



LATIN AMERICAN
STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Review: Reforming Higher Education in Latin America: Policy and Practice

Author(s): Jorge Balán

Source: *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2006), pp. 228-246

Published by: [The Latin American Studies Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3874678>

Accessed: 03/08/2011 12:16

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=lamer>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Latin American Studies Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Latin American Research Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION
IN LATIN AMERICA
Policy and Practice

Jorge Balán
The Ford Foundation

- THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION IN BRAZIL*. Edited by Colin Brock and Simon Schwartzman. Oxford Studies in Comparative Education. (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2004.)
- INFORME SOBRE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR EN CHILE: 1980-2003*. By Andrés Bernasconi and Fernando Rojas. (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 2004. Pp. 201)
- CAMBIO ORGANIZACIONAL Y DISCIPLINARIO EN UNIDADES DE INVESTIGACIÓN Y POSGRADO EN CIENCIAS SOCIALES EN MÉXICO: UNA VISIÓN COMPARATIVA*. Coordinated by Rollin Kent Serna. (Mexico City: Plaza & Valdes, 2003. Pp. xiii+257.)
- TO EXPORT PROGRESS: THE GOLDEN AGE OF UNIVERSITY ASSISTANCE IN THE AMERICAS*. By Daniel C. Levy. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. Pp. 407. \$45.00 cloth.)
- TERTIARY EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA: PAVING THE WAY FOR REFORM*. By The World Bank. (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2003. Pp. 228. \$30.00 paper.)
- THE DECLINE OF THE GURU: THE ACADEMIC PROFESSION IN THE THIRD WORLD*. Edited by Philip G. Altbach. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pp. 348. \$85.00 cloth, \$26.95 paper.)
- ESTUDIANTES Y PROFESIONALES EN LA ARGENTINA: UNA MIRADA DESDE LA ENCUESTA PERMANENTE DE HOGARES*. Edited by Anibal Y. Jozami and Eduardo Sánchez Martínez. (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2001. Pp. 183.)
- POWER AND POLITICS IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: ORGANIZATION AND CHANGE AT THE UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO***. By Imanol Ordorika. (New York and London: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 272. \$85.00 cloth.)

Latin America occupies a peculiar niche in the world of higher education. Statistical indicators underline the region's relative isolation and

backwardness in higher education and science. A recently compiled *Atlas of Student Mobility*¹ shows no Latin American country among the twenty-one major destinations in the world, while all the countries of the region combined contribute fewer students to the world flow than South Korea. In the recent ranking of five hundred “world class” universities—arguably a contentious exercise—only two Latin American institutions (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [UNAM] in Mexico and Universidade de São Paulo [USP] in Brazil) have any chance at all, way back in the second hundredth ranking.² Science indicators are even more dramatic: Dutch or Swedish scientists have more publications in the Science Citation Index than all the Latin American and Caribbean scientists together.³

This picture stands in sharp contrast with the dramatic expansion of both basic and higher education systems, rapidly growing enrollment rates at all levels, multiplication and diversification of tertiary institutions, and the increased percentage of the labor force with higher qualifications. Only five decades ago there was just a handful of public universities in each country, mostly located in the major cities and serving perhaps half a million students in the region. The institutional landscape is so diverse today that it defies easy description and in each country extends over the entire national space, attending roughly ten million students.⁴ Although other world regions have also seen comparable expansion, the jump in enrollment rates has been more dramatic in Latin America than elsewhere.

The contrast calls our attention to the variable outcomes of transformation processes that have taken place all over the world during the last few decades, both as a consequence of similar demands upon higher education and of the adoption of ideas and organizational forms. Even before globalization became the catch-all concept to subsume changes in higher education, the international transfer of experiences and models has occurred continuously and in many different ways. The Latin American university throughout the last century has been the battleground for experiments and reforms often inspired and promoted by France, Germany, Great Britain, and increasingly the United States. Both

1. Todd M. Davis, *Atlas of Student Mobility* (New York: Institute of International Education, 2003).

2. Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, “Academic Ranking of World Universities—2004,” <http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2004/2004Main.htm> (accessed November 16, 2005).

