

University Sustainability Index 2025

Assessment Report

Public Policy Research Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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1. USI Project Overview

About the Research

Overview



PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE
Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Centre for
Business
Sustainability

The University Sustainability Index (USI) project is led by the Faculty of Social Science at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and undertaken jointly by the Public Policy Research Centre (PPRC) and the Centre for Business Sustainability (CBS).

The USI is Hong Kong's first systematic global University Sustainability Index (USI). Grounded in the Value-Process-Impact (VPI)¹, the USI aims to foster universities to adopt university social responsibility (USR) as a management model for achieving university sustainability.

Note:

1. The methodology framework was developed by Professor Carlos Lo, previously applied to the Business Sustainability Index Series (BSI). Please visit the CBS website for more information: <https://cbs.bschool.cuhk.edu.hk/research/>.
2. The assessed universities partially overlap across the three sub-indices.

Sub-Indices and Constituents ²

The USI consists of three sub-indices with overlapping members, representing a total of **151** universities worldwide.

Global University Sustainability Index (GUSI)

113 universities from the QS World Top 150 list (2024)

Asia-Pacific University Sustainability Index (APUSI)

58 member universities of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU)

Greater China University Sustainability Index (GCUSI)

30 universities from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and Mainland China

Mission

The USI project aims to:

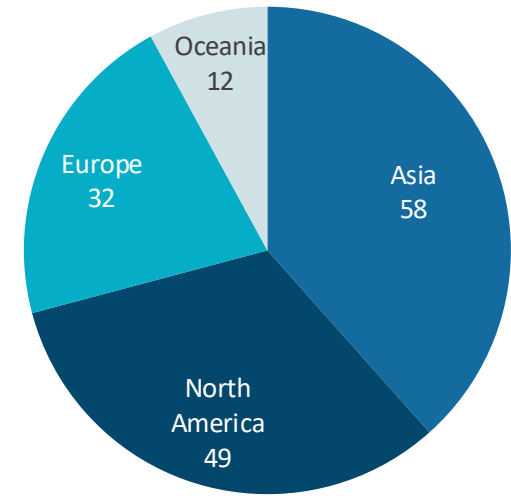
- Promote a high level of transparency in USR-related disclosure and communication with stakeholders.
- Develop a USR assessment framework that is adaptable to local contexts while being scalable for global application, enabling universities to manage, disclose, and benchmark their performance against regional and international peers.
- Engage with and support universities in their efforts for continuous improvement in USR initiatives.
- Measure and track the sustainability performance of universities, recognising those that demonstrate outstanding commitment to USR.

Constituent Selection and Distribution

Summary of Constituents Selection

Sub-Index	No. of Universities	Constituent Source	Selection Criteria
Global USI	113	QS World University Rankings (2024)	Selected from the top 150 universities; Inclusion is strictly contingent on the public availability of USR, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and sustainability data in either English or Chinese
Asia-Pacific USI	58	Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU)	Limited to universities that are active participating members of the APRU network
Greater China USI	30	Regional institutional data	Selected universities within the Greater China region

Regional Distribution of Constituents



Note: Although the sub-indices are named after regions, they do not correspond to the continental groupings used in the regional distribution and subsequent analyses.

Assessment Framework: The VPI Model

Value (V)

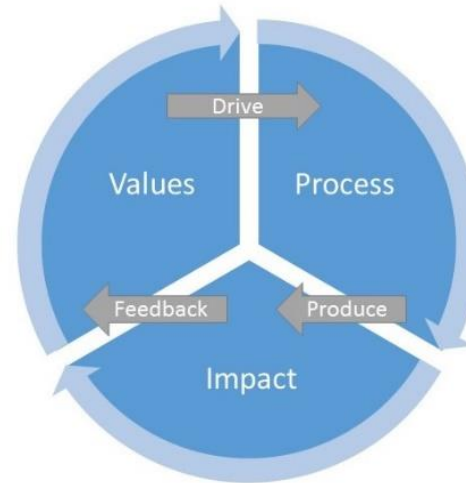
- The sustainability values (V) of a university require the formulation of a vision and mission of USR and university sustainability that are conceptually sufficient to inform its strategic positioning.

