

# **Ranking Systems in Higher Education: How They Work and Why They Matter (EDHI 677)**

**College of Education, University of Maryland  
Winter, 2012  
Benjamin 3233**

## **Instructor**

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## **Meeting Times**

This course will meet for nine sessions over five days. In addition, students will complete ten “lab hours” by working on team projects, course prep assignments, and independent work assigned in class. The course meeting times are as follows:

### **January 5, Thursday**

Session 1: 9am-2pm

Session 2: 3-6pm

### **January 6, Friday**

Session 3: 9am-1pm

Session 4: 2-6pm

### **January 12, Thursday**

Session 5: 9am-1pm

Session 6: 2-6pm

### **January 13, Friday**

Session 7: 9am-1pm

Session 8: 2-6pm

### **January 17, Tuesday**

Session 9: 7-10pm

## **Course Overview and Purpose**

Each year college administrators and faculty hold their breath as college and university ranking systems are released. Did they move up or down? What will this mean for their programs and the resources they can attract for them? At the same time, many students begin their higher education experience with little to no knowledge of how their programs are ranked by such magazines as *Money* and *USNWR*. Rather they care about their college's location within 100 miles of their home, the cost, and career placement upon graduation. At the same, many students log-in to websites that rank party schools, their professors, and fraternities and sororities. Somehow, ranking systems seem to be endemic to the higher education experience today. Yet what is being ranked, rated, or categorized varies greatly, and has differing levels of consequence for various stakeholders of higher education: the student, the parent, the faculty member, the college president or provost, the alumni, the donor, the higher education researcher, the community member nearby, and the state legislator. These stakeholders become even more diverse and complex when we consider global rankings and their influence on the world stage.

If you had the chance to create your own ranking system of higher education institutions, what criteria would you hold up as most important? How would you collect your data? Ranking systems, not unlike reward systems, are important symbolic representations of what we think are important and value about higher education. Would you rate the diversity of the student body or faculty? Would community engagement or teaching be a criterion? What about the degree to which the institution contributes to social mobility or is a good steward of the environment? Would you take a historical approach to see how many political leaders, Nobel Laureates, Fortune 500 CEOs, or social activists graduated from the institution in the last 20 years? Maybe, you might assess the social capital students leave with or the "pull." In this imagined universe, institutions begin to work toward your criteria and your ranking system has power in shaping their priorities. Which institutions are included in your "field" to be ranked? Which institutions will win and which will lose in your new ranking system for higher education? What kinds of behaviors will your new ranking system promote? We will discuss all of these issues as we survey the literature on ranking systems and their influence on higher education.

## **Objectives**

The learning outcomes intended for this course are that by the end of the seminar students:

- Understand the history of ranking systems in higher education and their evolution
- Have working knowledge of the major ranking systems used today and how they identify fields, determine criteria, collect data, and assign ranks, as well as the impact they have on institutional and individual behavior
- Are able to effectively critique major ranking systems on the basis of (a) the criteria used to identify quality (b) the methods used to collect data on these criteria and (c) the impact on behavior—the consequences of the criteria for how institutions behave
- Are able to design their own ranking system, use their system to rank 10 institutions, defend the criteria, methods, and consequences of their ranking system using research on higher education, and make a persuasive argument for why it would be preferable to other major ranking systems

## **Required Texts**

*Ranking Systems Course-pack:* Most articles listed on the syllabus are available on the Blackboard site for this class. Some readings will be handed out in class.

## **Course Assignments and Expectations**

This course represents a relatively short but intense learning experience. Over three weeks we will meet together and work intensely in our nine class sessions. You will also be expected to do ten additional hours in course preparation assignments and in class projects, viewing relevant websites and ranking reports. Each student is expected to prepare very thoroughly and carefully for each class session. As such the grade for this course will be distributed between three key areas—active classroom preparation and engagement (including course preparation assignments and attendance), reflective essays, and final team projects.

### **Classroom Engagement (20%)**

Classroom engagement will be evaluated based on (a) attending and engaging in all classes, (b) preparing for each class using course preparation guidelines at the end of the syllabus.