3. Claudio de Moura Castro, *Science and Technology: An IDB Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, 2001).

4. Carmen García Guadilla, *Situación y principales dinámicas de transformación de la educación superior en América Latina* (Caracas: Fundayacucho, 1997).

university-based and military-government inspired reformers in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, the latter following in the steps of the others in 1966, 1968, and 1973 after the clamping down on student and faculty protests, looked at particular elements of the American or European models for inspiration. Beginning in the 1980s, ministries of finance often prevailed in inspiring higher education transformations designed to shift the burden of finance from public to private. This change increased institutional differentiation and consumer choice, a move that was in line with a broader economic policy, but the ministers were not opposed to copying what they saw as new and better models tried elsewhere. Both bottom-up, democratically inspired university reform movements, and top-down higher education policies inaugurated under authoritarian regimes, did not fail to have a vision of higher education largely inspired or at least tuned to prevalent utopias.

The field of higher education policy debates, in Latin America perhaps as elsewhere, seems to be fertile ground for zero-sum games. For some time the false dilemma of basic versus higher education was at the center of the international debate. Public versus private investment is the source of a continuing tension, even if most specialists agree the region needs more of both. The issue of "models" confronts the ideal of the research, teaching, and service institution (dominated in fact by the schools for training in the liberal professions) to the "tertiary" institutions focused on training for the less prestigious professions and the workforce, including teaching. Most would agree in principle that we need many different kinds of institutions as well as better articulation between them. The tension in the policy field leads to conflict when it comes to the governance of public sector institutions, with governments' generalized intentions to regulate and steer through selective funding confronting institutions intent on claiming complete autonomy and internal accountability.

The books under review, with a variety of foci and styles, are largely based on original research and illuminate different aspects of the systemic transformation taking place in the region, its sources of inspiration, and the main actors involved. In a rather arbitrary way, I will comment first on experiences led by governments or by the universities, moving then to the contentious issue of the role of international agencies, finally focusing briefly on the main actors within higher education, students and faculty, mainly to point out their relatively silenced roles in these transformations.

GOVERNMENTS TAKE THE LEAD, BUT THEN INSTITUTIONS GAIN AUTONOMY

"Reform is most expeditious when procedures exist that rapidly translate expert decisions into policy outcomes. In Latin America,

authoritarian regimes put such procedures in place.”⁵ Although the author refers to reforms in family law that actually expanded women’s rights in spite of military rulers’ conservative values, a similar argument could be made regarding another highly contentious issue, education in general, higher education in particular. As Eunice Durham indicates in her carefully worded analysis of higher education policies in Brazil, included in the volume edited by Brock and Schwartzman, after the defeat of the student movement in 1968 and in a context of intense political repression, the military government introduced reforms to Brazilian higher education that past student movements had demanded and academic circles backed. The reforms were also very much influenced by the American model. They included the replacement of *cátedras* by departments; the creation of basic institutes covering broad areas of knowledge; the development of a credit system; and the foundation of a differentiated, research-oriented, graduate education system. Yet, it was a top-down reform movement with a set of often implicit alliances between the academic elite—in particular in the hard sciences—modernizers within the military, and business sectors. The goal of the reform was cut short, however, because it left intact the dominance of the professional schools.

The reforms introduced by the military regime in Brazil, as well as their limitations, have continued to shape the higher education system. Durham argues, for instance, that the amazing growth in the private sector since the 1970s occurred largely through the proliferation of low-cost courses with lower academic standards in less-prestigious professions—the response to a massive demand in the face of the public sector’s inability or unwillingness to create new kinds of courses and higher education institutions other than the universities. Maria Helena Magalhães Castro, in another chapter, provides a most useful follow-up to Durham through an analysis of the reforms needed in Brazil. A key dimension of the new regulatory environment is quality assurance—an area where Brazil has shown considerable innovation in the region. In the 1970s, through CAPES (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior), regular quality assurance through peer review was systematically introduced into graduate education. In 1996, Brazil introduced a test that all students graduating from specific programs were required to take—the so-called *Provaão*. The published results, grouped by institution on a five-point scale according to its distribution in each field, provide the public with information on the quality of higher education courses, help the students and their families

5. Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79.

select courses, and provide the Ministry of Education with information to be used in the accreditation and reaccreditation of higher education institutions. Each year, over 400,000 students graduating in 26 different fields in 6,500 course programs offered by public and private universities took the exam, until the government decided to end this innovation.⁶ However, the system, according to Castro, was expensive and limited since it only measured final outcomes rather than the value added by education to students with different backgrounds. Students at more selective public institutions, for instance, would do better than those at less selective, often private, institutions, but not necessarily as a consequence of what they learned in the specific course under scrutiny. Institutions should be using the results to identify problems and introduce reforms. Furthermore, results from the *Provaão* should be complemented with the assessment of other dimensions, such as innovation, efficiency, and social relevance of courses.

