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Inside Rankings: Limitations and Possibilities

KerryAnn O'Meara
University of Maryland - College Park

Matthew Meekins

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Please send correspondence to:

KerryAnn O'Meara
Associate Professor of Higher Education
University of Maryland
komeara@umd.edu

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Americans love ranking systems. Whether we are ranking the hottest celebrities, the top ten singles, the top chef, or the next design star, ranking seems to be built into the American psyche as a symptom of our competitive, aspirational nature, and our desire to quickly understand the value of things.

This desire has fueled a veritable ranking industry with respect to institutions of higher education. There is great diversity in what ranking systems purport to rank. Beyond the well-known *U.S. News and World Report* (*USNWR*) "Best Colleges" lists are those that rank specific institutional types, such as flagship, land-grant, and international universities. Others aim to provide information to consumers about how a particular college or university rates on anything from "value," broadly defined, to institutional commitment to sustainability, gender balance within the student population, and salaries of recent graduates, to the perceived quality of its athletic facilities, the popularity of its website, or its status as a party school.

On the whole, ranking systems rely on those aspects of higher education that are easy to count. For example, *USNWR* criteria include student selectivity as measured by SAT, high-school GPA or rank, faculty resources (which include class size, faculty salaries, faculty qualifications and appointment types), graduation and retention rates, spending per student, alumni giving, and graduation-rate performance. Further, dominant ranking systems, such as USNWR, tend to measure a diverse array of colleges and universities based on the characteristics of research universities. Nevertheless, the ranking industry has become very influential in higher education, raising questions about the relationship between dominant ranking systems and the purposes and goals of institutions of higher education. Whose interests do the most widely-used rankings systems serve, and why? What purposes and ideologies are they not representing?

Questions such as these led the first author of this paper to develop a graduate course on ranking systems in higher education. The second author was first a student, then a speaker in the course. To our knowledge, this is one of a very few graduate courses on the topic. To date, the class has run three times, with a total of 29 students exploring ranking systems and their role. The course is designed to tackle the rankings issue from various angles, through examination of the considerable body of literature on the topic and the multiple perspectives of guest speakers on the benefits and drawbacks of ranking systems. As a capstone project, students work together to develop a new ranking system to emphasize institutional qualities that are often neglected in the popular, mainstream ranking systems. They then run a trial test of their methodology using publicly-available data sets. For example, students use NSEE, the Common Data Set, and IPEDS to rank ten institutions on issues of first-year student retention efforts, career development, or opportunities for student leadership.

The purpose of this article is to present our critique of the main weaknesses and contributions of dominant ranking systems, to consider some of the positive and/or neutral roles that they are serving, and to offer three examples of purposes and goals of higher education we think they are not fulfilling. This critique is based on an extensive review of over 100 articles on ranking systems as well as notes from class discussions aimed at unpacking their role in higher education.

We began our classroom discussions by considering the criteria popular ranking systems such as *USNWR* use to rank academic programs (Appendix A outlines some of the more popular ranking systems) and then moved onto an examination of some new alternative ranking systems. Our framework for analyzing each of these systems is included in Appendix B.

In the following section, we consider the weaknesses of the ranking systems we analyzed, as well as some of the benefits higher education and its stakeholders have gained via the creation of these ranking systems.

Weaknesses of the Dominant Ranking Systems

While ranking systems may provide a quick and useful way to sort institutions along a wide range of institutional characteristics, they are also highly problematic. Birnbaum (2006) observes that "ratings or rankings pretend to be objective and scientific; in reality, however, they are manifestations of ideologies about the purposes of higher education" (p. 9). The dominant ideology represented in these ranking systems favors the practices and policies of prestigious research universities, to the detriment of the many diverse colleges and universities that educate the lion's share of undergraduate students. An especially potent example of this ideology is that "high quality" research is determined by where that research is published, how often it is cited, and the number and kinds of awards and fellowships faculty at a particular institution receive. Additionally, because it is difficult to measure academic quality quantitatively, more often than not research reputation is taken as a proxy for academic program quality, a relationship that can be misleading and can result in the unfair comparison of high-quality programs at lesser-known universities to mediocre departments at universities with greater name recognition (Marginson, 2006).

