

by much of society. Of course, some failings are the result of or are exacerbated by forces outside higher education's control, while others result from inefficiencies within institutions and systems.

Functional Differentiation

To move beyond a general listing of achievements and problems, the analysis must turn more specifically to real institutions and functions. To date, the university myth has been such that assessments focus too much on universities and on their purported aims rather than on their real functions. In reality, academic leadership as it is conventionally associated with the term university remains poorly developed in Latin America. Most of what higher education does, even most of what universities do, does not involve academic leadership. Much of the best academic work being done in Latin America (meaningful publications, scholarly dialogue and evaluation, and rigorous graduate education) is now performed outside universities, with the exception of a few places.

Latin American higher education either greatly distorts its actual performance in order to claim compliance with a university ideal or else it is judged a failure. Unfortunately, too many one-size-fits-all public policies treat different institutions, units, and individuals the same. Public policy often glorifies and rewards places that purportedly (but rarely, in fact), display academic leadership. This public recognition undermines other university functions as well as other institutions that truly are academic leaders yet lack the official title of "university." Universities are often lavished with rights and resources while other institutions are blocked from sources of funding or the granting of graduate degrees. This situation creates incen-

tives for the worst sort of mimicry. Rather than pretending that all higher education institutions do or should pursue the same ends, scholars and policymakers need to deal more with higher education's true functions.

One approach is to regard four of the functions listed above as essential to modern higher education and its role in national development. It is, therefore, important to minimize invidious comparisons among the functions. This means rejecting the common tendency to regard academic leadership as the *best* or *highest* and either technological or general education as the *worst* or *lowest*. Instead, the main policy rationale for analyzing specific functions is to help match performance with appropriate mechanisms, rules, and incentives. Policies or programs that suit one function may be pointless or even detrimental for others. Although figuring out what will work best is not easy, it is worth doing to move higher education policy forward from a one-size-fits-all policy.

For each of the four functions—academic leadership, professional development, technological training and development, and general higher education—a parallel set of questions requires consideration. What is the proper balance between achievements and problems, and what are the key variables that determine that balance? Which public policy is most effective for addressing present problems and for helping institutions to carry out their mix of functions? Consideration of such crucial issues as subsidization, incentives, and quality control shows that public policies appropriate for one function are quite often inappropriate for others. Thus, instead of trying to design national policy and legislation for a mythical university that will fulfill the singular function of academic leadership, macro and micro policy needs to become much more realistic and to discriminate depending on the particular function. ■

Higher Education and the New Mexican Government

Manuel Gil Antón

Manuel Gil Antón is professor at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Azcapotzalco, Departamento de Sociología, Área de Sociología de las Universidades
E-mail: <maga@correo.azc.uam.mx>

On July 2, 2000, after 70 years without change in the political composition of the federal government, Vicente Fox, the candidate for Partido acción nacional (PAN—National Action Party) and the Alianza por el cambio (Alliance for Change) was elected president of Mexico for a six-year term. This change has produced a feeling of hope and considerable concern about the future of the country. How will higher education change as a result of the politi-

cal changes? Will this be the beginning of a new era of public policies that are radically different from those of the PRI, the party that governed Mexico for the past 70 years. Will there be continuity in the trends observed in the 1990s?

The 1990s

The past decade saw a huge growth in Mexican higher education. The national enrollment went from 1,200,000 to nearly 2,000,000—a growth of 66 percent. At the beginning of the decade, 14 percent of the college age cohort in Mexico was enrolled in some kind of higher education. By the year 2000, this had increased to 20 percent. Seventy thousand new academic positions were needed, and the number of institutions of higher education went from 800 to 1,250. The main catalyst for growth in the previous decades had been the public sector. In these 10 years, the expansion occurred with a large push from the private sector: 47 percent of all new places in higher education were generated by private institutions, and 60

percent of new academic positions were in the private sector. Formerly concentrated in the public sector, nearly 30 percent of the national enrollment in higher education in Mexico today is within the private sector.

