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### Law School Rankings

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## Law School Rankings

RICHARD A. POSNER\*

*Rank ordering is a crude but economical method of conveying information that assists “consumers” (such as prospective law students) to make choices; hence the popularity of the law school rankings by U.S. News & World Report (“U.S. News”). However, U.S. News’s rankings are vitiated by the arbitrary weights attached to the different factors on which the rankings are based. This paper explores a variety of alternatives, beginning with the mean LSAT score of the student body, and emphasizes that the design of a ranking system is relevant to the interest of the people whom the rankings are intended to guide. There is broad convergence on plausible systems of ranking law schools, but it is possible to improve on the U.S. News rankings.*

Efforts to rank law schools, and in particular the influential ranking system used by *U.S. News & World Report* (“*U.S. News*”), are controversial. Other papers for this symposium debate the issues at length. My focus is narrower. I take for granted that law schools will be ranked and explore alternatives to and incremental improvements upon the *U.S. News* methodology.

Ranking is a method of evaluation. It has the advantage of extreme simplicity and the disadvantage of revealing very little because the ranking does not disclose the distance between the ranks. In fact, rank ordering exaggerates quality differences because of its association with winning; normally what matters in a contest is who came in first, not how much better the winner was than the losers. Ranking is thus a low-cost, low-benefit method of evaluation—cheap but crude. This makes it suitable primarily for unimportant decisions—decisions where the cost of a mistake is slight, so that there is little benefit to increasing the information content. It is odd, therefore, that the ranking of law schools by *U.S. News* should be thought a significant factor in the choice of a law school by prospective law students, since the choice, if not quite momentous, is important. So one would expect a rational student to invest a significant amount of time in learning about the relevant characteristics of different law schools. True, there are at least 180 American law schools, which is too many to search thoroughly over, but most prospective students know in a rough way which schools or, at least, which tier of schools they should be choosing among. Ranking might, however, at least enable the student to identify the tiers so that if he knew he was an excellent student he could confine his search to the top tier, and if he knew he was a poor student he could confine his search to the bottom tier.

Within a tier or other small grouping, however, a bare ranking will not help students choose a school. The reasons are not only that a ranking does not reveal the distance between ranks (numbers 1 and 2, for example, might be separated by a hair’s breadth from each other and by a wide margin from number 3), but also that the ranking is a composite measure that is created by weighting different attributes of a law school and averaging the weighted scores of each attribute. The second reason for doubting the

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validity of a ranking as a guide to picking a law school creates a more serious problem than the first, because *U.S. News* does publish scores as well as ranks.<sup>1</sup> But the scores also depend on the weights the magazine attaches to the different attributes. The weights are arbitrary<sup>2</sup> and so, likewise, are the rankings except insofar as the different weighted factors happen to be well correlated with each other. But if they are, then a ranking based on just one factor will produce about the same results as the multifactor ranking. In fact, as shown in table 1, the median<sup>3</sup> Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score of a law school's students does much of the work of *U.S. News's* ranking algorithm (especially since the more subjective factors in the algorithm, such as school reputation and students' college GPAs, are correlated with it), and one imagines that the reason for the algorithm may be to make readers think that some analytic subtlety went into the magazine's system and perhaps also to obtain some copyright protection. Anyone without a copyright license is free to report the rankings, but the tables that array and display the full results of the algorithm and the accompanying explanations of terms and methods are copyrightable.

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1. *U.S. News* does not give the raw scores for schools. It assigns the school with the top score (Yale) a score of 100 and divides the raw score of the other schools by the top score, so that the reported overall score is the percentage of the top score. For example, in 2004 the top five schools were:

Rank	Law school	Overall score
1	Yale	100
2	Harvard	93
3	Stanford	92
4	Columbia	90
5	NYU	89

Source: *Rankings: Top Schools in Business, Education, Engineering, and Law*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 12, 2004, at 69.

