University Ranking and Higher Education Goals: Random Variables?

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**Abstract:** The issue of educational goals setting and university mission determination is crucial for higher education management and outcomes. Although educational goals are a backbone construct, they are seldom addressed, most underestimated, and are hardly considered for calibration in university ratings. The hypothesis of this study was that educational goals of world universities may have relationship with their rankings. The objective of this descriptive conceptual study was to scrutinize universities’ strategic missions and trace possible relationship between them and the university’s academic success materialized as QS rank. The subject of this study was shared educational goals of three cohorts of randomly selected universities from the QS World University ranking yearbook 2021: the top hundred, the 2-4th hundreds, and 9-12th hundreds of universities. Relying on the framework of a descriptive research the author applied techniques of coding, content analysis, comparison, and interpretation. The research results were presented in a table. The main findings show that each of the three cohorts of universities has a core of similar repeated educational goals; these goals differ across cohorts in thematic dominants that manifest some trends; the goals of the top hundred universities are more clearly articulated, structured, diverse than those of the other cohorts and are shared not only by their cohort but also by universities in the middle and peripheral cohorts. The goals of the top cohort are universal, whereas those of the other cohorts are locally or culturally-marked, which may be related to their rank because they are involved with specificities ignored by the existing ranking scales and require consideration in the future. The results lead to the conclusion that although there is no rigorous dependence between educational goals and ranks, there can hardly be an unequivocally negative answer to the question in the title.

**Key words**: higher educational goals, educational mission and values, QS world university ranking.