

their first political experience. These students considered themselves a generation without a future and in many ways as saviors of the Mexican left. The CGH pretended to be democratic, but was in practice just the opposite. The council created a very bureaucratic structure with intolerant and violent tendencies, particularly at the end of the conflict when support for the strike had dwindled. Moreover, the movement opposed the traditional idea of academia itself. The enemy was defined as anyone who disagreed with the CGH.

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The fact that, at that time, Mexico was living through one of the most important presidential elections in its history (for the first time in 75 years, the ruling party lost) complicated the panorama of the UNAM conflict and increased the polarization of the different groups, inside and outside the university, and the relationships between UNAM and the government. In particular, it created tensions between the strikers and the Mexico City government, which was aligned with the leftist political party and whose presidential candidate was weakened by the strike. There were also ongoing charges about the involvement of political parties and guerrillas in the movement with the intent of creating turmoil during the national elections.

In the view of some analysts, the protest by the CGH was one of the first student movements in the struggle against economic globalization and its impact on education, at least in the Latin American region. The students argued that some of the policies proposed by UNAM authorities came from recommendations dictated by international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to Third World countries. It seems that the antiglobalization movement is revitalizing student activism at least in some Latin American countries. Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, and Mexico are examples of that phenomenon.

UNAM is currently facing one of the most problematic moments in its history. After the strike ended, the university lost considerable prestige in public opinion. The institution became more politicized than ever. Some students dropped out, and others have transferred to different higher education institutions. The university community is absolutely divided along the lines that the various factions took during the conflict. The rector insists that the university will have its reform congress, but the community is not showing any enthusiasm for the idea. This new

reform process, starting with setting up the commission that will organize the congress, is struggling in a climate of apathy, distrust, and fatigue with respect to university politics. The congress is following in the footsteps of an earlier UNAM congress organized in 1990 for the purpose of discussing and working on issues such as governance, financing, and academic transformation. That congress, which was the outgrowth of another important student movement at the institution, also had very little lasting impact on the institution.

While the student movement did provide an impetus toward university reform, it is not clear if this process will move in the direction set by the student activists, or in the opposite one. Currently, the CGH seems to have lost the ability to influence events, mainly because the council is now made up of a number of small groups that seek to boycott every reform proposal put forward by the authorities. One of the main challenges for UNAM authorities will be to mobilize the community's interest in UNAM's reform. Another very important task will be to resolve some of the major conflicts at UNAM, given that it is the most important public university in the country. Like other public higher education institutions worldwide, UNAM has an obligation to respond to the needs of a changing society and the challenges of the global context.

Faculdade Pitagoras: A New Phoenix Is Born

Claudio de Moura Castro

Claudio de Moura Castro is President of the Advisory Board of Faculdade Pitagoras. Address: Rua Santa Maria de Itabita 381 apt 1100. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil, 3014061 E-mail: <claudiomc@attglobal.net>.

Close to three-fourths of Brazilian higher education is private. This private sector is composed of sedimentary layers with different cultures and backgrounds. The oldest layers comprise mostly religious institutions and tend to be conservative. Newer ones include a share of for-profit institutions run by businessmen who see the money in education and little else. But there is a third and newer category that is also profit-driven but more professional in management and based on the belief that investing in quality pays better than offering shoddy education.

Some of the latter institutions started as cramming courses for elite universities. Cramming courses work in a very competitive market, have clear and public performance indicators (how many students pass the university entrance exams), and therefore have to offer better teaching and pricing than their competitors. The most successful courses grew and eventually their creators became competent in the art of running multicampus programs. The best of them

migrated to K–12 education and, sooner or later, to higher education.

The 35-year-old Pitagoras School is counted among the most successful of this breed, both as a cramming course and as K–12 school—enrolling 23,000 students. Twenty years ago it began operating overseas and presently has five schools in Japan, catering to Japanese Brazilians who work there. It also operates a franchise-styled operation, with 260 associated schools. But for a number of reasons, Pitagoras delayed its transition to higher education.

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Three years ago, Pitagoras asked the author of this article to prepare a project to help usher it into higher education. After the broad outlines of the project were ready, it was discovered that the executives of Apollo Group—the parent corporation of the University of Phoenix—were interested in moving to Brazil as part of a policy to go international through its new partner company, Apollo International.

As it turns out, both Pitagoras and Apollo have much in common: a professional management, a willingness to innovate, effective practices of quality control, and a familiarity with operating multicampus programs. In addition, the organizational cultures are similar. As a result of these affinities, Faculdade Pitagoras was created, a joint venture of the Pitagoras Group and Apollo International, each holding half of the equity. The staff is all Brazilian, the capital mixed, and the *faculdade* can freely borrow techniques, know-how, and practices from both parent institutions. But the model is quite different from that of the University of Phoenix.

Phoenix caters to midcareer adults who typically have an associate degree and want to continue their education. They find that the large public institutions they could afford do not match their requirements, being far too theoretical, not relevant for job needs, and too bureaucratic and impersonal. The most innovative features of Phoenix are the reduction in lecture and contact time, small classes, group work, practitioners as teachers, practical courses, and targeting state-of-the-art business practices. Students take one (five-to-six week) course at a time.

Pitagoras targets a higher-status, much younger clientele (even though many of the students are already employed, which is typical in Brazil). While, it cannot yet compete with the costly and tuition-free public universities that attract the top candidates, Pitagoras does compete

for the next best crop of students. Therefore, it enters a fiercely competitive market, both in terms of quality and tuition levels. Yet, it follows the tradition of both parent institutions in not aiming to be a small boutique but rather a scalable model, designed for growth. The plans for the next several years include 50 campuses and possibly operations in other Latin American countries. It offers, at present, four-year business degrees, and classes already started last August.

