



For Immediate Release
May 30, 2006

Contact:
Jamie Merisotis
+1 202 861-8223, ext 200
institute@ihep.org

Jan Sadlak
+40 21 313 0839
j.sadlak@cepes.ro

International Partnership Issues Groundbreaking Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions

Berlin – A groundbreaking meeting involving experts from more than a dozen countries has resulted in the first-ever international principles for ranking of higher education institutions. The global phenomenon of college and university rankings requires the establishment of international principles to ensure “that those producing rankings and league tables hold themselves accountable for quality in their own data collection, methodology, and dissemination,” according to the document, which is known as the *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions*.

Convened by the UNESCO-European Centre for Higher Education in Bucharest, Romania (known more commonly by its French acronym, UNESCO-CEPES) and the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington, DC, USA, the meeting involved representatives of several leading ranking organizations as well as academic leaders and others with expertise in the field of ranking. Participants discussed the latest developments in rankings in different countries—there are now at least 20 different countries where such rankings regularly occur—as well as the emerging phenomenon of cross-national, or global, rankings. The meeting was hosted by the Centre for Higher Education Development, which produces university rankings published in the German newsweekly *Die Zeit* and is now developing rankings in other nations.

The Berlin Principles focus on good practice that will be useful for the improvement and evaluation of ranking systems over time. The principles emphasize the purposes and goals of rankings, the design and weighting of indicators, the collection and processing of data, and the presentation of ranking results.

The 16 principles articulate several important standards of good practice, including recommending that rankings should:

- *Recognize the diversity of institutions and take the different missions and goals of institutions into account;*
- *Be transparent regarding the methodology used for creating the rankings;*
- *Measure outcomes in preference to inputs whenever possible;*
- *Use audited and verifiable data whenever possible;*
- *Provide consumers with a clear understanding of all of the factors used to develop a ranking, and offer them a choice in how rankings are displayed.*

Over the past two decades, higher education rankings and league tables (as they are referred to in the United Kingdom) have emerged around the world. With the *US News and World Report* rankings of undergraduate colleges that began in the 1980s generally recognized as the first in the field, other magazines, newspapers, individuals, and even governments have followed with their own rankings in several other countries. While sometimes controversial within higher education, these ranking systems are playing an increasing role as information tools for consumers at the local, national, and international levels.

The meeting participants agreed to the Berlin Principles (without formally committing their respective institutions or organizations) while UNESCO-CEPES and the Institute for Higher Education Policy have taken responsibility for widely disseminating the principles and continuing to convene these international dialogues.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy, located in Washington, DC (for more information, visit the Institute website at www.ihep.org) and the UNESCO-European Centre for Higher Education located in Bucharest, Romania (for more information visit the website at www.cepes.ro), are responding to a need for informed international debate with regard to the phenomenon of institutional and programmatic ranking in higher education. The project began in 2002 at the first-ever international meeting on ranking, hosted by UNESCO-CEPES, in Warsaw. A second meeting was held in late 2004 in Washington, DC where the notion of a somewhat informal but ongoing International Rankings Expert Group was formed. The next gathering of the International Rankings Expert Group is planned for Shanghai in the fall of 2007 and will include discussion of establishing a more formal and deliberative body to continue the work outlined in the Berlin Principles.

The Berlin Principles are attached.

#####



Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions

Rankings and league tables of higher education institutions (HEIs) and programs are a global phenomenon. They serve many purposes: they respond to demands from consumers for easily interpretable information on the standing of higher education institutions; they stimulate competition among them; they provide some of the rationale for allocation of funds; and they help differentiate among different types of institutions and different programs and disciplines. In addition, when correctly understood and interpreted, they contribute to the definition of “quality” of higher education institutions within a particular country, complementing the rigorous work conducted in the context of quality assessment and review performed by public and independent accrediting agencies. This is why rankings of HEIs have become part of the framework of national accountability and quality assurance processes, and why more nations are likely to see the development of rankings in the future. Given this trend, it is important that those producing rankings and league tables hold themselves accountable for quality in their own data collection, methodology, and dissemination.

