

Methodology for the Inventory of Higher Education Academic Programs

The inventory of higher education academic programs was developed through a systematic, multi-step process combining verification of existing sources, data aggregation, targeted searches, and manual review. The methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive and regularly updated representation of the global landscape of higher education academic programs.

The inventory builds on earlier mapping work in the field of higher education programs. This dataset was used as a starting point, while the present inventory applies an updated data-collection approach based on source verification, database searches, manual confirmation, and targeted gap-filling.

1. Review of previous inventory data

The 2014 Inventory of Higher Education Academic Programs developed by the Center for International Higher Education was used as the foundational dataset. Each program listed in the inventory was reviewed to determine whether it remained relevant and active. This review included checking institutional websites, program pages, degree descriptions, admission information, and other publicly available evidence of current operation.

Entries were retained where there was sufficient evidence that the program continued to offer a formal degree in higher education or a closely related field. Entries were removed or marked for further verification where no reliable evidence of recent activity could be found. Programs that no longer appeared to be active, had been discontinued, or could not be verified were excluded from the final list.

2. Identification of additional programs

To identify programs not included in the original inventory, data were aggregated from several major international academic databases and platforms that catalogue degree programs worldwide. These sources were used to capture newly established programs as well as previously unlisted programs that fit the scope of the inventory.

Searches focused on formal higher education academic programs, such as BA/BSc, MA/MSc, PhD, EdD, and comparable qualifications. Non-degree professional development offerings, including certificates, short courses, executive education, workshops, and staff training programs, were excluded from the inventory.

3. Inclusion criteria and manual verification

Programs were included where publicly available evidence showed that they were formal degree-granting higher education programs with a clear academic focus. Relevant fields included

higher education studies, higher education leadership, higher education policy, university management, education administration, and related specializations.

The verification process considered several types of evidence, including official institutional descriptions, program handbooks, degree requirements, course structures, admission pages, staff profiles, and other indicators of program activity. A program did not need to include “higher education” in its formal title, provided that its curriculum and purpose were substantially focused on higher education.

Where information was incomplete or ambiguous, additional manual searches were conducted. Expert input was also used to identify smaller, newer, or regionally important programs that may not be highly visible in databases or search-engine results. This was especially important in contexts where programs were offered in local languages or were not well represented in international catalogues.

4. Deduplication and dataset enrichment

After the database and manual search stages, duplicate entries were removed. This included cases where the same program appeared in multiple sources, where a program was listed under slightly different names, or where a single program was represented through both institutional and faculty-level pages.

The dataset was then enriched with additional information, including institution name, country, program title, degree level, website, and where available, language of instruction and geographic location. Where possible, entries were checked against official institutional sources rather than third-party listings.

5. Geographic gap-Filling

Following the initial data collection, the dataset was reviewed to identify countries and regions that appeared underrepresented. To address these gaps, targeted searches were carried out using search engines and AI-assisted queries to locate additional relevant programs in those specific regions.

This stage was used to improve geographic coverage and reduce the risk that the inventory would overrepresent countries with stronger digital visibility or more extensive participation in international databases. Gap-filling searches were especially useful for identifying programs in local-language contexts and in regions where program information is less centralized.

6. Mapping

The institutions offering the identified programs were mapped to provide a visual representation of the global distribution of higher education academic programs. Where a program was associated with more than one institutional location, the main host institution was used for mapping purposes when it could be verified with reasonable confidence.

Entries without reliable location information may be included in the searchable table without being plotted on the map. The mapping component is intended to support geographic analysis of program availability and institutional concentration.

7. Ongoing maintenance and future Steps

The inventory is intended to function as a living resource rather than a one-time publication. It is presented on the GOHEC website as an interactive online map and searchable table, allowing entries to be corrected, expanded, and updated as new information becomes available.

Ongoing maintenance will rely on several mechanisms: regular review of user-submitted corrections, expert suggestions, periodic database monitoring, and manual verification of uncertain entries. A dedicated email address and an editable suggestion form can be used so that users report missing programs, outdated information, closed programs, incorrect institutional affiliations, or errors in program classification.

Future updates should also introduce additional database fields to improve transparency and longitudinal value. These may include “source of entry,” “date added to the inventory,” “date founded,” “date closed,” degree level, and language of instruction, where such information can be reliably identified. Programs that are no longer active should, where possible, be retained and marked as inactive rather than deleted, so that the inventory can support future research on the development of the field over time.

8. Limitations

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness, several limitations should be noted.

First, open-source methods may omit programs that are not digitally visible, do not maintain updated websites, or operate mainly in local languages. Second, database-based searching introduces a bias toward programs that are well indexed, internationally visible, and described in English or in widely used database formats. Programs focused primarily on local professional needs, with limited online documentation, may therefore be underrepresented.

Third, the verification of active status is based on publicly available evidence such as current program pages, degree descriptions, admission information, or institutional announcements. This is a practical proxy, but it does not definitively confirm enrollment, staffing, accreditation status, or program quality.

Fourth, the inventory represents a snapshot in time and may contain inaccuracies. Institutional restructuring, program closures, title changes, and website changes may not be immediately reflected. Finally, some classification and search refinement steps relied on AI-assisted methods and should therefore be interpreted as provisional and subject to further manual review.