Q+A Memo

BACKGROUND

Why is U-Multirank an important development in higher education?

Europe (and the world) needs a wide diversity of higher education institutions which do well in different areas, to meet the needs of different students and different labour market and research needs. The available information on the performance of higher education institutions focuses mainly on research-intensive universities, and thus covers only a very small proportion of higher education institutions. It is essential to draw on a wider range of analysis and information, covering all aspects of performance - to help students make informed study choices, to enable institutions to identify and develop their strengths, and to support policy-makers in their strategic choices on the reform of higher education systems. A multi-dimensional ranking and information tool addresses these information needs and has been shown to be both feasible and widely supported by education stakeholders.

For which target groups is U-Multirank designed?

U-Multirank was designed in very close consultation with stakeholders to ensure that it meets the diverse information needs of various target groups like (prospective and mobile) students, their parents, teachers and researchers in higher education institutions, decision makers in institutions (presidents, vice-chancellors, rectors, deans of institutions), employers, etcetera. This information is provided through a user-friendly interactive web tool that can be used flexibly by all users.

How was U-Multirank designed?

U-Multirank is an initiative that originated at a conference under the 2008 French Presidency of the European Union, which called for a new methodology to measure the different dimensions of excellence of higher education and research institutions in Europe and in an international context. Subsequent to this, the European Commission commissioned a feasibility study on a multi-dimensional ranking. This study, completed by a consortium of higher education and research organisations (known as CHERPA) in 2011, confirmed that both the concept and further implementation of a multi-dimensional ranking were feasible, based on pilot work with 150 higher education institutions from Europe and around the world. U-Multirank built on this feasibility study, publishing its first set of ranking results in May 2014. For the 2015 results, U-Multirank has evaluated the web tool further to improve its presentation and functionality, such as: simplifying the user tracks and ranking selections allowing for faster results, creating a new newsletter and registration feature, as well as an enhanced presentation of the results in both the university profiles and results pages.

Who is leading U-Multirank?

U-Multirank is developed and implemented on the initiative of the European Commission by an independent consortium led by the Centre for Higher Education (CHE, www.che.de/) in Germany, the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS, www.utwente.nl/mb/cheps/) at the University of Twente and the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS, www.cwts.nl) from Leiden University in The Netherlands. The consortium is headed by Professor Dr. Frans van Vught of CHEPS and Professor Dr. Frank Ziegele of the CHE. Other partner organisations include the International

Centre for Research on Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation Management (INCENTIM) from KU Leuven, Elsevier, the Bertelsmann Foundation, student advice organisation Push and software firm Folge 3. The consortium also works closely with a range of national partners and stakeholder organisations. A full list of partners is provided on the U-Multirank website.

What is the operating budget of U-Multirank?

The U-Multirank project receives seed funding through the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme (now Erasmus+) for an initial period of two years (2013-2015) totalling €2 million with an extension for a further two years (2015-2017). The total operating budget of U-Multirank averages €1 million per year. The goal is for an independent organisation to manage the ranking on a sustainable non-profit funding model thereafter. Additionally the institutions participating in U-Multirank bear their own operational costs of data collection which will vary depending on the sophistication of their internal management information systems, however U-Multirank does not charge any additional fees to be included in U-Multirank, nor to use the web tool.

What kinds of institutions are included in U-Multirank?

U-Multirank currently includes more than 1,200 universities from more than 80 countries around the world. Around 57% of these institutions are from Europe, 16% from North America, 18% from Asia and 9% from Oceania, Latin America and Africa. While other global rankings focus mainly on 400-500 of the world's research universities (only about 2-3% of the world's total number of universities), U-Multirank covers a very broad range in terms of institutional profiles: small specialised colleges, art and music academies, technical universities, agricultural universities, universities of applied sciences as well as comprehensive research universities etc.

How many universities and faculties are included in the 2015 ranking?

