

## Welcome

Admit it. Every April, when the *U.S. News and World Report* law school rankings are announced, we sneak a peek. I do, despite my belief that the survey employs deeply flawed methodology, contributes to bad behavior by law schools, influences applicants to make unreasoned decisions, and makes most deans, faculty members, and law school graduates grind their teeth. Law schools are notorious in our condemnation of the rankings (even as deans find the budget and authorize mailings to influence the outcome). Faculty members deny that they care about their school's number, but will not hesitate to remind others that they have risen and that other undeserving places have finally been put in their place. In short: whatever its merits, the ranking system is in place, is not going anywhere, and is influential in our lives.

One might ask whether a workshop about law school rankings is worthy of a full-day workshop at the annual meeting of our learned society. But this thinking reflects an unduly narrow conception of the issue. As so amply demonstrated in the wonderful Indiana Law Journal Symposium: *The Next Generation of Law School Rankings*, 81 Ind. L. J. 1-409 (2006), the subject is a matter for serious discussion and scholarship. Moreover, every law faculty member is affected by rankings that may influence applicants, alumni contributions, or the allocation of resources by the law school.

This workshop picks up the discussion where the Indiana symposium left off, accepting that rankings are here to stay, (but wondering aloud whether the *U.S. News* monopoly will remain in place in its current form). It also assumes that assessment of law schools is legitimate, that our stakeholders are entitled to know whether we are fulfilling our missions, whether our students receive a good education, whether our investment in scholarship is producing something of value, whether our universities should be proud of our performance, or whether work remains to be done. But the core of the program is a challenge: is the current system the best it can be? What improvements could be made? Are there alternative ways to assess our schools?

We begin with an exploration of the effect of rankings within the law schools—the folklore of rankings, our favorite horror stories, the influence of rankings on our admissions and other student policies, the games we seem to play, and perhaps the corrosive effect on us as role models for our institutions. It turns next to a break out session, brainstorming on ways to improve rankings. Discussion leaders will catalogue the suggestions of workshop participants, both for improving the current rankings system and inventing other tools for ranking, rating, or assessing law schools. Next, we turn to a roundtable discussion on creative alternatives to rankings and other ways to assess our schools. We end with a reflection on the ideas generated during the workshop.

These sessions utilize a couple of different techniques, ranging from traditional presentations, to full audience participation break-out sessions, to roundtable panel discussions, to discussion leaders reporting back to the whole group the product of mini-sessions they have led. The purpose is simple: to engage us all in a wide-ranging

discussion of the issues underlying assessment and to inspire us to think of better ways to evaluate the product of our work. The program is not an end, but the beginning of a discussion that we hope each participant brings back to his or her school. Complaining is always easy and a daily part of our lives in the academy. Doing something about it is a bit more difficult, but worth trying!

The members of our planning committee, Ann Iijima, of William Mitchell College of Law; Nancy Rapoport of the University of Houston; Richard Schmalback of Duke University; and Dale Whitman of the University of Missouri-Columbia have brought several life-times of experience with legal education to their planning of this workshop. This program reflects their optimism that together we can create a forum to stimulate discussion and promote action. They've given us an engaging roster of speakers and brought participants from institutions of every shape and size. Their job is to push us to create the type of assessment that will improve our schools.

I hope you find the workshop stimulating and that you are enticed to continue the dialogue at your own school. Enjoy.

for

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AALS Workshop on The Ratings Game