White Paper: NASPAA and
US News and World Report's Rankings

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Introduction

Following *US News and World Report*'s (US News) 2016 Public Affairs rankings cycle, there appeared to be a renewed interest among NASPAA members for NASPAA to evaluate its relationship with US News. US News first began ranking public affairs programs in 1995, and subsequently has published rankings every 3 to 4 years, specifically ranking programs in 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016.[1]   NASPAA has assisted US News in this process from the beginning and not much has changed in its relationship with US News over the past twenty years.

 This White Paper looks at:

- What NASPAA's current relationship with US News is;
- What concerns have been voiced by the membership regarding US News rankings; and
- What NASPAA's role should be moving forward.

Background

NASPAA's historic and current role in the rankings process has been as the middle man between US News and our member schools. In each year of the rankings since its inception, NASPAA has provided US News with a listing of NASPAA members (including APPAM members starting in 1998) as well as their principal representatives' contact information and school mailing address. NASPAA also serves as a conduit in the reverse direction by providing our members any pertinent information from US News regarding the survey and rankings.   This role has left and leaves NASPAA in the unenviable position of having no control over the rankings or the survey, but receiving many of the complaints and frustrations that go along with them.

This was increasingly evident in the most recent rankings cycle. During the 2016 cycle US News encountered a myriad of problems with their survey instrument, including:
- an initial delay in mailing leaving too little time to complete the survey, and

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[1] Frederickson, G. H., & Stazyk, E. C. (2016). Ranking Public Policy and Administration Graduate Programs, 1995-2016 An Analysis and Discussion. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 46(5), 507-525. doi:10.1177/0275074016651716

- errors in the survey instrument itself (missing universities, including universities who don't have programs, not including branded "named schools" next universities who should have them included) etc.

This resulted in a remailing of the survey and a *lot* of confusion for schools. As NASPAA helped our members navigate through these issues, we also were hearing the usual complaints regarding the rankings reputational nature; the lack of inclusion of international schools; concerns regarding specializations being ranked; and questions as to why NASPAA was involved with US News in the first place.

It was following this experience that NASPAA's Executive Council decided an evaluation of our association with US News would be appropriate. The Executive Council charged the NASPAA Data Committee with considering our relationship with US News and how that relationship should evolve moving forward. Following this charge the Data Committee developed several possible scenarios for what NASPAA's role with regards to rankings could be in the future

Should NASPAA's Relationship with US News Change?

NASPAA has historically served as an enabler for the US News rankings. The first question to consider is whether these rankings are valuable to NASPAA and to the profession. There is clearly some face value provided by the rankings. They are an oft-used resource for prospective students in the field. They are also the only source of such ranking at the master's level and their inclusion beside other professional degree programs such as law and business provide a sense of comparable worth and equivalent importance to the fields of public affairs, public policy and public administration. It is also free promotion and profile for the field and for many of NASPAA's members.

Assuming there is a need for rankings, the next question for NASPAA to address is whether there are enough problems with the current rankings and their methodology for NASPAA to invest its limited time and resources into fixing them, either through US News or pursuing some other form of rankings. What are the complaints?

While some concerns voiced by members have recently been addressed by US News, most of the feedback NASPAA has received from membership regarding their concerns center around three issues:

1. The reputational nature of the rankings;
   a. Is reputation an adequate measure of quality?
   b. Do reputational rankings reflect the quality of the overall University rather than of the program itself?
   c. Are voters conflating the master's and doctoral programs at an institution?
2. The failure to include international schools and programs; and
3. Dissatisfaction with the specializations ranked.

US News contacted NASPAA staff in late June about some upcoming and significant changes they were planning for the public affairs survey. The plans have since been enacted and include:

- a move to an electronic format from a hardcopy mailing,
- an increase in the specializations ranked from 9 to 12 (Appendix A), and
- a move to an annual survey instrument.

While these changes allow NASPAA to address some of its concerns regarding the specializations ranked, two of the top concerns voiced by members remain: the exclusion of international schools and the reputational nature of the rankings.

Exclusion of International Schools from Rankings
The exclusion of international schools is problematic for NASPAA as we continue to grow our global membership. International members have expressed frustration over their lack of inclusion and its role in the perception that NASPAA isn't *truly* a global organization. This is an area where NASPAA's lack of control over the methodology and the lack of leverage it has over US News has been a hindrance for NASPAA. When US News contacted NASPAA about their latest edits to the rankings process, NASPAA asked if including international programs could be one of the improvements made to the survey methodology. While US News did not flatly turn down NASPAA's request, they indicated they were not ready to do so at this time and the question of adding international schools would have to be a discussion in house for them across the graduate fields they rank.

Reputational Rankings
Most of the complaints NASPAA has heard regarding the current rankings relate to their *solely* reputational nature, and the belief that reputation is not a good measure of quality. The concerns regarding reputation as a factor in rankings is not isolated to our field.

> "The reputation factor drives me crazy," Poulin said. "It's hard to imagine that those who complete the survey have more than superficial knowledge of more than a few other colleges. So the 'reputation' score is based upon what they know about the other college, which can be tainted by factors such as advertising or having a good basketball team or my cousin's son went there."[2]

While there is likely less concern about a good basketball team tainting the rankings of public affairs programs; the concerns regarding voters "knowing" the programs about which they are voting and the potential to conflate masters and doctoral programs are reasonable enough for NASPAA members to question whether US News methodology results in a useful measure of quality.

Alleviating this concern somewhat is research by Sweitzer and Volkwein (2009), who found significant relationships between reputational rankings of schools of business, education, engineering, law and medicine and the enrollment size, admissions test scores, and faculty publication per capita of those schools (common data used in data-

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[2] https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/03/15/colleges-and-experts-assess-value-us-news-online-program

based rankings).[3] If data-based rankings will result in the same or very similar results to the current rankings, is it worth the time and resources to pursue them? Are reputational rankings an appropriate approximation of quality? Would going to a data-based approach create a better result, or simply introduce a new set of concerns and criticisms?

One important factor to note about the above research is the type of data indicators used. Enrollment size and admissions test scores are inputs and not necessarily good measures of the quality of a program. Faculty publications may be a good data element in determining the productivity of a given faculty, but is it a measure of the quality of the program and the outcomes students in the program will experience?

If NASPAA members feel that the solely reputational nature of US News rankings and the exclusion of international schools from the rankings are enough of a concern as to call into question the validity of the rankings; then it would be in the best interest of NASPAA, our members, and our prospective students to reevaluate if the *status quo* relationship with US News is appropriate moving forward. If, however, our members feel that reputation is a valid proxy measure of quality then the time and resources necessary to embark on data based rankings are probably not worth the effort.

If the Relationship *Should* Change, What Could that Look Like?

