

How does ranking
influence students
when applying to
universities?



It is a common phenomenon to hear students from different universities argue about whose university is a better school, specifically discussing which school has a better ranking. This may happen between two rivalry schools such as USC and UCLA. According to Altbach, universities rankings was first developed in the United States because of the various academic institutions for students to choose from (2010). This sense of competition arose because university rankings began to increase their prevalence across the world (Lo, 2014). Higher education system enacts as a 'market' in which universities are firms that seek effective competitive strategies (Grewal, Dearden, & Lilien, 2008). Rankings are also marketing tools for university administrators because of the decrease in governmental funding and the increase in university cost caused more competition between universities (Grewal et al., 2008).

Moreover, international university ranking systems provide a growth in both national and global demand for more information on academic quality (Dill, & Soo, 2005). Along with a rapid growth of globalization, and marketization in higher education, university rankings became a popular factor that many people (other than students) pay attention to (Shin, Toutkoushian, & Teichler, 2011). For instance, policymakers view rankings in order to determine the value of their investment in certain institutions and higher ranking schools can attract more financial sponsors (Shin 2011 et al., 2011).

Thus, this focus group paper aims to discover and answer these following specific questions: what are some important factors for choosing a university, and why do students think university rankings are important when applying for schools. the findings discovered from this focus group can

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-ranking-influence-students-when-applying-to-universities/>

be helpful because understanding university ranking is significant for prospective students to make appropriate choices during a difficult decision-making period (“ How Important”, 2018).

Method

Procedure

One focus group was conducted that lasted ten minutes. The group moderator was a graduate student in the Communication Management program at Annenberg.

Participants

A total of four participants—one male and three females took part in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years, one male was Caucasian and all three females were Asian ethnicity. Also, the participants all attend the same school, which is University of Southern California.

Focus Group

The focus group discussion consisted of two main questions. The first part focused on the important factors when applying for universities. An example question was “ What are some things you have to consider when applying for a university (either for undergrad or grad school)?” The second part focused on why is university ranking important to students. An example question was “ Why do you think ranking is an important factor when applying for universities”? The moderator guide can be seen in the Appendix.

Findings

From the focus group exercise, there were one male participant and three female participants who are all studying the graduate program of communication management at USC. All the participants applied to numerous universities for grad school other than USC such as university of Florida, George Washington University and Carnegie Mellon University. When asked with the question ' Why did you choose USC', participants responded that location is an important factor because Los Angeles has a lot of good internship opportunities and it is far away from a participant's hometown. As well, the weather of Los Angeles is not only comfortable but also similar to a participant's hometown. A participant's family member also went to USC which was another factor that made the participant to choose USC. A participant also mentioned that two of his friends did the same program previously and they recommended the program to the participant. As well, one participant replied that " I applied to USC because it has a good ranking."

When discussing about which programs participants applied to, one participant only applied to communication management, another participant said " I actually chose undecided for my major under faculty of arts & science because it was easier for me to transfer to which ever program I wanted to study afterwards". While other participants applied to the general program of communication but with different focuses, " I believe they were all under category of communication but with different concentration. The names were television, radio and film, media management and entertainment." All the participants agreed that they consider their

university (USC) as a school with good ranking. Additionally, they all researched upon the university's ranking before they have actually applied.

Furthermore, participants applied to other schools not only of their similar rankings with USC but also with the consideration of location, reputation and alumni connections. As a result, they all chose USC mostly because it has a fairly good ranking. When participants were asked Why do you think ranking is an important factor when applying for universities, they had a variety of responses. One participant explained that " Because everyone wants to be part of the best, and it looks good on your resume for any job application." Other participants agreed and added that ranking is an appropriate way for their parents to evaluate a school since there are no other standards.

Another participant claimed that although ranking may be nothing special, it is a common method to assess universities especially for Chinese students.

As a result, it is discovered from the focus group that ranking is not the only important factor to consider when applying to universities for both students and parents. But the participants also evaluate other components such as the variety of programs the schools offer, the size of the school, geographical locations, athletic teams, career networks and job connections.

