

GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES PROJECT



ACADEMIC REPUTATION SURVEY

STAGE 2 METHODOLOGY

This document concerns the reputational survey instrument and not the data validations (normalization, weighting, etc) that will inform the final league tables for the times higher education world university rankings (stages 4 and 5).

OVERVIEW

When setting out to create the new survey instrument, we reviewed methods of capturing and reporting academic reputation, drawing from [community feedback](#) and internal analyses. This document outlines five major criticisms from previous surveys that we sought to address in our methodology. After our 2010 survey closes, we will post the instrument to the project website and offer further review of the problems we identified, our proposed methodological solutions, and how things played out in real-world logistics. In the interim, this outline will help survey respondents briefly review our approach, while providing the community substantive background for future discussion.

We understand that this annual process requires constant (re)evaluation and engagement, and we look forward to sharing our 2010 survey experience to facilitate discussion and continued evolution for next year's venture.

Five major criticisms stood out when reviewing both community feedback and internal analyses. We noted that existing surveys....

1. Overrepresented "the West" — North America and Western Europe in particular
2. Were biased toward English speakers
3. Asked unrealistic questions that perpetuated high scores — across all disciplines — for the traditionally "elite" institutions year after year
4. Did not allow respondents to choose lesser-known institutions, only the traditionally elite
5. Did not take teaching into account

APPROPRIATE REPRESENTATION OF ALL REGIONS

To help better balance regional representation, we sought an independent source to help outline the "expected" global distribution of researchers around the world. For 2010, we relied on UNESCO figures provided in the [Global Perspective on Research & Development report](#). Our goal was to help control any regional bias inherent to either our source lists (internal and external) or final submission tallies by bringing expected results to the forefront.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESEARCHERS:(UNESCO; LAST MEASURED IN 2007)

North America	22.20%
Europe	28.40%
Asia	41.40%
Oceania	2.10%
Latin America	3.60%
Africa	2.30%

We made every attempt to develop the sample plan based on these proportions, and the data analysis will likewise take them into account. Our primary sample source was a list of authors publishing in journals covered by the *Web of Science*SM, which is comprised of the *Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE)*, *Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)* and *Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI)*. To boost our reach into Social Sciences and Arts & Humanities, we also drew from the IBIS Worldwide Academic and Library File, produced by Mardev. This source provided academic scholars who may or may not have published their work in scholarly media.

ACCESSIBILITY IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

By aligning our geographic distribution more closely with true researcher populations, the same strategy helped counteract English language bias to some degree. We also recognize that while many reports show that worldwide researchers often speak English, it may not be their primary language. To help control for language and translation bias, we are providing the survey in seven languages:

- French
- German
- Japanese
- Portuguese (European and Brazilian)
- Simplified Chinese
- Spanish
- English

RELEVANT, DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

One of the most unique aspects of our survey is its disciplinary focus. This design feature allows respondents to choose “the best” institutions in their field, rather than prompting them to evaluate broad categories. For instance, an agricultural scholar can nominate schools based on their strength in Agriculture rather than “Life Sciences” more generally. We believe this approach anchors questions (and responses) in reality, allowing respondents to draw on individual experience, knowledge, and contacts to provide more accurate assessments.

In turn, the reputational data we provide Times Higher Education will allow for more comprehensive league tables in their final rankings. For example, when selecting the “best” institutions in their individual fields, respondents can now identify exceptional departments (Psychology) rather than default their selections to traditionally elite institutions of already broad reputational strength—that is, without disciplinary focus, the respondent’s answer hinges on the strength of Life Sciences or Arts & Humanities more generally, where Harvard and Oxford Universities would take center stage and dominate the resulting league tables.

With this granular methodology, we look to improve the accuracy of institutional assessments and, ultimately, better equip universities, scholars, and students worldwide with more meaningful data.

WIDER CHOICE OF INSTITUTIONS

The Academic Reputation Survey allows respondents to choose from over 6,000 academic institutions around the world—offering thousands more selections than have been available in other global reputational surveys. We believe that this wider selection base, combined with the survey’s disciplinary focus, will only further enhance the opportunity for more granular data across institutions. Respondents can draw on their intimate knowledge of networks and shifting trends to identify exceptional departments in their fields of expertise. Institutions that were excluded in past ranking initiatives will now have opportunity for recognition, whether by overall quality or exceptional departments.

MEASURE FOR TEACHING

The survey attempts to better identify teaching quality, an often elusive (and ignored) component, by incorporating questions about teaching environments within specific disciplines. We ask all respondents to identify the best teaching institutions in their field of expertise. Additionally, those who indicate that teaching accounts for the “highest percentage of time spent” are later asked to identify the one institution they would recommend that a student attend “to experience the best undergraduate and/or graduate teaching environment” in their subject area.

We look forward to discussing the survey with the community and hearing your thoughts on both our methodology and its logistical implementation. Please check back with us soon for our review of the 2010 Academic Reputation Survey stage, along with the original survey instrument posted in its entirety.