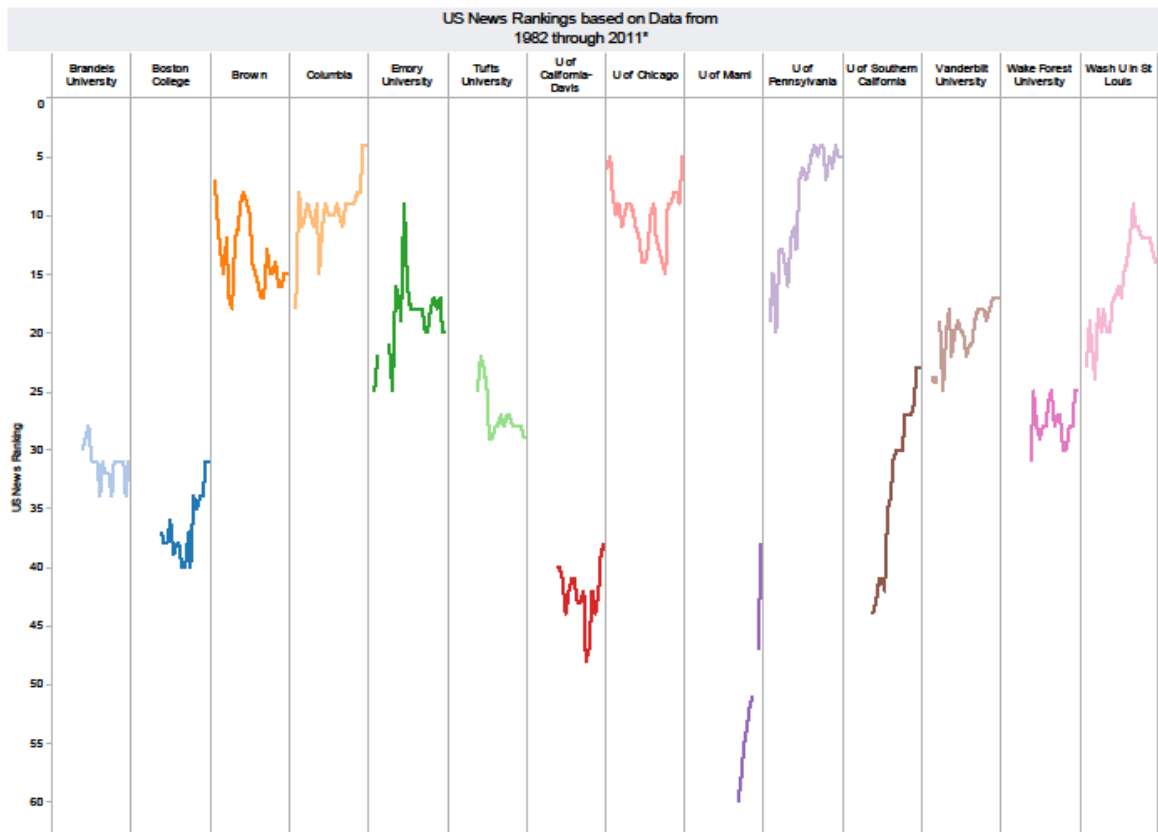


**NOTE:** The following report by the Benchmarking Task Force was reviewed with the Strategic Planning Steering Committee at its April 25, 2012 meeting.

## Brandeis University: Benchmarking Success

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee formed the Benchmarking Task Force to examine lessons that could be learned by examining universities that have made significant improvements in how they are perceived. The Task Force is focusing on other institutions' success in attracting the interest of top students, based on the perception that some institutions have increased in popularity far more than Brandeis has. A number of anecdotal examples have been cited, notably Brown, Tufts, and Washington University in Saint Louis. Brandeis Board members additionally suggested examining the University of Southern California and the University of Pennsylvania, among others.

The Office of Students and Enrollment subsequently added to the list a number of schools based on a review of the US News and World Report rankings data since 1982 (when the rankings were first published), for the top fifty schools over that period. Based on that review, Columbia, Boston College, the University of Miami, and Vanderbilt were added as schools that had significant improvement in the rankings.



