

- *Internationalization.* Research universities are by their nature international institutions, linking with other similar universities in other countries and participating in the international scientific community. India has the advantage of its use of English, the world's language of science, and its possession of a large group of academics who have received training at the best universities abroad. India must take steps to broaden its international reach.

- *The public good.* Research universities serve the interests of society, and they require public support. They should not be forced to engage exclusively in applied research and to pay for themselves by charging high tuition and producing income from all research activities. An effective mix of basic and applied research is needed. Scholarship funds for needy but able students are also required to supplement tuition fees.

- *The academic profession.* Top-quality professors are central to the success of a research university. Professors must be adequately paid so that they can devote their full-time attention to academe, and so that the "best and brightest" can be attracted to the profession. There must be a stable, and competitive, academic career path that rewards merit and productivity—and punishes poor academic work by ejecting those unable to adhere to the highest standards.

- *Research and teaching.* Research universities emphasize and reward top-quality research, but they are also teaching institutions. Both research and teaching are necessary and contribute to the institution's goals.

- *Autonomy and accountability.* Research universities require a significant degree of autonomy—more than they have traditionally had in India's highly bureaucratic environment. At the same time, accountability is needed to ensure effective performance.

The tiny quality sector in Indian higher education is now being severely undermined.

The Indian Institutes of Technology are a uniquely Indian contribution to higher education. While they are not quintessential research universities, they play a key role in India's elite higher education sector. They must be supported and strengthened as institutions that support India's high-tech development.

CONCLUSION

India is truly at a turning point. If the nation is to fulfill its economic and technological potential in the 21st century, it must have an elite and internationally competitive higher education sector at the top of a large and differentiated higher education system, with a mixture of public and private support. The elite sector requires support and recognition. It cannot afford being used as a tool for partisan political policies. World-class research-oriented universities are the spearhead of India's international competitiveness. ■

Political Crisis at the University of Buenos Aires

ANA M. GARCÍA DE FANELLI

Ana García de Fanelli is director and senior researcher in the Higher Education Department at CEDES (the Center of Study of the State and Society), Buenos Aires, Argentina, and member of CONICET (the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research). Address: Sánchez de Bustamante 27, Buenos Aires (CP 1173) Argentina. E-mail: anafan@cedes.org.

The University of Buenos Aires (UBA), Argentina's largest and most prestigious public university, has failed to gather an assembly of 236 elected professors, alumni, and students to elect a new president for the next four years. The left-wing-dominated student union has been blocking the university assembly, in opposition to the candidate most likely to win—Atilio Alterini, the dean of the Faculty of Law. They argue that he had held a position in the Buenos Aires city government during the last military dictatorship. During the fourth attempt to initiate the assembly, a violent fight ensued between members of the university staff unions and the students who had taken over the building. After this serious event, Alterini dropped his bid in order to unlock the political crisis. Nonetheless, the student union continued to block other attempts to hold the assembly by making new demands for greater democracy in the university. Student union activists are calling for some extreme measures, such as more student participation in decision making via a direct election of the president on a "one man, one vote" basis.

Other layers of the conflict involve ideological opposition and vested interests among the 13 UBA deans and academic authorities of the faculties, or *facultades*: most of the professional ones (politically conservative) support the dean of the Faculty of Law's candidacy, and the scientific faculties (politically left-wing) seek the candidacy of the prestigious molecular biologist, Alberto R. Kornblihtt. This confrontation reflects the struggle between two visions of the university—the scientific and the professional—that have paved UBA's trajectory over the last century since its foundation in 1821.

These episodes, which have been front-page news over several weeks since the beginning of April 2006, were mere symptoms of something more profound and more basic: the failures in the governance of a mega university.

