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A Quantitative Analysis of Public Law Programs Revisited

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When applying to public law programs nearly four years ago, I encountered difficulty determining the top 10 programs. Both advisors and colleagues gave a plethora of responses based upon their own unspecified criteria and personal perceptions of the sub-field. Looking back, I realize this experience likely occurs in many departments across the nation, to advisors and students alike.

It is difficult to rank programs in public law. Foremost, public law as a sub-field is not defined by a single dominant methodology; programs which examine jurisprudence are markedly different from those which examine judicial behavior. Second, measuring a quality such as "prestige" is problematic, as reasonable individuals can easily disagree with regards to what makes a quality program. Third, the ranking of public law programs contains a temporal component, making it complicated to assign a ranking when only looking at a particular snapshot in time. Finally, any ranking based only on one criterion contains a possible bias towards over inclusion of some programs over others. To this end, the following study attempts to form a ranking of public law programs based on what I consider to be objective criteria and takes into account the changing nature of the discipline over time.

This study follows in the path of previous attempts to rank programs within the sub-field. In 1998, this newsletter published a quantitative ranking of public law programs by Ashlyn Kuersten. Kuersten used only one source of data for the ranking she constructed; four major journals in political science generally accepted to be the most prestigious of the field (*American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, and *Political Research Quarterly*).

While these four journals by no means contain all the important scholarship done in the sub-field of public law, in the wider field of political science they are generally recognized as being among the top 25 journals with a general focus (Giles and Garand 2007). Furthermore, these journals accept public law scholarship using a wide range of theoretical traditions including historical analysis, jurisprudence, and judicial behavior. These characteristics, in addition to the primacy of these journals with regards to tenure decisions, make these publications a useful starting point to creating an objective, systematic ranking of public law programs.

But I argue that publications in these journals should be only part of the rankings of public law graduate programs. Increasingly, external funding in the form of grants is an expected contribution of scholars in political science to the larger university environment. And since external grants are increasingly used for tenure decisions, who receives these grants are important for future students of public law to consider when choosing graduate programs. While the NSF is not the only external funding institution for the field of public law, it has a tradition of funding some of the most recognizable research in political science, including the American National Election Study, the General Social Survey, and both the Spaeth and Gibson databases on the Supreme Court and will be analyzed here for purposes of ranking.

The quality of the programs contained within this study is therefore based upon two data sources; publication in one of the four journals listed above and the reception of external funding via the National Science Foundation. The programs

will be evaluated based upon both publication and reception of a grant either by the faculty in the field of public law, or by the graduates of the program in the subfield. To qualify for inclusion into this study the articles published or grants awarded must have the field of law and courts as its central focus and was determined by examining the abstracts of each. To take into account the temporal factor, individuals are classified as students of a specific school only if they have received their Ph.D within the past 15 years. The authors' CVs were used as the primary source to determine where and when they received their Ph.D. In circumstances where the authors' CVs were not listed on their universities website, or the individual has left the discipline, the APSA Directory of Members was used. I collected this data from January 1997 through December 2008 and weighted single-authored, co-authored, and multi-authored publications and grants equally. Further, articles and grants which were authored by a faculty member and a graduate student accumulated one point for the faculty and one for their graduate students. While different faculties employ different techniques when it comes to co-authoring with students, this study is provided as a resource to would-be graduate students and advisors whom presumably would value such publication opportunities. As an additional resource to possible graduate students, I am including a simple count of the number publications or grants that were received by women faculty. While this may seem an arbitrary inclusion, this may be a decisive factor for some future graduate students.

This study is not intended to serve as the definitive word on the ranking of public law programs in political science, of course. There are some possible shortcomings of this review. Most notably, by only examining these four journals, this analysis may miss scholarship which had a large impact on the field that was published elsewhere, either in books or other journals. Also, the available measure does not indicate the quality of the education students received while at their Ph.D granting institution. It is hoped, however, that the measure of publication activity and receipt of NSF grant money by former students will serve as an accurate proxy for this.

Table 1 and Table 2 presents the rank of public law programs based upon faculty and graduate student productivity when publishing in the four journals surveyed. In order to facilitate direct comparisons to the rankings produced by Keursten (1998) are contained within the tables.

Table 1

Publications – Author's Home Institution at Time of Publication, 1997-2008				
Ranking	Prev. Rank	School	Count	Female
1	8	George Washington University	20	2
2	8	Washington University, St. Louis	18	7
3	3	University of South Carolina	17	2
4	1	Ohio State University	14	2
5	1	SUNY at Stony Brook	12	1
6	n/a	University of California, Davis	11	0
7	n/a	Texas A&M University	10	0
8	4	Michigan State University	9	7
8	n/a	University of Pittsburg	9	2
8	11	Emory University	9	1

Table 2

Publications – Author’s Ph.D Granting Institution, 1997 - 2008				
Ranking	Prev. Rank	School	Count	Female
1	3	Washington University, St. Louis	30	1
2	3	Michigan State University	16	7
3	2	Ohio State University	14	4
4	8	SUNY at Stony Brook	13	4
5	5	University of Minnesota	12	3
6	n/a	Stanford University	9	1
7	1	University of South Carolina	6	5
8	12	University of Houston	5	3
8	8	Emory University	5	3
10	12	Florida State University	4	3
10	n/a	University of California, Davis	4	0

As both tables indicate, the past 11 years have been defined both by continuity and change. Comparing the updated rankings with the previous ranking, there are only four new departments which were previously unranked; Stanford University, Texas A&M University, University of California, Davis, and University of Pittsburg. In terms of ranking high on both scales based upon publication, Washington University, St. Louis, Michigan State University, Ohio State University, SUNY, at Stony Brook, and University of South Carolina are at or near the top of both lists.

Turning to rankings based upon NSF grants, while some new institutions appear, many of those in the top 10 are familiar faces. Vanderbilt University, University of Georgia, New York University, Princeton University, and University of California, Berkley did not appear in the publication rankings yet appear to have large numbers of faculty who are successful in obtaining grants. In terms of consistency in the top 5, Washington University, St. Louis, Michigan State University, and University of South Carolina appear on both rankings based upon NSF grants.

Table 3

NSF Grants – Author’s Home Institution at Time of Acceptance 1997 – 2008			
Ranking	School	Count	Female
1	Washington University, St. Louis	15	6
2	Michigan State University	14	3
3	Vanderbilt University	8	2
4	University of Georgia	6	3
4	University of South Carolina	6	0
6	Emory University	5	1
7	George Washington University	4	0
7	University of Michigan	4	3
9	New York University	3	1
9	Ohio State University	3	0
9	SUNY at Stony Brook	3	0
9	University of Arizona	3	2

Table 4

NSF Grants – Author’s Ph.D Granting Institution, 1997 - 2008			
Ranking	School	Count	Female
1	Washington University, St. Louis	14	1
2	University of South Carolina	6	6
3	Michigan State University	4	2
3	Princeton University	4	1
5	Ohio State University	3	1
5	SUNY at Stony Brook	3	1
7	Florida State University	2	2
7	Stanford University	2	0
7	University of California, Berkley	2	2
7	University of Minnesota	2	0

Overall, taking into account all four methods of ranking programs, there are five schools which appear within the top ten of each list consistently; Michigan State University, Ohio State University, SUNY at Stony Brook, University of South Carolina, and Washington University in St. Louis. Emory University is the only institution to rank in the top ten in three of the four lists.

While future graduate students of public law may decide to utilize different criteria to determine which schools are producing either the most productive future faculty members, or which have current faculty who are highly productive, this analysis provides a good starting point.

Works Cited

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