



For Immediate Release
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International Expert Group Created to Improve Higher Education Rankings

Washington, DC – A new multi-national initiative has been established to provide an ongoing forum for discussion and debate about higher education ranking systems. Known as the International Rankings Expert Group (IREG), the initiative includes a distinguished group of individuals who develop or analyze ranking systems and involves the leading media and other organizations that publish ranking systems along with researchers and others who scrutinize the rankings of colleges and universities as well as their study programs and research activities.

Over the past two decades, higher education rankings and league tables (as they are referred to in the United Kingdom) have emerged around the world not only from private, media-based sources but also from professional associations and governments. While sometimes controversial within higher education, these ranking systems are playing an increasing role as information tools for consumers at the local, national, and international levels.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy, located in Washington, DC (for more information, visit the Institute website at www.IHEP.org.) and the UNESCO-European Centre for Higher Education in Bucharest, Romania (known more commonly by its French acronym, UNESCO-CEPES—for more information visit the website at www.cepes.ro), are responding to a need for informed international debate with regard to the phenomenon of institutional and program ranking in higher education.

It is in this context that a meeting sponsored by the Institute and UNESCO-CEPES was held in Washington, DC, on December 9-11, 2004. The meeting included more than 25 top-level experts directly involved in rankings. Participants represented the major media organizations involved in publishing rankings, including *US News and World Report* and the *Times Higher Education Supplement (London)*, representatives of research funding and accreditation organizations, and other leading organizations such as the RAND Corporation. In addition, individual experts involved in the development or assessment of ranking systems in Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, and Spain provided updates on recent developments in ranking methodologies. Participants also offered an understanding of the differences between ranking systems that are primarily aimed at information for students and parents and those that are assessing excellence in university research.

A key item of discussion was the recent development of international rankings of universities. Two such projects - one sponsored by the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and the other by the Academic Ranking of World Universities Project, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China - have resulted in the first-ever world university rankings.

“While colleges and universities cannot agree on whether or not rankings are a desirable practice, there is an increasing understanding that they are here to stay,” said Jamie P. Merisotis, President of the Institute for Higher Education Policy and co-sponsor of the new initiative. “The goal of the International Rankings Expert Group is to provide a forum for those who conduct rankings, as well as those who study them, to share information about the methodologies and approaches used in different systems.”

The group expects to accomplish several specific purposes:

- Provide innovative research on a rapidly growing global phenomenon that has received relatively little attention in higher education research;
- Contribute both a framework and a process to the understanding of how to assess existing higher education ranking systems and league tables;
- Contribute to international comparative analysis of the ranking/league tables and their methodologies; and
- Ultimately improve existing ranking/league tables and inform future ranking methodologies.

Jan Sadlak, Director of UNESCO-CEPES and co-sponsor of IREG, said, “Increasingly, around the world, rankings have evolved to serve different purposes for their varied audiences. But, regardless, there continues to be a real consumer focus. This project has the potential to extend credibility to the rankings/league tables and to ensure that they more effectively reflect higher education quality.”

The Washington session is a follow-up to the first-ever international meeting on rankings held in 2002 in Warsaw, Poland. Proceedings from the Warsaw meeting were published in the UNESCO-CEPES journal *Higher Education in Europe*, No. 4, Volume XXVII. The discussions that took place at the Washington meeting also will be published in a future issue of *Higher Education in Europe* in 2005.

The group plans to convene at least every other year and to focus on evaluating what works, taking into account the distinct educational and cultural issues of the various countries involved. They also expect to better understand how rankings are linked to economic competitiveness and how they contribute to quality in higher education.

The next gathering of the International Rankings Expert Group is planned for spring 2006 in Berlin, Germany, to be hosted by the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHE). CHE produces rankings that are currently being published in *Stern*, a popular weekly German magazine. The purpose of the meeting will be to examine various details of ranking systems, including data availability, how weighting is used to support various components of the rankings, language issues that may impact how ranking is done, and other key issues that emerged from the Washington discussion.

A list of participants is attached.

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Washington, DC, Meeting, December 9-11, 2004
International Rankings Expert Group (IREG)

Participants

- Jürgen **BREITKOPF**, Information Manager, *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – DFG* (German Research Foundation), Bonn, Germany
- Marc **CHUN**, Research Scientist, RAND/Council for Aid to Education (CAE), New York, NY, USA
- Marguerite **CLARKE**, Adelaide, Australia, currently on non-resident post-doctoral programme, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA
- Jesús M. **DE MIGUEL**, University of Barcelona, Spain; currently Visiting Professor, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA
- Gero **FEDERKEIL**, Project Manager on Ranking, *CHE - Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung GmbH*, Gütersloh, Germany
- Nikolay **FILINOV-CHERNYSHEV**, Vice-Rector and Director of the Centre for International Programmes, State University of Management, Moscow, Russian Federation
- Jens-Peter **GAUL**, Director for Strategic Planning, *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – DFG*, (German Research Foundation), Bonn, Germany
- Cassandra **GUARINO**, Economist, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, USA
- Klaus **HÜFNER**, Chairman of the Advisory Board of UNESCO-CEPES, Berlin, Germany
- David **JOBBINS**, Foreign Editor, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, London, United Kingdom
- Ayumi **KOBASHI**, Kawaijuku Educational Institution, Tokyo, Japan
- Alexander **KOHLER**, Director General, Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance, Vienna, Austria
- Nian Cai **LIU**, Director of the Institute of Higher Education, and Coordinator of the Academic Ranking of World Universities Project, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China
- Robert J. **MORSE**, Director of Data Research, *US News & World Report*, Washington, DC, USA
- Detlef **MÜLLER-BÖLING**, Director, *CHE - Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung GmbH*, Gütersloh, Germany
- Marek **ROCKI**, Rector, Warsaw School of Economics (*SGH*) (and Chairman of Collegium providing a methodological oversight of university ranking published by several leading Polish news magazines), Warsaw, Poland
- Jara D. **SANCHEZ**, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
- Hong **SHEN**, Director of the Center of International and Comparative Education at Huazhong University, China
- Yingjie **SHU**, Manager of Management Information System, *US News & World Report*, Washington, DC, USA
- Noriko **TAKI**, Director, Department of University Administration Services, Kawaijuku Educational Institution, Tokyo, Japan
- Alexander **USHER**, Vice President, Educational Policy Institute, Toronto, Canada
- Jane **WELLMAN**, Senior Associate, Institute for Higher Education Policy, Washington, DC, USA
- Akiyoshi **YONEZAWA**, National Institution for Academic Degrees (NIAD), and Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan

Project Coordinators:

- Jamie **MERISOTIS**, President, Institute for Higher Education Policy, Washington, DC, USA
- Jan **SADLAK**, Director, UNESCO-CEPES, Bucharest, Romania