

March 27, 2008

Robert J. Morse
Director of Data Research
U. S. News and World Report
1050 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mr. Morse:

For a number of years now, we at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD and Santa Fe, NM have not participated in the *U. S. News and World Report* survey of colleges. We don't believe the survey fits the needs of students or their parents who are looking at us and who want to know who we are and what we offer. We also think ranking serves no useful purpose to those students or their parents.

It should be said that *U. S. News and World Report* has not done or ever attempted to do anything harmful to this college's interest. Indeed, we have been ranked everywhere from the third tier, to the second, to the first, to the "Top 25." Yet, this very fluctuation seems odd in itself: we know we haven't changed. We know that our mission and our methods have been virtually constant for almost seventy years. So it can only be that the measurement itself changes or different editors weigh things differently. We would rather be ourselves and have our college speak for itself, than to be part of this fluctuating outside analysis.

We also are concerned that the distinctiveness of each individual college and the diversity among them tend to be lost in a scale of "best -- good -- worse." We know there are some colleges in the lower tiers that are exactly right for some students; their mission, their mode of teaching, their concentrations, their location, their moral or religious character, might make them far superior to colleges in "higher tiers" or in the "top 25." Yet, all the students see is that their prospective college is "ranked lower."

Rankings assume that the value of an education can be quantified. We don't think it can. Students ought to be looking at the quality of a school, and measuring quality requires the exercise of judgment, a considerably higher function than the ability to count. These rankings involve too much counting and too little judgment.

Also, we know (through no fault of yours) that different schools report figures differently; in some cases, you find them impossible to dispute or verify. We would rather not be part of a grading system where everyone doesn't answer the same question the same way. Therefore, we will not complete the form you have sent us and request that you not rely on previously reported data since parts of it are out of date and incorrect. We further request that you remove us from your annual rankings altogether.

Sincerely,

Christopher B. Nelson
President
St. John's College, Annapolis, MD

Michael P. Peters
President
St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM

