

Higher Education in Brazil: Current Trends

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Until recently, perhaps the most compelling characteristic of higher education in Brazil has been its stasis. With an average of only 1.6 million enrolled students since the early 1980s—less than 10 percent of the available age cohort—Brazilian institutions of higher learning have failed to keep pace with the country's growing demand for an educated work force. (According to some estimates, Brazil needs to double its postsecondary student population in the next few years if future demand is to be met.) The inability of Brazil's secondary schools to produce a sufficient number of qualified university candidates is the primary reason for this stasis. Today, however, important reforms in basic and secondary education are being implemented to ameliorate this dilemma, and the number of students passing through the educational system is increasing rapidly. In the next several years, the impact of these changes on higher education will be tremendous.

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How will higher education institutions cope with this explosion of demand? Contrary to what happened in the majority of other countries in the region, Brazilian public universities remained selective during earlier periods of expansion in the 1960s and 1970s—establishing academic careers, graduate programs, and research institutes that were not found in the private sector. Last year, Brazil spent about \$5.4 billion on its federal universities, approximately \$13,500 per student in gross figures—excluding substantial university hospital and retirement benefit expenditures, this figure is closer to \$10,000. The state of Sao Paulo alone annually spends more than \$1 billion on its three universi-

ties, each of which absorbs less than 10 percent of the state's educational demand. Although public universities are free for their students, quality is very uneven, teaching loads are light, only a small percentage of the faculty have adequate academic credentials, and there are no incentives for improving quality, getting rid of incompetent professors, and increasing enrollments. Salaries are mediocre, but fringe benefits, including early retirement with full pay, are very generous. Left to themselves, it is not likely that these institutions would change much.

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Private institutions, on the other hand, expanded very quickly in the 1960s and 1970s, filling the gaps left by the public sector. Today, about two-thirds of Brazil's higher education students are in private institutions. Very heterogeneous in type, these private-sector schools include confessional institutions like the Catholic universities; community projects sponsored by local governments, businessmen and voluntary organizations; and diploma mills. Most of the schools provide evening courses, and specialize in fields like administration, law, accounting, and economics. In many of these schools, tuition is low, research is not a focus, and staff and instructors are poorly paid. Although many of these institutions are in practice profit oriented, most were, until recently, considered nonprofit and were tax exempt. Despite flagging enrollments in the 1980s, private institutions were able to maintain their share of enrollments. Because the quality of some private schools is occasionally suspect and because established professions fear growing competition, they are subject to strict governmental regulation, and must gain federal approval for both large and small changes to curriculum and administration.

Paulo Renato de Souza—an economist, former rector of one of Brazil's leading public universities, the *Universidade de Campinas*, and Brazil's current minister of education—is trying to change this picture in significant and innovative ways. His most important and visible initiative has been the introduction of a national exam for students graduating from public and private universities. The goal of the exam is not to evaluate the students themselves, but rather the performance of their institutions. Students must take the exam to have their degrees recognized by the govern-

ment. (Because of the exam's purpose, individual grades are not revealed.) This is the first time Brazilian higher education institutions have had to bow to nationwide, systematic evaluation. Although its introduction produced intense opposition from some universities and student groups, the exam is now in its second year, and has had a remarkable impact on Brazil's educational system, particularly in the private sector, which is scrambling to get good marks, and thereby forcing the public institutions to do the same.

In addition to the implementation of a national exam, new legislation has been introduced to distinguish between proprietary, profit-oriented private institutions and non-profit ones. Under the legislation, for-profit schools would have to pay taxes as any other business, but would be allowed more freedom to run their institutions as they see fit. Nonprofit schools, on the other hand, would be held to a stricter set of educational controls within the communities they are supposed to serve. To date, there are no takers for the first alternative, and the control mechanisms for the second are still not fully implemented. The idea that education can be a legitimate business is a completely new and revolutionary one in the Brazilian context.

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The country's Ministry of Education is also trying to change public universities—an interesting and innovative project, but one that is encountering great resistance. The idea is to provide universities with full autonomy to control their own resources, set their own policies, and establish their own rules regarding personnel. In this effort they will be provided with monies each year based on past performance. Today, salaries are set by the government, academic and administrative staff are civil servants protected by full stability, and the universities have no access to the resources used for salaries—about 90 percent of the funds they receive. University administrators and faculty fear that the proposed changes could mean that the federal government is trying to do away with its universities. To soothe these fears, the Ministry of Education has proposed that 75 percent of the federal government's budget for education should be earmarked for federal higher education institutions (public and basic secondary education are the responsibility of state and local governments, although the federal government plays important supplementary roles). Ratification of this project requires a

constitutional amendment. Because it is feared by universities and goes against the general policy of various economic authorities, the project's future is uncertain.

Other initiatives and changes are also in the works. These include reforming the National Education Council, the reorganization of technical education programs, changes in student admissions procedures, the introduction of periodical reaccreditation of universities, and the reorganization of student loans for the private sector.

Ultimately, the forces reshaping Brazilian higher education will be the growing demand for university access due to the expansion of secondary education and the expanding market for better qualified professionals—a consequence of opening the country's economy to international competition and economic growth. With the help of ongoing reforms, the public sector is already organizing to respond to these new challenges and opportunities. Undoubtedly, the private sector will likewise follow suit.

Secularism and Education in the Philippines and the United States

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Culture in the United States in the second half of the 20th century will be characterized by future historians as privately religious and publicly secular. While a huge majority of individual citizens claim to be Christian, the culture has tended to become increasingly secularist. This secularism features a pronounced indifference, rather than a manifested antipathy, toward religion. Dawson has distinguished this indirect form of secularism from the directly secularist approaches found in modern history in continental Europe.¹

A prime example of secularism in late 20th-century American culture is found in public higher education. The subtitle of Marsden's recent book, *From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-belief*, signifies the pattern of development.² According to the author, Americans have become so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of secularism that we are even distorting our own history. He elaborates the gross omission of attention to the role of religion in the history of American higher education—which overlays the centrality of Christianity in state colleges and universities well into the 20th century. A similar misrepresentation is manifested in a comparison of the writings of outstanding educators in the history of West-