



## **The Business School Rankings Dilemma**

For more than 20 years, media rankings of business schools have grown both in popularity and public perception. BusinessWeek, Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, and other organizations publish extensive articles or devote entire issues to the rankings. As a result, the rankings have created an international competition among business schools, where "winners" emerge with enhancements in prestige, enrollment, faculty and, most likely, donations.

“The Business School Rankings Dilemma,” an AACSB International report released this month, offers a compelling look into the popular practice of ranking business schools. It reflects the opinions of business school deans that the various measuring systems to determine rankings do not accurately reflect the quality of each school’s business education. Differences between schools that are of little importance are often magnified, while important characteristics that are more difficult to measure are left out. Even when the measures do correlate to quality, attempts to draw significant differences among similar programs are often subjective and reflect a bias of a particular constituency.

The report points out that the rankings put too much emphasis on short-term performance, and apply the same criteria to all schools, regardless of a different mission or orientation. Most importantly, the rankings fail to consider differences in degree programs and rank only specific types of programs. For example, most publications rank traditional, full-time MBA programs, which include only about 20 percent of those enrolled, while ignoring the other 80 percent enrolled in more popular part-time, non-traditional programs. A recent issue of Forbes, for the first time, included rankings of part-time programs. We view this as a step in the right direction.

With so many publications approaching schools for rankings information, the expense of providing data to the publications has become problematic. Even so, the potential of a high ranking—as well as the perceived benefit—presents an opportunity that schools cannot afford to pass up. AACSB accreditation, which has been earned by more than 500 business schools in 28 countries, is a comprehensive, quality assurance and continuous improvement process. Whether a school has attained AACSB accreditation is a much more reliable measure of quality than arbitrary rankings.

AACSB International hopes to convince publications that by adjusting the way they collect and interpret data, the rankings will more accurately reflect the capability and performance of business schools. One of the ways we can do this is to encourage the media to make use of our own AACSB International database, which includes searchable profiles of business schools that could help standardize the rankings data.

As a worldwide advocate for business schools, AACSB International is determined to engage the media on the rankings, with the goal of educating the public about their limitations. We will also attempt to expand our role in defining and collecting data that reflects program quality, by

clarifying such activities as MBA admissions, post-graduate employment data, and in the process, try to reduce the overall data reporting burden of our schools. Most importantly, we will advocate the benefits to business school stakeholders of attending and recruiting from AACSB accredited schools, “the best business schools in the world.”

**About AACSB International**

AACSB International founded in 1916 by a consortium of 17 business schools that included Dartmouth College (Tuck Business School), Harvard University (Harvard Business School), the University of Pennsylvania (Wharton School) and Northwestern University (Kellogg School of Management). AACSB International is the world’s first and largest accrediting agency for bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctoral degree programs in business administration and accounting. The association also is the business education community’s professional development organization, conducting a wide array of conference and seminar programs at various locations around the world.