- Contributions in class should reveal a substantial familiarity with assigned readings, a capacity to analyze the issues and problems under discussion, and an ability to listen, incorporate, synthesize and constructively criticize the comments and work of classmates. Class members are encouraged to bring questions, issues, critiques, and insights from the readings and from professional experiences to every class.
- Because this course relies so heavily on classroom participation and interactive dialogue, it is essential for you to **attend all classes**. In the case of an absence caused by sickness, it is your responsibility to inform Dr. O'Meara of your absence via email and to connect with classmates to cover work covered during the absence. Attendance will influence participation grades. We will need to reconsider your enrollment in this class if you miss more than one class session. Missed classes should not be for work reasons. Please do not read email or work on other class assignments or projects during the class. Students should be ready and prepared to start class at 9am. Repeated lateness will hurt the course grade.

### **Reflective Essays (40%)**

Each student will be required to submit **three** of the following five reflective essays (**Essay 2 and two others**). These essays should be completed in 4 pages, 1.5 spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font. They must be submitted at the beginning of class on the day assigned in hard copy.

*Reflective Essay One:* Building on the articles for Sessions 1 and 2, discuss the history of the ranking systems and whom they were created to serve. Consider carefully their earlier purposes and then compare those to the way the system operates today. In doing so, integrate at least two theories or concepts from the Key Concepts Handout. Finally,

imagine how the evolution of rankings might be different if they were created by a different set of organizations, or for different stakeholders and different reasons. **Due January 5<sup>th</sup>**

*Reflective Essay Two:* Building on articles from Sessions 1-4, critique the USNWR Ranking system. Concisely summarize the criteria and weights used by the ranking system. Use evidence from the readings to discuss several strengths and weaknesses. Make recommendations for how this ranking system could be improved. **Due January 6<sup>th</sup>**

*Reflective Essay Three:* Building on readings from Sessions 1-6, discuss the specific behaviors of institutions that are in active “striving mode.” Be careful to distinguish between striving behaviors (what you do to move up) versus consequences. What are the benefits for students, administrators and faculty of being in an institution in active striving mode? What are the likely negative aspects? **Due January 12<sup>th</sup>**

*Reflective Essay Four:* Building on readings from Sessions 1-6, consider the consequences that have been found from striving behavior. Given this is a new area of research, document what the readings suggest is known about consequences for institutional mission, for student engagement, equity and access, faculty work-life, but also acknowledge what is unknown or areas where further research is needed. **Due January 13<sup>th</sup>**

*Reflective Essay Five:* Building on readings from Sessions 1-8, consider carefully the different stakeholders of ranking systems. What are they getting and not getting from the existing ranking systems out there today? Discuss some of the alternative attempts to measure quality outside ranking systems and the strengths and weaknesses of other approaches. What purposes and criteria are currently being ignored and how might they be measured in a future system? In answering these questions please integrate at least two key concepts from the Key Concepts Handout. **Due January 17<sup>th</sup>**

<b>Grading Criteria</b>	<b>Points</b>
Writing clarity, presentation, editing and grammar	1
Organization and focus—well organized response to the question(s) asked	1
Critical analysis—major points are clear, made effectively, and are persuasive	1
Critical analysis—major points are supported by details from the readings-facts, research findings, etc.	1
	4 Points

\*extra credit goes for making these innovative, creative and bringing different sources into them than what is in the course pack

4 points= A

3 points= B+

2 points= B

1 point= Fail

## **Final Project—Creating a Ranking System (40%)**

Students' final project will be to create an original ranking system, using criteria they have selected. Students must:

1. Clearly identify criteria and methods of their system.
2. Use class readings and importantly—higher education research-- to substantiate the importance of criteria chosen and/or ignored, the methods used to measure quality, the likely stakeholders and behavior.
3. Actually provide a ranking of 10 institutions using their ranking system and publicly available data.
4. Differentiate characteristics of the system from those of other ranking systems.
5. Explain the implications of these differences.
6. Argue persuasively as to why their system is superior. Which stakeholders will it serve and how? What kinds of likely institutional, faculty, or student behavior is it likely to catalyze?
7. Discuss the limitations of their system.
8. Use APA, be double spaced, normal margins, 12-point font, Times New Roman.
9. For individual projects, be a minimum of 15 pages plus references and appendix. For Team Projects, be a minimum of 20 pages plus references and appendix and include a one-paragraph description of the role of each team member in the project, signed off by the entire team.

Final projects will be comprised of two parts: (1) a 15-20 page paper, and (2) a 20 minute class presentation of the ranking system. Students will receive feedback on a proposal for the project in class on Friday, **January 6<sup>th</sup>**. The feedback here will focus on the key ideas, sources of data and field proposed. The presentation will occur on **January 17<sup>th</sup>** and will allow instructors and students to provide feedback that can be integrated into the final paper, due **January 24<sup>th</sup>** in hard copy by 1pm to 2202 Benjamin. Here the focus of feedback are ways the ranking system is presented, and criteria and methods justified by higher education research.