Dominant ranking systems rely heavily on survey instruments that are completed by administrators, faculty, and students to gauge academic reputation. *USNWR* criteria, for example, include academic reputation as measured by a peer review survey of academics. An unintended consequence of such a practice is that raters may have a bias toward an institution based on its past rankings or on its elite status. For example, one third of those who responded to an American survey ranked Princeton among the top ten law schools in the country; however, despite attempts to reconstitute it in recent decades, Princeton's law school hasn't existed since 1852.

Nonetheless, the primacy of institutional reputation in dominant ranking systems persists and leads many consumers to conflate reputation with a quality undergraduate education while overlooking colleges and universities – including special-interest institutions that popular rankings tend to neglect (Gasman, 2010) – which might provide a better educational experience.

Research- and reputation-based rankings privilege the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge, in particular those fields, such as biomedicine, in which faculty publish articles in highly regarded journals like *Science* and *Nature*. Increasingly, U.S. research universities compete in international ranking systems such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities, *Times Higher Education* supplement, and Webometrics' ranking of world universities. These world university ranking systems place even greater emphasis on measuring research performance and prestige in the hard sciences than

USNWR (Hazelkorn, 2009; Marginson, 2006). International research university ranking systems focus even more explicitly on the percentage of faculty who hold Nobel prizes and field medals and bring in research-related external funding. Further, these systems assume a relationship between scholarship that is widely cited in scientific journal indexes, and quality. The "Matthew effect," whereby the scientific reputation of the author influences reception of the scientific findings (Braxton, 1986), reveals the flaw in this assumption. Merton (1968) observed that "a scientific contribution will have greater visibility in the community of scientists when it is introduced by a scientist of high rank than when it is introduced by one who has not yet made this mark" (p. 59). Therefore, some faculty may have an undue impact on institutional rankings based more on their accumulated prestige than on current accomplishments.

At the other end of the spectrum, a significant body of faculty work is effectively excluded from dominant ranking systems because the principal language of peer-reviewed publications is English, thereby disadvantaging non-English speaking scholars in the citation index.

Below we identify several other key weaknesses associated with dominant ranking systems:

Strategic Imitation. Currently, research- and reputation-based ranking systems are having a disproportionate effect on the vast landscape of higher education in the U.S. and around the world. As several national and international studies demonstrate, such rankings exert considerable influence over institutional decision making in critical areas, including faculty compensation and institutional mergers (Hazelkorn, 2009; IHEP, 2009; Marginson, 2006; Meredith, 2004; Winston, 2000). An example of the extent of this influence is the role that they play in perpetuating a phenomenon identified by Rhoades (2010) as "strategic imitation," the mimicking of behaviors of higher ranked institutions, or "aspirational peers," that lower-ranked institutions seek to emulate. For example, upon assuming their positions, new presidents and provosts often identify a set of aspirational peers for the purposes of strategic planning. As part of the process, the names of the aspirational peers then feature prominently in the everyday rhetoric of institutional leaders and in the benchmarking exercises of institutional researchers. The drive to rise in rankings provides a powerful incentive for institutional leaders to restructure academic programs and even institutions as a whole so that they more closely resemble aspirational peers at the expense of institutional and programmatic diversity, both regionally and nationally (Rhoades et al, 2008; Rhoades, 2010).

Flawed Instrumentation. Too often, inexact wording in survey instruments leads to confusion. For example, those completing surveys may not understand what measures of quality refer to which unit (e.g., department versus program versus university).