In the 1960s, a differentiated and strong system for graduate training became a key objective for reform-oriented academic elites in Latin America as a means to build a modern academic profession based upon disciplinary, specialized training, and full-time involvement in teaching and research. A rather idealized version of the American graduate school was clearly the model—although it was creatively mixed with French-inspired, local versions of national centers for scientific research created at the same time to fund laboratories, research programs, and research careers. The boldest reform that the military government launched in the 1970s took place when universities became a privileged partner in the development of science and technology by increasing funding for graduate training and for basic and applied research. Today, almost 100,000 students are enrolled in accredited master's and PhD programs in Brazil, most of which are oriented towards training university professors and researchers in all academic fields, and almost half of them supported by fellowships with public funding. Graduate education, the pride of Brazilian universities, faces a number of challenges, which Elizabeth Balbachevsky discusses in her article. Perhaps the most troublesome, and by no means unique, challenge is the combination of extended time spent completing a degree and low completion rates. Although Balbachevsky provides no estimate in her chapter, costs per master's or doctoral student must be huge and born largely through public funding. Furthermore, although programs are supposed to train academics, data show that most MAs, and a high percentage of PhDs, are employed by government and businesses outside of academia. An area definitely remote from

6. Simon Schwartzman, "The National Assessment of Courses in Brazil," http://www.unc.edu/ppaq/Brazil_designed.html (accessed January 2006).

public debate, graduate education is likely to become a contentious issue in discussions over the allocation of federal funds for education and science in Brazil.

Following Brazil's top-down reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s were the much more radical and authoritarian reforms the Pinochet regime carried out in Chile in the early 1980s. As in Brazil, the reforms were preceded by a period of intensive debate and student mobilization that had taken place before the 1973 military coup. The pre-1973 drive for reform was characterized by student demonstrations, strikes, occupation of buildings and popular assemblies and brought about significant transformation, with a focus on rapid expansion in student enrollments. University governance was changed to include elections for authorities previously appointed by government and for student representation in governance bodies. Like Brazil and Argentina, the Chilean reform included some characteristics of the American model, such as the replacement of chairs by disciplinary departments, an emphasis on research, and the trend towards differentiation between undergraduate and graduate education. The 1973 coup brought a rapid end to this experiment in reforms. A few years later, the Pinochet regime established a constitutional framework, and more importantly, an economic model, to inspire the kind of higher education system it wanted in order to absorb the contained demand, promote private investment in education, and expand the educated workforce the envisioned economy would require. But unlike authoritarian Brazil, which was ambivalent about the roles of state and market in education, Chile under Pinochet had an explicit design for a market-driven policy reform attractive to private investors.

The book by Bernasconi and Rojas is a detailed, systematic description and analysis of the policies formulated and implemented first by the Pinochet regime and then later, to a large extent, by the democratically elected Chilean governments that followed. The book presents a comprehensive view of policy design and legal framework within the social and economic context of Chile; traces the impact of reforms upon system design, institutional differentiation, and governance; and shows major trends in student enrollments and student composition, graduation rates, and the upgrading and differentiation of the academic profession. Brief reviews of system regulation through quality assurance and accreditation, of the intricacies of current funding schemes, and of the research function within the higher education system, complete this tightly packed most valuable overview of reforms in Chile.

In 1980, Chile adopted a new constitution. In the educational arena, the major break with past constitutional history was to discard the state's traditional, nineteenth-century role of provider (the so-called *estado docente*) and replace it with the idea of a subsidiary state, which was responsible

for the overall framework regulating the actions of free agents in the system and for establishing some intermediary bodies to oversee their behavior according to the law. The new constitution was immediately followed by a series of decrees establishing a tri-partite system (universities, professional institutes, private technical training centers) with a differentiated set of functions and patterns of governance, as well as establishing institutional funding for a restricted set of older universities, both public and Catholic (and private). Almost ten years later, one day before transferring power to the newly elected democratic government, the regime approved an overall legal framework for the entire education system. This legal framework still governs education in Chile.