Process (P)

- The process (P) of practising USR asks a university to institutionalise the management of USR and deliver USR projects that translate its vision and mission into action.

Impact (I)

- The impact (I) of USR practices obliges a university to evaluate the contribution of its USR endeavors to economic, social and environmental sustainability in terms of the well-being of various stakeholder groups.



Values (principles)

Process
(Management + Practices)

Impact

Stakeholders-Materiality Issues Matrix

The VPI model categorises and defines the management strategies and stakeholder groups involved in USR implementation. The USI project has identified seven distinct stakeholder groups, and five types of cross-cutting action strategies.

Stakeholder/ Strategy	Teaching and learning	Academic research	University governance	Community service	Environmental sustainability
Student	✓	✓		✓	
Employee	✓	✓			
Environment	✓		✓		✓
Government/funding bodies			✓		
Peer universities	✓	✓	✓		
Communities				✓	✓
Suppliers			✓		✓

Table 2: Assessment matrix linking USR strategic areas with stakeholders

Source: Lo, C. W. H., Pang, R. X., Egri, C. P., & Li, P. H. Y. (2017). University Social Responsibility: Conceptualization and an Assessment Framework. In University Social Responsibility and Quality of Life (pp. 37-59). Springer Singapore.

VPI-based Scoring

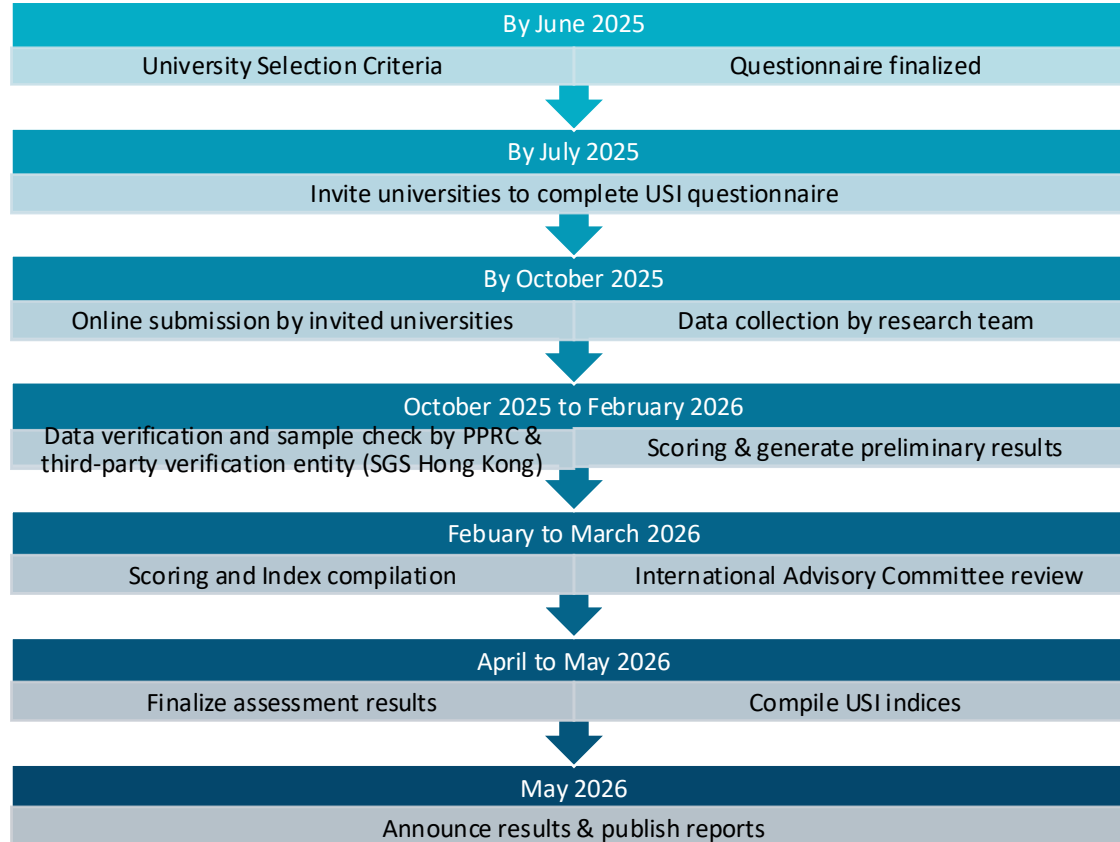
Weight in USI Scoring

20%	Value Vision and mission formulation — the philosophical orientation of USR.
20%	Process - Management Governance systems, ESG management structures, and KPI frameworks.
40%	Process - Practice Concrete actions and programs across all stakeholder groups.
20%	Impact Outcomes and contributions achieved through USR endeavours.

