

### Rankings as a Student Information Tool

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#### **Contents of Presentation**

- n Why rankings?
- Approaches to rankings
- n Indicators and critiques
- n Brief history of student information tools in the Netherlands
- Methodology of student information tools
- Pilot project cooperationNetherlands Belgium Germany
- n Conclusion



#### For Whom is Ranking?

- For students: 'where shall I go and study?'
- For HEIs: 'against whom am I competing?'; 'Who's the benchmark?'
- For policy makers: 'Where should special funding be allocated?'
- For society: 'where has my physician graduated?'
- For employers: 'am I recruiting the right person for the right job? Where did s/he graduate?'



#### **Existing Approaches to Rankings**

- Who conducts the rankings?
- n How are the rankings presented?
- n How are variables put together to create the ranking?



#### Who Conducts the Ranking?

- Magazines, e.g.:
  - u USNWR (US), Times (UK), Guardian (UK), Repubblica (I)...
- n Educational publishers, e.g.:
  - Barron's (US), Good Guides (AUS)
- n University-based Groups e.g.:
  - Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China)



#### What Format of Rankings?

- Straight Numerical Rankings
- Clusters or groupings, in which institutions are assembled into clusters of similar quality
- n 'Top Level' approach,
  - Only the top institutions are ranked numerically, while the 'worse' performers are grouped



#### **How Indicators Are Presented**

- " 'Weight-and-sum' approach
  - Indicators are combined to produce an overall institutional score.
  - Each indicator is assigned a weight according to its perceived importance
- Neutral comparisons (not weighted)
  - All indicators must be shown for all institutions
  - Use of interactive technology

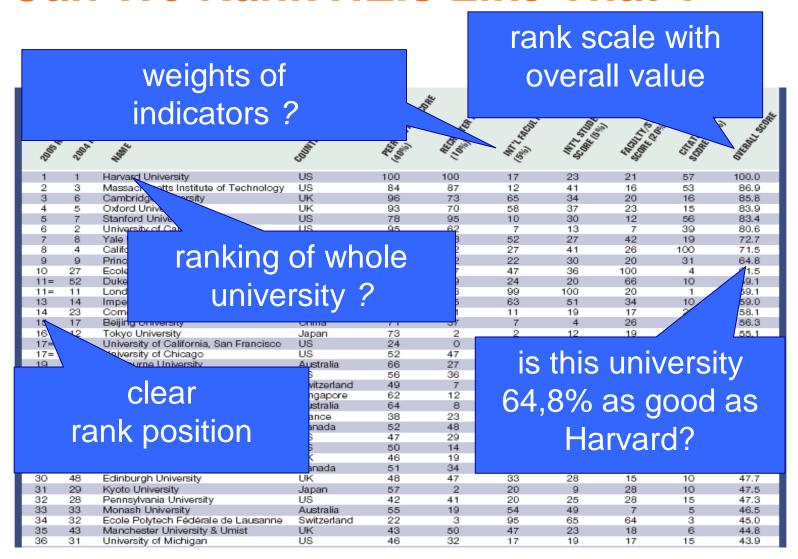


### How to Rank – and How Not An Example of a Widely Accepted Ranking

Tabel	clear,	Sp.	g.	u.	v.	Tore	Diff.	Pkte.
1	unequivocal	10	8	2	0	26:9	17	26
2	positions	10	7	2	1	21:11	10	23
3	positions	10	6	2	2	21:9	12	20
4	► Sporting Charleroi	10	5	4	1	15:11	1	19
5	<ul> <li>Standard Lüttich</li> </ul>	10	5	2	3	16:11		17
6	▶ KVC Westerlo	10	5	2	3	16:13		17
7	<ul> <li>Germinal Beerschot</li> </ul>	10						5
8	► KAA Gent	10	C	ea	ar 1	rules	tor	5
9	<ul> <li>Excelsior Mouscron</li> </ul>	10					-	4
10	<ul> <li>KSV Roeselare</li> </ul>	10	C		cul	latio	n ot	2
11	▶ FC Molenbeek Brussels	10	0	VIC	\r <sub>2</sub>	III sc	oro	2
12	▶ RAEC Mons	10	U	VC	51 Q	III SC	OIE	2
13	▶ Cercle Brügge	10	- 5		0	7.10	-5	, δ
14	➤ KSK Beveren	10	3	1	6	7:15	-8	10
15	▶ KSC Lokeren	10	2	4	4	8:13	-5	10
16	▶ SV Zulte-Waregem	10	2	3	5	10:16	-6	9
17	▶ Sint-Truidense VV	10	2	1	7	11:17	-6	7
18	▶ Lierse SK	10	0	1	9	4:20	-16	1