Discussion

The data found from this focus group is that all the participants had similar opinions regarding university rankings. They all believed a good ranking is important for choosing universities and they applied to the university they are currently studying at (USC) because of its great ranking. On the other

hand, participants believed that location, weather, sports teams and <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-ranking-influence-students-when-applying-to-universities/>

connections are also factors they would put into consideration when evaluating universities. Since our current environment became so competitive, everyone wants to obtain a good job and achieve lots of accomplishments. Thus, an excellent educational background is required for a good job. In other words, a person who graduates from a school that has a good ranking would possibly bring them more career opportunities and be on the advantaged side when comparing to someone who did not graduate from a known school. If the person continues to achieve great success in their professional field, other people would look up to that person and follow their path.

Eventually, ranking becomes an important reference for the public to evaluate universities. From the data given by this focus group, it can be implied that parents would continue to encourage their children to study harder in order to get accepted by top ranked schools such as University of Oxford, Stanford University, MIT and etc. Indeed, students themselves would choose to apply to schools with higher rankings in order to obtain better job opportunities. But students may also attend schools in good locations such as Los Angeles and New York, because one is the heart of entertainment industries and the other has more opportunities in fashion and business. As a prediction, institutions across the world would continue to improve their rankings due to the increasing competition within the education sector. Institutions may hire more prestigious professors, conduct more academic researches, connect with more sponsors, reconstruct campus buildings, accept smarter students (higher SAT/GRE scores) and etc.

Consequently, there are two areas which could be improved for future focus groups. Firstly, the questions asked can be more detailed because the focus group was not efficient in covering depth on the issue of university ranking. More questions could have been asked on 'do they know the current ranking of their schools or any other schools they wanted to go to'. Since the focus group had a consistent agreement on ranking, questions on 'what could be some disadvantages of school ranking' could be asked to understand both sides of the issue. As well, participants may be too timid to share about their personal opinions. These issues could be improved by inviting participants from different schools who study different majors with equal ratio of male and females. There could be a feedback form at the end of the focus group with questions that were asked during the discussion. In other words, if any participant wants to share more thoughts privately with the researcher, they can put in the form.

References

- ALTBACH, P. (2010). University Ranking Season Is Here. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45 (49), 14-17. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy1.usc.edu/stable/27917926>
- Dill, D., & Soo, M. (2005). Academic Quality, League Tables, and Public Policy: A Cross-National Analysis of University Ranking Systems. *Higher Education*, 49 (4), 495-533. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy1.usc.edu/stable/25068082>
- Grewal, R., Dearden, J., & Lilien, G. (2008). The University Rankings Game: Modeling the Competition among Universities for Ranking. *The*

American Statistician, 62 (3), 232-237. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy2.usc.edu/stable/27644031>

- Lo, W. (2014). *University Rankings Implications for Higher Education in Taiwan*. Singapore: Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4560-35-1>
- Shin, J., Toutkoushian, R., & Teichler, U. (2011). *University Rankings Theoretical Basis, Methodology and Impacts on Global Higher Education*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1116-7>
- “How Important Are University Subject Rankings?” *QS*, (2018, July 19). Retrieved from <http://www.qs.com/how-important-are-university-subject-rankings/>

Appendix

Moderator Guide

Problem: A lot of people chose their universities because of their good rankings

Goal: Understand how school ranking is an important factor to students when applying for university

Participants: university students 17-25, who are currently enroll in an university both undergraduate and graduate. Recruited at the library of USC.

Reimbursement: snacks and refreshments during focus group and \$50 Starbucks gift card

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-ranking-influence-students-when-applying-to-universities/>

1) Intro/Warm Up

1. Please state your name and which university you are attending

2) School choices

1. Did you apply to any other schools before coming to your school?

1. General probe: why did you choose these schools?

2. Specific probe: which programs did you apply to?

3) Considering Ranking

1. Would you consider your university as a school with good ranking?

1. General Probe: Did you research upon your school's ranking before applying?

2. Did you apply to other schools that also had similar rankings?

4) Important factors

1. Why do you think ranking is an important factor when applying for universities?

2. What other factors are important for choosing a university?