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The Top 100 Law Reviews: A Reference Guide Based on Historical USNWR Data

Brad Areheart

University of Tennessee College of Law

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Brad Areheart, *University of Tennessee College of Law*

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Updated April 28, 2020

Bradley A. Areheart
Associate Professor, University of Tennessee College of Law

A Few Words About Methodology

In 2008, I first compiled a chart that allowed me to order main, or flagship, law reviews based on the rolling averages of historical U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) data. My original impetus for this resource was the sense that whether people like or dislike USNWR's rankings, they are important in shaping many – if not most – law professors' perceptions about the relative strength of a law school (and derivatively, the home law review). That chart, updated with the newest USNWR rankings, begins on page 4 of this document.

Generally speaking, I think the best way of valuing any particular placement is by trying to gauge the value that others would assign to that placement. This is akin to how people might talk about measuring value in the real estate market: a house is only worth what someone else is willing to pay for it. When other people think that a law review has cachet or is prestigious, they will be willing to publish an article with that journal and incur the concomitant opportunity costs. So, for example, the fact that most people would be thrilled to publish an article in Harvard Law Review – and almost no one would turn down an offer from HLR – means that an offer from HLR is extremely valuable. The value that others place on HLR is an imminently reasonable basis for you to place value on publishing in HLR.

I believe the best proxy for how other law professors react and respond to publishing in flagship law reviews is the USNWR rankings. These rankings are accessible and widely utilized by prospective students. The fact that prospective students are often fixated on such data means that law professors are required to pay attention to said data.

That said, in any one year, there can be wild swings in USNWR rankings and these new rankings do not immediately take hold in most law professors' minds. In fact, some may pay no attention to the new rankings, though they likely paid attention to the rankings at some point in their career. Accordingly, I have sorted schools by their 10-year averages because I suspect the majority of current law professors have been active in scholarship at some point during that time period and thus are likely to judge placements based on rankings from that period of time.

A 10-year average is admittedly an exercise in line-drawing. The current ranking in any one year seems not terribly useful because only a handful of people will have internalized that ranking. A 5-year average would be best for capturing the views of people who have recently entered the academy. On the other hand, a 15-year average seems to give too short of shrift to the importance of recency in affecting people's cognition. So I view a 10-year rolling average as a "happy medium" in balancing recency with the fact that many of the people whose impressions one might care most about in placing an article have been in the academy for a decade or more. The 5-year and 15-year averages are also included 1) to better discern trends and 2) to have a sense of what more senior and more junior law professors are likely to think of a particular placement.

Frequently Asked Questions

Isn't Washington & Lee's Law Review Rankings (by citation count) a better metric?
In my opinion, the best metric is the one that most other people use – not the one that is necessarily the most principled, or even defensible. Although I think Washington & Lee does an excellent job of capturing which law reviews are publishing pieces that others cite, I do not think this is how most people judge law reviews. More to the point, I greatly enjoy looking at Washington & Lee's rankings from year to year and am pretty familiar with them. That said, I think very, very few people both have a strong working knowledge of Washington & Lee's rankings and use them for their placement decisions.

Isn't US News peer assessment (or "peer rep") a better metric?
Peer rep is a better metric than any one year's current overall ranking, because any changes in peer rep are more glacial and less subject to wild swings. But as I stated above, the metric that makes the most sense for placement decisions is the one that other law professors most frequently use. Here, I believe that more people are aware of a school's USNWR overall rank than their ranking by peer rep. Also, peer rep is derived from USNWR surveys that only allow one to rank any particular school on a 1-5 basis. In this vein, one might view peer rep as just as specious as overall USNWR rank. Additionally, peer rep has only been around since 2007 and thus would not allow as much data capture. Finally, I have read that, in proverbial tail-wag-dog fashion, overall rank appears to drive peer rep. If that is true, it would be one more reason not to worry much about peer rep.

Isn't Google's Scholar Law Review Rankings a better metric?
Once again, I think the best metric is the one other people most frequently use. I do not think most law professors are knowledgeable of Google Scholar rankings and utilize them for placement decisions.