Practice carries the highest weight to demonstrate the importance of translating values into concrete actions.

Impact dimension stresses the transparency of USR data disclosure

Assessment Procedure



Six-Tier Performance Classification

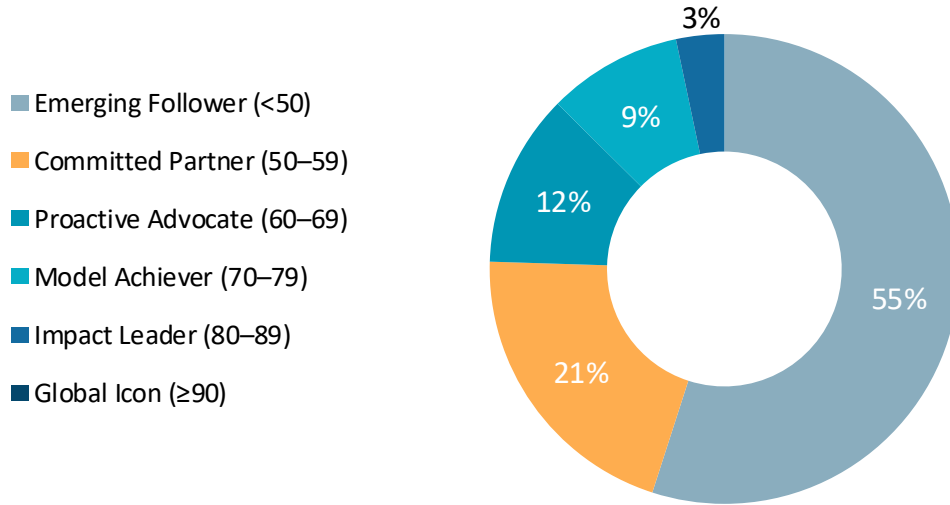
Score	Tier Name	Description
90–100	Global Icon	Representing the pinnacle of global excellence, these elite institutions achieve exceptional performance across all VPI dimensions, fully embedding sustainability into their governance and yielding profound, long-term impact.
80–89	Impact Leader	Regionally leading and highly mature, these institutions systematically translate academic research into concrete outcomes, achieving outstanding, above-average performance across Management, Practice, and Impact.
70–79	Model Achiever	Mature and robust, these leading institutions systematically implement multi-dimensional initiatives supported by clear values, strong management, and quantified impact tracking. Continued progress lies in expanding long-term social responsibility programmes and strengthening impact evaluation and disclosure.
60–69	Proactive Advocate	Highly proactive, with strong execution in Management and Practice, these institutions generate tangible outcomes. Further advancement lies in adopting systemic, socially responsible management and strengthening impact evaluation.
50–59	Committed Partner	These institutions exhibit strong leadership and commitment, though their management frameworks and practical outcomes remain underdeveloped. Further progress requires advancing socially responsible practices, strengthening long-term programmes, and enhancing institutional management systems.
< 50	Emerging Follower	Institutions in this tier exhibit foundational sustainability awareness but remain constrained by decentralized initiatives and incomplete data. Significant advancement depends on greater integration of sustainability and more cohesive responsible practices.