The concept of the program runs against the grain of Brazilian educational traditions. In terms of content, Pitagoras parts company with the French model of professionally oriented programs, universally adopted in Brazil. In fact, it borrows heavily from the American tradition of liberal arts, with a broad range of courses in the first two years, including physical sciences and liberal arts (reading the classics is taken seriously). The program also puts much emphasis on the development of basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, foreign languages, computer literacy, and applied math). Thus, in contrast to the Latin American tradition, professional training is less intense and comes later, only in the final two years. This is also the first course in which the Ministry of Education permitted students to postpone the choice of a “major” for two years.

However, Pitagoras parts company with American liberal arts schools in many respects. The first two years offer no elective courses to the students—at least for the time being. This saves costs and allows a very ambitious scheme to integrate different subjects in a matrix formula. For instance, mathematics uses economics examples and students use spreadsheets for all practical work. English and Spanish are woven into the other courses, which must contain readings in those languages.

More importantly, American liberal arts schools depend heavily on the high level of initiative and competence of individual teachers—a reasonable practice for a country that does not have a shortage of Ph.Ds. In Brazil, being in Belo Horizonte and Curitiba—the two cities where it has started operations—Pitagoras has had no problem finding high-caliber teachers. However, once the program goes to smaller and less-advanced areas, the supply shrinks dramatically. To deal with this uneven quality of teachers, it borrows again from both parent institutions in adopting what is sometimes called structured or highly scripted learning. In practical terms, there is a detailed description of learning sequences, reminiscent of what is found in the materials of the Open University. There are touches of mastery learning with fully spelled out procedures, content, and outcomes, session by session. There is central planning of each course and eminent Brazilian scholars are invited to design the broad outlines of the courses and choose the readings. The complex details of planning are filled in subsequently by staff trained in such techniques.

In addition to attending classes, students are frequently expected to log-on to a “virtual classroom,” styled after web-

based courses—both for its intrinsic value and to force students to use computers every day.

The classroom design borrows from Phoenix, but had to be adapted to Brazilian legislation, which requires 20 hours a week of contact with teachers. Four courses are taken simultaneously. During the week there is a single lecture per course, offered in classes with 100 students. This is followed by discussion sessions with 25 students. The class is then broken down into groups of five, which receive practical tasks and projects to work on. Evening students use class time to read the materials, since many do not have additional free time. Fridays are spent on evaluation and assessment of the week's work.

Teachers are selected for their willingness to accept the new model and receive two weeks of training in content and methods. Although the centrally planned syllabus and detailed delivery strategies might have scared teachers away, this has not happened. They like not having to spend time planning classes and delivering the same lecture over and over. Instead, they spend ample time in discussions with students and then develop—based on suggestions and guidelines—interesting applications, examples, and projects for the groups to work on (the best ideas are beginning to be collected and put on the teachers' homepage).

The first crop of students is in. Their reactions to the innovative classroom have been very positive. As a new institution, the image of Pitagoras has served as the single most important factor in attracting good students in Belo Horizonte.

There are challenges ahead. Will good students enroll in localities where Pitagoras is not known? How will Pitagoras fare in such a competitive market (40 percent of applications to new higher education programs are in business administration—indicative of the popularity of that field). Will students accept having to read the "great books" and take courses on physics in their first two years, while students at other schools are struggling with cash flows and breakeven points? So far, students understand the rationale for general education, but if the academic level of the clientele falls, this may not be the case. The delivery methods are designed to compensate for teachers who are less than ideal. But the acid test has not been passed, given the high quality of present teachers.

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Faculdades Pitagoras chose a model that requires very heavy upfront investments in courseware. To break even, it needs to go to scale, replicating several times the relatively small individual campuses. Only time will tell whether the model can withstand replication in environments that are very different from Belo Horizonte. ■

Argentine Higher Education in Transition

Marcela Mollis

Marcela Mollis is professor of the history of education and comparative education and director of the research program in comparative higher education at the Research Institute of Education, University of Buenos Aires. Address: Zapiola 3271, Buenos Aires 1429, Argentina. E-mail: <marcela@rcc.com.ar>.

A transition is now taking place within higher education in Argentina. As part of that process, the National Commission for the Improvement of Higher Education has been given the task of diagnosing the condition of the system and proposing reforms. The final report will be submitted to the Senate to assist it in the potential revisions of the 1995 higher education law. From my point of view as a commission member, the present debate over higher education and its reform seems marked by a very shortsighted perspective and driven by an overwhelming notion of "financial and economic crisis." When the commission's work is concluded, Argentina's historical tradition of public higher education is expected to undergo significant changes.

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Social Institution or Industry?

Higher education in Argentina is moving away from the idea of the university as a social institution toward the idea of higher education as an "industry." Those who support the idea of higher education as a social institution believe that public universities must preserve a broader range of social functions—among them, the cultivation of citizenship, the preservation of the country's cultural heritage(s), and the formation of individual character and critical habits of mind. This perspective seems to have been inspired by the modernizing and democratic thinking of the leaders of Argentine public universities at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1916, one of the most influential rectors of the University of Buenos Aires, Eufemio Uballes, made a declaration in favor of state funding of the university while protecting the civil rights of poor Argentine citizens with respect to mandatory free public schooling. He proclaimed the need for state financial investment at the top of the system as much as at the bottom. Uballes considered that reading and writing were basic skills useful for the working class. However, he believed that the development of a na-