The current total number of higher education institutions is more than 1,200 (850+ in 2014) with more than 1,800 (1,000 in 2014) faculties and 7,500 (5,000 in 2014) study programmes in the fields of computer science, psychology and (human) medicine, as well as electrical and mechanical engineering, business studies and physics from more than 80 countries. For all 1,200+ institutions, U-Multirank includes bibliometric and patent data from publicly available data bases as do some of the other global university rankings. Performance measures (indicators) on bibliometric data are based on a count of the scientific publications produced by the academic staff of a university and the number of times these are cited in other publications. Of the 1,200+ institutions included in U-Multirank more than 670 (517 in 2014) provided comprehensive data for the 2015 round of U-Multirank, exceeding our yearly expansion target goals.

How were the 2015 fields of study selected?

All fields were reviewed and selected by the U-Multirank consortium through stakeholder consultations, including business and industry, higher education experts and student representatives.

THE APPROACH

What makes U-Multirank unique?

U-Multirank is a multi-dimensional instrument which allows institutions to be assessed on a range of individual performance measures, with the performance groupings per measure ranging from "A" (very good) to "E" (weak). U-Multirank does not produce composite scores because there is no sound methodological justification for "adding up" the scores on diverse individual measures, or for weighting them to produce a single composite score as used in league tables. Therefore, U-Multirank provides transparent comparisons and not an over-simplified league table.

League tables may satisfy media needs for headlines ("The number one is…"); yet they tend to exaggerate differences in performance between universities and they provide a false impression of exactness ("Number 27 is better than number 29", but in fact differences between the two positions could be marginal). Another key feature of U-Multirank is that it enables users to specify the type of institutions they wish to compare (in terms of the activities they are engaged in). This ensures that institutional comparisons are "like with like" and not "apples with oranges". Users can then decide which areas of performance to include in the comparison of the selected group of universities; in this way U-Multirank produces personalised rankings.

How does U-Multirank assist users to compare similar institutions ("like with like")?

A basic point of departure of U-Multirank is that it makes little sense to compare the performances of institutions with completely different missions and activity profiles: for example, to compare a specialised, regionally orientated, Bachelor awarding College of Information Technology with one of the world's leading comprehensive, research-intensive universities. One of the first things users are asked to do when using the web-tool is to select the characteristics of the universities they would like to compare. To do this U-Multirank uses a set of performance measures/indicators developed by CHEPS in its U-Map instrument (www.u-map.org) to "map" the activity profiles of universities: the different activities that different universities are engaged in, or what different universities do (rather than how they perform). These "mapping" measures include the level of degrees offered, the subject areas the university is active in, the proportion of graduate and international students and the size and age of the institution. Once the user has made this selection the web tool will display performance information only for universities that meet these mapping criteria. This process has been further developed for the 2015 edition, by minimising the number of required steps in order to allow the user to obtain their results more quickly and efficiently.

How does U-Multirank measure performance?

U-Multirank covers five dimensions of performance: teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement; it is a multi-dimensional ranking. Performance in each dimension is assessed through a number of indicators, with institutions ranked separately on each individual indicator. On each indicator institutions are ranked into five groups: from "A" (very good") to "E" (weak). Performance profiles are provided at two levels: for the institution as a whole and at the level of different disciplinary fields (in 2015 the fields include computer science, psychology and (human) medicine, as well as mechanical and electrical engineering, business and physics).

How does U-Multirank showcase the performance of institutions?

U-Multirank does not create composite aggregate scores as this does not allow for fair and transparent comparisons. Unlike many other rankings, U-Multirank does not attempt to rank universities in numbered lists or to declare 100 universities to be the best in the world. The basic methodology of U-Multirank is multi-dimensional which allows institutional performance to be assessed on each individual indicator in terms of five performance groups ranging from "A" (very good) to "E" (weak). This method allows users to see both the strengths and weaknesses of a specific university. Users have different preferences with regard to the relevance of performance measures. Depending on their personal selection of measures different institutions will perform better than others. The calculation of performance groups for each measure is based on the whole sample of institutions. Performance on the chosen measures is shown in tables where the user can sort the selected institutions in different ways (by the number of top "A" scores, by performance on a specific measure or simply alphabetically by university name).

THE DATA

What are performance measures/indicators?

Performance measures or indicators are the different areas of university performance that are used within U-Multirank to compare universities. A full list of these performance measures as well as their definitions can be found on the U-Multirank website.

How does U-Multirank collect its data?

