Rankings as a Student Information Tool

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Contents of Presentation

- Why rankings?
- Approaches to rankings
- Indicators and critiques
- Brief history of student information tools in the Netherlands
- Methodology of student information tools
- Pilot project cooperation
  Netherlands – Belgium – Germany
- Conclusion
For Whom is Ranking?

- For students: ‘where shall I go and study?’
- For HEIs: ‘against whom am I competing?’; ‘Who’s the benchmark?’
- For policy makers: ‘Where should special funding be allocated?’
- For society: ‘where has my physician graduated?’
- For employers: ‘am I recruiting the right person for the right job? Where did s/he graduate?’
Existing Approaches to Rankings

- Who conducts the rankings?
- How are the rankings presented?
- How are variables put together to create the ranking?
Who Conducts the Ranking?

- Magazines, e.g.:
  - USNWR (US), Times (UK), Guardian (UK), Repubblica (I)...

- Educational publishers, e.g.:
  - Barron’s (US), Good Guides (AUS)

- University-based Groups e.g.:
  - Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China)
What Format of Rankings?

- Straight Numerical Rankings
- Clusters or groupings, in which institutions are assembled into clusters of similar quality
- ‘Top Level’ approach,
  - Only the top institutions are ranked numerically, while the ‘worse’ performers are grouped
How Indicators Are Presented

- **‘Weight-and-sum’ approach**
  - Indicators are combined to produce an overall institutional score.
  - Each indicator is assigned a weight according to its perceived importance.

- **Neutral comparisons (not weighted)**
  - All indicators must be shown for all institutions.
  - Use of interactive technology.
How to Rank – and How Not
An Example of a Widely Accepted Ranking

clear, unequivocal positions

clear rules for calculation of overall score
Can We Rank HEIs Like That?

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Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (1)

- Reputation and Prestige: peer evaluations through, e.g., surveys of other (similar) institutions’ presidents and deans.
  - Subjective measure
  - Problem of circularity
    - ‘New’ universities are almost always ranked below the ‘old’
  - Proximity (foreign universities are less known)
    - Except the ‘usual top-10’
  - Reputation and prestige privilege research-oriented
Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (2)

- Student Characteristics, e.g. acceptance rates, high school class standing, entrance test scores, student diversity
  - Reputational conception of quality, often adopted in HEIs’ admission policies
  - Resource notion of quality
    - Problem: input measures fail to measure what the university provides to students
Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (3)

- Staff characteristics, e.g. salary
  - This variable mostly measures the institutional value placed on research, for it is the best researchers (not teachers) who typically earn the highest salaries.
- Proportion of full-time staff
- Proportion of staff with Ph.D.
Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (4)

- Student faculty relationship, e.g.
  - Student Staff Ratio and class size
    - However, optimal class size is a function of discipline

- Student satisfaction

- Assets, e.g. funding
  - Without information on how funds are spent these measures are difficult to interpret as measures of institutional quality
Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (5)

- **Expenditures**
  - How much is an institution committed to teaching/learning and/or research?
  - Suitable for inter-institutional comparisons, but what is actually included in the investments?
  - Lack of standardised formats for reporting expenditures
  - Can a HEI that spends more to achieve a similar result than another HEI be ranked higher for this very fact?
Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (6)

- Student Grades/Test Scores
- Retention Rates and Graduation Rates
  - Problem of grade inflation: rankings that rely heavily or entirely on this indicator favour institutions with lower academic standards over more demanding HEIs
- Graduate employment
  - No control on influencing factors e.g. social background and connections
Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (7)

- **Research**
  - Bibliometrics (e.g. number of publications and citations),
  - Number of faculty with special awards (e.g. the Nobel Prize),
  - Financial indicators of research (e.g. the research budget, number of research grants etc.) and
  - The number of patents issued. Moreover, some other rankings utilise also the number of Master and Ph.D.

- **Other**, such as alumni giving, etc.
The Dilemmas of Ranking (1)

- Universities have different goals and missions
- Universities are internally differentiated: cannot be measured as a whole
- Bias towards research (low/no focus on teaching quality)
- Popularity contests (appreciation vs. facts)
- Bias towards natural & medical sciences
- Bias towards English language / Anglo-Saxon world
- Tables vary in their validity, comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, relevance, and functionality
- Rankings share broad principles and approaches, but differ considerably in detail
- Variations related to: different aims, systems, cultures and availability and reliability of data
A Multidimensional ‘Ranking’: The CHE Approach

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<td>labour market, employability</td>
<td>overall assessment (students, professors)</td>
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History of Student Information in the Netherlands

- 1980s: Minister supports data collection + book publication ‘Choice Guide’
- Ca. 2000: web-based student information tools appear in Britain, Germany
- 2006: Netherlands web site appears: [www.studychoice123.nl](http://www.studychoice123.nl) (English)
- 2006-2007: pilot in internationalisation:
  - connect SK123 with German CHE- ‘ranking’ and
  - introduce CHE method in Belgium
Aims and Target Groups

1. Information for prospective / mobile students

   = primary target group

2. Information for HEIs (benchmarking)

Challenge: find a balance between reduction of complexity for least informed students vs. detailed information for HEIs
Methodological Principles