Focus on Inputs. Because dominant rankings rely heavily on inputs, simply knowing the input measures, such as student selectivity, age of institution, endowment, faculty productivity, and alumni giving, can be sufficient to predict an institution's ranking. For example, Webster (2001) showed a severe and pervasive set of relationships between average SAT score and predicted retention and graduation rates. Webster further found average SAT and ACT scores of incoming students to be the most influential criteria in determining where an institution ranks. While these relationships reveal nothing about the quality of the undergraduate experience, they reinforce an unfortunate tendency among colleges and universities to recruit students whose SAT scores can be read as a

measure of institutional quality. Kuh and Pascarella (2004) arrived at a similar finding in their examination of 50 universities participating in *USNWR* rankings.

Additionally, dominant ranking systems tend to imbue certain inputs with greater significance or predictive value than is warranted. For example, ranking systems associate the number of prolific faculty employed at an institution with the quality of the institutional environment. Yet, the fact that highly productive faculty tend to be associated with prestigious institutions may have more to do with their preference for working at these institutions than institutional efforts to create a supportive environment for faculty work.

Limited Mobility within the Ranking System. Though ranking systems imply a certain level of fluidity, there is in fact remarkably little long-term mobility at the top of the *USNWR* rankings. Johns Hopkins, for instance, has always ranked between ten and 22, and Harvard between one and three (Dichev, 2001). Because the institutions being ranked vary with respect to contexts and resources, and dominant ranking systems favor highly-selective and resource-rich institutions, possibilities for mobility are largely illusory. Even when evidence of mobility exists, research shows that it is based less on a change in "quality" and more on shifts in measurements and methodologies from year to year. Dichev (2001) found most of the changes in the rankings (70-80%) are due to meaningless "noise"—i.e., changes in measurement estimation and information processing errors in the ranking's underlying components. "About 30 percent of a given change in the rankings reverses in the very next ranking and another 23 percent unravels in the 2 year ahead ranking" (p. 248). In one year the ranking systems may give more statistical weight to a measure that has attracted much interest in higher education (such as cash value of fringe benefits adjusted for regional variations), resulting in shifts in the ranking status for some institutions. Once interest has waned, however, the category is eliminated, and the rankings stabilize. Dichev notes changes in the weightings of financial resources, faculty resources, and alumni satisfaction between 1991 and 1993. Whereas changes in fundamental school quality account for only about ten percent of the changes in published school rankings, variation in changes for faculty resources is the main driver of that ten percent.

Questionable Rewards. One could argue that attracting more academically talented students and faculty skilled at drawing outside funding benefits institutions in several ways. First, doing so increases institutional prestige. Also, because a large percentage of academically talented students come from middle- and upper-middle-class households with parents that can afford to pay all or most of the tuition and fees, an institution might see financial gains associated with reduced need to offer financial aid. In fact, students most likely to rely on rankings come from second- or third-generation college-educated homes and have significant cultural capital and resources (McDonough et al, 1995). Indeed dominant ranking systems reward institutions that strive to attract students who are almost guaranteed to be academically successful and faculty who increase institutional resources by obtaining outside funding. But the administrative costs of recruiting and supporting these groups are considerable. In fact, rankings contribute to a winner-take-all environment: The ranking systems serve to reward those at the top with the most resources. The same is true within institutions, as departments that are highly ranked receive more resources to improve themselves; those with poorer rankings the least (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Perhaps even more disquieting is the price that society pays when colleges and universities make decisions that prioritize self-interest over the interests of the public realm. The race to enroll academically successful and financially flush students ultimately hampers the diversity and social mobility functions of the higher education system.

Disturbing Consequences. Assessing the performance of many college presidents (much less directors of admissions and development) based on such factors as admissions and alumni giving has led to some dubious behavior. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *New York Times* have been replete with examples of higher education administrators who fabricated the numbers in order to move their institution up in the rankings. Additionally, efforts to reach certain institutional targets incentivize institutions to accept more students on early-decision, to reject qualified applicants who are likely not to attend, and to recruit students to apply who are not likely to get in. Most of these same institutions require their students to sign honor codes saying they will not cheat, yet many are modeling exactly the opposite behavior in their attempts to game the dominant ranking systems to their advantage.