NASPAA's Data Committee identified three scenarios in which NASPAA's relationship with US News could change moving forward. Those scenarios are:

Scenario One: NASPAA collaborating with US News to do data-based rankings
In the first scenario, NASPAA would signal to US News that our members are no longer satisfied with a solely reputational survey and wish to move to a data-based ranking like US News does with other fields. *This is not a new sentiment*. Perry (1995) stated "US News already uses a more comprehensive set of criteria in rating programs such as medicine, law, and business. Public administration should insist on the same comprehensiveness for its own rankings. Because rankings such as those appearing in US News are taken seriously by, many readers, we should insist on multiple criteria as a principle for ethical transmission of information."[4] The change here would be if NASPAA were ready/wanted to move on if US News is unwilling to make this accommodation (Scenario 2).

If US News is interested in collaborating with NASPAA on data-based rankings, the likelihood is strong that they would use the similar methodology to what they use for our peer fields such as business, law and education. This methodology is a hybrid of reputation and data-based factors, with reputation (peer assessment) still making up a sizeable factor with a (.25) weighting (every graduate rankings using data included peer assessment with a .25 weighting). While many data-based rankings include reputation as a component, US News does seem to

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[3] Morçöl, Göktuğ & Han, Sehee. (2017) The National Research Council's Rankings of Doctoral Programs in Public Affairs. *International Journal of Public Administration*. doi:10.1080/01900692.2017.1292529

[4] Perry, James L. (1995). Ranking Public Administration Programs. *Journal of Public Administration Education*. 1(2), 132-135. www.jstor.org/stable/40215109

have it as a bigger component of their data-based rankings than other ranking entities. The following chart looks at the methodologies of US News' current data-based rankings to give an idea of what it could look like if NASPAA were to ask US News to begin factoring data into the public affairs rankings.

US News and World Report Methodology

	Business	Law	Education
Quality Assessment (.40)	Peer assessment (.25)	Peer assessment (.25)	Peer assessment (.25)
	Recruiter assessment (.15)	Assessment score by lawyers and judges (.15)	Superintendent assessment (.15)
Student Selectivity	Acceptance Rate (.0125)	Acceptance Rate (.025)	Acceptance Rate (.06)
	Mean GMAT & GRE (.1625)	Mean LSAT & GRE (.125)	Mean GRE Quantitative (.06)
	Mean Undergraduate GPA (.075)	Mean undergraduate GPA (.1)	Mean GRE Qualitative (.06)
Placement Success	Mean starting salary and bonus (0.14)	Bar passage rate (0.02)	
	Employment rates for full-time MBA program graduates: at Graduation (.07) and at 3 mths (.14)	Employment rates for 2015 grads at graduation (0.04 weight) and 10 months after (0.14 weight)	
Faculty Resources		Student-faculty ratio (0.03)	Student-faculty ratio (.045)
		Library resources (0.0075)	% Faculty with awards (0.025)
		Expenditures per student: The average instruction, library and supporting services (0.0975) are measured, as are all other items, including financial aid (0.015).	Doctoral degrees granted (.05)
Research			Total Research Expenditures (.15)
			Average expenditures per faculty member(.15)
			Source: https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools
Other interesting measures:	**Nursing:** Percentage of faculty with important academic achievements in the nursing field (0.0375): This is the proportion of full- and part-time faculty in fall 2016 who were recognized for the following academic achievements identified by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing: (List of fellows and similar recognitions); Nursing practice participation (0.075): This is the proportion of 2016 full- and part-time faculty members who were in active nursing practice.	**Engineering:** Percentage of faculty in the National Academy of Engineering (0.075): This is the proportion of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty who were members of the National Academy of Engineering in fall 2016	

While there are some differences in the methodology of the US News graduate rankings across fields (particularly in the weightings) the overall main categories are very similar with five main overarching areas (Quality Assessment, Student Selectivity, Placement Success, Faculty Resources, and Research).

If NASPAA members feel this is an appropriate methodology, then it would befit NASPAA to work with US News to implement this hybrid data-based/reputation-based ranking for our field, as:

- they are a leading, trusted source for rankings of our prospective students,
- they have experience using these data elements for rankings,
- universities should be used to having the data in the format necessary for collection,
- we have a prior working relationship with them and they have been willing to work with us to some extent in the past on issues and concerns that arise.

The US News brand has value in the rankings market, NASPAA should consider strongly the value of that brand for our programs marketing when considering possibly ending our relationship with US News. One of our Deans was quoted in Inside Higher Ed stating,

> "It has raised our visibility in important ways, nationally and locally," said John Bartle, dean of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. "Our [graduate] criminal justice program is ranked No. 2. We use that in our publicity and on our

website. We don't have a big ad budget, so this helps us." Bartle also said Omaha made changes to its undergraduate online programs to better meet the U.S. News criteria, and that "our rankings did go up significantly." But, he added: "It led to good [for students] because we improved the quality of the ... degrees."[5]

Collaborating with US News on data-based rankings or moving on from US News would depend on NASPAA's answers to the following questions:

> *Is the value of the US News brand more important to our members than the concerns that arise from working with US News (ie. lack of control over methodology, lack of international schools, reputation still a major factor)? Additionally, would NASPAA have a complete set of data available to populate these rankings?*

Scenario two: NASPAA partnering with another organization to do data-based rankings or conducting its own high stakes data-based ranking

If the answer to the above question is no, the US News brand is not valuable enough to forsake exploring other options, then NASPAA could pursue data-based rankings in two ways:

- NASPAA could partner with another organization that brings its own strengths (such as Financial Times' global reach or Wall Street Journal's survey capacity)
- NASPAA could go it alone and completely do our own rankings.

In either case, much of the initial work for NASPAA would be the same. NASPAA would first need to identify the data members feel are appropriate measures of quality. One benefit is that there is *already* a data-based ranking for our field—the National Research Council's (NRC) rankings of doctoral programs of public affairs. The NRC rankings include indicators based on the assessment of faculty members (reputational assessments) and objective indicators of faculty productivity, student qualifications, and program characteristics.[6] NASPAA could use these data as a starting point for the discussion of what constitutes a quality program at the master's level.

Following the identification of which data should be included in the rankings and what weightings those data should have, NASPAA would have to evaluate how/if we are collecting all the identified data and if not, begin the process of adding the data element to NASPAA's collection efforts. For example, one data element currently used as part of the NRC rankings— faculty research productivity—is one NASPAA would need to add to its data collection efforts and one identified by the NRC as the measure that "most closely tracks the overall measures of program quality."[7] Once NASPAA has developed the survey instrument for programs, we could either conduct the rankings ourselves or partner with another organization to conduct the rankings for us.