The data included in U-Multirank are drawn from a number of sources: information supplied by the institutions themselves, data from international bibliometric and patent data bases and surveys completed by more than 85,000 students at participating universities - one of the largest international student samples in the world. By offering this wealth of data U-Multirank provides comprehensive information to its users.

What are bibliometric indicators?

Bibliometric indicators seek to measure the quantity and impact of scientific publications and are based on a count of the scientific publications produced by the academic staff of a university and the number of times these are cited in other publications. The bibliometric analyses in U-Multirank are based on an extensive verified data base of academic publications - the Thomson Reuters data base. U-Multirank partner CWTS (Centre for Science and Technology Studies) at Leiden University is responsible for all of the bibliometric data.

How is the self-reported data in U-Multirank verified?

Some performance measures within U-Multirank rely on information collected directly from the institutions as this information is not available in international data bases. Those data are carefully verified. Data verification in U-Multirank includes several steps and procedures: data delivered by institutions are tested multiple times for consistency and plausibility and "outlier" results are carefully checked. The process includes both "manual" and automated checks and a series of direct communications with institutions.

WEB TOOL

How are the U-Multirank results published?

A distinguishing feature of U-Multirank is that it is user-driven. The results are published on an interactive web tool, offering various entry points for various target users. The U-Multirank website starts by asking users to indicate the sorts of universities or programmes they are interested in and would like to compare. Users are then prompted to choose the measures of university performance that are important to them. In this way U-Multirank offers almost unlimited possibilities for different users to develop personalised rankings that suit their different interests.

How can I find the results?

The freely accessible U-Multirank web tool (www.umultirank.org) gives users the possibility to compare higher education institutions of similar profiles with a personalised touch. It offers four main tracks with many possibilities for users to work with the rankings. The "student track" allows students to compare study programmes or universities of their choice, and has a special focus on teaching and learning. The "compare track" allows users to compare higher education institutions of similar profiles or make comparisons with a specific institution in mind. The "at a glance" allows users to view the entire performance profile of a selected institution.

In addition, the U-Multirank consortium has created 17 "readymade rankings", three on the institutional level and 14 on the field-based levels. These are examples of how a user can compare institutions with similar profiles on a selected group of measures. The three readymade rankings on the institutional level include a Research and Research Linkages Ranking, an International Orientation Ranking and an Economic Involvement Ranking. The 14 readymade field-based rankings are a Teaching and Learning Ranking and an International Orientation ranking in the seven fields-of-study: computer science, psychology and (human) medicine, as well as electrical and mechanical engineering, physics and business studies

Why are there gaps in the profiles and results pages?

There are two types of gaps in data visible in the web tool. The one is a "dash mark" (-) which indicates that (valid) data are not available. This means that the institution did not have the data available at the time of submission or that the data did not pass our verification rules. However, even if the relevant data for some indicators are not available this does not prevent an institution from participating and being visible in U-Multirank. The second type of gap is indicated with an "X", which means that the data were not applicable to the institution. For example, an institution that only offers bachelors and masters degrees would not be able to provide data that apply to a PhD programme. When applicable publicly available bibliometric and patent data are provided for institutions included in U-Multirank. While most institutions have provided additional self-reported data, some institutions have not and are only shown in U-Multirank with publicly available data, therefore showing gaps. To fill these gaps, institutions are kindly invited to register for U-Multirank and provide the additional information.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

What are the new fields of study for 2016?

For the 2016 edition of U-Multirank we will add six additional fields. The scope of fields from the sciences will be broadened by including biology, chemistry and mathematics. Fields from the social sciences and the humanities will be included for the first time: history, sociology and social work/welfare. More subjects from other broad fields will be added in the years to come.

How do institutions register for participation in U-Multirank 2016?

First time participants interested in registering can express their interest by completing a simple registration form online. Universities that participated in the 2015 ranking do not have to re-register for 2016 as they will be contacted directly by the U-Multirank team. Deadline for registration will be in May.

How can I stay up to date on all the latest news regarding U-Multirank?

U-Multirank publishes a quarterly e-newsletter, at www.umultirank.org. To register, visit our website and click on "Stay in touch". Interested parties can also follow U-Multirank on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (@UMultirank). Media personnel can send an email to info@umultirank.org requesting to be added to the media contact list.