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## Ethics and public relations: a good outcome from a bad source?!

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## Quad 136

### Outcome from a Bad Source?!

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## Ethics and Public Relations: A Good Outcome from a Bad Source?!



Like all Johnnies and Bennies from the late 1970s onward, I took an ethics class as part of my liberal arts requirements. The goal of these classes, then as now, is to help students wrestle with ethical dilemmas and to complicate their moral views, to help them understand the world is more often than not complicated and messy. Students are expected to wrestle with tradeoffs and grey areas in ways that will serve them well in their personal and professional lives.

As I considered this post, I was reminded of how Professors Jim Murphy and Linda Hansen regularly challenged my worldview.

My moral dilemma:

A good thing happened to an institution I know to be doing fine work to transform the lives of young people. This institution got some rare and unusually good press by being mentioned in the *Wall Street Journal*. The institution was noted for having one of the highest returns on investment (ROI) among liberal arts colleges in the country. Number 15 to be precise (see the table below for liberal arts majors). OK, the institution also happens to be my employer, Saint John's University of Collegeville, MN, but that is not the moral dilemma.

The problem is that the methodology for calculating the ROI for the schools is flawed. As an economist who has written about this exact problem before, I cannot claim to be unaware of the methodological problem. Simply described, the study uses a non-random sample of alumni from the colleges studied. Does this problem totally discredit the analysis? Maybe, maybe not. Should it cause me to ignore this rare mention of Saint John's in the *WSJ*? Isn't part of my job to highlight the value of a Saint John's education? Might some good come from mentioning the good press for SJU?

My solution:

Rather than using this headline for this post:

**Saint John's Ties Yale and Tops Amherst and Holy Cross in ROI**

Please consider this to be the headline, were I to post on this topic:

### Saint John's University's Good Professional Outcomes Noted in the *WSJ*

I'll sleep OK since this is not exactly the trial of Socrates, but I learned enough from Murph and Linda to know they'd give me no more than a C+ for trying to have my cake and eat it too!

#### Best Returns on Investment, Liberal Arts Majors

For liberal arts graduates of private and public universities, based on projected earnings over 20 years. Four-year cost is based on 2013 tuition, room and board on campus, with no financial aid.

School	Cost	Annual ROI	20-Year Net ROI
Harvey Mudd College	\$229,500	8.8%	\$980,900
Princeton University	\$217,300	7.6%	\$690,800
Harvard University	\$225,700	7.2%	\$650,100
Dartmouth College	\$233,600	7.1%	\$666,000
University of Pennsylvania	\$230,800	7.0%	\$641,100
Williams College	\$226,500	7.0%	\$623,500
Brown University	\$228,100	7.0%	\$633,000
Lafayette College	\$220,600	7.0%	\$605,500
Columbia University	\$236,500	6.8%	\$614,300
Washington & Lee University	\$216,800	6.8%	\$558,900
Bucknell University	\$225,800	6.8%	\$589,500
Cornell University	\$227,600	6.6%	\$560,400
Yale University	\$230,100	6.5%	\$559,600
Colgate University	\$223,600	6.5%	\$543,200
Saint John's U (Collegeville, MN)	\$177,200	6.5%	\$429,500
Amherst College	\$228,400	6.2%	\$505,900
Lake Forest College	\$197,000	6.1%	\$429,200
Bloomfield College	\$172,900	6.0%	\$366,800
College of the Holy Cross	\$216,000	5.9%	\$439,000
SUNY – College at Old Westbury	\$122,400	5.9%	\$249,700
University of Richmond	\$217,600	5.8%	\$432,600
Union College – Schenectady, NY	\$225,000	5.8%	\$449,200

Source: PayScale.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | March 9th, 2015 | Categories: [Economics](#), [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).

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