

# University rankings: it's complicated

Stakeholder insights on the present and future of rankings (aka cries of despair and hopeful notes)

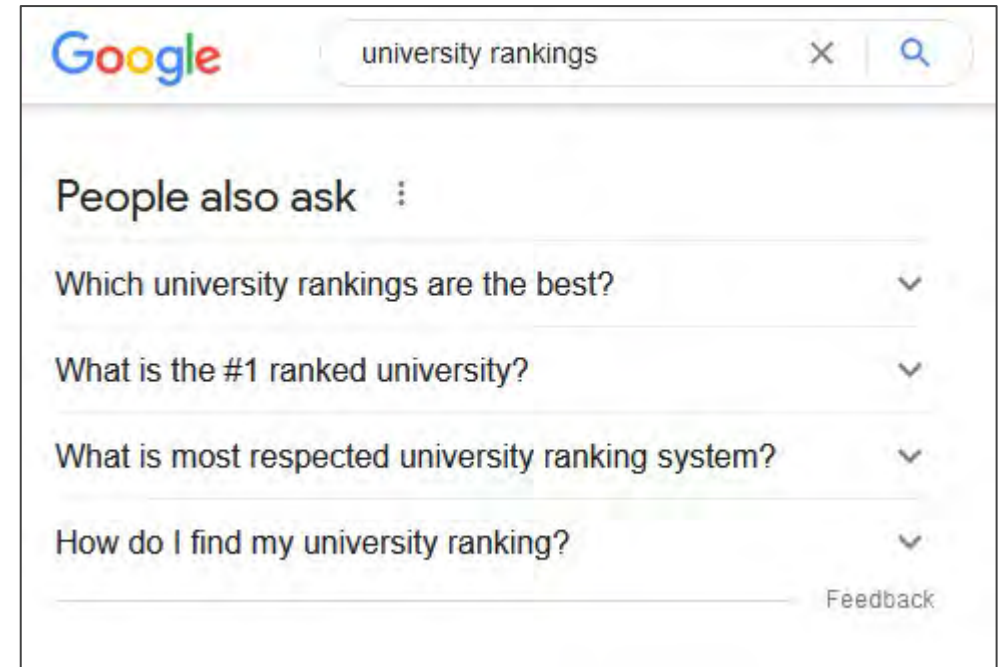
Andrea Reyes Elizondo

Mark Neijssel

# University rankings: horrible/great

El que gana festeja, el que pierde explica

- But what are they?
- An ordering system of universities based on various factors:
  - Citation impact
  - Publication output
  - Student surveys
  - Swimming pools & facilities
- No ranking is comprehensive
- Pretend to quantify excellence/quality