### **Grading Criteria for Final Projects**

- Organization, structure, and clarity of writing and presentation.
- Employment of higher education research to justify criteria, methods and field.
- Quality of critical analysis and reasoning for chosen criteria; consideration of field.
- Effectiveness of comparison and contrast with extant ranking systems.
- Effective use of class feedback to improve the final product.
- Creativity, innovation, and significance.

### **Policy on Incomplete Grades**

We will restrict the grade of Incomplete to documented emergencies at the end of the semester only. Such emergencies are not based on work commitments; rather students should not take the course if work or other course responsibilities make it clear at the beginning of the semester that they will not be able to complete assignments by the end of course deadlines. A grade of incomplete requires the instructor's prior approval.

### **Policy on Students with Documented Disabilities**

Please let the instructor know at the beginning of the class if you have a documented disability so that accommodations can be made to support your learning.

### **Course Evaluation**

As a member of our academic community, you as a student have a number of important responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is to submit your course evaluations each term through CourseEvalUM in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. Please watch for the dates the system will open for evaluation of the semester and make a note of the link at which you can access the submission system: <https://www.courseevalum.umd.edu/>. We greatly appreciate your completing the course evaluations when the email invitation is sent to you.

### **Class Sessions**

**Session One - January 5:** In this session we consider the history of striving in the last half century and what is meant by striving for prestige? What were some of the key social, political and economic forces that influenced the emergence of rankings? We will also compare and contrast how competition operates in higher education versus other fields such as health care. We will also introduce key concepts and theories and how these might be used throughout the class.

- Webster, D. S. (1992). Reputational rankings of colleges, universities, and individual disciplines and fields of study, from their beginnings to the present. *Higher Education Handbook of Theory and Research: Vol. VIII*, 234-304.
- O'Meara, K. (2007). Striving for what? Exploring the pursuit of prestige. J.C. Smart (ed.). *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Vol. XXII, 121-179.
- Birnbaum, R. (1983). *Maintaining Diversity in Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (Chapters 1 & 2).
- Cutright, M. (2003). Untitled. [Review of the book *In Pursuit of Prestige*]. *Journal of Higher Education*, 74(2), 238-240.
- Winston, G. C. (2000). *The Positional Arms Race in Higher Education* (Discussion Paper No. 54). Williamstown, MA: Williams Project on the Economics of Higher Education.
- Aldersley, S. F. (1995). "Upward drift" is alive and well: Research/doctoral model still attractive to institutions. *Change*, 27(5), 50-56.
- Eckel, P. D. (2007). Redefining competition constructively: The challenges of privatisation, competition, and market-based state policy in the United States. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 19(1), 77-93.
- Porter, M. E. & Teisburg, E. O. (2004). Redefining competition in healthcare. *Harvard Business Review*, 82(6) 64-76.

**Session Two - January 5:** In this session we analyze one of the most dominant and influential of ranking systems: USNWR. We will use a rubric created for this class to analyze the most popular prestige oriented ranking systems and the criteria that are used to measure performance. We will carefully consider what is ranked, rated, and categorized and why in USNWR and other dominant ranking systems.

**Guest Speakers:**

**Dr. Mona Levine**, Associate Vice President for Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment and **Pamela Phillips**, Associate Director for Reporting and Special Projects. Dr. Levine and Ms. Phillips are responsible for collecting and reporting University of Maryland data to ranking systems. They will discuss their experiences as institutional researchers working with data collection for USNWR and other ranking systems.

O'Meara, K. & Meekins, M. (In press). *Inside Rankings: Limitations and Possibilities*. Working Paper: Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education.

Baty, P. (2010, November 7). Simulation software claimed to predict effect of management choices on ranking position. *Times Higher Education*. Retrieved November 29, 2010, from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=414131&c=1>

Richards, A. & Coddington, R. (2010, August 29). 30 ways to rate a college. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved November 29, 2010 from <http://chronicle.com/article/30-Ways-to-Rate-a-College/124160/>

Meredith, M. (2004). Why do universities compete in the ratings game? An empirical analysis of the effects of the U.S. News and World Report college rankings. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(5), 443-461.

Kuh, G. D. & Pascarella, E. T. (2004). What does institutional selectivity tell us about educational quality? *Change*, 36(5), 52-58.

