

What Should We Know About Rankings

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ERASMUS+ WEBINAR: IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL RANKINGS ON THE
PERFORMANCE OF LEBANESE HEIS AND NEW U-MULTIRANK APPROACH

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Which Are The Best Universities?



Are the best universities those that focus disproportionately on research or those that focus on student learning and helping graduates earn credentials for sustainable living and employment?



Are the best universities those which pursue global reputation OR those that encourage civic engagement and responsibility to their communities and wider society?



Are the best universities those which adopt indicators chosen by ranking organisations for their own purposes OR those which choose indicators which best align with the university's mission and purpose?



Themes

Why Rankings

What Rankings Measure

Rankings Influence on Higher Education

Issues to Think About



Why Rankings



Policy Context

Globalisation and knowledge society

Knowledge is key “factor in international competitiveness”

Importance of talent – and hence HE – for knowledge-intensive economies;

Competition between HEIs for students, faculty, finance, researchers

Demographic shifts pose challenge to national economic and societal goals;

Internationalisation of higher education and research

Trend towards government steering mechanisms

Increased emphasis on accountability, and societal value, contribution and impact.

Shift to public value management & growing need to (re)regulate market

Increasing desire for internationally comparative or benchmarking data

“Consumer” information for students/parents, and government;

Dissatisfaction with robustness of traditional collegial mechanisms.



Geopolitics of Rankings

Rankings changed how we think about universities:

- National pre-eminence no longer enough in global economy;
- Knowledge/scientific activity and talent are key requirements for/indicators of global competitiveness;
- Succeed in placing educational quality, performance and productivity within *wider comparative and international framework*.

Illustrate shift to a multi-polar world:

- US/Europe have dominated int'l HE & global science;
- Today – more than 40 countries involved in global science;
- China rising in the rankings compared with the US and Europe.



Geopolitics of Quality

Because HE plays a vital role in human and capital development, how universities perform, and how they are governed, are matters of national policy/public interest.

- National *geo-political positioning and pride*
- Beacon to attract mobile *investment and talent*
- Institutional *reputation and status*
- Performance *assessment* of scientific-scholarly research
- Graduate *capability and opportunities*
- Link between qualification with *career/salary and life-style*
- Value-for-money and return-on-(public) *investment*



What is Quality

No internationally agreed-upon definition, how to measure, much less improve.

Everyone has own perspective, as evidenced by different approaches, methodologies, and choice of indicators.

Emphasis has primarily been on T&L and research, but increasingly reflects capacity/capability of HE to meet a variety of societal needs and demands.

There is a distrust with professional self-regulation; academics are coming under the same level of scrutiny.



Evolution of Rankings

Global rankings began in 2003, but rankings have been around for over a century. Evolution highlights changing role and significance of universities while their shifting formats and methodologies tell us about what we think matters and how it should be measured.

- Shift from elite to universal participation, and from national to international/global orientation;
- Shift from traditional research indicators to increasing focus/questions about learning outcomes, equity, engagement, societal impact.



Most Influential Global Rankings Today

Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) (Shanghai Jiao Tong U, China), 2003

Webometrics (Spanish National Research Council, Spain), 2004

National Taiwan University Rankings, 2007

Leiden Ranking (Centre for Science & Technology Studies, Netherlands), 2008

SCImago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) (Spain), 2009

University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP) (Middle East Technical U, Turkey), 2009

QS World University Rankings (Quacquarelli Symonds, UK), 2010

THE World University Ranking (Times Higher Education, UK), 2010

U-Multirank (European Commission, Brussels), 2014

Best Global Universities rankings (USNWR, US), 2014



What Rankings Measure



How Rankings Work

Compare institutions by using a range of indicators

- Different indicators are weighted differently;
- Choice of indicators/metrics are not value-free;
- Final score aggregated to single digit.

However: There is no such thing as an objective ranking.

- The evidence is never self-evident;
- Measurements are rarely direct but consist of proxies;
- Weightings of indicators reflect value-judgements on priorities.



