Reviewer's report

Title: International ranking systems for universities and institutions: a critical appraisal

Version: 1 Date: 17 August 2007

Reviewer: Amy Blue

Reviewer's report:

General

This manuscript provides an analysis of the strengths/weaknesses and general challenges of systems that rank the "excellence" of institutions. The authors provide a thorough discussion of two prominent systems and highlight the difficulties with ranking institutions.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The manuscript would be strengthened by the following:

An overall purpose statement (i.e., what is the value of this manuscript to the general literature - it is to improve how ranking should be conducted, is it to criticize that rankings even occur, is it to advocate for particular features in a ranking system, etc?) would help orient the reader at the beginning of the manuscript.

Explain early in the manuscript how/why the Shangahi and Times systems are a primary focus in the article - what is meant by "web visibility"?

Explain what the proposed criteria for excellence are at the outset (it is unclear to me as a reader on page 4 in the discussion of construct validity what are the proposed criteria for excellence.)

On page 5, what criteria are used for determining ratings of poor, low/modest, good and very good?

It may be helpful for a reader not very familiar with ranking systems but interested in this topic to initially describe the systems (what criteria each uses/components of excellence, how the systems gather information, what their focus is [research, education]). Such description (found on pages 7-9) could then be followed by discussion of the construct validity and measurement validity within the systems. This section could then be followed the discussion of generic issues in institutional rankings, such as begins on page 9.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of
a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**Which journal?:** Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.