In view of the above, the International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) was founded in 2004 by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) in Bucharest and the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington, DC. It is upon this initiative that IREG’s second meeting (Berlin, 18 to 20 May, 2006) has been convened to consider a set of principles of quality and good practice in HEI rankings—the **Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions**.

It is expected that this initiative has set a framework for the elaboration and dissemination of rankings—whether they are national, regional, or global in scope—that ultimately will lead to a system of continuous improvement and refinement of the methodologies used to conduct these rankings. Given the heterogeneity of methodologies of rankings, these principles for good ranking practice will be useful for the improvement and evaluation of ranking.

Rankings and league tables should:

A) Purposes and Goals of Rankings

1. *Be one of a number of diverse approaches to the assessment of higher education inputs, processes, and outputs.* Rankings can provide comparative information and improved understanding of higher education, but should not be the main method for assessing what higher education is and does. Rankings provide a market-based perspective that can complement the work of government, accrediting authorities, and independent review agencies.
2. *Be clear about their purpose and their target groups.* Rankings have to be designed with due regard to their purpose. Indicators designed to meet a particular objective or to inform one target group may not be adequate for different purposes or target groups.
3. *Recognize the diversity of institutions and take the different missions and goals of institutions into account.* Quality measures for research-oriented institutions, for example, are quite different from those that are appropriate for institutions that provide broad access to underserved communities. Institutions that are being ranked and the experts that inform the ranking process should be consulted often.
4. *Provide clarity about the range of information sources for rankings and the messages each source generates.* The relevance of ranking results depends on the audiences receiving the information and the sources of that information (such as databases, students, professors, employers). Good practice would be to combine the different perspectives provided by those sources in order to get a more complete view of each higher education institution included in the ranking.
5. *Specify the linguistic, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of the educational systems being ranked.* International rankings in particular should be aware of possible biases and be precise about their objective. Not all nations or systems share the same values and beliefs about what constitutes “quality” in tertiary institutions, and ranking systems should not be devised to force such comparisons.

B) Design and Weighting of Indicators

6. *Be transparent regarding the methodology used for creating the rankings.* The choice of methods used to prepare rankings should be clear and unambiguous. This transparency should include the calculation of indicators as well as the origin of data.
7. *Choose indicators according to their relevance and validity.* The choice of data should be grounded in recognition of the ability of each measure to represent quality and academic and institutional strengths, and not availability of data. Be clear about why measures were included and what they are meant to represent.
8. *Measure outcomes in preference to inputs whenever possible.* Data on inputs are relevant as they reflect the general condition of a given establishment and are more frequently available. Measures of outcomes provide a more accurate assessment of the standing and/or quality of a given institution or program, and compilers of rankings should ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved.
9. *Make the weights assigned to different indicators (if used) prominent and limit changes to them.* Changes in weights make it difficult for consumers to discern whether an

institution's or program's status changed in the rankings due to an inherent difference or due to a methodological change.

C) Collection and Processing of Data

10. *Pay due attention to ethical standards and the good practice recommendations articulated in these Principles.* In order to assure the credibility of each ranking, those responsible for collecting and using data and undertaking on-site visits should be as objective and impartial as possible.
11. *Use audited and verifiable data whenever possible.* Such data have several advantages, including the fact that they have been accepted by institutions and that they are comparable and compatible across institutions.
12. *Include data that are collected with proper procedures for scientific data collection.* Data collected from an unrepresentative or skewed subset of students, faculty, or other parties may not accurately represent an institution or program and should be excluded.
13. *Apply measures of quality assurance to ranking processes themselves.* These processes should take note of the expertise that is being applied to evaluate institutions and use this knowledge to evaluate the ranking itself. Rankings should be learning systems continuously utilizing this expertise to develop methodology.
14. *Apply organizational measures that enhance the credibility of rankings.* These measures could include advisory or even supervisory bodies, preferably with some international participation.

D) Presentation of Ranking Results

15. *Provide consumers with a clear understanding of all of the factors used to develop a ranking, and offer them a choice in how rankings are displayed.* This way, the users of rankings would have a better understanding of the indicators that are used to rank institutions or programs. In addition, they should have some opportunity to make their own decisions about how these indicators should be weighted.
16. *Be compiled in a way that eliminates or reduces errors in original data, and be organized and published in a way that errors and faults can be corrected.* Institutions and the public should be informed about errors that have occurred.