2. In 2004, the factors and their weights were: quality assessment by academics, 25%; quality assessment by lawyers and judges, 15%; median LSAT score, 12.5%; median undergraduate GPA, 10%; acceptance rate, 2.5%; employment rate at graduation, 6%; employment rate nine months after graduation, 12%; bar passage rate, 2%; expenditures per student for instruction, library, and supporting services, 9.75%; student/teacher ratio, 3%; average per-student spending on all other items (for example, financial aid), 1.5%; and total number of volumes and titles in library, 0.75%. *2004 Edition: America's Best Graduate Schools*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., 2003, at 29; see also Michael Sauder & Wendy Nelson Espeland, *Strength in Numbers? The Advantages of Multiple Rankings*, 81 IND. L. J. 209 (2006) (discussing the *U.S. News* rankings methodology and listing weights attached to specific factors).

3. *U.S. News* reported the median LSAT prior to 1998. The magazine then switched to two variables, 25th percentile and 75th percentile. See *Law: Exploring Ethics, Values, and Personal Fulfillment*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Mar. 2, 1998, at 78. I have combined the 25th percentile and 75th percentile variables to create a mean LSAT for the subsequent years by averaging the two variables.

**Table 1.** Correlation of factors in *U.S. News* rankings 1998–2004

Factor	LSAT	Academic reputation	Non-academic reputation	GPA	Rank
LSAT	<b>1</b> 324				
Academic reputation	<b>0.83</b> 324	<b>1</b> 324			
Non-academic reputation	<b>0.85</b> 324	<b>0.97</b> 361	<b>1</b> 324		
GPA	<b>0.68</b> 280	<b>0.67</b> 280	<b>0.69</b> 280	<b>1</b> 280	
Rank	<b>0.85</b> 323	<b>0.93</b> 323	<b>0.93</b> 323	<b>0.65</b> 280	<b>1</b> 339

Sources: *Law: Exploring Ethics, Values, and Personal Fulfillment*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Mar. 2, 1998, at 78; *Law*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Mar. 29, 1999, at 94; *The Best Law Schools*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 10, 2000, at 73; *The Best Law Schools*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 9, 2001, at 78; *Exclusive Rankings of Academic Quality*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 15, 2002, at 64; *Best Graduate Programs: Exclusive Rankings for Business, Education, Engineering, Law, and Medicine*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 14, 2003, at 70; *Rankings: Top Schools in Business, Education, Engineering, Law, and Medicine*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 12, 2004, at 69.

NOTE: The boldfaced numbers represent correlation coefficients; the numbers underneath represent the number of school-year data points available. The years of interest are 1998–2004, though GPA data were unavailable for 1998. All schools in the top 50 of the *U.S. News* are included. Correlations range from –1 to 1, where 1 implies a perfectly positive relationship between the two variables and –1 implies a perfectly negative relationship. All correlations are significant at the 1% level.

So one question to ask is whether a ranking of law schools according to the mean LSAT score of its students is a sensible basis on which to choose which law school to attend. The ground for thinking it is a sensible basis is that since the best applicants have the widest choice of law schools, the ranking of schools by mean LSAT score reflects student preference. If a student with an astronomical LSAT score that would get him admitted to any law school chooses Yale, this will tend to increase the mean LSAT of Yale students; so the mean LSAT tells us how much a particular school is preferred relative to the other schools. Presumably, given the importance of the choice of law school, most students do not choose a law school solely on the basis of the *U.S. News* rankings; and so the mean LSAT ranking actually impounds greater information about schools than the more complex algorithm used by the magazine.

Table 2 shows that the mean LSAT score of a school's student body has the largest effect on a school's rankings. For example, a 1% increase in the mean LSAT of a school's students from one year to the next will increase the school's *U.S. News* rank by almost 4%, while a 1% increase in the mean GPA of the school's students will increase its rank by less than 1%.

