Case Study

RANKINGS

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The most well known global university rankings are those of

QS (https://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings)

THES (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2019/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats)

CWUR (https://cwur.org/2018-19.php)

USNews (https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/articles/slideshows/us-news-best-global-universities)

Shanghai Jiaotong ranking Academic Ranking of World Universities (www.shanghairanking.com/)

Methodologies overlap to some extent but also show great variation:

USNews uses "*13 indicators that measure academic research performance, global and regional reputations, global research reputation, regional research reputation and publications*"

QS relies upon academic reputation, employer reputation and publications.

THES uses performance indicators grouped into five areas: **teaching** (the learning environment); **research** (volume, income and reputation); **citations** (research influence); **international outlook** (staff, students and research); and **industry income** (knowledge transfer).

Centre for world University Rankings (CWUR) uses 7 indicators: quality of education; alumni employment; quality of faculty; research output; quality of publications; influence; citations

Shanghai ranking (ARWU - Academic Ranking of world Universities) as its name suggests is purely concerned with academic qualities such as publications and quality of teaching

For this reason rankings are unlikely to agree. Most of these rankings would place the following universities very high in their list: MIT, Stanford, Harvard, CalTech, Oxford, Cambridge. However they would disagree on who would make up the rest of their “best global universities”: options at present include Imperial, ETH Zurich, Chicago, UCL, Yale, Princeton, Chicago, UC Berkeley and Columbia. As an example of the nature of the variation to be found, UC Berkeley provides an excellent example: UCB ranges from 4 to 27 depending upon the ranking chosen.

What this means among other things is that quality is far more widely diffused than rankings might suggest. The example of UC Berkeley above shows that, rather than take a ranking as a precise measure of quality, better to treat rankings in the round i.e. accept that a university that can get into a top 50 or 100 ranking is likely to be a very good university and don't believe that a ranking of 15 automatically means greater "quality" than a ranking of 25.

For further insight into these issues see https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/university-news/comparing-world-university-rankings-qs-shanghai which has an excellent piece of advice:

“If you’re looking for a university that has an enviable record of consistently producing high-quality research, try the Shanghai ranking. If you’re looking for a university which is well-regarded by employers and other academics, and will set you up perfectly for a well-paid graduate job, the QS World University Ranking should be your first port of call. And, if you want to see a ranking which attempts to reflect both a university’s research impact and its reputation, the Times Higher Education ranking is worth checking out, as it considers more variables than the other two.”