



How Size Matters in University Rankings

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*Does Size Matter? Universities Competing
in a Global Market.*

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Outline

- Types of Indicators used in Rankings around the world
- Direct Impact of Rankings
- Indirect Impact of Rankings
- Size and Reputation

Types of Indicators Used

- Roughly 50 major rankings systems in use around the world
- Use Hundreds of Different Indicators
- Broadly, these fall into eight categories
 - Characteristics of the Student Body, Financial Inputs, Staff Inputs, Student Experiences, Learning Outcomes, Final Outcomes, Research Metrics and Reputation

Types of Indicators Used (2)

- Of these, 2 have little or no size bias (learning outcomes, final outcomes) and one (characteristics of students) has a bias that varies nationally.
- Only 5 have a serious size bias. 4 towards larger institutions (Financial Inputs, Staff Inputs, Research Metrics and Reputation) and 1 has a bias to smaller institutions (Student Experiences)

Types of Indicators Used (3)

- Of the 5 sets of indicators: Faculty Inputs, Staff Inputs and Research can be normalized **provided common data standards for counting staff and students are available.**
- Student Experiences and Reputation are probably impossible to normalize

Direct Impact of Size on Rankings

- Financial inputs are used in some rankings, but they are nearly always adjusted for the size of the student body (e.g. Maclean's)
- Research rankings and staff inputs are used in some rankings. They can be adjusted for size of faculty or of staff, but this is rarer
 - Examples: Netbig, Wuhan, Guangdong, Asiaweek, Ranking Universitario (Peru), Shanghai Jiao Tong, QS/Times Higher Education
- Often not normalized because no relevant data is available to permit normalization

Indirect Impact of Size on Rankings

- Size has a major impact on indicators of student satisfaction and engagement : consistently, across countries, students give higher marks to smaller institutions.
- Size also has a significant impact on reputation, at least in international rankings. Even holding objective criteria constant, once you transcend national boundaries, smaller institutions have difficulty being noticed.

Why Does Size Affect Reputation?

- Network Node Effect
- Size=research (economies of scale)
- Research = reputation (global and non-rival)
- Teaching cannot generate reputation because it is inherently a rival good.

Summary

- Rankings are simply collections of indicators, which require common data
- Only 5 out of 8 categories of indicator really have a size bias
- With adequate common data, biases in research, staff inputs and financial inputs can be corrected
- Indirect biases of size are much more difficult to correct.

What can be done?

- **Re: direct sources of bias:** more common data about institutions, first at the national and regional levels and later at the international levels, can only improve rankings
- **Re: size bias on student experiences:** Why bother changing anything? It's useful to focus attention on the benefits of smaller institutions, and useful to spur larger institutions to action
- **Re: size bias on reputation.** Unclear that much can be done; unless academic profession swings strongly against Humboldtian norms.

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