Wouldn't the best system for ranking law reviews be some combination of USNWR overall ranking, USNWR peer rep, Google Scholar, and/or Washington & Lee?
Maybe. That sounds pretty complicated. In all seriousness, I know that some have put together meta-rankings of this sort (see, e.g., https://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/2018/02/meta-ranking-of-flagship-us-law-reviews.html), and I have considered doing something similar, but I just don't think many people are familiar enough with Google Scholar or Washington & Lee to justify giving those rankings equal weight to the overall USNWR ranking. For example, when an appointments committee is going through hundreds of FAR forms and trying to quickly gauge each candidate's scholarly potential, I doubt the committee would take the time to consult (or know right off the top of their head) the Google Scholar or Washington & Lee ranking of a particular journal. Similarly, I think that the overall rank of a school should be weighted more heavily than peer rep: again, most people are simply not familiar with peer rep rankings. Finally, I think there is a certain elegance in sorting by just one ranking; a meta-ranking that combines multiple rankings requires even greater defense than one that simply calculates rolling averages of the most familiar and utilized ranking (i.e., USNWR overall).

But don't some schools have better or worse flagship journals than their overall ranking suggests?
Of course. Some schools are known to have better flagship journals than their school's ranking suggests (e.g., Fordham, Illinois, or Cardozo). Conversely, some schools are known to have a better school reputation than flagship journal (I will refrain from supplying examples here). For such journals, one might make a mental adjustment based upon Washington & Lee's citation ranking, USNWR peer rep scores, or one's own individual sense of these things. That said, I think a rolling average of USNWR ranking data is a pretty good proxy for the vast majority of law reviews.

You left off my school – and it is absolutely top 100!
I have worked to include all schools that might have a claim at being "top 100" – hence, my current chart actually includes 108 schools. But I'm certainly not perfect. If I have omitted any school that has a reasonable claim over a 10-year period to "top 100" status, please email me at brad.areheart@tennessee.edu and I will run the numbers.

Were there any ties?
If two law school's 10-year rolling averages were within 1/10 of a point, I tied them and then attempted to break those ties based on the current year's peer reputation scores. You'll see that where there was a tie, I have included the peer rep scores in parentheses for those schools. If the peer rep scores were the same, I allowed the tie to remain.

What about specialty journals?
Admittedly, what I have compiled is not a ranking system for specialty journals. Here, I think Washington & Lee's rankings are one way of roughly comparing a flagship law review to a specialty law review. For example, if you were to receive an offer from the Yale Journal of Law & Feminism (YJLF), one way of assessing how that compares to publishing in a flagship journal would be to compare it to the nearest flagship journals in W&L's rankings. In this case, and using W&L's "combined score" rankings from 2018 (the most recent year available), the closest flagship journals to YJLF (#162) are Villanova Law Review (#161) and St. Louis University Law Journal (#160). That said, I would like to reiterate that most people are not very familiar with Washington & Lee's rankings. This leads many – when asked to compare a flagship offer to a specialty offer – to invoke some sort of heuristic such as "add 60" (or "add 50" or "add 70") to the rank of the school at which the specialty is located. Under such a heuristic, one could think of the offer from a specialty journal at Yale as roughly equivalent to a flagship journal located around 60. (I.e., adding 60 to Yale's historical rank of 1 equals 61.) My personal view is that the specialty journals at Yale and Harvard enjoy an unusual amount of prestige and thus they ought to be discounted the least. So if one were looking for a rule she might "add 50" for Yale and Harvard specialties and "add 70" for all others. Your mileage may vary. Of course, if you ultimately receive two publication offers (one from a specialty and one from a flagship) that are "close" enough to make you wonder, you should survey those colleagues you know and respect regarding which one they would choose.

Why are there a bunch of 111s near the bottom of the chart?
For schools that were not ranked in the top 100 in years prior to 2012 — when the numerical rankings did not extend as deep as they do now — I have arbitrarily assigned them a number of "111." I did this because I am trying to be fair in balancing the fact they could have been just on the other side of 100 or they could have been much lower. I also like it because it's readily, visually apparent that I lacked data. If anyone has a better idea about what to do with schools that had no numerical ranking prior to the 2012 rankings, please let me know.