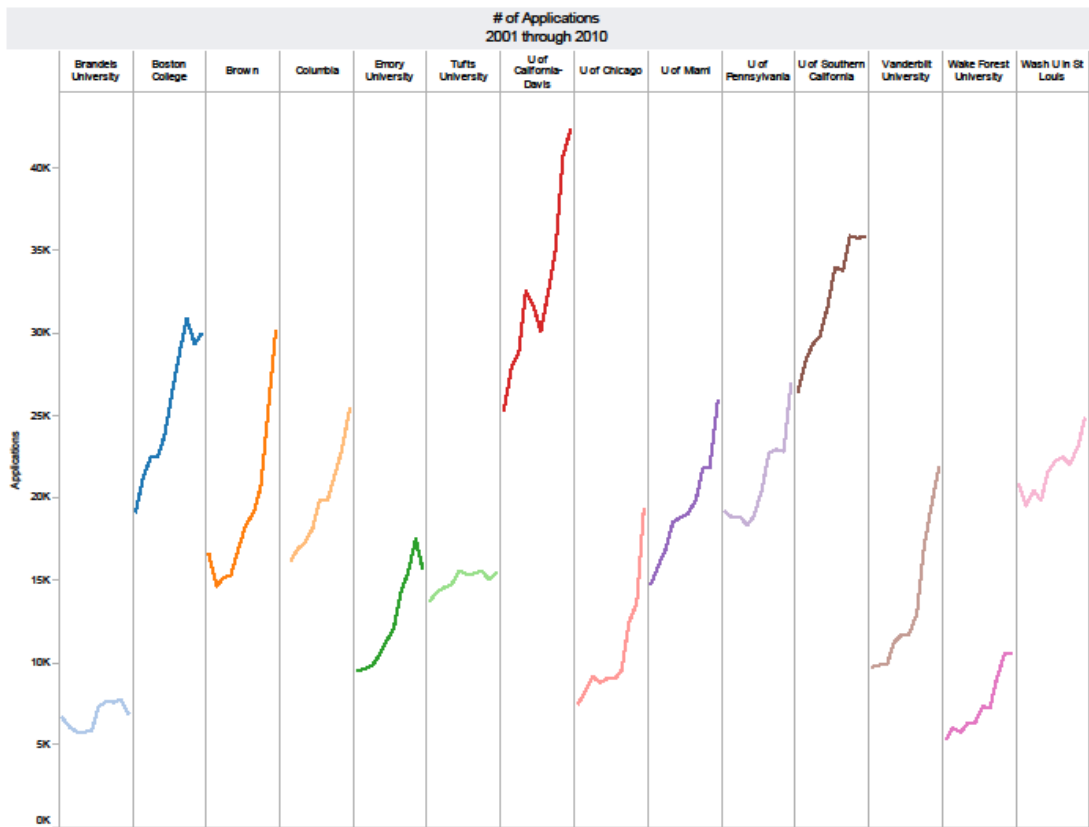
\*US News Results are calculated based on the prior years information.

For all of the schools being considered, three sources of information are being explored:

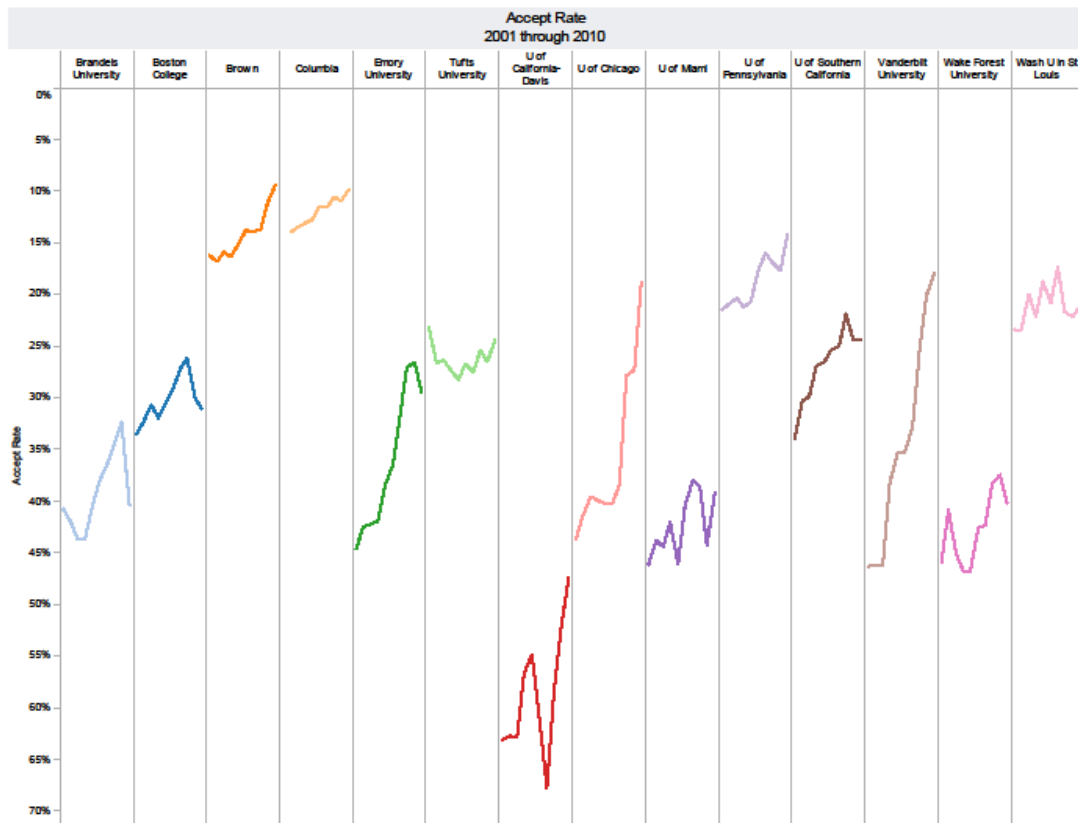
1. Official Statistics from the Department of Education were pulled from the IPEDS national data mart from 2001 through 2010.
2. Select high school college and guidance counselors from high profile schools across the nation were interviewed informally by the Senior Vice President for Students and Enrollment and the Dean of Admissions.
3. Several consultants known for their expertise in improving market position for colleges and universities were either interviewed by the Senior Vice President for Students and Enrollment, and/or recent literature on the subject by those consultants was reviewed and compiled.

The Task Force also considered directly interviewing individuals at the subject schools. The Senior Vice President for Students and Enrollment strongly recommended against that approach, suggesting that it was unlikely that schools collected data to explain their success and, even if they did, it was unlikely that those involved were still with the school; and even if they were, it would be even more unlikely that they would be interested in sharing their data and analysis with a perceived competitor. Moreover, prior experience suggested that some might be inclined to knowingly offer misleading information and also to use Brandeis's inquiry as a basis for obtaining additional allocation of funds for marketing, in response to an assumed new Brandeis marketing/recruitment campaign.

The data from the sources contacted did, however, offer a range of preliminary insights useful in guiding the strategic planning process at Brandeis. The most significant finding supports perceptions that Brandeis lags these peers in recruitment success. Of the schools studied, during the past decade nearly all have seen dramatic increases in applications. University of Chicago, for instance, in 2001 was, like Brandeis, in a 6–7,000 application range. While Brandeis has crept above 8,000, Chicago receives closer to 20,000 applications. Emory, while showing less dramatic change, began the decade with fewer than 10,000 applications but now tops 15,000. Of the institutions reviewed, only Tufts mirrored Brandeis in growing so modestly, although Tufts started the decade with more than double the number of applications Brandeis receives (see chart, below).



Interestingly, acceptance rates are far less consistent, although nearly all the schools examined decreased (improved) acceptance rate during the period studied. Consistent with application rates, Tufts seems to have made the least progress in this area, while University of Chicago, Vanderbilt and Emory made fairly radical improvements. The pattern at Brandeis, along with Washington University in Saint Louis, can best be described as erratic (see chart, below).