Pike, G. R. (2004). Measuring quality: A comparison of U.S. News rankings and NSSE benchmarks. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2), 193-208.

Ehrenberg, R. G. (2003). Reaching for the brass ring: The U.S. News and World Report rankings and competition. *The Review of Higher Education*, 26(2), 145-162.

**Session Three - January 6:** In this class we extend our conversation of dominant ranking systems to the world stage. What are the dominant international ranking systems for world universities and within other national systems of higher education? What are the criteria they are using to assess performance?

**Guest Speaker:**

**Dr. Ellen Hazelkorn**, Director of Research and Enterprise, and Dean of the Graduate School, Dublin Institute of Technology. Dr. Hazelkorn also leads the Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU), and is a Consultant to the OECD Programme on Institutional Management of Higher Education (IMHE). Dr. Hazelkorn is currently leading an international research project on the Impact and Influence of League Tables and Ranking Systems on Higher Education Decision-Making and Academic Behaviour in association with IMHE and IAU [<http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/rankings>]. Ellen is also working with the Institute for Higher Education Policy on a New Agenda for College and University Ranking.

- Altbach, P. G. (2010, November 11). The state of the rankings. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved November 29, 2010 from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/11/11/altbach>
- Hazelkorn, E. (2009). Rankings and the battle for world-class excellence: Institutional strategies and policy choices. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 21(1), 55-76.
- Marginson, S. (2006). Dynamics of national and global competition in higher education. *Higher Education*, 52, 1-39.
- Marginson, S. (2007). *Global university rankings: Where to from here?* Paper presented at the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education, Singapore.
- Altbach, P. G. (2004). The costs and benefits of world class universities. *Academe*, 90(1), 20-23.
- Tierney, W. G. (2009, March). Globalization, international rankings, and the American model: A reassessment. *Higher Education Forum*.
- Birnbaum, R. (2006). *No world class university left behind*. Paper presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Anaheim, CA.
- Morphew, C. C. & Huisman, J. (2002). Using institutional theory to reframe research on academic drift. *Higher Education in Europe*, 27(4), 491-506.
- Rauhvargers, A. (2011). *European University Association Report on Rankings 2011: Global university rankings and their impact*, Belgium: European University Association. READ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLY (Pages 10-17)

**Session Four - January 6:** We will continue with our critique of dominant ranking systems with a particular focus on criteria used to measure performance and their strengths and weaknesses. We will also consider the “fields” and contexts specific to different ranking systems.

**Guest Speakers:**

**Allison Bell** serves in the University of Maryland's Office of Undergraduate Admissions as the Senior Associate Director for Marketing and Communication. While a job in marketing wasn't necessarily in her plans, trying to understand people was always her goal. With a bachelor's degree in anthropology, a master's in counseling psychology for higher education, and over twelve years professional experience in undergraduate admissions, Ms. Bell brings to her role a keen understanding of what messages students, parents and counselors are most interested in hearing.

**Matthew Meekins** is currently Assistant Director of Graduate Admissions for the School of International Service at American University. His role entails recruiting both domestically and internationally for MA and PhD candidates. Previously, he worked in the undergraduate admissions office at Salisbury University (part of the University System of Maryland). He is also a 2010 MA graduate of the Higher Education Program at the University of Maryland.

- Monks, J. & Ehrenberg, R. G. (1999). U.S. News & World Report rankings: Why they do matter. *Change*, 31(6), 43-51.
- Dichev, I. (2001). News or noise? Estimating the noise in the U.S. News university rankings. *Research in Higher Education*, 42, 237-266.
- Webster, T. J. (2001). A principal component analysis of the *U.S. News & World Report* tier rankings of colleges and universities. *Economics of Education Review* 20, 235-244.
- Massy, W. F. & Zemsky, R. (1994). Faculty discretionary time. *Journal of Higher Education*, 65(1), 1-22.
- Volkwein, J. F. & Sweitzer, K. V. (2006). The influences on prestige and reputation at research universities and liberal arts colleges. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(2), 129-148.



Altbach, P. C. Rankings Season is Here. *International Higher Education*. p. 2-5.

**Session Five - January 12:** Having considered the dominant rankings systems in the US and abroad we will consider the behavior of institutions trying to move up within them. What do campuses do when they are striving? What kinds of behaviors do they exhibit? Here we begin to consider the consequences of striving, with particular focus on admissions, access, equity and educational quality.

