THE ETHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITIES[1]

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Executive Summary

Considerable attention has been paid to the characteristics of world class universities (Altbach 2004; Salmi 2009; Heyneman and Lee 2012). Separately attention has been drawn to the problem of corruption in higher education, including its definition, the degree to which corruption occurs, and its economic impact (Heyneman 2004,2010,2011; Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva 2008). This paper combines these two lines of scholarship and explores the degree to which world class universities exhibit ethical qualities. The study defines ethics' in the management of a university. This includes mission statements which mention ethical issues, transparency in governance and fiscal affairs, codes of conduct for faculty, administrators and students, procedures for adjudication of infractions, and other elements. It then proposes a rating for the ethical infrastructure elements. Universities have been divided into two groups. First are universities listed on the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) international ranking. The second are random samples of universities in countries which use English, Korean, Japanese, Georgian, Chinese, German, French, and Russian languages as the medium of instruction.

The paper poses three questions. First, how common is it for internationally-ranked universities to exhibit ethical characteristics on their websites? The answer is unambiguous: 98% of the world class universities have established an ethical infrastructure of some kind. Second, which areas of the world are more likely to have universities which exhibit a depth of ethical infrastructure elements on their websites? In terms of countries, the most comprehensive ethics infrastructure can be found in Britain, Canada,the U.S.,and Japan. Lastly, what is the relationship between the level of international ranking and the depth of ethical ingredients? The strength of the relationship is weak, suggesting that the depth of ethical infrastructure is not an important determinant of ranking. However, the fact that virtually all ranked THES universities, across 40 counties, mentioned ethical infrastructure elements, suggests that having an ethical infrastructure is an important ingredient associated with other elements in a university's reputation.

Universities with ambitions of being world class are unlikely to gain that status without establishing an ethical infrastructure.Areas of the world where it is uncommon for universities to have an ethical infrastructure are also areas with high levels of government corruption. In these circumstances, universities will likely be suspected of being corrupt themselves.

Introduction

World class universities can be defined in many ways, but there is general agreement that they exhibit: (i) a concentration of talent from around the world in terms of students, faculty and research interests; (ii) abundant resources from multiple private and public sources, research awards, contracts, endowment and tuition, and (iii) enabling internal governance with supporting regulations, autonomy, academic freedom, and professional management (Salmi 2009; Altbach 2004). To this list a new set of characteristics concerning an enabling macro-policy environment have been added. These included: state incentives to improve

quality and diversity, independence of Licensing and accreditation agencies, open competition for scientific research in which universities participate, exception from taxation, clear title to university property, autonomy from governmental managerial regulation, institutional differentiation in mission, and permission to garner a wide variety of income sources (Heyneman and Lee 2012).

On the other hand, it has been noticed that many universities are plagued by problems of corruption. This has included bribery to governmental agencies for accreditation and permission to offer particular curricula,student bribery for entrygrades.dissertation approval, Library books and housing, and professional misconduct in research and teaching (Heyneman 2004,2010,2011; Heyneman, Anderson, and Nuraliyeva 2008). This has led to questions as to whether university resistance to corruption might be an additional ingredient for attaining the status of being world class.

Many universities, including my own, require administrators, faculty and students to sign a code of conduct and, in the case of administrators and faculty, to sign a conflict of interest statement annually. Incoming students are not only asked to sign a code of conduct, but their names are posted on the wall of the student union displaying their signatures. Students, faculty and administrators are reminded periodically of the need for integrity and what to do when there are infractions. There is a student-run system of honors councils to hear cases of infractions and recommend sanctions. There is a similar faculty-run system to hear cases of faculty infractions. Annual reports from the honors council are publicly available. These reports will list the infractions by category, the decisions and sanctions in each case. Names of the accused are kept confidential. Mission statements may include the definition and recognition of'harmful activity'to the university. This may include fraud, waste or abuse of resources, misuse of grant money, research fraud, violations of athletic or medical regulations, theft or embezzlement, conflicts of interest, procurement fraud, threats to personal safety, discrimination or harassment, academic misconduct, standards of conduct, and violations of data privacy. We were curious if this sort of attention to ethics was common to universities in other countries.

We began by creating a list of possible ethical elements (16 elements). These included whether or not a university had:

- A mission statement
- Honor code for students
- Codes of conduct for students, faculty and administrators
- Adjudication procedures in case of infractions
- Reported ethical infractions
- Results of ethical infractions
- Faculty handbook
- A statement of non-bias in hiring
- A statement of the criteria used in faculty promotion
- A statement on fairness in admissions
- Transparency in budgets and accounting
- Ethics in research
- Diversity and equity
- Academic integrity

We also noted whether a university was affiliated with a religious institution, public or private, for profit, vocational-oriented or not, its language of instruction, location, and whether in addition to offer a first degree, whether it offered post graduate degrees.