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<th>Organised by disciplines / fields</th>
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<td>Multidimensional</td>
<td>No aggregated overall score</td>
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<td>Multi-perspective</td>
<td>Not just one data source</td>
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<td>Robust rank groups: Top [Green]</td>
<td>No spurious precision of league tables</td>
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<td>and Bottom group [Red]</td>
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Major Data Sources

- National statistics
  - From state statistics agency
  - From Ministry of Education
- Alumni survey

- Institutional data
  - Paper + Web form
- Student survey
  - Telephone + web-based
Data Sources Not Used

- Reputation among professors
  - E.g. ‘Where would you send your child?’
  - Note: only works well if
    - Professors know their colleagues
      - Not internationally, except for ‘stars’
    - Reputations relate to teaching performance
      - In fact mostly research-based

- Accreditation status
  - It is a precondition for getting mentioned, therefore not a variable anymore
Compare more than 2500 studies in the Netherlands

The Netherlands offer a world-class education system, with qualifications that make a real difference to your career. This website gives you details of all English-taught and Dutch-taught bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes.

Look, compare and choose. That’s Studychoice.nl

Students
Go international. Be ambitious. Compare all English-taught bachelor’s and masters degree programmes in Holland.

[More info]

School-leavers
Study in Holland. Are you up to the challenge? Compare all English-taught bachelor’s degree programmes. Be critical. It’s your future!

[More info]

Advisors
Give your students good, honest advice about study in Holland. Our unique website gives you all the tools you need.

[More info]

News
[10.02] More Mexican students in Holland

[More info]
All bachelor's and master's programmes

Here you will find all English-taught bachelor's and master's degree programmes in the Netherlands. We provide quality, survey-based information on each programme. This website is a joint, non-profit initiative of the higher education sector in the Netherlands.

Look, Compare and Choose. That's Studiechoice.nl. Click here.

Compare more than 2500 studies in the Netherlands (English and Dutch)

Compare now! Click here.

My opinion

Name: Alma Gonzalez from Mexico
Age: 32
Study programme: Biomedical Sciences

"I know Holland was small, but I didn't realize it was a melting pot of cultures! It's quite a relief to know that you can get by in English. The universities are free of politics, quite different than back home."

"I wanted to know the average starting salary"

A teacher suggested Holland. Studiechoice.nl provides study information about all universities, as well as information obtained from a number of surveys. I wanted to know whether it's easy to find work in my discipline. The study is fantastic!

Poll

I am interested in studying in the Netherlands because...

- The Netherlands has good job opportunities
- This programme is only offered in the Netherlands
- The quality of education in the Netherlands is renowned
- The tuition fees in the Netherlands are low

Vote now!
Study programmes
Go straight to all bachelor's and master's programmes.

Choose programmes
Choose fields of study and programmes to compare.

Select criteria
Choose from more than 90 different criteria to make a comparison.
### Results of search query

**New search**: economics

**Filter results**: HBO and WO

#### Information of the association and the selected courses on score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Career preparation (student opinion)</th>
<th>Teaching quality (student opinion)</th>
<th>Ease of study (student opinion)</th>
<th>Study &amp; teaching facilities (student opinion)</th>
<th>Study intensity avg. hours/wk</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HAN-University, Arnhem</td>
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</table>
### New search
- **Bachelor**
- **Master**
- **Economics**
- **English only**
- **HBO and WO**
- **All regions**

### Filter results

<table>
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</table>
Pilot Project: NL – BE - DE

- CHE approach is the better-known version of SK123
- European Commission wants to stimulate European mobility of students
- Project aims:
  - Link existing Student Info Tools (NL)
  - Introduce CHE approach in a ‘new’ country (BE)
Experiences Pilot Project: Linking Student Info Tools

- Data collection differs in 2 countries
  - Different administrative systems
    - E.g. how to count ‘professors’, ‘students’?
  - Different political issues 
    - different ideas of what are relevant data/dimensions
    - E.g. gender balance
  - Different survey approaches
    - Ask for general opinions vs. ask for detailed data
    - E.g. ... (see next slides)
### CHE Questions on Courses

**Question No. 5**

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the **coursework (instruction)** of your Masters programme?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursework (Instruction)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly disagree</th>
<th>Mildly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>The quality of theory training is excellent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The quality of methodology training is excellent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the level of interdisciplinarity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the variety of course content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The quality of instruction is excellent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The courses are relevant to my research interests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have sufficient opportunity to participate in research.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction with PhD students is vivid.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If coursework is offered in another language than the national language of the country in which you study: The language skills of teachers are sufficient.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
SK123 Questions on Courses

- The extent to which the course work material is interesting ............... (rate)
- The Level of the Study Material ................................. (rate)
Experiences Pilot Project: Student Responses

- Low response rates
- Validity: is there a bias in responses?
- Comparability of judgements
  - Students have different expectation levels
    - German students are satisfied with situations that Dutch students find unsatisfactory
    - Same also applies within a single country
      - Students in Amsterdam are more critical than students in Enschede
  - This leads to bias of ranking
    - Dutch study programmes are valued lower than German programmes
    - In Netherlands: Enschede is the ‘best’ town for students??
Conclusion

- Student information tools are in high demand
  - Students use web sites next to school advice and ‘informal’ information
- Collecting data is hard work
  - Validity is far from perfect
- International student information tools presuppose demand for international mobility
  - In Europe: small part of students, mostly at Master or Ph.D.-course levels