Of further concern is that most of the dominant research- and reputation-based rankings are published for for-profit businesses whose underlying profit motive may hamper their ability to objectively assess quality. This may lead such companies to oversimplify complex criteria, cater to certain stakeholders within the market (such as MBA programs as opposed to TRIO students and their families), and be resistant to change criteria that are fatally flawed but popular.

Most important, we argue that the dominant ranking systems miss certain essential purposes and goals of higher education. The research- and reputation-based rankings rarely address important process issues like student engagement, hours spent studying, and value-added college experiences, including internships, study abroad opportunities and service learning. They shed no light on how college shapes people as learners and citizens, contributes to social change, revitalizes communities, or enhances social mobility. We recognize that rankings could not possibly be all things to all people, but we think the dominant ranking systems and the attention they receive have marginalized many significant roles that higher education can play in the lives of individuals and in society at large. We will explore this argument further after discussing some of the assets of ranking systems in the next section.

Benefits of Ranking Systems

Before acknowledging the benefits of ranking systems, we want to note that there have been significant improvements in *USNWR* methodologies over the last five years, in ways that mitigate some of the limitations we have mentioned, such as decreasing the weight of reputation-based criteria, extending the reputational survey mailings to include admissions counselors, creation of alternative niche rankings (such as for service-learning programs). For example, in the case of expanding reputational surveys to guidance counselors, they have added a new perspective to that criterion. Guidance counselors work with students and their families and have a distinct perspective on what colleges are offering and who they are attracting. Likewise, on the international stage, *Times Higher Education* recently retooled its ranking system with the help of a new partner (Thomson Reuters, replacing QS) by incorporating measures intended to reflect

teaching quality, as well as measures for research quality, innovation, and internationalization.

There are several ways in which ranking systems can benefit individual institutions and higher education as a whole. First, some of the criteria, especially many of the newer ones, provide a reason to collect data on noteworthy aspects of higher education such as class size and faculty-student ratios, four-year graduation rates, students receiving nationally competitive awards, and four-year debt load for typical student borrowers. As such, the ranking systems require institutions to produce data that can be mined for institutional research and used for institutional improvement. Second, even though there is limited mobility within dominant ranking systems, occasionally a less visible institution benefits from the free marketing that accompanies media attention for an improved ranking. Third, ranking systems create an external accountability medium in the areas they evaluate, isolating areas of importance for institutions to improve upon in order to achieve upward movement in the rankings. Ranking systems can prioritize and incentivize certain areas of measurement that can benefit society as a whole—for instance, boosting graduation rates. Fourth, the world rankings have caused many more American research universities and faculty to pay attention to their competition in other countries and may even have promoted additional exchange of scholars and students. Fifth, institutions that have seen improvement in the rankings over short or long periods of time can use the rankings to boost morale or celebrate institutional progress toward a goal, providing a motivating force for faculty and staff. Finally, dominant ranking systems provide information to consumers and stakeholders that may help them navigate some of the complexities associated with institutions of higher education.

Perhaps most important to us though, the dominant research- and reputation-based rankings have created a forum for dialogue about the purposes of higher education and how to measure quality. In the next section we explore recent additions to the ranking system industry which expand this dialogue.

Recent Alternatives to Dominant Rankings

As many readers know, there have been some important newcomers to the world of rankings. Three examples are *Washington Monthly*, The Voluntary System of Accountability, and the Education Trust's rating of public flagships in a report entitled *Opportunity Adrift*. *Washington Monthly*'s ranking system includes criteria for service (as measured by the size of Army/Navy ROTC programs relative to the size of the school, the number of alumni currently serving in the Peace Corps, and the percentage of federal work-study grant money spent on community-service projects) and criteria for social mobility (as measured by the percentage of Pell grant recipients, SAT scores, and graduation rates)—which serve as indicators of an institution's efforts to enroll low-income students. As *Washington Monthly* observes, "our approach is fundamentally different from *USNWR* and similar guides: instead of focusing on what colleges can do for you, we ask what colleges are doing for the country by improving social mobility, producing research and promoting public service" (Glastris, 2009).

