

Introduction

What began as a known and understood weather phenomenon named Katrina, quickly became a symbol of injustice, racism, inadequacy, failure, classism, and about every other ism social scientists, journalists, and pundits could name. Katrina is a word that is used to convey that which cannot be conveyed.

Once the initial shock of New Orleans drowning and the Gulf Coast washing away turned into the relief effort, volunteers descended on the area. Among the thousands of construction, utility and medical workers were law students.

One of the groups formed, the Student Hurricane Network, brought in roughly 5,000 law students to the Gulf Coast region. These students spent thousands of hours assisting with backlogged pro bono cases, rebuilding homes and in general listening to the stories.

With Katrina, legal education experienced the necessary conditions for the start of an evolution. Some schools now require pro bono service for graduation, provide recognition for service, support alternatives to traditional clubs and journals as well as offer certificates in public interest law. The more recent programming moves beyond volunteering and develops the public interest law student into an advocate and champion of justice.

My research builds on the experience in a legal education embedded in public interest law as well as time spent rebuilding the Gulf Coast. This research effort seeks to find a way to support the evolution in law school curricula.

The concept is simple, create an indicator that shows the level of public interest law and pro bono service opportunities offered at a law school. Typical rankings only show traditional criteria such as GPA and LSAT scores. PILS endeavors to show how their PIL and PBS programming compares to other law schools.



NOAA GOES-12 Weather Satellite Image of Katrina, August 29, 2005



Method – Building an Indicator

Why the indicator

- Quantitative or qualitative measure
- Derived from series of observed facts
- Designed to discover the relative position of a law school compared with other units observed

Data Set Construction

- Use found data, text on a website
- Repurpose over 25 lengthy web pages, addressing over 50 different facets for more than 150 law schools
- Build at least two indicators, public interest law and pro bono services → PILS

Steps Involved

- Theoretical framework** – basis for selection of factors
- Data selection** – strengths and weaknesses of factors
- Imputation of missing data** – absence of data is just as important as having a value
- Multivariate analysis** – examine the overall structure of the data set, most likely using factor analysis
- Normalization** – scale adjustments, address skewed factors
- Weighting and aggregation analysis** – in keeping with theoretical framework and data properties
- Uncertainty and sensitivity analysis** – assess robustness
- Return to data** – identify overly dominant factors
- Link to other indicators** – develop data, drive stories based on results
- Visualization of results** – build dashboard that allows user to manipulate factors

Based on content from: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2008). Handbook on Creating Composite Indicators: Methodology and Users' Guide.

Results

Indicator will be set at a 50 / 50 distribution

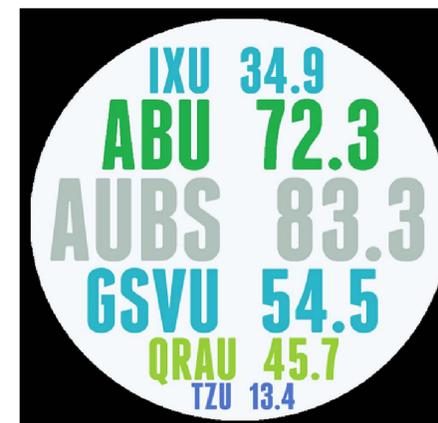
- Public Interest Law
- Pro Bono Service

Using a dashboard

- User weighted distribution
- User selected factors such as state, types of certificates, and other relevant factors

Indicator will fall on a scale of 0 to 100

- 0 = no Public Interest Law or pro bono service indicators
- 100 = every factor indicates highest level of public interest law or pro bono service



Challenges

Self-Reported data → have to work with data as provided, no control over source

Extensive standardization → text is free-form

Disclaimer → indicator is just one tool for determining potential law schools, programming or curricula decisions

Timeliness of data → dependent on law schools responding and then publication of text, no set schedule

Controversial → critics often target ranking systems or indicators, which then potentially subjects the PILS to high volumes of criticism

Accuracy → ensures that all the data compiled is adequately and appropriately reflected in the indicator

Impact Targets - ABC

Assists various units in a law school, such as a law library, in building programs, curricula, and opportunities related to their strengths as displayed as part of the ranking indicator

Benefits the potential law school applicant seeking a legal education emphasizing public interest law and pro bono service programming

Creates a better understanding of whether a school provides opportunities for a student.

Goal → impact positively as many different populations as possible

- law school administration
- law students
- potential students
- law school support units

and of most importance

- underserved and unrepresented citizens
- advocates for justice

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the experts from the UIUC Library's Scholarly Commons and Research Data Services. My research is more innovative and meaningful because of their assistance and insights.