Table 2. Causes of ranking changes

Panel A. Linear regression		Panel B. Logarithmic form	
Independent variable	Rank of school	Independent variable	Log rank of school
LSAT score	0.54 (2.76)***	Log (LSAT)	3.85 (2.75)***
Academic reputation	13.83 (4.45)***	Log (Academic reputation)	1.78 (3.73)***
GPA	7.86 (2.05)**	Log (GPA)	0.93 (1.79)*
Constant	-189.31 (4.83)***	Constant	-25.92 (3.55)***
Observations	258	Observations	258
R <sup>2</sup>	0.97	R <sup>2</sup>	0.99

NOTE: Robust t statistics are shown in parentheses to correct for heteroskedasticity: \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%. R<sup>2</sup> tells us the percentage of the total variation in the ranks that can be explained by the independent variables (LSAT, GPA, etc.), school fixed effects in both regressions to minimize unobservable heterogeneity across schools. For panel A, the formula for the equation that I want to estimate is

$$\text{rank} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{LSAT}) + \beta_2 (\text{academic rep}) + \beta_3 (\text{GPA}) + e$$

Interpreting from the second column of panel A, a 1 point increase in the mean LSAT increases the rank by 0.54, a 0.1 point increase in academic reputation increases the rank by 1.38, a 0.1 point increase in GPA increases rank by 0.78. The regression in the second column assumes a linear relationship (the increase is the same whether you are going from LSAT 150 to 151 or from 179 to 180). The formula for the equation that we wish to estimate in panel B is

$$\ln(\text{rank}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\ln(\text{LSAT})) + \beta_2 (\ln(\text{academic rep})) + \beta_3 (\ln(\text{GPA})) + e$$

The second column of panel B presents an alternative model using elasticities. A 1% increase in LSAT increases the rank by 3.85%, a 1% increase in academic reputation increases rank by 1.78%, a 1% increase in GPA increases the rank by 0.93% (but this is not significant at the 5% level). This model is better because the change in rank now depends on where you are in terms of GPA/LSAT/Academic Reputation. These OLS estimations will be biased if the rankings are nonlinear due to violation of the normality assumption in the error term. Hence an ordered logit regression would be more appropriate.

A point that supports the validity of using mean LSAT scores to decide which law school to attend is that a student learns from his fellow students as well as from his teachers; a further point is that the smart students are likely to be successful, and it is helpful to a lawyer's career to know successful lawyers. The first of these points suggests that besides mean LSAT, the standard deviation from the mean, or some other measure of the heterogeneity of the student body, is important. For the weaker the bottom group of students is, the greater the pressure on faculty to "dumb down" the teaching so as not to lose the bottom of the class. We know for the years after 1998 what LSAT score 25% of a school's students are below and what score 25% are above, and the greater the difference in the two scores the greater the heterogeneity of the student body and therefore the greater the pressure to dumb down.

Table 3 compares *U.S. News's* top-ranked 45 law schools (column 1) with the top-ranked 45 law schools ranked by other criteria, beginning with the mean LSAT score

of the student body (column 2) and a weighted average (75% to 25%) of the mean LSAT score and the difference between the LSAT scores of the 25th and 75th percentile (column 3).<sup>4</sup> I will call the third method the “dispersed” LSAT score.

Despite the fact that the *U.S. News* rankings, the mean LSAT ranking, and the dispersed LSAT score ranking (i.e., the first three columns in table 3) are well-correlated, there are some interesting discrepancies. Table 4 lists schools whose rank shifts at least eight places depending on the ranking method used.

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4. *U.S. News* reports the 25th and 75th LSAT percentiles. We calculate the mean LSAT as the average of the percentiles and similarly for calculating mean GPA. The weighted LSAT formula that we use is  $0.75 \times (\text{mean LSAT}/180) + 0.25 \times (1 - \text{LSAT}_{\text{SD}}/60)$ . 180 is the highest LSAT value and 60 is the highest possible  $\text{LSAT}_{\text{SD}}$  value (180–120).  $\text{LSAT}_{\text{SD}} = \text{LSAT}_{75} - \text{LSAT}_{25}$ , the difference between the 75th percentile LSAT score and the 25th percentile LSAT score. Because we do not have an actual standard deviation of the LSAT score for each school, substantial heterogeneity in the distribution of LSAT scores by school may bias our results.

