Reputation and rankings

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ABSTRACT
Over the last decade global rankings of universities have begun to grow in importance allowing national and international comparison of higher education institutions. In fact, they are already at the heart of public discussion about the role of universities in our societies because they provide a way of measuring and comparing the quality and results of these institutions and thereby, influencing their reputation. The most important of these rankings (such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities, Shanghai Ranking, Times Higher Education World University Ranking, and QS World University Ranking). All of these put universities into a league table where the ranking of a given institution is based on a composite score that reflects the weights of several individual indicators. This article reviews the methodology of three rankings, focusing on their limitations and weaknesses (such as over-stressing research or their subjectivity in setting specific weights for each individual indicator). Finally, we present the U-Multirank, promoted by the European Commission, which seeks to overcome the limitations of traditional rankings. It is an alternative way to rank universities, based on their performance as gauged by a wide number of indicators in five dimensions—(1) Teaching and Learning; (2) Research; (3) Knowledge Transfer; (4) International Orientation; (5) Regional Engagement—and in several subjects.

Keywords: rankings, universities, reputation, U-Multirank.

INTRODUCTION

Global rankings of universities began to emerge a little over a decade ago. Since then, they have gained considerable importance as a yardstick of higher education institutions' performance. They also began to elicit great interest among the public, politicians, and university managers. It has now become impossible for universities to ignore the results of such rankings and the comparisons drawn with other higher education institutions at home and abroad. Given the impact that university rankings have acquired when it comes to academic reputation, it is worth understanding how rankings are drawn up and their strengths and weaknesses.

The following sections of this paper look at the rankings with the greatest worldwide media impact: the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), also known as the Shanghai Ranking[1], Times Higher Education World University Ranking (THE)[2], and QS World University Ranking (QS)[3]; we will examine their strengths and weaknesses. Next, we examine the new U-Multirank[4] system ranking which was created with the support of the European Commission. Here, one should note that U-Multirank was designed to overcome some of the methodological deficiencies of traditional rankings. A brief section covering final considerations concludes the paper.

TRADITIONAL RANKINGS

Following the work of Rauhvargers (2011 and 2013), Universidad.es (2014), Sanz-Casado (2015), and Fundación CYD (2016), as well as the websites of the ranking organisations, one should note that the ARWU, THE, and QS have some basic common features. All three were conceived as general rankings to place higher education institutions in rank order, taking their performance as a whole. All three rankings were constructed on a synthetic indicator comprising a set of individual indicators, each given a certain weight. The final ranking of universities emulate football league tables.

The ARWU ranking was the first to appear and at the time it received the most media coverage. It is a world ranking of universities drawn up by the Centre for World-Class Universities at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. It was first published in 2003, when it analysed over 1,200 higher education institutions and then ranked the 500 institutions considered to be the best from those surveyed.

1 See: http://www.shanghairanking.com/index.html

2 See: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings

3 See: http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings

4 See: http://www.umultirank.org/#!/home?trackType=home

From the methodological standpoint, the ARWU took six indicators into consideration, namely: (1) the number of alumni with a bachelor's, degree Master's, or PhD degree, who had received a Nobel Prize or the Fields Medal for Mathematics (10% weight in the score); (2) the number of university professors linked to the institution when they received a Nobel Prize for Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Economics, or the Fields Medal for Mathematics (20%)[5]; (3) the number of papers published by the university faculty in *Nature* or *Science* in the last five years (20%)[6]; (4) the number of articles catalogued by the Expanded Science Citation Index and the Social Science Citation Index during the previous year (20%)[7]; (5) the number of university faculty members in the 21 categories defined by Clarivate Analytics[8] in its list of Highly-Cited Researchers (20%)[9]; (6) academic performance in relation to the institution's size (weights of the five previous indicators divided by the number of full-time faculty members), with a 10% weight in the overall ranking score.

Apart from these indicators and weights, the ranking assigns the maximum index figure of 100 to the university which receives the best score. The index figures for all the remaining universities are then calculated in relation to the 100 index figure. Using this methodology, the top 100 universities each have their own index figure in the

5 With both indicators, such prizes count for less as time goes by. Thus for every ten years that elapse, they lose 10% of their weight applying 'straight line depreciation'. In other words, prize-winners in the last decade carry 100% of their assigned weights, those in the previous decade, 90% and so on, up until the decade spanning 1921-1930, which only retains 10% of said weight (Adina-Petruva, 2015).