# Leiden Ranking

Aligned with our vision on responsible/meaningful metrics

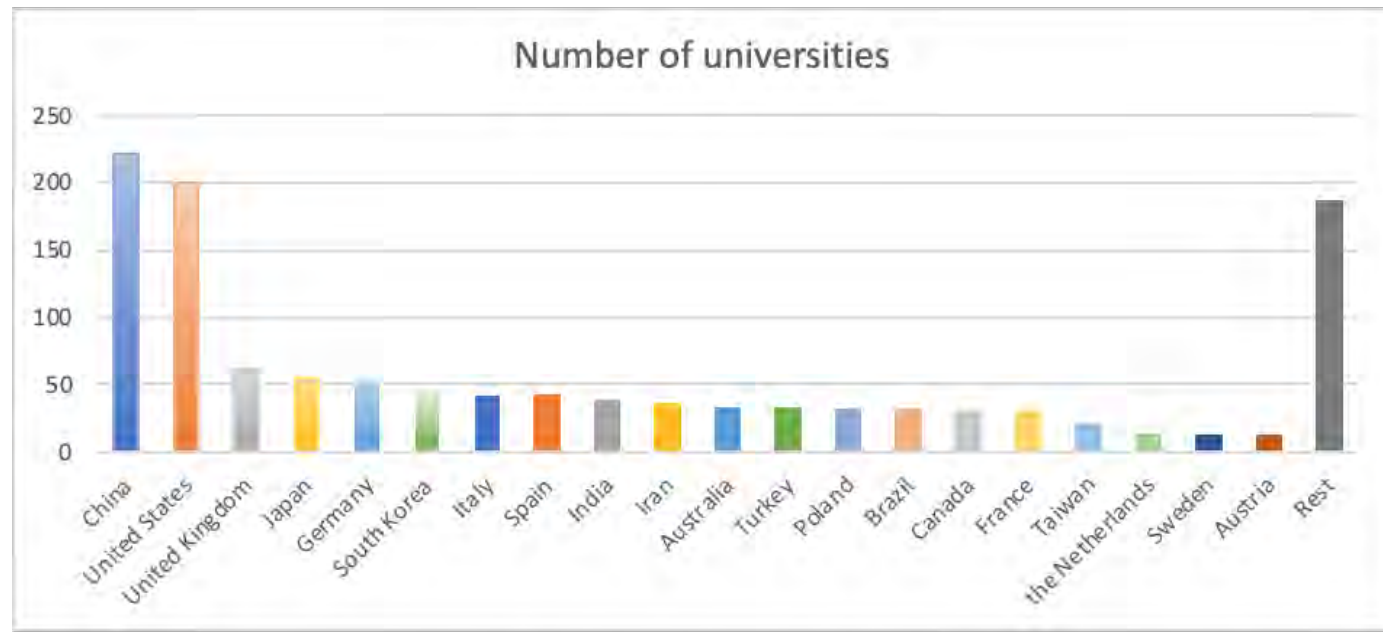
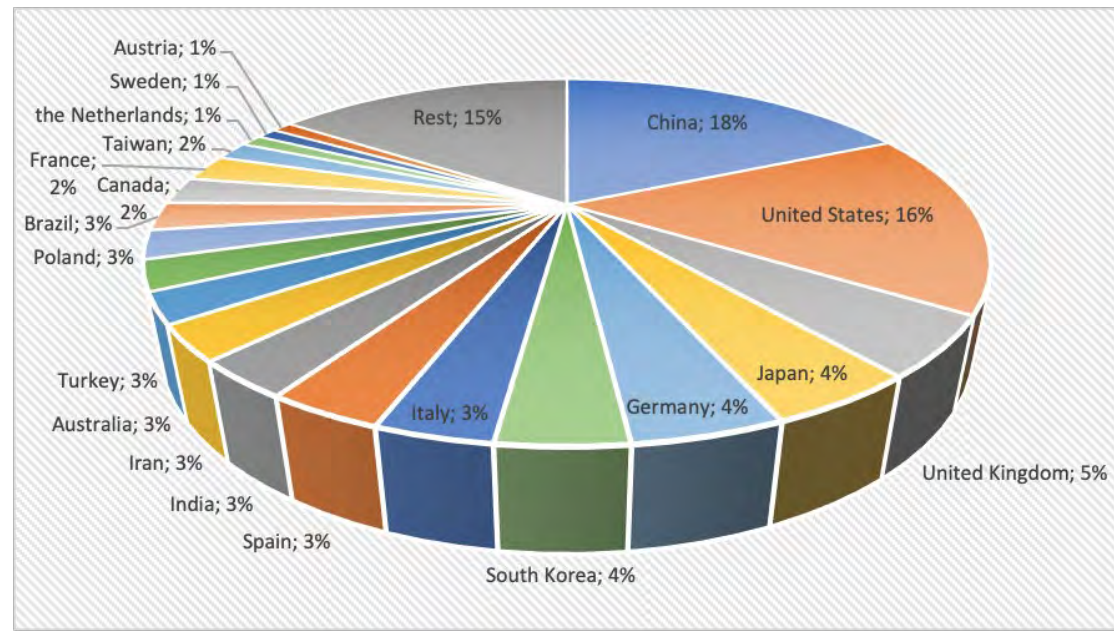
- No composite indicators
- Focussed solely on scientific performance: not on teaching etc.
- Scientometric indicators based on our data: universities do not provide any data
- High quality data collection and sophisticated state-of-the-art methodologies
- Separate indicators for size-dependent and size-independent performance
- Multi-dimensional perspective



# Leiden Ranking 2021

- 1225 universities from 69 different countries
- In-house enhanced version of Web of Science
- Articles and reviews in *core publication set*
- Period 2016-2019/2020
- Fractional counting
- >800 publications

