IREG-6

A Perspective on U-Multirank in the Light of Students as Key Rankings Stakeholders

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Housekeeping

On Student Decision-Making

Ubiquity and Impact of Rankings Outside of the Academic World

The Different Nature of U-Multirank

Institutional versus Study Field Rankings Information

The Shift in Rankings' Structure and Direction

Summary Perspectives

HOUSEKEEPING

- **The presentation is geared to run for about 15 minutes**

- **Questions should be deferred until the end of Session Four**

- **This presentation will be posted as a PDF file at www.icg.ac**

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ON STUDENT DECISION-MAKING

- Decision-making by prospective students regarding their potential higher education institution is based on complex and often highly individualized factors. One factor which has emerged forcefully at a global level over the last years is university rankings.

- In some instances rankings have assumed a binary (or cut-off) function. Some families are also now insisting that their child study at a "ranked" institution (or, relatedly, the most highly ranked institution to which their child can be admitted).

- The key attraction of rankings in this process is their supposed objectivity and authoritative role in supplying well-researched and reliable information.

- One criticism is that many rankings actually offer little information on key aspects salient to students (such as the quality of the classroom experience). Another shortcoming lies in the rankings' various methodological limitations.

- Finally, despite the positioning of some rankings as arbiter of an institution's quality in the global context, there are no universal criteria regarding what constitutes "good" or "quality" higher education (think proxies).

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- Rankings influence decision-making across multiple stakeholders: Students, employers, media, society-at-large, etc. Yet, given the methodology of many rankings, these uses are typically poorly supported.

- Employers have utilized national rankings since their respective creation. This has especially been the case in selective companies (often as a cut-off tool). The emergence of international rankings has broadened the credibility of candidates from less well-known, but now ranked institutions.

- Societies-at-large and media have discovered rankings as a conversation piece, point of national pride or lament, and generally as an opportunity to attract attention or readership.

- The amalgamated impact of these uses and discussions of rankings on students is that students pay more heed to rankings – especially international students who make large investments into their education.

- This, however, does not mean that decisions made by students based on institutional rankings are necessarily well informed and thus beneficial for them.

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- **U-Multirank constitutes a departure from current practices based on both its multi-dimensional nature as well as the opportunity it offers users to input their own criteria and proxies for quality.**

- **U-Multirank's value to students is two-fold: First, it is supposed to operate in a transparent manner. Second, by allowing users themselves to define their own proxies and indicators of quality, it provides a more tailored and user-centric way to deliver information.**

- **The greatest potential of U-Multirank is to clearly demonstrate how subjective most but all rankings actually are. It is, however, also the greatest pitfall of U-Multirank. U-Multirank must provide seemingly objective information about the quality of institutions, while also stressing the limitations of that information.**

- **A user-centric and customizable ranking is no small departure from existing rankings' methodologies, which can be centered on an "overly simplistic" league table approach (yet which clearly address a stakeholder need).**

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- **For most students, the quality of the institution is often of less importance than information about a study field. Yet a large majority of faculties or individual degree tracks are not internationally ranked. Institutional rankings (if available) have to serve as a difficult proxy.**

- **Students benefit from specific rankings information to avoid wrong decisions and misaligned resource allocations. The potential of U-Multirank, thus, is to address some of the misalignments and gaps between the students' own desires and ambitions, the information available, and the actual programs.**

- **In order to fulfill this potential, U-Multirank must strive to gather precisely this kind of relevant, high-quality, and user defined information. Otherwise the utility of this ranking will be very much in doubt.**

- **From a cross-rankings viewpoint, U-Multirank has chosen an ambitious course. Yet it is a course that addresses specific stakeholder concerns more concisely than other rankings.**

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- A question is to what extent rankings have to become more user-friendly, customizable, transparent, socially relevant, and methodologically sound.

- Different objectives are likely to clash: More clarity for policy-makers, students, or parents may not yield the best economic results for a provider.

- It is unlikely that existing rankings can significantly broaden their rankings pool based on their respective methodologies. U-Multirank can address a good number but not all issues.

- Most "ranked" institutions are essentially research-based. Yet one area of rising need remains substantially underserved: Applied sciences and certain professional fields, such as nursing.

- Another aspect of social relevance is that international university surveys, as mentioned, cover only a small share of the world's universities. Current rankings are thus essentially irrelevant for the vast majority of students.

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- **U-Multirank offers the opportunity to significantly enlarge the pool of "rank-able" institutions if it stays within the parameters of the recently concluded feasibility study period.**

- **This approach should serve many students better than information provided by the current rankings if U-Multirank manages to gather sufficient amounts of data.**

- **Open questions regarding U-Multirank's future development include data acquisition, funding, operational professionalism, dissemination, etc.**

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