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ABSTRACT

All of the major academic quality rankings of American Ph.D.-granting geography departments during 1925-80 are examined, and trends in the universities and regions in which the best Ph.D.-granting geography departments have been located are analyzed. Seven major ratings of geography departments are considered. Reputational rankings were conducted by Raymond M. Hughes (1925, 1934), Hayward Keniston (1959), Allan Cartter (1966), and Roose and Andersen (1970). Studies based on more objective criteria were conducted by Peter Beaumont (1971), David E. Sopher and James S. Duncan (1975), and Richard L. Morrill (1980). Based on these seven quality rankings of geography departments, the following have been rated among the discipline's best departments: University of California at Berkeley, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, and University of Wisconsin. In 1925, the nation's highest-ranked departments were located mostly in the Northeast and upper Midwest. By 1966, many of the best departments in the Northeast had declined or disappeared, and of the nine highest-rated schools in the Cartter survey, six were in the upper Midwest and three on the west coast. Recently, as illustrated by the three geography department rankings done since 1971, the nation's best geography departments have become relatively decentralized. A list of the ratings for each study and references are included. (SW)

QUALITY RANKINGS OF PH.D.-GRANTING DEPARTMENTS OF GEOGRAPHY, 1925 - 1980

by

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ABSTRACT

Academic "quality" is a complex and hard to measure property, but one of great importance to college and university administrators, faculty, students, and others. This article examines all the major academic quality rankings of American Ph.D.-granting departments, 1925-80. For each, it discusses its methodology and displays its findings. It then shows the trends in the universities and regions in which the best Ph.D.-granting geography departments have been located, 1925-80.

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Although several attempts have been made over the years to rank the leading American geography departments using a variety of approaches, no comparison of all the important rankings has ever been published.* The purpose of this article is briefly to compare the methodologies and findings of such rankings and to show the shifts, from 1925 to 1980, in America's highest-ranked geography departments and their location.

Academic quality rankings provide information and comparative data that are helpful to academic administrators, faculty members, students, boards of trustees, statewide governing boards, funding agencies, and others. Such information helps them judge the relative quality of different departments and of entire colleges and universities. In the present era of retrenchment, when campus administrators, university governing boards, and state legislatures may wish to reduce funding for or phase out departments that rank low in their disciplines or lower than most of the institution's other departments, academic quality rankings are especially important. In a society where the performance of corporations, stocks and bonds, and political figures is widely monitored and evaluated, it is appropriate to evaluate the performance and rank the quality of colleges, universities, and

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individual departments. "The larger society's hard-nosed demand for objective evaluation is mirrored in the subculture of the colleges and universities" (6, p. 57).

Criticisms of Academic Quality Rankings

Academic "quality" is an elusive, inherently subjective concept reflecting a variety of characteristics too complex to be measured along one or two dimensions. Reputational ratings, the best known and most influential types of quality ranking, have sought to reduce their inherent subjectivity by obtaining large numbers of informed opinions. Other ranking studies have used "objective" measures, rating departments by such criteria as the number of their faculty's publications, awards, honors, and citations in citation indexes, the fellowships won by their graduate students, and the prestige of the universities offering faculty positions to their new Ph.D.s. These "objective" studies, though, have generally neglected many important considerations -- for example, how well the faculty teaches, how much the students learn, and how much alumni, other than those who become geography professors, achieve. In addition, since many of the criteria used in so-called "objective" rankings, like faculty and student honors and awards, are themselves qualitative judgments, "summing such information does not create an 'objective' measure, but another type of subjective measure once removed" (2, p. 5).

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y lag a few years behind "reality."
of seeking trends based on these imperfect quality
difficult one, and any generalizations must be
ly, especially when, as is the case with these
irtment rankings, such studies employ several dif-
ologies. Still, the consideration of findings of
employ several different methodologies has an advantage,
approach can reveal trends in the relative standing
lepartments that might be masked by the faults of
: quality ranking methodology.

Geography Department Rankings

Seven major ratings of geography departments are considered here. They were published between 1925 and 1980, ranking anywhere from 8 to 35 of the leading geography departments (TAble 1). The earliest four rankings (2,7,9,11) were based on surveys in which knowledgeable respondents rated the "reputation" of those departments' Ph.D. programs and the quality of their faculty's research. The next three (1,10,12) were not "reputational" rankings; rather, they were based on a variety of objective criteria. (In addition to these seven, Gourman has produced three recent rankings of geography departments, including two almost identical rank orders purporting to show the 15 leading undergraduate programs (3,5) and a third ranking of 27 graduate geography programs (4). However, due to his eccentric methods, not the least of which is his refusal to reveal the methods he used to arrive at his rank orders, his ratings will not be considered here).