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[5] https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/03/15/colleges-and-experts-assess-value-us-news-online-program
[6] Morçöl.
[7] Morçöl.

If NASPAA were to do the rankings ourselves, there would be significant costs/ considerations involved:

- A review of the data we collect and corresponding edits to our data collection forms and outputs.
    - Would we start collecting faculty research productivity data?
    - Would NASPAA Alumni Survey data be included? Would schools be required to participate in the Alumni Survey if its data is included?
    - Would we allow schools to "opt out of rankings" and not provide the data
    - If NASPAA does the ranking we would include international schools—what issues may arise in ensuring consistent/comparable data internationally?
- Additional staff would be needed for communicating with the membership (deadlines, instructions, FAQ, etc.), data collection/cleaning/auditing, marketing of the rankings;
- Liability concerns—with high stakes rankings NASPAA could find itself involved in a legal dispute regarding the rankings. NASPAA will need legal advice before beginning any rankings endeavor to protect itself, and will likely need legal advice following implementation as issues arise. [NASPAA may want to consider spinning off the rankings to a separate but still "NASPAA" entity for legal protections].
- NASPAA would need to develop policies and strategies for marketing and branding these rankings. It would also require additional resources to actually market and promote the rankings.

The benefit of partnering with another organization would be to help alleviate some of these additional costs NASPAA would incur if we were to go it alone. If NASPAA were to collaborate with say the Financial Times, it would expect the FT to incur the marketing/branding costs of the rankings endeavor where NASPAA would likely incur most of the data-collection costs.

The issues with partnering with another organization would be:
- Finding an interested partner who sees the value (and potential profit) from working with NASPAA
- Not having full control over the survey—our partner would likely want input on the data used to determine quality

The benefits of partnering with another organization over NASPAA doing our own rankings are:
- Marketing/ Branding of the rankings—the partner we choose would likely already have a brand in place that prospective students know and trust that NASPAA could build on with the partner
- Allows NASPAA to step back and not be the final arbiter between our own members.

Scenario three: NASPAA providing the tools and data necessary for users to 'create-their-own' low stakes rankings

In this scenario, NASPAA determines that it is not interested in getting involved in rankings, however; NASPAA wants to make data publicly available in a way in which prospective students

and other important stakeholders can 'create-their-own' rankings.   Users would be able to create-their-own rankings by choosing the data variables that are most important to them and assign them their own weightings.

> "There is no doubt that Princeton is a good school and most of its graduates get good jobs and have solid and rewarding careers. What parents and students really want to know, however, is how to differentiate the outcomes of the thousands of other colleges that are not among the top schools in the U.S. News rankings."[8]

US News ranks the Top 50 of NASPAA (excluding specialization rankings), this is only 17% of NASPAA's US-based membership (281 schools) and excludes all of our international members (23 schools). Even if NASPAA were to develop its own rankings as discussed in Scenario 2, it would still exclude a sizeable chunk of our membership. Rankings are inherently a zero-sum game where each positive move up the rankings for one member means a negative move down the rankings for another. A low stakes data-based rankings allows NASPAA to not participate in the zero-sum game that puts our members against each other in favor of creating rankings that can be individualized to the user.   Additionally, research shows that when a student's "values, goals, and attitudes correspond with those of their institution, the probability of graduation increases."[9] NASPAA could create our own 'fun' low stakes rankings such as "Top Schools for Federal Government Employment", "Top Schools for Full Time Faculty Teaching Courses", or "Schools with the Highest % of International Students"

It is important to note that though NASPAA would consider these "low stakes" individual rankings; depending on the data made available, there is the potential for people to mine the data to create their own "high-stakes" rankings that NASPAA would have no control over. There would be nothing to prevent the 20+ "rankings" websites that have popped up over the last few years from accessing and using this data for their own purposes and profit (Appendix B).

What would it take for NASPAA to be able to do the low stakes 'create-your-own' rankings described above?
- A review of the data we collect
    - Moving data elements from long form to short form (such as # of applications)
    - Completion rate data would need to be provided by all schools not just accredited schools
    - Would we want to add data elements?
    - Additional auditing of the data to ensure programs are following data instructions/ providing accurate information (ie they are providing total tuition instead of yearly, etc.)
- More consistent participation of member schools in the Annual Data Report

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[8] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/07/10/new-rankings-tackle-old-problem-measuring-the-outcome-of-college/?utm_term=.20358ce3f63d
[9] Swail, W. S., Redd, K. E., & Perna, L. W. (2003). *Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, Volume 30, Number 2*. Jossey-Bass.

- Integration into NASPAA's upgraded website (additional budget will likely be necessary for a more complex search then currently planned for)

Conclusion

When US News decided to move to an annual ranking, the urgency for NASPAA to make a decision regarding our relationship with US News, and have something in place before their next ranking cycle, was removed. However, this should not prevent NASPAA from having conversations regarding what the organization's role should be and whether NASPAA can be a better advocate for its programs regarding the rankings. NASPAA hopes that this paper will serve as a discussion point and solicit feedback from the membership as it continues to evaluate it role with regards to rankings.

Appendix A

NASPAA Recommendations to USNWR
Specializations Ranked

Recommended changes to current specialization categories:

Break City Management & Urban Policy into two categories titled:
· Local Government Management
· Urban Policy

Change Public Management Administration to Public Management & Leadership

Add two new categories:
· International/Global Policy & Administration
· Homeland/National Security & Emergency Management

These changes make the list of specializations ranked the following:

· Environmental Policy & Management
· Health Policy & Management
· Homeland/National Security & Emergency Management
· Information & Technology Management
· International/Global Policy & Administration
· Local Government Management
· NonProfit Management
· Public Finance & Budgeting
· Public Management & Leadership
· Public Policy Analysis
· Social Policy
· Urban Policy

Specialization Descriptions

Local Government Management
Local government programs prepare students for management in city, metropolitan, regional and county public service agencies, with responsibility for ensuring the provision of basic services such as public safety, public works, economic development, and other services; supervising employees; managing budgets; and working with the community. These are the best public affairs schools for local government management.

Urban Policy
Urban policy programs prepare students for careers in urban planning, urban design, community development and policy analysis. These are the best public affairs schools for urban policy programs.

Environmental Policy and Management
Environmental policy and management programs involve principles of environmental sustainability and change, combined with core sciences, ethics and technology courses. These are the top schools for environmental policy and management.

Health Policy and Management
Health policy and management readies graduates to work as leaders in the healthcare sector, as policy analysts and as health policy advocates. These are the best public affairs schools for health policy and management.

Homeland/ National Security and Emergency Management
Homeland/ National Security and Emergency Management programs develop specialists for careers in public health, disaster management, risk management, cyber security, and intelligence. Including organizations such as TSA, border patrol, Secret Service, maritime security, Coast Guard, FEMA, and more. These are the best public affairs schools for homeland/national security and emergency management.