6 For institutions specialising in Humanities and Social Sciences, this indicator is left out and the 20% weight is shared out among the other indicators in a pro rata fashion.

7 This scores more if it is included in the latter, in order to deliver greater accuracy for each academic discipline.

8 Formerly Thomson Reuters. At the end of 2016, Thomson Reuters sold its Intellectual Property & Science Division, which among other things, included the Web of Science brand. The division was bought by the Onex Corporation and Baring Private Equity Asia investment groups. The resulting company now goes under the name of Clarivate Analytics.

9 In reality, there are 22 categories, but the 22nd is in the multi-disciplinary field.

ranking. Other universities are grouped in alphabetical order in blocks of 50 (ranks 101 to 200) and in blocks of 100 (ranks 201 to 500).

Britain's *Times Higher Education* (THE) has published an annual ranking of universities since 2010. It not only incorporates research indicators but also other indicators which have a bearing on teaching, technology transfer, and international outlook. That said, the key indicator is research, which carries a 60% weight in this ranking. To calculate the 13 indicators used, the ranking uses information gathered on the universities concerned by the company Elsevier (specifically, the firm's Scopus publications database)[10], and a reputation survey reflecting academics' views on teaching and research which contributes a third of the weight in the overall index.

More specifically, there are five indicators which have a bearing on teaching: (1) the THE's Annual reputation survey covering teaching and which reflects the prestige enjoyed by the university in this field, as judged by scholars responding to it (which has a 15% weight in the overall index);[11] (2) the ratio between students registered and academic staff (4.5%); (3) the ratio between those holding a PhD and those with bachelor's degrees (2.25%); (4) the ratio between PhD students and academic staff, by scientific discipline (6%); (5) the institution's revenues divided by the number of academic staff and its purchasing power (2.25%).

The other four indicators are linked to research: (6) the THE's annual onine Academic Reputation Survey regarding the prestige conferred on the university by its researchers (which is given a weight of 18%); (7) revenue from research, divided by the number of academic staff and adjusted in terms of purchasing power, broken down by scientific disciplines (6% weight); (8) research productivity: number of papers per faculty member, adjusted to account for the institution's size and normalised by scientific disciplines (6% weight); (9) citations: the number of times university papers are cited by other academics worldwide compared with the average number of citations one would expect for a paper of the same type and on the same subject, taken over a five year period (30% weight).

There are also three indicators covering 'international perspective': (10) the ratio between foreign students and home students (2.5% weight); (11) the ratio between foreign faculty and home faculty (2.5%); (12) the proportion of articles published by at least one foreign co-author, taking into account the volume of publications and academic disciplines (2.5%); (13) an indicator of knowledge transfers, namely—the institution's research income from business, divided by the number of academic staff and taking into account the university's purchasing power (2.5%).

In its 2016/17 edition, THE analysed over 1,300 universities worldwide and included 978 institutions in its ranking. The first 200 universities were listed individually, and from rank 201 onwards, in alphabetical order (in blocks of 50 up until 400, and then in blocks of 100 up until 600, then two final blocks: 601-800 and 801+).

QS is the world ranking of universities which has been published annually by the British company Quacquarelli Symonds, since 2010.[12] Like the THE but

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10 Before the 2015/16 edition, such data were obtained through the Web of Science database, which is now owned by Clarivate Analytics.

11 The questionnaire is administered on THE's behalf by Elsevier and is aimed at academics with wide experience and strong publishing track records. The views of these academics are sought on the research and teaching excellence of institutions they know well, in their respective fields. Respondents are asked to name no more than the best fifteen universities, excluding the one at which they work. Effort is made to properly weight the results by discipline and geographic scope. The 2016 survey was carried out between January and March; there were 10,323 responses from 133 countries, and the data was combined with those from the 2015 survey, giving rise to over 20,000 responses in total. See: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/academic-reputation-survey-explained.

12 Times Higher Education and Quacquarelli Symonds published a joint ranking between 2004 and 2009. This went under the name of the THE–QS World University Ranking. In 2010, the two companies went their separate ways, each producing its own ranking using a different methodology.

unlike the ARWU, apart from universities' research, it also takes into account other aspects and sets great store by reputation surveys (indeed, even more so than the THE). The QS ranking is based on the following six indicators: (1) academic reputation. This indicator is obtained through a global online survey of academics which asks them to identify institutions they consider to be leaders ones in their fields (40% weight); (2) reputation with companies, which is also obtained through a global survey. Companies are asked to say which universities (in their view) are turning out the best graduates (10% weight);[13] (3) the number of academic staff in relation to the number of students enrolled (20%); (4) citations per faculty member: the number of citations made in the last five years for papers published by the university in relation to the total number of faculty members, based on Elsevier's Scopus database, broken down by academic disciplines (20%); (5) the proportion of international faculty members as a percentage of the total (5% weight); (6) the proportion of foreign students as a percentage of the whole student body (5% weight).