More consistency was found in SAT score ranges, and that table has been included in an appendix to this report. While this data only spans the past decade, combined with ranking data and interviews four patterns emerge that offer possible explanations of the relative success of many of the institutions examined. In the interest of protecting the privacy of those interviewed, some of whom supplied institutional data, these models have been aggregated with only limited reference to the institutions that benefited from them:

## Models

### Big Splash

This model involves triggering events that tend to get schools noticed. Those events are usually sports related (and the result is often called the Flutie Effect, especially locally), and sometimes are even related to negative press. These institutions received, more often than not more through luck and happenstance than any plan, a great lift in their efforts from these events. There were suggestions that this effect may be engineered, usually involving a donation in an area combined with a series of initiatives, including major faculty/awards, facilities, and often events that draw national attention. The performing arts was used an example by some of those consulted as an area that may be engineered toward this kind of positive attention.

### **Velvet Rope**

A few schools in the eighties purposely rejected large numbers of applicants, often coupled with offering very targeted, large merit scholarships, to create an impression of great exclusivity. At the time, many of the scholarship programs focused largely on National Merit Finalists and/or SAT scores and rank in class. There is some evidence that the more strategic of these institutions did so as part of a marketing effort that strongly sent out the message that most students were unlikely to be accepted, and this was usually accompanied by decreases in size of the freshmen class for at least some period, to accelerate the lowered acceptance rate. Although most continue to use scholarships to one degree or another, it is unclear whether any of these institutions have deployed a strategy to purposefully deny more students in recent years.

### **Graduate and Professional Schools**

Explanations of graduate-school influence largely focused on law schools, medical schools, or both, although there was some mention of MBA programs as well. Rank, together with other national recognitions of professional schools, was often cited as a precursor to great acceleration of interest at the undergraduate level. Funding flowing from professional schools was also cited as a source of support for enrollment efforts.

### **Rank Amateurs?**

In some cases, schools having benefited more from demographic shifts and/or their placement in US News ranking or the Newsweek hot schools list than from any plan. At times, these schools' ranking resulted either from statistics that pre-dated the list or simply from a shift in methodology that advantaged them, or even as a result of someone on an editorial board liking them, rather than from actions on the part of the institution. This may, to some degree, explain the perceived relative success at Tufts. While copies of the old Baron's guides were not available in time for this report, members of the committee have suggested that Brandeis significantly outranked Tufts — if Tufts was even listed — in their report on the best colleges and universities. In 1982, in the very first US News and World Report, Tufts appears in the top 25, and in the second publication in 1985 they appear in the top 20. What limited data are available suggest that the transition in market placement for Brandeis and Tufts occurred roughly in this same time period.

### **Marketing, Recruitment, and "Branding" campaigns**

There is little evidence that any school rose to national prominence solely on the strength of a marketing/branding campaign. However, we can likely name dozens of schools that fit one or more of the above models and yet failed to increase their reputation/popularity/ranking. In most cases, the schools that were examined ALSO had strong marketing, especially on the recruitment side. As one very helpful graduate student put it, "marketing appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to accomplish these goals."

There is quite a bit of theory on how to conduct these campaigns, but most assume that a huge factor is the alignment of all public messages and images with fundraising and

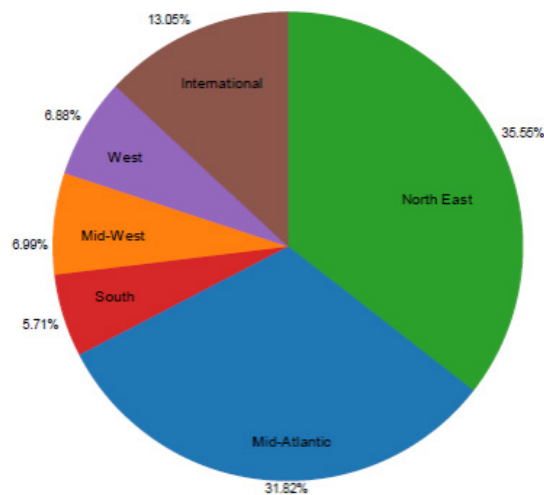
recruitment efforts, assuming those efforts are clearly and positively tied to institutional mission and niche. The assertion that all messages should complement recruitment campaigns may be a natural outcome given the constituencies that were contacted. Strategies for dramatically improving institutional reputation might, of course, be viewed very differently by faculty in funded research fields or by major donors.