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Top 100 Law Schools Based on USNWR Data & Sorted By 10-Year Rolling Averages

Brad Areheart, University of Tennessee College of Law [updated April 28, 2020]

Rank	School	10 Yr	5 Yr	15 Yr	"21	"20	"19	"18	"17	"16	"15	"14	"13	"12	"11	"10	"09	"08	"07
1	Yale	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	Stanford	2.3	2.2	2.3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2
3	Harvard	2.5	2.8	2.4	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3
4	Columbia (4.7)	4.3	4.6	4.3	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4
5	Chicago (4.6)	4.2	4	4.8	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	7	6	6
6	NYU	6	6	5.6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	4	4
7	Pennsylvania	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	7	6	7
8	Virginia	8	8.2	8.5	8	8	9	8	8	8	8	7	7	9	10	10	9	10	8
9	Berkeley (4.5)	8.9	9.6	8.3	9	10	9	12	8	8	9	9	7	8	7	6	6	8	8
10	Michigan (4.4)	8.9	8.4	8.8	9	9	8	8	11	10	9	10	7	9	9	9	9	8	8
11	Duke	10.5	11	11	12	10	11	10	11	8	10	11	11	11	11	10	12	10	11
12	Northwestern	11.2	10	11	9	10	11	10	12	12	12	12	12	12	11	10	9	12	12
13	Cornell	13.1	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	14	13	13	13	12	13	13
14	Georgetown	13.9	14	14	14	14	14	15	14	14	13	14	13	14	14	14	14	14	14
15	Texas	15.1	15	15	16	16	15	14	15	15	15	15	16	14	15	15	16	18	16
16	UCLA	15.8	16	16	15	15	16	15	17	16	16	17	15	16	15	15	15	15	15
17	Vanderbilt	16.6	17	17	18	18	17	17	16	17	16	15	16	16	17	17	15	16	17
18	Wash. U. (3.7)	18.5	18	19	17	18	18	18	18	18	18	19	23	18	19	19	19	19	19
19	USC (3.6)	18.4	18	18	18	17	19	17	20	17	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	16	17
20	Minnesota	20.4	21	20	21	20	20	23	22	20	20	19	19	20	22	20	22	20	19
21	Notre Dame	22.5	22	23	22	21	24	20	22	22	26	23	22	23	22	23	22	28	22
22	GW	22.7	25	22	23	22	24	30	25	22	20	21	20	20	20	28	20	22	19
23	Emory	23.1	23	23	24	26	22	22	22	19	19	23	24	30	22	20	22	22	26
24	Boston Univ	23.8	22	23	20	23	22	22	20	26	27	29	26	22	22	20	21	20	22
25	Iowa	25.2	24	25	27	27	27	20	20	22	27	26	29	27	26	26	27	24	22
26	UC Irvine	26.2	25	26	27	23	21	28	28	30									
27	Alabama	26.7	27	30	31	25	27	26	28	22	23	21	29	35	38	30	32	36	46
28	Arizona St	28	26	35	24	27	27	25	25	26	31	29	26	40	38	55	52	51	54
29	Indiana - Bloomington	29.5	32	30	38	34	32	30	25	33	29	25	26	23	27	23	36	36	37
30	Boston College	29.8	28	29	31	27	27	26	30	34	36	31	29	27	28	26	28	28	27
31	U. Wash. (WA)	31.1	36	31	42	44	32	30	33	28	24	28	20	30	34	30	30	28	27
32	Georgia	31.5	31	32	31	27	32	30	33	31	29	33	34	35	32	35	32	36	34
33	Wash & Lee	32.4	32	31	31	34	26	28	40	42	43	26	24	30	34	30	25	25	22
34	Wisconsin	32.7	32	33	38	34	27	30	33	31	31	33	35	35	28	35	36	31	32
35	William & Mary	32.9	36	32	31	39	37	41	33	29	24	33	35	27	28	28	30	31	27
36	UC Davis	33.2	35	34	38	31	37	39	30	31	36	38	29	23	28	35	44	34	34
37	Ohio State	33.9	33	34	38	34	32	30	30	34	31	36	39	35	34	35	32	31	39
38	Fordham	34.3	35	33	27	39	37	36	37	34	36	38	29	30	34	30	27	25	32
39	North Carolina	34.7	37	34	27	34	45	39	38	34	31	31	38	30	28	30	38	36	27
40	Wake Forest	37	36	38	42	31	32	36	40	47	31	36	44	31	38	40	42	36	39
41	Illinois	37.7	38	33	31	39	37	44	40	41	40	47	35	23	21	23	27	25	27
42	BYU	39.6	40	40	37	39	41	46	38	34	36	44	39	42	42	41	44	44	34
43	Arizona	42	43	42	47	39	41	48	40	42	40	38	43	42	38	43	38	44	43
44	Florida (3.3)	42.2	37	44	24	31	41	41	48	47	49	46	48	47	47	51	46	47	41
45	George Mason (2.7)	42.2	43	41	42	45	41	41	45	42	46	41	39	40	42	34	34	37	
46	Colorado	43.1	43	42	46	45	46	36	40	40	43	44	44	47	38	45	32	36	43
47	Utah	45.6	47	47	45	47	54	44	45	42	49	41	47	42	45	51	57	57	
48	Maryland	45.9	49	45	47	52	49	48	48	47	46	41	39	42	48	43	42	36	42
49	Florida State U (3.1)	48.7	49	50	50	48	47	48	50	50	45	48	51	50	54	52	55	53	54
50	SMU (2.7)	48.6	50	48	56	52	50	46	45	46	42	48	51	50	48	49	46	46	46
51	Tulane	49.6	51	48	54	52	47	51	50	50	46	48	51	47	48	45	44	47	46
52	Baylor U	52.2	51	54	50	48	50	51	55	56	51	54	51	56	64	65	55	53	51
53	UC Hastings	53	57	49	59	62	58	54	50	59	54	48	44	42	42	39	38	36	43
54	Temple U	54.2	51	57	56	48	47	53	50	52	61	56	58	61	72	65	60	60	58
55	U Richmond	54.9	54	63	54	52	50	57	55	52	52	51	53	58	67	86	77	68	77