The Voluntary System of Accountability recommends that institutions use one of three measures—the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency, or Collegiate Learning Assessment—to assess student learning. For example, the Collegiate Learning Assessment "presents realistic problems

that require students to analyze complex materials and determine the relevance to the task and credibility. Students' written responses to the tasks are evaluated to assess their abilities to think critically, reason analytically, solve problems and communicate clearly and cogently" (Council for Aid to Education, 2009). Shulenburger, Mehaffy, and Keller (2008) point out that such measures provide an alternative to standardized tests that cannot measure high-level skills. Students, however, take the assessments on a voluntary basis, so there are concerns about the representativeness of the sample and the degree to which the three instruments are measuring the same skills.

In early 2010, the Education Trust released a report and ranking, *Opportunity Adrift,* a follow-up to *Engines of Inequality*, an unprecedented 2006 study of access and success with respect to 50 U.S. public flagship universities—typically the oldest, largest, and most prestigious in each state. *Opportunity Adrift* includes ratings on access for low-income and underrepresented minority students, on the relative success of students from those groups in earning a degree, and on the changes in these ratings over time.

After having examined the existing world of ranking systems, our class deliberated on the areas where we felt dominant ranking systems and newer alternatives were paying insufficient attention. What kinds of higher education contributions and outcomes were left out of the spotlight? What kinds of unintended consequences of ranking systems need to be avoided? Our deliberations were informed by the views of several class speakers whose professional work intersects with the issue of rankings in higher education (i.e., George Mehaffy from AASCU, Peter Eckel from ACE, Alan Bloomgarden from Mount Holyoke, Sean Simone from NCES, Mona Levine and Mike Pascarella George from UMCP, Bob Morse from *USNWR*, and Ellen Hazelkorn and Brian Sponsler from IHEP). Finally, we considered the priorities and values we ourselves bring to the higher education enterprise—what we think is important and needs to be monitored, assessed, and celebrated. In the next section, we outline three areas that emerged from class discussions and that we see as emblematic of critical purposes of higher education that, unranked, could suffer from a lack of institutional prioritization.

Ranking Alternative, but Core, Commitments of Higher Education

We argue that the dominant research- and reputation-based ranking systems obscure the innovative and change-oriented goals of colleges and universities that are both vital to the well-being of the communities in which they reside and that educate the vast majority of an increasingly diverse student population. The first author on this paper, for example, has studied faculty community engagement for many years, as well as academic reward systems. In her research—whether exploring the use of a broader definition of scholarship in promotion and tenure decisions, or the challenges that community-engaged faculty face in the academy—faculty and administrators repeatedly referred to *USNWR* as a major obstacle to change in higher education. (To be fair, they could also have targeted *The Princeton Review* or Shanghai Jiao Tong's Academic Ranking of World Universities.) The issue raised by these faculty and administrators is that the criteria for and measurement of excellence included in the most dominant national and international ranking systems favor very traditional measures of research productivity. As referenced earlier, such measures include publication in peer-reviewed journals, national research awards, and the procurement of external grant dollars. Often community-engaged scholars disseminate their scholarship in more applied venues such as policy reports, grant applications, and curriculum guides that are not recognized in

rankings criteria. Further, rankings devalue interdisciplinary work by emphasizing citations in traditional discipline-based journals and failing to collect data on joint appointments as well as on interdepartmental collaboration. Omissions such as these effectively ignore a growing awareness within the academy that disciplinary approaches alone are insufficient to understanding and solving the problems of a complex world as well as the central role that many colleges and universities play in their communities.

