Problems/suggestion with mba "ranking" and grades

Posted by banjomba - 2011/09/24 11:29

I came across geteducated.com as a prospective mba student. While I do think that the site has some good information, I have a few problems with it. I would like to preface this by saying this is applicable to the mba's on the site.

First, the "rankings". If you click on "Best Buys for AACSB or Best Buys for regionally accredited schools you will get a list by number. In the description these are all colleges that are below the average cost for other schools with their accreditation. HOWEVER, it is merely a list from top to bottom of the IN STATE COST. This means that there is no differentiating between the quality of a degree from say, the University of South Dakota and the University of North Carolina. Also, for many students, they will be paying out of state tuition (one of the reasons they're going online) so the "ranking" isn't correct anyway. In fact, some of these schools are over the average cost of an online mba in their category. I wouldn't have such a problem with this except for the fact that schools actually use this "ranking" as part of their advertising. When you claim something is a "Best Buy" or "Best Value" it means that it is more bang for you buck, not just cheaper.

Secondly, is the grades they give for student satisfaction and (ESPECIALLY) public perception. To be fair, the student satisfaction ranking is based on verified students. However, it's a simple average so if 1 student gives the school an A, then so be it, the school has an A. A school really should be reviewed by more than 1 student to receive a ranking. However, that's not as big of a deal as the public perception grade. The public perception is mostly just unverified students or prospective students grades. To say public perception implies that this is how an employer views the school. Anyone can go on to any school and review it and it will go for or against this school as he sees fit. I don't really see a fix for this as you're not going to get people that matter to start reviewing online mbas in this manner.

Having said that, there is a lot of good info on the site and the degree mill section is definitely doing a service to the public and would honestly like the site to be improved.

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Re:Problems/suggestion with mba

Posted by VickyPhillips - 2011/09/25 16:18

Hello BanjoMBA,

Thanks for taking the time to post these great suggestions.

Your comments reflect issues we discuss a great deal here in terms of providing better tools that will let consumers take control of how they individually desire to sort, rate, order and rank online degrees.

Our goal isn't to provide one single index of the "best," but to create many lists and ordering options that let consumers take control and sort for themselves what they consider the most important factors.

Your posting reveals some of how you would define "best" and "cost" and so this is helpful to us as we develop reliable operational definition, measures, and sorting tools.

As you probably know from your online mba search Get Educated maintains the largest free directory of

online MBAs --around 400. We are working on an expanded, better sorting degree search tool for release this spring so your comments are timely.

First, you are spot on that the tables we publish for ranking MBA degrees by cost default to show degrees by total estimated cost (tuition plus fees, which in many cases are as much as the tuition) with in-state tuition as the set default. We developed these tables (which are published every two years as a frozen gauge / rulers for consumers to see factual anchor cost comparisons).

FOR REFERENCE SEE: Online MBA cost ranking table

Obviously if you have one table you have to decide how to default show the data. In our case we decided to default list the tables by in-state cost BUT to also show on the table ALL cost rates that may be in order: in-state, out-of-state, international and military. (There are actually 4 different rates to consider when setting the default so we didn't look at just 2 but all 4 as possible defaults.)

Each degree profile carries all price rates so there is total transparency on cost and how it applies to different types of students. (Obviously we don't know if the viewer is in state or out or military or international.)

We publish the methodology on each table so it is clear where the numbers come from and how they apply for each degree. Users can click through to degree profiles to see more details on estimated total degree cost.

We can't put all those complexities on one table but what we can do is make transparent and accessible where and how those numbers are derived.

FYI – WE do give users the ability to sort and rank all 3,000 online degrees by cost using the default out-of-state cost ranking option that you suggest.

All users need do is search our directory for any degree level, such as Online MBA, and then hit SORT by COST at the top of the master search.

SEE List of Online MBA Degrees List of Online MBA Degrees (notice SORT by COST button at TOP after you close BIG BLUE box)

The self-generated ranking list you get this way will give you the results you wish based on out-of-state cost as the default.

(**Though we receive many-many more complaints about this feature than about the sort by in-state on the tables so we will likely be changing this in the filtering this spring)

Our goal is to publish snap shot tables for quick use as rulers … THEN give consumers tools and filters so they can create their own sorts and short lists.

Note that the snap shot Best Buy lists are NOT an index of quality as you'd like them to be (great idea by the way)-- EXCEPT that we screen all colleges listed for comparable accreditation -- listing and comparing all AACSB MBAs and comparing them to each other, for example.

If you've spent much time searching for a good online MBA directory -- sounds like you did -- you probably discovered that most aren't factual directories but lead generation mills that only list colleges that pay them to recruit students. Cost is either hidden or manipulated by the advertiser who pays for that listing as an ad placement.

These “online degree directories” do not screen out unaccredited programs, sort programs by different accreditation levels, screen out licensed programs, screen for fake accreditors and so on.

So in this sense Get Educated provides a crucial quality screen that is highly unusual in today's pay per lead college directory environment. Accreditation is our criteria for first level quality (though many disagree with the fact that we don't list licensed schools or unaccredited or nationally accredited schools, and so on.)

The Best Buy lists are factual cost comparisons. We designed them this way bcs. consumers complained they could not get accurate cost data for tuition + fees from online colleges.

We made accurate cost data our #1 goal so that there would be for the first time an online degree directory that would answer that one crucial question for consumers: How much does this online degree cost????

You want also a quality index.

We are working on several straight up "quality" indices – we are with you on this one -- but these are not yet available as we must first operationally define quality, then consistently measure it.

You also want to be able to go beyond factual cost and sort by the much-much more complex dimension of "value."

Here, if I read you right you are defining or might define value around factors things like employer acceptance, job placement, perhaps even overall financial aid, loan indebtedness, salary increases, and so on.

We agree that a separate overall value index -- as defined above or in a similar fashion -- would be great and are working on this also. One hold up is that the data does NOT exist to measure these things yet. Most online degree programs are not collecting this data bcs they are NOT required to collect it specifically on online degrees.

There is a great project called College Choices for Adults, http://www.collegechoicesforadults.org/, that is looking at data like online degree completion and student engagement rates for online students. This is a voluntary effort by a group of colleges so the sample is small, but it’s great data related to the type of info you may seek.

You want more, and so do we.

Stay tuned.

It's coming.

Vicky Phillips
Founder

banjomba wrote:
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