Rank	School	10 Yr	5 Yr	15 Yr	"21	"20	"19	"18	"17	"16	"15	"14	"13	"12	"11	"10	"09	"08	"07
56	Houston	55.3	55	57	56	59	56	54	50	59	58	48	57	56	60	59	55	60	73
57	Pepperdine U	56.1	59	59	47	51	65*	72	65	52	54	61	49	54	52	55	59	66	89
58	Connecticut	56.4	54	54	50	52	50	54	65	63	54	58	62	56	54	52	46	47	50
59	Cardozo	60.3	60	58	53	52	56	65	74	75	64	58	56	50	52	49	55	52	54
60	Georgia St. U	62.3	66	67	76	67	65	65	57	56	64	54	58	61	60	65	77	82	98
61	Tennessee (2.7)	62.6	63	61	70	59	65	57	65	52	72	61	69	56	60	59	52	53	62
62	Seton Hall (2.5)	62.7	60	66	62	59	59	57	65	63	68	64	69	61	72	77	66	70	73
63	Kentucky	63.5	65	63	70	71	65	57	60	63	58	58	62	71	64	55	59	60	67
64	Case Western	65	66	62	76	71	65	62	57	59	64	68	67	61	56	55	63	53	51
65	Loyola, L.A.	65.4	64	65	62	62	65	65	65	75	87	68	51	54	56	71	63	66	67
66	Penn St - Dick.	66.5	69	71	62	71	59	65	86	71	51	64	76	60	72	65	77	91	89
67	U Miami	68.2	67	69	67	67	65	77	60	63	61	76	69	77	60	71	82	70	67
68	UNLV	68.4	64	76	62	58	59	62	78	67	83	68	76	71	78	75	88	100	111
69	U Oklahoma (2.5)	68.8	68	70	76	71	63	72	60	67	58	68	82	71	72	71	70	70	83
69	Penn St U. Park (2.5)	68.8	73	72	60	64	74	82	86	71	51	64	76	60	72	65	77	91	89
71	U Nebraska	69.1	69	75	76	77	80	57	57	56	54	61	89	84	93	111	73	77	73
72	American	69.5	79	62	76	77	80	86	78	71	72	56	49	50	48	45	46	47	46
73	U Denver	69.7	70	73	74	67	63	76	72	67	68	64	69	77	80	77	88	77	73
74	U Missouri	70.8	65	70	67	64	65	65	65	59	64	76	76	107	93	65	59	66	62
75	U Kansas	73	68	72	70	67	74	65	65	67	68	86	89	79	67	65	73	66	73
76	Loyola - Chi. (2.6)	73.5	75	75	70	77	74	82	72	78	68	76	67	71	78	87	82	70	73
77	Cincinnati (2.4)	73.4	73	67	83	83	65	72	60	82	79	80	69	61	56	52	52	57	54
78	U San Diego (2.7)	76.5	83	74	83	86	95	77	74	71	79	68	65	67	56	61	82	85	67
79	Northeastern (2.6)	76.5	70	80	67	64	74	65	82	87	93	86	76	71	86	94	88	85	89
80	U New Mexico	77	83	75	99	91	88	77	60	71	72	64	69	79	67	77	68	70	78
81	Chicago-Kent	77.4	87	75	83	87	85	92	86	78	72	88	62	61	80	77	66	60	62
82	U Pittsburgh	77.7	77	74	76	77	74	82	78	78	81	91	69	71	67	71	73	57	62
83	Brooklyn	79.5	84	74	83	71	83	88	97	78	83	80	65	67	67	61	63	60	58
84	Arkansas-Fay.	80.9	86	88	90	91	88	77	86	75	61	68	89	84	86	94	111	111	111
85	Villanova	81.2	70	75	62	71	65	77	74	87	93	98	101	84	67	61	68	60	62
86	Rutgers	82.1	76	81	76	77	74	62	92	95	82	89	91	84	80	82	77	74	75