Information and Technology Management
IT management specialists can use technology and cyber security to help public organizations deliver services, communicate with citizens and protect data. These are the best public affairs schools for information and technology management programs.

International/ Global Policy and Administration
International/ Global Policy and Administration programs prepare graduates to interact with global stakeholders and think critically about international policy and administration. Students gain competency to work in the global public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Nonprofit Management
In nonprofit management programs, students learn how fundraising, effective leadership and financial management can improve a nonprofit organization. These are the best public affairs schools for the nonprofit management specialty.

Public Finance and Budgeting
Public finance and budgeting trains students in financial management and policy analysis skills related to government revenues and expenditures. This specialization can lead to budget and policy analyst jobs in the legislative and executive budget offices and in nonprofit organizations. These are the top schools for public finance and budgeting.

Public Management and Leadership
Public management and leadership programs give students leadership, human resources and conflict management skills for jobs in the public and private sectors. These are the top schools for public management and leadership.

Public Policy Analysis
Earning your MPP or similar policy degree will strengthen your leadership and analytical skills, preparing you for a job in government or public organizations. These are the top schools for public policy analysis.

Social Policy
Social policy analysts and social workers aim to improve the lives of children, the elderly, minority groups, disadvantaged populations and others. These are the top public affairs schools for social policy.

Appendix B

Websites Found in May 2015 Purporting to Rank our Programs

	A
1	Links to Public Affairs Rankings or "Top Schools" type websites
2	http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-public-affairs-schools/public-affairs-rankings/page+2
3	http://www.best-masters.com/ranking-master-public-administration-management-in-western-europe.html
4	http://www.phds.org/rankings/public-policy
5	
6	http:// graduateprograms.com
7	http://www.geteducated.com/online-college-ratings-and-rankings/best-buy-lists/best-buy-master-of-public-administration-and-master-of-public-affairs
8	http://onlinempadegrees.com/mpa-programs/
9	http://www.thebestschools.org/blog/2013/04/17/20-online-master-public-administration-mpa-degree-programs/
10	http://www.masterofpublicadministration.org/mpa-masters-in-public-administration-program-rankings.html
11	http://www.bestvalueschools.com/50-most-innovative-public-service-schools-in-the-us-2015/
12	http://publicpolicydegree.org/program-rankings-for-public-policy-degrees/
13	http://www.collegecrunch.org/rankings/top-10-public-affairs-colleges-ranked/
14	http://www.thebestcolleges.org/the-top-10-online-colleges-for-public-administration/
15	http://learn.org/articles/Public_Administration_What_is_the_Top_US_School_for_a_Masters_Degree_in_Public_Administration.html
16	http://colleges.startclass.com/d/o/Public-Administration
17	http://mastersinpublicadministration.com/master%E2%80%99s-in-public-administration-program-rankings
18	http://mpadegree.org/top-25-most-social-media-friendly-public-administration-schools-2013/
19	http://mpadegree.org/online/
20	http://www.topmanagementdegrees.com/top-online-mpa-degrees/
21	http://www.campusexplorer.com/colleges/major/738E3F4B/Social-Work/C5E5A501/Public-Administration/
22	http://www.firescience.org/public-administration-degree-programs-online/
23	http://www.schoolsintheusa.com/PublicAdministrationandPolicySchoolRankings.cfm
24	http://www.bestmastersprograms.org/online-masters-in-public-administration/
25	http://www.masterinpublicadministration.com/masters-in-public-administration-program-rankings.html
26	http://www.studentsreview.com/school-rankings/top-public-policy-schools
27	http://mphprogramslist.com/accredited-online-mpp-degrees/

The National Research Council's Ranking of the Doctoral Programs in Public Affairs and Comparisons with US News Rankings of Master's Programs in Public Affairs

Göktuğ Morçöl

Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg

Measuring Educational Quality

Issue of reputational rankings

One of the three issues mentioned in the NASPAA data committee report is the reputational nature of the US News rankings.

The report asks:

- Is reputation an adequate measure of quality?
- Do reputational rankings reflect the quality of the overall University rather than of the program itself?
- Are voters conflating the master's and doctoral programs at an institution?

The following slides will address these questions.

What constitutes educational quality?

- **This is the question behind the rankings of universities/ colleges and their programs.**

- **The rankings of universities began in the early 20th century in England and the United States.**

- **In the rankings since then researchers used three groups of factors to measure educational quality:**

  - **Inputs (institutional characteristics, such as educational expenditures, student-faculty ratio, and incoming students' test scores),**
  - **Outcomes (such as the counts of the eminent graduates of universities and faculty research productivity), and**
  - **Reputation (evaluations of programs by "expert judges," such as faculty members, department chairs at peer institutions)**

- **The earliest rankings were outcome based or reputational.**

Educational quality in public administration

- **Public administration scholars** have assessed program quality in their field since the **1980s.**

- **In their assessments they used:**

- **Outcome-based criteria** (faculty productivity and student productivity)

- **Reputational criteria** (faculty members' assessments of other programs)

The literature on educational quality in public affairs:

Legge and Devore (1987), Douglas (1996), and Forrester (1996) used faculty research productivity—measured in terms of the number of publications by faculty members—as the primary criterion of their rankings of public administration programs.

Farber and his colleagues (1984) measured faculty productivity as average number of citations per article published by faculty members.

The primary components of the index of "institutional impact" Williams and his colleagues (2014) developed for their worldwide rankings of public administration programs was the impact factors of journals faculty members published in.

Douglas's (1996) ranking index included the numbers of publications by students and graduates of programs.

McCurdy and Cleary (1984), White (1986), Cleary (1992), and Adams and White (1994) assessed the doctoral programs in public administration and public affairs based on the qualities of the dissertations produced in them, but they did not rank them.

Is reputation an adequate measure of quality?

From the NASPAA White Paper:

- **Sweitzer and Volkwein (2009), who found significant relationships between reputational rankings of schools of education, business, engineering, law and medicine and the enrollment size, admissions test scores, and faculty publication per capita of those schools.**

- **If data-based rankings will result in the same or very similar results to the current rankings, is it worth the time and resources to pursue them?**

- **Are reputational rankings an appropriate approximation of quality?**

- **Would going to a data-based approach create a better result, or simply introduce a new set of concerns and criticisms?**

The National Research Council (NRC) Study of 2005

The NRC Study: Background

- **The first ranking of the doctoral programs in the United States in 1925 were solely reputational.**

- **The NRC has conducted three studies of the doctoral programs:**
    1982, 1995, and 2005

- **In all three studies, the NRC researchers used reputational measures, but not exclusively.**

- **They developed indexes from multiple input- and outcome-based measurements.**

- **The 2005 study is the most elaborate one, methodologically.**

The 2005 NRC Study

- **The NRC collected data from 5004 doctoral programs in various fields at 212 universities in 2005 and 2006.**

- **The report was published in 2010.**

- **This was the first time the programs in public affairs were ranked.**

- **In the public affairs category, there were 54 programs.**

- **Information about the NRC study:**
  - **http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/Resdoc**
  - http://www.nap.edu/rdp/.