2. USI 2025 Result Highlight

Overall USR Performance

Distribution of Universities by Tiers of Performance (N=151)



Leading (≥90)

No university reaches the *Global Icon* tier

0

Upper echelon (≥70)

19 universities achieve *Model Achiever* or *Impact Leader*

13%

Middle echelon (50-69)

49 universities: *Committed Partner* and *Proactive Advocate*

32%

Emerging (<50)

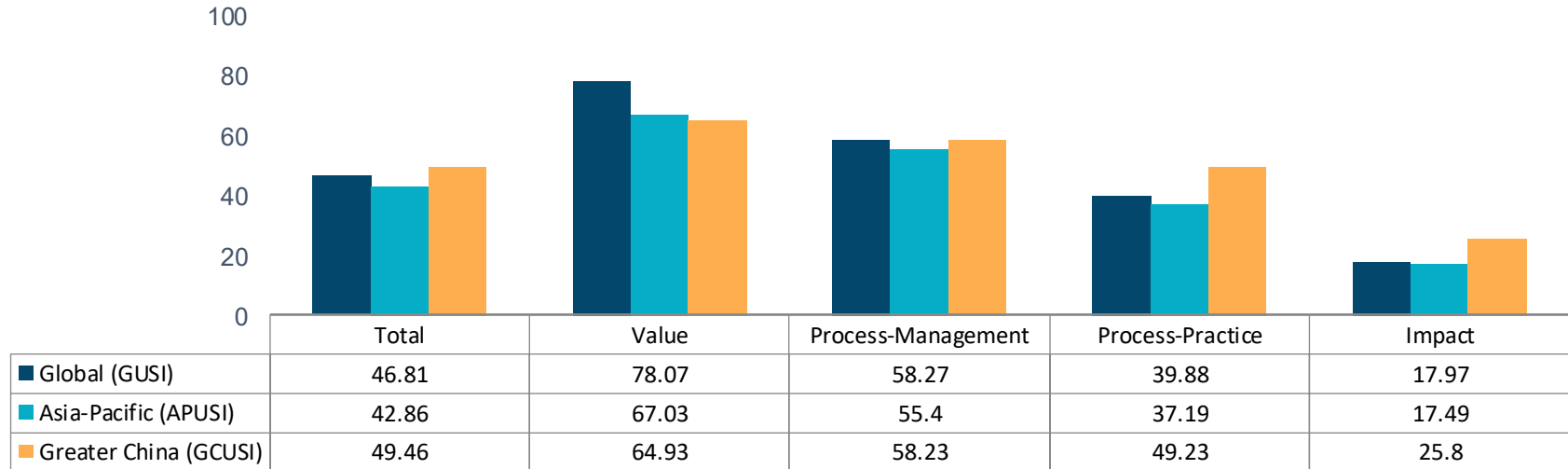
83 universities remain *Emerging Follower*

55%

Over half of assessed universities remain in the **Emerging Follower** group, and none have achieved **Global Icon**, indicating that USR is still in the early stage of transitioning from value advocacy to tangible impact.

Comparative USR Performance by Sub-Index

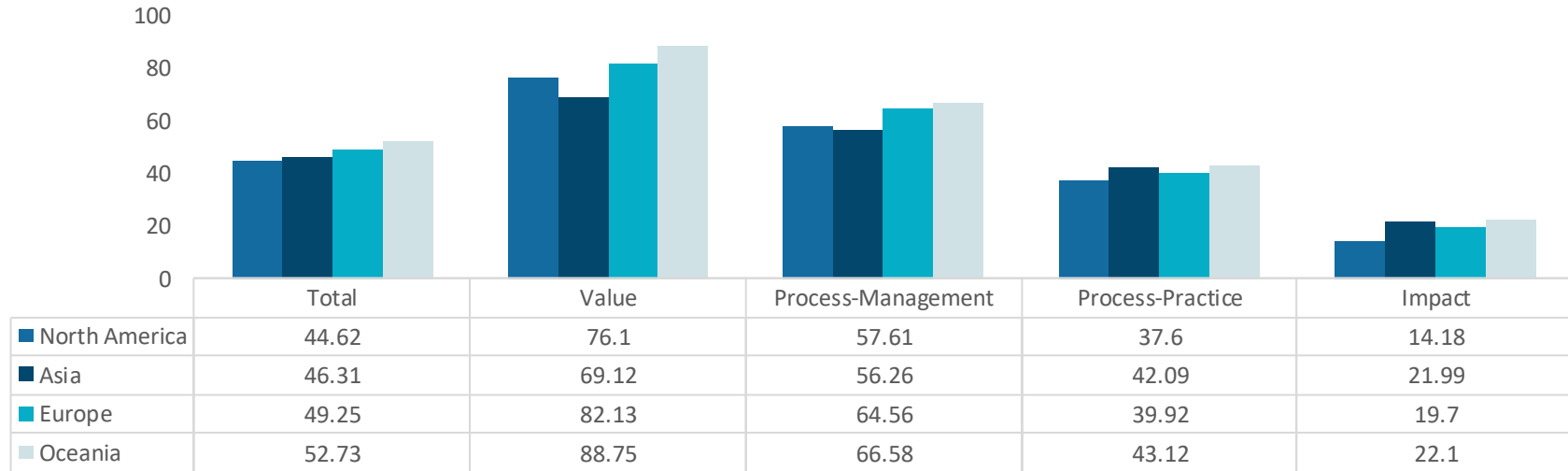
Comparison of Average Scores by VPI Dimensions (N=151)



