Oct 4th, 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM

The Campus Human Rights Index: Measuring University Commitment to Human Rights

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Session: Impact and Measurement Tools

Abstract:

To what extent do universities respect human rights? Despite the prevailing view that universities are bastions of progressive ideas with a bias for rights protection, anecdotal evidence suggests that they diverge significantly in their commitment to promote and protect human rights, even within the U.S. To this point, though, there exists no systematic measure of university human rights commitments. In this manuscript, we introduce the first such indicator - the Campus Human Rights Index (CHRI). We describe the measure and introduce our initial ranking of universities. We then formally assess the construct validity of our measure by comparing it to other plausibly related university characteristics. We conclude by describing our future data collection efforts. This paper constitutes our first step in a larger research project that seeks to understand the determinants and consequences of university human rights practices.

Presenter information:

Volha Chykina is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Donia Human Rights Center. Her research focuses on how the educational outcomes of immigrant and minority youth are shaped by the communities wherein they live and learn.

Charles Crabtree is a University of Michigan political science doctoral candidate. He defended his dissertation on April, 16, 2019. In academic year 2019 – 2020, he will serve as Senior Data Scientist at Tokyo Foundation; in academic year 2020-2021, he will start as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Dartmouth College. His substantive research focuses on various aspects of repression, human rights, and discrimination.

Kiyoteru Tsutsui is a professor of sociology at the University of Michigan. He also directs the International Institute’s Donia Human Rights Center, as well as the Center for Japanese Studies. As a neo-institutional sociologist, he has conducted cross-national quantitative analyses on how human rights ideas and instruments have expanded globally and impacted local politics. He has
also conducted qualitative case studies on how minority groups have leveraged global human rights to advance their activism.

Michelle Bellino is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. She also co-directs the International Institute’s Conflict and Peace Initiative. Her research centers on how the young understand historical injustice, whether experienced directly or shaped through school curriculum, family narratives, or social movements. She is also involved with Human Rights Educators-USA, a nation-wide network of scholars and practitioners dedicated to promoting human dignity, justice, and peace by cultivating support for human rights education in American universities.
The Campus Human Rights Index: Measuring University Commitment to Human Rights

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For decades, university campuses have been the front line of struggles for human rights and social justice, spearheading many social change efforts such as the Civil Rights Movement (McAdam 2010; Morris 1981), anti-Apartheid movement (Soule 1997), anti-sweatshop campaigns (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005; Gay Seidman 2007), and democracy movements in China (Calhoun, 1997; Zhao 1998), South Korea (Altbach, 1970; Kim & Kim, 1964), and across Latin America (DeFronzo, 2018; Sandoval & Rosario Ramírez, 2011). These legacies fuel the perception that universities are bastions of progressive ideas with a bias for rights protection (Munson, 2010), making them one of the primary targets of authoritarian leaders intent on suppressing dissent. In reality, however, universities diverge significantly in their commitment to promote and protect human rights, even within the U.S. Some universities boast of large human rights centers and offer a number of courses focused on human rights, while others have few human rights events and courses to speak of (HRE USA & UCCHRE, 2017). In addressing sexual assaults and hate crimes, many universities established reporting protocols, but the effectiveness of these systems varies considerably. In response to the recent so-called Muslim ban issued by the Trump administration, some universities released official statements condemning the ban, while others remained silent. We know surprisingly little about these variations in campus human rights commitments, despite a wealth of data and all kinds of rankings on universities across subject matters ranging from academic reputation and post-graduation employment to culinary environment and party culture.

To be sure, human rights organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and independent political action groups, such as the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), have attempted to record and categorize human rights violations on campus. The resulting data, however, are either constrained to a small number of schools, as in
the case of the ACLU, or known to be politically biased, as in the case of FIRE (Beauchamp, 2018). No systematic, objective measure of human rights practices on college campuses yet exists.

In this paper, we introduce the first such measure - the Campus Human Rights Index (CHRI). First, we describe the measure and introduce our initial ranking of universities. Second, we formally assess the construct validity of our measure by comparing it to other plausibly related university characteristics. Third, we conclude by describing our future data collection efforts. This paper constitutes our first step in a larger research project that seeks to understand the determinants and consequences of university human rights practices.¹ As such, the focus here is on introducing the CHRI, but we will briefly discuss our plans for additional analyses using the CHRI Scores in the last section.