Since we had no access to internal university documents we decided to base our assessment solely on the basis of a university's public information displayed on its website. Of course a university may have an ethical infrastructure not mentioned on its website, and the fact that universities do mention ethical elements on its website is no guarantee that the university is free of corruption.

We began by gathering and training research assistants capable of working in languages in addition to English. We divided the research assistants into country (not language) teams. These included teams to work on Japan, Korea, the Peoples Republic of China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Georgia, Germany, Britain, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Gabon, and France. The first task of each country team was to locate a complete list of the nation's higher education institutions[2]. Once a country's master list was approved, a random ten percent sample was chosen and the websites of that ten percent sample were analyzed. Separately, we used the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) of 400 highly-ranked universities as our source for World Class Universities[3]. From the THES list we took a ten percent random sample and analyzed their websites.

Results

Universities differ dramatically in their propensity to mention ethical issues or to describe elements of their ethical infrastructure on their websites. In Kazakhstan, Gabon, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia ethical infrastructures were absent altogether from university websites. In Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea they were universal, nearly universal in the U.S. (95%), France (91%), and Australia (91%), and very high in China (89%), Georgia (84%), Belarus (80%), Germany (79%), and Russia (77%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Universities with ethical infrastructures

Country	%	Average number of infrastructure elements		Country	%	Average number of infrastructure elements
THES universities*	98	9.2		China	90**	4.8
Britain	100	9.5		U.S.	95	7.6
Canada	100	8.3		Georgia	84	5.2
Hong Kong	100	6.0		Belarus	80	1.4
Japan	100	7.7		Germany	79	0.9
Korea	100	6.9		Russia	77	2.8
New Zealand	100	3.0		Armenia***	0	0
Singapore	100	4.5		Gabon	0	0
Taiwan	100	6.7		Kyrgyzstan	0	0
Australia	91	7.4		Kazakhstan	0	0
France	91	2.4				

2   Two year institutions and those with no undergraduate degree programs were eliminated. All accredited institutions were included, public, private and for-profit.

3   We obtained the THES world-class universities from the following website: http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2011-2012/top-400.html

Notes:

Times Higher Education Supplement

** Chinese websites usually cited the general law on corruption across all sectors

***Many of the better universities in Armenia have documents describing the regulations pertaining to student conduct and ethics. These might include the American University in Armenia and Yerevan State Universities which have student handbooks and codes of ethics. But none of them happened to fall into the sample.

Knowing the portion of university websites mentioning one ethical infrastructure element may not be as revealing as the number of elements mentioned. These ranged from 9.5 in Britain, 8.3 in Canada, 2.8 in Russia and zero in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Gabon. Germany has a surprisingly low number of elements mentioned, perhaps on grounds that the internal websites would be more explicit than those open to the public (Figure 1).

Both Russia and Belarus had a high percentage of their universities which mentioned an ethical issue on their websites (77% and 80%), but neither included much more detail. The average number of infrastructure elements was 1.4 in Belarus and 2.8 in Russia. This suggests that the emphasis on ethics may have been more for pro forma reasons than a genuine concern.
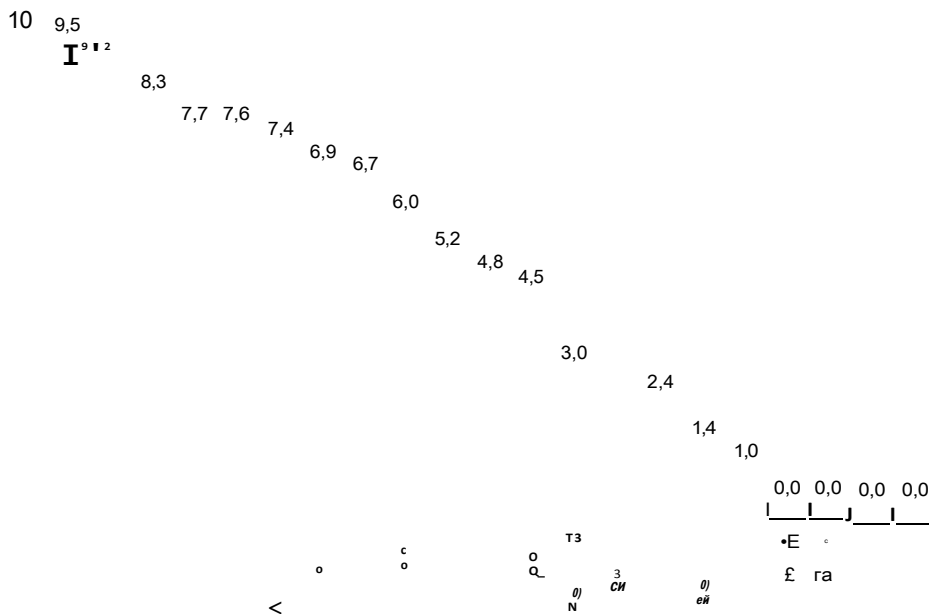
**Figure 1.** Average number of ethical infrastructure elements by country

