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1991

Elixir for the Elites

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Recommended Citation

Carl Tobias, *Elixir for the Elites*, 76 Iowa L. Rev. 353 (1991)

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Elixir for the Elites

Carl Tobias*

Dear Editors:

The recent law review survey placing the *Iowa Law Review* twenty-fifth¹ demonstrates that your journal is afflicted by the single most important cause of decline among American law reviews today—low citation count.

Do you fear loss? Perhaps the loss of prestige that could accompany Iowa's declining position in the law review hierarchy is troubling you. Are you worried that the *Iowa Law Review* is losing quality manuscripts to higher ranked journals? After all, at least one of them is now said to make offers on submissions that the editors like within three days of receipt. You may be concerned that Iowa is losing its intellectual rigor and pep and that the journal's reputation as a publisher of cutting-edge scholarship has been tarnished.

Do you fear rejection? Does the *Iowa Law Review* lack the courage to solicit work from distinguished scholars because they might not be receptive to your overtures? You may be afraid that those brilliant assistant professors at the truly elite schools, fresh from Supreme Court clerkships, or those stunning associate professors, who have been polishing their tenure pieces to a high state of gloss for three years, will reject Iowa's offers to publish their submissions. Worse yet, maybe they will cease submitting their pieces to Iowa altogether.

Are you feeling old, tired, and past your prime? Remember, Iowa is no spring journal, now that it's pushing eighty. Do you find yourself envying the brash, young upstarts at the other 175 law schools that claim to be in the top twenty? Why, the *University of Chicago Law Review* is in its mid-fifties, *Stanford Law Review* recently turned forty, and *UCLA Law Review* is still in its thirties.

If none of this bothers you, how did you become editors? Consider exactly what losing your position near the apex of the law review world portends. Iowa's twenty-fifth place finish means that you cannot sit back, relax, and rely on journals below Iowa to insure that you review only the finest manuscripts on the theory that they float to the top. Iowa can no longer count on authors' willingness to string along and cut loose lesser journals, and even twist in the wind without an offer, in the hope of capturing the prestige that once attached to publication in the *Iowa Law Review*. You may actually have to promptly read every submitted manuscript and make the right decision, first time, every time.

*Professor of Law, University of Montana. Thanks to Peggy Sanner for sound advice in concocting this brew and to Beverly Stevenson for processing it.

1. See Law Review Survey, 65 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 195, 204 (1989).

You are responsible for a sick journal. But not to worry. Simply try Professor T's Law Review Ranking Recipe. This bromide is just what the Juris Doctor ordered, an instant cure for reduced review rankings. Why, if you implement my easy-to-follow instructions, the *Iowa Law Review* will be just fine in no time at all. In less than a volume, one short year—a single editorial board, assuming that you stay on schedule—Iowa will be ranked with Harvard and Yale, receiving the finest manuscripts, publishing only cutting-edge scholarship, rejecting ninety-nine submissions for every one it prints, and doing less work.

All you have to do is follow these simple directions. Remember the doleful cry of Brooklyn Dodger fans—"wait 'til next year"—because the compilers of the recent law review rankings intend to conduct annual surveys. Then, immediately institute my review regimen to start building your citation count, as the *crucial figure* in the law review rankings is the total number of times that other journals cite the *Iowa Law Review*.²

The *Review* can maximize its prospects for future citation in several ways. The quick and easy path to elevated citation count is simply to increase the quantity of pages you publish. Eight issues is the maximum number that any journal publishes annually. Consider increasing the number you publish to ten or even twelve. If this suggestion is too expensive in terms of money, time, and most importantly, your effort, think about the following possibilities.

Increase citation count by publishing a larger number of shorter articles. You could devote the pages now consumed in publishing book reviews to articles. Because articles are usually cited more than book reviews, Iowa can't afford the potential citation loss of publishing book reviews, regardless of their quality. Seriously consider jettisoning or drastically limiting student work, as it is cited even less than book reviews. Similar recommendations apply to the Correspondence section, but they should be implemented, of course, only after publication of this Elixir for the Elites.

Quicker than you can say "*Harvard Law Review*," Iowa's citation count and its law review ranking are bound to soar. Iowa's ranking will be commensurate once again with the prestige it deserves, and your successors will be able to kick back, take it easy, and depend on Iowa's place at the top of the hierarchy. What does Iowa have to lose, especially when the price of this remarkable review remedy is absolutely free?

2. You have to hand it to the compilers. After all, they made absolutely no pretense of speaking to the bench or to the bar. Instead, they contributed to the ever-widening chasm between the legal academy and practice by counting only citations in other law reviews and not even deigning to include judicial citations. Hey, remember what G. Gordon Liddy said about the large fees he commanded to speak on college campuses after Watergate: "Make a virtue out of a necessity!"