

CONCLUSION

In reality, while some private deemed universities are innovative and entrepreneurial, meeting market demands, they are also susceptible to cutting corners on infrastructure or staffing and indulging in unfair practices in matters of fees and admissions—to increase profits. Overall, the policy on private deemed universities is so ambiguously spelled out that less-reputable ventures have come to dominate.

Though small in numbers, private deemed universities would increasingly shape the future of private higher education in India. Even the foreign institutions would be given deemed university status under the proposed Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operation, Maintenance of Quality and Prevention of Commercialization) Bill currently under consideration.

This article is based on the author's Observatory on Borderless Higher Education report, "Private Higher Education in India: Status and Prospects," released in July 2007 (available online at <http://www.obhe.ac.uk/products/reports/pdf/2007-07-01.pdf>). ■

Higher Education Crossing Borders in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Foreign education activity has become a relatively recent but rapidly growing phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean. The past few decades have seen a surge in external tertiary providers within a region once largely overlooked as a site for transnational higher education.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

There is a growing flurry of foreign education activity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Branch campuses have been set up by European and US-based institutions, such as the Universities of Bologna (Italy) and Heidelberg (Germany) and Endicott College (United States), just to name a few. The growing diversification of actors suggests that not only Spanish- and

Portuguese-speaking providers see a potential for operating in the region. While still a modest trend, the market for foreign online and distance learning is attracting interest, particularly in regions such as the Anglophone Caribbean. The number of for-profit providers has also been on the rise, with the US giants Sylvan/Laureate and the Apollo Group as the forerun-

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ners of expansion. The number of students in the region in transnational programs, while currently modest, is expected to undergo expansion.

However, transnational higher education continues to encounter a mixed reputation in the region, with widespread concerns over the quality and relevance of provision. Cases of low-quality or "fly-by night" operators has prompted some countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia to impose relatively strict requirements on foreign institutions. Language constitutes an obvious barrier. Domestic institutions do not seem to be offering many courses taught in English, and inadequate language skills remain a barrier for a major proportion of Latin American students seeking to study in English, at home or abroad.

There is a growing trend toward the "Latin Americanization" rather than "transnationalization" of higher education. A number of the regional countries (e.g., Mexico and Chile) have begun to export transnational programs, in response to an attempt to internationalize the "Latin American way." A number of the countries have expressed a desire to attract foreign providers exclusively from within the region. In Ecuador and Bolivia, for example, nearly half of all external providers are from South America, mainly Chile, Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina. The Latin Americanization model could impact the market entry of external tertiary providers—supporting those able to integrate into the local system and improve perceptions of the developmental impact of foreign higher education delivery.

MAJOR PLAYERS AND PROVISION

The vast majority of foreign institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean have linguistic, cultural, or historical links to the region. Spain continues to dominate the market. Latin American institutions are also becoming increasingly active in the region, in line with the broader Latin Americanization trend. The Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, in Mexico, is the most active Latin American transnational provider in the region. It has learning centers in five regional countries and operates a virtual university enrolling over 12,000 students throughout the Americas.

Regarding the exporting potential of institutions, over the past decade some Latin American countries have targeted the Spanish-speaking migrant populations in the United States. Institutions from Puerto Rico, for example, have set up learning centers in Miami and Orlando for the Hispanic community of Florida. Various initiatives have sought to bolster the participation rate among the Hispanic population, which overall is underrepresented in US higher education.

The vast majority of transnational provision in the region is at the postgraduate level, in some cases due to national regulations. However, there appears to be a growing transnational

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market for upper-level technical university preparation and professional degrees. The main language of instruction is Spanish. The most common subject areas are economics and business administration. There are very few external providers offering courses in resource-intensive areas such as health sciences, engineering, or technology. Overall, transnational providers appear to be focused on offering courses with minimal costs and maximum output. From this viewpoint, although it serves to satisfy some unmet demand, transnational delivery also exacerbates the enrollment imbalance in the region.

EMERGING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Over the past five years, the rise in external tertiary providers has inspired largely controversial discussions about the developmental impact, in the region, of foreign education activity. There have been repeated claims about the “McDonaldization” of higher education, but little data have been collected to validate or refute these opinions. Some countries have been characterized by a *laissez-faire* approach to foreign institutions, while others have shaped the sector as less of an open market for external providers. A dichotomy, then, has emerged between the regional countries for and against the import of transnational higher education, in many cases creating a fragmented, ambiguous, and controversial environment for external institutions seeking to operate in the region.

Some changes in outlook are under way concerning cross-border education. It is evident that the quality assurance of foreign institutions will remain a top priority on the regional policymaking agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean for years to come. Future innovations could include monitoring the projects of networks that are assuming accreditation and

quality assurance roles. The development of clearly defined national regulations and regional accreditation mechanisms could also help to dissuade less-committed foreign players, while improving official oversight of transnational higher education and public perceptions of this type of provision.

Author's note: This article highlights the key research findings of an extensive study undertaken (in Spanish) by UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) on the transnationalization of tertiary education across the region. For further details, please refer to the report “Foreign Education Activity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Key Issues, Regulation and Impact” at www.obhe.ac.uk. ■

Quality Assurance in Colombia

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Quality assurance of higher education has been a concern in Colombia since the 1960s when, pressed by the overwhelming creation of programs and institutions, a legal project to create an accreditation system was drafted. The project did not become a law; but further efforts, the most important a decree in 1980 and a law in 1992, produced today's complex system of quality assurance.

Currently, the Colombian government exercises control in higher education through the tasks of inspection and surveillance. The Ministry of Education authorizes the start-up of new programs and institutions and imposes administrative penalties on institutions that break the law. Academic peers have gained influence in the system, and today they have a significant role in the evaluation process.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation is carried out at three levels—institutions, programs, and students. The establishment of a new public or private higher education institution starts with the application, consisting of several documents related to academic, legal, and financial requirements; followed by the evaluation by a group of consultants, hired by the Ministry of Education, and a group of academic peers designated by CONACES (the Inter-institutional National Commission for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education), which is a collegiate body formed by scholars and organized by areas of knowledge; and finishes with the decision issued by the Ministry of Education. When the deci-