Bernasconi and Rojas follow this process in detail and with full control over the available information. In comparison to the rest of the region, and reflective perhaps of institutional stability across regime changes, Chile has managed to create a reasonably well-developed higher education data system that the authors use extensively. The authors are also careful to explain legal and policy frameworks, although they do not explore how and why these frameworks came into being. Most fascinating is the authors' ability to follow continuities and discontinuities across regime change. In particular, they show how the democratic government, frustrated in its attempt to introduce wholesale reforms through the democratic process, ended up accepting institutional design inherited from the authoritarian government, working on the margins to make it more equitable and to improve performance and assure quality. In this process, the government has respected institutional autonomy, stronger and more established among the set of traditional universities that receive public support, hoping for self-regulation but frustrating many who might have envisioned a much more interventionist state.

Bernasconi and Rojas conclude that "el curso de la educación superior está en manos de las universidades, no del gobierno. El gobierno no establece las direcciones estratégicas del sistema: ellas resultan de las decisiones agregadas de las instituciones. Les ha costado a las instituciones, en especial a las universidades tradicionales, acostumbrarse a esta actitud del gobierno. Ello no deja de ser paradójico, por cuanto equivale a que las universidades, autónomas por ley y tradición, renieguen de esa autonomía, para esperar en cambio las instrucciones del gobierno" (178). A recent analysis indicates that the Universidad Católica is using its increased autonomy to lessen dependence on sharply reduced government subsidies while introducing changes long claimed by the reform movement.⁷ Thus, new private revenues are used to hire a full-time professoriate

7. Burton R. Clark, *Sustaining Change in Universities: Continuities in Case Studies and Concepts* (United Kingdom: Open University Press, 2004).

involved in research, to strengthen graduate education, and to improve student performance. At the same time, as Bernasconi and Rojas show in detail, the quality assurance framework developed to regulate the private institutions has largely failed to contain the growth of low-quality, often fly-by-night suppliers, or their many ways of gaining increased autonomy to expand where the market allows, with little consideration of mission or ethics. Only recently (1999) has the government succeeded in development program accreditation bodies that, although operating on a strictly voluntary basis, have the promise of bringing greater transparency into the system and eventually orienting consumers away from low-quality institutions. This is not an isolated initiative: reforms used by the national examination system for admissions and student aid, although currently restricted to students in traditional universities, indicate a new government will become more proactive in mending a complex system of differentiated institutions that now serves around one-third of the young adults in Chile.

There is another piece of the Chilean puzzle that seems unique both in terms of continuity and direction of the effort: the intersection between science and university policy. Since the early 1980s, Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico (FONDECYT), the national funding agency for science and technology, has become the main support for university research in Chile. Much of the competitive funding has gone to three traditional universities, although in recent years others have joined in the effort. A transparent, peer-review-based system has tended to favor the hard sciences and an elite group of highly productive scientists. Graduate training in Chile still has limited capacity in comparison to other Latin American countries, but has grown rapidly since the late 1990s. Still, the relative size of research and graduate training capacity is small, clearly out of proportion with the needs of the educational system and the broader economy.

In Brazil, the return to democratic governance in the 1980s opened up the question about the the leading public universities' capacity to innovate and respond to the changing needs of society. Brazil, and in particular São Paulo, was exceptional in the strength of an academic elite, powerful both within academia and in key research funding agencies, and legitimate vis-à-vis political power. Would this elite lead a process of change, attempting to cope with a rapidly shifting environment, building upon the top-down reforms introduced in the previous decades and from which they were the direct beneficiaries, even when they staunchly opposed the military government? Or, as is usually the case with academic oligarchies, would it fight to maintain power and privilege and ignore the need for change? The chapters in the book edited by Brock and Schwartzman suggest a negative answer to this question. Universities have largely been reactive to reforms, which

often originate within central governments' broader attempts to reform the public sector within a neoliberal policy framework. Unlike the authoritarian regimes that preceded them, democratically elected governments—although showing a varying degree of commitment to democratic rules—have usually lacked the power and authority to implement the broad educational reforms, both in basic and higher education, which they proclaimed as essential for the nation to become competitive in the knowledge-based global economy.

