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FINDING THE CREAM OF THE CROP Would-be students can now consult the 17th-annual Maclean's university rankings.

Maclean's PSE rankings released

Annual report continues following last year's boycott from 26 different schools

KIRSTEN GORUK
News Staff

Maclean's magazine's 17th annual university rankings issue hit newsstands last Thursday, a year after 26 top post-secondary institutions from across the country boycotted filling out the required questionnaire traditionally used to compile the lists.

Despite being a leader of the initial boycott, the University of Alberta landed in the top three of four national reputation categories in the rankings, coming in third for "Best Overall," second for "Most Innovative," third in "Leaders of Tomorrow," and seventh for "Highest Quality."

"We have moved up, whatever it means, but [the University] continues to have really serious disagreements with Maclean's on a wide range of methodological issues," Carl Amrhein, Provost and Vice-President (Academic) explained. Among those concerns is his desire for Maclean's to recognize that Alberta highschool students are graded on a different scale than those that of other provinces.

The results of the national reputation ranking are determined by combining the universities' results in the undergraduate, comprehensive, and medical doctoral categories. Each individual category's information is gathered from a number of performance measures: student/classes, faculty, resources, student support, libraries, and reputation. Each measure is given a weighting that ranges from 12 per cent for resources to 22 per cent for reputation.

Working with a number of sources, Maclean's sends out thousands of

reputation surveys to university officials, high-school principals, guidance councillors, CEOs and corporate recruiters each year. However, as Maclean's managing editor Tony Keller explained, a change was made to research methodology this year.

"We're only using publicly available data. We're not going to any of the universities directly; everything we're using is either gathered directly by us from outside the university system or is coming to us from a third party," he said.

Although Keller feels that this change has made last year's boycott a thing of the past, Amrhein says he isn't completely convinced. Still, he admits he has no qualms with the Maclean's reputation ranking.

"It's a perfectly reasonable, acceptable methodology," he noted. But with regards to the other three ranking categories the reputation category is then based on, Amrhein says he "resents the fact that a national news organization knows that they're doing something incorrect and refuses to fix it."

Keller, on the other hand, views the University's position as absurd.

"I think the negative impact of the boycott has been largely felt by the universities themselves. The position of the universities that refused to make information public was embarrassing and highly detrimental to them," Keller argued.

But Amrhein explained that as an academic institution, the University finds it difficult to take part in a preferential fashion with an exercise that "appears to be as much public relations as news."

"[They] are not providing preferential information to any other news organization, and all useful information is on the web."

However, Keller explained that amid this conflict, there's a general agreement regarding the value of Maclean's information to students.

"Maclean's university rankings issue outsells a regular issue in multiples," Keller said—and Amrhein himself encourages students to pay attention to the it.

A survey conducted by the 2007 Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium also revealed that 80 per cent of students use the Maclean's rankings to weigh their options, and about half of those students said the issue had an influence on their decision.

Kaylee Galipeau, a twelfth grade student at Eastglen High School in Edmonton, is no exception.

"It's always good to see how the U of A compares to other universities," she said. "You don't pick a university because it's close; you want to pick one because it has good programs and a good reputation."

Kris Lensink, a third-year Business student at the U of A, believes that the results are relevant to current students as well as prospective ones. Although he was aware of the boycott and did express some skepticism, he said it doesn't change the fact that people take Maclean's seriously.

"I want to know that I'm going to a fairly reputable institution. I guess it also matters in the long term in that my employers are probably going to look at where I got my degree and how high their level of competitiveness is."

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