The first rank order ever made of geography departments was included in Raymond M. Hughes' pioneering multi-disciplinary reputational ranking of 1925 (7). His ranking of the eight best Ph.D.-granting geography departments was based on the responses of only 16 geographers, including Isaiah Bowman, Charles Colby, and Carl Sauer, who were asked to rate the leading departments of geography on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest score. The University of Chicago's department was ranked first; fully 14

of the 16 respondents gave it a "1," while Clark, the second-ranked department, was rated "1" by only four of 16 respondents, and Wisconsin, ranked third, was rated "1" by only one of 13 respondents.

Hughes' follow-up study, a reputational survey of 35 disciplines, including geography, did not present precise rank orders. Rather, each respondent "...was requested to check those institutions which in his judgment had an adequate staff and equipment to prepare candidates for the doctorate; and to star the departments of the highest rank, roughly the highest 20 per cent" (7, p. 194). Those schools starred by a majority of respondents were classed together as the "most distinguished" in the discipline. Those named, but not starred, by half the respondents were classed together as "adequately staffed and equipped for work leading to the doctorate in Geography" (8, p. 210). Four of the 18 institutions then granting the Ph.D. in geography were starred -- Clark, and the universities of California, Chicago, and Wisconsin. Five more were listed as adequate to give the doctorate -- Columbia, Harvard, Ohio State, and the Universities of Cincinnati and Michigan. Hughes' two reputational surveys, though published nine years apart, thus yielded very similar results. Of the eight institutions ranked in 1925 and the nine listed in 1934, fully seven overlap. The only schools not included in both lists are Yale, ranked 8th in 1925 but not listed in 1934, and Cincinnati

and Ohio State, not ranked in 1925 but called adequate to offer the doctorate in 1934. (Because the 1934 study fails to present an actual rank order of schools, it is not displayed in Table 1).

Hughes' 1934 study was followed 25 years later by Keniston's multi-disciplinary reputational ranking (9). Keniston surveyed the department chairpersons in 24 disciplines, including geography, at 25 leading comprehensive universities and then ranked the top 10 to 16 departments in each discipline. A serious defect of his study, though, was that chairpersons were instructed to list in their rankings only those 25 universities they represented; thus outstanding departments in all disciplines at schools other than those 25 were not rated at all. In the case of geography, strong departments at Syracuse, Clark, and Louisiana State, among others, could not be ranked.

In 1966, Cartter published his famous reputational ranking of departments in 29 disciplines, including geography (2). He asked department chaipersons, "distinguished senior scholars," and "knowledgeable junior scholars who had completed their formal training not more than ten years earlier" (2, p. 12) to rate the quality of the graduate faculty of each department on a six-point scale ranging from "distinguished" to "not sufficient to provide acceptable doctoral training." Respondents were also asked, for each department, to rate the effectiveness of the graduate program on a four-point scale. For geography, Cartter asked his re-

spondents to rate 30 departments that had granted at least one Ph.D., 1952-62, and were still offering it. Based on respondents' judgments of the quality of their graduate faculty, he ranked three as "distinguished," seven as "strong," and listed nine alphabetically as "good" and four alphabetically as "adequate plus." (The lowest rated seven schools were not listed at all).

In 1970, Roose and Andersen, using a methodology very similar to Cartter's, but ranking more disciplines at more universities, and using more raters, produced another multi-disciplinary ranking (11). This was the last multi-disciplinary ranking ever done that includes geography departments; it ranked 15 Ph.D.-granting geography departments in order of their "quality of graduate faculty" and lists in alphabetical order two groups of institutions that received lower scores.

Since the Roose-Andersen study, three rankings of geography departments have been published. None of them was "reputational"; rather, they were based on one or more "objective" criteria. In 1971, Beaumont (1) published a study listing geography departments according to where 976 geography professors at American departments awarding graduate degrees had received their Ph.D. Beaumont called his article a study of the "Origins and Dispersal of Professional Geographers;" and he was careful not to refer to his lists of the leading institutional "producers" of graduate faculty as quality rankings. Still, he pointed out the "marked similarity" between

his and the Roose-Andersen ranking and added wryly that "quality and quantity appear to be closely correlated in American graduate education in geography" (1, p. 157). Thus his tables may be considered as academic quality rankings.