Table 3. Alternative ranking schemes

School	U.S. News rank (1)	Mean LSAT rank (2)	Weighted LSAT rank (3)	Job placement rank (4)	Clerk placement rank (5)	Scholarly productivity and impact (6)	Full faculty scholarly impact (7)	Business-law faculty quality (8)	SSRN top law schools (9)	Average rank (10)	Average academic rank (11)
Yale	1	1	3	8	1	2	1	6	9	4	4
Stanford	2	6	5	10	4	3	3	3	2	6	2
Harvard	3	2	2	2	3	3	4	1	1	1	2
NYU	4	3	1	4	6	7	8	5	13	4	7
Columbia	5	4	3	3	5	5	5	2	4	2	5
Chicago	6	5	6	1	2	1	2	3	3	2	1
Michigan	7	9	9	6	12	8	7	18	19	10	9
UC Berkeley	8	9	24	11	9	6	10	7	8	12	6
Virginia	8	9	12	5	7	15	9	11	10	8	9
Cornell	10	14	8	14	11	12	6	7	24	10	13
Duke	10	9	12	13	8	17	17	20	23	13	18
Northwestern	12	7	6	7	10	10	11	11	29	7	15
Pennsylvania	12	9	9	9	17	13	12	7	16	9	12
Georgetown	14	8	11	15	13	14	16	15	12	13	13
Texas	15	27	29	16	18	8	15	11	6	21	8
UCLA	16	15	16	23	14	16	13	11	5	16	9
USC	17	17	12		20	19	19	10	27	15	21
Vanderbilt	18	19	21	12	16	20	22	15	14	17	17
Minnesota	19	19	21	34	18	11	18		26	25	16
Washington & Lee	20	15	16	38	15					23	

School	U.S. News rank (1)	Mean LSAT rank (2)	Weighted LSAT rank (3)	Job placement rank (4)	Clerk placement rank (5)	Scholarly productivity and impact (6)	Full faculty scholarly impact (7)	Business-law faculty quality (8)	SSRN top law schools (9)	Average rank (10)	Average academic rank (11)
Iowa	21	40	39	44		34	23	18		37	30
North Carolina	22	29	34	21		38	31		41	28	38
Boston College	23	24	25	17					25	24	26
George Wash.	23	24	16	19		28	26		11	20	21
Illinois	23	32	32	40		26	14	15	17	32	18
Emory	26	32	26	22		20	21		43	27	29
Notre Dame	26	22	20	20		26				22	28
U. Washington	26	22	26	37			32			30	33
U. of Georgia	29	29	34			35				34	35
Washington U.	29	35	38	25		31			31	35	31
William & Mary	29	19	21	29		39				25	39
Boston U.	32	24	16	18		22	29		18	19	23
Brigham Young	32	32	32	28						33	
Fordham	32	17	12	27		42		20	20	18	31
UC Hastings	32	29	28	32		36				31	37
Wisconsin	36	43	41	39		40	28			43	34
Arizona	37	35	42			24				41	24
Indiana-Bloom.	37	43	45				24			45	24
Ohio State	37	45	44	30					35	42	35
Wake Forest	37	37	36			25				38	26
Connecticut	41	37	29							36	
UC Davis	41	37	36			44			38	38	40



School	U.S. News	Mean	Weighted LSAT	Job placement	Clerk placement	Scholarly	Full faculty	Business-law	SSRN	Average	Average
	rank	LSAT	rank	rank	rank	productivity and	scholarly impact	impact faculty quality	top law	rank	academic rank
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Tulane	43	40	39	33						40	
Utah	43	41	41			44				41	41
Colorado	45	27	29				20			28	20

