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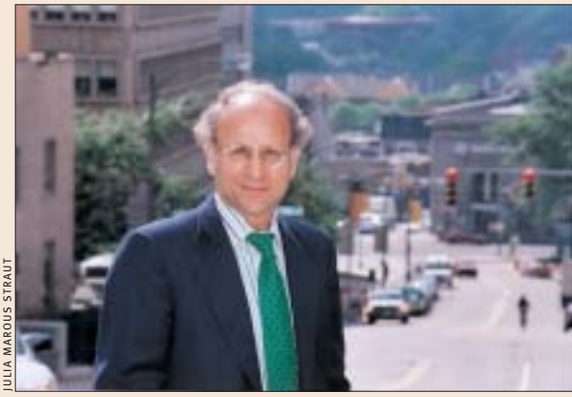
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JULIA MAROUS STRAUT

I have discovered that most of the beauties of travel are due to the strange hours we keep to see them: the domes of the Church of the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken against a smoky dawn—the heart stirred—are beautiful as Saint Peters approached after years of anticipation.

William Carlos Williams, the great poet and physician, reminds us how much what we value is influenced by perspective. The roofline of a New Jersey town can rival the splendor of Rome. It depends on what you're looking for.

The University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine consistently ranks in the top tier of institutions listed in *US News & World Report*'s Best Graduate Schools edition. This ranking pleases alumni, and may influence applicants, but I and many other deans believe that such rankings are ill-conceived and possibly pernicious. If reality is the dream of a mad philosopher, the inappropriate use of statistics is his nightmare: Ten percent of a school's ranking is based on faculty/student ratio, though the survey does not identify which faculty members actually teach and aren't virtually full-time clinicians. Thirty percent of a school's score is attributed to NIH funding, though some schools include funding for public health research while others don't. Forty percent is based on "reputation," derived from a survey of senior faculty and administrators. The magazine has had no more than a 50 percent response rate from that survey in recent years—not statistically robust. *US News* has reported no difference in reputation rankings throughout the last 25 years despite enormous changes in the schools themselves. I suspect that in many cases schools are deemed "great" even if the respondent is not familiar with the program in question, but only with its university's overall reputation. The magazine rescales its scores so that Harvard gets 100 percent and Northwestern 45 percent: Is the latter really only half as good as the former?

It's helpful for the magazine to show potential applicants, as they do now, what sort of grades and scores a given school expects of its candidates, but wouldn't it make sense for the overall ranking to reflect student creativity and the quality of the careers graduates establish? What caliber of residency programs are graduates entering? (Currently *US News* reports the percentage of graduates who were accepted into one of their first three picks, even if they aimed "low.") What percentage of a school's graduates serve the underprivileged? Embark on research careers? And what percentage of tuition goes to teaching? What resources are available—lab space, number of teaching beds, dual degrees offered, etc.?

Now the medical profession is fragile for economic reasons, yet the opportunity to better the human condition through health-care research is profound—do we want these rankings to be a disincentive to any applicant, and can there be any real use in comparing schools with very different priorities? Programs filling critical societal needs are bypassed by *US News*' current methodology. How does one compare an Ivy League venerable to Howard? Or to a school that specializes in rural medicine? Or to one committed to educating in-state students? Weehawken's Paulist Fathers may not lift their eyes every day to a ceiling painted by Michelangelo, but they've got one hell of a view of Manhattan.

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