

Special Report

Is the CoB one of the Best?

An Investigation into the CoB's Public Relations Efforts

This Special Report examines the recent announcement made by CoB Dean Harold Doty that the College of Business has been “selected for inclusion in the 2008 edition of *The Princeton Review*’s best business schools.” That announcement was made by Doty via e-mail. That e-mail is presented below:

Date: Oct 2006
From: Harold Doty
To: Cob faculty and staff
Subject: Princeton Review

The College of Business has been selected for inclusion in the 2008 edition of Princeton Review's best business schools. This suggests that the efforts the college has been making over the last decade are beginning to pay off and we are continuing to enhance the reputation of the business school. While we haven't yet hit the top 100 business schools, inclusion in the best business school guides indicates that we are continuing to improve. Congratulations, and thank you for your help and support.

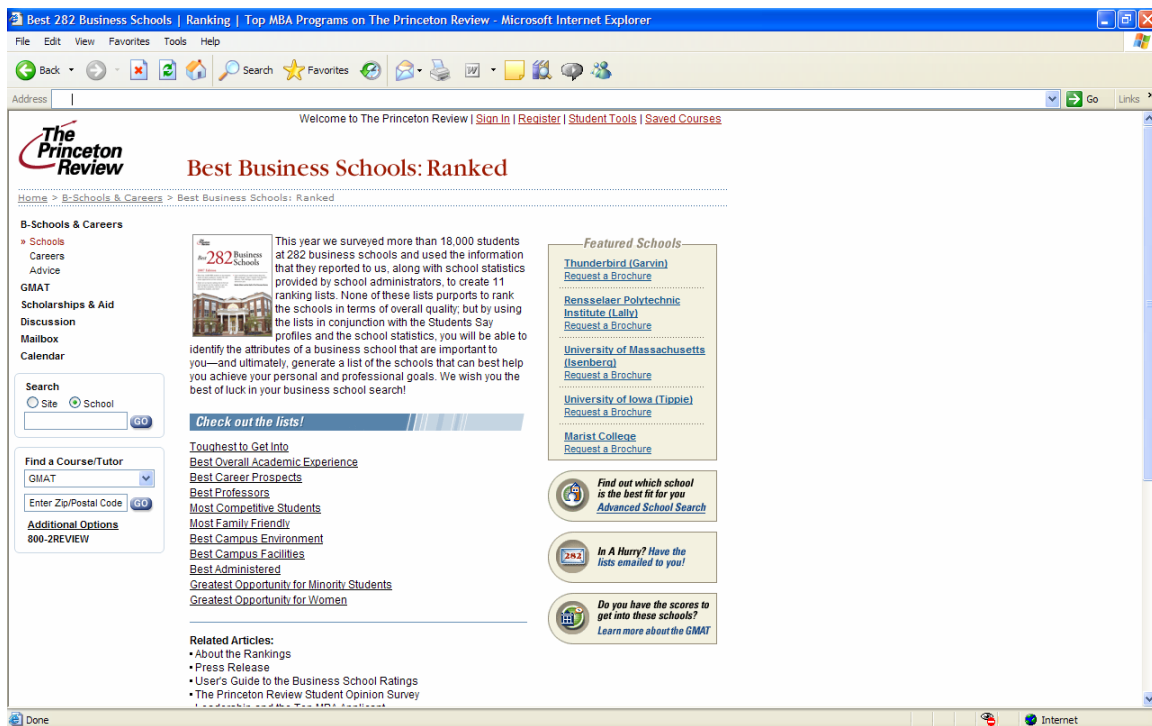
D. Harold Doty

As Doty wrote to CoB faculty and staff (regarding the “inclusion” of the CoB by *The Princeton Review*):

“This [selection] suggests that the efforts the college has been making over the last decade are beginning to pay off and we are continuing to enhance the reputation of the business school. While we haven’t yet hit the top 100 business schools, inclusion in the best business school guides indicates that we are continuing to improve.”

