

# MIRO VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM

March, 2021

## Decode, Track, and Use Ranking Information

### Symposium Registration Form Questions & Answers

**Q1: There are too many rankings, which one should we track? How can you assess the validity and rigor of each ranking agency?**

Tracking ranking is only a small part of our IR office's responsibilities and we are only able to track a number of rankings due to our capacity, so our strategy is to focus on a few most well-known rankings that have been established for years, have resources to buy data sources and hire people to develop ranking methodology, and have channels to reach a wider audience. We also tend to focus on the rankings that rank our university well and have clear and reasonable ranking methods.

Also, when a new ranking comes up and we are not sure whether it is worth promoting, we usually wait and see how this ranking is accepted and promoted by other universities. If many universities start to use a new ranking, we may give that ranking more consideration as well.

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**Q2: How do you interpret and comprehend information from different ranking sites?**

We usually look for two things when looking at the ranking websites: data sources and methodology, because they help us understand what the ranking emphasizes, whether

the data sources are credible, and what type of universities the ranking favors. Rankings that heavily rely on research data tend to rank research universities well. A prestigious university with a nice student profile is usually ranked better in the rankings that use lots of student profile data.

When rankings used student survey results, we either looked at or asked for the number of responses and survey response rates because they helped us understand how representative the survey data was. Other than that, we also looked at the characteristics of the ranking. Is it an institutional ranking or a subject ranking? Is it international or domestic? Does it focus on graduate programs only or online programs only?

After collecting all the important pieces of information, we used the information to advise our colleagues whether the ranking was worth promoting. We also decided which rankings to track and how to display the ranking information in a structured way on our [ranking webpage](#). Our goal is to help our viewers easily digest the ranking information that we would like to deliver.

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**Q3: How does MIRO improve the university management and operation at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa? What's your key strategy?**

The mission of our IR office is to improve the university's efficiency and support our decision makers with timely and accurate data. Our efforts focus on providing easy-to-access data to users, so they don't need to spend much time on looking for the information by themselves. That's why we created a [ranking webpage](#) and a ranking web app to help people easily find the ranking information.

Another important piece of work is to help the university develop consistent "ranking stories". Therefore, we created a [ranking analysis brief](#) to interpret and explain the ranking information and worked with the Communications' Office closely to develop

ranking news stories. This is the “consulting” role our IR office takes in addition to providing accessible ranking information.

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**Q4: What our university values does not align with what international rankings value. How do we communicate with students about what rankings mean and in what way they reflect or do not reflect the experience we are offering students?**

This is an excellent question. Take UH Manoa for example, as a public university, our mission is to make the college experience more accessible to Hawai'i residents, but certain measures of many domestic rankings, like the student selectivity and the alumni giving rate, do not put Mānoa in a fair position to compete with the universities that only admit the best performing students. This is one of the reasons that we do not track or emphasize those rankings, but rather focus on the international rankings that emphasize research excellence because those rankings reflect our research competence, and also rank us well.

As to communicating the university's mission and values with the public, we explained the issues in our [ranking analysis brief](#). You can find them on our website. We also worked with the Office of Communications to publish news stories and presented the latest ranking results on our [ranking webpage](#). On top of that, we hope the diversity of ranking results can provide people with a comprehensive perspective, and less focus on one specific ranking or a few points of ups and downs in the rankings.

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**Q5: International students heavily rely on rankings when choosing schools, how can we better explain to them what rankings are and are not?**

This question overlaps the previous question. Again, it is key to having a centralized place for programs to find relevant ranking information and working with the Communications' Office to tell the ranking stories that you want to frame. When choosing how to tell the stories, we recommend selecting the results that can highlight the strengths of the university and its programs; also, it is helpful to mention different rankings and subject rankings as well to help people look at rankings in a context. By

doing so, we can help the students, especially international students, realize that there are actually many rankings that they can look at, and they should also consider subject rankings when choosing schools and majors.

In addition, we understand that our deans, chairs, and other faculty and staff need to address ranking-related questions directly from students, so we make ourselves available for consultation and use what we know about rankings to help our colleagues better understand the meaning behind the ranking results and communicate with their prospective students.

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**Q6: We have an internal ranking tracking tool, but the challenges are (1) infusing it into the culture so it gets used and (2) using it to "tell stories" and pull out meaning that informs practice.**

We agreed that it is always not easy to get people to use the data that the IR office collected and tell their own stories. IR doesn't have the authority to tell others what to do, but we can try our best to make the data easy to access, set up a tone of the ranking stories by creating ranking reports, listing, and tracking certain rankings that we believe is worth emphasizing, and work with the Communications' Office to consistently tell our own ranking stories.

We also offer campus-wide training sessions or present our rankings and available resources to the deans and directors to keep them updated. We know that it takes time to infuse the ranking data tool or any data tools that the IR office built into the campus culture and operations, but we believe that our efforts will eventually pay off.