Sources: For the *U.S. News* rankings and mean LSAT scores, see *The Best Law Schools*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 10, 2000, at 73. The weighted LSAT rankings data are based on my calculations, as explained *supra* note 4. The job placement rankings are for the law school classes of 2001, 2002, and 2003. ANTHONY CIOLLI, THE LEGAL EMPLOYMENT MARKET: DETERMINANTS OF ELITE FIRM PLACEMENT, AND HOW LAW SCHOOLS STACK UP 51–52 (Apr. 15, 2005), available at <http://www.autoadmit.com/studies/ciollidraft12.pdf> (last visited Sept. 5, 2005) (ranks 16 through 44 were provided by Ciolli in personal correspondence). Note that Ciolli's placement figures are for elite law firms only. The federal clerk placement rankings data are from 2000. See Christopher Avery, Christine Jolls, Richard A. Posner & Alvin E. Roth, *The Market for Federal Judicial Law Clerks*, 68 U. CHI. L. REV. 793, 888 (2001). The scholarly productivity and impact rankings are from Brian Leiter's rankings for 2000–2002. See Leiter's Law School Rankings, Faculty Quality by Objective Measures, 2000–02, [http://www.leiterrankings.com/faculty/2000faculty\\_product\\_objective.shtml](http://www.leiterrankings.com/faculty/2000faculty_product_objective.shtml) (last visited Nov. 18, 2005). Leiter measures productivity by the number of articles and books published and the impact by number of citations in prominent law journals. The full faculty scholarly impact rankings are based on citations analysis from Theodore Eisenberg & Martin T. Wells, *Ranking and Explaining the Scholarly Impact of Law Schools*, 27 J. LEGAL STUD. 373, 388 (1998). The business-law faculty quality rankings are based on a survey conducted by Brian Leiter from 2003–2004 of more than 150 leading legal scholars. Leiter's Law School Rankings, Faculty Quality in the Business Law Areas, 2003–04, [http://www.leiterrankings.com/faculty/2003faculty\\_businesslaw.shtml](http://www.leiterrankings.com/faculty/2003faculty_businesslaw.shtml) (last visited Nov. 18, 2005). The SSRN rankings are based on the number of downloads of faculty members' papers from each law school between March 2004 and March 2005. Current faculty download statistics can be found at Social Science Research Network (SSRN) Homepage, <http://www.ssrn.com> (last visited Aug. 27, 2005). The average ranking is based on an unweighted averaging of the school's mean LSAT, weighted LSAT, job placement, clerk placement, and business-law faculty quality. For each school that did not have rankings for all five categories, I divided the sum of the available rankings by the number of categories in which the school was ranked. I then ranked schools based on these average scores. The average academic ranking is based on averaging the three general faculty-research measures (columns 6, 7, and 9—that is, excluding business-law faculty research quality, column 8, as subsumed in the other measures of faculty research quality). I then ranked schools based on these average scores. Despite the fact that the *U.S. News* ranking, the mean LSAT score ranking, and the dispersed LSAT score ranking (that is, the first three columns in table 3) are well correlated, there are some interesting discrepancies. Table 4 lists schools whose rank shifts at least eight places depending on the ranking.

Table 4. *U.S. News* versus mean and dispersed LSAT: significant rank differences

School	<i>U.S. News</i> rank (1)	Mean LSAT rank (2)	Dispersed LSAT rank (3)
Berkeley	8	9	24
Texas	15	27	29
Iowa	21	40	39
North Carolina	22	29	34
George Washington	23	24	16
Illinois	23	32	32
Washington University	29	35	38
William & Mary	29	19	21
Boston University	32	24	16
Fordham	32	17	12
Indiana–Bloomington	37	43	45
Ohio State	37	45	44
Connecticut	41	37	29
Colorado	45	27	29

The most dramatic result in table 4 is the great discrepancy in Berkeley's ranking when the dispersed LSAT score is used in lieu of the *U.S. News* ranking. Berkeley is notorious for affirmative action, which is probably what is responsible for its unimpressive showing in column 3, and I would predict that the result would be a distinct dumbing down of the teaching there. Texas, Iowa, North Carolina, Illinois, Washington University, Indiana–Bloomington, and Ohio State show similar, but less marked, effects. In contrast, George Washington, William & Mary, Boston University, Connecticut, Colorado, and, above all, Fordham show dramatic rank increases when the ranking method used is dispersed LSAT. William & Mary and Fordham also rank high on mean LSAT.