# Geographical spread

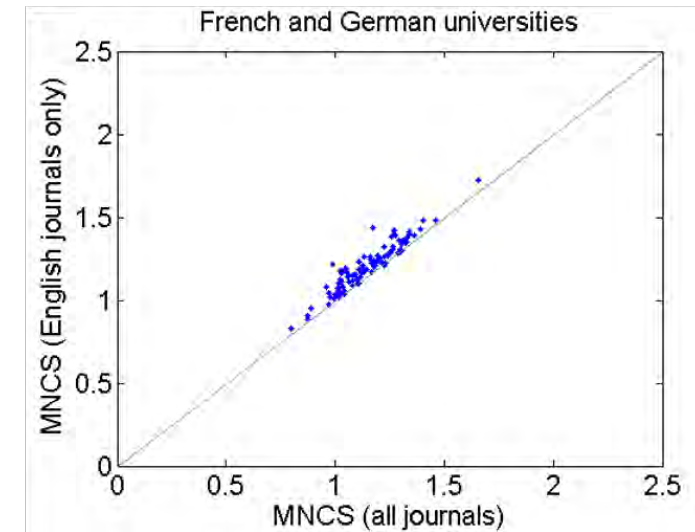
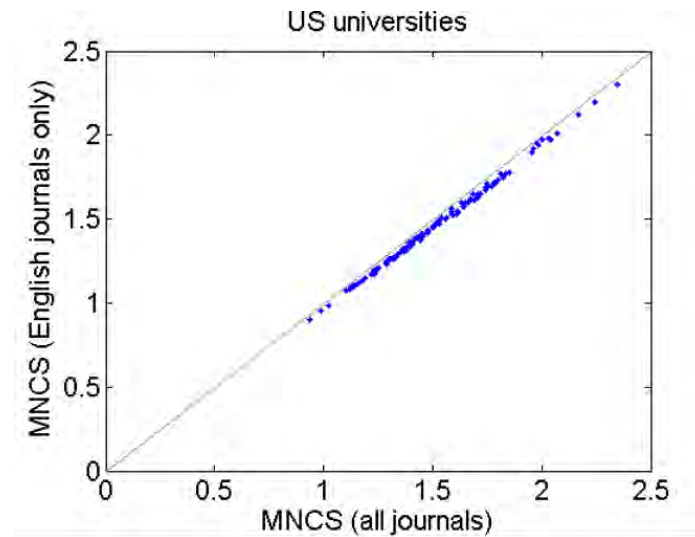


# Enhanced version of Web of Science

- Own algorithms for counting citations and filtering of self-citations
- Unification of name- and address variants: the A-team
- Systematic allocation of affiliated institutions
  - Component
  - Joint research facility or organization
  - Associated organization
- Linking to other data sources: PATSTAT, Orbis, Unpaywall, CED, Gender API etc.
- Own classification system of science

# Core publication set levels the playing field

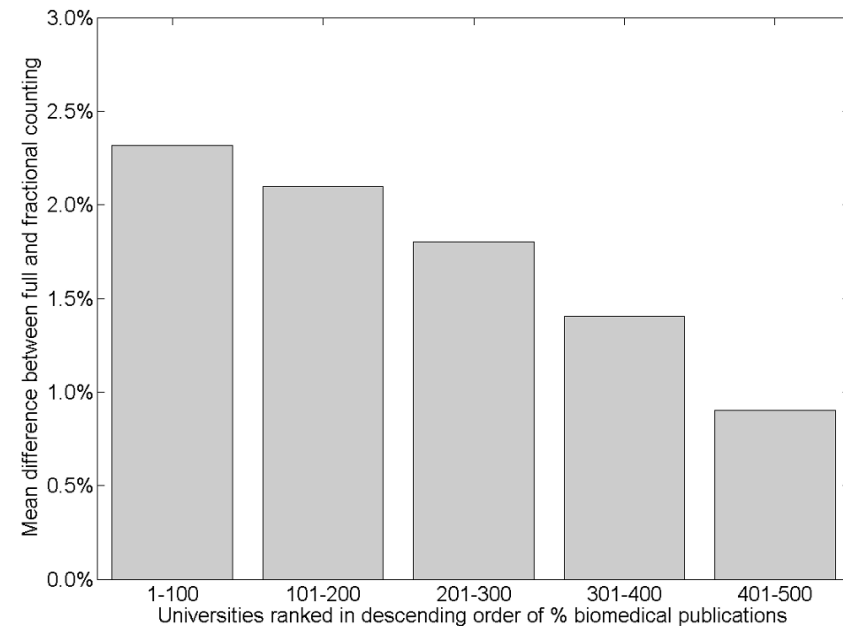
- The publication has been written in English.
- The publication has one or more authors. (Anonymous publications are not allowed.)
- The publication has not been retracted.
- The publication has appeared in a core journal.