### Challenges

"While studies such as the NCES Digest of Education Statistics predict modest enrollment growth from 2009 to 2018, they frequently overlook the fact that the growth experienced by many states from 2007 to 2010 will be followed by a steady, nearly nationwide decline through 2014-15." - Noel Levitz

This decline is particularly steep in the Brandeis traditional markets in the New-England and Mid-Atlantic states. There is also some evidence that negative word of mouth among current students (recently accelerated through social media) and alumni is a significant risk to our efforts. Class size/availability, graduation rate/time to degree, career placement, housing, dining, and campus safety are the factors most often mentioned. Most campuses have a mixed bag of mentions on these issues on public web sites, but sustained "noise" on a particular issue, especially at and around application decision time, is often seen as being particularly impactful. The other most often mentioned reputational risk from high school college guidance officers arises from admitting lower profile students; this often becomes widely known and dramatically lowers interest from higher profile students, and that was specifically cited in "feeder" areas as a challenge for Brandeis. The second most often mentioned issue was housing, especially when there is a perception that there is a shortage of space.

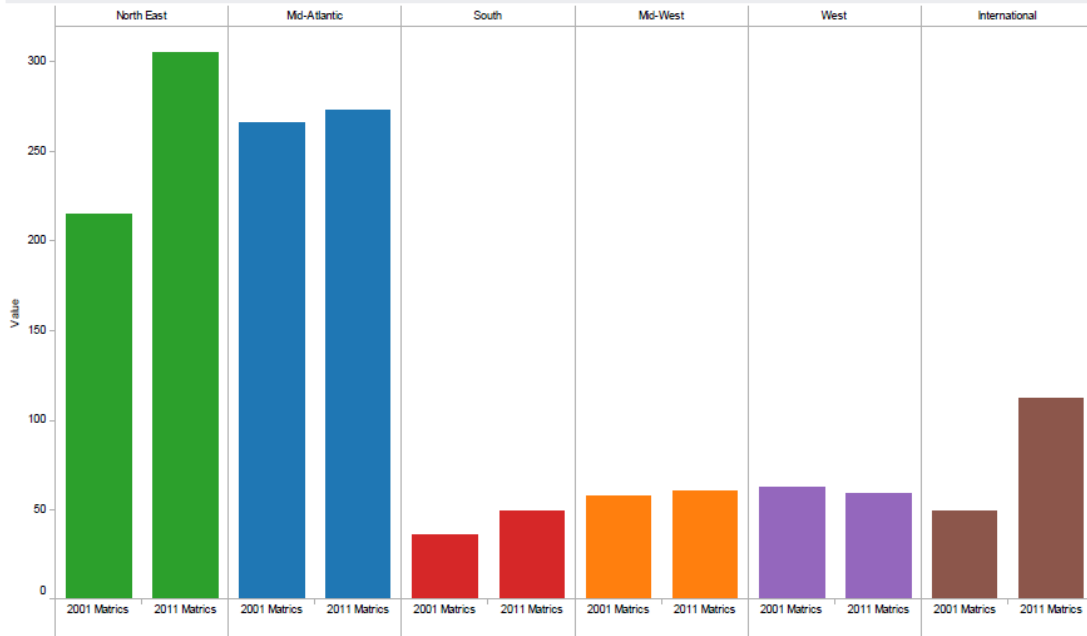
Representation by region within Fall 2011 freshman Class



