

## Academia's Obsession with Universities Ranking - Part 2: Role of universities in society amid COVID-19

COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing global health, social and economic crises have raised the question about universities engagement in community development as well as how universities can support the global response during crisis like the current one.

The current crises not only represent an opportunity for academic institutions like colleges & universities to make significant changes in their economic and academic models to handle the new financial realities but also to review its engagement with society at large.

Although, with the death toll rising, families separated and livelihoods collapsing, employees sent home to work, leaders unsure of the future, and our entire way of working flipped upside down. So many companies are now struggling to effectively communicate in this new reality. The role of universities should become imperative to combat and tackle the current crises.

We have seen in past that universities were engaged with governments, NGOs, industry, and communities to solve issues and plan for future. Even the shrinking of budgets did not divert the engagement role of universities rather it is enhanced, not declined.

During and after the current crises' universities must devote attention and resources to demonstrate their positive impact. This demonstration can be visible through ranking agencies methodologies based on Sustainability, Engagement or Community Development

Notwithstanding, sustainability, engagement or community development being a big and growing part of universities' activities, little has been done to measure it and compare institutions. It has been ignored by major university ranking organizations, including Times Higher Education and QS World University Rankings. For Example: The Times Higher Education's (THE) Impact Rankings, based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This initiative is an important step towards greater recognition of university engagement activities. While, less famous UI GreenMetric Ranking is completely environmental centric ranking based in Indonesia, publishing results officially since 2010 on broad based league table. The aim of this ranking is to provide the result of online survey regarding the current condition and policies related to Green Campus and Sustainability in the Universities all over the world. It is expected that by drawing the attention of university leaders and stake holders, more attention will be given to combating global climate change, energy and water conservation, waste recycling, and green transportation.

However, there is need for a simpler set of metrics that can be incorporated into global league tables rather than used for a standalone ranking system. Thus, the study by the consortium of King's College London, University of Chicago, and The University of Melbourne explores this possibility. They come up with metrics that can enhance global league tables, because such tables influence university

behavior and resource allocation. The findings from this project are contained in a new report, [“Advancing University Engagement: University engagement and global league tables”](#).

The metrics developed by them result from nearly two years of consultation. They have started by developing a theory of change, which explained how possible indicators encouraged the desired behaviors, and conducted multiple pilot studies with universities from North America, Asia, Latin America, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada to test and refine the behaviors and indicators.

### **Eight engagement indicators capture what matters**

After considering and testing dozens of possible measures of engagement, they settled on a framework that distills university engagement in eight indicators:

- 1. University commitment to engagement:** An institution’s commitment to engagement is reflected in strategic documents and in an executive position responsible for these activities.
- 2. Community opinion of the university:** A survey of a university’s partners (community, not-for-profits, business and government) captures how they view the university and its engagement.
- 3. Student access:** Measured by the proportion of pre-university students who participate in university preparedness programs, an indication of support for under-represented groups.
- 4. Volunteering:** Measured by the proportion of students and staff who participate in volunteering/service programs run by the university.
- 5. Research reach outside academic journals:** Measured by the ratio of non-academic mentions (including citations in grey literature, the media and policy papers) to a university’s total output.
- 6. Community-engaged learning within curriculum:** Measured by the proportion of curriculum dedicated to engagement learning and the proportion of students participating in these courses.
- 7. Socially responsible purchasing:** Measured by the proportion of the university’s negotiable budget that is spent on procurement linked to social benefit.
- 8. Carbon footprint:** Measured by total metric tons of carbon emissions produced by a university each year.



The framework developed by them is simple, applicable to multiple types of universities, can be linked to global league tables (i.e. we can now compare engagement activity) and is linked to a theory of long-term behavior change. Importantly, they have tested it with partner institutions and know it can work in practice without creating a major compliance burden.

Reference:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/advancing-university-engagement.pdf>

<http://unbouncepages.com/advancing-university-engagement/>

<https://www.topuniversities.com/>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/>

<http://greenmetric.ui.ac.id/>