

GLOBAL: US again leads world rankings

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American universities again dominate the latest **Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings** as they have for the past six years. Released last Friday, almost a week earlier than expected, the rankings place US universities in all but three of the top 20 spots with Harvard, Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley in first, second and third spot, and the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Tokyo the only outsiders at fourth, 10th and 20th respectively. The top 10 universities are unchanged this year from the rankings drawn up in 2008.

Of the top 50 universities, 36 are US institutions although University College, London, came in at 21, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology at 23, Japan's Kyoto University at 24, Imperial College, London at 26, Toronto at 27, British Columbia at 36, Pierre and Marie Curie University - Paris 6 at 40, Manchester at 41, Copenhagen equal 43 with University of Paris Sud (Paris 11) and Sweden's Karolinska Institute at number 50.

Sixty seven of the top 100 universities, however, are in the US while 13 are based in Britain and five in Japan. But the Shanghai Jiao Tong listings differ markedly from other rankings. As *University World News* **reported last month**, the annual Times Higher Education-QS rankings also placed Harvard at number one yet British institutions dominated the peak group.

Cambridge leapfrogged Yale to take second place while British institutions were placed fourth (University College London) and fifth equal (Imperial College London and Oxford University) giving the UK four of the top six institutions in the world. Cambridge and Oxford were in the top five last year with Imperial College sixth.

As we reported on 11 October, the eroding dominance of North American universities in the Times Higher rankings was reflected in the top 100 where their number fell from 42 in 2008 to 36 this year, as more Asian and European institutions climbed into the league table. Overall, 39 European universities found a place in the top 100, up from 36 in 2008, as did 16 Asian institutions, up from 14 last year.

The apparent dramatic change in the fortunes of US universities over just 12 months is undoubtedly more a reflection of methodology than a judgement on their quality. The THE-QS rankings differ from those of their main rival in relying heavily on academic peer review rather than on measurable criteria.

Given the absence of comparable and reliable data on the world's diverse university systems, critics of the Shanghai rankings point to its reliance on citations and awards such as Nobel laureates which gives the outcome a heavy research focus.

For the first time this year, the Chinese rankings are published by ShanghaiRanking Consultancy which is described on the website as "a fully independent organisation". As well as its annual rankings, the consultancy says it will in future provide "various global comparison and in-depth analysis on research universities, supporting relevant decision-making by national governments and universities in global context".

The first rankings were published in June 2003 by the Center for World-Class Universities and the Institute of Higher Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong. They have been updated annually using what the group claims are "six objective indicators", including the number of alumni and staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, number of highly cited researchers selected by Thomson Scientific, number of articles published in journals of *Nature and Science*, number of articles indexed in Science Citation Index - Expanded and Social Sciences Citation Index, and per capita performance with respect to the size of an institution.

More than 1,000 universities are actually ranked each year and the "best" 500 are published on the web. The publishers say that while the initial purpose of the rankings was to determine the global standing of China's top universities, the annual publication has attracted considerable attention from universities, governments and public media worldwide.

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