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ABF Doctoral Fellow Publishes Innovative Study on Law School Rankings

CHICAGO, April 20, 2018 – A new article written by American Bar Foundation (ABF) Doctoral Fellow [Christopher J. Ryan](#), "[A Value-Added Ranking of Law Schools](#)," proposes a new ranking system of law schools using value-added methodology, which measures a law school's ability to improve a student's likelihood of passing the bar and finding a job.

Every year, *U.S. News & World Report* publishes its annual rankings of law schools in the United States, including its latest rankings, the [2019 rankings](#), which were released in March. While other alternative rankings have gained popularity in recent years, the *U.S. News* rankings remain the gold standard, in part because prospective law students equate the quality and value of law schools based on these rankings.

Ryan's article, however, offers evidence of the relative time invariance in an important component of the *U.S. News* rankings methodology, peer review, and proposes a value-added ranking of law schools. Ryan leverages value-added modeling, a well-known methodology from education policy literature, to the context of legal education, answering the question: to what extent do a law school's actual post-graduation metrics for a given cohort exceed or fall short of the same cohort's predicted performance upon admission?

Ryan's value-added ranking is outcomes based, and essentially measures the *effect* of attending law school – a first for conceptualizing the value that law schools add to their students in this way.

"My dissertation research, which surveyed current law students, discovered that many – perhaps too many – law students consider the *U.S. News* ranking of law schools to be determinative of not only of where they enroll in law school, but also of their perception of the value of a law school," Ryan said. "It is my hope that this ranking will spur national discourse about more appropriate definitions of the value of legal education, as well as the requirement of good data to assess the current conditions in legal education."

Ryan is a doctoral fellow in the [ABF/AccessLex Institute Fellowship Program in Legal and Higher Education](#), which assists emerging scholars who are studying issues of access, affordability, or value in legal or higher education. He is a doctoral candidate in policy studies at [Vanderbilt University](#), and will begin a position at [Roger Williams University School of Law](#) as an associate professor in the fall. His research examines issues of organizational and individual decision making in the context of legal education, business, intellectual property, and wealth transfer.



About the American Bar Foundation

The [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) is the nation's leading research institute for the empirical study of law. The ABF seeks to expand knowledge and advance justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes, and legal institutions. To further this mission the ABF will produce timely, cutting-edge research of the highest quality to inform and guide the legal profession, the academy, and society in the United States and internationally. The ABF's primary funding is provided by the [American Bar Endowment](#) and the [Fellows of The American Bar Foundation](#).

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