Critical Analysis of Rankings of Universities

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Agenda

▸ Context and drivers

▸ Rankings – pros and cons

▸ Mission of higher education

▸ Impacts

▸ Implications

Context

Drivers

- Egalitarianism ⟶ Growth ⟶ Competition for Students

- Public Interest/Media ⟶ Competition for Publicity

- Globalization ⟶ Competition across Borders

- Increasing Costs ⟶ Competition for Resources

- Institutionalization ⟶ Isomorphic Presses

Advocates for Rankings

▸ Transparent shared information for stakeholders

▸ Fair Comparisons

▸ Rewards "best" meritocratic achievers

▸ Reinforces virtuous, healthy competition

▸ Data shortcomings are a necessary evil or are fixable with sufficient effort

Critical Views on Underlying Motives

▸ Emphasis on competition

▸ The relevance of "flagships" and "skyscrapers" in an increasing global competition

▸ Stratification is desirable

▸ Common world-wide criteria for a good university

▸ Academic quality is linked to the "knowledge economy"

▸ Research is the dominant driver of quality

▸ Desire to be first

Critique of Rankings

▸ Over-reliance on quantitative proxy measures

▸ Lack of agreement on constructs, definitions, measurement, and weighting

▸ Limited data and inequitable resources

▸ Heavy reliance on additive scoring

▸ Variability in control factors (e.g. size, discipline, location, language, resources)

▸ Reputation $\geq$ actual performance

▸ Social reproduction over social transformation
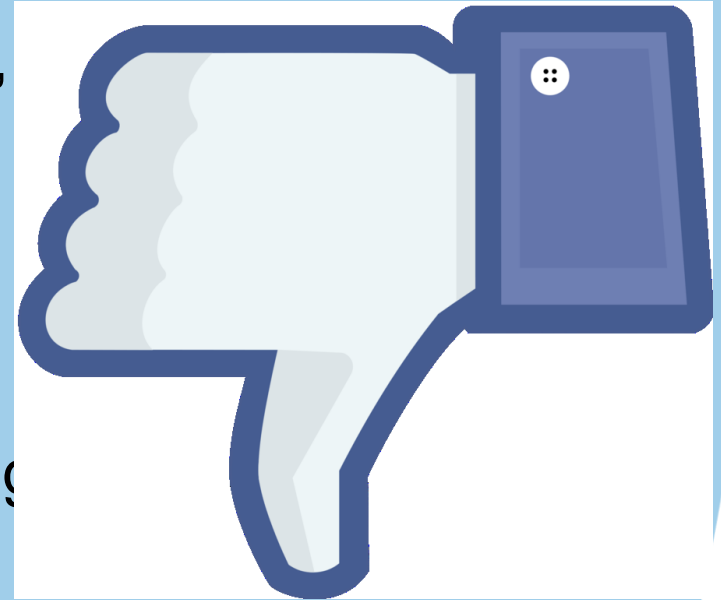
Mission of Higher Education

▸ **educate highly qualified graduates able to meet the needs of the present and future society**;

▸ provide opportunities for higher learning throughout life as a contributing citizen in society;

▸ **create and advance knowledge through research** and provide relevant expertise to assist cultural, social and economic development;

▸ help understand, interpret, preserve, enhance, and promote national and regional, international and historic cultures, in a context of cultural pluralism and diversity;

▸ help protect and enhance societal values which form the basis of democratic citizenship;

▸ contribute to the development and improvement of education at all levels.

(adapted from UNESCO, 1998)

