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The Choice

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[Which Colleges Make the Best Neighbors?](#)

By [Jacques Steinberg](#)

Update | 11:11 a.m. See below for some thoughts on the limits of Dr. Dobelle's survey, and references to other institutions that might have merited inclusion on his list.

Here's a way for students and parents to size up potential colleges using a metric not found in most guide books: Which institutions have the best relationships, fiscal and otherwise, with the communities in which they reside?

Dr. Evan S. Dobelle, the president of [Westfield State College](#) in Massachusetts has compiled just such a list, highlighting the good works of 25 colleges, which he released today. (He calls them "[Saviors of Our Cities.](#)") His top five? The [University of Pennsylvania](#) in Philadelphia; the [University of Southern California](#) in Los Angeles; the [University of Dayton](#); the [University of Pittsburgh](#); and [Indiana University-Purdue University](#) in Indianapolis. Further down the list are the [University of Louisville](#); [Rhode Island School of Design](#) in Providence; and the [University of Nebraska](#) in Omaha.



Sal DiMarco Jr. for The New York Times The University of Pennsylvania campus in Philadelphia.

The value in Dr. Dobelle's survey, as I see it, lies not in its billing as yet another attempt to "rank" colleges as if they were refrigerators or tires. Instead I hope that his study might train high-school students' attention (and their parents', too) on institutions that might not otherwise be on their radar. (That any such effort is incomplete is made obvious by several comments below this post highlighting the community work of [Bates](#) and [Fordham](#), among other institutions.)

Among Dr. Dobelle's criteria are "faculty and student involvement in community service," "real dollars invested," "effect on local student access and affordability to attend college through K-12 partnerships," and "qualitative esprit in the institution and its engagement."

Dr. Dobelle is a former president of [Trinity College](#) in Hartford and the [University of Hawaii](#), where he made such "town-gown partnerships" a priority. Neither institution — nor Westfield, for that matter — made this year's list, which he released at an annual conference of the [Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities](#). The list represents a revision of one that he originally compiled in 2006.