and the winner is......

University Rankings in the Region:
One more cut throat exercise or opportunity for preeminence?

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League tables of preeminent universities worldwide, regionally, or even locally at the institutional, program, or subject level depending on the scope of the ranking

Started in the US almost 30 years ago followed by the UK more than 20 years ago; now a worldwide phenomenon

They rank universities based on ‘performance’ criteria most notably in the area of research

The most popular ones are published yearly: e.g. ARWU, THE, QS

U21 rankings of higher education systems
What kind?

Many:

1. ARWU (Shanghai); THE (Times Higher Education); QS (Quacquarelli-Symonds); Webometrics; US News; etc.
2. Worldwide: ARWU, THE, QS, USNews
3. Regional: QS Asia, QS BRICS, THE BRICS & Emerging Economies; US News Arab region
ARWU (Shanghai Ranking)

One of the 3 most influential, along with QS and THE.

Criteria

Research-based

University-level; subject-level (broad subject fields and specific subjects)

Worldwide and regional/local:

- Greater China; Macedonian HEIs

ARWU World Ranking Indicators

- Number of alumni who are Nobel laureates and Fields medallists
- Number of staff who are Nobel laureates and Fields medallists
- Number of frequently quoted researchers
- Number of papers published in Nature and Science
- Number of articles in SCI and SSCI
Positives
- Objective methodology
- Comparative view of research performance and reputation
- Consistency, clarity of purpose, and transparency

Negatives
- Undermines humanities and quality of instruction
- Relies too much on award factors
- Favoring Anglo-Saxon higher education institutions
  - Latin America scores very poorly
- The 500+ dead Nobel Prizes are worth a significant portion of all living researchers put together
QS Ranking

Published by British Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)

Published jointly with the THE from 2004 to 2009 (THE-QS Rankings) and QS since 2011 rankings made use of responses from 33,744 people from 140 nations in its academic peer review

Participants can nominate up to 30 universities

Survey includes over 500,000 data point
QS Ranking

Criteria

- Academic reputation (40%)
- Faculty student ratio (20%)
- Citations per faculty (20%) – based on Scopus
- Recruiter review (10%)
- International orientation (10%)
  - 5% international students
  - 5% international staff

QS world university rankings; Rankings by faculty and subject; QS Top 50 under 50; Regional Rankings (QS Asian, QS Latin American, QS BRICS)
QS Ranking

Positives

- Large data set
- Composite

Negatives

- Use of an opinion survey: Academic Peer Review
- Favoritism for sciences over the humanities
- Undermines universities which do not use English as their primary language

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THE Rankings

Published as THE-QS between 2004-2009.

Citation database supplied by Thomson Reuters since 2010 and publication of the first THE ranking

Research publication data source from Elsevier Scopus as of Nov 2014

Criteria: Teaching (30%), Research (30%), citations, Research impact (32.5%), international outlook (7.5%), industry income (2.5%)

Rankings: World, subject and reputational with 2 league tables: Asia, BRICS & Emerging Economies

All use the same criteria
THE Rankings

Positives
- Only global university rankings to examine a university teaching environment
- Reducing the weighting of the subjective reputation factor in the main rankings

Negatives
- Undermining non-English instruction and research
- Research measures favor the sciences over the humanities
- Percentage of respondents from Latin America (3.6%) and Africa (2.3%)
- Commercial
Rankings in the Arab region

- Big business...for the predatory rankings

ARWU World:

- KAU & KSU ranked in top 200 universities worldwide (151-200)

- 3 Saudi universities are ranked in the top 150 engineering schools in the world

- 3 Saudi universities make it into the top 75 of the Shanghai top 200-math list
QS Rankings’ top 863 universities in the world

- List includes 29 universities in 10 Arab countries (@225 KFUPM and @250 AUB)
  - 8 are in the Gulf (4 in Saudi, 3 in the UAE, 1 in Bahrain)
- The rise of Saudi Arabian institutions is due only to their performance in science.
- As a notable exception in the region, The American University of Sharjah was ranked among the top 150 institutions for English language and literature.
- The American university in Cairo, Cairo University, and Al-Azhar made it to the QS rankings but continue to decline year on year.
- Institutions in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco are absent from the rankings.
  - Universities in the Maghreb emphasize training elite cadres over research, in the Francophone tradition (McPhedran, 2013)
  - Most of their research is in French with limited citations.

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2014 QS Rankings’ – Arab Region (Pilot)

- Usual suspects (9 Saudi universities in the top 50 with KFUP, KSU, KAU ranking 1,3,5 respectively)
- Only ranking with 2 Jordanian universities in top 10 (UJ & JUST)
- First North African university ranks 40 (U. Tunis El Manar)
- Bahrain lists 2 universities at 30 and 48 (AGU & UoB)
- Large contradiction with US News & World Report rankings
US News & World Report
2014 Ranking of 91 Arab Universities

Rankings cover 16 countries across the Arab world and include subject rankings for 16 subjects over a five-year period 2009-13.