Being a steward of place. As mentioned above, a leading voice in the engagement movement, George Mehaffy of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), served as a guest speaker in our rankings course. As an introduction to AASCU's work on the concept of institutions serving as "stewards of place," George posed a question we know he has asked elsewhere: "Consider two institutions—Eastern New Mexico and Harvard University. Now consider that an asteroid will unfortunately be falling on one or the other of these institutions and leave a great gaping hole in the ground where it once was. Which institution will be more greatly missed—not by the world or even the disciplines—but by the people who live all around that hole?"

This colorful example aptly describes what AASCU considers a signature feature of its institutions—that public colleges and universities matter to the communities and regions that surround them. They are integrated in such fundamental ways that if they were to disappear, it would irrevocably harm the educational, cultural, economic, health care, and leadership enterprises of those communities.

Among the 430 colleges and universities that comprise AASCU's membership, there are excellent models of campuses that are deeply engaged with their communities. They have become the "anchor institutions" that, as Nancy Cantor (2009) notes, so many communities rely on for support when times are bad and as engines of growth when they are good. Yet, scant attention has been paid to best practices of community-engaged institutions by dominant ranking systems, thereby limiting opportunities to influence the practices of less-engaged peers. Furthermore, while community engagement leaders have made significant progress in benchmarking the degree to which institutions are engaged (see, for example, the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement: http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf), little work has illuminated actual and specific contributions to a community and broader region. In a recent article in *Public Purpose* (Meekins & O'Meara, 2011), we suggest a set of criteria for measuring and ranking such contributions that institutions make as "stewards of place."

The kinds of contributions colleges and universities make to their communities depends on geography, resources, academic programs, and the condition of the communities themselves, making comparisons among institutions difficult. Additionally, institutionalizing community engagement will be influenced by factors idiosyncratic to individual institutional cultures and resources. The Carnegie classification, however, has found ways to take this into account, by evaluating commitment to community engagement based on the missions and resources of each individual campus rather than against a one-size-fits-all rubric. If a major goal of ranking systems *could be* to bring attention to important but typically under-examined institutional qualities, we believe that an institution's community engagement is one such criterion worthy of inclusion.

Developing citizens and leaders. While some important new sources of data on student engagement have emerged over the last 15 years (e.g., NSSE, SESSE, CIRP),

as well as some important new studies of student leadership, we do not have a systematic way of ranking or rating institutions on the degree to which they form and shape the civic and leadership capacity of students. Pope's classic *Colleges that Change Lives* (2006) and Daloz et al.'s *Common Fire* (1996) are research studies that consider the characteristics of colleges that matter in cultivating individuals who serve the public good. Additionally, *The Princeton Review* now publishes a guide entitled *Colleges with a Conscience* that highlights colleges and universities that prioritize community involvement. We are now at a time that the American Commonwealth Partnership, AACU, and the U.S. Department of Higher Education have referred to as "a crucible moment" in democratic education. Higher education can, and in some circumstances does, play a critical role in enhancing the civic knowledge, skills, and values of students. More needs to be done, however, to showcase this critical aspect of higher education service. If the purpose of a college education is at least in part to develop leaders and civic agents involved in the political and social lives of their communities—and we believe it is—then those institutions that prioritize this kind of education and experience should be given greater visibility.

Enhancing social mobility. If we as a nation truly endorse the axiom that every American should have an opportunity to improve his or her life and standing in society through hard work and education, then it follows that we should reward higher education institutions that successfully recruit, retain, and graduate first-generation students. *Washington Monthly* has taken positive steps by including the number of student Pell-grant recipients among their criteria. The Gates and Lumina Foundations have made access to a two- and four-year degree a focus of their work and have supported institutions that make graduation of first-generation students a priority. As we have argued above, while many existing ranking systems give points to institutions for high graduation rates, the process used can end up rewarding institutions that endeavor to recruit and admit academically talented students. The focus on improving rankings can obscure institutional efforts to improve the undergraduate educational environment in ways that facilitate the success of all students, in particular those who are the first in their families to attend college. Among the exemplary institutions profiled in Pope (2006) are many with small endowments and few academic "super stars" represented in incoming freshmen classes that have achieved this end. We would like to see more ranking criteria that reward institutions that invest in student success and enhance their chances for social mobility and talent development.