In Mexico, the slow process of democratization and decentralization of recent years has allowed public institutions considerably greater room for maneuver. Graduate education, as elsewhere in the region, has been a privileged area of experimentation given its relatively small size, the ubiquitous relationship with governmental agencies, and the consistent growth in student demands. In this context, the study reported by Rollin Kent Serna and his colleagues provides most valuable insights into the operation of institutional agents under shifting political conditions.

Organizational change in research and graduate education units is the topic of the book. Although restricted in scope—it deals only with social science programs in Mexico—the volume presents the results of an in-depth study of five institutions, a unique example in the empirical examination of higher education institutions in the region. The problems addressed by Kent and his colleagues are the weak institutionalization of the scientific disciplines and the tension between academic research and professional training in the Mexican university. The research approach, in the tradition of organizational analysis developed by Burton Clark, lends itself to the use of case studies. Five social science research institutions, four of them in public universities and the fifth an independent, publicly funded research institution, are examined through an organizational lens. The studies, however, provide a wealth of quasi-ethnographic material on the contemporary political scene of higher education in Mexico.

Kent et al. show that the university-based research institutes, although deeply rooted in the academic politics of the large-scale public university, survive through their relative independence from teaching (including in some cases from graduate education!) and the professional schools. Science and technology policy, rather than university policy, has played a key role in the institutionalization of research in public universities, but has created no incentives to integrate them in the educational enterprise. The coordination of research and graduate training emerges as an option left to the internal dynamics of each organization.

Kent and his colleagues provide a wealth of insights and valuable information about changes in higher education governance during recent decades in Mexico. Each of the five case studies is introduced by a short but carefully written institutional history that opens a window to

the intriguing scene of Mexican university politics. The sharp ideological swing from the dominance of a Marxist rhetoric and strong student involvement in governance during the 1970s and 1980s to the increasingly influential reward system established in the 1990s through national reform policies—couched in terms of research incentives, merit pay, and differentiation of functions—cuts across the case studies. Yet each institution was shaped by strong leaders who often navigated through ideologically turbulent times as well as highly diverse local contexts. The few pages devoted to this topic certainly help whet the appetite for more.

In his impassioned book, largely based on a Stanford doctoral dissertation, Imanol Ordorika analyzes changes in twentieth-century governance and politics at UNAM. UNAM is perhaps the archetypical Latin American public university: located at the intellectual heart of a centralized authoritarian political system, its history is closely intertwined with the emergence and consolidation of the modern state in Mexico. Until the recent expansion of the system, UNAM was a hegemonic institution, the model for all other national universities and the dominant force in national university politics. As Ordorika's well-documented study clearly shows, powerful leaders equally at home in the field of national power struggles and the contentious arena of university life led this complex, gigantic institution. They include Justo Sierra, who shaped UNAM as a modern institution by the end of the Porfiriato, and José Vasconcelos, the first rector under the revolutionary government; Pablo Gonzalez Casanova and Guillermo Soberón, the contrasting leaders responsible for the institution after the Tlaltelolco massacre; and more importantly Ignacio Chavez, the architect of the modern research institution during the days of the Mexican "miracle." Perhaps Mexico is unique, in the region and elsewhere, in the extent to which the university leadership of the dominant institution was occupied by outstanding intellectuals who also were key actors in the national political scene.

Ordorika's outstanding contribution is to show how this strong and highly personalized governance system mixes with the operation of a governing board (*junta de gobierno*), whose membership often reflects the long-lasting influence of some of these men, in dealing with the pressures coming from outside (i.e., government) as well as from inside (i.e., faculty or student movements). The more detailed analysis is focused on three distinctive periods: the consolidation of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional's (PRI) hegemony from the 1940s to the 1960s, when university leadership allied with government in a magnificent expansion of UNAM as well as in suppressing any demands for expanded political participation; the crisis around the Tlaltelolco events of 1968, when political mobilization and a radicalized charismatic rector

took the lead in confronting government in campus politics; and the conservative restoration that followed. Within each of these periods, the leading factions built around strong leaders (i.e., *chavistas*) find a base in institutional segments (i.e., the school of medicine) and/or political-academic orientations (i.e., *científicos*).

