

Ranking Journals Raises Temps

by Duane Cobb

The recent *31st & Pearl* column about the politicization of the current journal ranking process is only the latest example of how temperatures rise when it comes to ranking journals in the CoB. Clearly, the columnist in question has strong feelings about the process, as do others. Though the recent *31st & Pearl* column makes reference to the journal ranking process of the early 1990s, one only has to go back to the process that covered the period 2003-05 to see just how volatile the situation can get when journals get ranked.

Remember that one? If not, here's a clue – that's the process that had former EFIB chair Mark Klinedinst sending out an "All CoB" e-mail asking finance professor Tom Lindley what he (Lindley) and his (Lindley's) "buddies" were up to as they worked in secret, at least according to Klinedinst, to produce a journal ranking. That episode was priceless, if only because at that time Klinedinst hadn't published a refereed journal article since 1998. It's now 2007, and Klinedinst still hasn't produced a refereed journal publication since 1998. So, Klinedinst's concern about a "secret" journal ranking process is a bit like the director of athletics at Temple complaining about the BCS system being flawed.

The 2003-05 attempt is also remembered for another, more humorous episode – the famous A-to-Z list of economics and finance journals that some of the CoB's economists displayed, in preparation for ranking journals in that department, in the anteroom of JGH 311. The list, which many readers should recall if only because of the traffic that was often observed moving between the third floor hallway and the anteroom of JGH 311, must have contained 1,000 economics and finance

journals, if not more. And, at least from what we were told, they were all real. No joke. Of course, real or not (and I presume they are/were), given Klinedinst's outburst a little levity was a welcome addition to that period's attempt at ranking journals. A 1,000-journal list provided that levity in buckets.

Let's turn to last year (2006-07). Before last year's attempt to rank journals even got off of the ground, the CoB's (now former) Associate Dean Farhang Niroomand sent an "All EFIB" e-mail, later circulated throughout the CoB, to rival Klinedinst's e-mail from 2003-05. In classic "Farhang form," the former AD hung a figurative sucker punch out there for all to see by initiating a contrived discussion about journal rankings that was used to publicly disparage a research record clearly better than his own – something Niroomand has made a career of doing. As expected, the only person soiled by the whole episode was Niroomand.

All of these anecdotes go to show what the CoB is "in for" during the 2007-08 academic season, now that Interim Dean Alvin Williams has renewed the CoB's quest for journal ranking fire. Here's a tip: Go and read Williams' new P&T policies document – the one the CoB voted to adopt at the 31-Aug-07 meeting. It states that journal ranking is the province of individual departments, not the CoB as a whole. Why, then, did he (Williams) establish a CoB-wide journal ranking committee – one dominated by *untenured* faculty with conflicts of interest – on top of that? Did he even read the P&T proposal, at least *before* constituting the committees? Or, maybe, just maybe, Williams is a fire starter.