Categories of variables that were used in the NRC survey

BOX 5-1 Characteristics Included in the Faculty Weighting Process	
CATEGORY I—Program Faculty Quality	
a.	Number of publications (books, articles, etc.) per faculty member
b.	Number of citations per faculty member
c.	Receipt of extramural grants for research
d.	Involvement in interdisciplinary work
e.	Racial and ethnic diversity of the program faculty
f.	Gender diversity of the program faculty
g.	Reception by peers of a faculty member's work, as measured by honors and awards
CATEGORY II—Student Characteristics	
a.	Median GRE scores of entering students
b.	Percentage of students receiving full financial support
c.	Percentage of students with portable fellowships
d.	Number of student publications and presentations[a]
e.	Racial and ethnic diversity of the student population
f.	Gender diversity of the student population
g.	A high percentage of international students

CATEGORY III—Program Characteristics	
a.	Average number of Ph.D.'s granted over the previous five years
b.	Percentage of entering students who complete a doctoral degree
c.	Time to degree
d.	Placement of students after graduation
e.	Percentage of students with individual work space
f.	Percentage of health insurance premiums covered by the institution or program
g.	Number of student support activities provided at either the institutional or program level[b]

Types of Rankings in the NRC Report

- **Survey-based** rankings (**S Rankings**)

- **Regression-based** rankings (**R Rankings**)

- **Separate rankings for the three dimensions of program quality**:
  - **Research activity**
  - **Student support and outcomes**
  - **Diversity of academic environment**

The tree dimensions of program quality (three indexes) in the NRC study

- **Faculty productivity**:
  - **Publishing patterns**
  - **Research funding**
  - **Awards for scholarship**

- **Student characteristics:**
  - **Student support**
  - **Completion rates**

- **Diversity of the academic environment**
  - **Diversity among faculty and students**

(Source: Jeremiah P. Ostriker, Paul W. Holland, Charlotte V. Kuh, & James A. Voytuk (Eds.), *A Revised Guide to the Methodology of the Data-Based Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States* (2010); Committee to Assess Research (http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12974.html).

S an R Rankings in the NRC Report

S Index and Rankings:

- In each field faculty members assigned weights to the **20 program quality variables** determined by the NRC researchers.

- The weight of each variable is the average of the weights assigned by the faculty members in each field.

  - Consequently, the weights of the variables varied among the fields included in the NRC study

R Index and Rankings:

- This is an index of the **20 program quality variables** based on the **weights calculated from faculty ratings** of a sample of programs in their field.

- **Multiple regression** and **principal components analyses** were used to develop the index scores.

For more details, see the appendix (methodology slides) at the end.

Most important factors contributing to S and R Rankings: All fields (analyses with index variables)

Significant contributions of the three intermediate index rankings to the S and R rankings

	Public Affairs	All fields	Social and Behavioral Sciences	Biological and Health Sciences	Physical and Mathematical Sciences	Engineering	Agricultural Sciences	Humanities
S Rankings								
Research	0.835**	0.800**	0.796**	0.852**	0.829**	0.834**	0.752**	0.611**
Student	0.250**	0.265**	0.265**	0.253**	0.269**	0.257**	0.293**	0.359**
Diversity	0.076*	0.062**	0.054**	0.062**	0.048**	0.049**	0.073**	0.215**
R square	0.955	0.918	0.951	0.876	0.935	0.88	0.87	0.896
R Rankings								
Research	0.716**	0.742**	0.786**	0.759**	0.755**	0.732**	0.685**	0.458**
Student	0.214*	0.131**	0.126**	0.078**	0.175**		0.183**	0.304**
Diversity		0.057**	0.09**	0.042*			0.097**	0.263**
R square	0.708	0.673	0.787	0.606	0.696	0.548	0.664	0.641

- **The coefficients of public affairs programs are similar to those of other fields.**

- **Research is the most important factor, followed by student-related factors, and diversity.**

Most important factors contributing to S and R Rankings in public affairs (analyses with individual variables)

**Standardized Regression Coefficients of Individual Variables**

	S Ranking		R Ranking	
	Standardized Coefficient	Sig.	Standardized Coefficient	Sig.
Faculty Research Activity Ranking	0.711	0.000	0.490	0.000
Student-Related Variables:				
Average GRE Score	-0.147	0.000	-0.366	0.000
Is Student Work Space Provided?	-0.105	0.001	-0.222	0.004
Percent Students completing in 6 years	-0.143	0.000		
Percent First Year Students with Full Financial Support	-0.131	0.000		
Percent Students with Academic Plans	-0.070	0.021		
	R square = .985		R square= .881	
	F= 181.2, sig.= .000		F = 57.6, sig.=.000	

- **Faculty research productivity** is **most important** for both rankings, but less so for R rankings.

- **Average GRE score** is the **second most important** variable for both rankings.