#### Can We Rank HEIs Like That?





### University of Twente The Netherlands Most Used Indicators and **Critiques to Rankings (1)**

- Reputation and Prestige: peer evaluations through, e.g., surveys of other (similar) institutions' presidents and deans.
  - Subjective measure
  - Problem of circularity
    - " 'New' universities are almost always ranked below the 'old'
  - Proximity (foreign universities are less known)
    - Except the 'usual top-10'
  - Reputation and prestige privilege research-oriented



# Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (2)

- Student Characteristics, e.g. acceptance rates, high school class standing, entrance test scores, student diversity
  - Reputational conception of quality, often adopted in HEIs' admission policies
  - Resource notion of quality
    - Problem: input measures fail to measure what the university provides to students



## Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (3)

- Staff characteristics, e.g. salary
  - This variable mostly measures the institutional value placed on research, for it is the best researchers (not teachers) who typically earn the highest salaries.
- Proportion of full-time staff
- Proportion of staff with Ph.D.



### University of Twente The Netherlands Most Used Indicators and **Critiques to Rankings (4)**

- Student faculty relationship, e.g.
  - Student Staff Ratio and class size
    - However, optimal class size is a function of discipline
- Student satisfaction
- n Assets, e.g. funding
  - Without information on how funds are spent these measures are difficult to interpret as measures of institutional quality



# Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (5)

- n Expenditures
  - How much is an institution committed to teaching/learning and/or research?
  - u Suitable for inter-institutional comparisons, but what is actually included in the investments?
  - Lack of standardised formats for reporting expenditures
  - u Can a HEI that spends more to achieve a similar result than another HEI be ranked higher for this very fact?



#### University of Twente The Netherlands Most Used Indicators and **Critiques to Rankings (6)**

- Student Grades/Test Scores
- Retention Rates and Graduation Rates
  - Problem of grade inflation: rankings that rely heavily or entirely on this indicator favour institutions with lower academic standards over more demanding HEIs
- n Graduate employment
  - No control on influencing factors e.g. social background and connections



# Most Used Indicators and Critiques to Rankings (7)

- n Research
  - Bibliometrics (e.g. number of publications and citations),
  - Number of faculty with special awards (e.g. the Nobel Prize),
  - Financial indicators of research (e.g. the research budget, number of research grants etc.) and
  - The number of patents issued. Moreover, some other rankings utilise also the number of Master and Ph.D.
- Other, such as alumni giving, etc.



#### The Dilemmas of Ranking (1)

- universities have different goals and missions
- Universities are internally differentiated: cannot be measured as a whole
- n Bias towards research (low/no focus on teaching quality)
- Popularity contests (appreciation vs. facts)
- Bias towards natural & medical sciences
- n Bias towards English language / Anglo-Saxon world
- n Tables vary in their validity, comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, relevance, and functionality
- n Rankings share broad principles and approaches, but differ considerably in detail
- variations related to: different aims, systems, cultures and availability and reliability of data



## A Multidimensional 'Ranking': The CHE Approach

city, university	students	study outcome			
internatio- nalisation	teaching	resources			
research	labour market, employability	overall assessment (students, professors)			



### History of Student Information in the Netherlands

- n 1980s: Minister supports data collection + book publication 'Choice Guide'
- Ca. 2000: web-based student information tools appear in Britain, Germany
- n 2006: Netherlands web site appears: <a href="https://www.studychoice123.nl">www.studychoice123.nl</a> (English)
- n 2006-2007: pilot in internationalisation:
  - u connect SK123 with German CHE- 'ranking' and
  - u introduce CHE method in Belgium



