Slide 1

There are at least 60 different international university rankings. The booming market for higher education and its globalisation have made these rankings inevitable.

Which top university offers the best value for money?

A visual summary of university rankings and tuition fees

We combined the three most well-known international rankings of higher education institutions to find the best universities. We also looked at these rankings' shortcomings. What do they measure? Are there any bargains to be had?

Spoiler: Switzerland, for once, is a good deal.

Slide 2

We created a consensus/ definitive ranking of the top 500 universities by averaging the three longest established and most influential global rankings: QS World University ranking, Times Higher Education (THE) and the Shanghai ranking (AEWU).

Slide 3

Each circle below represents one of our top 500 universities. Most of them are in North America, Europe and East Asia. Tap or hover over a circle to know more.

Slide 4

The top 20 universities are concentrated in the United States and in Western Europe. Circles in this map are scaled and coloured according to universities' average rank.

Slide 5

Here are the top 500 universities grouped by continent and rank category.

Slide 7

University rankings only consider a small share of the global higher education offerings. They also mainly assess research.

Only about 5% of all universities worldwide are ranked

Estimates of the total number universities worldwide vary greatly between 18,000 and 26,000... The most inclusive estimates categorise any post-compulsory schooling institution as a university. Opting for a conservative estimate, there are about 18,000 universities worldwide. About 5,000 universities do research, of which only about a thousand are considered in international rankings (~5%).

Slide 8

The general public, the media and the universities themselves have embraced university rankings. They have been remarkably influential even though measuring quality is not so straightforward and that there is still disagreements over the methodologies used.

What is actually ranked?

The three most popular university rankings rely heavily on research indicators to rank universities. The number of citations of academic papers is a common metric to rate research.

Research indicators tend to favour "hard science". That's why Swiss technical schools (ETH and EPFL) are always ranked higher than other Swiss universities.

Also, it places universities which do not use English as their primary language at a disadvantage. This is because most academic societies and journals publish articles only in English.

Overall, it is not clear who the rankings are designed for. A PhD student or a researcher might only care about research quality. On the other hand, an undergraduate student is more likely to be interested in teaching quality. Assessing teaching quality is both difficult and subjective and that is why it is typically not heavily weighted in rankings' (teacher to student ratios are often used as a proxy metric for teaching quality).

Slide 9

What is actually ranked? (part 2)

What is actually ranked?

The cost of education has no effect on ranking. This means that relatively expensive North American private universities are compared to more affordable European institutions. Many European countries, like France or Germany for example, have a long tradition on offering free education. We address cost comparison in the next graphic.

Last but not least, there might be large variations within a university depending on the subject or degree type (BA, MA or MBA).

Although most rankings provide sub categories by subject and/or course type. It still begs the question what an overall ranking of universities as a league table is good for?

Slide 10

Which University offers the best value for your money?

For once, Switzerland offers some of the best bargains considering the quality of higher education on offer. The ETH in Zurich for instance is ranked 13th on average but costs less than $1,200 per year for a master degree in computer science. Some of the best universities in China, Japan and Germany also provide excellent value for their tuition fees.