15

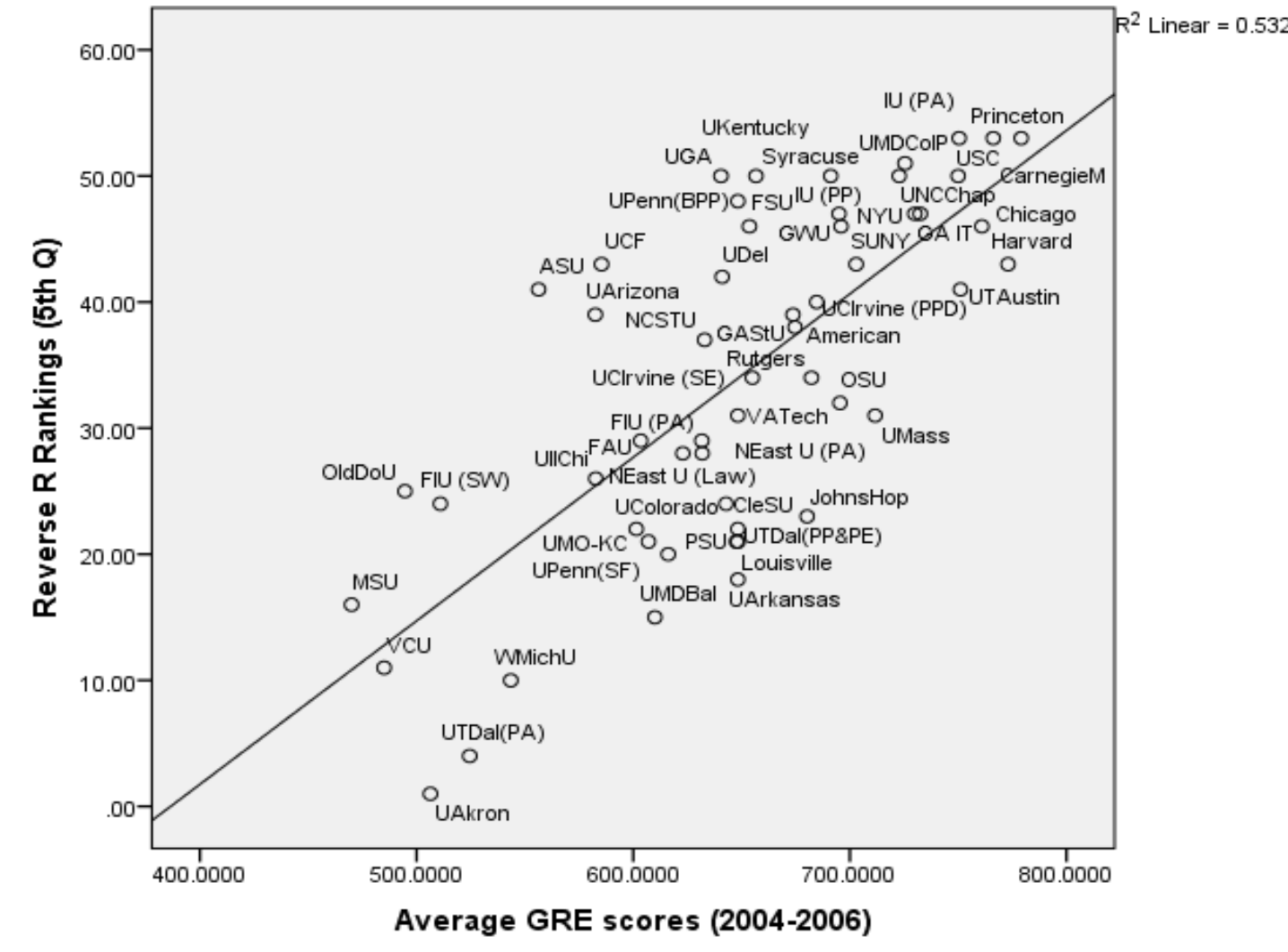# Faculty Publications & R Rankings in Public Affairs

Quadratic is the best fitting line.

Faculty publications do not seem to be as important for the programs at some highly prestigious universities.
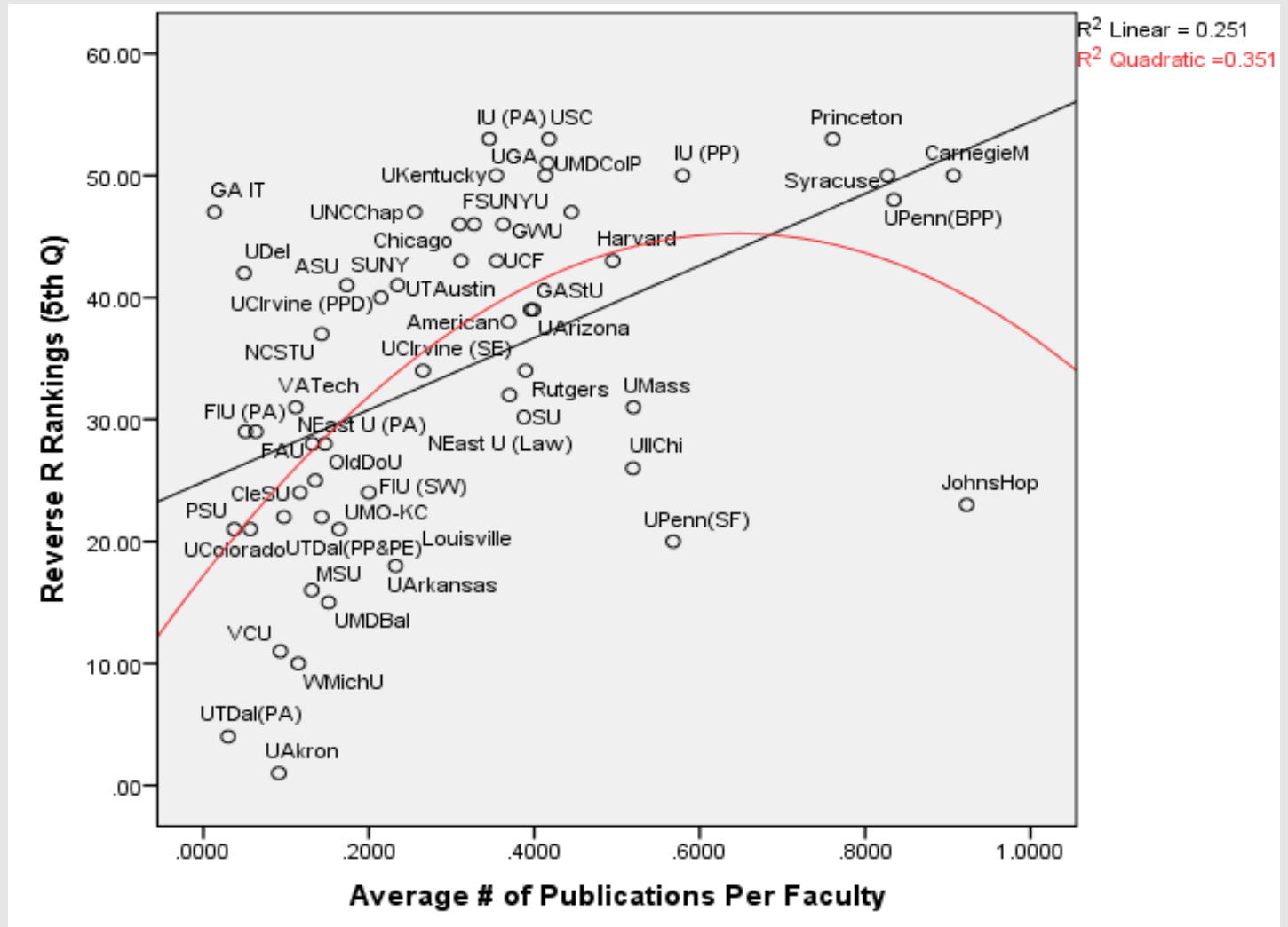
GRE Scores & R Rankings in Public Affairs

GRE scores are linearly related to rankings.