A complicating factor is identified in an important recent article by Richard Sander.<sup>5</sup> His subject is affirmative action in law schools, which is no part of my subject except insofar as it affects the dispersed LSAT ranking measure. But in the course of his analysis, he demonstrates the existence of a tradeoff between attending a prestigious (that is, high-ranked) law school and getting mediocre grades there and attending a lower-ranked law school and getting good grades there.<sup>6</sup> Law firms attach weight to whether an applicant went to a prestigious law school but also attach weight to the applicant's grades independent of the prestige of the law school. The second weight is actually greater below the level of the very best law schools, and this implies that a student who would be a marginal admit at Law School *X* but a prize catch at Law School *Y* would do better to attend *Y* even if *X* is significantly more prestigious.<sup>7</sup>

5. Richard H. Sander, *A Systemic Analysis of Affirmative Action in American Law Schools*, 57 STAN. L. REV. 367 (2004).

6. See *id.* at 456–58.

7. *Id.* at 460.

This does not invalidate the use of the LSAT rankings by students to help in choosing a law school. Rather, it suggests that a student deciding which schools to apply to should compare his own LSAT score with the mean LSAT scores at the law schools. If his score is low relative to the mean of a particular school (though it may be within the range in which the school admits applicants), he may be better off going to a lower-ranked school.

The dependent variable in Sander's study was earnings, and not all applicants to law school are primarily interested in the boost, often modest, to earnings that the choice of law school may produce. For one thing, the boost might be offset by higher tuition or other expenses. For another, locational preference may point to another school. There are even some would-be law students who care about the quality of their life during their three years in law school, including the intellectual experience. To the extent that these dimensions of law school, which may depend on geographical location, school size, class size, and teaching quality, are important, the student body's mean LSAT score is not a good index.

Faculty naturally think that the best index to a law school's quality is the academic prowess of the faculty, and so they turn to Brian Leiter's careful study, which is based on number of citations to faculty scholarship. The top 45 schools in his ranking is the sixth column in table 3. (An alternative ranking, also based on citations analysis, is presented in column 7.) Ranking by quality-adjusted faculty output is undoubtedly helpful information for deans, faculty, and would-be faculty, including law students considering the possibility of an academic career, but probably for only a few law school applicants. Most applicants to law school expect to practice law, and faculty publication, the basis of Leiter's ranking, is increasingly removed from the concerns important even to practitioners, let alone to students, though this phenomenon is more pronounced at the elite schools. Current faculty scholarship is, for example, disproportionately concentrated in constitutional law, which few practicing lawyers specialize in. Faculty publication in business-law areas, in contrast, is likely to be a good proxy for the quality of the business-law education that the students receive (and business law tends to be more lucrative than other areas of practice), and Leiter has obligingly ranked law schools by this criterion as well, with results shown in the eighth column in the table.

Two other columns (4 and 5) reflect job placement in elite firms and the percentage of graduating students who become law clerks to federal judges, respectively; the latter in particular is a good proxy for elite student status. The tenth column is a ranking based on an unweighted averaging of the rankings most likely to be relevant to students: mean LSAT, LSAT dispersion, job placement, clerk placement, and business-law faculty quality.<sup>8</sup> I'll call this the "composite ranking."

From a prospective student's standpoint, the composite ranking should be more meaningful than *U.S. News's*; let us see how they—columns 1 and 10 of table 3—compare. The differences are not dramatic; in *U.S. News's* top 10 schools, for example (actually top 11, because of a tie for 10th place), only two schools, Berkeley and Duke,

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8. For each school that did not have rankings for all five categories, I divided the sum of the available rankings by the number of categories in which the school was ranked. I then ranked schools based on these average scores.

drop out; the two newcomers are Northwestern and Pennsylvania. Table 5 compares the ranks of those schools that moved at least eight places between columns 1 and 10.

