

OPINION

AS I SEE IT

Ivy League? So What?

New Englanders believe the whole nation cherishes an Ivy League education. A lot of teenagers are heading off to college this fall disappointed that their schools aren't covered by the prestigious vines.

RONALD J. PARISE

The reality will set in when Ivy League grads leave the sanctity of this insulated region to look for jobs. Most employers care less about the name of the school than the quality of the work done at the school.

What are the origins of this league of schools that prides itself on being the zenith of higher education? Sports. The Ivy League was formed by Northeastern schools to compete at what used to be the highest level of intercollegiate competition on the old gridiron — football. In fact, Ivy League schools boasted some early winners of the Heisman Trophy, an award given each year to the outstanding college football player in the nation. But the league then opted against giving athletic grants-in-aid (scholarships), forgoing Division I-A status (the largest number of annual grants-in-aid allowed), and instead deciding to emphasize academic scholarship.

Leave the New England area, and what do you hear about Ivy League schools?

In Virginia, Ivy League schools are not even discussed. William and Mary is considered the academic standard. In Georgia, Emory University is considered the Ivy League school of the South.

While attending graduate school in Atlanta in the 1980s, I met a Dartmouth grad who told me she went to "Dartmouth College, the Ivy League school in New Hampshire." When I told her I was from Connecticut and had heard of Dartmouth, she laughed and explained that outside of New England, she has to tell people what Dartmouth is and where it is located. "South of Pennsylvania," she lamented, "whoever heard of Dartmouth?"

So, you Ivy League hopefuls and acceptees, once you obtain that much-cherished diploma, don't be surprised if, during a job interview in Silicon Valley, a Westerner looks at your resume and says, "Oh, you went to Dartmouth? Too bad you didn't go to UC-Berkeley or Stanford." Every region has its darling schools, and there is no removing that local bias.

In reality, any diploma will only be as good as the effort put into earning it. The bottom line is studying hard and getting a college education. Ivy League prestige is a myth — ask someone



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who has moved to Connecticut from another part of the country.

Recently, I asked a neighbor raised in the Chicago area where the best business school in the country was. He didn't hesitate to answer: "The University of Chicago, isn't it?" His wife, who is from New York State, said, "Isn't Wharton [at the University of Pennsylvania] the best business school?"

So the message is simple to graduating seniors: After you start working, your work performance and resume are what matter. School status drops off the radar screen very quickly.

Ronald J. Parise, an inventor in Suffield, has a graduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League school often mistaken for Penn State, the one with the nationally ranked football team.

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