The book's main thrust is to show how national politics has always been at the center of UNAM, thus debunking the persistent myth of university autonomy. Yet, as the author himself recognizes, autonomy is a relative concept—you may gain some or lose some, or have more or less autonomy than others—and as such he finds considerable variation in the degree to which UNAM has been largely in opposition to government power (whether on the right-wing opposition, as in the 1930s, or the left-wing, as in the 1970s) or aligned with it. Interestingly enough, throughout this long period, at least in Ordorika's analysis, university politics and higher education policy at UNAM have largely been domestic affairs, apparently free from important international influences.

THE SHIFTING ROLES OF EXTERNAL AGENCIES, FROM THE 1960S TO THE NEW MILLENIUM

The contentious role of external agencies—banks, in particular the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank; bilateral government agencies, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); private American foundations; intergovernmental organizations, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and more recently Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—is frequently mentioned in the literature. However, there is precious little research on how they operate and with what results. Much attention has focused on policy proposals that originated in banks or intergovernmental organizations, but we know less about actual interventions through loans, technical assistance, or participation in reviews of systems and institutions, and the outcomes of these interventions.⁸

The “golden age” of external assistance for higher education in Latin America, however, occurred when the World Bank's presence, currently

8. See, for instance, Roberto Rodríguez-Gomez and Armando Alcántara, “Multilateral Agencies and Higher Education Reform in Latin America,” *Journal of Education Policy*, 16, no. 6 (2001): 507–25; Claudio de Moura Castro, “The World Bank Policies: Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't,” *Comparative Education*, 38, no. 4 (November 2002): 387–99; Carlos A. Torres and Daniel Schugurensky, “The Political Economy of Higher Education in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization: Latin America in Comparative Perspective,” *Higher Education*, 43, no. 4 (June 2002): 429–55.

seen as the prime mover of the so-called neoliberal agenda, was scarcely felt. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), USAID, and private American foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller, were the main external donors between the 1960s and early 1980s, the period Daniel Levy chose for his study of the role of university assistance in the Americas. *To Export Progress*, however, is a study of both exporters and importers of “progress,” a reform movement that, as far as higher education is concerned, had its clear inspiration in the U.S. system as shaped in the post-World War II period by the unbeatable combination of generous public support and a high degree of institutional autonomy and functional differentiation. This system, already admired by many Europeans earlier in the century, gained world dominance for its capacity to combine elite and mass segments, as well as to house advanced basic and applied research.

Levy argues that admiration for the U.S. model, although not as uncritical as the often quoted report prepared for the Alliance for Progress,⁹ prevailed among exporters (IADB, USAID, LASPAU, the foundations) as much as among importers, largely elite academics and selected university administrators rather than government officials. First, the U.S. model, in contrast with the typical Latin American version of the centralized and uniform system, was seen as a landscape of autonomous institutions, public and private, selective and open, with varying strengths and missions, competing for resources. It offered both diversity and scale, while Latin American systems were based on homogeneous, elite institutions. Second, unlike the dominant Latin American public university, often described as a federation of powerful professional schools scattered in an urban environment, the U.S. model offered strong executive functions concentrated in the presidency of a largely residential campus tuned to the needs of students, departments instead of chairs, and a first cycle devoted to general education rather than long first cycles of professional schools. Third, and perhaps most important, the proposed model argued for a central role for the full-time, professional academic devoted to teaching and research, to replace the “taxi professor,” a liberal professional or government functionary who, for little pay but enhanced status, devoted minimal time to teaching.

Levy provides substantial data and careful analysis of interventions along these three dimensions of reform, negotiated through grants and loans to selected institutions in a wide range of substantive areas and with varying intensity in most countries of the region. “Modern” fields, including the natural and social sciences, agronomy, education, and

9. Rudolph Atcon, *The Latin American University* (Bogotá: ECO, 1966).

technology, were much favored over “traditional” fields such as law, medicine, and the humanities. Although goals for system change were ambitious, projects chosen for donor support did not aim at replacing main institutions, or even creating new ones, nor at changing system structures and practices through a frontal attack. Rather, they moved by carefully selecting programs and institutions in promising contexts, arguing that success stories would diffuse and inspire. Donors were not confrontational and avoided sticky issues in the areas of finance or governance. They pushed for diversification, but initially worked largely with those national universities that were open to change. Contrary to stereotypes, national universities were often receptive and included strong, reform-minded centers. Thus, UNAM in Mexico, Universidad de Buenos Aires in Argentina, Universidad de Chile, Universidad Central in Venezuela, and San Marcos in Peru, among others, were initial foci of attention. The push towards institutional alternatives came about only after frustrating experiences with the national universities, often with regret. Student politics, increasingly joined by the activism of professors and unions, helped erode university leadership that was favorable to donor-supported reforms and caused the retreat.

