CU by the Numbers

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On September 30, 2013, the Chronicle of Higher Education published a report addressing the performance of U.S. universities on three lists of global rankings: (1) The QS World University Rankings, produced by the British company Quacquarelli-Symonds; (2) the Academic Ranking of World Universities, assembled by Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China; and (3) the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, based in London.

“Worldwide,” writer Karin Fischer noted, “these academic rankings have generated a tsunami of headlines and news releases, celebratory and otherwise. But although American universities dominate all three, publication of the rankings has caused barely a ripple in this country. Indeed, the only ranking Americans seem to pay attention to is the one with U.S. in its name—U.S. News & World Report’s Best Colleges list.”

CU administrators have certainly paid attention to U.S. News & World Report’s Best Colleges list, and the university has performed well on it. But as Clemson transitions to a new administration, it may behoove administrators, faculty and staff to consider how the university fares internationally and what its performance on global lists reveals about the institution relative to its peers. To begin that conversation, synopses of recent rankings appear below.

U.S. News & World Report

Criteria
Undergraduate academic reputation: 22.5%
Student selectivity: 12.5%
Faculty resources: 20%
Graduation and retention weights: 22.5%
Financial resources: 10%
Alumni giving: 5%
Graduation rate performance: 7.5%

In the 2014 U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings, Clemson appeared at #62 among national universities, tied with Brigham Young, Syracuse, Maryland, Pittsburgh and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Among public universities, CU appeared at #21, tied with Maryland and Pittsburgh.

2 For additional details, see http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2013/09/09/best-colleges-ranking-criteria-and-weights
**QS World University Rankings**

**Criteria**
Academic reputation from global survey: 40%
Employer reputation from global survey: 10%
Faculty / student ratio: 20%
Citations per faculty from Scopus: 20%
Proportion of international students: 5%
Proportion of international faculty: 5%

The 2013/2014 QS World University Rankings did not recognize Clemson among its top 700 schools. Clemson’s ranking of “701-plus” placed it in a bracket with *U.S. News* top-100 schools Fordham, Baylor, Brigham Young, Marquette, Miami of Ohio, Stevens Institute of Technology, Tulsa, Auburn, the University of San Diego and Binghampton University (SUNY). Statistically, in the QS system, CU tied these schools at #128 among U.S. universities. QS also showed Clemson tied with five other U.S. universities, including Arkansas, Georgia State, Ohio University, the University of San Francisco and the University of the Pacific.

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**Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai)**

**Criteria**
Quality of education – alumni winning Nobel prizes and fields medals: 10%
Quality of faculty – staff members winning Nobel prizes and fields medals: 20%
Quality of faculty – highly cited researchers: 20%
Research output – paper published in Nature and Science: 20%
Research output – paper indexed: 20%
Per capita academic performance: 10%

The 2013 Academic Ranking of World Universities placed Clemson in its 301-400 bracket, ranking it 109 in the U.S. and tying it with *U.S. News* top-100 schools Georgetown, Wake Forest, Northeastern, Tulane, Brigham Young, Syracuse and Vermont. The ranking tied CU with 15 additional universities in the United States.

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3 For additional details, see [http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/](http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/)
Times Higher Education World University Rankings

Criteria

Teaching – the learning environment: 30%
Research – volume, income and reputation: 30%
Citations – research influence: 30%
Industry income – innovation: 2.5%
International outlook – staff, students and research: 7.5%

The 2013/2014 World University Rankings from Times Higher Education did not recognize Clemson among its top 400 universities. This “tied” Clemson with 22 other universities from the U.S. News top-100 list. For purposes of discussion and illustration, I assigned CU and the 22 schools it tied the rank of #109, which represents the best score any one of the schools could have attained.

In examining data gathered by international rankings organizations, it becomes apparent that CU is very much an undergraduate institution, and as undergraduate education goes, it keeps some solid company. In contrast, its status as a research institution appears marginal relative to its peers, and one way to appreciate that status is to examine a snapshot of Clemson in comparison to schools close to it in the U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges list.

Figure 1 contains rankings for 10 universities, beginning with Georgia, which placed slightly ahead of Clemson on the U.S. News & World Report list, and continuing with public schools tied with, or ranked below, Clemson. The graph, assembled to include as many peer institutions as possible in the space allotted, reveals that similarities between CU and other schools end with U.S. News & World Report. As an example, in U.S. News, the University of Minnesota is ranked #69 among national universities, tying it with Rutgers, Texas A & M, and Virginia Tech. Looking to the left side of Figure 1, lines representing each of the four schools depart from the same point, with 69 appearing about half-way between 60 and 80 on the vertical axis. The light green line representing Minnesota then moves to QS, which ranked the university #31 among U.S. schools, and then to the Shanghai survey, which ranked Minnesota #21, and finally to the Times Higher Education list, where the university ranked #27.

In fact, most of the schools in Figure 1 show relative stability as research institutions – the focus of global rankings – whereas CU is (technically) unranked on two of the four lists. The disparity can be attributed to multiple factors, beginning with the administrative decision to focus heavily, if not exclusively, on metrics used by U.S. News & World Report; most of the U.S. News metrics have little to do with the development of a research university. Some universities also have greater financial resources than

5 For additional details, see http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking/methodology
Clemson has, in addition to larger enrollments and more stringent standards for research and scholarship. Still, there is considerable room for improvement.

For Clemson to move closer to schools it regards as peer institutions, it will almost certainly need to move away from a one-dimensional approach to image construction and focus more heavily on actual scholarly performance. As Professor McGuire noted in his recent essay, the university will also need to establish a more egalitarian relationship between administrators and faculty members, such that both sense a connection to the university and take an active role in its continued development.

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Figure 1. Rankings of 10 universities by US News, QS, ARWU and Times Higher Education.