

semielite institutions elsewhere, such Polish institutions compete with good second-tier public institutions to become the “first second choices” for prospective students who prefer but cannot obtain the top public places. Some semielite institutions aspire to compete with the best public institutions and thus enhance their academic legitimacy. This competition is most credible in niches, epitomized by the master of business administration (MBA). The methods to create leading schools include specializing in niche areas. Some semielite institutions want to become comprehensive colleges and thus expand the curriculum and introduce PhD programs.

In Poland, as in eastern Europe overall, the private higher education sector suffers challenges of legitimacy based on the lack of tradition, social standing, and established support. The sector is stigmatized by the perception that private institutions are not academically committed. Consequently, semielite institutions not only need to be seen as socially accepted but also that they offer high-quality programs. This process is achieved through improving various types of legitimacy at different levels, which helps distinguish semielite institutions from demand-absorbing ones.

*Semielite institutions have their own status and characteristics—substantially different from characteristics found in most institutions in the private sector.*

Most semielite institutions are well recognized and occupy the leading positions in rankings of private institutions published by Poland's newspapers. The institutions also try to present themselves as internationally oriented organizations. Polish semielite institutions resemble such institutions in other countries in being usually Western and US oriented. They publicize their links with US colleges as, for example, Kozminski University with the State University of New York at New Paltz. In general, they are entrepreneurial and market oriented with successful job-oriented programs. As other private institutions, semielite institutions are nonprofit organizations that generate their incomes by charging tuition fees. They do not receive any government subsidy, but their students may be eligible to receive governmental support. Semielite institutions' tuition fees are high.

#### ACADEMIC LEGITIMACY

To obtain an acceptable academic legitimacy, all Polish semielite institutions undertake various approaches to respond to criticisms that private institutions lack such quality. As mentioned, a small group of semielite institutions labor to create formidable PhD programs and hire leading professors.

For the bulk of semielite institutions a common legitimacy-

seeking strategy is application for accreditation to one of the nongovernmental accreditation commissions (government accreditation is mandatory for all public and private institutions). The process of obtaining accreditation increases institutional prestige considerably.

Another common strategy constitutes building partnerships with foreign institutions and creating opportunities to establish joint degrees and exchange programs. The institutions often offer joint-degree programs and provide foreign modes of education.

Another strategy consists of establishing the right to confer graduate degrees. Institutions offering graduate education may achieve high status as PhD programs imply an engagement in research. Semielite institutions in Poland do not have

*Another common strategy constitutes building partnerships with foreign institutions and creating opportunities to establish joint degrees and exchange programs.*

well-developed basic research projects, though some develop applied research. This can help to attract a selective student body. In fact, quite unlike most private institutions, Poland's semielite institutions have students from high social-class backgrounds who are capable of paying ample private tuitions.

The semielite institutions place priority on good practical teaching or training supported by good full-time faculty. A number of them even foster activities to improve their academic staff. Several semielite institutions in Warsaw show a much more favorable student/faculty ratio than other private institutions, and some boast an above-average number of prestigious academics. ■

## Iran's Giant Semiprivate University

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In 1983, the new Islamic regime in Iran permitted the founding of a nongovernmental, nonprofit university, called the Islamic Azad University. Azad was the first nongovernmental university to be created after the Iranian revolution of 1979.

Although the university began with only a handful of students and a small location, it has now become one of the largest universities in Iran. It took several years for Azad's degrees and programs to gain the approval of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and as a result, Azad did not establish itself as a respected higher education institution in Iran until the late 1980s. Conventionally, only those Iranian institutions approved by the Ministry of Higher Education possess higher status and prestige. Consequently, Azad now is enjoying a higher prestige than during the early years of its inception. Now enrolling a record 1.3 million students, Azad is educating approximately 50 percent of the total student population in Iran.

#### THE CREATION OF AZAD

*Azad* literally means “free” in Persian. However, in the case of Azad, it also means “open access,” and the university promotes itself as the alternative to the ultracompetitive national universities. While this spotlight might imply absence of criteria for admission, Azad does in fact use an entrance exam. However, to gain entrance to Iran's public universities, students must pass a more rigorous and difficult exam. Thus, Azad attracted large numbers of applicants, including those who were denied access to the public universities because of low scores.

Azad University was supported by the former Iranian government administration, and the idea was initiated by the former president, Hashemi Rafsanjani himself. Such a university was established to alleviate the ever-increasing demand for higher education among high school graduates denied access to public universities due to the limited number of seats and stringent entrance examinations. Maintained not by government support but by the tuition and fees it collects from its students, Azad must charge high fees and cast its nets widely enough to obtain students who might otherwise apply to public universities. Students willingly pay the high tuition because a university degree in Iran disproportionately improves social and professional status and mobility. (The public universities, in contrast, levy no fees on their students.)

#### AZAD'S ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Yet, in spite of the fact that Azad is not government subsidized, it is still not considered a “private” institution. Instead, it is considered semiprivate, since its degree programs are overseen by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. In Iran, no institution of higher education is permitted to function independent of the ministry's rules and regulations. Consequently, Azad's curriculum is similar to that of public universities, and the scope of academic freedom compares to that allowed at public universities. Azad's instructors may supplement the prescribed curriculum by using outside instructional materials. Azad has both part-time and full-time faculty, with 15,000 full-time faculty at its branches.

The administrative structure of Azad University also differs

from public universities. The university is run by several councils, the highest and most important one being the supreme council. The supreme council is the main decision maker concerning university policies and is responsible for the appointment of president and approval of the budget.

