University Typologies and Rankings
the North American Experience

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**Klassifizierung, Typologie – Eine neue Ordnung fur das Hochschulsystem
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Structure

- History of classifications and rankings in US and Canada

- Examine differences between North American and European Rankings

- Responses to Rankings and in North America

Key Arguments

- The importance of non-state actors

- The choice of indicators and data collection methods in rankings has a major impact on reactions

- Long-term effect of rankings is to make institutions much more data-conscious

US History (1)

- First rankings system appeared just after 1900.

- One stream – failure rates on licensing exams

- Second stream - so-called "genius studies", based on # alumni who became eminent scientists

- Top Ten then looks a lot like the Top Ten today...

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US History (2)

- Large scale ranking of graduate programs begins in 1960s; SCI and SSCI make possible new comparisons systems

- 1982 Assessment of Research Doctorate programs – 2700 programs across US

- Not a lot of controversy until rankings of undergraduate programs began

US History (3)

- First typology undertaken in 1911, by US Bureau of Education

- Divided 650 colleges into four tiers, according to perceived quality of Bachelor's Degree

- Results so controversial that two successive presidents signed executive orders banning its publication

US History (4)

- Further classification efforts taken outside of government, first by AAU (1913-43) more recently by Carnegie (1974-present)

- Still concerns about perceived hierarchy and language (change from Research I/II to "Research – Extensive and Intensive"

- Carnegie classification is basis for USNWR categorization

Canada

- No national classification system, though "top" universities had an informal data consortium

- Fall 1991, Maclean's Magazine produces first ranking.

- Undifferentiated rankings caused complaints

- Moved to a three-tier system of classification in 1992

Key Factors

- Lack of close federal involvement meant government not really an actor

- Ranking of graduate programs and research not very controversial

- Controversy much greater around undergraduate education

- Role of the private sector is key

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Indicators in US News and Maclean's

- Almost no research indicators

- Emphasis on student characteristics, faculty participation in teaching, resources.

- In US, a preoccupation with graduation rates

- In Canada, a preoccupation with budgeting practices

Indicators Shape the Debate

- US News and Maclean's indicators are not captured by government agencies

- Therefore institutions rely on institutional co-operation

- An oddly co-dependent relationship

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Indicator totals by type

	Raw indicator count	Survey data	Third parties	Universities
Asiaweek—Asia's Best Universities	18	-	-	18
Daily Telegraph (2003)	1	-	1	-
Education18.com	9	3	4	2
Excelencia, 2001	71	-	71	-
Financial Times (2003)	17	-	17	-
Guangdong Institute of Management Science	17	-	14	3
Guardian—University Guide 2005	7	-	2	5
La Repubblica	23	2	21	-
Maclean's University Rankings	24	1	5	18
Melbourne Institute— International Standing of Australian Universities	26	3	23	-
Netbig, 2004	18	1	10	7
Newsweek, 2006	8	-	4	4
Perspektywy / Rzeczpospolita Uniwersytet	18	1	2	15
Shanghai Jiao Tong University—Academic Ranking of World Universities	6	-	6	-
The Times—Good University Guide 2005	9	-	9	-
Times Higher Education Supplement—World University Rankings	5	1	1	3
US News and World Report— America's Best Colleges 2006	15	1	3	11
Washington Monthly—College Rankings 2005	8	-	1	7
Wuhan University Centre for Science Evaluation	45	2	22	21