Mission of Higher Education

Mission of Higher Education

Teaching

Research

Service

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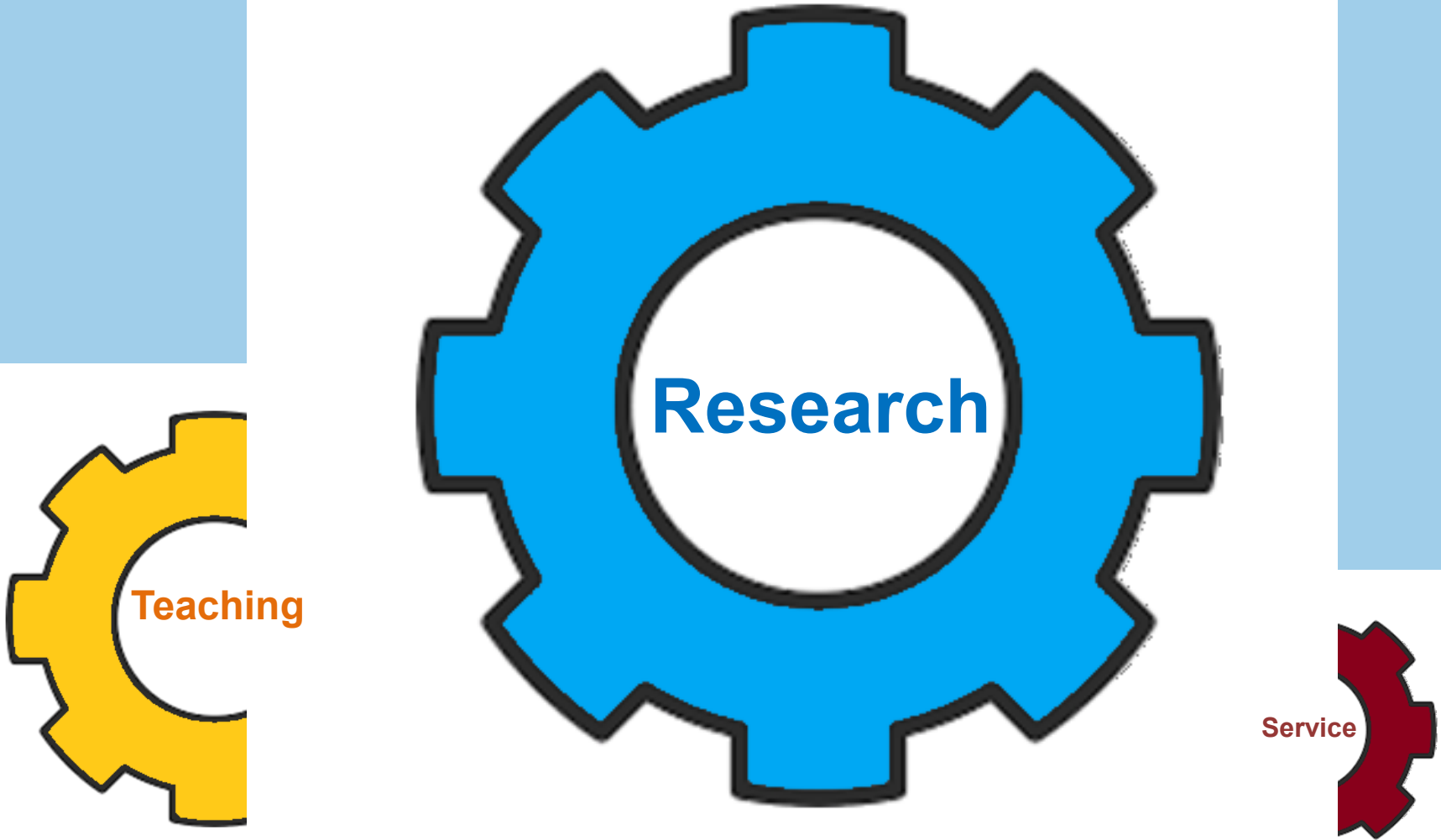
National and Institutional Impacts

▸ Greater attention to higher education

▸ Increased use of data and evidence to inform decision-making

▸ Increased emphasis on competition and vertical stratification within and across countries

▸ Priority on research at the expense of teaching and service

▸ Increased, but inequitable, allocation of resources

▸ Language policies – instruction & research

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National and Institutional Impacts