#### **Aims and Target Groups**

Information for prospective / mobile students

= primary target group

Information for HEIs (benchmarking)

Challenge: find a balance between reduction of complexity for least informed students vs. detailed information for HEIs



#### **Methodological Principles**

Organised by No ranking of whole universities disciplines / fields No aggregated Multidimensional overall score Not just one Multi-perspective data source Robust rank groups: No spurious Top Middle precision of league tables and Bottom group



#### **Major Data Sources**

- National statistics
  - From state statistics agency
  - From Ministry of Education
- n Alumni survey

Already collected

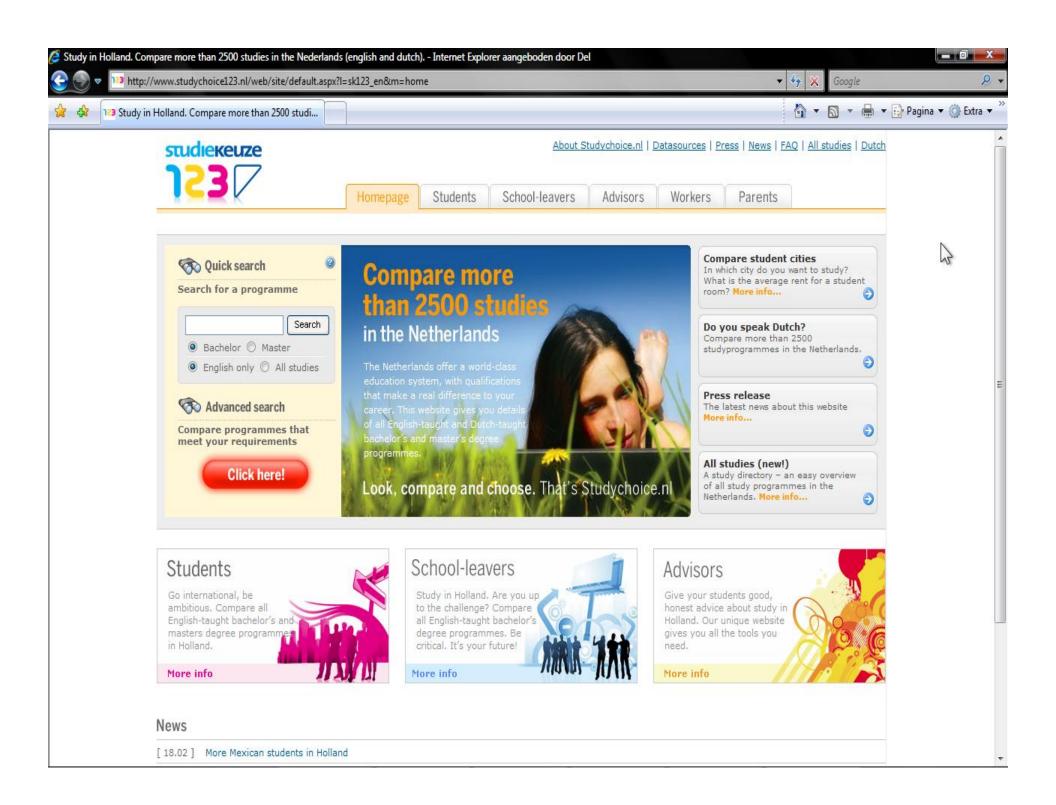
- Institutional data
  - Paper à Web form
- Student survey
  - Telephone à web-based