- Bowman, N. A. & Bastedo, M. N. (2009). Getting on the front page: Organizational reputation, status signals, and the impact of US News and World report rankings on student decisions. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, p. 415-436.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2011). Rankings: Student Choice and Recruitment. P. 121-152. *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Astin, A. W., & Chang, M. J. (1995). Colleges that emphasize research and teaching: Can you have your cake and eat it too? *Change*, 27(5), 44-49.
- Kirp, D. L. & Holman, J. (2004). This little student went to market. In D. L. Kirp, D. Solomon, P. Roberts, E. P. Berman, J. T. Holman, & J. VanAntwerpen (Eds.), *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* (pp. 11-32). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sumner, J. (2005). Sins of admission. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(25), B34.
- Hossler, D. (2000). The problem with college rankings. *About Campus*, 20-24.
- Machung, A. (1998). Playing the rankings game. *Change*, 30(4), 12-17.
- Lovett, C. M. (2005). The perils of pursuing prestige. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(20), B20.
- Morse, R. (2010, December 3). Report: More government involvement needed in college search process. *Morse Code: Inside the College Rankings*. Retrieved December 6, 2010 From: <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/college-rankings-blog/2010/12/03/report-more-government-involvement-needed-in-college-search-process.html>

**Session Six - January 12:** We will continue our conversation about the impact of striving by turning to the influence of ranking systems and striving within the prestige hierarchy on faculty work-life and administrative expenditures. We will also look at cases of striving institutions in liberal arts colleges and research universities for how striving impacts the culture of a place.

**Guest Speakers:**

**Amanda Nachman '07**, founded College Magazine during her senior year with the advisory assistance of the University's Dingman Center for Entrepreneurship. The magazine consists of student editors mentoring over 40 staff writers, bloggers and photographers from universities nationwide. College Magazine has done several rankings of institutions as well as several "top campus" lists, such as the 10 most hipster campuses or the 10 most LGBT-friendly universities. <http://www.collegemagazine.com>

**Donna L. Wiseman, Ph.D.**, assumed the duties of Dean of the College of Education at the University of Maryland in May 2008. She served as interim dean of the college during the 2007-08 academic year. Prior to that, she held the position of Associate Dean for Academic

Programs responsible for student services and advising, international activities, outreach, teacher education and accreditation. Wiseman is also a professor in the Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership Department.

- Dubrow, G., Moseley, B, & Dustin, D. (2006). Life at mission creep U. *Academe*, 92(3), 24-28.  
*Impact of college rankings on institutional decision-making: Four country case studies* (2009). Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.
- O'Meara, K. & Bloomgarden, A. (2010) Prestige at what Cost: Examining the consequences of striving for faculty work-life, reward systems, and satisfaction. *Journal of the Professoriate*, 4(1). 40-74.
- Ward, K. & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2005). *Faculty Life at Comprehensives: Between a Rock and A Hard Place*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Philadelphia, PA.
- Morphew, C. C. & Baker, B. D. (2004). The cost of prestige: Do new research one universities incur increased administrative costs? *Review of Higher Education*, 27(3), 365-384.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2011). Impact and Influence of Rankings—The View from Inside Higher Education. p. 82-120. *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education*. Palgrave MacMillan.

**Session 7 - January 13:** There are many stakeholders of ranking systems, including but not limited to students, parents, alumni, legislators, donors, administrators, higher education researchers, and state legislators. In this session we consider whether stakeholders are getting what they want from ranking systems.

**Guest Speakers:**

**Dan Fisher**, *Research Analyst for the Smith School of Business*. One of Dan's primary duties is overseeing the data gathering, submission and analysis of the Smith School internal data to several publications for rankings purpose.

- Fisher, B. (2009). Athletics success and institutional rankings. In J. D. Toma & D. A. Kramer II (Eds.), *New Directions for Higher Education*, 148, 45-53.
- Ostriker, J. P., Holland, P. W., Kuh, C. V., & Voytuk, J. A. (Eds.) (2010). *A Data-Based Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Sponsler, B. A. (2009). *The Role and Relevance of Rankings in Higher Education Policymaking*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.
- Avery, C., Glickman, M., Hoxby, C., & Metrick, A. (2004, September). A revealed preference ranking of U.S. colleges and universities. NBER Working Paper No. 10803.

**Session 8 - January 13:** How should we measure quality in higher education? How should we assess whether institutions are achieving their missions? During this class we consider several dominant alternative projects underway and critique the strengths and weaknesses of each, as well as consider the challenges of measuring performance in higher education. Please reference the tables at the end of the syllabus for helpful links and other information.