Importantly, Azad is a multicampus university with over 300 physical branches inside Iran and another five campuses outside Iran in the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Lebanon, Tanzania, and Armenia. The students who attend branches outside Iran are both Persian and foreign nationals; however, since the language of instruction is Persian, the applicants must demonstrate mastery of language as a prerequisite for admission. In general, the mission of campuses outside Iran was to promote the Persian language and culture. The multiple branches within Iran were established to make higher education accessible in rural areas remote from the traditional centers of higher education in Iran. In this way, students from the provinces are able to avoid dormitory expenses, by living at home.

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In addition, Azad was instrumental to economic development in Iran, as it created a multitude of new jobs in a variety of fields: Azad not only employed scholars and administrators to teach and run the university at its many branches but also required skilled and unskilled laborers to build and service its facilities. These newly created jobs and Azad's more lenient admissions policies have mobilized populations around the country, leading to a wave of migration that reversed the trend of the 1960s and 1970s, when moving from the provinces to the major cities was the way to facilitate improved educational and employment opportunities. Now, potential Azad employees and students are leaving the cities to work and study at Azad branches around the country.

#### RESULTS OF AZAD'S CREATION

Although the creation of Islamic Azad University was a positive step to accommodate the needs of the higher education seekers in Iran, its creation may have further contributed to the “diploma disease” or “chase for diploma” phenomenon in Iran. Iranian high school graduates seek higher education, as parents dream that their children will gain elevated status as professionals, especially in the field of medicine or engineering.

While the establishment of such a university further democratized university admissions by offering a more relaxed

entrance examination than the public universities require, Azad's fees are an obstacle for many Iranians. The creation of Azad University has alleviated the pressure on public universities to supply a growing youth population with higher degrees (there are currently three million university students in Iran), but since the economy has been characterized by a high unemployment rate (11%) graduates of Azad cannot be guaranteed to have a better chance of finding employment than graduates from public universities (1 out of 10 unemployed holds a university degree).

Moreover, Azad focuses purely on meeting the growing need for university degrees and does not provide its graduates with professional career counseling (higher education institutes in Iran lack career-planning services). Therefore, many students after graduation may not possess a clear idea of what they can do with their university degrees. As the brain drain persists in Iran, perhaps many of Azad's graduates leave the country to pursue advanced degrees or work abroad. ■

## Seeking Autonomy: French Universities Against the Jacobins

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Since the Imperial University of Napoleon, founded in 1808, only four higher education laws have been passed in France: in 1896, an unsuccessful attempt to introduce the Humboldtian model in France; in 1968, the Faure act, after the student demonstrations of May 1968; in 1984, the Savary act aimed at amending the Faure act; and finally the new Pécresse act, also called LRU (Loi relative aux Libertés et Responsabilités des Universités). All these acts have at least two points in common. First, they all aimed at transforming the governance of French universities rather than the whole higher education system. Second, they all provided universities with autonomy—a main issue often at stake in the discussions preceding the adoption of these acts.

The diagnosis of French universities suffering from lack of autonomy was central in the debates at the end of the 19th century. The same diagnosis was again essential in most of the reflections led by a group of French academics some years before the events of May 1968, during the second colloquium of Caen in 1966. In the act voted six months after May 1968,

Edgar Faure allocated administrative, budgetary, and pedagogical autonomy to the newly (re)created French universities. Autonomy was again reaffirmed in the Savary act of 1984. Nevertheless autonomy remained on the agenda, in 2007, when Nicolas Sarkozy was elected.

### FAVORABLE INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

When looking at the reasons why the previous acts had failed, one could anticipate a more efficient result from the LRU: many of the previous obstacles seemed to be erased. In the book I wrote on the “long march” of French universities, I explained the failure of the 1896, 1968, and 1984 acts in making universities autonomous by the fact that they all focused on universities and not on the French “university configuration” as a whole. Thus, these acts sought to change university governance but not the management of the academic profession or the comanagement relationships the ministry had developed since Napoleon, with a centrally organized academic profession. The disciplines and their vertical and centralized structure remained the main interlocutors of the ministry while universities were marginal partners. In 2007, three factors raised the belief that this could change.

The four-year contracts introduced by the end of the 1980s between the ministry and each university had weakened the corporatist comanagement between the disciplines and the state and fostered the recognition of universities by the ministry administration. It also pushed university presidents to have an active role in the preparation of their institution's four-year strategic plan. As a whole, by the beginning of 2000, French universities had become much less anomic and ungoverned than they were 20 years earlier.

Not only providing administrative and budgetary autonomy, the LRU also contained the germs for universities to become more autonomous in the management of their human resources, therefore transforming the management of the academic profession. In terms of positions, the payroll up to now managed by the ministry was to be included in the operating budgets, thus allowing each university to decide on the reallocation of posts or the nature of a post (junior or senior, for instance). In terms of staff, some of the already existing possibilities (such as the allocation of bonuses or decisions on some promotions) were extended and new dispositions included in the act, such as the possibility to renegotiate the teaching, research, and service duties of academics.

One year before the LRU, another act (Loi de programme pour la recherche) was aimed at transforming the French research system so as to put universities at its center, by reducing the prerogatives of the national research institutions (such as the CNRS, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). On the one hand, a research council (the Agence Nationale de la Recherche) was created to manage grants run by the ministry and the national research institutions. On the other, the evaluation of the research units of the latter, was transferred to a newly created evaluation agency, the AERES (Agence