PROFESSIONAL VS. SCIENTIFIC MISSIONS

UBA has absorbed the rapid growth of student demand since the restoration of democracy in 1983 through a policy of open admissions and cost-free education. Public resources devoted to sustain this expansion have not been able to maintain the expenditure per student. Under these financial constraints, UBA hired part-time and *ad honorem* (unpaid) faculty, especial-

ly in the lower-level ranks (assistantships). At the same time, in response to student demand, UBA has increased the openings in the traditional professional fields such as law, accountancy, medicine, architecture, and psychology. Most of the 300,000 students at UBA are now concentrated in these professional fields in faculties with scarce research activities. These professional faculties have average enrollments equivalent to those of large universities in other countries. For example, the Faculty of Economics and Business Studies has 45,000 students. In contrast, the Faculty of Exact and Natural Science has only 6,000 students, and the research activities are highly developed. Moreover, unlike the professional faculties, the majority

According to the UBA statute, the president is elected by the university assembly, which is composed of the deans and academic bodies of the 13 faculties and the university council.

of the academic staff at the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences work full-time, and there are no *ad honorem* faculty. But, as the expansion of UBA enrollments has taken place mainly in the professional fields, the actual structure of the university is clearly biased toward the professional-oriented model. As a consequence, given UBA's huge size and complexity, it is quite difficult to reach a consensus on the university's institutional mission. The present political conflict at UBA clearly reveals a cleavage between the professional faculties (which back the candidacy of the dean of the Faculty of Law) and the academic-research-oriented ones (which support the candidacy of the molecular biology researcher in the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences).

PARTISANSHIP AND CORPORATE INTERESTS

According to the UBA statute, the president is elected by the university assembly, which is composed of the deans and academic bodies of the 13 faculties and the university council. In the tradition of the 1918 Cordoba Reform, the university council and the faculty bodies are tripartite bodies formed by representatives of professors, students, and alumni. One characteristic of these representatives, as well as those from student unions, has been their ties with major political parties. Consequently, there has been an element of partisanship concerning the way votes from the constituencies have been cast. Likewise, the majority of the student population and the faculty are not motivated to become involved in university elections and academic politics. Moreover, at least 60 percent of students work and study at the same time and 85 percent of faculty teach part time. They simply attend their classes and then return to their activities outside the university. The vacuum created by the faculty members' and students' lack of commitment to university governance has been filled by those actors who are more interested in their personal or political careers

than in the well-being of the academic community.

THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION ISSUE

Student leaders also protest the actual composition of the assembly, questioning the election mechanisms, and faculty representation on academic councils. The main issue revolves around the point that only "regular" faculty can participate in institutional governance. This means that they can be elected to political posts—such as president, vice-president, or dean—or become members of the academic bodies. They can also vote in the elections to these posts. As the 1966 UBA statute establishes, "regular" faculty are appointed on the basis of periodic open competitions. Nonetheless, at UBA, only half the professors hold regular posts (i.e., a stable tenure-like status). Given the complex set of factors, a large proportion of the faculty are currently employed as "interims," without having been appointed through open competitions and without the periodic reviews of their performance. Student leaders are now demanding that these interim professors and assistants should also be able to participate in the university governance. This could only worsen the partisanship of UBA's political life. Faculty could be hired or fired depending on their political sympathies with different political parties or corporate groups. The only possibility to deepen democracy at UBA is to increase the proportion of faculty hired under open competitive procedures.

Ultimately at stake in the present conflict are three key issues: first, whether UBA, given its huge size, should be a federation of autonomous institutions or a university with a clear-cut common institutional mission; second, whether the partisanship of university politics can be replaced by greater involvement and representation of university actors in academic decision making; and, finally, whether university authorities have the ability to address the issues posed by the failures in open competition so that faculty can be elected under more transparent procedures that guarantee both academic freedom and quality in performance. ■

Building a Regional Academic Credit System in Latin America

JANE KNIGHT

Jane Knight is adjunct professor in the Comparative, International and Development Education Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto; and adviser to the 6x4 UELAC Project—A Dialogue Among Universities. E-mail: janeknight@sympatico.ca.