Berlin, 20 May 2006

2nd Meeting of the International Ranking Expert Group

Berlin, Germany

18 - 20 May 2006

List of Participants

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Prenome</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Country</u>
Prof.	Agachi	Paul Serban	University Babes-Bolayii	Romania
Mr.	Amuraritei	Aurelian	S.C. Adevarul S.A.	Romania
Prof.	Baur	Max	Institute for Medical Biometrics, Computing and Epidemiology	Germany
Dr.	Bekhradnia	Bahram	Higher Education Policy Institute	England
Dr.	Berghoff	Sonja	CHE Centre for Higher Education Development	Germany
Mr.	Cheng	Ying	Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University	P.R. China
Mr	Chun	Marc	Council for Aid to Education	USA
Dr.	Clarke	Marguerite	University of South Australia	Australia
Dr.	Coelen	Robert	Leiden University	Netherlands
Mrs.	Cunningham	Alisa F.	Institute for Higher Education Policy	USA
Mr.	Deiss	Richard	European Commission	Belgium
Prof.	Devinsky	Ferdinand	Academic Ranking and Rating Agency and Comenius University	Slovakia
Mr.	Federkeil	Gero	CHE Centre for Higher Education Development	Germany
Dr.	Fedrowitz	Jutta	CHE Centre for Higher Education Development	Germany
Dr.	Gaul	Jens-Peter	German Research Foundation	Germany
Dr.	Giesecke	Hans	Independent Colleges of Indiana, Inc.	USA
Dr.	Göbbels-Dreyling	Brigitte	German Rectors Conference	Germany
Dr.	Hazelnorn	Ellen	Dublin Institute of Technology	Ireland
Prof.	Hornbostel	Stefan	Institute for Research Evaluation and Quality Assurance	Germany
Prof.	Hüfner	Klaus	Advisory Board, UNESCO-CEPES	Germany
Mrs.	Ionita	Venera	UNESCO-CEPES	Romania
Mr.	Kee	Arnold	Institute for Higher Education Policy	USA
Mr.	Kobayashi	Tetsuo	Asahi Shimbun newspaper	Japan
Mr.	Keuleers	Tony	Ministry of the Flemish Community, Department of Education	Belgium

Dr.	Kohler	Alexander	Austrian Quality Assurance Agency	Austria
Dr.	Lange	Rainer	German Science Council	Deutschland
Ms	Lin	Xiao Qing	Ministry of Education, P.R. China	P.R. China
Dr.	Linovitskaja	Olessja	Institute of Applied Information Technology	Ukraine
Prof.	Liu	Nian Cai	Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University	P.R. China
Dr.	Matthews	Dewayne	Lumina Foundation for Education	USA
Mr.	Merisotis	Jamie	Institute for Higher Education Policy	USA
Mr.	Morse	Robert J.	U.S. News & World Report	USA
Dr.	Müller	Marion	German Research Foundation	Germany
Prof.	Müller-Böling	Detlef	CHE Centre for Higher Education Development	Germany
Prof.	Nazaré	Maria Helena	University of Aveiro	Portugal
Prof.	Proulx	Roland	University of Montreal	Canada
Dr.	Sadlak	Jan	UNESCO-CEPES	Romania
Mr.	Salmi	Jamil	The World Bank	USA
Prof.	Siegenthaler	Claude Patrick	Department of Humanity and Environment, Hosei University	Japan
Prof.	Siwinski	Waldemar	PERSPECTIVES Educational Foundation	Poland
Mr.	Spitzeck	Heiko	University St. Gallen	Germany
Prof.	Troyan	Vladmir	St. Petersburg University	Russian Federation
Dr.	Usher	Alexander	Educational Policy Institute	Canada
Dr.	Winter	Ekkehard	German Telekom Foundation	Germany
Mr.	Yelland	Richard	Directorate for Education, OECD	France
Prof.	Yonezawa	Akiyoshi	National Institute for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation	Japan
Prof.	Zgurovsky	Michael	National Technical University of Ukraine	Ukraine

Note: Identification of the organization of those participating does not imply formal endorsement by that organization.