**Campus Human Rights Index Measure**

Measuring university human rights commitment is a challenging endeavor. This is because it is a latent trait, like intelligence or democracy, and can be only observed indirectly in different aspects of university operation (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). To minimize measurement error and bias, we take a measurement model approach to constructing our index. This means that we collect many different manifest variables that are plausibly related to campus human rights and then combine them into one score/index that captures the underlying latent trait.

For the first version of this measure, we have limited our sample to the 303 national non-profit institutions of higher education ranked in the U.S. News and World Report.² We base our

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¹ A possible additional benefit of creating a university human rights index could be that it would encourage universities to become more dedicated to championing human rights.

² We think that an important direction for future work would be to extend our measure to include every four-year college in America.
sample selection on the U.S. News and World Report rankings because the schools included on this list are among the largest and most well-known universities in America (Gnolek et al, 2014). They are considered to be standard-bearers in higher education whose practices influence those of other universities, making them particularly important to understand.

Data

Our measurement strategy is guided by the idea that universities can signal their commitment to human rights in many ways. Specifically, we delineate 3 main categories to group such commitments: (1) Human rights courses and institutions on campus; (2) Human rights policies and practices; (3) External engagement regarding human rights. We discuss each of these categories below, as well as the measures that we employ as the components of CHRI.

1). Human Rights Courses and Institutions on Campus. It is reasonable to expect that the universities that are more committed to human rights will have a more human rights-oriented curriculum and will also have institutions whose mission is to advance the study and practice of human rights. University catalogues are the most reliable sources of information about the courses that the university offers. We have collected university catalogues for the universities in our sample and have conducted automated text analysis to determine how much their course offerings are oriented towards (1) human rights and (2) diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).³ We have also manually collected information regarding whether each university in our sample has a human rights center or an equivalent. As such, in this category, we have 3 manifest variables: HR Catalog, DEI Catalog, and Human Rights Center.

2). Human Rights Policies and Practices. Universities’ commitments to human rights can

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³ We provide additional details about this process in the Appendix.
also manifest in the policies that the universities adopt and practices that they either promote or discourage. For this category, we have in mind the inward-looking policies and practices that are visible to students, faculty, and staff during their every-day interactions with the university. One manifestation of such policies and practices is whether the university makes an effort to hire faculty from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in academia, such as racial minorities and females. Further, we also include a measure for the number of reported hate crimes that have occurred on campus. To reiterate, the three measures included in this category are Minority Representation; Female Representation; and Hate Crimes.

3). External Engagement Regarding Human Rights. Universities can also choose to engage with the broader human rights community by being part of initiatives and associations whose goals are to support and promote human rights across the world. We collect four related indicators. First, we examine whether universities have pledged to have its branded merchandize produced in non-sweatshop-like conditions. The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) are two organizations that monitor the conditions under which workers labor at foreign factories and document abuses of local workers. Universities that choose to be affiliated with WRC and FLA pledge to not have merchandise that carries their name produced at the factories that engage in abusive labor practices. As such, WRC Affiliation and FLA Affiliation measure universities’ commitment to protecting human rights off campus where they have some influence. Further, universities can choose to be affiliated with the UN’s Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). SDSN mobilizes knowledge to promote practical

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4 Because some universities might encourage their community to report hate crimes more actively and might also provide an easy way to do it, this measure could be capturing either the actual amount of hate crimes that occurred or the university’s commitment to having these crimes properly reported and recorded. We discuss this matter further when we present the correlation plot for all manifest variables and factor loadings for the latent model that we use to produce the ranking.
solutions for sustainable development, which increasingly emphasize human rights issues, including environmental protections. The universities that choose to be affiliated with SDSN work together with civil society, as well as public and private sectors, to mobilize knowledge around sustainable development and help implement growth in ways aligned with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Universities can also become affiliated with the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI). HESI-affiliated universities commit to teach sustainable development topics across all disciplines, have a green campus, support local sustainable development initiatives, and encourage research on sustainable development goals. Thus, SDSN Affiliation and HESI Affiliation also capture universities’ commitment to advancing rights in the broader communities they operate in.

Descriptive statistics for our collected measures are presented in the Appendix. Before incorporating these measures in our latent variable model, we examine the extent to which they correlate. Figure 1 presents Spearman’s rank correlation coefficients (ρ) between pairs of manifest variables. Darker red cells represent stronger positive correlations, while darker purple cells indicate stronger negative relationships. As can be seen here, nearly all measures positively correlate with each other. This provides some initial evidence that the collected measures are related to the same underlying latent construct.
Figure 1. Correlation Plot of Manifest Variables.