In terms of Languages, the highest number of infrastructure eLements can be found in universities using Japanese, English and Korean (Figure 2).
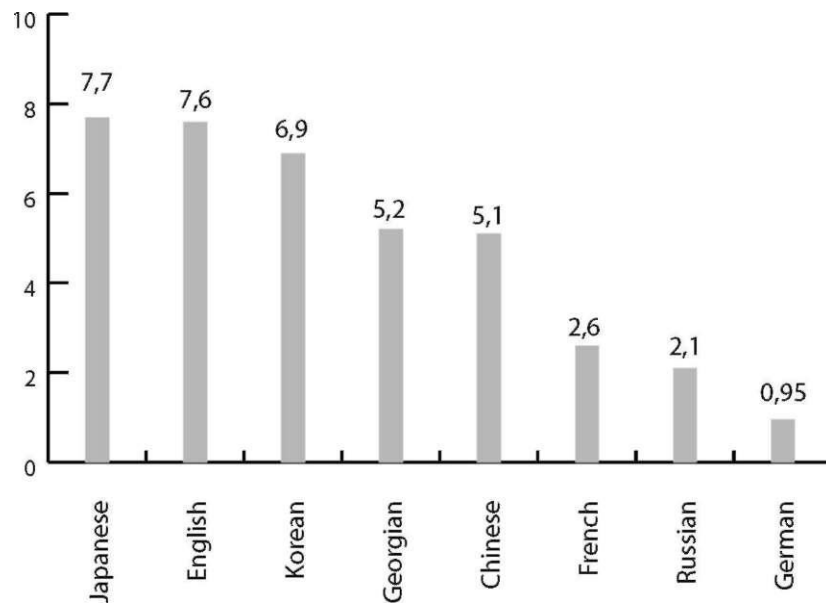
Figure 2. Average number of ethicaL infrastructure eLements by Language

Ranked universities appearing on the THES were situated in 40 countries. VirtuaLLy aLL of them (97.5%) mentioned ethicaL eLements on their websites. The typical THES university mentioned 9.2 different eLements, higher than any nation's universities save Britain. The correlation between the number of eLements mentioned and the level of THES ranking (r=0.14) was neither strong nor statistically significant. This suggests that the number of ethical infrastructure elements is not a factor in the Level of ranking. However, the more important question may be whether candor about an ethics infrastructure is associated with attaining any THES ranking. The fact that virtually all ranked THES universities, across all 40 counties, mentioned ethical infrastructure suggests that it is an important ingredient associated with other elements in a university's reputation.

Among THES universities, the most common elements to mention were regulations pertaining to academic integrity and the goals of diversity and equity in enrollment and employment (82.5%) budgetary transparency and non-bias in hiring (77.5%), and codes for student conduct and research ethics (75%). Less common were results of ethicaL infractions (12.5%) and portion of ethicaL infractions found to be justified (10%) (Figure 3).