# Fractional counting levels the playing field

No bias towards biomedical sciences

- Publication includes five authors of which two belong to a particular university, the publication is counted with a weight of  $2/5 = 0.4$  for that university.
- Waltman, L., & Van Eck, N.J. (2015). Field-normalized citation impact indicators and the choice of an appropriate counting method. *Journal of Informetrics*, 9(4), 872-894.

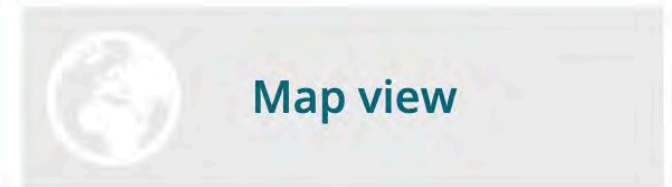
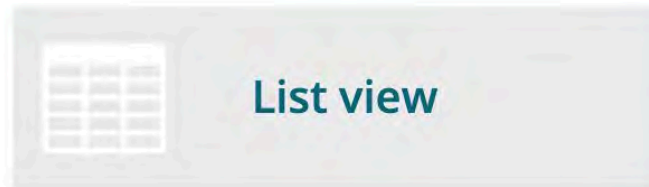




# Multi-dimensional perspective

Choose your relevant Leiden Ranking

- Three different views:

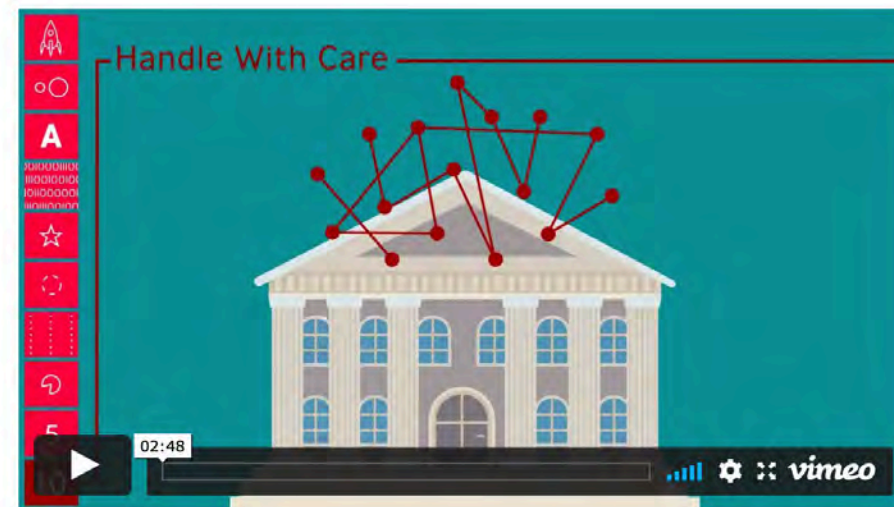


- Four analytical dimensions:
  - Scientific impact
  - Collaboration
  - Open access
  - Gender

