

indicators.

Within the same logic, the Argentine Ministry of Education also created a program to align the government's and public universities' objectives to improve the quality, efficiency, and relevance of those programs in regulated professions (such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, and so on). For example, the Program for the Improvement of Teaching Engineering Programs follows the same pattern as the contract program, but in this case the three-year contract is signed with a school (*Facultad*) within a university and is based on its strategic plan and the results of the accreditation process CONEAU carried out. The program requires that the institutions report their performance in meeting the agreement's goals every year. The final accountability will be judged when these schools are to be accredited by CONEAU once more, and they can demonstrate that they have tackled their weaknesses by implementing a strategic quality-improvement plan.

The contract-program experience, both at the institutional and school levels, is still fairly new in Latin American higher education. It is a promising strategy to promote change in autonomous universities, taking into account the results of assessment and accrediting procedures, and making the funds available based on their having fulfilled the contractual terms (objectives, expected main results, and indicators).

*The practice of financial agencies inviting universities and faculty to tender for funds to carry out research activities has also gained ground in the last decade.*

#### PROBLEMS

Although several Latin American countries introduced new mechanisms to finance the higher education system in the last two decades, the proportion of funds allocated through these mechanisms is still very low. Moreover, to be effective they should deal with some obstacles in their design and implementation. From our point of view, these obstacles have to do with both organizational and technical factors.

Regarding organizational factors, the mechanisms do not always consider the complexity of autonomous public universities. One point, overlooked in the process of mechanism design, is that many relevant decisions—especially those affecting the quality of teaching and research—rest on the faculty and not on the university governance. However, the mechanisms are designed to provide signals and incentives to the university executive and collegial governments—and not to the faculty. Unless this approach is taken into account when designing policies and incentive mechanisms, it will not be possible to align the faculty's behavior with the institutional objectives. At most Latin American public universities, no explicit faculty management policy exists to align faculty objec-

tives with those of the university organization.

Finally, the trend toward linking the results of assessment and accrediting procedures, on the one side, and the financing of higher education through three-year contracts between the government and a particular university or school, on the other, looks like a promising strategy to promote change at autonomous universities. However, the lessons from the European cases suggest that the success of this mechanism depends on whether: (1) the governments fulfill the commitments in terms of the amount and schedule to deliver the funds, (2) the amount of resources allocated through contracts is large enough to carry innovative and enduring organizational changes, and (3) governments develop institutional capacity to follow up the contracts. Unfortunately, none of these conditions are easy to meet in Latin American countries. Macroeconomic instability affects the ability of government to deliver funds; the quantities of funds are usually small because the bulk of the resources targets faculty and administrative staff remunerations. Finally, public bureaucracies, overall, are not trained or strong enough to enforce the contracts. ■

## Student Quotas in Brazil: The Policy Debate

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The Brazilian Congress is discussing a bill requiring federal higher education institutions to introduce a 50 percent quota for poor, nonwhite applicants who are public-school graduates. The bill addresses that these students lack the opportunity to attend the best secondary schools, which are mostly private, and are in disadvantage regarding the entrance examinations of the best public universities in the country. This bill does not represent the first project for social inclusion in higher education in Brazil. For some years, private higher education institutions can obtain a tax relief if they admit a certain number of students who pay no tuition or pay half the tuition rate. Many public universities have also created their own affirmative programs.

In 2009, there are about 5.8 million students in higher education in Brazil, 75 percent in private institutions. These student numbers form about 13 percent of the 18–24 age group—the net enrollment rate—(data provided by the National Household Survey of 2007). One of the main reasons for the low net enrollment is that 40 percent of the people in that age bracket have not completed secondary education. The quality of secondary schools, particularly in the public sector, is very low, and many applicants cannot pass the entrance examinations for the programs of their choice. About half the students

in higher education are older and study in the evening.

Public higher education is free, and most of the best and more prestigious programs and institutions are public. The cost per student in federal higher education institutions equals around US\$10,000 a year, by far the highest in Latin America. Most graduate education and research take place in a number of (but not only) public universities. Competition to enter the prestigious careers of medicine, dentistry, engineering, and law in these institutions can be fierce, with dozens of applicants per place, selected through written examinations. Expensive private secondary schools and cramming preuniversity courses prepare the students who can pay for these exams. Thus, only students from richer, better-educated families can likely get the necessary training and eventually enter these

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careers. For students from other social backgrounds, the alternative options are the less-competitive careers in public universities—teaching, social work, nursing, and others—or the private sector, which provides evening, nondemanding programs in administration, pedagogy, and other “soft” fields with affordable tuition fees.

#### ARGUMENTS FOR QUOTAS

This situation, however, is under change, with strong pressures and incentives from governments and social movements for public universities to expand and admit more students and a new trend for the creation of elite private institutions, particularly in fields such as economics, business administration, and law. Today, 35 percent of the students in public institutions have family incomes under about US\$300, compared with 25 percent in private institutions and 47 percent for the population as a whole. The national minimum wage (about US\$200 per month) is established each year by the federal government and is mandatory for all labor contracts. Most secondary school students in Brazil (83%) attend public institutions. In higher education, however, 60 percent of the students come from private schools. These figures show that many students who would benefit from this bill are already in higher education, and many more are likely to be admitted as the system expands.