In its 2016/17 edition, QS evaluated almost 4,000 institutions throughout the world and published results on 916. The first 400 universities were individually classified, and from 401 onwards, in blocks of ten, in alphabetical order, from 401 to 500, and in blocks of 50 from 501 to 700, the last block extending from 701 to the end of the series.

Traditional rankings have sparked criticisms and controversies (Aguilló, 2010; Rauhvargers, 2011; Van Vught and Ziegele, 2012; Federkeil, 2013; Parellada, 2013;

Sanz-Casado, 2015, 2016). The ARWU ranking is easy to calculate and objective but it refers almost solely to university research. Thus, while it can be taken as an overall indicator of universities, it is based on the possibly false supposition that there is a correlation between an institution's research capabilities on the one hand, and its teaching capabilities and transfer of knowledge to society as a whole on the other. The supposition is that a university that is good at research will also be good at its other tasks. Furthermore, the indicators used by ARWU (except one) do not take the university's size into account. The only indicator that does only carries a weight of only 10% in the overall score. Thus, all other things being equal, large universities make a better showing in the ARWU rankings than small ones.

One of the main criticisms made of the THE and QS rankings is the relatively high weights they give to reputation surveys in calculating universities' overall scores. The methodology used in such surveys and their reflection in the final results remains something of a mystery. The way the surveyes are selected is also murky and the response rate tends to be low (roughly 5%, according to Rauhvargers, 2011). This bias leads to over-representation of American academics. Furthermore, the most prestigious and famous institutions are the ones named by everyone and this leads to remarkably similar results. In other words, as Federkeil put it: "This means that those rankings which actively influence the reputation of universities are doing this by measuring just that reputation!" (2013, p. 254).[14]

A criticism of all three rankings is the issue of the weights attached to the individual indicators contributing to the overall score. Here, there is no objective way of knowing what weight should be given to each indicator and thus the decision taken by the ranking authors is a wholly subjective one. Furthermore, trying to sum up a university's performance in a single score is controversial to say the least, given the complexity of higher education itself.

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13 The database is obtained from the combination of a mailing list, acquired applications, and suggestions. The 2016/17 ranking drew on 74,651 responses from scholars from over 140 countries, including votes cast in the previous five years. Participants could put forward the names of no more than 30 universities, excluding their own. In the case of an employers' survey, this edition of the ranking drew on 37,781 replies. See: http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/indicator-academic/; http://www.iu.qs.com/academic-survey-responses/; http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/indicator-employer/; http://www.iu.qs.com/employer-survey-responses/.

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14 This is an application of the so-called Matthew Effect, the term coined by Robert K. Merton (1968) regarding the measurement of institutional reputation. [Matthew, 25:29, King James Version]

As noted above, research is very heavily weighted in the ARWU ranking but also carries significant weight in both the QS and THE rankings. Within the research category, most stress is usually laid on publications, given that these are the easiest things to measure in a homogeneous, worldwide manner (thanks to publication statistics and databases kept by various companies). Summarising a university's contribution, quality and performance on the basis of publications indexed by academic journals is a highly reductionist approach. That is because it does not take into account teaching or knowledge transfer into society. Moreover, certain disciplines use ways (apart from papers) to disseminate their research results—for example, conferences, books and so forth (AUBR, 2010, p. 26). In addition, the language of such journals is English by default, which may prejudice universities in countries that have 'heavyweight' languages in terms of number of speakers but not in terms of scientific output—Spanish [Castilian] being a case in point.[15] This means that traditional rankings focus on measuring the performance of those institutions falling in the 'world-class universities', and 'top-research universities' categories. rather than universities following the Humboldtian model or that have other priorities and specialisations. In this respect, they cover less than 5% of the world's universities (Rauhvargers, 2011).

