

Rankings and Reputation



“Students are behaving increasingly like consumers and are expecting a full assessment of potential universities before they invest” - QS, 2019

Introduction

Ranking systems compare universities’ performance on factors such as research, teaching, and impact. Over the past decade, post-secondary institutions have increasingly used rankings for analysis, strategic planning and policy making. Rankings can be useful for institutional development as they benchmark, both nationally and internationally, what is possible for an institution and areas of improvement¹.

Historically, the University of Windsor has either not ranked or ranked outside of the top 600 universities in all major global ranking systems. In recent years, UWindsor has worked to improve its global rank, specifically by focusing on the Times Higher Education World University Rankings ([THE WUR](#)) which is the most influential and well-respected system. Though rankings are not a direct indication of the institution’s quality, they are correlated with the university’s overall reputation and can impact student and faculty recruitment, partnerships, and research funding¹. The university’s overall reputation is a major consideration for applicants, and the reputation of a program strongly impacts whether one chooses a university. Reputation for campus experience, teaching, and graduate outcomes are other key deciding factors². International students from China and India particularly believe that institutional rankings are most useful when researching education options³.

In the past few years, the university has taken a strategic approach to participation in rankings: developing criteria for participation, working to improve data collection and submission, and providing insight into strategies to improve in the ranking. It should be noted that there are rankings that we cannot elect to participate in (e.g., Maclean’s) or be strategic about, which can create risk.

Facts and Figures

- Major global rankings (Table 1) tend to weight two factors heavily: research and reputation. In 2022, UWindsor’s overall rank in THE WUR was 645, which had risen by 124 positions compared to 2018 but has fallen in the last three years. For the first time, UWindsor placed among the top 300 universities in Engineering and among the top 400 in Computer Science, Education and Psychology, outperforming several notable universities such as Queen’s, Guelph, and Ryerson.

¹ QS. (August 14, 2019). Demystifying the Rankings: A Guide for Universities.

² Academica Group. (2021). University/College Applicant Study. 2021 UCAS™.

³ QS. International Student Survey, 2021.

Table 1. University of Windsor on Major Global Rankings

Ranking System	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
THE WUR	769	637	608	609	645
QS WUR	651-700	651-700	651-700	751-800	701-750
ARWU	NR	NR	NR	701-800	NR
US News Best Global					1,049
NTU	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
THE Impact		DNP	DNP	DNP	DNP

The Higher Education World University Rankings (THE WUR), Quacquarelli Symonds WUR (QS WUR); Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU); US News Best Global; National Taiwan University (NTU) and THE Impact.

NR = Not Ranked, DNP = Did Not Participate

- UWindsor ranked 14th overall in Maclean’s 2022 rankings for Canada’s top 15 comprehensive universities. Universities included in this group have significant research activity and a wide range of programs at the undergraduate and graduate level, including professional degrees⁴. The reputation score (worth 15%) is determined through a survey sent by Maclean’s to faculty, senior administrators, and businesspeople around the country. In the past 5 years, UWindsor’s overall rank has placed in the bottom third, however, our reputation for student services and library resources typically ranks above average. In 2022, UWindsor ranked in Maclean’s top 20 Canadian universities for Computer Science and Nursing, and in 2021 ranked in the top 20 for Education.
- UWindsor ranked 1st place on the Huffington Post’s five Canadian universities to watch in 2017. The university’s growing enrolment and endowment, size and scope of programs, and recent investments in infrastructure were among the top reasons⁵. In 2020 and 2019, UWindsor ranked 30th and 31st, respectively, in Canada’s top 50 research institutions⁶. Rankings are based on total sponsored research income, and UWindsor outperformed peer institutions like Wilfrid Laurier and Brock.
- In 2021, UWindsor ranked 31st on Forbes’ list of Canada’s top 300 employers, outperforming Ryerson, Western, and University of Waterloo⁷. Rankings were based on employees’ willingness to recommend their employer to others⁸.