Sopher and Duncan (12) seeking an alternative to reputational rankings, used a complex two-stage algorithm to rank Ph.D.-granting geography departments on the basis of the prestige of the university which hired their Ph.D. recipients, "using the location in 1974-75 of faculty who had received the Ph.D. in the period from 1960 to 1974" (12, p. 19). Their resulting rank order, though arrived at very differently from those of consensual rankings, nonetheless correlates quite highly with those of the Cartter and Roose-Andersen reputational rankings (12, p. 23).

Finally, Morrill (10) recently published a rank order of 27 geography departments based on five indices -- "enrollment productivity," "graduate productivity," "numbers of Ph.D. graduates teaching at other Ph.D.-granting institutions" (10, p. 88), and two indices based on number of faculty publications, one in geography journals, the other in geography journals and some in ancillary disciplines in which geographers often publish. Morrill also provided a "composite weighted index" based on his other five indices, and, finally, the rank order displayed here, based on the unweighted means of his five indices. (For the rank orders of leading American geography departments produced by all

these studies, see TAble 1).

Trends in the Highest-Ranked Geography Departments

One of the most striking things revealed by TAble 1 is the consistently strong showings of four geography departments. In all six rankings, 1925-75, the departments at Chicago, Michigan, Wisconsin, and UC/Berkeley were ranked among the nation's nine best departments. Even in Morrill's 1980 study, where Chicago (10th) and Michigan (14th) fell off somewhat, these four were still ranked quite high. Since 1959, the universities of Washington and Minnesota and Ohio State, UCLA, Penn State, and Clark have also ranked high in most studies.

Recent rank orders of geography departmetns differ considerably from rank orders of "whole" universities, partly because several distinguished schools, like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, and Stanford have no geography departments. Earlier in the century, before some of these schools, like Harvard and Yale, closed their geography departments, geography rank orders mirrored the rank orders of whole universities much more closely than they do today. For example, Keniston (9, p. 119) combined the rankings of individual departments from Hughes' 1925 study into a rank order of universities. Of the eight highest-ranked geography departments in 1925, fully seven were at institutions ranked among the nation's top nine universities. Only Clark, whose

geography department was ranked second in the United States, was not ranked among the nine best universities overall. By contrast, the most recent reputational ranking of geography departments, by Roose-Andersen in 1970, lists several departments among the top 10 which are located in universities never ranked among the top 10 institutions overall. These were the departments at Minnesota, Ohio State, Penn State, and Syracuse.

Regionally, comparisons of the leading geography departments during the last half century reveal a steady shift. In 1925, all the eight top-ranked geography departments were located either in the Northeast or the upper Midwest. Between 1925 and 1959, though, the geography departments at these Northeast schools either disappeared or greatly declined. Departments at Clark, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, all rated among the top eight in Hughes' 1925 study, failed to be listed among the top 10 in Keniston's 1959 ranking; only Columbia (11th) made the top 15. The rise of programs in regional science and urban planning in some universities during the latter part of this period may have contributed to these geography departments' decline. These programs may have received money and resources that would otherwise have gone to geography departments.

As geography departments in the Northeast declined, some new ones in the upper Midwest (for example, Northwestern and Min-

nesota) and some on the west coast (for example, UCLA and Washington) were rapidly improving, all of the being ranked among the top 10 in both the Keniston and Cartter surveys. In the 1960s and 1970s, the spatial pattern of the best departments decentralized, with high-ranking departments appearing from regions that so far had not produced any, like the South (Louisiana State, Georgia) and the Great Plains (Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska). If regional shifts of the nation as a whole predict forthcoming changes in the distribution of high-ranking departments, one may well expect schools in the South, and to a lesser extent in the West, to improve their rankings in years to come.