US News & World Report Rankings

US News Rankings: A Background

- **The first US News rankings of the universities in the U.S.: 1983**

- **The first US News rankings of professional graduate programs: 1987**

- **The US News rankings of the master's programs in public affairs: 1995.**

- **The initial rankings were solely reputational in all fields.**

- **The US News researchers included input-based and outcome-based indicators in some fields in the late 1980s.**

- **The rankings of public affairs programs remain solely reputational.**
  - **The US News researchers conduct surveys among the directors of the programs and the deans and department chairs of the units in which these program were housed and ask to rate the programs based on the quality of the curriculum, record of scholarship, quality of faculty, quality of graduates.**

Is reputation an adequate measure of quality?

NRC Doctoral Rankings and US News Master's Degree Rankings

	NRC R Rank		NRC S Rank		US News Rank 2014	
	Pearson	Spearman	Pearson	Spearman	Pearson	Spearman
US News Average Assessment Score in 2007	-.573**	-.613**	-.447*	-.467**		
	(n=31)	(n=31)	(n=31)	(n=31)		
US News Rank of Public Affairs Master's Programs in 2007	.568**	.613**	.379*	.467**	0.322	0.813
	(n=31)	(n=31)	(n=31)	(n=31)	(n=31)	(n=31)
US News Rank of Public Affairs Master's Programs in 2014	.787**	.798**	.665**	.670**		
	(n=51)	(n=51)	(n=51)	(n=51)		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

- **NRC and US News rankings are correlated.**

- **Spearman correlations are higher.**

US News Rankings of Master's Programs (2014) and NRC Rankings of PhD Programs (2005)

NRC (2005) and US News (2014) rankings are linearly related.
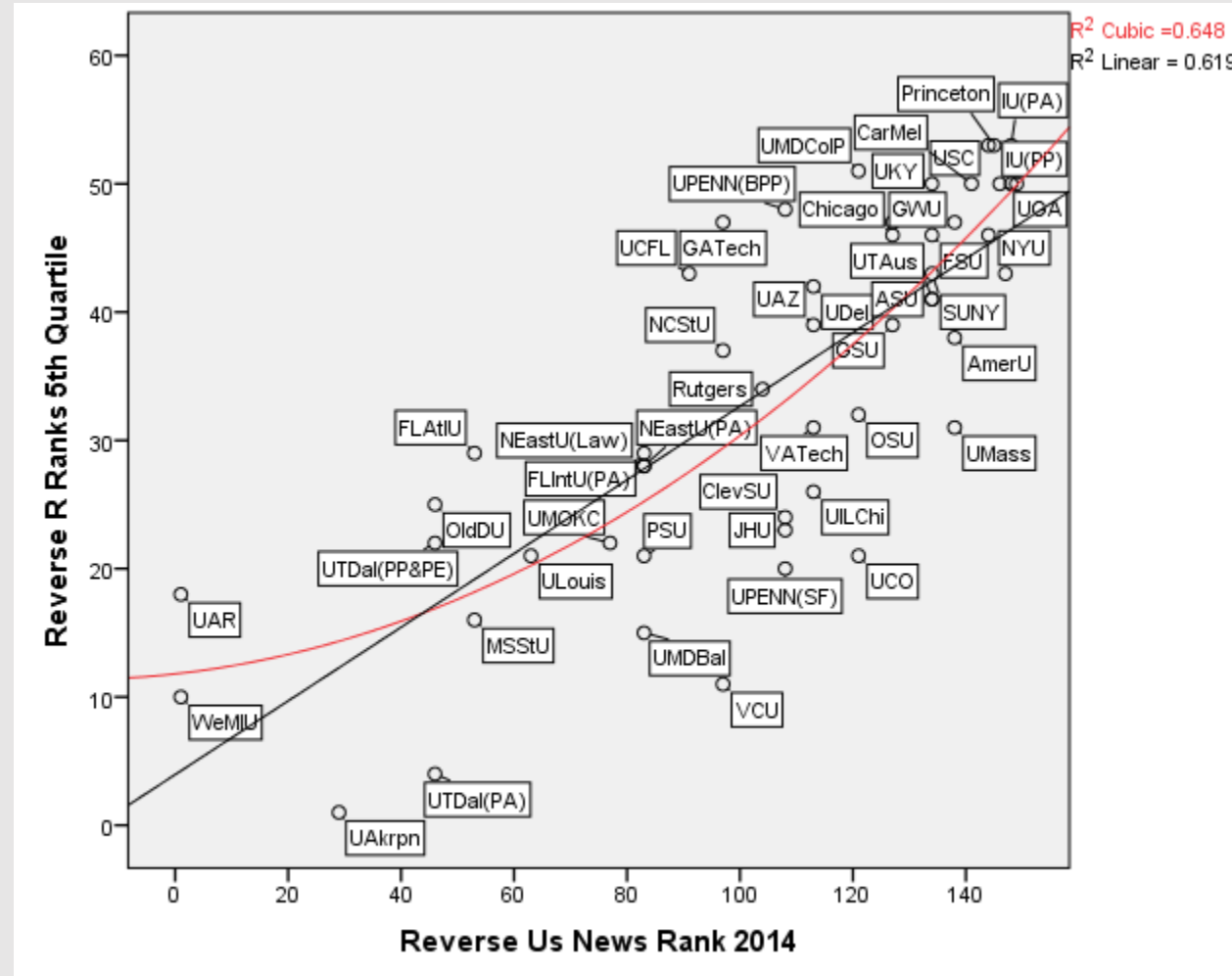
Summary of the findings

- **Both faculty research productivity and student characteristics contribute to the NRC rankings**
  - **But faculty research productivity is the most important factor.**

- **NRC rankings of doctoral programs are highly correlated with US News rankings of master's programs in public affairs.**

Implications of the findings for NASPAA's data committee

The data committee asked in the white paper:

Is reputation an adequate measure of quality?

- **It can be argued that the NRC's rankings have more validity than the US News rankings, because they include all three methods of measuring educational quality: inputs, outputs, and reputations of programs.**

- **The US News rankings are not as comprehensive (only reputations).**

- **But they have some criterion validity (if the NRC rankings are the criterion), because they are correlated with the NRC rankings.**

Implications of the findings for NASPAA's data committee

The data committee also asked in the white paper:

- **Do reputational rankings reflect the quality of the overall University rather than of the program itself?**
- **Are voters conflating the master's and doctoral programs at an institution?**

The answers to these two questions may be affirmative because of the well-known "halo effect":

One's perception of an aspect of an institution or a program affects one's perception (assessment, rankings) of that institution or program.

The literature shows that there is some truth to that (see Morcol & Han, 2017, for details).

The "halo effect" of the rankings of program quality

Does the halo effect mean that reputational rankings lack validity?

Not necessarily. The halo effect is a form of the "anchoring effect," which is common in human perceptions (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974).