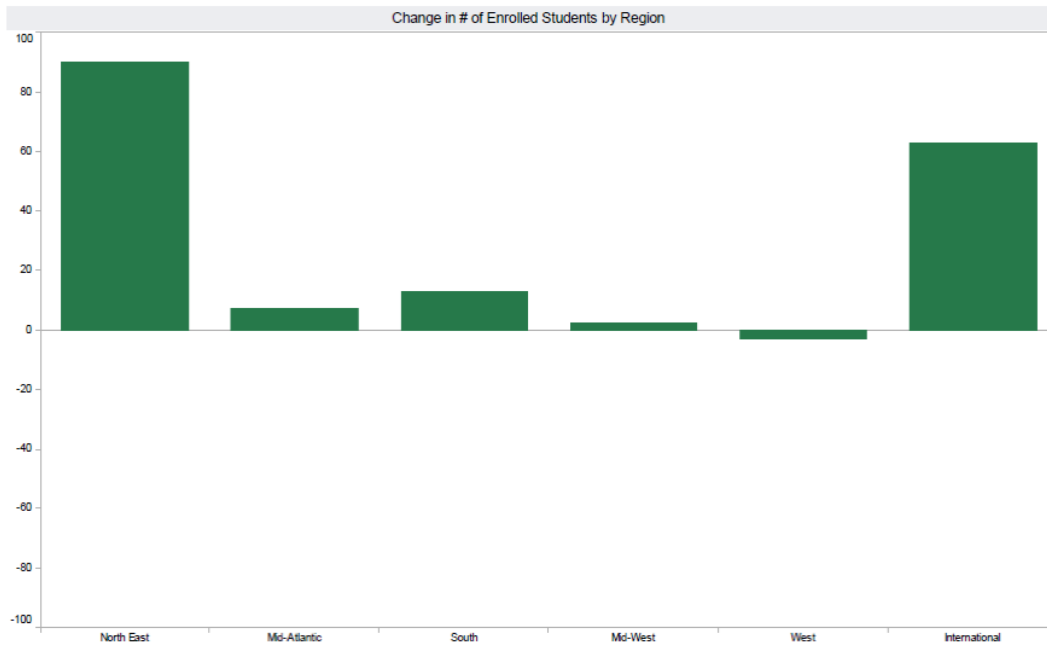
# of Enrolled Students by Region  
2001 to 2011

Region	2001 Matrics	2011 Matrics
North East	215	305
Mid-Atlantic	266	273
South	36	49
Mid-West	58	60
West	62	59
International	49	112

# of Enrolled Students by Region  
2001 to 2011







### **Implications for Strategic Planning**

If a primary goal is to match the perceived success of other institutions, Brandeis will need to implement a comprehensive communications strategy, integrating recruitment with alumni and parent outreach, marketing and public relations, in addition to website and social media efforts. Such a strategy is only likely to succeed if combined with one or more additional efforts:

1) Big Splash — in a Brandeisian context, this would likely entail a focused effort in an area that receives national attention, combining a massive gift with prominent faculty, an impressive facility, and supporting funds (and possibly a recognizable award); or it might entail a landmark discovery/solution/cure that has ongoing impact. With the reopening of the Rose, given the strength of its collection, the visual and performing arts are one area mentioned that might be promising in pursuit of this outcome.

2) Velvet Rope — freshmen enrollment could be limited while application rates expand, such that admission rates are lowered precipitously.

3) Graduate/Professional schools — the launch of a successful new professional school, or the advancement of IBS and/or Heller could serve as a grounding for a campaign. The recent top ten ranking for Heller is an obvious advantage, but pressure to aggressively grow presents challenges to the profiles of both units.

It is notable that, of the schools studied, **only Brandeis does not have a medical school, and only Brandeis and Tufts (unless we count Fletcher) do not have law schools.** It is possible, and worthy of further research, that medical and/or law school prominence is a crucial factor for perceived institutional success.

4) Rank Amateurs — careful attention to ranking categories can be used to drive some reasonable institutional decisions that could, in time, adjust the Brandeis rank in US News. Controlling class size is a good example of these efforts aligning with institutional mission. Alternatively it may be that Brandeis can leverage some other ranking to gain rapid additional exposure, although as of this writing none of the other current rankings have the exposure or impact of US News.

Additional Sources:

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Lipman Herne (2009). High Achieving Seniors and the College Decision.

Noel-Levitz (2010). Strategic Enrollment Planning for the Coming Demographic Change. [www.noellevitz.com/campusissues](http://www.noellevitz.com/campusissues)

Trout, Jack (2006). Differentiation in Higher Education. STAMATS, Cedar Rapids, IA.

US Department of Education, IPEDS online database.

US News and World Report, Guide to Best Colleges, 1983-present

Additional Data:

