

08.7.2025

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Title

The Berlin Principles on Ranking Higher Education Institutions : limitations, legitimacy, and value conflict / Gary R. S. Barron

Publication year

2017

Source/Footnote

In: Higher education. - 73 (2017) 2, S. 317 - 333

Inventory number

45181

Keywords

Hochschule : Wettbewerb ; Hochschule : Verfassung und Selbstverwaltung

Abstract

University rankings have been widely criticized and examined in terms of the environment they create for universities. In this paper, I reverse the question by examining how ranking organizations have responded to criticisms. I contrast ranking values and evaluation with those practiced by academic communities. I argue that the business of ranking higher education institutions is not one that lends itself to isomorphism with scholarly values and evaluation and that this dissonance creates reputational risk for ranking organizations. I argue that such risk caused global ranking organizations to create the Berlin Principles on Ranking Higher Education Institutions, which I also demonstrate are decoupled from actual ranking practices. I argue that the Berlin Principles can be best regarded as a legitimizing practice to institutionalize rankings and symbolically align them with academic values and systems of evaluation in the face of criticism. Finally, I argue that despite dissonance between ranking and academic evaluation, there is still enough similarity that choosing to adopt rankings as a strategy to distinguish one's institution can be regarded as a legitimate option for universities. (HRK /

08.7.2025

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