

Statement by Ron Morrison, Professor of English, at

4 November 2021 Faculty Senate Meeting

At our last Faculty Senate meeting, Regent Adams urged faculty to engage in a campus-wide discussion regarding the value of college and university rankings, especially since pursuing “Reputation and Rankings” remains a stated goal in the University’s strategic plan. Regent Adams asserted that pursuing such rankings is, at best, a distraction from our educational mission. She also argued that, at worst, the pursuit of such rankings actively harms the institution by diverting limited resources away from supporting strong academic programs and addressing areas that need improvement or enhancement. In the selection of articles that she provided, this approach is often referred to as “gaming the system.”

My sense is that most faculty at this institution agree with the Regent’s assessment. I know that I do. But I have one brief comment to add.

Shortly after the meeting, quite by accident, I ran across a different sort of ranking that provides an insight into the folly of pursuing college rankings. If we believe that our public image depends on “Reputation and Rankings,” then perhaps we need to acknowledge that not all our rankings are positive.

For example, in a list of “Worst Colleges for Your Money” published by Moneywise.com, Morehead State University is singled out as the worst college or

university in Kentucky. A brief narrative explains that MSU has modest tuition and relatively low student loan debt, but the surveys of alumni are highly negative (a claim unsupported by any evidence). In short, the website asserts that MSU is inexpensive but that the quality of education is very low.

For the record, I do not believe that MSU is the worst college or university in Kentucky, and I **do** believe that the main purpose of this article is to serve as “click bait.” It certainly attracted my attention. But if we are going to go “all in” in pursuing rankings, why don’t we put this ranking from Moneywise.com on our webpage?

This is a facetious question, but it is still worth answering. We don’t value this ranking because it is basically meaningless. Like many other rankings, the Moneywise.com ranking relies on incomplete or arbitrary criteria designed to sell advertising or digital “clicks.” It makes broad assertions about the overall value of the institution without taking into consideration its mission, the diversity of its programs, the makeup of the student body, or a whole range of other factors. In short, it shares the limitations of all other ranking systems, including the ones typically considered the most prestigious.

Like many of you, I believe we need to put aside the quest for rankings and use our energies and limited resources to build and maintain the strongest academic programs possible.

Thank you.