- Greater China USI leads in **Total** (49.46), **Practice** (49.23) and **Impact** (25.80) dimensions. Global USI leads in **Value** (78.07).
- All three sub-indices score highest in **Value** and lowest in **Impact**, on average, signifying a pronounced performance gap in translating sustainability aspiration into practice with measurable impact.

Comparative USR Performance by Region

Comparison of Average Scores by VPI Dimension (N=151)



- Oceanian schools achieved the highest overall score, leading across all VPI dimensions; European universities lead in **Management**.
- Divergence emerged in **Impact** and **Practice**, where Asian universities closed the gap to rank second overall. Despite weaker performance in the foundational Value and Management dimensions, Asia demonstrated stronger real-world outcomes in **Practice** and **Impact**.

Stakeholder Priorities by Sub-Index

- Across the sub-indices, **Students** and **the Environment** are most prioritised in Practice, together with Community are visible in Impact; in contrast, **Suppliers** consistently received the least attention in both dimensions.
- Greater China USI outperforms Global and Asia-Pacific peers across all stakeholder groups except **Suppliers**, achieving a higher overall aggregate and a more balanced distribution of scores.

Comparison of Stakeholder Priorities in Practice and Impact, by Sub-Index (N=151)

Practice	Top 3 Most Prioritised Stakeholders			Least Prioritised
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	
Global	Student	Environment	Peer university	Suppliers
Asia Pacific	Student	Environment	Peer university	Supplier
Greater China	Student	Environment	Employee	Suppliers

Impact	Top 3 Most Prioritised Stakeholders			Least Prioritised
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	
Global	Peer university	Environment	Community	Suppliers
Asia Pacific	Peer university	Community	Environment	Supplier
Greater China	Peer university	Community	Student	Suppliers

Stakeholder Priorities by Region

- The Practice dimension reveals both regional variations and convergence.
- Oceania led the four regions in engagement with **Funding Bodies**, **Peer Universities**, and the **Community**. In contrast, Asia recorded the highest performance regarding **Student** and **Employee**, while Europe demonstrated the strongest focus on the **Environment** and **Suppliers**.

Comparison of Stakeholder Priorities in Practice and Impact, by Region (N=151)

Practice	Top 3 Most Prioritised Stakeholders		
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
North America	Environment	Student	Employee
Asia	Student	Environment	Employee
Europe	Environment	Student	Peer university
Oceania	Student	Peer university	Government & Funding body

Impact	Top 3 Most Prioritised Stakeholders		
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
North America	Peer university	Environment	Community
Asia	Peer university	Community	Student
Europe	Peer university	Environment	Community
Oceania	Peer university	Community	Environment

Key Findings

The 2025 USI assessment indicates that USR is at a transition phase: moving from value advocacy toward the demonstration of tangible impacts.

1

Unsustained Follow-through of University Social Responsibility

While social responsibility has been widely internalised as an institutional principle, it has yet to be fully operationalised into consistent, measurable societal effects.

2

A Landscape of Varied Readiness and Priorities

USR maturity varies significantly across regions, reflecting diverse institutional readiness and priorities.