Note: Figure 1 presents Spearman’s rank correlation coefficients ($\rho$) between pairs of manifest variables included in CHRI. Darker colors represent stronger correlations.

Model and Measure

To measure human rights practices across universities, we use the variables presented in Figure 1. One way to view them is as manifest variables that are caused by the latent level of university commitments to human rights. We combine these indicators using a measurement model. Taking a structural equation model approach to this task, we estimate a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model. Figure 2 provides a graphical illustration of our model called a path diagram.\(^5\) It indicates how the manifest variables we have collected relate to the underlying

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\(^5\) We allow the residual variances to be correlated between Human Rights Center and Hate Crimes, Minority Representation and Female Representation, and DEI Catalog Measure and HR Catalog Measure.
construct, which we have named *CHRI Scores* \(^6\). As a reminder, this construct relates to the degree that universities respect human rights. Since we include binary, ordered, and continuous variables on the right-hand side of this equation, we estimate model parameters using mean- and variance-adjusted weighted least squares (WLSMV).\(^7\)

**Figure 2: Path Diagram.**

Note: Figure 2 presents a stylized path diagram of our measurement model.

This model appears to fit the data well. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.960 and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is 0.944. These statistics suggest that our model is much better than one that assumes the variables are not correlated with each other, exceeding the standard levels used to assess whether a model is acceptable (Kline 2014). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.032, which provides additional empirical evidence that our model plausibly captures our underlying construct of interest (Brown 2014). These statistics, which all point to the same conclusion, combined with our theoretical expectations about how the observed variables relate to the latent trait and the correlation plot presented in Figure 1, provide strong evidence that

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\(^{6}\) The \(\alpha\) denotes that this is the alpha-version of our measure. The estimated value for this measure might change for many universities as we include additional variables in our model.

\(^{7}\) We present factor loadings from this model in the Appendix.
our latent variable measure captures campus human rights practices. To ease interpretation, we rescaled the raw measure to a $[0, 1]$ interval.

Figure 3 presents a histogram of the rescaled measure. We can learn several things from this. First, there is considerable variation in the extent to which universities support human rights. This can be seen in the shape of the histogram, which resembles a right-skewed normal distribution. Second, there is a non-trivial number of universities where human rights practices appear to be underdeveloped. One way of thinking about this is that if we line up all the universities in our sample on a scale from 0-1, with 1 representing the university with the highest level of commitment to human rights, the largest number of universities cluster around the relatively low point of 0.2. In other words, a significant proportion of universities in our sample exhibit less than one-fifth the level of human rights practices as the most committed university.

To ground readers’ understanding of the data, we rank the top- and bottom-20 universities based on $CHRI \, Scores \, \alpha$ in Figure 4 and Figure 5. For each figure, universities are listed on the vertical axis and $CHRI \, Scores \, \alpha$ are presented on the horizontal axis. These plots can be used to assess the face validity of our measure. We see in Figure 4 that universities with long-standing human rights centers, programs, and initiatives have high $CHRI \, Scores \, \alpha$. For example, the University of California Davis, the University of Connecticut, the University of Notre Dame are all ranked highly.
Note: Figure 3 presents a histogram of the rescaled CHRI Scores $\alpha$ measure. The presented rankings are preliminary and will likely change as more data is added to the measure.

We also see in Figure 5 that universities in the South tend to have low CHRI Scores $\alpha$. This fits with qualitative research and anecdotal evidence, which suggest that human rights practices were slower to diffuse to Southern universities. Taken together, the data in these plots provide additional evidence that our measure is capturing real differences in human rights practices across universities.
Figure 4. Top 20 Universities by CHRI Scores $\alpha$.

Note: Figure 4 presents the top-20 universities according to CHRI Scores $\alpha$. These rankings are preliminary and will likely change as more data is added to the measure. Universities are listed on the vertical axis and CHRI Scores $\alpha$ are presented on the horizontal axis.

Figure 5. Bottom 20 Universities by CHRI Scores $\alpha$.