The three rankings (ARWU, THE, QS), even if they were dreamt up to cover universities as a whole, have also developed some more specific rankings by scientific fields, disciplines, geographical scope, the employment prospects of their graduates, the age of institutions, and so on—changes that in many cases have been made as a market adaptation to the criticism they have received. Thus, there is an ARWU-field ranking and an ARWU-subject ranking, a THE-subject ranking, a QS ranking by faculty, a QS ranking by subject, and the QS Graduate Employability ranking. In the cases of THE and QS, there are special rankings by geographical areas, such as Asia and Latin America, and for universities less than fifty years old. There is also THE's World Reputation Ranking which lists the 100 universities with the strongest world brands as determined by reputation surveys. The methodology followed in drawing up these specialised rankings is similar to that followed in compiling the general institutional ones, with minor variations in the indicators used, their weights, and procedures (for greater detail, see *Universidad.es*, 2014 and Sanz-Casado, 2015).

Lastly, one should note that the ARWU methodology can be disentangled and replicated to obtain the rank of any university in the world (Docampo, 2013). However, the same cannot be said for THE and QS, whose results are largely based on reputation surveys and confidential data provided by universities themselves (Sanz-Casado, 2015).

A NEW KIND OF RANKING: U-MULTIRANK
Following Van Vught and Ziegele (2012), Krüger and Federkeil (2014), Federkeil (2013, 2015, and 2016), and the U-Multirank web site, one can say that is this a system of performance indicators for higher education institutions worldwide. This system has been promoted and funded by the European Union and drawn up by a consortium led by the Centre for Higher Education (CHE) in Germany, and the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) in the Netherlands. The consortium works closely with various linked entities that help in drawing up the ranking system. In Spain's case, the CYD Foundation plays this role and acts as an intermediary between U-Multirank and Spanish universities and draws up the ranking for Spain.[16] The CYD ranking and U-Multirank share the same methodological principles and most

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15 THE's ranking shifted from using the Web of Science database to Scopus. The latter features more publications in languages other than English (especially in Spanish) and more publications with a small circulation. Both factors led to some improvement in the rankings of Spanish-speaking universities.

16 See: http://www.rankingcyd.org/

of the same indicators. However, in CYD's case, there are also indicators that are better suited to the Spanish university system.[17] Both rankings were first published in 2014 and come out each year.

U-Multirank differs from traditional rankings and tries to overcome their most glaring shortcomings. The ARWU, THE, and QS rankings, as mentioned earlier, present results in the form of league tables based on an overall score that is the sum of various weighted indicators. In contrast, U-Multirank gives a whole set of indicators, which, are not only more numerous but are kept separate rather than mixing them up in an overall score. This avoids the need for weighting (which, by its very nature, is highly subjective). These indicators —up to 31 at the institutional level (see Table 1) in the 2016 edition, are classified into five dimensions: (1) Teaching and Learning; (2) Research; (3) Knowledge Transfer; (4) International Orientation; and (5) Contribution to Regional Development. The system is thus a multi-dimensional one. U-Multirank shows the results obtained for the participating universities in each of the aforesaid dimensions, and is placed in one of five groups ranging from A (very good) to E (weak). The performance groups are determined by the distance of a university's score in relation to a given indicator, taking into account the mean score of all the institutions for which it was possible to calculate said score.

In this respect, U-Multirank analyses university data and builds indicators at both the institutional level (updating these each year) and in terms of fields of knowledge (updated every 4-5 years). The first three editions covered thirteen such fields: Business Studies; Physics; Electrical Engineering; Mechanical Engineering (2014 edition); Computing; Medicine; Psychology (2015 edition); Chemistry; Biology; Mathematics; Sociology; Social Work; and History (2016 edition). The fields of knowledge are based on consistent groups of education programmes. Thus, right from the outset and unlike

traditional rankings, U-Multirank accounted for the need to cover all fields of knowledge, because while it is unusual for universities to excel at all disciplines, they often shine in one or more on the world stage. The multi-dimensional nature of the index means universities can be considered centres of excellence in a way that may not be captured by the crude classification of world-class universities. It also reflects differentiation, whether this be in research, teaching, or regional contribution. U-Multirank therefore, in contrast with traditional, media-friendly rankings, better reflects the diversity of higher education institutions and the variety of concepts that can be taken into account in measuring their quality in an international context.

The data used by U-Multirank to draw up its system of indicators come from various sources: universities themselves; international bibliography databases (the Web of Science from Clarivate Analytics is used), the patent database—PATSTAT (the Worldwide Patent Statistical Database) from the European Patents Organisation (EPO)[18] and the results of surveys of over 100,000 students, measuring their degree of satisfaction with: the university; the quality of its courses and teaching; programme organisation; contact with faculty; classrooms; computer equipment; labs; and libraries.[19] U-Multirank, on its web site, gives users the option of drawing up their own personalised rankings by selecting the indicators they are most interested in. Stakeholders may have varying needs and priorities and so, U-Multirank caters to these.