- Oceanian universities lead in overall score with consistently strong performance across all VPI dimensions;
- European universities show strong practice but fragmented impact tracking;
- Asian universities demonstrate practice-led USR that may reflect compliance-driven rather than coherence, institution-wide strategy; and
- American universities are politically comprised: their sustainability performance are undermined by anti-DEI pressures that constrain both active practice and public disclosure of sustainability-related data.

3

Data Governance and Disclosure

- In the absence of a standardised USR data framework, institutions vary widely in their disclosure practices.
- Most assessed universities lack integrated reports and demonstrate inconsistent reporting across cycles, which significantly compromises the accuracy of assessment and hinders comparison of institutional progress over time.

Recommendations

1

Elevate the Priority of USR Initiatives in Sustainability Discourse

- Universities should move beyond “ivory tower” into intellectual hubs by applying academic expertise to real-world issues.
- University social responsibility should transition from conceptual advocacy to proactive implementation, with greater focus on assessing changes among stakeholders to validate material social impact.

2

Deepen and Institutionalise Stakeholder Assessment

- Universities should conduct annual reviews and audits of their stakeholder interaction and data collection methods, and develop targeted strategies to identify deficiencies and ensure all stakeholder groups are adequately understood and engaged.

3

Strengthen Data Governance and Disclosure Transparency

- To rectify fragmented and narrative-style reporting, universities should strengthen data governance by transitioning from one-off event disclosure to systematic, transparent data tracking that provides measurable insights into USR achievements.

4

Bridge the Gap Between Practice and Impact

- Universities should reedirect strategic focus from value advocacy to the practical use of resources toward concrete initiatives, supported by systemic, longitudinal data collection to accurately capture and demonstrate stakeholder impact over time

Future Directions of USI

Track Progress

- Share the USI Assessment Framework to support universities in enhancing their data governance.
- Track the progress of lower-scoring universities in developing institutional capabilities to enhance their USR performance.

Connect Stakeholders

- Host USI symposiums and build an international network to connect stakeholders.
- Share research, insights, and best practices on university sustainability globally.

Refine Metrics

- Develop more thematic/ issue- or context-specific assessment metrics to help universities transition from broad statements to clearly defined, measurable goals.

Foster Learning

- Foster a culture of mutual learning and collective growth among policymakers, USR researchers and practitioners.



3. USI 2025 Performance Ranking

Top 20 Universities of Overall USI

University (in alphabetic order)	Sub-index covered*	Region
Asia University	●	Asia
Erasmus University Rotterdam	●	Europe
Hong Kong Baptist University	●	Asia
Imperial College London	●	Europe
KAIST	●	Asia
Korea University	●	Asia
Lingnan University of Hong Kong	●	Asia
National Yunlin University of Science and Technology	●	Asia
Simon Fraser University	●	North America
Taipei Medical University	●	Asia
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	● ● ●	Asia
The University of Sydney	● ●	Oceania
University of Amsterdam	●	Europe
University of British Columbia	● ●	North America
University of Groningen	●	Europe
University of Leeds	●	Europe
University of the Philippines	●	Asia
University of Toronto	●	North America
UNSW Sydney	● ●	Oceania
Utrecht University	●	Europe

- Global (GUSI)
- Asia-Pacific (APUSI)
- Greater China (GCUSI)

Top 10 of Global USI

University (in alphabetic order)	Sub-index covered*	Region
Erasmus University Rotterdam	●	Europe
Imperial College London	●	Europe
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	● ● ●	Asia
The University of Sydney	● ●	Oceania
University of British Columbia	● ●	North America
University of Groningen	●	Europe
University of Leeds	●	Europe
University of Toronto	●	North America
UNSW Sydney	● ●	Oceania
Utrecht University	●	Europe
















- Global (GUSI)
- Asia-Pacific (APUSI)
- Greater China (GCUSI)

Top 10 of Asia-Pacific USI

University (in alphabetic order)	Sub-index covered	Region
KAIST	●	Asia
Korea University	●	Asia
POSTECH	●	Asia
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	● ● ●	Asia
The University of Osaka	● ●	Asia
The University of Sydney	● ●	Oceania
University of British Columbia	● ●	North America
University of the Philippines	●	Asia
University of Washington	● ●	North America
UNSW Sydney	●	Oceania



