

sors with graduate degrees, publications, research productivity, retention rates, and management effectiveness. But Argentina is not France, nor Spain, nor the United States, nor Chile. How useful are these measures, used for evaluating the quality of higher education in those countries, to Argentina? It is important to consider several key characteristics in which higher education in Argentina differs from higher education elsewhere.

Tradition and economics have conspired to make interna-

Quality is a concept not unlike "success"—although everyone wants it, few can define it in a way that will suit diverse audiences.

tional criteria used to measure quality impractical and, in the short term, meaningless. This critique is not meant to imply that such criteria would not be useful in the long term; the only point is that this is not where evaluation should start in Argentina. The risk of using international standards now is that limited resources will be redirected, and more timely (and more relevant) priorities might be pushed aside. For example, very few graduate programs were offered by universities in Argentina until the mid-1980s. Given that traditionally a graduate degree has not been a prerequisite for university-level teaching, not surprisingly only a small percentage of professors currently hold one. Budget challenges have caused most universities to opt for a largely part-time faculty. According to annual statistics published by the Ministry of Culture and Education, barely 12 percent of the faculty at public universities are hired in full-time positions.

Argentina's universities have little, if any, tradition of research, which has been conducted at independent institutes in the past. Moreover, predominantly part-time faculty and a limited budget to invest in infrastructure restricts the universities' future research capacity. On average, the number of students graduating from public universities is less than 24 percent of the number entering and only slightly higher (26%) in the private sector. Argentina has not held a tradition of providing student services (i.e., academic advising, career counseling, personal counseling, or financial aid).

Senior administrators are elected by the faculty, students, and staff. Newly elected officials appoint their own management team, inhibiting the development of a local cadre of administrators with professional management experience.

MEASURE WHAT YOU DO

Given current conditions, budgets, and tradition, the criteria used to evaluate university quality elsewhere make little sense for Argentina. What universities do in Argentina (almost exclusively) is teach. So, to measure the quality of Argentine universities should the primary focus of evaluation not be

teaching? Yet in the processing of mimicking other countries, this activity has been nearly overlooked. Some institutions have introduced student evaluations of faculty, but this process is in its infancy and requires more effective instruments as well as skills to analyze and make use of data collected. And this is only one small part of an effort to improve teaching.

Should scant resources not be focused on developing excellent teaching rather than attempting to develop resource capacity in an environment that cannot sustain it? Would universities not see more immediate benefit by offering faculty opportunities to integrate new technology and new pedagogy in the classroom?

The cascade of evaluations has mainly demonstrated how little most universities knew about themselves. The process of self-study launched a scramble for data about students, professors, and facilities and the implementation of new systems to track data in the future. Improving quality is most effective when it begins with an accurate and honest assessment of current conditions and realities. Universities are creating baselines against which future improvements can be measured. Key now is how these data are used and what the focus of institutional development will be—an isomorphic exercise or a carefully considered process that addresses the needs and realities of higher education in Argentina. ■

Education Reform in Montenegro: Public and Private Tensions

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Montenegro, one of the six republics of the former Yugoslavia and one of the newest members of the United Nations (2006), is witnessing a transformation and restructuring of higher education. A small state with a population of approximately 650,000, Montenegro is unable to support complex and multiple systems of higher education. Currently there is one state institution, the University of Montenegro, which was established in 1974 and enrolls 14,000 students across 19 faculties. There are also two private institutions: the University of the Mediterranean, established in 2005 and enrolling 1,000 students in six faculties; and Univerzitetes,

established in 2007 with 222 students in two faculties. In 2007 these two private universities enrolled nearly 14 percent of all first-year students in Montenegro.

While growth of private higher education has surged throughout much of the world in recent years, its emergence in western European countries, which are the core of the European Union, has been much more tempered. Having exhibited a strong interest in becoming a member of the European Union, higher education in Montenegro has tended to mimic the western European models where private universities enroll only a small percentage of university students. However, still geographically and culturally tied to central and southeastern Europe, which has experienced significant growth of private universities over the last 15 years, Montenegro has been influenced by that region's surge of private universities.

Unlike many of the former Soviet republics, where the state is either unwilling or unable to fund public education ade-

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quately, Montenegro provides, relative to its GDP, a generous level of support. For example, 19.1 percent of the state budget and 5.7 percent of the GDP are spent on education. While the proportion of state funds directed to higher education is not readily available, estimates suggest the amount to be substantial. However, Montenegro is a relatively poor country, and there is scarce support for any efforts to direct public monies to stimulate or support a private higher education sector.

STATE POLICY

While the government seeks to maintain substantial control over the entire higher education system, current laws regarding higher education are directed primarily at the state university with little direct attention to private higher education. It is legally possible to open private preschool and adult education institutions as nongovernment organizations (NGOs). Classification as an NGO provides a degree of insulation from state control as well as conferring the important tax-free status. However, these provisions do not apply to private universities where the legal environment is largely undefined, making it difficult to expect much further expansion of that sector until the legal void is addressed. Financing, quality assurance, and competition with the state university for qualified faculty are the main source of tension between the state university, the Ministry of Education, and private universities.

The state protects the University of Montenegro and constrains private higher education development by prohibiting the privates from offering programs of study already existing at the state university. This constraint has led students, unable to

gain access to their desired program of study at either the state or one of Montenegro's two private universities, to go abroad. Each year more than 25 percent of Montenegro's university-age students study at state and private universities in neighboring countries (mostly Serbia).

PROGNOSIS

Montenegro's nascent private sector appears to suffer from many of the same perceptions and characterizations faced by counterparts in neighboring countries. Education primacy rests with the state university, with privates generally perceived to be an inferior subsystem with less recognizable diplomas, attracting less-qualified students, and more concerned with finance than quality. Conversely, the state university with its traditions, relatively strong reputation, and elite philosophy of education is often characterized as inert, bureaucratic, overly centralized, and unresponsive to rapidly changing market needs. However, despite the onerous Ministry of Education restraints, the private sector has been able to identify and respond to market niches.

Religious as well as related cultural and ethnic impulses, which have spawned private universities in other parts of eastern Europe (e.g., Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv and Solomon University in Kiev), have found little traction in Montenegro. As a new secular state with a history of religious conflict, there is a strong, underlying social consciousness and fear that private, faith-based universities might fuel historic tensions and that factors such as quality, market, and reputa-

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tion, not religion, should be the impetus for private higher education development.

Higher education in Montenegro faces many challenges. Only a small number of students are engaged in doctoral-level studies, and the exodus to Serbia and other countries for higher education has the potential to create a considerable brain drain. International exchanges and linkages are limited and in need of considerable expansion. Competition for academic staff between the state and private universities tends to discourage cooperation. At a time when Montenegro, with its very limited resources, should be encouraging the development of a higher education system to meet changing national needs, it appears to be engulfed in a culture of regulation and protectionism that throttles private initiative. ■