



NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

## **This Isn't Going Away**

### **AALS Workshop on The Ratings Game**

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#### **Time to put the rankings fight behind us**

- Rankings are a form of consumer information that are here to stay
- Applicants have always used reputational rankings to choose a law school
  - Before 1990: word of mouth
  - Post-1990: *U.S. News*
- *U.S. News* provides consumer information
  - Annual survey of Northwestern Law admits (both enrollees and nonenrollees) in 2006 indicated that 96% consulted rankings
  - But is not the only source
    - 85% say it is not most influential information source
    - Ranked third behind information from current students and practicing attorneys

#### ***U.S. News* Methodology: Not perfect, but not implausible**

- Calculation and presentation of rankings
  - Weighting may not be perfect
  - Presentation of rankings below top 50 put pressure on schools at margin
- People can differ on weights to give rankings in final calculation
  - Applicants are fully capable of doing that and do
  - All consumer information has this aspect
  - People are not blank slates
- Fairly comprehensive set of data: types of data a consumer would want
  - Objective data: student quality, placement results, investment in educational process
  - Reputational data: academic, practitioners, areas of specialty

### **LSAC letter: Why I didn't sign**

- No other industry would urge its consumers not to take into account relevant information
  - University presidents and business school deans would not think of such a letter
  - Concerned about rankings, but accept them
- Patronizing
  - Implies that applicants lack ability to properly evaluate data
  - Do we have such a low opinion of their judgment?
  - Ironic: we are trying to attract people to a profession where good judgment is a core ability
- Employers use rankings as well
- LSAC is spending applicant's money to try to quash use of valuable information

### **Real Problem: We are not convincing applicants of the added and distinctive value of each school**

- Every school has a market in which it competes
- Too many offer a "one-size-fits-all" product
  - Every law school says it's a national or international law school, hires faculty from a similar mold, uses the same means of evaluating applicants (LSATs, GPAs)
  - ABA accreditation standards bear some responsibility for this and *U.S. News* ranking reflects it
- Undergraduate colleges have done a better job of differentiating their missions
- Many deans decry the cost of *U.S. News* related mailings
  - If they have no effect, then why are you spending money?
  - "Arms Race": no social value to expenditures but must make them to not fall behind
- Applicants and market will respond to your efforts if they really do add value
- Use rankings to effect internal change

### **Ideally, U.S. News should have competition**

- More rankings by independent publications or services
  - Multiple rankings each using different methodologies
  - Some exist, but not yet broad enough distribution
- Should encourage other publications to do their own rankings of law schools
  - *American Lawyer, Business Week, Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, National Law Journal*
  - Some of these have the experience and infrastructure in place from their rankings of business schools

### **Business school rankings methodologies**

- *Business Week*
  - Survey of current students
  - Survey of employers
- *Financial Times*
  - Alumni salary (3-years out)
  - Educational offerings
  - Research rating: publications in journals
- *Wall Street Journal*
  - Survey corporate recruiters to determine productivity and market value of working graduates
- *U.S. News*
  - Reputational surveys: business school deans, MBA program directors, and recruiters who hire graduates
  - Objective measures: student quality, mean starting salary, placement, etc.