Meanwhile, the process of decentralizing in higher education from the capital to the states has continued. There is a growing tendency for enrollments to be concentrated in a few fields (law, accounting, and business administration have more than a third of the students), and participation by women has reached 50 percent nationwide. Multiple evaluation mechanisms have been established in public institutions and strong efforts made to increase the quality of work conditions for full-time academics.

Looking Ahead Toward 2006

Experts calculate that over the next six years national enrollments will grow by 1,000,000 students, the result of an increment in the 18-to-24-year age cohort and the improvement in the quality of secondary education. In order to serve the student numbers, we will need 55,000 new professors. Where will these new students find places to study? Will it be mostly the public sector that takes them in and, if so, will it be in the traditional modalities—public four-year universities—or in short two-year courses in new institutions such as technological universities?

The Transition

The public, keen on knowing the programs of the new government and the people who will be in charge, must wait five months until the president assumes his post (the first day of December). Fox formed a transition team for science and technology and another one for education. It is notable that this last one is coordinated by the dean of the Instituto tecnológico y de estudios superiores de Monterrey (ITESM—Technological and Higher Studies Institute of Monterrey), one of the most prestigious private institutions in Mexico. The members of the team have experience in different areas. One of the members, for example, is the general secretary of the Asociación Nacional de universidades e instituciones de educación superior (ANUIES—National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education), an organization that includes and represents the deans of all public institutions.

People in the traditional higher education elite have strongly criticized the views of the people close to Fox. This opposition has been well covered by the press in the last few weeks. Is this an expression of their defense of the values of public higher education or is it only a defense of their long-held positions of power? It is very likely that both motivations are at work.

Central Issues

Though the specific proposals of the transition team on higher education have not been made public, two issues seem priorities on the next government's agenda: first, the organization of a National Scholarships and Educational Credit Program, to aid students and decrease dropouts for eco-

nomics reasons; and, second, the growing use of virtual strategies in order to widen access to higher education.

These two policies have generated criticism from the public sector: Dr. de la Fuente, dean of the UNAM said: "the university must not depend on the market . . . and we, the UNAM, are not a *virtual* university." On the other hand, the left, which believes in the right to free higher education—now the case only at the UNAM, since all other public institutions charge fees, and most of these fees are more than merely symbolic—sees great risks in the idea of scholarships or systems of educational credit.

As of November 2000, in the absence of any official announcements from Fox, intellectuals and public opinion are still trying to speculate on the future of higher education and the risks and problems that may ensue.

Unavoidable Realities

Regardless of what Fox and his team may have in mind on the subject of education, it is a fact that the 2001 budget will be austere, as was this year's. Fox has correctly stated that without a tax reform that increases public funds it will not be possible to implement the central programs of his plan. Such a tax reform will be very difficult to achieve in a parliament where Fox lacks a majority.

Demands on higher education will grow at great speed, and Fox's policies will be strongly criticized by the followers of the old regime. It remains to be seen whether Fox and his ministers will be granted sufficient time to set up their plans for scholarships and wider access. ■

Higher Education Subsidies in Argentina

Martin Gonzalez Rozada and Alicia Menendez

Martin Gonzalez Rozada is associate researcher at CEDES, Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: <mgr@cedes.org>. Alicia Menendez is Lecturer in economics and public affairs at Princeton University. E-mail: <menendez@princeton.edu>. Authors' note: This article summarizes "Public Education in Argentina: Subsidizing the Rich?" Serie de Documentos de Economia No. 15, Universidad de Palermo - CEDES, June 2000.

The Argentine central government heavily subsidizes higher education by financing tuition-free public universities serving all students, regardless of their economic and academic background. Enrollment is open to all individuals with a high school degree. In 1998, almost 83 percent of more than one million undergraduates in the greater Buenos Aires area were attending public universities. During the last decade, this figure has been increasing at an average annual rate of 3.6 percent. A direct consequence of