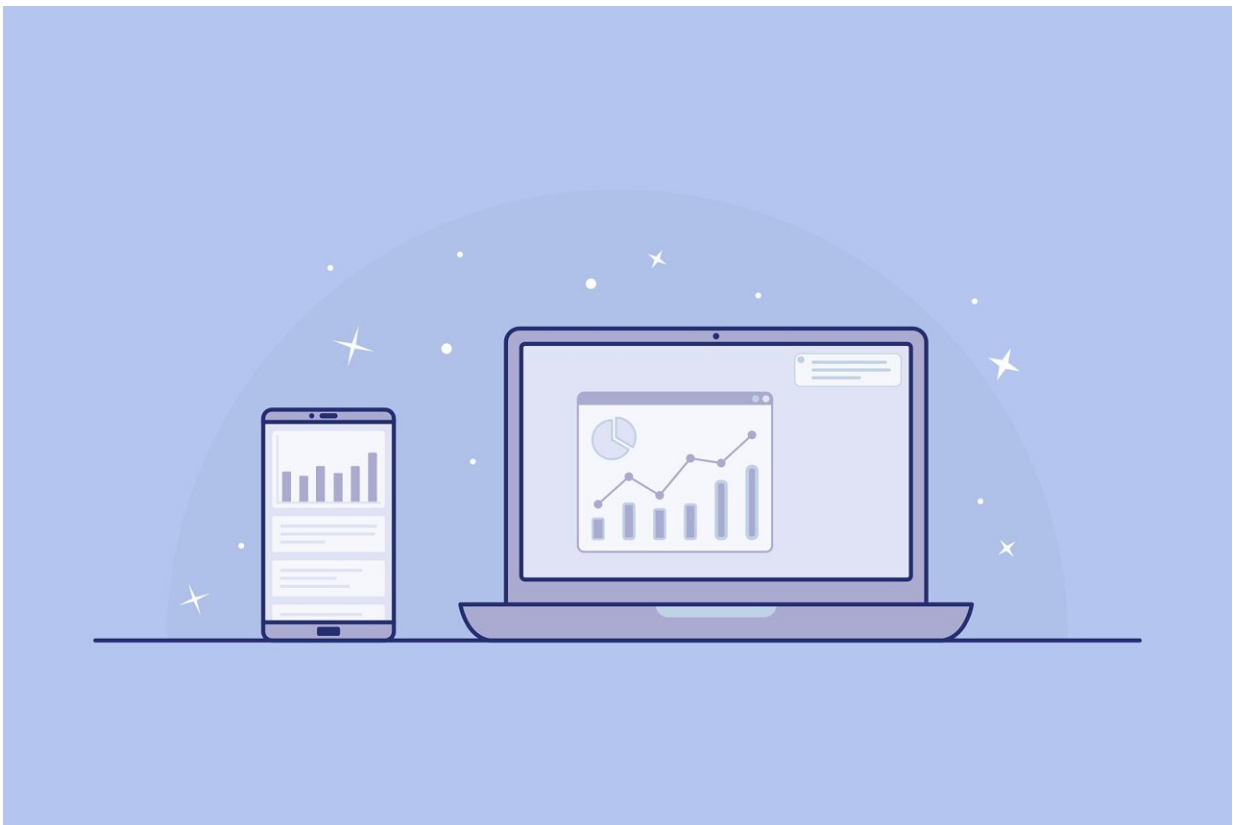


Rethinking quality: Experts challenge the harmful influence of global university rankings

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An Independent Expert Group (IEG) convened by the United Nations University's International Institute for Global Health (UNU IIGH) has

released a strong statement criticizing the wide and uncritical use of global university rankings.

The IEG highlights the vital importance of universities in delivering not just education, training, and research, but also in shaping public policy, promoting informed public discourse, and helping advance democracy and human rights.

However, although marketed as a tool for improving university performance and providing information to [prospective students](#), the statement describes how global university rankings lead to a variety of perverse behaviors and negative impacts that undermine key aspects of the mission of universities.

According to IEG member Marion Lloyd, a research professor at the Institute for the Study of the University and Education at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, "Global university rankings exert too much influence over higher education, promoting a narrow and simplistic version of success that overlooks many of the rich and vital contributions that universities make to society."

The problem with rankings

The IEG statement highlights nine problems with global university rankings.

Key among them is that the very idea of global university rankings is fundamentally flawed. It is simply not possible to produce a fair and credible global league table of universities given their multiple missions and their diverse social, economic, and political contexts around the world.

Because there is no adjustment made for the resources available to

universities, rankings inevitably advantage historically-privileged institutions and help perpetuate global inequalities in higher education instead of raising academic standards equitably and universally.

"It is not appropriate for universities from historically exploited and disadvantaged regions to feel compelled to compete on an un-level playing field with a set of rules that are biased in favor of the Global North," stated Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Professor of African and Gender Studies at the University of Ghana.

Moreover, the methodologies employed by the major rankers are opaque, while demonstrating a clear bias towards the English language, certain types of research, and STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). This undermines the importance of teaching and of the humanities and social sciences. Disturbingly, the lack of transparency over the data and scoring systems employed raises serious doubts about their reliability and objectivity.

"These rankings perversely incentivize universities to prioritize short-term and sometimes unethical interventions to improve their rankings, rather than the needs of their students, staff, [local communities](#), or of society more generally," stated Marion Lloyd, adding that "the constant and short-sighted obsession with annual rankings comes at the cost of long-term and broader goals, which is especially harmful given the many serious and complex problems facing society."

The IEG statement also highlights the extractive nature of major global rankings and the fact that the rankings industry is dominated by private businesses whose fundamental mission is to produce profits. According to UNU-IIGH's Professor David McCoy who helped convene the IEG, "Many of the commercial practices of the rankings industry are simply not in the public interest and result in significant resources being diverted away from core academic functions."