Summary

Given the difficulty of measuring a characteristic as vague and multi-dimensional as "quality," any inferences based on rankings of academic departmetns should be made cautiously. This is especially true when these rankings have been made, as is the case with those discussed here, using several different methodologies. Those researchers who produce rank orders of geography departments in the future should be careful not to overlook the special strengths and weaknesses of departments' particular subfields. They should

also try to devise ways to measure important aspects of a department's quality that have been largely overlooked by previous researchers -- how well the faculty teaches, how much the students learn, and how well those who don't become geographers at Ph.D.-granting universities benefit from their education. And, since all the major rankings of geography departments have considered only Ph.D.-granting universities, future researchers should be encouraged to evaluate and rank the quality of undergraduate geography programs, both at universities and liberal arts colleges.

Examination of seven quality rankings of gepgraphy departments published from 1925-80 shows that four of them -- at the universities of California at Berkeley, Chicago, Michigan, and Wisconsin -- have been rated among the discipline's best departments in every study. Comparison of these rankings also illus reveals the shift in the location of the nation's highest-ranked departments. In 1925, they were located mostly in the Northeast and upper Midwest. By 1966, many of the best departments in the Northeast had declined or disappeared entirely, and of the nine highest-rated schools in the Cartter survey, six were in the upper Midwest and three on the west coast. Recently, as illustrated by the three geography department rankings done since 1971, the nation's best geography departments have become relatively decentralized.

Table 1 -- Results of the Seven Quality Rankings[a]

Rank	Hughes 1925 (16)[b]	Keniston 1959 (25)	Cartter 1966 (30)	Roose-Andersen 1970 (34)	Beaumont[c] 1971 (51)
1.	Chicago	Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Chicago	Wisconsin
2.	Clark	Chicago	Chicago	Michigan	UC/Berkeley
3.	Wisconsin	UC/Berkeley	UC/Berkeley	Minnesota*	Chicago
4.	Columbia	Michigan	Washington	Wisconsin*	Washington
5.	Harvard	Northwestern	Syracuse U.	UC/Berkeley	Michigan
6.	UC/Berkeley*[f]	UCLA	Northwestern	Washington	Northwestern
7.	Michigan*	Washington	Minnesota	Ohio State	Clark
8.	Yale	Ohio State	UCLA	Penn State*	Syracuse
9.		Illinois	Michigan	Syracuse*	Minnesota
10.		Minnesota	Louisiana State	UCLA*	Columbia*
11.		Columbia*	Penn State	Kansas*	Iowa*
12.		Indiana U.*	Indiana U.	Northwestern*	UCLA*
13.		Iowa	Iowa	Clark*	Illinois
14.		Johns Hopkins	Johns Hopkins	Iowa*	Johns Hopkins*
15.		Yale	Kansas	Johns Hopkins	Louisiana State*
16.			Michigan State		Harvard*
17.			Ohio State		Kansas*
18.			Illinois		Ohio State*
19.			Clark		Penn State*
20.			Pittsburgh		Michigan State
21.					Indiana
22.					
23.					
24.					
25.					
26.					
27.					

a. Unless otherwise indicated, state names refer to institutions called the "University of.....", as, for example, the "University of Wisconsin."

b. Number of geography departments included in the study

c. According to "Universities at which Professorial Faculty of all Ranks Teaching in Geography Departments which Award Ph.D. Degrees Obtained their Graduate Education"

d. Sopher and Duncan rank 35 geography departments (12, p. 21), of which only the first 26 are displayed here.

e. Not given

f. University of California at Berkeley

* icates that two or more schools are tied at the same rank

Table 1 -- Results of the Seven Quality Rankings (continued)

Rank	Sopher-Duncan[d] 1975 (51)	Morrill 1980 (e)
1.	Michigan	Wisconsin
2.	Washington*	UCLA
3.	Wisconsin*	UC/Berkeley
4.	Chicago	Ohio State
5.	Minnesota	Minnesota
6.	Northwestern	Washington
7.	Kansas	Kansas
8.	Iowa	Clark
9.	UC/Berkeley*	Michigan State
10.	Penn State*	Chicago
11.	Syracuse*	Georgia
12.	Illinois	Iowa
13.	Michigan State	Illinois
14.	Ohio State	Michigan
15.	Indiana U.	Syracuse
16.	Hawaii	Northwestern
17.	Johns Hopkins	Penn State
18.	UCLA	Colorado
19.	Georgia	Oklahoma
20.	Clark	Rutgers
21.	Colorado	Hawaii
22.	Pittsburgh	Texas
23.	SUNY/Buffalo	Johns Hopkins
24.	S. Illinois U.	Indiana U.
25.	Texas	Boston U.
26.	Florida	Oregon State
27.		Arizona State

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