The Finnie-Usher quality model schematic, modified
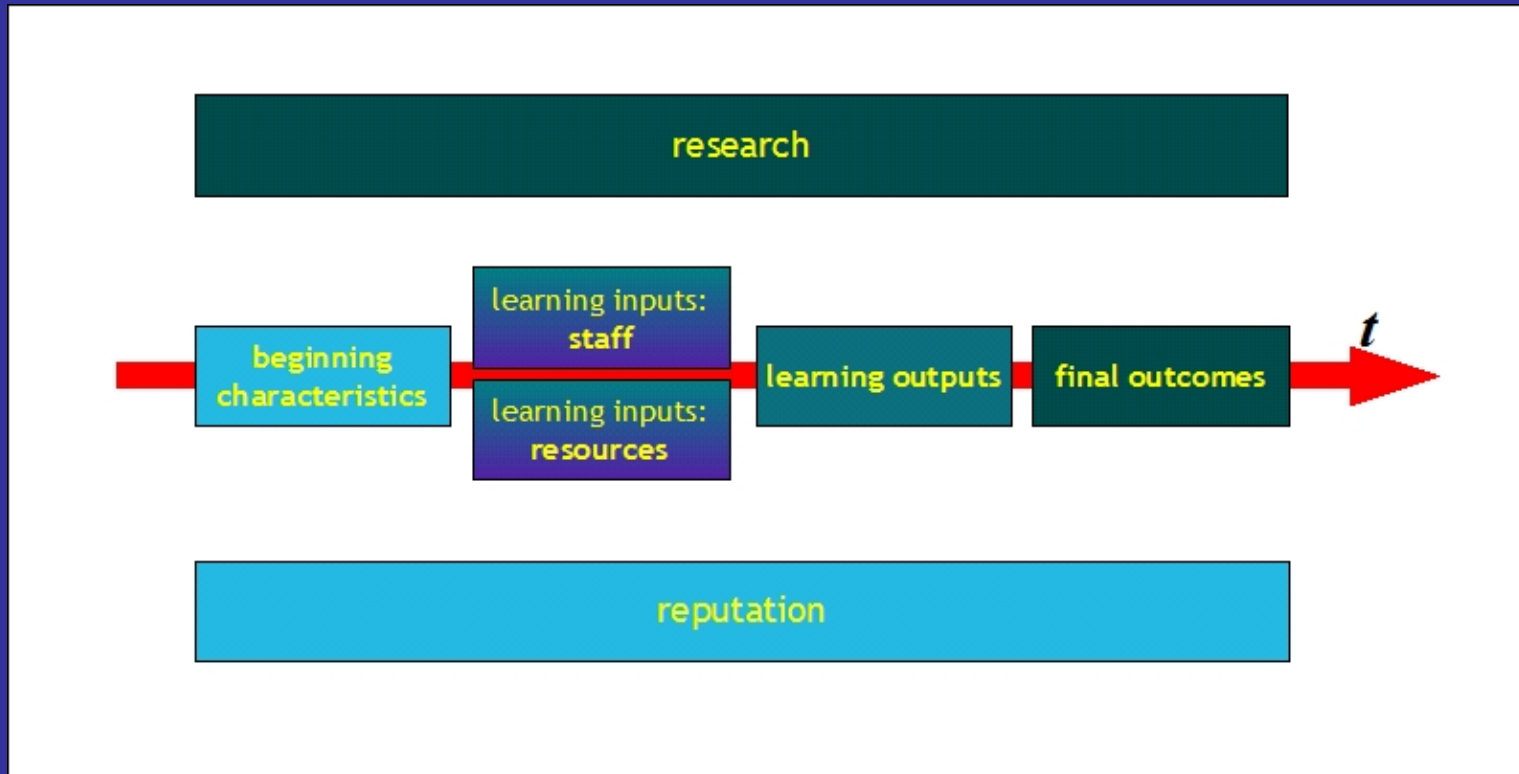
Reactions to Rankings

- Complaining About Methodologies

- Withdrawal from the System

- Gaming the System

- Search for alternative methods of quality measurement

- Multiplying Rankings

Complaints

- *"You can't do that!"*

- Apples-to-apples

- Choice of indicators

- Accuracy of results

- Cheating

Withdrawal

- Individual institutions moved out and then returned to Maclean's (1994-1997)

- Individual institutions moved our of peer-review section of US news (2006 onwards)

- Mass abandonment of Maclean`s rankings in Canada (2006)

Gaming the Rankings

- Hiring full-time analytical staff to present data to rankers

- Specific arranging of institutional inputs to make them rankings-positive

- "Creative interpretation" of data requests

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Creating an Alternative (1)

- National Survey of Student Engagement

- - survey data on study conditions

- - used as an internal management tool

- - increasingly, the principles of student engagement are creeping into rankings

- - now seriously affecting typologies as well

Creating an Alternative (2)

- College Learning Assessment (CLA)

- Actually measures educational value-added

- Much lower adoption rate than NSSE

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Multiplying rankings

- Rankings by institution

- Rankings by program (especially professional programs) or service (e.g. libraries)

- Rankings on environmental sustainability, ethnic diversity, gay-positiveness, etc.

- Each new ranking adds to the importance of rankings as a whole while diminishing the importance of any *single* ranking

Concluding Thoughts

- Any system of classification or rankings is going to be based on indicators; the only questions are: "how many?" "which ones?" and "how will the data be presented"?.

- Even when governments are not involved, rankings serve a "transparency agenda" – and that is probably a good thing.

- Even where no money is at stake, norms of the academic profession mean that choice of indicators will be politically charged.

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Lessons for Europe?

- Different audiences have legitimately different definitions of quality and therefore legitimately different data needs

- A mix of input, throughput and output measures is best

- Common data collection does not necessarily mean common definitions of quality.

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