"When making judgments for which the answer is ambiguous, most people will start with a particular value that is available to them, and then adjust their final judgment accordingly" (Bastedo, 2011)

How to improve the validity of US News rankings

Conceivably, if the US News, or NASPAA, conducts a more comprehensive study, like the NRC's study, that will increase the validity of the rankings of master's programs.

But it should be remembered that the NRC's study took years to complete and probably it was costlier than the US News rankings.

NASPAA may choose between the "good enough" reputational rankings or take on a more ambitious project, like the NRC's, to improve the validity of the rankings of master's programs.

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Appendix: Detailed Information about the Calculations of the R and S rankings in the NRC study

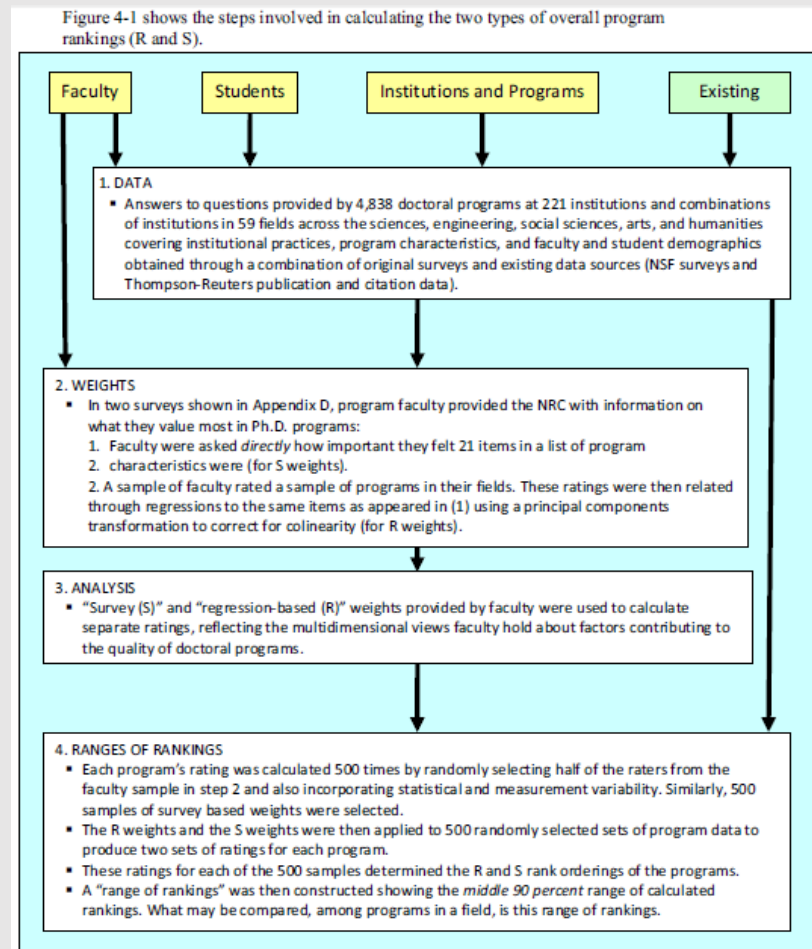# How the S and R indexes and rankings were calculated
(Quoted from Morcol & Han, 2017)

The researchers computed the **survey-based (S) index** for each field based on the weights assigned by faculty members in that field who participated in the faculty questionnaire to the 20 variables listed in Appendix A of this paper. They determined the weight of each variable as the average of the weights assigned by the faculty members who participated in the survey in a given field (Ostriker et al., 2011, 11). Consequently, the weights of the variables varied among the fields included in the NRC study.

To develop the **regression-based (R) index** in each field, the NRC researchers asked stratified samples of faculty members in each field to rank a sample of programs in their field. Then they used "principal components and regression analyses to obtain the implied weights for the institutional variables that would most closely reproduce the results" (Ostriker et al., 2011, ix).

The researchers calculated each program's **S and R rankings** after **running 500 simulations with the program's S and R ratings**, each time with a randomly selected half sample of the programs in each field. Consequently, they developed a range of rankings for the S and R categories in each field. The NRC database includes the 5th and 95th percentile rankings of the programs in each field (17-18).

Summary of the methods used in calculating the S and R rankings

Figure 4-1 shows the steps involved in calculating the two types of overall program rankings (R and S).

A more detailed view of methods of calculating R and S rankings

An example of calculations of R ratings
(Source: Revised methodology guide, p. 22)

TABLE 5-2a: 5th Percentile for the Regression-Based (R) Ranking Calculation

Institution Name: IHE University
Program: Economics
Program ID: 12345

Description	Variable	Program Value*	Standardized Program Value with Variation†	Regression Coefficient‡	Product of Col 4 X Col 5
(Col 1)	(Col 2)	(Col 3)	(Col 4)	(Col 5)	(Col 6)
Publications per Allocated Faculty	V1	1.067	2.113	0.024	0.051
Cites per Publication	V2	0.864	-0.444	0.213	-0.094
Percent Faculty with Grants	V3	25.47%	-0.618	0.054	-0.033
Percent Faculty Interdisciplinary	V4	5.88%	-0.605	-0.026	0.016
Percent Non-Asian Minority Faculty	V5	7.69%	0.430	-0.007	-0.003
Percent Female Faculty	V6	12.50%	-0.465	-0.025	0.012
Awards per Allocated Faculty	V7	0.000	-0.770	0.035	-0.027
Average GRE-Q	V8	746	-0.238	0.158	-0.037
Percent 1st yr. Students with Full Support	V9	100.00%	1.506	0.047	0.071
Percent 1st yr. Students with External Funding	V10	0.00%	-0.503	-0.002	0.001
Percent Non-Asian Minority Students	V11	10.00%	0.213	0.001	0.000
Percent Female Students	V12	44.44%	0.225	-0.078	-0.017
Percent International Students	V13	53.33%	-0.879	-0.050	0.044
Average PhDs 2002 to 2006	V14	5.4	-0.229	0.104	-0.024
Percent Completing within 6 Years	V15	27.62%	-0.842	-0.030	0.025
Time to Degree Full and Part Time	V16	5.67	-0.203	-0.049	0.010
Percent Students in Academic Positions	V17	11.11%	-1.340	-0.033	0.044
Student Work Space	V18	1	1.000	-0.044	-0.044
Health Insurance	V19	1	1.000	-0.013	-0.013
Number of Student Activities Offered	V20	17	0.184	0.009	0.002

Program Ranking: *53 of 117 Programs*

* Col 3 is based on data submitted by the program or calculated from these data.
† Col 4 is standardized value for the set of perturbed program values that produced the 5th percentile ranking.
   Standardized values have a mean of 0 and variance of 1.
‡ Col 5 is the regression-based weight for each variable