87	St. John's U	83.8	76	83	74	77	83	72	74	82	107	98	76	95	72	87	88	70	83
88	Texas A&M (2.6)	85.4	85	85	60	83	80	92	112										
89	Lewis & Clark (2.4)	85.5	97	81	93	104	95	100	92	94	72	80	58	67	64	61	73	82	78
90	U Oregon	85.7	84	83	88	83	85	86	78	82	100	94	82	79	80	77	82	82	73
91	LSU	86.4	92	86	96	100	88	96	82	94	72	76	76	84	80	75	88	91	89
92	Michigan State	90.6	94	97	93	91	88	96	100	94	87	80	82	95	111	111	111	111	111
93	Tulsa	91.5	93	98	111	87	101	82	86	82	72	86	99	109	111	111	111	111	111
94	St. Louis U	92.5	88	93	90	90	88	88	82	87	93	102	101	104	111	94	96	87	83
95	U Hawaii (2.5)	94.3	96	93	96	91	101	100	92	82	100	80	106	95	72	111	82	91	94
96	U Louisville (2.2)	94.2	101	97	99	108	113	92	92	94	87	68	89	100	111	98	100	97	111
97	South Carolina	95.2	91	96	96	91	88	88	92	93	93	98	109	104	111	87	95	91	98
98	Syracuse U (2.4)	95.4	94	98	111	91	88	92	86	87	107	96	96	100	86	111	100	111	111
99	Buffalo-SUNY (2.3)	95.4	103	94	99	104	106	106	100	87	100	86	82	84	111	85	100	77	83
100	Florida Int'l	96.1	97	101	90	91	101	100	103	102	45	105	113	111	111	111	111	111	111
101	Indiana - Indianapolis	97.1	103	92	122	108	98	88	100	102	87	98	89	79	86	87	68	85	78
102	West Virginia	97.4	102	101	111	100	106	96	97	94	83	91	101	95	93	111	111	111	111
103	Marquette U (2.3)	99.4	102	100	102	91	95	100	123	105	93	94	96	95	111	87	95	97	111
104	Catholic (2.1)	99.4	108	99	111	108	110	106	103	108	107	80	82	79	98	94	88	97	111
105	Wayne State	99.7	94	103	83	91	98	100	97	105	87	105	110	121	111	111	111	111	111
106	U. New Hamp.	105	88	105	87	87	85	100	82	87	93	119	142	143	111	111	111	111	111
107	Santa Clara U	107	118	100	113	104	113	132	129	94	107	96	96	84	93	85	77	91	89
108	Seattle U	108	122	100	129	122	128	120	111	113	87	102	82	84	86	77	83	85	94
Rank	School	10 Yr	5 Yr	15 Yr	"21	"20	"19	"18	"17	"16	"15	"14	"13	"12	"11	"10	"09	"08	"07

* Although U.S. News did not officially assign a rank to Pepperdine in light of an inadvertent reporting error, I have assigned a rank in accordance with the lowest rank suggested by Pepperdine after consulting with a number of "rankings" experts. See http://taxprof.typepad.com//taxprof_blog/2018/03/pepperdines-place-in-the-2019-us-news-rankings.html.

Please send comments, corrections, or questions to brad.areheart@tennessee.edu.