

2ND INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON UNIVERSITY WEB RANKINGS



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The increasing globalization of the higher education system and the fact that universities may internationally compete for economic and human resources are underlying reasons for the proliferation of university rankings. Improving university's position in the educational rankings might increase institutional visibility and attract students, researchers and funds. Due to this fact, several international workshops and conferences that deal with main methods and characteristics of these rankings have been recently held in different countries. The International Conference on World Class Universities in Shanghai and the International Symposium on University Ranking in Leiden are a sample of these conferences.

Last April 21st it was held in Madrid the 2nd International Workshop on University Rankings devoted to the scientific discussion of the principal methodological characteristics of the existing rankings on Universities, as well as to the presentation of new ranking developments. The Workshop was organized by the Cybermetrics Lab of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) at its new facilities in the Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences (CCHS). Unlike the first 2007 call, focused solely in the technical description of the World Ranking of Web Universities (www.webometrics.info) and including

a seminar about search engines optimization for university web pages, the second call had a wider number of speakers and dealt with different university ranking projects. This aroused the interest of scholars from various disciplines (bibliometricians, web researchers, university managers, etc.) and countries, exceeding the organizers' expectations and emerging as an important forum in order to discuss the increasing importance of the university rankings.

After a brief introduction by the Director of CCHS, Eduardo Manzano, the first talk was delivered by Vicente Guerrero Bote from the University of Extremadura in Spain and member of the Scimago research group. His presentation entitled "Scimago Institutions Rankings" was centred in the introduction and description of a new academic ranking which is still in trial period. This ranking is a bibliometric application based on publications and citations which allows building customizable rankings for 2,000 universities and research institutions. These organizations can be ranked according to different criteria (papers, citations, international collaboration, Leiden or Karolinska crown indicators) exclusively obtained from Scopus data. Its main advantage is the possibility of producing customised reports comparing the evolution of several institutions according to those indicators.



Next, we had the opportunity to listen to Martijn Visser representative of the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. He talked about the ranking developed by that research centre. As the previous project, the Leiden Ranking 2008 (www.cwts.nl/ranking/) classifies their scholar institutions only through bibliometric indicators, although these were the result of its long and deep own research. The principal shortcoming of this ranking is its scarce coverage, because it only consists of one European ranking with 250 institutions and one World ranking with another 250 institutions. However, the Leiden Ranking 2008 is built from the Web of Science database, it applies well-known CWTS indicators and a thorough normalization process. It is interesting to remark that the Leiden Ranking 2008 is a research-oriented application which allows an in-depth study of the unequal performance of the US vs. European universities, the impact of the collaborative research or their relationship with other R&D indicators.

The next speaker was Isidro Aguillo, head of the Cybermetrics Lab which publishes the World Ranking of Web Universities. Unlike the two previous ones, this ranking shows the web performance and technological development of 6,000 educational institutions. These institutions are arranged by the Webometrics Rank, a linear indicator combining weighted variables such as number of web pages, inlinks to those web pages and number of scholar documents on the

web. These data are extracted using the principal search engines. The main contribution of this ranking is its coverage -the largest university ranking to date- and it provides a different and additional point of view focused in the academic activity on the Web (open access, e-learning, etc.). Isidro Aguillo informed us about new improvements to the World Ranking of Web Universities, because this ranking not only measures e-scientific production (e.g. open access) but also educational activities on the Web (e.g. e-learning, e-content production). Among the main improvements, one can highlight the new count of links which come only from academic sites, emphasizing the scholar visibility of a university and the building of a new ranking at the level of departments and research groups, showing the more scientific related activity of a university on the Web. Stronger efforts in normalization and aggregation of several domains belonging to the same university were also announced.

Finally, the last talk was given by Ben Sowter, head of research of QS Intelligence Unit which publishes the Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings. This commercial ranking tries to measure several excellence aspect of each university. It takes different weighted indicators to classify the higher education institutions, being 40% Peer review, 10% Recruiter review, 20% Student faculty ratio, 5% International faculty, 5% International students and 20% Citation per faculty. Unlike the previous approaches, THE-QS Ranking (www.topuniversities.com) uses both qualitative and



quantitative indicators which intend to assess not only the research performance but also the teaching quality, employability and international outlook. Ben Sowter also commented future developments in this ranking such as to go in depth in the creation of rankings at the level of subjects, to go from global rankings to regional (Southeast Asia) and national ones, to redesign the arrangement criteria introducing new indicators (Papers per faculty) and redistributing the weight of each variable accordingly.

After lunch, the Workshop finished with a practical session by Isidro Aguillo. The aim of this

session was to describe cybermetric techniques and skills which facilitate the management of academic web sites, improving their visibility on the Web. This was organized in three parts: Cybermetrics Indicators, in which he explained the main operators to extract data from the major search engines; Applied Cybermetrics, related to the web positioning and search engine optimization; and Web traffic analysis, about techniques and software in order to monitor the visits that a web site receives.

For more information about this event visit: www.webometrics.info/workshop.html

NOTE: Isidro F. Aguillo, co-organizer of the 2007 ISSI Conference at Madrid and head of the Cybermetrics Lab (CSIC), has been awarded the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of Indonesia. In an event chaired by the Minister of Education, the Rector of Universitas Indonesia mentioned his contributions to Cybermetrics and the innovative Webometrics Ranking of World Universities as the main reasons for this recognition in the field of Information Science. The ceremony took place in Jakarta, April 16 2009 as part of the International Conference on World University Ranking 2009 (<http://wur2009.ui.ac.id/>).