What Global Rankings Measure

GLOBAL RANKINGS MEASURE

Bio- and medical sciences Research
Student and Faculty Characteristics (e.g., productivity, entry criteria, faculty/student ratio)
Internationalization
Reputation – amongst peers, employers, students
Emphasis on elite universities and elite/high achieving students

GLOBAL RANKINGS DO NOT MEASURE

Teaching and Learning, incl. "added value",
Arts, Humanities and Social Science Research
Impact and Benefit of Research
Regional or Civic Engagement
Student Experience
Ignore non-traditional student, e.g., mature/adult learners

Advantages of Rankings

Simple, quick and easy way to measure/compare HE performance & “quality” , within wider comparative and international framework;

- Inform student choice and stakeholder opinion;
- Beacon to attract/retain mobile capital and talent;
- Performance assessment of scientific-scholarly research;
- Signal of what to expect upon graduation and from graduates;
- Value-for-money and return-on-(public) investment;

Accountability tool, esp. where QA culture/practices weak or immature;

Heighten attention to quality and drive-up performance:

- Accelerate modernisation agenda;
- Emphasize institutional strategic decision-making and data collection/analysis.

Disadvantages of Rankings

HEIs are complex organisations meeting diverse needs, but rankings measure/compare “whole institutions” using same set of indicators;

- Leads to simplistic comparisons: whereas, statistical differences are insignificant;

Academic quality is complex and not easily reduced to quantification;

- Use of proxy variables can misrepresent and lead to unintended consequences;
- Difficulty obtaining meaningful indicators and (international) comparative data.
- Undermines mission diversity, and ignores diversity of student cohort (e.g. SES factors);

Focus on small number of indicators encourages perverse behaviour – because it promotes a single model of university or quality/excellence.



Research vs. Reputation

Rankings	Research	Reputation
Academic Ranking of World Universities [ARWU] (Shanghai Jiao Tong, China)	100	50
Times Higher Education World University Ranking [THE] (UK)	93.5	33
Quacquarelli Symonds World Ranking [QS] (UK)	70	50

NB. Computation based on an assumption of a strong correlation between academic reputation and research/research related activities.



Ranking Wealth?

Indicators measure wealth – whether garnered via institutional age, endowments, tuition or government investment. And the Gap is widening.

Ranking	QS (2016)	Age	Fees (€)	Endowment (€Bn)
1	MIT	155	35,887	12
2	Stanford	131	40,103	19.7
3	Harvard	380	40,176	33.4
4	Cambridge	807	10,632	7
5	Caltech	125	40,679	2.2

Wealthiest private colleges/universities have maximised their advantages over recent decades:

- Faculty salary
- Recruitment of most able/high-socio economic students
- Money spent on facilities and student experience

Corresponds with growing income and social/capital inequality



Do Rankings Measure What's Meaningful 1

1. Measuring Faculty/Student Ratio:

- Used as proxy for teaching quality;
- But different meanings for different disciplines and types of learning environments, and for public and private institutions and systems;
- Says more about the funding or efficiency level than teaching.

2. Measuring Education Outputs:

- Focus on students who complete/graduate within the determined time-frame as a good measure of quality;
- Educational performance is influenced by many factors, including socio-economic profile of the student population.



Do Rankings Measure What's Meaningful 2

3. Measuring Research Productivity:

- Counting peer publications and citations is most common method;
- But,
 - Main beneficiaries are physical, life, and medical sciences;
 - Emphasis on international peer-reviewed articles can ignore national/regionally important research;
 - English language bias disadvantages countries where English is NOT native language;
 - Ignores public value and societal impact of research.
 - Responsible metrics and open science are transforming reliance on citation counts, etc.

Do Rankings Measure What's Meaningful 3

4. Measuring Reputation:

- Survey of academic peers, students, or industry stakeholders;
- But:
 - Reputational surveys are subjective and self-perpetuating;
 - Benefits older institutions in developed countries and global cities with which there is an easy identification;
 - Not possible to assess teaching quality, especially at the international level, via reputational surveys;
 - Overestimation "related to good performance in the past, whereas underestimation may be a problem for new institutions without long traditions".



