year's rankings remained the same. The University of Texas—Austin made the jump from 15th to a tie for 14th with Georgetown University, cracking the so-called "T-14"—the law programs that have remained in the top 14, in some order, since the advent of the U.S. News Best Law Schools rankings and are held in the highest esteem by many in the legal world. Conversely, Emory University tumbled to 30th after being ranked 22nd last year.

Engineering: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is once again the top ranked engineering program, and the only change among the top 10 is the University of Texas—Austin sliding ahead of the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor to the eighth spot.

Education: Among education programs, Vanderbilt University claimed the top spot yet again. Johns Hopkins University fell from sixth place last year into a tie for 18th this year. The University of Texas—Austin, on the other hand, leapt from a tie for 10th last year to a tie for 2nd on this year's list.