

International Association of Labour Law Journals
Annual Meeting Philadelphia July 3rd 2012

Statement on Law Journal Rankings

The International Association of Labour Law Journals recognizes that there is national and international interest in rankings of law journals. It also recognizes that there can be value in such rankings if they are done thoughtfully and used appropriately. For example, a well-conceived ranking system can highlight good law journal practices, such as peer review and timeliness, and it can provide some evidence of the impact of journals.

Nevertheless, for two sets of reasons, the Association urges extreme caution in the development and use of systems for ranking law journals. First, for a number of reasons, any ranking system will be flawed and imprecise. Every step in the development of such a system is fraught with problems. *Determining* the appropriate variables upon which to base the ranking is difficult and controversial; *measuring* the variables for comparison will be subject to error and manipulation (especially if the stakes are high); *weighting* the variables to arrive at an overall ranking is likely to be both highly important to the overall ranking and highly subject to manipulation. Each of these steps will inevitably be subject to the biases and prejudices of the persons constructing and implementing the ranking system. This is problematic even when those persons are as neutral and disinterested as humanly possible. Of course, the persons constructing such rankings are often deeply interested in the outcome of the rankings.

Second, even if it were possible to develop a reasonable ranking system for a particular purpose (which we doubt), the ranking will have unforeseen and unpredictable consequences. If the rankings are important, journals will engage in gaming strategies to maximize their position, allocate resources differently, and be more wary of creative approaches to scholarship and publishing. The rankings will also transform relationships within and between journals and influence journal relationships with publishers, authors, and others. None of these consequences will lead to better scholarship; all will distract attention and resources from the main mission of high-quality law journals.

For example, despite a serious, conscientious and consultative attempt to formulate reasonable Australian journal rankings for the Excellence in Research Assessment exercise conducted by the Australian Research Council, rankings were ultimately abandoned in 2011, on the instructions of the responsible federal government Minister, principally because universities were misusing the rankings. There was a serious concern that the system for evaluating research was being “gamed.”

For these reasons and others, the International Association of Labour Law Journals urges extreme caution in the use of journal ranking systems.

Who We Are

The International Association of Labour Law Journals is a joint project of twenty-four leading labour law journals from around the world. More information on the Association and its member journals can be found here: <http://www.labourlawjournals.com>