Serving Students: Consumer Rankings in Higher Education

Paul W. Thurman
Columbia University
New York, New York, USA

When last we met:

"All models are wrong. Some are useful."

-- George Box

<u>Key Question</u>: How do we "Rank" Things?

Think of your favorite sports team.

Now think about why this team is your favorite…

Common Mental Models:

- "Statistics:" Wins, goals scored, etc.
- "Likeability:" Leading coach, player ethics
- "Marketability:" Jerseys, hats, posters
- "Loyalty:" Long-time fan base

Analytically Speaking:

- **Objective viewpoint**
- **"Look and Feel" (beyond amenities)**
- **Consumer-ready (easy-to-use)**
- **Consistent**

The Human Challenge:

We often blend or "rebalance" our ranking models based on different contexts!

For Example:

- Your top team has a poor season
- A favorite player of yours commits a crime
- You move away from your team's town
- Your new in-laws…

The Key "Glue:"

YOU!

The <u>consumer</u>, not the statisticians, players, marketers, promoters, or your father-in-law <u>defines</u> what "good" looks like!

The Higher Education Context: Would you admit/hire (become a fan of) an applicant based solely on:

- GPA?
- Attire?
- Number of other college/job offers?
- Duration of last schooling or employment? (Or # of Facebook friends?)

Of course not!

- **Objective measures help…**
- **…but qualitative factors—"subjective intangibles"—also play a huge role…**
- **…but consistency matters, too: lots of others saying the same thing probably aren't wrong!**

Who is the "fan" or "customer, here?

- Mobile (internationally)
- Diverse: culturally, geographically
- Fact-based…yet "sensitive"
- Collaborative…yet focused
- Loyal in some respects…but fickle in others

WURs: Customer-Focused; Blended for Balance

- 50-50: Quantitative vs. Subjective (Surveys)
- Academic ("supply") peer-review and employer ("demand") metrics
- Student and faculty diversity
- Research and publication success

Example: QS Stars

- **Allows universities to benchmark themselves against comparable institutions/programs**
- **Quantitative and qualitative assessment**
- **More participation strengthens comparisons**
- **Periodic resampling allows participants to see ongoing improvements and opportunities**

Like our Minds…:

- **WURs (and QS Stars) blend objective and subjective customer measures…**
- **…across one of the largest consumer samples available…**
- **…to create one of the most consistent, fan-friendly ratings sets in the world!**

Remember:

A carpenter doesn't buy a half-inch drill because he wants a half-inch drill...

Thank you!

Paul.Thurman@Columbia.edu
+1 917 647 9090