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17 An example is the so-called six-year rule (*sexenios*) in relation to Spanish researchers. This is an important feature of the Spanish university system but not of higher education elsewhere.

18 The Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) at Leiden (the Netherlands) is a partner in the U-Multirank consortium. CWTS is in charge of drawing up the bibliographic data and calculating the related indicators. Another partner —The International Centre for Research on Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation Management (INCENTIM) at the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL)—deals with the section dealing with patents.

19 These indicators stem from a survey of students who have been taking a given course for at least a year. The survey results are only used in connection with U-Multirank fields of knowledge, not within institutions. The results yield additional dimensions which have a bearing on teaching and learning.

Table 1: List of U-Multirank indicators (2016 edition) at the institutional level

TEACHING AND LEARNING	Graduation rate (bachelor's degree)
	Graduation rate (master's degree)
	Normalised graduation (bachelor's degree)
	Normalised graduation (master's degree)
RESEARCH	Normalised impact of publications
	Highly-cited publications
	Inter-disciplinary publications
	Publications (absolute, normalised number)
	Art-related output
	Outside research funds
	Post-Doctoral qualifications
KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER	Publications with companies
	Private funds
	Patent applications with private companies
	Patents granted (absolute, normalised number)
	Spin-offs
	Publications cited in patents
	Income from continued training
INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION	Degrees taught in a foreign language
	Masters' degrees taught in a foreign language
	Student mobility
	International faculty
	Doctoral theses by foreign students
	International scholarly publications
CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Bachelor degree graduates working in their region
	Master degree graduates working in their region
	Intern students in companies in the region
	Regional scholarly publications
	Income from regional research

SOURCE: Elaborated by the author, based on U-Multirank data[20]

20 For greater detail on the definition of indicators, see the 2016 Indicator Book at: http://www.umultirank.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/indicator-book-2016_u-multirank.pdf

Thus, a potential student may set greater store in teaching or learning, or on an international orientation, whereas a company may be more interested in universities' research performance and knowledge transfer. This ranking system takes account of these differences and caters to them. Likewise, one can choose which institutions one wishes to compare. Thus U-Multirank offers 'like-with-like' options for comparing universities with similar profiles, with filters for sifting institutions by size, foundational year, or a set of variables that indicate the institution's research orientation, international positioning, and contribution to regional development.

The U-Multirank web site allows users to order institutions in alphabetical order, or by their score for a given indicator. Furthermore, it allows institutions to be ordered according to the overall result of a set of selected indicators. This ordering takes the form of a medal table with the universities with the most indicators in the top performance group (Group 'A') are shown at the top of the table. Should there be more than one institution with the same number of indicators in group A, these indicators are applied in the second group B establish the order. Should this lead to a draw, the number of indicators in each successive group is taken into account to determine the rank.

In the 2016 edition, U-Multirank included over 1,300 higher education institutions drawn from 90 countries, which means over 3,250 faculties and 10,700 programmes were analysed. The third edition of the U-Multirank–Ranking CYD included 66[21] Spanish universities. In comparison, only 39 Spanish universities took part in the first edition.

U-Multirank, as one might expect, has also been criticised. However, one of those criticisms, namely that the project promotes European universities is a little unreasonable, bearing in mind the funding comes from the EU. Here, one should note that in the 2016 edition of the ranking, of the more than

1,300 universities on which information was given, 57.3% were European and 47.9% were within the EU. This presence was even more marked in the case of universities which actively provided data over and beyond that gathered from bibliographic sources. Of the more than 780 universities actively taking part in the 2016 edition, no fewer than 80.8% were European (CYD Foundation, 2016).

Another criticism is of the fact that the U-Multirank requires universities to provide a large volume of data and detail on its fields of knowledge. In some cases, gathering such information may be both expensive and time-consuming and will thus put some institutions at a disadvantage. Thus, universities that perform poorly but are managed efficiently or that have simpler organisations will likely have a better ranking than those where the converse is true. There is also a risk that universities may provide inaccurate or inconsistent information[22] that does not reflect the true state of affairs and may thus, produce misleading indicators. In this respect, the information requested may not be fully specified or, even where it is, each institution may have a different idea of what is being asked for. This may be especially true where universities are based in countries with very different cultures (Federkeil, 2015; Sanz-Casado, 2016).