Note: Figure 5 presents the bottom-20 universities according to CHRI Scores $\alpha$. These rankings are preliminary and will likely change as more data is added to the measure. Universities are listed on the vertical axis and CHRI Scores $\alpha$ are presented on the horizontal axis.
Robustness Checks

Looking at the list of highest and lowest ranking universities, it is possible to speculate that the CHRI Scores capture something other than universities’ commitment to human rights. We further investigate the construct validity of our measure by examining how it relates to two other latent constructs that seem most plausible as alternative latent constructs captured by the CHRI Scores – university political ideology and university capacity. Skeptics could dismiss our scores as simply reflections of universities’ ideological leaning or resource capacity that prompts them to offer many human rights events and courses, adopt rights-friendly policies, and engage with broader human rights communities. We will address these possible criticisms by examining the relationships between our scores and those two most likely suspects. The idea here is that if our measure captures a different underlying construct than commitment to human rights, we would expect that it would be exogenous to or only weakly correlated with independent measures of university political ideology and capacity. In other words, if we are measuring university commitments to human rights, our measure should contain additional information not related to either of those two constructs.

Perhaps the strongest criticism of our measure is that it measures the underlying political ideology of universities instead of their human rights practices. Since liberal views and support for human rights are known to positively correlate among Americans (Doherty et al, 2018; Eagan et al, 2017), it is reasonable to assume that they might for American institutions as well, and that our measure might thus be driven by more of the latter than the former. To see if this is the case, we compare CHRI Scores \( \alpha \) to a measure of university political ideology.

Unfortunately, despite frequent debates about the political leanings of colleges, no quantitative measure of these preferences exists. To fill that need, we construct a measure of
university political ideology based on the approach introduced in Barberá (2015). The general idea here is to use the structure of an online social network, Twitter, to gather information about the underlying ideological position of individuals and institutions within that network. Specifically, we assess the ideology of universities based on the political actors they follow with their official Twitter accounts. Importantly, this validated approach allows us to place universities in the same ideological space as politicians and news media. The resulting measure, which we call *Ideology*, is scaled so that higher values indicate more conservative ideological positions.

Figure 6 presents a bivariate plot of *CHRI Scores α* and *Ideology*. The vertical axis denotes university ideology and the horizontal axis denotes university human rights practices. Plotted points denote universities. The thick line represents the best-fit line and the shaded region around the line indicates 95 percent confidence intervals. Strikingly, we see here that the two latent traits appear to be largely unrelated. This is indicated both by the flat slope of the regression line and the random patterns among the plotted points. Based on this analysis, it seems clear that *CHRI Scores α* captures something in addition to, and quite different from, university political ideology.

Another strong possibility is that *CHRI Scores α* might capture university resource capacity instead. The logic here is that the observable indicators included in the latent variable model are not related to university respect for human rights, but rather to the resources that enable universities to engage in human rights related activities and adopt rights-friendly practices. To address this issue, we examine the relationship between university capacity and our *CHRI Scores α*. As a proxy for capacity, we use the size of a university’s endowment. Since this measure is skewed, we log it.

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8 We can think of other alternative ways of assessing university political ideology and do not claim that our approach is the best. We aim here to create a plausible measure of ideology based on a previously validated approach. One potentially productive area for future research would be to develop different measure of university political ideology.

9 We can provide additional details about the measurement approach and our political ideology measure upon request.
Figure 6. CHRI Scores and Political Ideology of Universities.

Note: Figure 6 presents a bivariate plot of CHRI Scores α and Ideology. The vertical axis denotes university ideology and the horizontal axis denotes university human rights practices. Plotted points denote universities. The thick line represents the best-fit line and the shaded region around the line indicates 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 7 presents a bivariate plot of CHRI Scores α and Endowment (log). The vertical axis denotes university capacity and the horizontal axis denotes university human rights practices. Plotted points denote universities. The thick line represents the best-fit line and the shaded region around the line indicates 95 percent confidence intervals. Unlike in Figure 4, we see that these two factors have a positive relation. This is indicated by both the upward slope of the regression line and the general pattern of the plotted points.
This relationship, though, is not strong enough to be concerning. If our measure were simply capturing university capacity, we might expect that \textit{Endowment (log)} would explain 80 or more of the variation in \textit{CHRI Scores $\alpha$}. If we regress \textit{CHRI Scores $\alpha$} on \textit{Endowment (log)}, we find that the $R^2$ for the model is only 0.156. This means that university capacity only explains about 15 percent of the variation in our campus human rights measure. While we recognize that capacity does have some influence on university human rights commitments, we interpret this as strong evidence that we are capturing a different underlying trait than university capacity.

