

Excellence in the humanities

Brazilian courses
distinguish themselves on
the international scene

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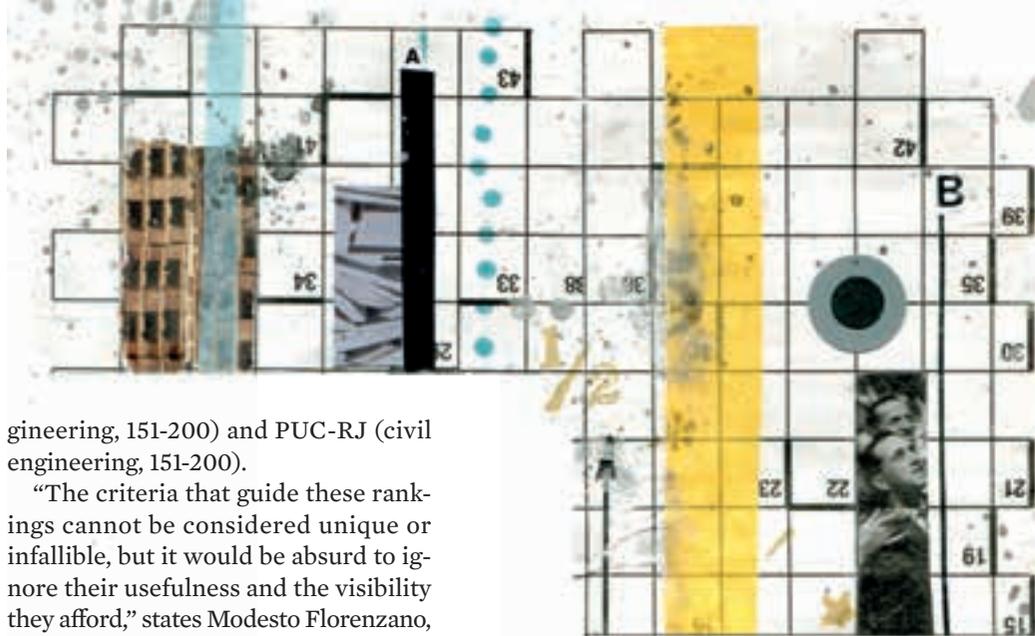




At the beginning of July, QS (Quacquarelli Symonds), which has evaluated and classified universities around the world every year since 2004, published the first global university rankings that rated the top institutions in each of various areas of knowledge (these rankings are available at www.topuniversities.com). Brazilian universities are relatively highly ranked, appearing among the top 200 institutions for various topics, particularly in the broad categories of the “social sciences” and the “arts and humanities.” For each field, the top 50 universities are listed in rank order; the institutions in the 51-100 range are then listed in alphabetical order, followed by an alphabetical listing of the universities in the 101-150 range and an alphabetical listing of the universities in the 151-200 range. Six Brazilian institutions appear in the list of the top 200 institutions for the human sciences as a whole: two state universities (USP and Unicamp), two federal universities (UFRJ and UFMG), the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) and the Pontifical Catholic University

of Rio (PUC-Rio). This list also includes two universities from other Latin American countries (Universidad Nacional Autónoma do México and PUC-Chile).

USP appears in the 51-100 group for philosophy and sociology and is in the 151-200 group for geography and international relations. Unicamp is included in the 101 – 150 group for philosophy and in the 151 – 200 group for statistics and operational research, whereas UFRJ has the converse rankings for these two fields of study. FGV and UFMG appear in the 151-200 group for international relations and philosophy, respectively. For comparison, in the exact and biomedical sciences, only three Brazilian universities are ranked: USP (agronomy, 51-100; civil engineering, 151-200), Unicamp (electrical and electronic en-



gineering, 151-200) and PUC-RJ (civil engineering, 151-200).

“The criteria that guide these rankings cannot be considered unique or infallible, but it would be absurd to ignore their usefulness and the visibility they afford,” states Modesto Florenzano, deputy dean of the School of Philosophy, Literature and Human Sciences (FFLCH) at USP, which houses three of the departments that were mentioned in the QS rankings (namely, philosophy, sociology and geography).

“The main purpose of these lists – and this is their economic basis – is to offer people who intend to enter these institutions a panorama of the universities. That is why carrying out research by discipline is very useful,” explains Rogério Meneghini, a specialist in scientometrics, the study of the quantitative aspects of science and scientific production. “The rankings weren’t produced to give a broad view of the quality of the universities, but they ended up serving this purpose.”