In addition, given that there are so many indicators for both institutions and fields, and that one can choose among them in making comparisons, all universities have the chance of excelling at something. Thus, it may be possible for universities to use U-Multirank solely to promote themselves in the disciplines in which they do well.[23]

Another criticism levelled at U-Multirank concerns the set of indicators proposed. In this respect, some indicators may be unsuitable for measuring a given aspect of university quality. Thus, for example, in the

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21 Sixty-four universities took an active part in furnishing data and two universities solely provided bibliographic and patent data.

22 This criticism is also applicable to traditional rankings and, in some cases, data has been falsified (Rauhvargers, 2011, p. 15).

23 Aguilló (2010) noted that U-Multirank is hard to interpret and that it can be configured as one pleases to yield the results wanted by the user.

teaching and learning dimension, students taking much longer to graduate than the usual term may be more common in countries with a greater tradition of part-time study. Furthermore, it is hard to say whether a shorter time to graduate really indicates quality or is merely a response to student demands (Rauhvargers, 2013). One also needs to incorporate other dimensions affecting the way universities work, such as how easily students find jobs; universities' corporate social responsibility and their willingness to open up their facilities and services to society as a whole and to publicly disseminate their knowledge (Parellada, 2016). Sometimes, the problem is the availability of the right information to build indicators that reflect a broad range of universities.

It is much more alluring for the media—and for political and university leaders for that matter—to reduce comparison to a simple overall score and to rank institutions than it is to use a more complex system of indicators. Thus, U-Multirank Thus, makes it easy to receive a 'top-performing' university ranking (even though this was not its initial aim). This is doubtless a response to the need to boost the ranking's media impact. The end result is that U-Multirank now yields a kind of league table that is similar to those produced by traditional rankings.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The rankings that are most successful and have the greatest impact are precisely those that simplify the presentation of results using an overall score to draw up a 'league table' of universities (the ARWU, THE, and QS). As we have seen, there are grave methodological shortcomings in attempting to summarise such a complex subject as university quality and performance in such a simple manner. Furthermore, the weights place too much emphasis on research and controversial 'reputation surveys' (the THE and QS, among others). The general view is that university rankings are here to stay. Yet the importance given to rankings by media, politicians, and university managers alike seems excessive. Furthermore, the rankings that have the greatest impact are precisely those that simplify their results the most—that is to say, a simple overall score and league table (i.e., the ARWU,

THE, and QS). We have already seen the methodological defects that summarise complex issues such as university quality and performance in a too simplistic fashion. Moreover, the weight given to each indicator to obtain the overall score is wholly subjective. Here, one should note the over-emphasis on research and the introduction of controversial reputation surveys (i.e., the THE and QS) among other factors.[24] In this respect, the U-Multirank approach explores the complex profiles of universities rather than producing hard-and-fast overall rankings and this subtle philosophy does not endear it to the media, which seek headlines rather than analysis.

In any case, the obsession with university rankings is having a pernicious impact on decision-making, leading managers to focus on getting their institution into the top rankings and to push them up the ladder at the expense of everything else[25] This explains why universities desperately seek collaboration with frequently-cited institutions and researchers in order to boost their own place in the rankings, with scant regard to either the field or the reasons why. The habit of writing papers with a long string of authors has become commonplace for the same reason. Advancing knowledge in a given field has become a purely secondary consideration. Furthermore, the importance given to the reputation stemming from these rankings has reached such a fever pitch that in some countries, students only get grants for foreign exchanges if these programmes are at universities listed among the 'top' 100 or 200 institutions in the traditional rankings (Fernández de Lucio and García, 2014; Mora, 2016).

24 Two of the factors highlighted as key to restoring the notion of university reputation are: (1) greater competition among universities; (2) the availability of tools to measure such reputation. Rankings play a notable role here. Hence the importance of the methodology used to build the various rankings and their impact on universities' reputations (Mora, 2015).

25 These consequences have led to some observers arguing that most of the world's universities should simply stop heeding rankings. Here, one should note that the so-called top 100 universities only make up 0.5% of higher education institutions and only 0.4% of the world's university students. Those falling outside this charmed circle tend to be universities that are one or more of the following: medium-sized, specialised, regional in scope, recently founded, or smaller (especially in developing countries). Such institutions make up the vast majority of the world's universities (Altbach and Hazelkorn, 2017).

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