The philanthropic vision and funding for system change, institution building and changes in academic work during the golden years (roughly defined as between the 1960s and early 1980s) are covered by the core chapters in the book. In case after case, Levy shows how philanthropic high ambition was challenged by reality, at times as outright political opposition, but more often as passive resistance to innovations by the many who were left out or who had good reasons to fear that innovations would erode their fragile positions within the system. Donors did not have difficulties in identifying and choosing partners in their quest for progress, but they could not, and would not, strengthen their partners’ political positions within government or the universities. Obviously, innovations had a chance only when change agents were powerful enough, or enjoyed sufficient autonomy, to carry out projects as planned.

Levy’s analysis relies heavily on a theory about philanthropic behavior that he calls the ideal type of philanthropic change and on detailed information about the grants and loans these agencies made in Latin America. This narrow focus is a source of both strength and of weakness in the book. On the one hand, Levy’s adherence to a plan enables him to reach precise, even if mixed, conclusions about how this particular set of agencies acted and with what results. He finds a good fit between ideals and practice. Also, he finds that reality proved to be elusive and changing in unplanned directions. On the other hand, the book offers a number of insights about higher education and politics during this exciting period that Levy refrains from following or

exploiting beyond the defined focus. Hopefully those insights may inspire further research in this fertile period of higher education innovations.

In the 1990s, external assistance to higher education worldwide became largely dominated by the World Bank, although recently UNESCO and OECD have added different voices, but very limited resources, to the field. In Latin America one should add the Inter-American Development Bank, already active in the past (and included in Levy's book as a main actor), but with renewed energy. A major new aim for all of them is to develop in-house capacity for research and publication. Although working with local experts, their privileged relationship with governments and the relative weakness of independent, empirical research on higher education in Latin America have enabled such agencies to dominate the agenda for public policy debate through the production of key documents and reports.

The World Bank's country study, *Tertiary Education in Colombia: Paving the Way for Reform*, is a good example. The 200-page report includes dozens of figures and tables illustrating analytic models and presenting data on all relevant parts of the puzzle. The first section is devoted to an overview of the current situation of tertiary education, including basic information about students and enrollment trends, academics, institutions (here called "providers"), governance and quality assurance, disciplines and programs, science and technology. The second section deals with the economics of higher education: external efficiency, public and private funding, and student aid. The third and final section brings a diagnosis of the system's ills and recommends strategies to cope with them. Appendices, taking up almost two thirds of the volume, include the working papers prepared to substantiate most of the views presented in the core sections of the volume. While the core was prepared by the Bank specialists, the seven studies included in the annexes were prepared by outside consultants, a majority of them well known Latin American experts in the field.

The scholarly oriented reader may be advised to focus on the appendices. Each of them is a summary of a longer document but retains a strong analytic flavor with many scholarly references. All tend to be quite critical of the Colombian higher education system. For instance, José Joaquín Brunner finds that the system's economic-political framework largely explains underperformance. Brunner takes issue with the three organizing principles underlying its operation, namely, a vertically disjointed system divided between public and private sectors with limited links; a public sector without incentives or with perverse incentives to grow and improve quality and equity; and a highly fragmented private sector with low quality whose worst suppliers are not eliminated in the market. Highly critical of public policy, he finds that

“institutions are forced to operate within a social space that is characterized by anomy, without any clear and stable norms, without accountability and without any consequence coming either from the Government or the market” (75). While the responsibility for change and innovation is therefore shifted to the institutions, Brunner doubts whether higher education institutions, with their own traditions, interests, and governance systems, can reform themselves and/or the system. In consequence, it falls to government to create an appropriate framework and to generate an appropriate mix of incentives for institutions to behave by selecting a group of instruments to modify modes of coordination and funding that do not work. Marta Laverde’s chapter devoted to an analysis of higher education governance—the set of government departments and agencies that guide and regulate the system—clearly confirms the difficult task ahead. Laverde finds an overall lack of clarity in the role of agencies, with duplicated responsibilities and mixed messages. The institutional map looks like a puzzle to even an expert observer, with three levels of government and a variety of semi-autonomous regulating agencies involved in caring for a complex and disarticulated institutional system. Additional chapters on quality assurance, the funding of higher education, and the organization of student aid are also carefully documented and analytically sound.

