



Building a College Rankings Research Agenda

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Why Rankings?

- They respond to demands from consumers for easily interpretable information on the standing of higher education institutions;
- They can stimulate competition among higher education institutions;
- They can provide some of the rationale for allocation of funds; and
- They can help differentiate among different types of institutions and different programs and disciplines.

In addition, when correctly understood and interpreted,

- They *can* contribute to the definition of "quality" of tertiary education institutions




Problems and Weaknesses

- Rankings may skew student, institutional or government decisionmaking
- Changes in methodology and weighting may result in inconsistent results
- Single number, overall rankings do not reflect nuances within institutions
- Available data may not be ideal to achieve purposes



History of Coordination

- 2002 UNESCO-CEPES meeting in Warsaw
- 2004 Meeting of the Working Group of the Project on Higher Education Ranking Systems and Methodologies (Washington, DC)
 - Establishment of an International Rankings Expert Group (IREG)
- 2005 Higher Education in Europe, "Rankings and Methodologies in Higher Education"
- 2006 Meeting in Berlin, Germany
 - Berlin Principles
- 2007 *College and University Ranking Systems: Global Perspectives and American Challenges*
- 2007 Meeting in Shanghai, China
- 2008 meeting of IREG steering group in Warsaw
 - "Observatory" on rankings issues



Berlin Principles

- Purposes and Goals of Rankings
- Design and Weighting of Indicators
- Collection and Processing of Data
- Presentation of Ranking Results



Purposes and Goals

- Be one of a diverse number of approaches to the assessment of higher education inputs, processes, and outputs.
- Be clear about their purpose and their target groups.
- Recognize the diversity of institutions and take the different missions and goals of institutions into account.
- Provide clarity about the range of information sources for rankings and the messages each source generates.
- Specify the linguistic, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of the educational systems being ranked.



Design and Weighting

- Be transparent regarding the methodology used for creating the rankings.
- Choose indicators according to their relevance and validity.
- Measure outcomes in preference to inputs whenever possible.
- Make the weights assigned to different indicators (if used) prominent and limit changes to them.



Collection and Processing of Data

- Pay due attention to ethical standards and the good practice recommendations articulated in these Principles.
- Use audited and verifiable data whenever possible.
- Include data that are collected with proper procedures for scientific data collection.
- Apply measures of quality assurance to ranking processes themselves.
- Apply organizational measures that enhance the credibility of rankings.



Presentation of Results

- Provide consumers with a clear understanding of all of the factors used to develop a ranking, and offer them a choice in how rankings are displayed.
- Be compiled in a way that eliminates or reduces errors in original data, and be organized and published in a way that errors and faults can be corrected.



Importance of Research

“To understand the impacts of rankings and evaluate the movement of ranking systems within a framework of best practices, it is important for researchers to explore multiple areas of research”



Themes in U.S. Research

- How students are influenced by rankings in their decision to attend a specific institution
 - sources and role of information, type of student
- Conceptual studies that create basic typologies of ranking systems or develop inventories of the different approaches to ranking
- Whether ranking is impacting senior-level institutional decision-making
 - strategic positioning/planning; staffing/organization; quality assurance; resource allocation; admissions/financial aid



IHEP Project:

“NEW AGENDA FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY RANKING”

The Impact of University Rankings Systems on Institutional and Government Policy Decisionmaking in the United States



Components

- Colleges and universities
- Federal and state policymakers
- Clearinghouse



Colleges and universities

- How rankings impact the decision-making structures of higher education institutions outside U.S. (Hazelkorn)
- Conduct case studies in other countries to determine other ways in which American institutions might draw on rankings for planning and campus change work
 - Germany
 - Australia
 - Japan
 - Canada
- Speak with college officials, students, and other stakeholders



State and Federal Government

- Whether federal and state policy-makers take rankings into account in developing their own assessments of higher education institutions
- Survey state and federal policymakers in the United States to determine how rankings have influenced their higher education policy decisions
- Also, consider how select state accountability systems align with ranking frameworks
- Interviews of policymakers for more detailed information
- Common theme = accountability and how data collection can be more transparent and use a diverse set of indicators when assessing the quality of schools



U.S. Context = "Accountability"

- Increasing tuition fees, affordability concerns – pseudo "ranking" of colleges and provision of data
- Spellings Commission – push on accrediting bodies
- HEA – collection of more institutional data to allow more student choice
- Graduation rates vs. other measures (NSSE, CLA)
- State performance based budgeting?
- State data collection systems / performance indicators



Clearinghouse

- Online rankings clearinghouse with easy access to information and resources about ranking
- Targeted toward researchers, institutional officials, national and international organizations, and government policymakers
- Includes research on students, descriptions of national (>30) and trans-national rankings, links to articles and media reports
- <http://www.ihep.org/Research/ranking-systemsclearinghouse.cfm>



Clearinghouse





For More Information...

www.ihep.org

To submit resources to the Rankings
Clearinghouse, please contact
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