



The American Association of Career Schools (AACS) Golden School Awards recognize the best beauty, barber, and wellness schools that our sector has to offer. You can enter your school in one or all of the categories. The school that receives the highest score in each category will be named “Winner” in that category.

CATEGORIES

- Advocacy
- Community Involvement
- Facilities
- Legacy Alumni
- Marketing Innovation
- Placement
- School Culture
- Student Salon and Spa
- School of the Year
- NEW: Small School of the Year (open to Tier 1 schools)



Judging will be based on the materials you submit. Responses should be thorough and descriptive. When applicable, submit supporting documentation including quantitative numbers/statistics, pictures, videos, screen shots, social media posts, and any other materials that support your submission.

CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS AND JUDGING CRITERIA

ADVOCACY			
Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that are actively involved in advocating for the interests of the beauty and wellness school industry and its students.	The school's history of government advocacy	The school should have a clear mission for advocating for the beauty and wellness school industry and it should have a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals.	- Working with legislators to pass laws that benefit the beauty and wellness industry - Lobbying against regulations that would harm the beauty and wellness industry - Educating the public about the importance of the beauty and wellness industry - Hosting school visits for government officials to educate them about the beauty and wellness school industry
	The school's current advocacy efforts	There should be a clear understanding of the issues that are important to the beauty and wellness industry.	
	The school's impact on government policy	Have a strong network of contacts within government. Demonstrate the positive impact its advocacy efforts have had on the industry.	
	The school's efforts to educate its students about government advocacy	Provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective advocates	

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT			
Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that make a significant impact on their community through volunteer work and charitable giving. The school should have a well-established history of community engagement and be able to demonstrate the positive impact their work has had on the lives of others.	The breadth and depth of the school's community involvement	The school should have a clear mission statement that outlines its commitment to giving back and a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals	- Serving as role models for compassion and service and striving to make their community a better place - Volunteering at local soup kitchens or homeless shelters - Donating products and services to charity - Organizing fundraising events for national or local causes - Mentoring young people in the community - Educating the community about beauty and wellness
	The impact the school's work has on its community	The school should make sure its community involvement is measurable and sustainable	
	The school's commitment to community service	The school should be proactive in seeking out opportunities to get involved in the community	
	The school's ability to inspire and motivate others to get involved in the community	The school should be creative in its approach to community service	

FACILITIES

Description	Criteria	Details	• Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that have the best facilities for student learning and practice. Facilities should be clean, well-maintained, and equipped with the latest technology and equipment. They should be spacious enough to allow students to work comfortably and safely. The schools should be welcoming and supportive with knowledgeable and helpful staff.	Condition and cleanliness of the facilities	The facilities should be well maintained and clean. Facilities should be ADA compliant to meet the needs of students, staff, and guests	- Well-lit and equipped classrooms - Spacious and well-equipped salon and spa areas - Library resources including access to a wide selection of beauty- and wellness-related books and magazines - Computer lab with access to the latest software - Mock salon where students can practice their skills on real clients - Retail area where students can sell products and services
	Availability of the latest technology	School should be equipped with the latest technology and students should have the tools they need to learn the latest techniques and trends in the beauty and wellness industry	
	Equipment appropriate for the courses taught	Facilities should be designed to meet the specific needs of the students.	
	Appropriately sized facility when compared to enrollment	Salon area should be large enough to accommodate multiple students working at once.	

LEGACY ALUMNI

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that have produced successful alumni who continue to contribute to the school and the beauty and wellness industry.	Number and success of the school's alumni	The school should have a clear mission for how it engages with its alumni and it should have a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals. The school should recognize and celebrate its alumni's successes.	- Alumni who have achieved success in the beauty and wellness industry, such as becoming award-winning hairstylists or makeup artists - Alumni who are active in the school's community, serve on the school's advisory board, or mentor new students - Alumni who give back to the school, such as donating money or volunteering their time
	Involvement of the school's alumni in the school's community	The school should have a strong alumni network and be able to demonstrate the positive impact that its alumni have on the school and the beauty and wellness industry	
	Willingness of the school's alumni to mentor new students	The school should actively encourage its alumni to stay involved in the school and its community.	

MARKETING INNOVATION

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that have the best marketing strategies to attract new students. Marketing should be creative, effective, and targeted to the right audience. It should be consistent with the school's overall brand and mission	Creativity and originality of marketing campaigns	Marketing should be creative and engaging to capture the attention of prospective students	• Online marketing, such as search engine optimization (SEO) social media marketing, and e-mail marketing • Offline marketing, such as print advertising, radio advertising, and television advertising • Word-of-mouth marketing, such as referrals from current students and alumni • Event marketing, such as open house events and career fairs
	Effectiveness of marketing campaigns to attract students and lead to enrollment	Marketing should be informative and targeted to the right audience. The school should have a clear understanding of its target audience and what motivates them to enroll in a beauty and wellness school.	
	Consistency of the marketing campaigns with the school's brand and mission	Marketing should be consistent to build brand awareness and trust	

PLACEMENT

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that have the best success rate in placing graduates in jobs in the industry. The school should have a strong network of employers and it should help graduates find jobs to match their skills and interests	Graduation rates	The percentage of students who successfully graduate from the school's programs. The school should have a well-defined plan for how it will ensure student success from enrollment through graduation	• Graduates who are placed in high-paying jobs at prestigious salons and spas • Graduates who are placed in jobs that allow them to travel and work with celebrities • Graduates who are able to start their own businesses
	Licensure passage rates	The percentage of students who successfully pass the state licensure exams. The school should have a well-defined plan for how it will assist its students in preparing for and passing state licensure exams	
	Placement rates	The percentage of students who are successfully placed in jobs. The school should have a strong network of employers and a well-defined plan for how it will place its graduates in jobs	