# Responsible use

- Ten principles developed by CWTS
- Supporting animation video

4. University rankings should be sufficiently transparent



8. Dimensions of university performance not covered by university rankings should not be overlooked



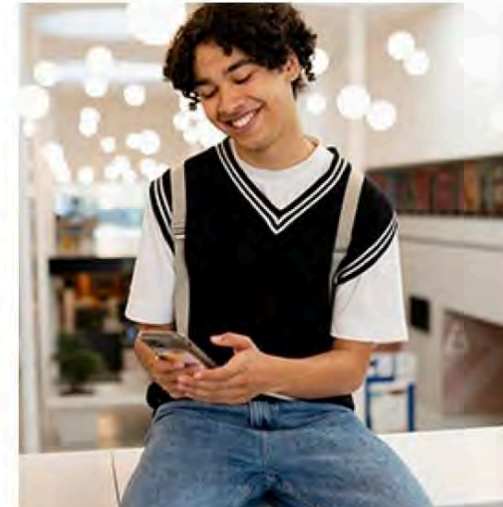
# Stakeholder consultation

## Developments in the field

- October 2021- April 2022
- 14 stakeholders
- Research managers, researchers, professors, deans, rectors, data providers, policy advisors, university policy support staff, information specialists, (open) data activists
- Europe, United States of America, Latin America, Oceania
- Gender (in)balance: 4 women, 10 men
- Questions about rankings in general and how the future of the landscape will look like

## Role of rankings

- Justification of a system where impact (international pubs/citations) = quality
- Serve to secure funding, increase student numbers
- Proxies for prestige, popularity
- Create non-contextualized & reductive “measures”
- Useful tools for mkt & communication departments
- Highly influential in setting up policy in a globalized higher education system
- Tools that pit institutions against each other
- PR for commercial rankings to sell their services
- Create a feedback loop: confirm funding choices
- Though: can be useful if contextualized, used in a larger inquiry



### UvA highest scoring university in the Dutch Instagram Top 100 list

The University of Amsterdam has been ranked the [number one](#) Dutch university on Instagram. We also placed at number 35 out of the top 100 Dutch brands in this ranking by social media company Somention. A proud achievement! The Top 100 rankings are based on the engagement rate and the number of followers, likes and comments.

[Follow the UvA on Instagram](#) →

## On their pernicious effects

- Impression of objectivity and neutrality:
  - Difference between 18 and 19?
- Branding over substance and quality
- False ideas on what they represent:
  - Hard work
  - Quality on teaching/research
- Increase of inequality
  - Narrow focus on epistemic traditions, disciplines & languages
  - Limiting collaboration
- Competition as a measure for excellence
- Used as management tool instead of marketing



**Political Science Leiden** @PolSciLeiden · Apr 7



@UniLeidenNews @UniLeiden improves it's world class ranking, climbing two spots to 20th best university WORLDWIDE in Politics in the 2022 #QS @worlduniranking:

[topuniversities.com/university-ran...](https://topuniversities.com/university-ran...)

Congratulations to everyone whose hard work has made this possible!



## Some examples of how they are (mis)used

- Influence policy: “what matters”
  - Reorganization of HE & research systems
- Coupled to university funding & grants
  - Mergers
  - Some developing countries > graduate grants depend on rankings
- Coupled to investment from industry
- From education/research excellence to good person
  - Fast-tracked visas (ex: HPI route in UK)
- Marketing to attract students
  - Latin America



## Will rankings be around in 10-15 years?

- Yes but no
- Lists will always exist
  - Easy overview for administrators & policy makers
- Times are changing, need for more meaningful metrics that can aid a strategy
  - Open science agenda
  - Responsible assessment & metrics
  - Demands for transparency
  - Metrics that reflect equity/impact/engagement
- Developments will depend on policy makers, governments & universities

## “Ideal” indicators

- Productivity (resources  $\leftrightarrow$  production)
- Local & regional impact (social, economic)
- Open science agenda/performance
- Diversity & inclusion
- Engagement (citizen science, NGOs, industry)
- Due diligence > fulfillment of mission & goals
- Employability
- Working conditions - satisfaction of staff
- Real contributions to knowledge production
- Teaching
- Patents
- Contribution to SDGs
- Coverage of more languages





# Who would be the user?



- a) or
- b) and



# The Leiden Ranking - what's next?

- Openness & transparency > do what you preach
- Ambition to renew > aligned with policy interests, needs
- Dilemmas:
  - Ranking label > yes or no
  - Tension > limitations of bibliometrics vs policy needs
  - Data & indicators availability > data driven instead of needs
- Users - better understand them & improve communication
- Place of rankings in current debates (research assessment)
- Work in progress



© Andreas