**Table 5.** *U.S. News* versus composite: significant rank differences

School	<i>U.S. News</i> rank	Composite rank
Iowa	21	37
Illinois	23	32
Boston University	32	19
Fordham	32	18
Indiana–Bloomington	37	45
Colorado	45	28

*Sources:* The *U.S. News* rankings can be found in table 3, column 1. The composite rank can be found in table 3, column 10.

Unfortunately, because of missing data (see table 3), these changes are not particularly meaningful, but it is noteworthy how well correlated the results are with those in table 4.

For students for whom faculty research quality is the most important criterion in choosing a law school, the last column in table 3 is a ranking based on averaging the three general faculty-research measures (columns 6, 7, and 9—excluding, that is, business-law faculty research quality, column 8, because it is subsumed in the other measures of faculty research quality). There are a number of significant discrepancies between this measure and my composite student-oriented measure (column 10). Northwestern drops in rank from 7 to 15, North Carolina from 28 to 38, William & Mary from 25 to 39, and Fordham from 18 to 31, but Texas jumps from 21 to 8, Illinois from 32 to 18, Minnesota from 25 to 16, Wisconsin from 43 to 34, Arizona from 41 to 24, Indiana–Bloomington from 45 to 24, Wake Forest from 38 to 26, and Colorado from 28 to 20. If one compares column 11, the composite academic ranking, with *U.S. News*'s ranking (column 1), there are additional discrepancies: Duke drops from 10 to 18, Iowa from 21 to 30, North Carolina from 22 to 38, and William & Mary from 29 to 39, while Arizona and Indiana–Bloomington both rise from 37 to 24, Wake Forest from 37 to 26, and Colorado from 45 to 20.

It is interesting to compare, finally, student quality, as proxied by mean LSAT scores, and faculty research quality—in other words, columns 2 and 11. As shown in table 6, there are a number of interesting discrepancies; again I use an eight-rank move as the measure of a significant discrepancy.

**Table 6.** Student versus faculty quality: significant rank differences

School	Mean LSAT rank	Average academic rank
Duke	9	18
Northwestern	7	15
Texas	27	8
Iowa	40	30
North Carolina	29	38
Illinois	32	18
University of Washington	22	33
William & Mary	19	39

School	Mean LSAT rank	Average academic rank
Fordham	17	31
Hastings	29	37
Wisconsin	43	34
Arizona	35	24
Indiana—Bloomington	43	24
Ohio State	45	35
Wake Forest	37	26

Not surprisingly, state schools (with the exception of North Carolina, the University of Washington, and Hastings) do better from a faculty than from a student standpoint; state schools are under pressure to enroll students from their state and so have a more limited field of selection. Conversely, when the student- and faculty-oriented rankings diverge in a private law school, the faculty rank is (with the exception of Wake Forest) lower—often considerably.

My conclusion, based upon the general agreement between the *U.S. News* ranking and my composite ranking (column 10 in table 3), is that the former, much criticized as it is, does a pretty good job of grouping law schools by tier. But only pretty good; table 5 identifies anomalies from a student perspective, and table 6 identifies (more) anomalies from an academic perspective. Within each tier, as I noted at the outset, no ranking system is likely to assist a prospective student in choosing a school. However, once the student with the aid of a ranking method (but also by comparing his LSAT score with the mean LSAT score of the schools in each tier) has narrowed his search to a handful of schools, he can, without undue expenditure of time, obtain the additional information about those schools that he will need in order to make an intelligent decision.

My analysis was limited to the top 45 law schools as ranked by *U.S. News*. The results in this paper seem sufficiently interesting to warrant the extension of the analysis to the other 135 or so American law schools.