The most controversial aspect of the bill, however, is the racial component, because it is entangled with a prolonged and sometimes bitter debate about racial identity and prejudice in Brazil. The Brazilian statistical office has traditionally asked persons to classify themselves in terms of their color (white, black, yellow, and *pardo*—meaning to have dark skin, between

white and black), with the “yellow” category being now divided into indigenous and Oriental. In the 2007 household survey, 49.4 percent considered themselves white, 42.3 percent *pardos*, 7.4 percent black, 0.5 percent yellow, and 0.3 percent of indigenous origin.

Given the high historical levels of miscegenation in the country, the boundaries between these categories are very fuzzy, and many whites would probably be classified as black in countries with more well-defined ethnic boundaries, such as the United States or South Africa. In spite of that, statistical analyses show consistently that *pardos* and blacks are economically more impaired than whites, and that blacks are worse off than *pardos* in terms of educational attainment. Social and racial prejudice in Brazil, however, is combined with high levels of intermarriage and conviviality between persons of various racial appearances. Education and the quality of jobs, and not race differences, explain the main social and economic differences in the country.

Supporters of race-based affirmative action in Brazil tend to lump the *pardo* and black categories in one group, which would include about half of the Brazilian population. As access to education has increased, the proportion of whites and nonwhites in basic and secondary education in Brazil is now similar to that in the population as a whole. In higher education, the proportion of nonwhites has grown from 22 percent in 2001 to 32 percent in 2007. In public institutions, the proportion is 38 percent and 30 percent in the private sector.

The various quota bills under discussion require that 50

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percent of places in programs at public higher education institutions should be filled in by underprivileged students. None of the suggested policies, however, take into account most of these students' inadequate academic requirements to complete the more demanding programs. If this legislation were enacted, it is likely that a large number of students would drop out, or public institutions may lower their standards, increasing the exodus of the richer and better-educated students to the private sector.

The quota bill would bring to public institutions a few hundred thousand students from a lower social background, displacing others who may likely also stand at the bottom of the entrance examination rankings. Social inequities within the higher education system would not change much, but high-quality programs and institutions can be affected by the forced admission of students unable to keep up with their standards.

**ONGOING PROBLEMS**

To make higher education in Brazil more equitable requires improving the quality and reach of secondary education, which would depend, in turn, on improving the equally precarious system of basic education. In the meantime, the controversies surrounding the quota bill have led to the neglect of the main issues concerning higher education in Brazil. Creating an effective differentiated system would provide alternatives for students with dissimilar backgrounds and needs. The system must protect high-quality programs from pressures to lower standards. Funding will be required for deserving students who need financial support, while tuition should be charged from those who can pay at public universities. A range of policies are necessary for public and private institutions to improve their quality and to use more effectively the public resources they receive. ■

## International Organizations for University Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean

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In Latin America and the Caribbean, despite current conditions favoring university internationalization, coverage and development of organizations promoting international university cooperation remain limited. These issues involve effects of globalization, protocols, political and economic agreements, as well as the opportunity to improve academic quality through cooperation. These factors have not yet been reflected in terms of the consolidation of these institutions or their effects on university development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS**

Over 30 international organizations now function in Latin America and the Caribbean. They are defined as "groups of universities," whose missions include "cooperation among their members" and improving "academic development through integrated action." Fifty percent of the actually active organizations were created less than 30 years ago; in the past years, the numbers have increased. Nearly all of the organizations are based on 20 to 50 affiliated universities, and only a fraction have integrated over 100 members.

The total number of institutions affiliated with interuniver-

sity organizations promoting international cooperation remains as yet low; and a considerable percentage of the affiliated are passive members. Moreover, many of these organizations are inactive, mainly due to financial and organizational problems.

Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico possess the highest number of organizational affiliations. On the other hand, in more than a dozen small Caribbean countries no university entities are registered as members of international-cooperation organizations. The situation in the Caribbean evidently involves the relative development of the university system in each country.

**PROBLEMS AND TRENDS**

International-cooperation agencies in Latin America and the Caribbean cope with several management and financial problems that limit their impact on university development. The increase in these types of organizations has not included differentiation of objectives, resulting in a large degree of overlapping and redundancy among them.

These agencies have encountered major management problems. The limited commitment of their members to materialize agreements relates to the practice that most universities do not plan international activities globally, except for student exchange programs. Even when a university creates a special unit for international affairs, the internal links with the rest of the institution are lax, resulting in limited academic involvement. Consequently, it becomes difficult to identify suitable mediators within each member to develop activities programmed by the international organizations. Relationships between a university and the international organization are personalized and restricted to officers, while the information flow toward academic levels remains deficient. Member-university representation is mostly formal within the international agency management structure, with limited authority and empowerment.

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Within the international organizations, responsibilities are commonly delegated to only a few persons in executive and technical positions, which reveals the low level of proficiency and activity planning, as well as a lack of a performance-based organizational culture. Thus, many conferences and meetings—the main activities undertaken by international university organizations—do not advance concrete academic products.

The Higher Education market in Latin America and the Caribbean appears to operate predominantly by competing