

Re-Engineering Higher Education in the Philippines

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Based on the recommendations of a joint congressional (Senate and House of Representatives) commission appointed in 1993, Congress enacted Republic Act No. 7722 establishing the Commission on Higher Education for the Philippines. The law was signed by President Fidel V. Ramos on May 19, 1994. The effect of the law was to abolish the Bureau of Higher Education in the Department of Education, Culture and Sports and to establish a Commission on Higher Education (patterned in its nomenclature after the University Grants Commission of the United Kingdom) directly under the Office of the President, in effect creating a separate department for postsecondary education. The separate structure for higher education is based on the pattern of Indonesia and Thailand, which have a similarly separate Ministry for Higher Education. The Commission has five commissioners with a chairman; the commissioners work full time and were selected on the basis of their experience and provide a cross-section of working experience with both the public and the private universities.

A major reform transforms government-higher education relations in the Philippines

One of the unresolved issues is the status of independently chartered state colleges and universities (102 as of the last count among a total of 1,145 public and private institutions for a population of 68 million) which have their own charters by a legislative act. The most important of these state colleges and universities is the University of the Philippines System, which hitherto has been almost totally autonomous. State colleges and universities **still** receive their budgets directly by an annual appropriation from Congress, administered by the Department of the Budget under the president, although it is the expressed intention of the Commission to eventually take authority over the budget by having all budget requests and applications and appropriations channeled through the Commission. It remains to be seen whether or not the Commission will be able to do **this** from the point of view of practical politics

Not yet released, but already programmed, is the

total sum of P 500 million to be set up as an endowment for grants to be made by the Commission; this endowment may be augmented by further government grants and gifts from the public at large. The regulatory functions of the former Bureau of Higher Education have been transferred to the Commission. These functions concern approval of new courses, the granting of permits to institutions, clearances for the incorporation of private institutions, conversion of colleges into universities. The Commission works through technical panels established for each major discipline—the panels comprised of specialists from academia and industry in the case of the professions. The technical panels make recommendations on curricula, pass judgment on institutions applying for new courses, draw up criteria for programs, but function purely as staff without line functions.

In the meantime, again following the recommendations of the Education Commission of Congress, other laws have been enacted lengthening the school year from 180 to 220 days, establishing a nationwide scholarship program for science and technology, restructuring legal education, providing government assistance to students in the private sector, and amending former education laws to align them with new developments. The most significant of these laws was the establishment of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, which will oversee and develop vocational-technical education in the country, again an autonomous body under the Office of the President—thus in effect likewise abolishing another office in the former Department of Education, the Bureau of Vocational and Technical Education, and setting up the equivalent of a new department. Wags have referred to these new laws as the “dismemberment” of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports; the “dismemberment” is believed to be partially responsible for the resignation of the former department secretary.

Still waiting for enactment by the new Congress (1995–1998) is a bill restructuring the former Department of Education, Culture and Sports and in effect making this department responsible for general or basic education at the primary and secondary level. Most controversial among the bill's provisions is the language policy on the use of Filipino (the national language) and English (the postcolonial second language), a perennial problem of Philippine education.