Top 10 of Greater China USI

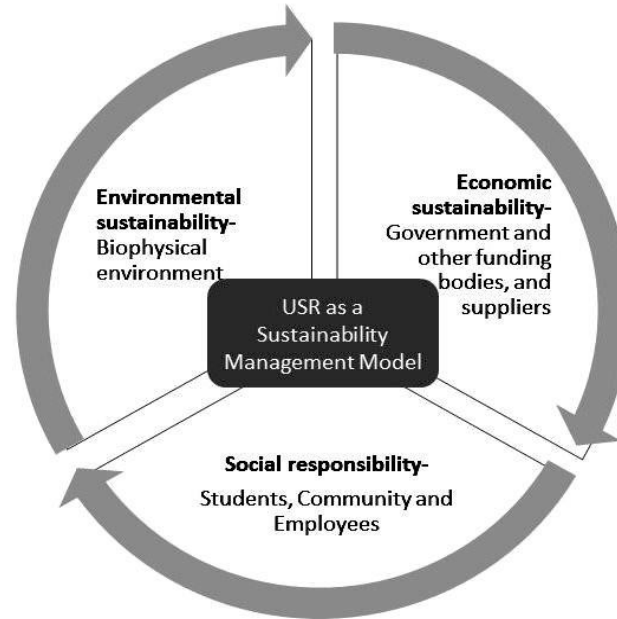
University (in alphabetic order)	Sub-index covered	Region
Asia University		Taiwan
Hong Kong Baptist University		Hong Kong SAR
Lingnan University of Hong Kong		Hong Kong SAR
National Cheng Kung University		Taiwan
National Sun Yat-Sen University		Taiwan
National Yunlin University of Science and Technology		Taiwan
Taipei Medical University		Taiwan
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	  	Hong Kong SAR
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	 	Hong Kong SAR
Tsinghua University	  	Mainland China

	Global (GUSI)
	Asia-Pacific (APUSI)
	Greater China (GCUSI)



Appendix

A. The Conceptual Model of USR



Lo, C. W. H., Pang, R. X., Egri, C. P., & Li, P. H. Y. (2017). University Social Responsibility: Conceptualization and an Assessment Framework. In *University Social Responsibility and Quality of Life* (pp. 37-59). Springer Singapore.

B. Scope of Data Collection

The USI data were gathered from a mix of primary and secondary sources to ensure credibility, objectivity and comprehensive coverage:

- **Official Institutional Platforms:** University-level websites, including general domains and specific department/office webpages.
- **Institutional Reports:** Comprehensive disclosures such as institutional annual reports, sustainability/ social responsibility reports, and official statements.
- **Supplementary Contextual Media:** Verified external publications, including government reports, media/news articles, and other public documents from reputable organisations.
- **Direct Institutional Inputs:** Invite universities to complete questionnaires, disclosing data that aligns strictly with publicly available institutional information.

C. List of 151 Universities (in alphabetical order) (1/2)

University	Region
Asia University	Asia
Boston University	North America
Brown University	North America
California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	North America
Carnegie Mellon University	North America
Chulalongkorn University	Asia
City University of Hong Kong	Asia
City University of Macau	Asia
Columbia University	North America
Cornell University	North America
Duke University	North America
Durham University	Europe
Education University of Hong Kong	Asia
Eindhoven University of Technology	Europe
Erasmus University Rotterdam	Europe
Fudan University	Asia
Georgia Institute of Technology	North America
Harvard University	North America
Hong Kong Baptist University	Asia
Huazhong University of Science and Technology	Asia
Imperial College London	Europe
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB)	Asia
Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD)	Asia
Johns Hopkins University	North America

University	Region
KAIST	Asia
Keio University	Asia
King's College London (KCL)	Europe
Korea University	Asia
Kyoto University	Asia
Kyushu University	Europe
Lancaster University	Europe
Leiden University	Europe
Lingnan University of Hong Kong	Asia
Macau University of Science and Technology	Asia
Macquarie University	Oceania
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	North America
McGill University	North America
Michigan State University	North America
Monash University	Oceania
Nagoya University	Asia
Nanjing University	Asia
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU)	Asia
National Cheng Kung University	Asia
National Sun Yat-Sen University	Asia
National Taiwan University (NTU)	Asia
National Taiwan University of Science and Technology	Asia
National Tsing Hua University	Asia
National University of Singapore (NUS)	Asia

