

Don't take national rankings all that seriously

If travel magazine writers and editors are flown into Cheyenne at our expense - wined, dined and put up for the weekend at our expense, but Deadwood, SD doesn't think the magazine has enough circulation to make the expense worthwhile - then those editors go back to the East Coast and rank Cheyenne the "No. 1 Old West Destination" - what validity does the ranking have?

There are more rankings available on more subjects now than there are vacant storefronts in downtown Cheyenne.

Are they all credible? Hell, no.

If states are ranked as business friendly based on tax incentives offered new business, Wyoming can't do very well because it doesn't have a state income tax to grant concessions from.

U.S. News & World Report recently released their ranking of "America's Best Colleges 2008." Most who review the rankings would do so with a jaundiced eye and, if making a superficial review, dismiss the ranking as just "their opinion."

Reed Eckhardt, who can't get past being dumped by UW and hates UW, accepts the rankings as gospel but obviously has spent absolutely no time in analyses.

His Saturday, August 25, 2007 column rails on UW for being among the U.S. News "Tier 3" schools - in no particular order.

How did UW get there?

U.S. News simply placed it there.

They had nothing to go on because after the words "University of Wyoming" on the page of rankings are the raised numeral "1" and an asterisk. The asterisk indicates UW is a public school. The "1" gives away the arbitrariness of the rankings. The footnote is explained:

"1. School refused to fill out U.S. News statistical survey. Data that appear may be from school in previous years or from the National Center for Education Statistics unless otherwise noted."

Or, it could just be a wild guess.

But, let's assume Tier 3 is a valid placement for the University of Wyoming. And let's take a quick look at the Top 50 schools from U.S. News' rankings. You could do these rankings from your living

room with nothing but names to go by. If you know anything about colleges and universities reputations, you would get most of the Top 20 right, probably.

It's like ranking medical facilities. Who in their right mind would leave the Mayo Clinic or Johns Hopkins off the top of any medical facility ranking? No one.

Same here.

In order, the Top 50: Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Penn, C.I.T., M.I.T., Duke, Columbia, U of Chicago, Dartmouth, Washington U in St. Louis, Cornell, Brown, Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, Rice, Emory, Vanderbilt, Notre Dame ...

Have you picked up the common thread here? Every one of the Top 20 ranked colleges by U.S. News are **PRIVATE** schools. Every single one of them.

UC-Berkeley, Carnegie Mellon, Virginia, Georgetown, UCLA, Michigan, USC, North Carolina, Tufts, Wake Forest, Lehigh, Brandeis, William and Mary, NYU, U of Rochester (NY), G.I.T., Boston College, UW-Madison, UC-San Diego, Illinois, Case Western, Washington, UC-Davis, Rensselaer Poly, UT-Austin, UC-Santa Barbara, UC-Irvine, Penn State, Florida and Syracuse. The Top 50 "America's Best Colleges 2008" - according to U.S. News.

33 are private schools, 17 are public. The public schools might just as well be private. The entrance requirements are as demanding - at UW-Madison, if your GPA isn't 3.8 or higher and ACT 25+, don't bother applying. Most Wisconsin high school graduates will not be accepted.

C.I.T. above is California Institute of Technology, M.I.T., of course, is Massachusetts Institute of Technology and G.I.T. is Georgia Institute of Technology.

The top public college in the U.S. News rankings is UC-Berkeley at No. 21. In the Top 35, there are only six public schools. **SIX!** The rest are private.

U.S. News also ranks schools by "Best Value." Here you might think UW has a chance. In-state tuition and fees for UW are shown to be \$3,173 a year and board and room is shown to be \$7,248. Sounds like a value.

But, the rankings for "Best Value," begin with these: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, C.I.T., M.I.T., Stanford, Dartmouth, Columbia, North Carolina, Duke, Vanderbilt, ...

Wow! The methodology is simply that a great education at any cost is a "value." That has some merit.

But what kind of "value" is it to enroll in the top 4 schools (all private)? Princeton has an enrollment of less than 5,000. Tuition is \$33,000 and room and board is \$10,980. That eliminates a lot of the rural, western high school graduates. Hell, that eliminates a lot of graduates, period.