QS, which is headquartered in the United Kingdom and has offices in various countries, prepares its rankings to be used as guides by students who wish to study outside their own cities or, in particular, their native countries. This objective is the reason that special attention is devoted in the rankings to the degree of



internationalization of the institutions that were evaluated. The recent rankings are based on three major criteria: academic reputation (professors are invited to evaluate courses and universities other than their own), reputation among employers (the quality of the professionals that graduate from each institution) and the number of citations of the academic publications from each institution.

QS considers its inclusion of the “employability” criterion to be the primary distinguishing factor of its rankings. However, this criterion is criticized because it represents an index that is not necessarily related to the quality of universities’ intellectual production. “For our target audience, it would be disproportional if we were to place more emphasis on academic research than we already do,” says Ben Sowter, head of the information unit of QS. “Furthermore, the other rankings already provide this emphasis, in part because of the type of data internationally available and in part due to the history of how the rankings

Latin America in the QS university rankings: social sciences

INSTITUTION	STATISTICS AND OPERATING RESEARCH	SOCIOLOGY	POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	LAW	ECONOMICS AND ECONOMETRICS
National Autonomous University of Mexico	—	44	—	—	151-200
University of São Paulo	—	51-100	151-200	—	—
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro	101-150	151-200	—	—	—
Pontifical Catholic University of Chile	151-200	—	—	51-100	—
Getúlio Vargas Foundation	—	—	151-200	—	—
State University of Campinas	151-200	—	—	—	—
Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro	—	—	101-150	—	—

SOURCE QUACQUARELLI SYMONDS

QS world university global rankings: philosophy

	INSTITUTION	COUNTRY	ACADEMIC	EMPLOYABILITY	CITATIONS	POINTS
1	Harvard University	United States	99,6	96,3	50,3	94,3
2	University of Oxford	United Kingdom	100,0	95,4	41,0	93,6
3	University of Cambridge	United Kingdom	94,5	100,0	51,9	90,8
4	University of California at Berkeley	United States	88,4	65,4	73,3	84,6
5	Princeton University	United States	80,1	39,7	81,6	76,2
6	Australian National University	Australia	73,8	52,8	95,1	73,8
7	University of Toronto	Canada	77,1	60,6	36,1	71,4
8	Stanford University	United States	74,8	46,0	56,7	70,1
9	Yale University	United States	73,2	64,4	22,1	67,2
10	University of Chicago	United States	71,1	50,4	13,8	63,3
51-100	University of São Paulo	Brazil	26,8	5,9	5,0	–
101-150	State University of Campinas	Brazil	16,1	0,0	9,8	–
151-200	Federal University of Minas Gerais	Brazil	10,7	0,0	8,5	–
151-200	Federal University of Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	14,4	0,0	0,0	–

first appeared. The first international classification was created by the Chinese government [via the University of Shanghai] to highlight the performance of scientific research in their own universities in comparison with those in the West.”

The QS rankings are also not free from bias. A quick glance at the lists is sufficient to reveal the predominance of universities from English-speaking countries (not only the United States and the United Kingdom but also Canada and Australia). For instance, the philosophy rankings feature very few institutions from France and Germany, the countries that historically (and currently) have contributed most to this field of knowledge, and the universities from these nations that do appear are not particularly highly ranked. “How can the University of Frankfurt, which has Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, be low on the list?” asks Ricardo Ribeiro Terra, a professor from the Department of Philosophy at FFLCH-USP and the coordinator of the human and social sciences department of FAPESP (which includes philosophy).

Terra also observes that although certain Brazilian universities are highly ranked with respect to various disciplines, such as sociology, the QS rankings consider very few of the articles in international publications that are produced by Brazilian researchers in these highly

We started out being international, and we came from a strong humanist tradition, says Florenzano from FFLCH.

ranked subject areas. “This raises doubts as to the journals chosen and makes one suppose that they are limited to analytical philosophy of the type that predominates in the United States,” he says.

FUNDING

Unsurprisingly, the international parameter of the English language is impossible to ignore. “There is a noticeable interest from foreign students wishing to study in Brazil, largely because of the possibility of obtaining funding for research at a very early stage in their academic careers. Even the scholarship seems attractive, but most of them don’t come because Portuguese is seen as a barrier,” says Meneghini.

Because of this situation, the weight placed on internationalization in the QS assessments is considered to be appropriate, and there is general agreement among various Brazilian academics that there continues to be a dearth of foreign students in Brazilian universities. “The main universities have always been meeting points for the best minds in the world,” says Sowter. “A large part of the drive for internationalization is conducted not only by institutions individually but also by government policies. Recently, universities have become centers for economic policy because governments have