University	Region
National Yunlin University of Science and Technology	Asia
New York University (NYU)	North America
Newcastle University	Europe
Northwestern University	North America
Peking University	Asia
Pennsylvania State University	North America
POSTECH	Asia
Princeton University	North America
Purdue University	North America
Pusan National University	Asia
Queen Mary University of London	Europe
Rice University	North America
RMIT University	Oceania
Seoul National University	Asia
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	Asia
Simon Fraser University	North America
Southern University of Science and Technology	Asia
Stanford University	North America
Sun Yat-sen University	Asia
Taipei Medical University	Asia
Texas A&M University	North America
The Australian National University	Oceania
The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)	Asia
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Asia

C. List of 151 Universities (in alphabetical order) (2/2)

University	Region	University	Region	University	Region
The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)	Europe	University College London (UCL)	Europe	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	North America
The University of Adelaide	Oceania	University of Alberta	North America	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	North America
The University of Auckland	Oceania	University of Amsterdam	Europe	University of Nottingham	Europe
The University of Edinburgh	Europe	University of Bath	Europe	University of Oregon	North America
The University of Hong Kong	Asia	University of Birmingham	Europe	University of Oxford	Europe
The University of Manchester	Europe	University of Bristol	Europe	University of Pennsylvania	North America
The University of Melbourne	Oceania	University of British Columbia	North America	University of Science and Technology of China	Asia
The University of Osaka	Asia	University of California, Berkeley (UCB)	North America	University of Southampton	Europe
The University of Queensland	Oceania	University of California, Davis	North America	University of Southern California	North America
The University of Sheffield	Europe	University of California, Irvine	North America	University of St Andrews	Europe
The University of Sydney	Oceania	University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)	North America	University of Technology Sydney	Oceania
The University of Tokyo	Asia	University of California, Riverside	North America	University of Texas at Austin	North America
The University of Warwick	Europe	University of California, San Diego (UCSD)	North America	University of the Philippines	Asia
The University of Western Australia	Oceania	University of California, Santa Barbara	North America	University of Toronto	North America
Tohoku University	Asia	University of California, Santa Cruz	North America	University of Washington	North America
Tokyo Institute of Technology (Tokyo Tech)	Asia	University of Cambridge	Europe	University of Waterloo	North America
Tongji University	Asia	University of Chicago	North America	University of Wisconsin-Madison	North America
Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin	Europe	University of Chinese Academy of Sciences	Asia	UNSW Sydney	Oceania
Tsinghua University	Asia	University of Glasgow	Europe	Utrecht University	Europe
Université de Montréal	North America	University of Groningen	Europe	Wageningen University & Research	Europe
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	Asia	University of Hawai'i at Mānoa	North America	Waseda University	Asia
Universiti Malaya (UM)	Asia	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	North America	Western University	North America
Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Asia	University of Leeds	Europe	Wuhan University	Asia
Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	Asia	University of Macau	Asia	Xi'an Jiaotong University	Asia

D. International Advisory Committee

Affiliation	Name	Position
University of Amsterdam	Benjamin VAN ROOIJ	Professor of Law and Society, Faculty of Law
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National University of Singapore	Ching LEONG	Vice Provost (Student Life); Associate Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Christina Wing Yan WONG	Professor, Business Division, Institute of Textiles and Clothing
University of Toronto	Ito PENG	Professor of Sociology and Public Policy, Canada Research Chair in Global Social Policy
National Sun Yat-sen University	Jui-Kun KUO	Professor, Institution of Public Affairs Management
Tsinghua University	Junming ZHU	Associate Dean and Associate Professor, School of Public Policy and Management
Tam-kang University	Min-fen TU	Professor, Department of Business Administration
City University of Hong Kong	Ning LIU	Associate Professor, Department of Public and International Affairs
Lingnan University	Paulina WONG	Associate Professor, Division of Science
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E. Research Team



The USI project is funded by the Faculty of Social Sciences at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and undertaken by the Research Team as follows:

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We thank all project interns and data assistants for their invaluable contributions to this project.

Thank You

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