We Need New Visions of the Possible

Dominant research- and reputation-based ranking systems for undergraduate programs gained prominence in the 1980s and have been a major topic of study and debate ever since. Whether we like them or not, they are constantly influencing institutional identity, aspirations, and cultures. By and large, as we have argued, the assumptions and expectations informing dominant ranking systems are flawed by methodologies that mistake inputs for outcomes, a reliance on traditional forms of research and teaching that have limited utility in complex, dynamic, regional, national and global contexts, and a tendency to give short shrift to the rich diversity of institutional types, missions, and goals that characterize the landscape of higher education. Returning to Birnbaum's (2006) observations, these dominant ranking systems gain legitimacy by purporting to put forward objective assessments of institutional quality. However, there are ideologies

behind each and every criterion used about the nature of quality in higher education. Those who use the ranking systems often assume a high overall ranking means quality in areas not ranked.

Within the academy, we contend that dominant ranking systems fail to capture central goals and purposes of higher education that many of us—from faculty to deans of students—value and that underpin our work to create educational environments in which all students succeed. The good news is that ranking systems continue to evolve. We would suggest that the seeds of ranking systems that inspire competition by rewarding institutional behaviors that contribute to the public good have been planted, as evidenced by recent changes to existing ranking systems and the addition of newer alternatives. Some will likely argue that evaluating institutions on measures that are not easily quantified, such as student leadership development, social mobility, or community impact, is unachievable. Admittedly, assessing things that cannot be easily counted is a challenge. What we assess and rank, however, tends to influence what matters in higher education. It is therefore important to assess the things that count.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ranking Systems for Higher Education

Domestic Focus (examples of popular rankings)

Publisher:	*Focus on:*	*Web Reference:*
U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)	Reputational surveys, selectivity, graduation and retention rates, faculty resources, financial resources, alumni giving, graduation rate progress	http://colleges.usnews.rankingsand reviews.com/best-colleges
The Princeton Review	"Best 376 Colleges"	http://www.princetonreview.com/ college-rankings.aspx
Washington Monthly	Social mobility, research, and service	http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ college_guide/rankings_2010/ national_university_rank.php
Forbes "America's Best Colleges"	Student satisfaction, postgraduate success, student debt, four-year graduation rate, competitive awards	http://www.forbes.com/2010/08/11/ best-colleges-universities-rating-ranking-opinions-best-colleges-10_land.html
Payscale College Salary Report	Salary data from Payscale users	http://www.payscale.com/best-colleges
State University	A mix of non-reputational, government reported data	http://www.stateuniversity.com/
College Prowler Rankings	A variety including campus dining, housing, strictness, social life, safety, parking, and weather	http://collegeprowler.com/rankings/
The Chronicle of Higher Education's "Great Colleges to Work For"	Workplace issues including governance, compensation, benefits, career development, an satisfaction	http://chroniclegreatcolleges.com/
"Rugg's Recommendations on Colleges"	Academic departments and programs	http://www.ruggsrecommendations. com/
Bloomberg BusinessWeek "Best B-Schools"	Focus on business schools: academic quality, student satisfaction, job placement	http://www.businessweek.com/ business-schools/

Domestic Focus (examples of popular rankings)

