

quired to fulfill the terms of the “intergenerational solidarity act,” which involves financing scholarships for working-class students.

The relationship between the university system and its parts—the institutions—also needs to be reexamined.

Future Challenges

Without a doubt, a higher education policy defined at central levels of government will be required to rescue Argentina’s universities from the current situation. The government will have to face structural problems affecting teaching—such as inadequate academic salaries, which rep-

resent between 85 and 90 percent of each university’s budget. Another issue to be revisited is the contest system of faculty recruitment, a tremendous tool that today requires greater transparency and efficacy. The relationship between the university system and its parts—the institutions—also needs to be reexamined. A concern pointed out by several international specialists is that pressures toward greater institutional uniformity through rigid criteria or formulas may limit innovation by reducing the wealth of institutional diversity.

At present, the public autonomous universities are facing difficult circumstances. It is possible that the government will move to limit autonomy in an effort to ensure accountability and a manageable academic structure. We believe that the Argentine public university is a central part of the academic system and that it plays a central role in research as well as in economic development. Weakening the public university would be a mistake. ■

Impediments to Private Higher Education in Uruguay

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The Republic of Uruguay is the administrative center of MERCOSUR, the South American economic consortium consisting of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay. This small country of three million people needs to prepare itself for this task, at a time when its only public university has been paralyzed by debate over the purpose of the university. Although Uruguay only began to experiment with the privatization of higher education in 1985, the Ministry of Education is contemplating the recognition of more than 30 private universities. These institutions are quite diverse in origins and offerings and already account for more than 10 percent of postsecondary degrees awarded annually.

The first private institution to be recognized, Catholic University, grew out of Jesuit outreach. Some institutions, like ORT, developed by building on its longtime programs in technology. Still others were formed as alternatives to the public university by disgruntled faculty at the national university—albeit while keeping their tenured positions at that university. However, most of the new institutions focus on a particular field—computer science or the MBA—and seek recognition only as a way to enhance the job prospects of graduates. Such programs are also offered by universities in Spain, Chile, and Argentina.

Uruguay is one of the last countries in the Western

Hemisphere to offer private higher education despite its historic reputation of being a modern (and model) state. Three key factors have impeded the growth of private universities: the low impact of the Catholic Church on society, a history of educational excellence, and state-imposed restrictions.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has had less of an impact on Uruguay than on other Latin American countries. Absolute separation of church and state is a long-revered tradition in Uruguay. Only in modern times has the Catholic Church paid attention to this small nation; previously, it was considered an annex of the Argentine church. For example, the first archbishop was not named until as late as 1853. The first (and only) Catholic university was opened in 1985, whereas many Latin American countries had Catholic “universities” soon after the time of the conquistadors. Some see the opening of Catholic University, at the time of the dictatorship (1973–1985), as a response to the pressure of special interest groups as well as the revenge of the military on the “liberal” public university. Though it sees itself as the “mother” of the national university, only recently has the church reclaimed tertiary education.

Educational Quality

A second impediment to privatization is that there simply has been no need for other universities in the past, due to the small population size and the general satisfaction with the national university. However, public opinion on the quality of the public school system and the national university has changed dramatically. Now, despite the historic monopoly of the public university, a growing number of students and parents are “voting with their feet” and pur-

suing options other than the national university. The fact that there are more private than public secondary schools in Montevideo signals a change in postsecondary education as well since students historically have chosen to attend public rather than private secondary schools to facilitate their entry into the national university. Correspondingly, the number of students in private higher education is growing. The number of students graduating from just two private universities (ORT and Catholic University) in 1996 was 216, while 2,724 graduated from the public university.

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Government Regulation

A third factor limiting privatization is the barriers created by government. The national university has jealously guarded its position within higher education—even in relation to other state-run educational institutions. For example, the national normal school, which is responsible for primary and secondary school teacher preparation, is not a part of the university system and has long been viewed as the competition by the university's College of Education. Not surprisingly, the national university has also opposed the recognition of private universities and believes that if they must exist, they should be regulated by an autonomous body—namely, by the national university itself.

At the present time, the government regulates private tertiary education by means of a special eight-person com-

mittee. However, the national university still exerts an inordinate degree of control: only two seats go to private universities, whereas three go to the national university outright and another three to government administrators who are alumni and former employees of the state university. The national university openly admits that it promoted the law regulating privates and that its ongoing involvement in the process is “without bias.” The Ministry of Education, which is usually headed by a former rector of the national university, has put several conditions on the recognition of private universities that discourage the presence of foreign faculty and the existence of specialized institutions. In 1995, on the 10th anniversary of the founding of Catholic University, an additional 20 institutions had already been approved by the Ministry of Education, while up to 15 more were seeking approval. Nevertheless, in the latest (1997) Ministry of Education report only two private institutions are listed under postsecondary education.

Conclusion

Of the three factors shaping private higher education in Uruguay, only the third, government barriers, has remained unchanged. The Catholic Church has reasserted its traditional influence in education. Private higher education enrollments continue to increase as dissatisfaction with public schooling grows. The Uruguayan education system has changed, and it is time for the government to reflect this new reality. The government must take steps to depoliticize the recognition process, reducing the role of the national university. As former President Lacalle noted, the government must get out of the business of private tertiary education; the tutelage of the state should end. Private institutions must have sufficient autonomy from external controls to respond to local needs. They must not be burdened by the bureaucracy that has handicapped the public university. ■

Challenges for Public Higher Education in Uruguay

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Uruguay is a small South American country with a population of 3.2 million. From the end of the 19th century it was transformed by a process of massive immigration, mainly from Europe. Since the early 20th century, education has been a tool for social progress, as reflected in the early extension of free public basic education. While much has changed, some things survive—the welfare state, for instance, which the people have not al-

lowed to disappear completely. Uruguay is now the least unequal country in Latin America in terms of income distribution. Education continues to be a high priority for the Uruguayan people, and the country is second only to Argentina, in Latin America, in terms of the proportion of the age group entering university.

Until 1985, Uruguay had only one university—a public one: the Universidad de la República (UR). Nowadays there are a number of private universities, but the bulk of Uruguayan higher education continues to be represented by the UR. It is a big university in Latin American terms, with 60,000 students. The vast majority of them study in the capital, Montevideo, which has a high concentration of higher education institutions.

The distinctive characteristics of the UR are that it is totally free of charge and students may choose what to study, since there are no limitations on admissions or en-