**Guest Speaker:**

**Dr. George Mehaffy**, Vice President for Academic Leadership and Change at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. AASCU is a Washington-based higher education association of nearly 420 public colleges, universities and systems whose members share a learning- and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved student populations and a dedication to research and creativity that advances their regions' economic progress and cultural development. Dr. Mehaffy has done a lot of thinking about the negative consequences of striving in AASCU institutions as well as the opportunity of these institutions to become something more distinctive: stewards of place, or institutions that mark their quality by the degree to which they provide unique service to a specific region and location.

- Steedle, J. Kugelmass, H. & Nemeth, A. What do they measure? Comparing three learning outcomes assessments. *Change*, 42(4), 33-37.
- Merrow, J. (2005). Afterword. In R. H. Hersch & J. Merrow (Eds.), *Declining By Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (pp. 233-239). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pope, L. (1996). *Colleges that Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even if You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. (Chapters 1 & 11).
- Mathews, J. (2005). Caveat lector: Unexamined assumptions about quality in higher education. In R. H. Hersch & J. Merrow (Eds.), *Declining By Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (pp. 47-59). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Callan, P. M., Doyle, W., Finney, J. E. (2001). Evaluating higher education performance: Measuring up 2000. *Change*, 33(2), 10-19.
- O'Neil, H. F., Bensimon, E. M., Diamond, M. A., & Moore, M. R. (1999). Designing and implementing an academic scoreboard. *Change* 31(6), 33-40.

**Session 9 - January 17:** Future Projections: What should be ranked, how and why? Final project presentations will begin during this class session. Each group will have 20-30 minutes for their presentation of a new ranking system. Students in the class will raise questions and provide feedback which should be integrated into the final paper submitted January 24, 2012.

**Guest Speaker:**

**Robert Morse**, Director of Data Research, *U.S. News & World Report*. Mr. Morse is responsible for the methodology and execution of the *U.S. News rankings*. He is also editor of the blog, "Morse Code:" <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/college-rankings-blog>

- Parker, J. T. (October 3, 2010). Let's Make Rankings that Matter. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Commentary.
- Gasman, M. (April, 25, 2010). Ranking a Well-Rounded College Education. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Innovations.
- Glenn, D. (December 2, 2010). How 3 graduate deans are putting the NRC rankings to use. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Faculty.

## **Course Preparations**

These will usually be 1-2 pages, pass/fail, and evaluated for content, not form.

**Session One:** January 5: After reading the Eckel and Porter pieces consider three ways health care and higher education are similar and three ways they are different with relationship to competition. Please use three concepts from the key concepts handout in providing your analysis.

Or

Have you ever been a part of a striving institution as described in the table at the end of the O'Meara piece? Describe the origins of this experience from your perspective, connecting at least three ways your institution was striving that parallels the striving characteristics described in this piece.

**Session Two:** January 5: Every student will be assigned a different ranking system to analyze using Table B. Be especially careful to include detail on the field, criteria, and measurement in your ranking system so you can explain it to the class. Please bring 15 copies of your ranking system table to class.

**Session Three:** January 6: Use the readings to consider three ways the world rankings are influencing colleges and universities worldwide. Do the world rankings encourage "strategic imitation," international distinction, or some of both?

**Session Four:** January 6: Consider Table C at the end of the syllabus. Also consider the differences between institutional types and their missions. Choose a ranking system other than USNWR. Please create a table that identifies some additional categories of critique of this ranking system.

**Session Five:** January 12: Please go to the USNWR page and specifically to the writings of Robert Morse. Develop four well-considered questions for discussion at the class with Mr. Morse, based on your readings and experiences of rankings.

**Session Six:** January 12: Use the readings today (especially Dubrow, O'Meara & Bloomgarden, and Ward & Wolf-Wendel) to consider how striving becomes part of the culture of a place. Try to identify values and assumptions that impact every day practices.

**Session Seven:** January 13: Using readings from today and previous sessions, develop a table (with three columns). In the first column put the names of the different stakeholders of ranking systems. In the second column critique what they are getting out of them—the benefits. Be specific about which ranking systems and which benefits. In the third column consider what each stakeholder is not getting from the same ranking system that might be helpful.

**Session Eight:** January 13: What do you think are the most compelling new ranking systems or assessments out there and why? Be very specific in your observations.

Alternatively, what purposes and missions of higher education have no spotlight or a limited one because of the difficulty of measurement (also be specific about this observation)?