Harvard (6,715) has a tuition of \$34,998 and r/b of \$10,622. Yale is \$34,530 and \$10,470 and Stanford is \$34,800 and \$10,808. Notice the similarities? These schools compete with each other, not UW.

Think these four private schools have some money in the bank? UW has a lot of money in endowments - \$133,037,090 according to U.S. News. That sounds like a lot of money, doesn't it? A hundred and thirty-three million dollars.

Chump change, my unenlightened ones. Chump change. Endowments of the four:

Princeton	\$13,458,440,000
Harvard	\$29,219,430,000
Yale	\$17,949,088,000
Stanford	\$14,084,676,000

Yes, my education-challenged ones, Harvard (according to U.S. News) has over \$29 **BILLION** in endowments on hand. For 6,715 students.

Reed, you getting any clues why some schools can provide better educations than others?

Another ranking in this report by U.S. News involves the percentage of students who receive Pell Grants. That reflects on income. UW supposedly has 25% of its students receiving Pell Grants. The top school for Pell Grants is the University of La Verne in California which has 90% of its students receiving Pell Grants. Reed would assess that as a negative. I say, "Great. I'm glad a bunch of poor kids are getting a college education." Other examples: UTEP (54%), Montana (41%), Idaho (34%), Montana State (29%). The lowest percentage receiving Pell Grants is at Washington University in St. Louis (6%). Remember, they were No. 12 of the Top 50 schools. Other schools with less than 10% of their enrollment eligible for (or receiving) Pell Grants include: Wake Forest, Virginia, Princeton, William and Mary, Yale, Notre Dame, Tufts, Rice, George Washington and Duke. The point? Poor kids don't get into the top schools. UW will take them. Must.

So, Reed, when you use rankings as your bible, research a little. And, UW ... Just be the best you can be. Just be the best you can be. That's good enough for me.

What happened with moving the Ten Commandments monolith now located in Lion's Park?

It seems like only yesterday that Patrick Collins and Jack Spiker were posturing on the radio about raising \$50,000 in donations to facilitate moving the Ten Commandments monolith from its longtime position by the walkway in Lion's Park.

They were reacting to the ever-present threat of a small town "minister" from Kansas who makes outlandish demands that communities and the weak-kneed bow to his demands and, as is usually the guy's issue, move their Ten Commandments statue or plaque they have on public land - or place it in storage.

Courts have made it clear that unless the Ten Commandments are placed on public land or in public buildings clearly for religious purposes, or obviously to proselytize, it can remain on that public land or property.

In Cheyenne, few residents knew of its existence, so completely out of view has it been in Lion's Park. And, as was pointed out on these pages a long time back, the Ten Commandments are actually Eleven Commandments as an apparent effort was made to merge the Catholic and Protestant versions together.

Still, the mayor and Collins were willing to acquiesce to the demands of a character who has made his calling tormenting small town local officials. His latest ploy has been to demand to place a demeaning statue or plaque demonizing Matthew Shepherd alongside any "law or liberty" monument area a community sets up to satisfy his other demands that the Ten Commandments cannot set alone on public property.

The monolith was viewed on July 4th where it's always been and should remain.

Now the question is why the City is holding the money donated in the failed effort to generate \$50,000 in donations to move the monolith? The account designation is "Law & Liberty Square" on the City's books and there is presently but a \$12,425 balance. There was over \$20,000 donated but \$8,233 has been "reappropriated" elsewhere for some reason(s). Several churches, which could presumably use the \$1,000 donations they made in their ministries, have had their money tied up for three years. First United Methodist Church, Miracle Valley Assembly of God, Diocese of Cheyenne, Grace United Methodist Church, Good Shepherd Assembly of God, as well as local businesses like Spradley Motors, Wal-Mart, Puma Steel, Hearne, McGee & Paiz and Spartan Management each made \$1,000 donations in 2004. If the decision has been made to leave the monolith where it is, return the money. If not, raise the rest of the necessary money and move the monolith. That would be a mistake.

PUBLICATION DATE TO CHANGE!!

Beginning with the first September issue of the Cheyenne Herald, Thursday will become our "on street" day. The papers will be available in the morning on Thursday, as opposed to Monday afternoon or Tuesday, as has been the case since the Herald was started. A schedule for the balance of 2007 is on page 11.

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