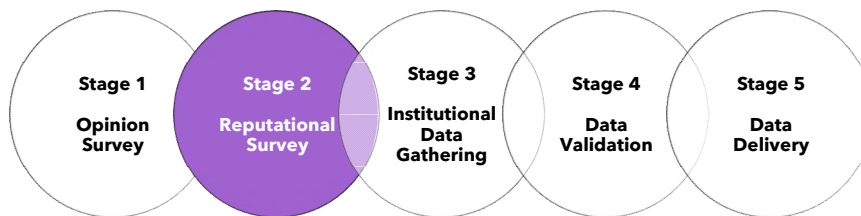## GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES PROJECT

Academic Reputation Survey

Stage 2 Methodology

This document concerns the reputational survey instrument and not the data validations (normalization, weighting, etc) that will inform any specific Project benchmarking outcomes such as the US News Best Global Universities Ranking (stages 4 and 5).

Overview

When setting out to create the new survey instrument, we reviewed methods of capturing and reporting academic reputation, drawing from community feedback and internal analyses. This document outlines five major criticisms from previous surveys that we sought to address in our methodology. After our 2010 survey closed, we posted the instrument to the project website and offered a further review of the problems we identified, our proposed methodological solutions, and how things played out in real-world logistics. In the interim, this outline will help survey respondents briefly review our approach, while providing the community substantive background for future discussion.

Five major criticisms stood out when reviewing both community feedback and internal analyses. We noted that existing surveys:

- Overrepresented "the West" – North America and Western Europe in particular
- Were biased toward English speakers
- Asked unrealistic questions that perpetuated high scores – across all disciplines – for the traditionally "elite" institutions year after year
- Did not allow respondents to choose lesser-known institutions, only the traditionally elite
- Did not take teaching into account

Appropriate representation of all regions

To help better balance regional representation, we sought an independent source to help outline the "expected" global distribution of researchers around the world. For 2025, we relied on *UNESCO figures provided in the UNESCO Science Report: the race against time for smarter development; executive summary*.
Our goal was to help control any regional bias inherent to either our source lists (internal and external) or final submission tallies by bringing expected results to the forefront.

Geographic distribution of researchers (last measured in 2018)	
North America	18.11%
Europe	31.02%
Asia	44.52%
Oceania	0.30%
Latin America	3.55%
Africa	2.50%

We made every attempt to develop the sample plan based on these proportions, and the data analysis will likewise take them into account. Our primary sample source was a list of authors publishing in journals covered by the *Web of Science*, which is comprised of the *Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI)* and *Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)*.

Accessibility in multiple languages

By aligning our geographic distribution more closely with true researcher populations, the same strategy helped counteract English language bias to some degree. We also recognize that while many reports show that worldwide researchers often speak English, it may not be their primary language. To help control language and translation bias, we are providing the survey in eight languages:

- French
- German
- Japanese
- Portuguese (European and Brazilian)
- Simplified Chinese
- Spanish
- English
- Arabic

Relevant, discipline-specific questions

One of the most unique aspects of our survey is its disciplinary focus. This design feature allows respondents to choose "the best" institutions in their field, rather than prompting them to evaluate broad categories. For instance, an agricultural scholar can nominate schools based on their strength in Agriculture rather than "Life Sciences" more generally. We believe this approach anchors questions (and responses) in reality, allowing respondents to draw on individual experience, knowledge, and contacts to provide more accurate assessments.

In turn, the reputational data we provide to US News and World Report allow for more comprehensive league tables in their Best Global Universities Rankings. For example, when selecting the "best" institutions in their individual fields, respondents can now identify exceptional departments (Psychology) rather than default their selections to traditionally elite institutions of already broad reputational strength— that is, without disciplinary focus, the respondent's answer hinges on the strength of Life Sciences or Arts & Humanities more generally, where Harvard and Oxford Universities would take center stage and dominate the resulting league tables.

With this granular methodology, we look to improve the accuracy of institutional assessments and, ultimately, better equip universities, scholars, and students worldwide with more meaningful data.

Wider choice of institutions

The Academic Reputation Survey allows respondents to choose from over 7,000 academic institutions around the world—offering thousands more selections than have been available in other global reputational surveys. We believe that this wider selection base, combined with the survey's disciplinary focus, will only further enhance the opportunity for more granular data across institutions. Respondents can draw on their intimate knowledge of networks and shifting trends to identify exceptional departments in their fields of expertise. Institutions that were excluded in past ranking initiatives will now have opportunity for recognition, whether by overall quality or exceptional departments.

Measure for teaching and impact

The survey attempts to better identify teaching quality, an often elusive (and ignored) component, by incorporating questions about teaching environments within specific disciplines. We ask all respondents to identify the best teaching institutions in their field of expertise.
Additionally, starting 2025, we will ask participants to identify organizations that conduct research with the most positive impact on society, and to provide examples of research or research-related activity that is particularly impactful.