\textbf{Figure 7. CHRI Scores and the Size of University Endowment.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{CHRI_Scores_alpha_by_Endowment.png}
\caption{CHRI Scores $\alpha$ by Endowment (log).}  
\end{figure}

\textit{Note:} Figure 7 presents a bivariate plot of \textit{CHRI Scores $\alpha$} and \textit{Endowment (log)}. The vertical axis denotes university capacity and the horizontal axis denotes university human rights practices. Plotted points denote universities. The thick line represents the best-fit line and the shaded region around the line indicates 95 percent confidence intervals.
**Conclusion: Future Work**

We underscore the preliminary nature of our CHRI Scores, hence the designation of $\alpha$. We are in the process of collecting other indicators that might plausibly be related to university commitment to human rights and plan to update our ranking accordingly by the time of ASA 2019. More specifically, we plan to collect the indicators presented in Table 1 below.

Once the CHRI Scores are finalized, we will move on to examine what shapes university’s commitment to human rights. In this analysis, we run multiple regression analyses on the CHRI Scores to identify drivers of universities’ behavior regarding human rights. Drawing on theories in organizational studies, social movements, sociology of education, and other sub-fields, we will develop our hypotheses about the impact of normative and mimetic isomorphism, regulatory pressure, stakeholder demands, resource capacity, and ideological affinity. These analyses will open the black box of university practices regarding human rights, and our rankings could also influence those practices, which in turn will have far-reaching impact on human rights and social justice in the next generations. We hope that collecting these additional indicators will further refine our ranking.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data Collection Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finish Course Catalogues</td>
<td>We have currently collected 122 course catalogues, and have calculated the scores on how oriented these course catalogues are towards human rights and diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have imputed the scores for the rest of the universities. We will collect the rest of the catalogues so that we do not have to rely on imputation for a subset of universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Mission Statements</td>
<td>We will collect data on mission statements for all universities in the sample and conduct automated text analysis on the mission statements to see how represented human rights and diversity and equity themes are in this data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Policies</td>
<td>We will collect this data from existing university documents concerning speech, association, assembly, and the protection of women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter Embeddedness Measure</td>
<td>We will collect data from Twitter on how embedded each university in our sample is in the network on NGOs, INGOs, and other groups that advocate human rights, social justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. First, we will collect Twitter handles for each such organization and then use network analysis to compute a score of how embedded each school is within the network. Higher embeddedness would indicate higher visible commitment to issues of human rights, social justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scraping University Websites</td>
<td>We will scrape data from university websites and perform automatic text analysis of the content. We will analyze the content in terms of how much focus it has on issues of human rights, social justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scraping University Newspapers</td>
<td>We will scrape university newspaper websites for universities in our sample and perform automatic data analysis on the data akin to the analysis mentioned above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Universities Participating in Scholars at Risk</td>
<td>We will collect a list of Scholars at Risk university affiliates. These university affiliates host scholars from across the world who are persecuted in their home countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Universities that have a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Chapter</td>
<td>We will collect information on which universities in our sample have a NAACP chapter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Crowd-Sourcing Campaign to Document Gender Neutral Restrooms</td>
<td>We will conduct a crowd-sourcing campaign to identify which universities in our sample have gender neutral restrooms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table 1 presents additional manifest variables to be collected for inclusion in subsequent versions of CHRI Scores.
References


Appendix

(Not for publication.)
Manifest Variable Descriptive Statistics

In this section of the appendix, we provide descriptive statistics for the manifest variables in our measure.

Figure A1: HR Catalog Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the HR Catalog measure. See text for more details.

Figure A2: DEI Catalog Histogram

Note: Figure A2 presents a histogram of the DEI Catalog measure. See text for more details.
Figure A3: Human Rights Center Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the Human Rights Center measure. See text for more details.

Figure A4: Minority Representation Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the Minority Representation measure. See text for more details.
Figure A5: Female Representation Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the Female Representation measure. See text for more details.

Figure A6: Hate Crimes Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the Hate Crimes measure. See text for more details.
Figure A7: WRC Affiliation Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the WRC Affiliation measure. See text for more details.

Figure A8: FLA Affiliation Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the FLA Affiliation measure. See text for more details.
Figure A9: SDSN Affiliation Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the SDSN Affiliation measure. See text for more details.

Figure A10: HESI Affiliation Histogram

Note: Figure A1 presents a histogram of the HESI Affiliation measure. See text for more details.