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**Q7: How did you map different rankings with your university's colleges and departments, since rankings categorize subject fields differently and so do universities?**

It's a big project. To make a long story short, we used the 6-digit CIP code, or Classification of Instructional Programs code, to map our majors to the subject rankings.

Our goal is to make our data users aware of any related rankings that we track, no matter if it's a perfect match or just a related discipline or field.

## Questions from the Ranking Symposium & Answers

### **Q: Inger Bergom**

**I would be interested to hear panelists talk about the processes used to modify or revise rankings criteria and weights from year to year. What sorts of input do they consider, how do they analyze and take into consideration the effects of the changes, etc.**

### **A: Duncan Ross (THE)**

Generally we try not to change too much on a year to year basis (although see below!). We do make changes, usually based on things we learn from the data that we get back, and from the conversations we have with universities. At THE we are forming advisory boards for the World University Rankings and Impact Rankings, who will act as a sounding board for changes. Of course sometimes we decide that a more major change is needed - and when that happens we try to think very carefully about why we're changing and what the impacts will be, both for individual universities and systems.

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### **Q: Jing Ren**

**What data do schools usually need to submit for ranking? How does the ranking agency ensure the accuracy of the data?**

### **A: Duncan Ross (THE)**

Hi Jing - this will vary from ranking to ranking! Usually the agency will have a lot of guidance which is designed to help you to identify the right way to prepare your data. It's also worth reaching out to us. I have a team of Data Editors whose

job is to help universities to represent their data as accurately as possible. Ensuring accuracy is always a challenge - we start with an assumption that universities are trying to be accurate. But we will check the data provided against other sources, and against similar universities and historical data submissions.

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**Q: Snow Wang**

**Will there be methodology changes post-COVID?**

**A: Duncan Ross (THE)**

Hopefully we provided some information on this. For THE, the World University Ranking won't change because of Covid, but Impact will (to an extent). Our US College Ranking is changing as we will be reusing historical survey data - we don't think that students' experience now is typical of the education that the university will be providing post-pandemic. College Scorecard is also altering some of the data that we use!

**A: Drew (QS)**

Hi Snow. Like THE, we don't have any plan to change our methodology as a direct result of Covid-19, a) because we don't know the lasting impact on HE of the situation and b) because it could overly destabilize the ranking which rather hinders its ability to act as a useful benchmark. We have an advisory board that we are in dialogue with about this.

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**Q: Scott Brenden**

**Philosophically, the metrics that rankings publishers choose represent a vision of an ideal university. It seems that many of the metrics that are chosen positively correlate with the wealth of the university and negatively correlate with the student body size. Instead of holding small rich universities as the ideal, will you continue to evolve to reflect the value that a university should benefit its society by being accessible and by scaling to include \*large\* numbers of \*non-elite\* students. That seems healthier for society.**

**A: Duncan Ross (THE)**

THE (and I think QS) normalise by size, so in most cases small universities don't have a huge advantage. However there is a good case that wealthier universities have big advantages, especially in rankings that focus on research. This may not always be the case where rankings focus on sustainability or teaching. Certainly we hope that our Impact Rankings are a better reflection of how universities are working for social impact.

**A: Duncan Ross (THE)**

I would follow-up with this with the point that as much as wealth of institutions correlates with performance (rankings or otherwise), that's a reflection of the reality of the situation. Grant funding, science heavy investment, top profs, great campuses etc. all come at a cost, and I think it would be disingenuous to ignore that or try to code against it. Tailored/niche rankings are clearly the way to shine light on those smaller institutions, and I think in many cases they are already rather adept at communicating their strengths.

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**Q: Mike Bolen (USF)**

**Hi everyone. This is Mike Bolen from University of South Florida. The creation of an international common data set is something that we've been advocating for years. We presented on this topic at AIR in 2019 with everyone on this presentation.**

**A: Duncan Ross (THE)**

Hi Mike - yes! We're looking at some (hopefully) relevant measures on this firstly we're working on APIs to allow integration with university data systems, which we hope will minimise data collection. Secondly for the Impact Rankings we're working with AASHE to try to identify commonality with the STARS system in terms of data similarity.

**A: Robert Morse (USNWR)**

Maybe when COVID is over we can convene a group to try to work on a common data set.

**A: Andrew MacFarlane (QS)**

I'd be happy to be part of that - making the burden on institutions lesser is certainly a goal we can subscribe to.

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**Q: Shifang Li**

**Can you provide a specific example of how the university used the ranking data to improve performance such as teaching, and student engagement?  
thanks**

**A: Yang Zhang**

Hi Shifang, we decided on a strategy of using ranking for marketing and promotion, improving university image and enhancing student/alumni/community engagement through that. Rankings usually do not have many teaching elements, so we are not using ranking for that purpose.

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**Questions Answered Live in the Ranking Symposium**

**Q: Michael Bolen**

**What program are you using to create the graphs in the web app? Are these homegrown in PHP or ASP.Net?**