	ARWU	QS	THE	UMR
No. Institutions	1000	1000	1500	1800
No. of Countries	93	80	93	92
No. Indicators	6	6	12	29
Categories of Indicators Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of Education Quality of Faculty Research Output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Reputation Employer Reputation Student Faculty Ratio Citations per Faculty (citation data supplied by Scopus) International Faculty Ratio International Student Ratio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching Research Citation/Research Influence International Outlook Industry Income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching and Learning Research Knowledge Transfer International Orientation Regional Engagement
Presentation Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard league table Overall Indicator based on a weighted sum of scores of a set of key indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard league table Overall Indicator based on a weighted sum of scores of a set of key indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard league table Overall Indicator based on a weighted sum of scores of a set of key indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunburst Multi-dimensional, with no overall weighted sum Score A-E
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Third-party data: Clarivates Analytics InCites; Nobel Prize and Fields Medal Laureats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEI data Survey data by ranking organisation; Third party data: Scopus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEI data Survey data by ranking organisation; Third party data: Scopus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEI data Survey of HEI staff and students Third party data: e.g. IPEDS, HESA

Rankings Influence on Higher Education



What We Have Learned

Rankings are driver of higher education decision-making at the institutional and national level;

- Highlights ambition and sets explicit strategic goal;
- Identifies KPIs used to measure performance and reward success;
- Rankings help identify under-performers and "reputational" disciplines.

Students, high achievers and international, use rankings to inform choice;

Other HEIs use rankings to identify potential partners or membership of international networks;

Employers and other stakeholders use rankings for recruitment or publicity purposes;

Government policy is increasingly influenced by rankings.



Changes in Institutional Decisions and Academic Behaviour

Universities often make strategic, organizational, managerial or academic decisions on the basis of rankings :

- Revising policy and resource allocation;
- Prioritising research areas;
- Changing recruitment and promotional criteria;
- Creating, closing or merging departments or programmes; and/or merging with another HEI, research institute, etc.
- Identifying preferential journals in which faculty should seek to be published;
- Research “stars” rewarded while teaching often seen as a “punishment”.

Source: Hazelkorn (2015) *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education. The Battle for World-class Excellence*. Palgrave MacMillan.



Student Choice & Rankings

Rankings provide good source of information especially for int'l students

- Institutional rank transmits social and cultural capital which resonates with family, friends and potential employers;
- Students aware of differences because rankings are widely diffused;

Strong correlation between rankings, perceptions of quality, institutional reputation and choice of destination, at the national and institutional level;

- Institutional prestige or country profile and whether qualification will be recognized by future employers;
- Top destinations for internationally mobile students include top-ranked HEIs;
- Ability, ambition and socio-economic status influence propensity for studying abroad, and country/institutional choice.
- But students are not a homogeneous group;



Poll Results



Issues to Think About



Are rankings still fit for purpose? 1

The world around us is changing and the issues impacting on and expected of higher education are changing also. Are rankings still relevant?

1. Teaching is being re-recognised as THE essential mission of higher education. But rankings do not and can not cover teaching.
2. No evidence that rankings improve quality, because quality is a multi-dimensional concept.
 - Rising in the rankings is NOT equivalent to improving quality.
 - In fact, it is easy to rise in rankings without making any significant contribution to the public good.
3. Open science and societal engagement challenges traditional bibliometric practices.



Are rankings still fit for purpose? 2

4. Overemphasis on elites at a time of growing policy/public concerns about inequalities and people being “left behind” by globalisation and meritocratic ideas. Currently almost 20,000 universities worldwide, but global rankings focus on only 5%.
- Top 100 universities (ARWU, 2019) = 1.4% of total students worldwide;
 - In Europe, top-100 constitute = 4% of 19.8m tertiary students (2017).
 - Top-20 is dominated by US universities, 11 of which are private with endowments which surpass the (HE) budgets of many countries.

The overwhelming majority of our students do not attend these universities.



Quality is More Important Than Rankings

Alerted universities to the importance of strategic use of data. Shifting institutional research into the boardroom.

Highlighted the importance of quality for competitiveness. Quality is fundamental.

- Being excellent requires more than simply climbing the rankings;
- Providing a high-quality education and research experience that attracts students, faculty, and is recognisable internationally.
- Rankings cannot replace QA and accreditation.

This requires a strategy which respects the university's mission, values and principles, and serves the values and needs of its community, within and external to the campus.



Global Rankings and the Geopolitics of Higher Education

Understanding the influence and
impact of rankings on higher
education, policy and society

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