Pepperdine School of Law loses ranking after reporting data error

Some other California law schools also saw significant changes in their U.S. News ranking.

The latest U.S. News & World Report rankings featured Pepperdine University School of Law joining the list of unranked institutions after disclosing a data reporting error, while some other California law schools experienced sharp changes in the annual standings.

Pepperdine was poised to jump from 72nd to 59th in the 2019 rankings, according to an embargoed copy provided to schools a week before the public release on Tuesday.

Pepperdine officials analyzed the information U.S. News reviewed, and the school realized it had made “an inadvertent data entry error” in reporting its median LSAT for the class that began in fall 2017, according to Dean Paul L. Caron. Instead of disclosing the figure as 160, it reported 162.

The dean said officials immediately contacted U.S. News’ chief data strategist on March 13 after learning of the mistake and requested that the rankings be updated with the correct data.

Caron said the school’s calculations indicated that the updated data would result in Pepperdine falling either into a tie for 62nd or a tie for 64th, an analysis he asserted was confirmed by three law school rankings experts.

U.S. News decided to list the school as unranked due to the data reporting error.

"It is worth noting that Pepperdine did complete the data verification process during the data collection for law schools, assuring U.S. News that its information was accurate," U.S. News’ chief data strategist Robert Morse said in a statement. “We do rely on schools to accurately report their information, and we thank them for their cooperation and efforts in doing just that.”

Caron wrote on the TaxProf Blog that U.S. News’ response was unfortunate.

“It is, of course, deeply disappointing to be unranked for a year,” he wrote. “But the reality is that we made great progress in the rankings this year and should continue our ascent next year.”

The rankings continued to be kind to UC Irvine School of Law, which rose from a tie for 28th to 21st out of 194 American Bar Association-accredited schools. UC Irvine debuted in the rankings three years ago and achieved the highest-ever initial rank of 30th.

“We are certainly proud of this latest recognition, but it does not begin to define us,” Dean L. Song Richardson wrote in a message to her school’s community Tuesday. “It is just one reflection of what our tremendous community can accomplish, and one example of how together we can, and will, continue to achieve and amaze."

UC Berkeley School of Law tied for ninth in the rankings, jumping back into the top 10 after being listed as 12th a year ago.
Santa Clara University School of Law rose from 132nd in the rankings to a tie for 113th, which the school said was the second-highest bump. It attributed its rise to improved employment statistics and a boost in the median undergraduate GPA of incoming students.

“This is yet another example of the exciting momentum behind Santa Clara Law, which includes our outstanding July 2017 California bar passage results and the move into our collaboration-focused, cutting-edge, new home,” Dean Lisa A. Kloppenberg said in a statement.

University of San Diego School of Law’s ranking fell from 77th to a tie for 95th.

Dean Stephen C. Ferruolo pinned the blame largely on employment data for the class of 2016, which was reported last year. He said the school has since seen a significant improvement in that category and in bar exam passage, factors he is confident will lead to a higher ranking.

“Although we are disappointed by this year’s ranking, we certainly are not discouraged,” Ferruolo wrote in a message Tuesday to accepted students.

UC Hastings College of the Law saw its ranking drop from 54th to 58th. Chancellor and Dean David L. Faigman slammed the rankings in a message to the Hastings community he sent Tuesday, though he acknowledged the school needed to improve its bar passage results.

“A rankings system in which law schools can move 18 points down (Univ. of San Diego) or 19 points up (Santa Clara) in a single year defies logic,” Faigman wrote.

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