⁴ Maclean’s. (October 7, 2021). Canada’s best Comprehensive universities: Rankings 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.macleans.ca/education/canadas-best-comprehensive-universities-rankings-2022/>

⁵ Huffington Post. (March 20, 2017). 5 Universities to Watch. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/canadian-universities-to-watch_b_15433758

⁶ Research InfoSource Inc. Canada’s Top 50 Research Universities 2021. Retrieved from: <https://researchinfosource.com/top-50-research-universities/2021/list>

⁷ Forbes. (January 26, 2021). Canada’s Best Employers 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/canada-best-employers/#576c8b8b241f>

⁸ Forbes. (January 26, 2021). Meet Canada’s Best Employers 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristinstoller/2021/01/26/meet-canadas-best-employers-2021/?sh=b37eefb2d2ce>

Best Practices

While rankings are important and impact the institution, there are caveats to consider. First, rankings do not measure the quality of an institution even though they are perceived to do so; factors like age, wealth and geography can influence an institution's rank⁹. Second, methodological issues include arbitrary weightings for performance indicators, inconsistent measurement across countries and institutions, and non-representative samples¹⁰. Lastly, performance indicators that use subjective measures may be beyond the institution's control and limit ability for improvement.

There are more than 20 global rankings, and each have sub-rankings (e.g., subject, region). The six rankings shown in Figure 1. have become the standard that universities use to benchmark themselves and make decisions. While each ranking system has their own methodology and set of indicators, most of them prioritize measuring institutional reputation and research productivity.

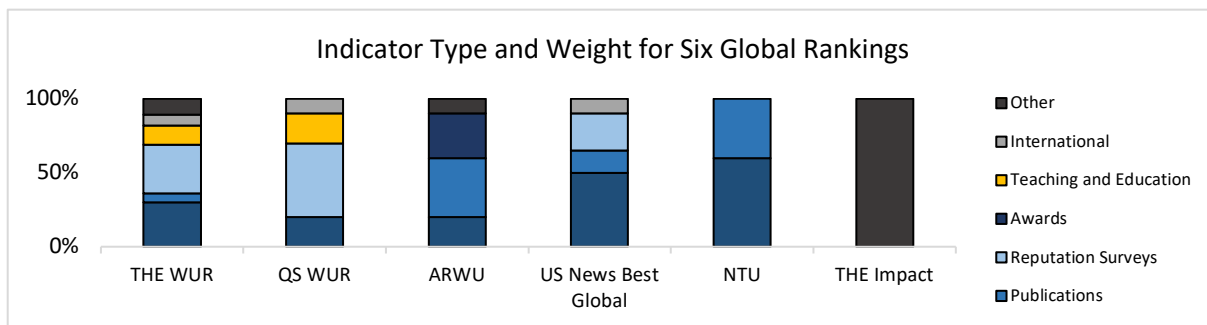


Figure 1

Some ranking systems involve direct data submission while others rely on indirect data sourced from Elsevier's Scopus and Clarivate's Web of Science. Submitting complete and accurate data on faculty citations and other related content is crucial for improving the university's bibliometric footprint. Other efforts undertaken by universities to improve their position in the rankings include: (1) Improving the impact of institutional research by supporting and incentivizing faculty research and collaborations, and (2) Strengthening the University's academic profile and reputation. The former involves, for example, participating in large, co-authored networks to produce more impactful research that is more highly cited, and the latter involves, for example, developing strategic marketing campaigns and narratives to promote the university's current ranking standings.

Thinking Question: What are some ways the University of Windsor can work to strengthen its overall reputation nationally and internationally?

⁹ Gadd, E. (2021). Mis-measuring our universities: Why global university rankings do not add up. *Frontiers in Research Analytics*, 6, 1-8.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2021.680023>

¹⁰ Fauzi, M. A., Tan, C. N. L, Daud, M., & Awalludin, M. M. N. (2020). University rankings: A review of methodological flaws. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 79-96. <https://www.iier.org.au/iier30/fauzi.pdf>