SCHOOL CULTURE

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes beauty and wellness schools that have a positive and supportive school culture. The school should be a place where students feel comfortable and safe, and where they are encouraged to be themselves and to reach their full potential	Overall atmosphere of the school	The school should have a clear mission for creating a positive and supportive environment and it should have a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals	- The school should be welcoming and inclusive of all students, regardless of their background or experience. - The school encourages and promotes positive relationship building through understanding, appreciating, and exemplifying the different character strengths of its staff, students, and clients - The school holds student appreciation events and other activities that engage students - Students are encouraged to post to their social media to show their engagement in school activities
	Relationship between students and staff	The school should have a strong sense of community where students feel like they belong and are connected to the school, the staff, and each other	
	Opportunities for students to get involved	The school should provide students with opportunities to get involved in extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports, and volunteer programs	
	Commitment to diversity and inclusion	The school should have a clear commitment to diversity and inclusion that celebrates the differences of its students	

STUDENT SALON & SPA

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Recognizes the beauty and wellness school that has the best student salon and spa. The salon and spa should be a well-run operation that provides students with opportunities to practice their skills and gain real-world experience. The salon and spa should also have great sales numbers and great client reviews	Overall operation of the salon and spa	The school should have a clear mission for providing students with the opportunity to practice their skills and gain real-world experience, and it should have a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals.	- Well-organized with a clear understanding of its target market - Provides students with the opportunity to practice a variety of skills - High sales volume that generates positive cash flow - Conveniently located and accessible to potential clients - Offers a variety of services that appeal to a wide range of clients
	The quality of the services provided by the students	The salon and spa should be well-equipped with the latest beauty products and equipment and be staffed by experienced and knowledgeable instructors who can provide students with the guidance they need to succeed	
	The sales numbers of the salon and spa	The salon and spa should have high sales volume that generates a positive cash flow	
	Client reviews of the salon and spa	The salon and spa should have a strong client base and receive positive reviews from its clients	

SCHOOL OF THE YEAR

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
The most prestigious award that can be won by a beauty and wellness school. Recognizes the beauty and wellness school that has done the best job overall in providing its students with a quality education and preparing them for success in the beauty and wellness industry. The school should excel in all areas including advocacy, community involvement, facilities, legacy alumni, marketing innovation, placement, school culture, and student salon and spa.	Overall performance in each of the other categories	• Commitment to advocacy for the beauty and wellness industry and works to make a difference in the industry • Strong commitment to community involvement and makes a positive impact on the lives of others • State-of-the-art facilities that provide students with the best possible learning environment • Innovative marketing that reaches a wide audience of potential students • Strong alumni network to support and mentor current students • High graduation, licensure, and placement rates • Positive and supportive school culture that encourages students to reach their full potential • Student salon and spa that provides students opportunities to practice their skills and gain real-world experience	• Committed to providing students with a well-rounded education that includes both theoretical and practical training • Strong focus on innovation and constantly looking for new ways to improve its programs and services • Committed to diversity and inclusion and creating a welcoming and supportive environment for students, staff, and clients
	Overall impact on the beauty and wellness industry	The school should be a leader in the beauty and wellness industry and should be working to make a positive impact on the lives of others	
	Commitment to excellence	The school should have a clear mission for providing its students with a quality education and it should have a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals. The school should be able to demonstrate the positive impact it has on its students, its community, and the beauty and wellness industry	

NEW: SMALL SCHOOL OF THE YEAR

Description	Criteria	Details	Examples
Open to schools at the Tier 1 membership level only. The most prestigious award that can be won by a beauty, barber and wellness school. Recognizes an outstanding small beauty, barber, or wellness school that has demonstrated excellence in providing students with a high-quality education and preparing them for successful careers in the industry. This award celebrates schools that make a significant impact regardless of size, excelling in areas such as advocacy, community involvement, facilities, legacy alumni, marketing innovation, placement, school culture, and student salon and spa operations. Small schools often foster close-knit learning environments, personalized instruction, and meaningful student success, proving that excellence isn't defined by enrollment.	Overall performance in each of the other categories	• Commitment to advocacy for the beauty and wellness industry and works to make a difference in the industry • Strong commitment to community involvement and makes a positive impact on the lives of others • State-of-the-art facilities that provide students with the best possible learning environment • Innovative marketing that reaches a wide audience of potential students • Strong alumni network to support and mentor current students • High graduation, licensure, and placement rates • Positive and supportive school culture that encourages students to reach their full potential • Student salon and spa that provides students opportunities to practice their skills and gain real-world experience	• Committed to providing students with a well-rounded education that includes both theoretical and practical training • Strong focus on innovation and constantly looking for new ways to improve its programs and services • Committed to diversity and inclusion and creating a welcoming and supportive environment for students, staff, and clients
	Overall impact on the beauty and wellness industry	The school should be a leader in the beauty and wellness industry and should be working to make a positive impact on the lives of other	
	Commitment to excellence	The school should have a clear mission for providing its students with a quality education and it should have a well-defined plan for how it will achieve its goals. The school should be able to demonstrate the positive impact it has on its students, its community, and the beauty and wellness industry	