

commission came up with a report proposing the creation of an incredibly complex system of institutional evaluations and self-evaluations. While Provão did not disappear, it did become engulfed by the baroque complexity of the system. In addition, the report openly challenged the previous policy of ranking institutions, although the arguments seem technically weak in the opinion of the author of this article.

Provão was slated to almost disappear and be replaced by procedures requiring several committees and armies of experts to visit the programs. Whereas Provão involved the evaluation of results, the new policy is a return to the evaluation of the process, known to be highly vulnerable to politics, corruption, and influence. While there is nothing wrong in principle with institutional evaluation, the problem is that when the stakes are high, preventing fraud becomes a very complex and expensive process.

The middle-of-the-road public reacted negatively to the report. But more importantly, the new minister, Cristovam Buarque, was not happy with the direction taken by the report. He openly declared to the press that he was in favor of ranking institutions and was focused on the need to have additional ways of evaluating higher education.

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After a number of internal discussions, a new proposal was produced: keeping Provão but basing its results on samples, rather than on all students. The test would be administered every third year, instead of yearly. The new system would keep all the heavy institutional evaluation apparatus but allowed the Provão results to be presented separately. It also required that 30 percent of the questions be less narrowly focused on the specific programs—a definitely welcome change.

Provão defenders—this author included—were not happy with the new guidelines even though they are not as disastrous as those produced by the initial committee. The new system introduces elements making fraud and manipulation much easier, while Provão was practically immune to any such problems.

For better or worse, much has been left unstated and undecided in the new guidelines. The possibility remains that Provão will survive intact and, hopefully, prove to be effective. But it may be watered down to the point where it loses its most useful features. Unfortunately, the minister has not taken a clear stand one way or the other. ■

The Academic Profession in Brazil

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Brazilian society underwent drastic changes in the last decade of the 20th century. The opening up of the economy, a successful privatization program, and currency reform that put inflation under control for the first time in 30 years created a number of challenges for the Brazilian higher education system. In response, Brazilian authorities have introduced new evaluation instruments to upgrade the quality of undergraduate education and improve the academic profile of higher education institutions. The impact of these changes on the Brazilian higher education system as a whole was revealed in the data collected by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in a 1992 survey, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as part of the International Academic Profession Project. Ten years later, a second survey on the Brazilian academic profession, funded by the Ford Foundation, was conducted by the University of São Paulo's higher education research unit. This second survey examined the impact the changes had on the working conditions of the academic profession in Brazil.

To ensure comparability, the team responsible for the second survey followed the sampling guidelines produced by the Carnegie Foundation 10 years previously. Also the questionnaire used in the second survey retained some of the questions from the first survey, while adding new questions aimed at deepening the understanding of the interaction between professionals and their institutional environment and academics' attitudes toward some relevant issues in Brazil's higher education policy.

The two surveys highlight important changes and continuities in the Brazilian academic profession. The profession's demographic profile has changed little. The proportion of women in the Brazilian academic profession, already comparatively high in 1992, grew even more—increasing from 4 out of every 10 academics to 6 out of every 10 Brazilian academics. The academic profession remains a middle-aged profession. The average age of professors in Brazil was 43 years in 1992 and 45 years in 2003. Attaining an academic position represents an important upward mobility for a significant proportion of Brazilian academics. In fact, 30 percent of the academics interviewed in 1992 had fathers with only four

years of primary education or less. In 2003 this figure changed only slightly, to 28 percent of the sample.

While the demographic profile of the Brazilian academic profession has experienced no significant changes, the same cannot be said of academic indicators. Here all data show important improvements. In 1992, 21 percent of the respondents reported the bachelor's degree as their higher academic degree. In 2003, this figure dropped to only 4.6 percent. At the other extreme, the figures for doctorate holders increased from 22 to 39 percent. The proportion of academics with full-time positions also increased from 72 to 82 percent in the public sector and, even more remarkably, from 10 to 22 percent in the private sector.

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As these figures illustrate, an important trend in the Brazilian higher education system in the last decade has been the improvement of the private sector's academic profile. Until the early 1990s, holding a graduate degree was of little value for professionals seeking employment in the huge Brazilian private sector, which now accounts for more than two-thirds of the country's undergraduate enrollments. At that time, private institutions operated mostly as postsecondary schools, using an institutional framework similar to the one usually found at the secondary level. For institutions in this sector, hiring professionals with graduate degrees was previously an unaffordable luxury and of little use.

In the latter half of the 1990s, this picture started to change. All institutions were required to submit to mandatory federal evaluations that put great emphasis on faculty academic profiles and involvement with graduate education. Prized indicators included having professionals with at least a master's degree and expanding the proportion of academics with full-time contracts. The 1995 Brazilian Education Act, which furthered this trend in the private sector, established that for an institution to be accredited as a university at least one-third of its faculty should have master's or doctoral degrees and the same proportion of its faculty should have full-time contracts. In Brazil, accreditation as a university is not only a matter of prestige but also bestows a significant degree of autonomy.

In the new environment, private institutions try to attract academics with graduate degrees by offering better terms of contract, which include higher salaries, more stable contracts, modest support for research, and so on. These trends are reflected in the two surveys: in 1992, 38

percent of professors employed in the private sector reported having only bachelor's degrees. This figure dropped to 7 percent in 2003. On the other hand, the proportion of master's degree holders employed by this sector jumped from 20 to 41 percent, and the figures for doctorate holders also increased from 8 to 25 percent. The change reveals a deeper transformation in Brazilian higher education that is related to a growing permeability between sectors. Graduate education is still an endeavor undertaken mostly by a small number of selected universities in the public sector. Since it benefits from the support of specific funding and well-designed procedures for accreditation and evaluation, the expansion of graduate education is under strict control by both the Brazilian academic community and the federal government. So, a large number of faculty hired in the private sector graduated from public universities, where they enjoyed good academic conditions. Thus, they are able to bring new sources of academic competence to the private sector. Whether or not private institutions are in a position to take advantage of this new resource is a key research question. The current data only partially address this question since it only focuses on the perspectives of professors. Fresh research is needed to verify the institutions' perspectives and policies. ■

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The Center also houses the International Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project, a six-year Ford Foundation-financed project that is compiling a worldwide database on the shift of higher education costs from governments and taxpayers to parents and students, as well as the many government and nongovernmental policies designed to maintain higher education accessibility in the face of this shift. Please contact: Center for Comparative and Global Studies in Education (<http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/DC/CCGSE/index.html>) and International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project (<http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance>).