Publisher:	Focus on:	Web Reference:
The Center for Measuring University Performance	Total research dollars, funding, endowments, annual giving, faculty awards, student competitiveness	http://mup.asu.edu/
The Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index	Citations, publications, research funding	http://chronicle.com/stats/productivity/
Kiplinger's 100 Best Values	Academic quality (selectivity), cost, and financial aid for public institutions	http://www.kiplinger.com/tools/colleges/
Princeton Review/USA Today, Top 100 Best Value Colleges	"High-quality academics at a reasonable price"	http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/best-value-colleges.htm
My Chances College Rankings	Aggregated from student admissions decisions	http://college.mychances.net/college-rankings.php
The Global Language Monitor's College Rankings (TrendTopper MediaBuzz Rankings)	Based upon number of keyword appearances on the Internet	http://www.languagemonitor.com/college-rankings/
What Will They Learn? (American Council of Trustees and Alumni)	Core requirements: composition, literature, foreign language, U.S. history, economics, math, science	http://www.whatwilltheylearn.com/

International Focus (examples of popular rankings)

Publisher:	Focus on:	Web Reference:
"Academic Ranking of World Universities" (Shanghai Jiao Tong University) – often referred to as "the Shanghai rankings"	Nobel and Field winners, citation indices, publications in *Nature* and *Science*, per capita performance	http://www.arwu.org/
Times Higher Education (UK) (as of 2010 publishing separate from QS)	Teaching, citations, research (volume, income, and reputation), international mix, and industry income	http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/index.html

International Focus (examples of popular rankings)

Publisher:	*Focus on:*	*Web Reference:*
QS World University Rankings (UK) (Quacquarelli Symonds Limited)	Academic reputation (peer review), employer reputation, student-to-faculty ratio, citations per faculty, and international students and faculty.	http://www.topuniversities.com/
G-Factor International University Ranking (USA)	Using Google search engine, ranks links to a particular institution from the websites of others	http://universitymetrics.com/g-factor
Webometrics World University Rankings on the Web (Spain)	Web publication: visibility (external links), size, rich files, Google Scholar	http://www.webometrics.info
Maclean's (Canada)	Student award winners, student-to-faculty ratio, faculty grants and awards, resources, student support, library, and reputation (peer review)	http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/rankings/
"International Professional Classification of Higher Education Institutions" - Ecole des Mines de Paris (France)	Alma maters of Fortune 500 CEOs	http://www.mines-paristech.fr/Actualites/PR/
Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan	Scientific papers citations: research productivity, research impact, and research excellence	http://ranking.heeact.edu.tw/en-us/2009/Page/Methodology
RatER (Rating of Educational Resources) (Russia)	Educational activity, research activity, faculty professional competence, financial maintenance, international activity, web volume	http://www.globaluniversitiesranking.org/
CHE Excellence Ranking (Center for Higher Education Development) (Germany)	European graduate study (by discipline/department)	http://www.excellenceranking.org/eusid/EUSID
4 International Colleges & Universities Web Ranking (Australia)	Web metrics: Google, Yahoo!, and Alexa	http://www.4icu.org/

International Focus (examples of popular rankings)

Publisher:	Focus on:	Web Reference:
High Impact Universities (Australia)	Research Performance Index: quality and consistency of publication	http://www.highimpactuniversities.com/
Scimago Institutions Rankings (Ibero-American Rankings) (Spain)	Research: scientific output, international collaboration, average scientific quality, publication rate	http://www.scimagoir.com/

Appendix B: Framework for Analysis of Ranking Systems

Area of Analysis:	Framing Questions:
History	Why was this ranking system created? By whom?
Stakeholders	Who is the ranking intended to serve?
The field	Who is included and excluded? What are the boundaries (e.g., national or international, 2- or 4-year institutions?)
Criteria	What counts in this ranking system and why?
Measurement	How are the criteria evaluated? What are the methods for collecting data? What is the process?
Consequences	What behavior and outcomes do the rankings encourage?
Key contributions and alternatives	What is most distinctive and useful from this ranking? How could it be more effective at accomplishing its stated goals?