**Table A: Ranking Systems for Higher Education (not an exhaustive list)**

**Domestic Focus**

Publisher	Focus	Website
U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)	Reputational Surveys, Selectivity, Graduation and Retention Rates, Faculty Resources, Financial Resources, Alumni Giving, Graduation Rate Progress	<a href="http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges">http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges</a>
The Princeton Review	Best 373 Colleges	<a href="http://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings.aspx">http://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings.aspx</a>
Washington Monthly	Social Mobility, Research, and Service	<a href="http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/rankings_2010/national_university_rank.php">http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/rankings_2010/national_university_rank.php</a>
Forbes “America’s Best Colleges”	Student Satisfaction, Postgraduate Success, Student Debt, Four-Year Graduation Rate, Competitive Awards	<a href="http://www.forbes.com/2010/08/11/best-colleges-universities-rating-ranking-opinions-best-colleges-10_land.html">http://www.forbes.com/2010/08/11/best-colleges-universities-rating-ranking-opinions-best-colleges-10_land.html</a>
Payscale College Salary Report	Salary data from Payscale users	<a href="http://www.payscale.com/best-colleges">http://www.payscale.com/best-colleges</a>
State University	A mix of non-reputational, government reported data	<a href="http://www.stateuniversity.com/">http://www.stateuniversity.com/</a>
College Prowler Rankings	A variety including campus dining, housing, strictness, social life, safety, parking, and weather	<a href="http://collegeprowler.com/rankings/">http://collegeprowler.com/rankings/</a>
The Chronicle of Higher Education’s “Great Colleges to Work For”	Workplace issues including governance, compensation, benefits, career development, an satisfaction	<a href="http://chroniclegreatcolleges.com/">http://chroniclegreatcolleges.com/</a>
“Rugg’s Recommendations on Colleges”	Academic departments and programs	<a href="http://www.ruggsrecommendations.com/">http://www.ruggsrecommendations.com/</a>
Bloomberg BusinessWeek “Best B-Schools”	Focus on business schools – academic quality, student satisfaction, job placement	<a href="http://www.businessweek.com/business-schools/">http://www.businessweek.com/business-schools/</a>

The Center for Measuring University Performance	Total research dollars, funding, endowments, annual giving, faculty awards, student competitiveness	<a href="http://mup.asu.edu/">http://mup.asu.edu/</a>
The Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index	Citations, publications, research funding	<a href="http://chronicle.com/stat s/productivity/">http://chronicle.com/stat s/productivity/</a>
Kiplinger's 100 Best Values	Academic quality (selectivity), cost, and financial aid for public institutions	<a href="http://www.kiplinger.com/tools/colleges/">http://www.kiplinger.com/tools/colleges/</a>
Princeton Review/USA Today Top 100 Best Value Colleges	"High-quality academics at a reasonable price"	<a href="http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/best-value-colleges.htm">http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/best-value-colleges.htm</a>
My Chances College Rankings	Aggregated from student admissions decisions	<a href="http://college.mychances.net/college-rankings.php">http://college.mychances.net/college-rankings.php</a>
The Global Language Monitor's College Rankings (TrendTopper MediaBuzz Rankings)	Based upon number of keyword appearances on the Internet	<a href="http://www.languagemonitor.com/college-rankings/">http://www.languagemonitor.com/college-rankings/</a>
What Will They Learn? (American Council of Trustees and Alumni)	Core requirements: composition, literature, foreign language, U.S. history, economics, math, science	<a href="http://www.whatwilltheylearn.com/">http://www.whatwilltheylearn.com/</a>

Source: O'Meara, K. & Meekins, M. (In press). Inside Rankings: Limitations and Possibilities. Working Paper: Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education.

### International Focus

Publisher	Focus on	Website
"Academic Ranking of World Universities" (Shanghai Jiao Tong University) – often referred to as "the Shanghai rankings"	Nobel and Field winners, citation indices, publications in <i>Nature</i> and <i>Science</i> , per capita performance	<a href="http://www.arwu.org/">http://www.arwu.org/</a>
Times Higher Education (UK) (as of 2010 publishing separate from QS)	Teaching, citations, research (volume, income, and reputation), international mix, and industry income	<a href="http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/index.html">http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/index.html</a>

