Stack, Michelle. *Global University Rankings and the Mediatization of Higher Education*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 149 pp, \$69.99.

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In *Global University Rankings and the Mediatization of Higher Education*, Michelle Stack explores the complex relationships between higher education institutions and global university rankings. Stack argues that these relationships are best understood through the process of mediatization, a communications theory which suggests that media plays a role in the discussions and actions of the entities it examines. Stack uses the theory of mediatization to discuss how mainstream media and global university rankings influence conversations, funding, and policy decisions at higher education institutions around the globe, arguing that a form of media education is necessary to understanding the changing landscape of higher education. She asserts that the growing prevalence of rankings on university websites and their influence on funding decisions contribute to a spectacle of the university as a hyper-real space, especially on university websites, in which universities brand themselves using the rhetoric of rankings as “world class” institutions.

In the first half of the book, Stack discusses the growing effects of rankings, the growth of brand-consciousness for higher education institutions, and the business of global ranking bodies. It becomes evident that many higher education institutions aim to become a highly ranked world class university and use careful communication tactics to protect and raise the reputation of the university. The second half of the book consists of three analyses of different aspects of mediatization and higher education. In one chapter, Stack looks at the website for the *Times Higher Education* ranking over time and explores how ranking bodies have branded themselves for legitimacy, trustworthiness, and strength. In another chapter, Stack completes a similar analysis of 13 university websites around the world over time, claiming that these websites have become more similar, using more stock images of happy students, and contributing to a “global visual language” in which the university becomes hyper-real (71). Lastly, Stack summarizes eight semi-structured interviews she had with

public affairs officials at Canadian universities. She discusses how these employees are boundary workers who must liaise between the corporate needs of the university and the those of academics who focus on nuance and resistance to commercialization. She concludes by asserting that universities, faculty, and others in higher education must become activists to transcend the narrow focus of what it means to be a “world class university.”

Having worked as a communications director and policy consultant prior to becoming a professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, Stack expands from her professional background to show the interactions among the fields that she has been involved with. Although the book is global in its scope, Stack relies on many Canadian examples throughout and all interviews are with Canadian public affairs officials. This reflects Stack’s Canadian context; further research could focus on other countries.

As much of the academic discourse around rankings focuses on critiques of their methodologies and their bias towards English-speaking Western institutions, Stack’s focus on media instead explores how rankings contribute to the mediatization, globalization, and marketization of higher education institutions. One of the strengths in this book is Stack’s close attention to the nuanced and complex relationships between universities, ranking bodies, policy makers, boundary workers, academics, and students. This nuanced discussion allows Stack to convincingly show how mediatization is at play in for all parties involved in higher education.

As a recent graduate of an MLIS program and someone who has worked at the boundaries of higher education and global university rankings, I found this to be a fascinating book about the politics of higher education and the tensions between historical understandings of academia as a place of study and the growing commercialization of higher education. It forced me to look at higher education in a different light, one in which universities increasingly act as businesses, but also try to navigate the mediatized world in which rankings are imperfect but powerful. The book did not leave me hopeless, though, but with a better, and more human, understanding of the complexity of both higher education institutions and global university rankings as entities that affect each other within the larger world. Overall, this is an informative book for anyone who works or interacts with higher education institutions. It will be especially interesting for those who work in university communications departments, as they will see themselves reflected in many of the discussions in this book.