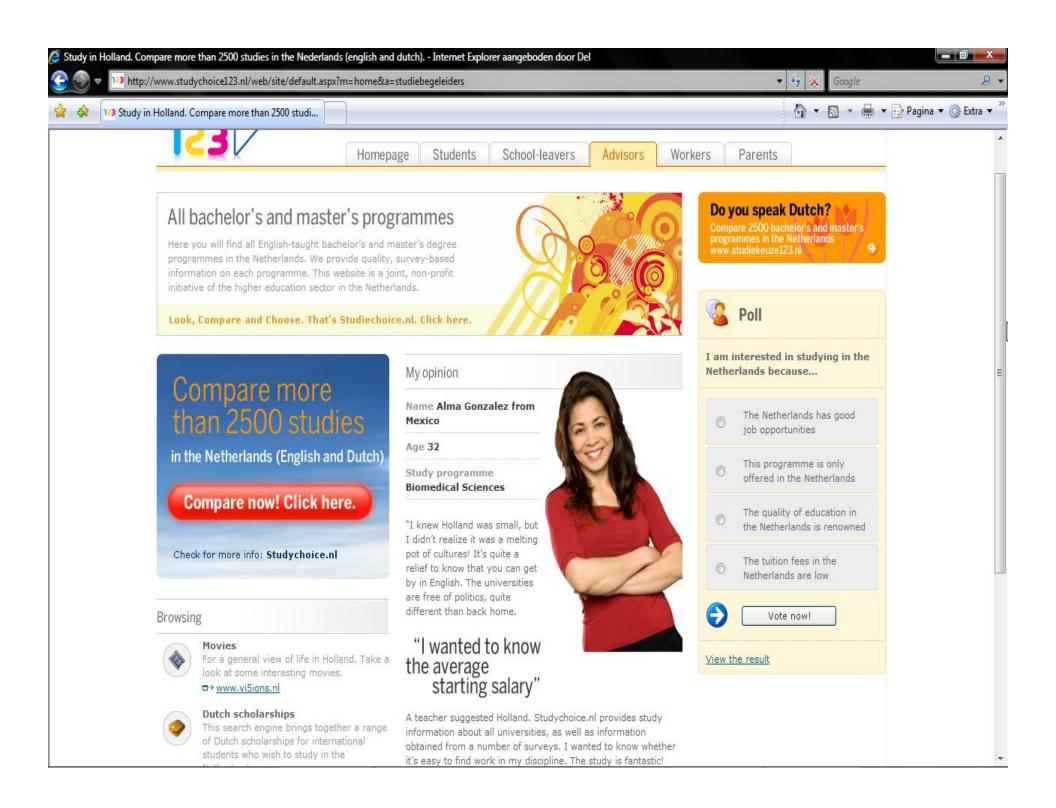
Collected on purpose

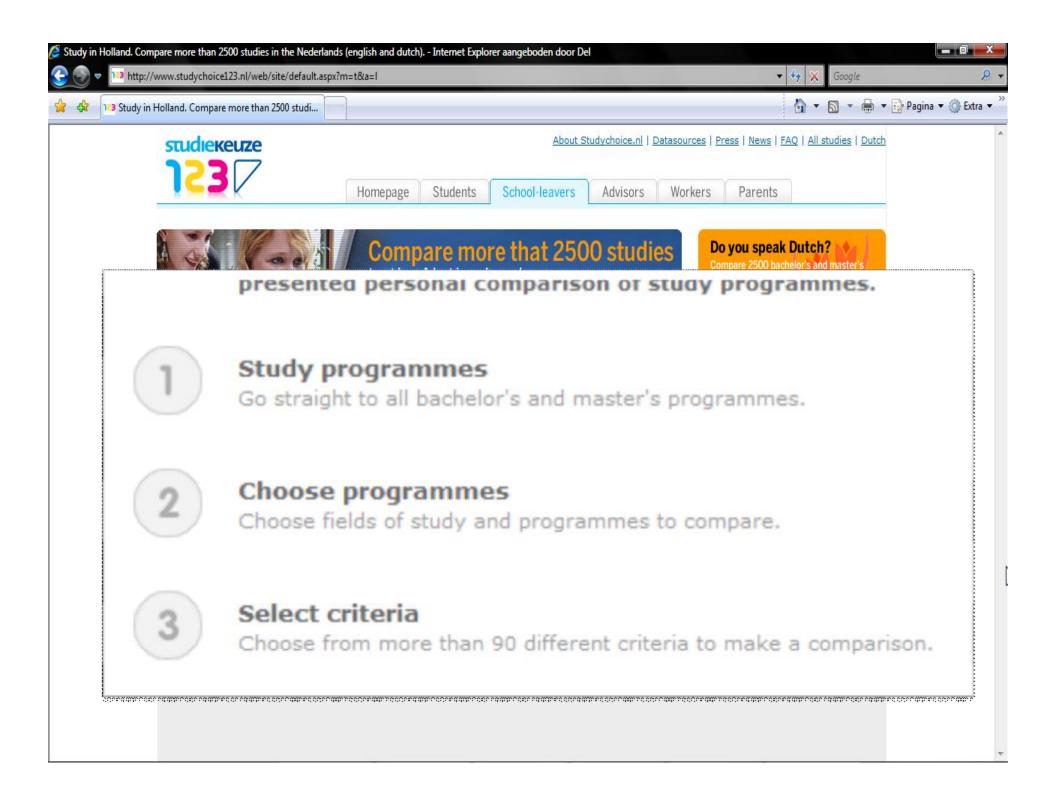


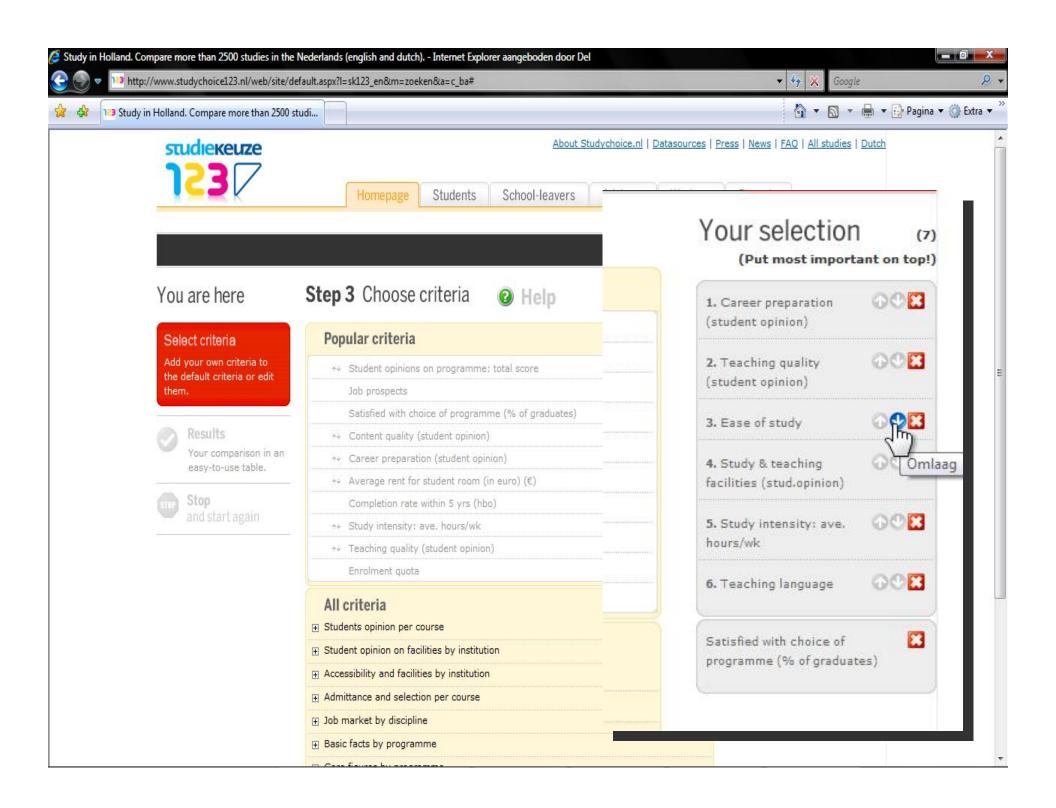
#### **Data Sources Not Used**

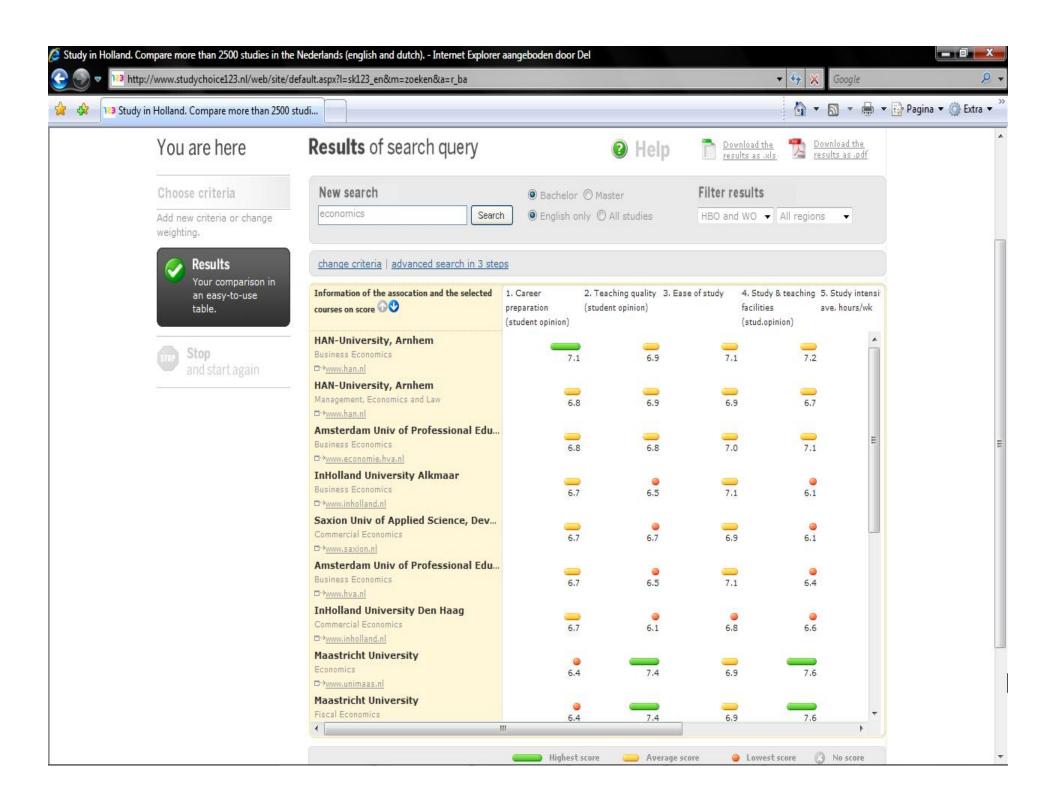
- Reputation among professors
  - E.g. 'Where would you send your child?'
  - Note: only works well if
    - Professors know their colleagues
      - Not internationally, except for 'stars'
    - Reputations relate to teaching performance
      - In fact mostly research-based
- n Accreditation status
  - It is a precondition for getting mentioned, therefore not a variable anymore