▸ Growth of Quality Assurance

▸ Increased accountability

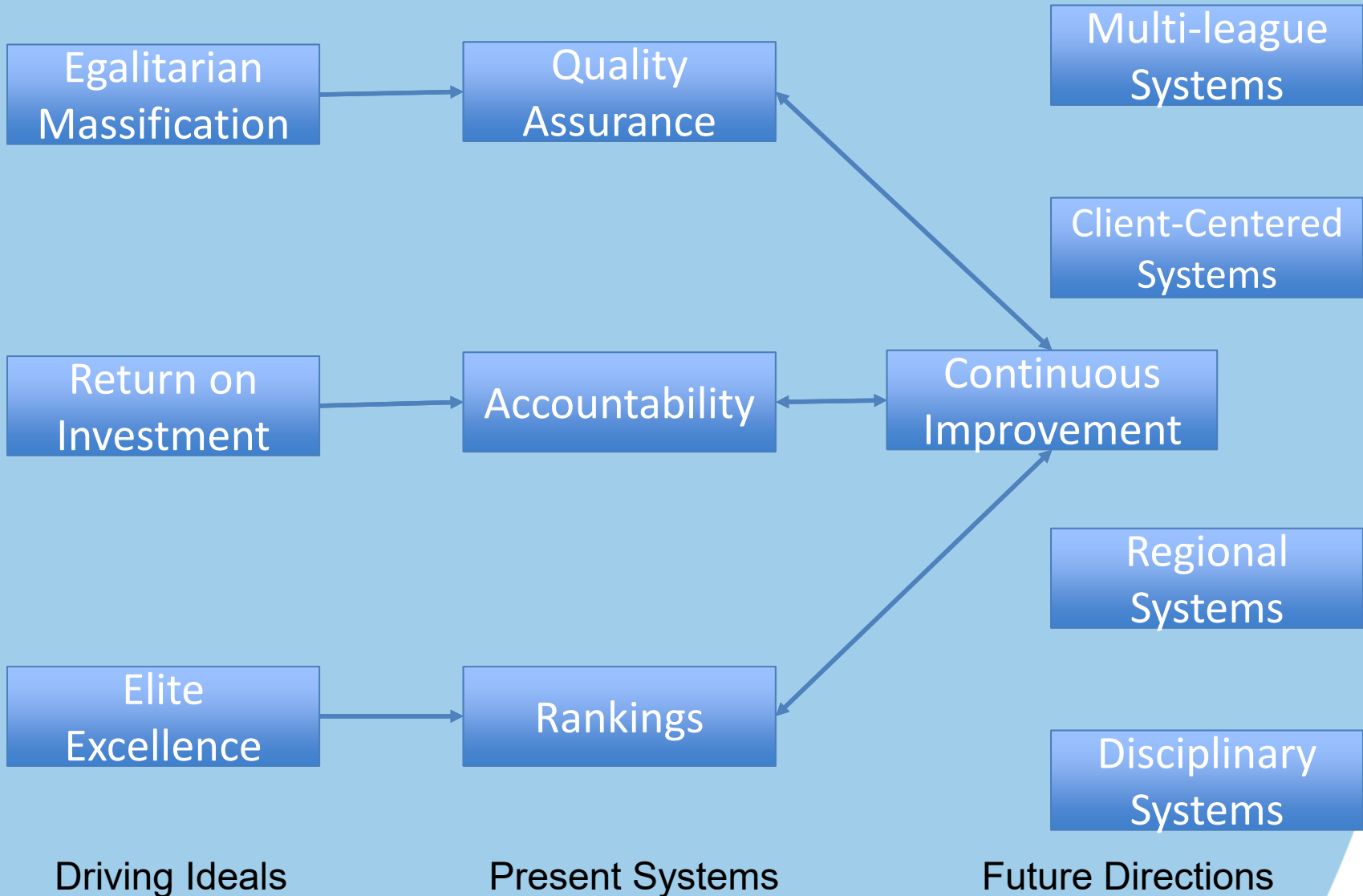▸ Improved focus on organizational effectiveness & efficiency

Rankings, Quality Assurance and Accountability

Table 2.1 Comparisons between quality assurance, ranking, and accountability

Characteristics	Quality assurance	Ranking	Accountability
Goals	Enhancing quality	Information providing	Financial accountability
Stakeholder	Government/HEIs/ agency	Media/research institute	Government/funding agency
Actions	Accreditation	Ranking by institution	Performance reporting
	Quality assessment	Ranking by region or disciplines	Performance-funding/ budgeting
	Quality audit		
	Program review		
	Licensure		
Indicators	Teaching/research/ service	Research/teaching/ reputation/ internationalization	Teaching/research/ service
Data sources	Nationwide data	Nationwide data	Nationwide data
	Peer review/survey	Peer review/survey	
Linking with government policy	Institution's legal status	Not linking	Linking or not linking with funding
	Financial aids	Some developing countries link with policy	
	Research funding		
	Operational funding		
Customers	HEIs, government	Parents, students, HEIs, enterprise, government	Government

(Shin, 2010)

Possible Future

Egalitarian Massification → Quality Assurance

Return on Investment → Accountability ← Continuous Improvement

Elite Excellence → Rankings

Multi-league Systems

Client-Centered Systems

Continuous Improvement

Regional Systems

Disciplinary Systems

Driving Ideals | Present Systems | Future Directions

**Adapted from Shin & Toutkoushian (2010)

Implications

▸ Cannot ignore rankings

▸ Value of usable data and evidence

▸ Rankings = one starting point

▸ Inquiry-driven

▸ Indicators and rankings as tools

▸ Collaboration over competition

▸ Adaptation over adoption

▸ Unique points of pride

▸ Mission-driven continuous improvement

▸ Tempered radicals

**Adapted from Berger, 2010; Blanco & Berger, 2014

Discussion

▸ Questions?

▸ Comments?

▸ Further Information:

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THANK YOU