40

100

82,5   82,5

77,5   77,5

80   75   75

72,5

65   65

57,5

60   52,5

47,5

40

40

30

20

12,5
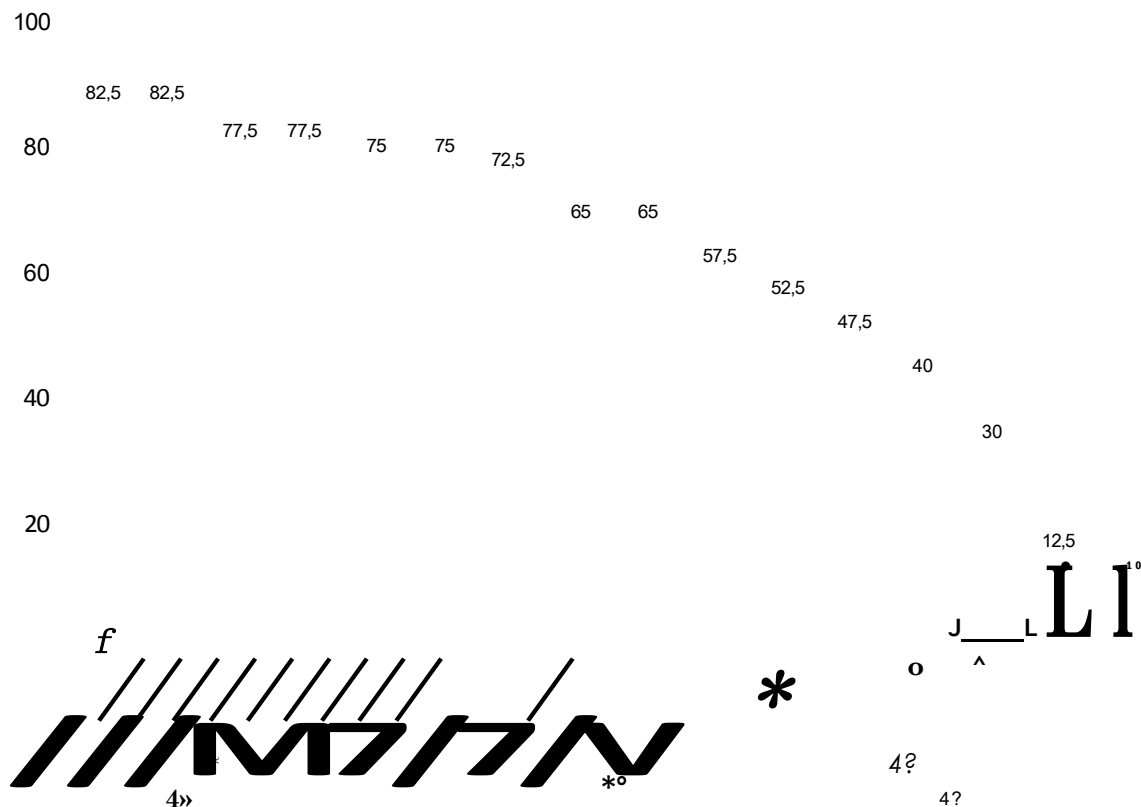
Figure 3. Presence of ethical infrastructure elements (THES) (%)

Focus on the United States

Of the 224 universities which fell into the 10% sample from the United States, 50 offered specialized degrees in technology, health, law or religious studies (Table 2).

Table 2. American higher education institutions with specialized vocational functions

Type of institutions	Number of institutions			Average number of infrastructure elements		
	All	Non-for-profit	For-profit	All	Non-for-profit	For-profit
Seminary including bible colleges	17	17		2.9	2.9	
Art-related	11	6	5	4.5	4.2	4.8
Medical, health-related	12	7	5	4.4	5.7	2.6
Technology	5	2	3	2.4	5.5	0.3
Law school including law-related	5	4	1	4.4	4.5	4.0
Total	50	36	14	3.7	4.0	3.0

About one in three of these were for-profit institutions. These specialized institutions tended to have a lower number of ethical infrastructural elements (3.7). For-profit colleges stand out among this group and against the general tendency of non-profit higher education institutions. Although vocationally-oriented for-profits had a higher number of ethical infrastructure elements in the arts, in medical field, law, and especially in technology, they did not. In technology-oriented institutions the average number of ethical infrastructure elements was 5.5 among non-profits and only 0.3 in for-profit institutions. This suggests that for-profit institutions which specialize in technology are particularly divergent from their non-profit rivals in their concern over ethics. In general, for-profit institutions tended to have a very low number of ethical infrastructure elements (3.0) (Table 3).

Table 3. American higher education: Average number of ethical infrastructural elements for profit and non-profit institutions

Type of institutions		Number of institutions	Average number of infrastructures
Non-for-profit	All	186	8.4
	(Excluding vocational institutions)	(150*)	(9.6*)
For-profit		38	3.7
Total		224	7.6

If one excludes for-profit and vocational institutions, the average number of ethical infrastructure elements typical on the websites of American universities (9.6) is higher than any other country in the sample and higher than the average institutions in the THES ranking. This suggests that for-profit institutions are simply not as interested in combating education corruption as non-for-profit institutions.

Summary

To combat education corruption a university will need to do more than mention ethical behavior on its website. But university concern for ethics is unlikely to be effective without mentioning the ethics problem on its website. Virtually all highly ranked universities are concerned with ethics, they mention more ethical elements on their websites than other universities, and they are more likely to be transparent as to the annual number and type of ethical infractions.

On the other hand, there are universities situated in sample countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Gabon where the typical university mentioned nothing about professional ethics on their websites. What does that suggest about them? Circumstantial evidence would suggest that the universities which are silent on the issue of professional ethics are also universities which are widely perceived to be corrupt. They tend to be situated in countries where education corruption is known to be high (Silova, Johnson and Heyneman 2007; Heyneman 2007a, 2007b) and where the business climate is characterized by a high degree of corruption. Kazakhstan for instance is ranked 120 and Kyrgyzstan 164 out of 182 countries in the corruption index of Transparency International (Transparency International 2012). These data from our small study would suggest that universities which do not mention professional ethics on their websites are at the highest risk of being corrupt themselves.

Universities with ambitions of being world class are unlikely to gain that status without establishing an ethical infrastructure. Areas of the world where it is uncommon for universities to have an ethical infrastructure are also areas with high levels of government corruption. In these circumstances, universities will likely be suspected of being corrupt themselves.

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