QS World University Rankings (UK) (Quacquarelli Symonds Limited)	Academic reputation (peer review), employer reputation, student-to-faculty ratio, citations per faculty, and international students and faculty.	<a href="http://www.topuniversities.com/">http://www.topuniversities.com/</a>
G-Factor International University Ranking (USA)	Using Google search engine, ranks links to a particular institution from the websites of others	<a href="http://universitymetrics.com/g-factor">http://universitymetrics.com/g-factor</a>
Webometrics World University Rankings on the Web (Spain)	Web publication: visibility (external links), size, rich files, Google Scholar	<a href="http://www.webometrics.info/">http://www.webometrics.info/</a>
Maclean's (Canada)	Student award winners, student-to-faculty ratio, faculty grants and awards, resources, student support, library, and reputation (peer review)	<a href="http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/rankings/">http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/rankings/</a>
"International Professional Classification of Higher Education Institutions" - Ecole des Mines de Paris (France)	Alma maters of Fortune 500 CEOs	<a href="http://www.mines-paristech.fr/Actualites/PR/">http://www.mines-paristech.fr/Actualites/PR/</a>
Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan	Scientific papers citations: research productivity, research impact, and research excellence	<a href="http://ranking.heeact.edu.tw/en-us/2009/Page/Methodology">http://ranking.heeact.edu.tw/en-us/2009/Page/Methodology</a>
RatER (Rating of Educational Resources) (Russia)	Educational activity, research activity, faculty professional competence, financial maintenance, international activity, web volume	<a href="http://www.globaluniversitiesranking.org/">http://www.globaluniversitiesranking.org/</a>
CHE Excellence Ranking (Center for Higher Education Development) (Germany)	European graduate study (by discipline/department)	<a href="http://www.excellenceranking.org/eusid/EUSID">http://www.excellenceranking.org/eusid/EUSID</a>
4 International Colleges & Universities Web Ranking (Australia)	Web metrics: Google, Yahoo!, and Alexa	<a href="http://www.4icu.org/">http://www.4icu.org/</a>
High Impact Universities (Australia)	Research Performance Index: quality and	<a href="http://www.highimpactuniversities.com/">http://www.highimpactuniversities.com/</a>

	consistency of publication	
Scimago Institutions Rankings (Ibero-American Rankings) (Spain)	Research: scientific output, international collaboration, average scientific quality, publication rate	<a href="http://www.scimagoir.com/">http://www.scimagoir.com/</a>

O'Meara, K. & Meekins, M. (In press). Inside Rankings: Limitations and Possibilities. Working Paper: Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education.

**Table B: Framework for Analysis of Ranking Systems**

History	Why was this ranking system created? By whom?
Stakeholders	For whom? Who is it intended to serve?
The field	Who is included and excluded? What are the boundaries? (e.g. national or international, 2 or 4 year institutions?)
Criteria	What counts in this ranking system and why?
Measurement	How are the criteria evaluated? What are the methods for collecting data? What is the process?
Consequences	To what end? What behavior and outcomes do the rankings encourage?
Criteria and alternatives	What is distinctive and useful for this ranking? How could it be more effective at accomplishing its stated goals?

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**Table C: Weaknesses of Dominant Ranking Systems**

Critiques of Dominant Ranking Systems	Explanation
Mistaken Identity or False Advertising	Research reputation is taken as a proxy for academic program quality
Survival of the craftiest	They encourage fabrication of data, questionable strategic decisions to play to the criteria and not all institutions have the same resources to compile the data.
That's what she said...	They rely heavily on reputational surveys that are highly network driven.
The fix is in	Highly input focused –you can predict the institutional ranking easily by knowing the input measures such as student selectivity, age of institution, endowment, alumni giving. There is very little movement in rankings and most movement is not based on quality change



	as much as shifts in how criteria are measured from year to year.
The glow in dim light	Rater bias and halo effect—raters not knowing information to rate appropriately and time lag of knowledge
They encourage “strategic imitation.”	The rankings encourage institutions to mimic the behaviors of higher ranked institutions; they do not reward distinctive missions, cultures and identities.

O’Meara, K. & Meekins, M. (In press). Inside Rankings: Limitations and Possibilities. Working Paper: Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education.

### **Additional Recommended Readings**

Bastedo, M. & Bowman, N. (2011). College rankings as an inter-organizational dependency: Establishing the foundation for strategic and institutional accounts. *Research in Higher Education* 52:3-23.

McDonough, P. M., Antonio, A. L., Walpole, M. B., & Perez, L. X. (1998). College rankings: Democratized college knowledge for whom? *Research in Higher Education*, 39(5), 513-537.