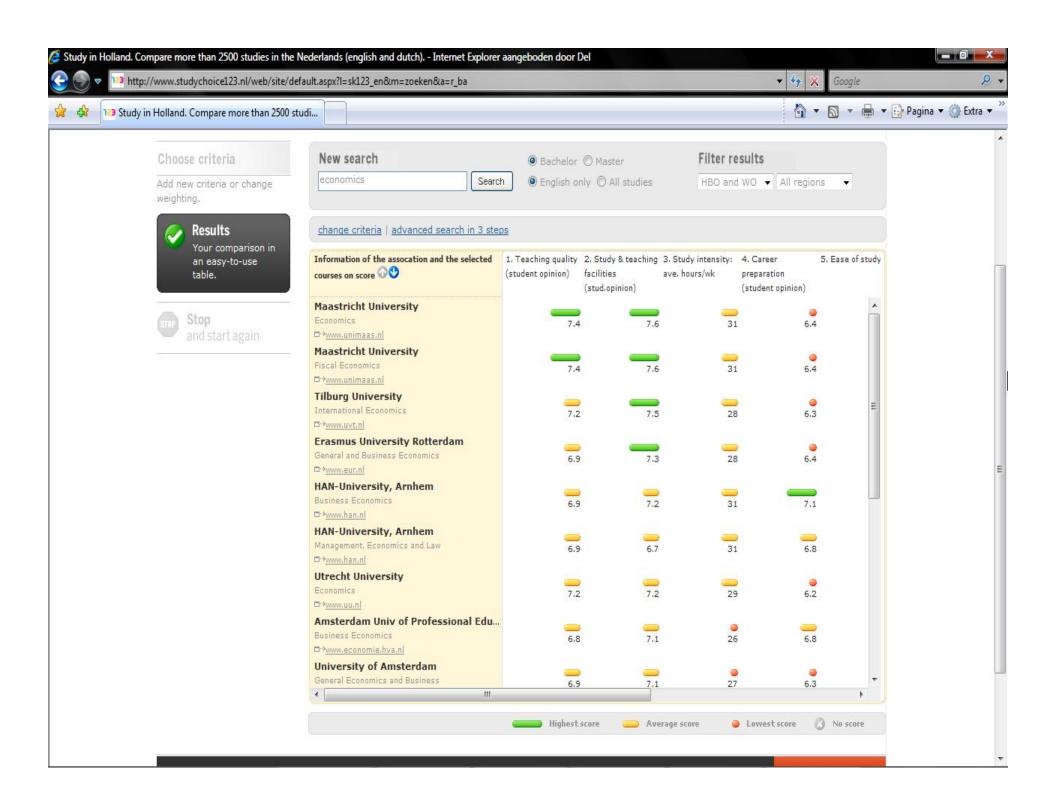














#### Pilot Project: NL – BE - DE

- CHE approach is the better-known version of SK123
- n European Commission wants to stimulate European mobility of students
- Project aims:
  - Link existing Student Info Tools (NL)
  - Introduce CHE approach in a 'new' country (BE)



### **Experiences Pilot Project: Linking Student Info Tools**

- Data collection differs in 2 countries
  - Different administrative systems
    - E.g. how to count 'professors', 'students'?
  - Different political issues à different ideas of what are relevant data/dimensions
    - E.g. gender balance
  - Different survey approaches
    - Ask for general opinions vs. ask for detailed data
      - E.g. ... (see next slides)



#### **CHE Questions on Courses**

#### Question No. 5

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the coursework (instruction) of your Masters								
programme?								
Coursework (Instruc-	Strongly	Disagree	Mildly	Mildly	Agree	Strongly	N/A	
tion)	disagree	Disagree	disagree	agree	Agree	agree	IN/A	
The quality of theory								
training is excellent.								
The quality of methodol-								
ogy training is excellent.								
I am satisfied with the								
level of interdisciplinarity.								
I am satisfied with the va-								
riety of course content.								
The quality of instruction								
is excellent.								
The courses are relevant								
to my research interests.								
I have sufficient opportu-								
nity to participate in re-								
search.								
Interaction with PhD stu-								
dents is vivid.								
If coursework is offered								
in another language than								
the national language of								
the country in which you								
study:								
The language skills of								
teachers are sufficient.								



#### **SK123 Questions on Courses**

```
The extent to which the course work material is interesting......(rate)
The Level of the Study Material...............(rate)
```



### **Experiences Pilot Project: Student Responses**

- n Low response rates
- validity: is there a bias in responses?
- Comparability of judgements
  - Students have different expectation levels
    - German students are satisfied with situations that Dutch students find unsatisfactory
    - Same also applies within a single country
      - Students in Amsterdam are more critical than students in Enschede
  - This leads to bias of ranking
    - Dutch study programmes are valued lower than German programmes
    - In Netherlands: Enschede is the 'best' town for students??



#### Conclusion

- Student information tools are in high demand
  - Students use web sites next to school advice and 'informal' information
- Collecting data is hard work
  - Validity is far from perfect
- International student information tools presuppose demand for international mobility
  - In Europe: small part of students, mostly at Master or Ph.D.-course levels