Rankings, based on bibliometric data, focus on institutions’ academic research output and performance.

Papers in physics and astronomy were excluded.

Need to have 400 or more total publications tracked by Scopus (average of 80 papers per year over the 5 year period).

91 schools from 800+ Arab region universities made it to the list.

9 ranking indicators all research related.

Branch campuses operated by a parent university in another country have been excluded (UAE: 33, Qatar: 11),
Size of university matters significantly

The top 3 countries in the rankings had 52% of the total (Saudi, Egypt, Algeria)

Seven countries had only one university in the table

Only ranking where NA countries place more universities than Gulf
THE best research universities in the MENA: another take...

1. Texas A&M at Qatar
2. Lebanese American University (No 52 in the US News ranking)
3. King Abdulaziz University
4. Qatar University (No 29 in the US News ranking)
5. American University of Beirut

Full ranking (30) will be released at the THE MENA Universities Summit in Doha, 23-24 Feb, 2015.
THE BRICS and Emerging Economies rankings 2015

Classification powered by Thompson Reuters uses 13 indicators across teaching, knowledge transfer, international outlook, and research excellence

University of Marrakesh Cadi Ayad first ranked Arab University (50)

UAEU and AUSharjah (71 and 84 respectively)

Only UAE, Morocco and Egypt were included from region
Saudi and the Rest....

- Saudi universities are moving up while many institutions in the Levant and Maghreb barely register.
- Only Saudi Universities appear in all 3 major World rankings
- Saudi State boasts the highest university spend as a percentage of GDP in the world
- There are approx. 150,000 Saudis on scholarship studying abroad mostly in the US
- In the Arab World, institutions with hundreds of years of history such as Al-Azhar (Cairo), Zaytuna (Tunis) or Al-Qarawiyin (Fez) are notably absent
- Most MENA universities do not have the ability to supply accurate data on the areas that rankings companies use to calculate their metrics (Carnegie Corporation supported study)
- Science Magazine report accuses 2 Saudi universities of “inflating research and rankings performance by paying highly cited foreign faculty to create “on-paper only” affiliations with Saudi research institutions (Al-Fanar Media, 15 Oct 2013)
Overall Assessment

- Oversimplified picture of the mission of universities
- Particularly elitist
- Rely heavily on publication and citation data and academic-reputation surveys
- Neglect the arts, humanities and social sciences
- Teaching is given little weight
- Discriminate against non-English speaking universities
- Rankings are commercially driven
- Susceptible to manipulation by institutions seeking to boost their performance in the lists
- Input almost exclusively restricted to the ‘Ivory Towers.’ How about employers, parents and students?
- Different rankings yield contradictory results even those strictly based on research
- Other than ARWU, complex calculations
Impact of Rankings

- Increasingly being used to shape institutional and public policy
- Foster accountability and encourage the collection of more reliable data
- Benchmarking tool
- “Innovation islands” in the middle of no absorbing economy
- The number game: “Universities today do little planning...instead they focus on manipulating the date they report...because this data influences league tables.” (theguardian, 3 Feb 2015)
- Could take away HE from its authentic path
- “Coopted” rankings? Qatar Foundation funding
Recommendations

- Salmi & Saroyan (2007)
  - Be clear what the ranking actually measures
  - Use a range of indicators and multiple measures rather than a single, weighted ranking
  - Compare similar programs or institutions
  - Use rankings for strategic planning and quality improvement
  - Nation-level, use rankings to stimulate a culture of quality
  - Use rankings to inform students, families and employers and to fuel public debates

- Hazelkorn (Dublin Institute of Technology):
  - “Rankings should not be the basis on which you make decisions. They are flawed: The data is flawed”
A take for every one!

Playing the ‘ranking game’ is expensive...not worth the investment unless you are truly a research-oriented university.

Identify the ranking that mirrors most your strategic objectives, otherwise it will have distorting effects.

Use the rankings for benchmarking against reachable targets.

Build your institutional research capacity around ranking requirements.

Stick with conventional QA.

Stay away from using rankings in HE policies.
Peter Scott on the guardian of 3 Feb 2015 in a article “Stop treating universities as if they were a football game”

“No one questions the underlying principle that competition is a good thing...the cut-throat competition that is practically forced on institutions almost certainly reduces choice and compromises standards. Potential students are almost drowning under a deluge of info-marketing and managed data...performance is degenerating into skilful compliance”