

Harvard Medical School Joins Boycott of U.S. News Rankings

Last fall, the university's law school joined other top programs in dropping out of the magazine's annual list. The medical school's dean said the rankings "cannot meaningfully reflect" the school's goals.



By Derrick Bryson Taylor

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Harvard Medical School will no longer submit data to U.S. News & World Report for the magazine's annual "best medical schools" rankings, becoming the university's second graduate school to boycott the list in recent months, the school's dean said on Tuesday.

In a letter, Dr. George Daley, dean of the faculty of medicine, said he had been debating the decision since becoming dean six years ago and was inspired by a group of top of law schools that withdrew from the rankings last fall.

"My concerns and the perspectives I have heard from others are more philosophical than methodological, and rest on the principled belief that rankings cannot meaningfully reflect the high aspirations for educational excellence, graduate preparedness, and compassionate and equitable patient care that we strive to foster in our medical education programs," Dr. Daley said.

U.S. News has published the rankings for decades, and while they have come under growing criticism, they continue to be an influential guide for students and their parents during the college selection process.

Dr. Daley said the rankings create what he called "perverse incentives" for institutions to report misleading information and set policies that boost rankings. Although Harvard's medical school will no longer share key data with the magazine, it will continue to share some of the data on its admissions website.

Harvard Medical School was ranked first in the magazine's 2023 best medical school for research list, released last spring, and the Grossman School of Medicine at New York University was ranked second. Tying for third were the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University, the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University and the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

Medical schools are evaluated on faculty resources, the academic achievements of entering students and qualitative assessments by schools and residency directors, according to U.S. News. More than 190 medical and osteopathic schools were surveyed by the magazine. That information, coupled with the results from peer-assessment surveys, was used to calculate the overall rankings.

"What matters most to me as dean, alumnus, and faculty member is not a #1 ranking, but the quality and richness of the educational experience we provide at Harvard Medical School that encourages personal growth and lifelong learning," Dr. Daley said.

Eric Gertler, the chairman and chief executive of U.S. News, said in a statement on Wednesday that the company believes students deserve access to all the data and information necessary to select the best school for them.

He said the company was aware of the challenges of comparing academic institutions across a common set of data, adding, "That is why we have consistently stated that the rankings should be one component in a prospective student's decision-making process."

It was also unclear what effect Harvard's decision would have on other medical schools' participation. Last fall, many of the country's top law schools announced that they would no longer participate in the rankings after the ones at Harvard and Yale said they were pulling out.

In response, the magazine said this month that it would make several changes in the next edition of the law school rankings, including giving more weight to those whose graduates pursue advanced degrees, or school-funded fellowships to work in public-service jobs that pay lower wages. Factors including indicators of student debt or the schools' spending per student would no longer be considered. The magazine said its rankings would also rely less on surveys of law schools' reputations submitted by academics, lawyers and judges.

While top-tier schools can weather potential fallout from dropping out of the rankings, there is a sense of hesitation among lesser known schools, which depend on the ratings to attract students.

Angela Onwuachi-Willig, the dean of Boston University, which was ranked 17th among law schools, said lower-ranked schools, applicants and employers get some benefit out of the "free marketing" of rankings.

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