Our investigators visited the *Princeton Review*’s website in order to gather more details. What *TPR*’s own website has to say about its “rankings” is quite interesting.

The screen below captures information on *TPR*’s website about its 2007 edition of the *Best 282 Business Schools*:



According to *TPR*, more than 18,000 students at 282 business schools were surveyed. The survey information was combined with information that the schools themselves reported to *TPR* in order to create 11 ranking lists. As *TPR* states,

“None of these lists purports to rank the schools in terms of overall quality, but by using the lists in conjunction with the Students Say profiles and the school statistics, you will be able to indentify the attributes of a business school that are important to you – and ultimately, generate a list of the schools that can best help you achieve your personal and professional goals. We wish you the best of luck in your business school search!”

Although *TPR* uses an “academic excellence” baseline for inclusion, as the passage above points out nothing about *TPR*’s database purports to rank the overall quality of the business schools included in a given edition. Thus, the *TPR* is more like a buyer’s guide of sorts, relying heavily on what a school’s own student body thinks about various aspects of the school they attend. Examples of this are shown through several “Q&A” bullets available on the website, some of which are featured below:

How many ranking lists are in the book, and how did you compile the lists?

The *Best 282 Business Schools* has 11 ranking lists, and each one identifies the top ten business schools in a specific category. The categories cover a range of topics that we think prospective applicants might want to know or would ask about during a campus visit, including academics, career prospects, and campus diversity. **Ten of the 11 lists incorporate or are based entirely on student opinions that we collected through our business school student survey.** A few of the lists also incorporate institutional data reported to us by administrators at the business schools; one list, **Toughest to Get Into**, is based entirely on information reported to us by administrators.

The statements highlighted above mean that the CoB’s reputation *inside of Greene Hall* is improving.

Why don't you have one list that ranks all the schools in the book?

We don't believe that any one business school is the best overall. Instead, we believe there is a best business school for you. Moreover, the prestige of an academic program does not constitute the exclusive criterion by which a school should be (or is) judged. Among other factors (such as location, cost, and size), the campus culture is very important, and this is something that varies considerably from one school to another. Some business schools in our book and on our website may be ideal for certain students but wrong for others, depending on the interests and needs of each individual student. We offer a range of ranking lists to help students choose the best school for them.

As stated above, *TPR* offers an opportunity for current CoB students to tell prospective students of business why USM's CoB is a good choice for them.

The profiles of business schools in the book, and the listings of schools on your site have ratings. What's the difference between the rankings and the ratings?

Every school that appears in the *Best 282 Business Schools* receives an Admissions Selectivity Rating, and the schools from which we received student surveys are also accorded Academic Experience, Professors Interesting, Professors Accessible, and Career Ratings. Only the top ten schools in each of our 11 ranking categories appear on our ranking lists. **For a school to appear on one of our ranking lists, its students' responses must reflect a high degree of overall consensus.** Three of our ranking lists—**Toughest to Get Into, Best Overall Academic Experience, and Best Career Prospects**—are based on the ratings for Admissions Selectivity, Academic Experience, and Career, respectively. You can learn about our ratings in the **User's Guide to Our Ratings**.

The highlighted passage above suggests that the selection of students to respond to survey is the key.

The *TPR* is open about its process, as stated in its “Pledge”:

Our Pledge:

All of our rankings—and the profiles to which they link—reflect uncensored, unbiased student views of the business schools featured on this site and in our publications. We guarantee that you won't read anything like our candid profiles in the recruitment material sent out by the schools themselves. **Almost every ranking is based at least partly on what the real business school experts—current business students—tell us about their schools. After all, what could be more useful to prospective business students than the opinions of current students?**

Again, *TPR* appears to be a buyer's guide for prospective business students that is generated by the opinions of “real business school experts” – each school's current business students. Thus, Doty's e-mail claims about what *TPR* inclusion means look to be a stretch (at the very least).