The World Bank is often accused of using a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to higher education policy. Only recently has the Bank laid out in detail its vision of what needs to be changed and its rationality for a lending policy in higher education worldwide.¹⁰ But is there a single vision of the systems to be reformed? Are there formulas to be applied universally? A Bank vision of what is wrong with higher education has been found by two Norwegian scholars, amazed at how dysfunctional their own system would look under this lens: “too much state involvement, too little cost sharing, too much student welfare, too much governance by the academic community, too close alliances with the state, too much public (as opposed to private) involvement in tertiary education governance, too little societal (i.e., private) control of institutions of higher learning, too little institutional diversification, a wrong focus on disciplines, etc.”¹¹ To what extent does this vision come through in the study of higher education in Colombia? Although some elements are there, one finds a much more nuanced diagnosis of what has gone wrong in Colombia. The main message, in fact, is the need to reform governance, starting

10. *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2002).

11. Tor Halvorsen and Tom Skaug, “Constructing Knowledge Societies? The World Bank and the New Lending Policy for Tertiary Education,” *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 2, no. 3 (2004): 140.

from the top level and then moving into the semi-autonomous agencies and to the institutional level. There is no blind defense of more private investment, but rather a critical description of how poorly the market works. Colombia has a highly diversified institutional system, the report says. What it obviously lacks is reliable, global mechanisms for coordination and articulation. And so on and so forth.

Perhaps the most blatant omission in this Bank report is the absence of contextual political and economic considerations that could be gathered immediately from other Bank reports. It is as if the Bank itself would need to achieve better articulation and coordination between its different departments. Prepared during 2001, the study ignored the steep decline in the rate of growth and greater volatility of Colombia's economy during the 1990s, marked by the rapid deterioration of economic welfare and increasing unemployment. Public spending kept growing during the decade until the crisis of 1998–2000, confronting the country with a fiscal crisis that was relatively new for Colombia. A decline in productivity may lie behind this reversal, thus suggesting that more and better investment in education would make sense, but authors have suggested a more clear relationship between the implosion of productivity and the rise in crime with the expansion in drug-trafficking activities.¹² The absence of these considerations certainly weakens the overall argument of the Bank's future vision for higher education, yet it does not challenge the quality of the diagnosis about what is wrong in the way the system operates.

CHANGES IN STUDENT COMPOSITION AND IN THE ACADEMIC PROFESSION

Growth in tertiary education enrollment has continued unabated throughout the region. Almost one out of four persons aged 20–24 is currently enrolled in some form of postsecondary education. Yet, little is known about who these students are—their demographics and plans, what they learn and do, how many actually obtain a degree, or how long it takes them to do so. Information is scattered and highly unreliable. Few countries in the region have in place an effective information system with national coverage. In the absence of better sources, analysts have turned to explore the use of a household survey now regularly conducted in most countries. Thus, the World Bank report on Colombia draws extensively on survey data to look at student information by gender and income. Argentina experimented with the use of an education module within the periodic household survey conducted in 1998. The book

12. Mauricio Cárdenas, "Economic Growth in Colombia: A Reversal of 'Fortune'?" Working paper, Center for International Development, Harvard University.

edited by Anibal Jozami and Sánchez Martínez reports on the results of this survey. Although coverage is limited to the urban population (about 64 percent of the total), so is the majority of postsecondary students.

The picture emerging from this source might at times surprise readers who are part of academia but do not systematically look at higher education as a sector. First, about one-third of the population age 18–24 is enrolled in postsecondary education in all urban areas, not just in the major cities. Migration is no longer needed, or justified, in order to pursue an advanced degree. Second, almost 30 percent of those enrolled in postsecondary studies are 25 or older, with older students more heavily concentrated in “tertiary” institutions, the postsecondary alternatives to the university. Third, a majority of students are now women, in particular in tertiary institutions, although with uneven representation in the science and technology fields. Fourth, most Argentine students work part-time and/or depend on family income, since few if any receive student support. Only in professional schools, such as medicine and dentistry, do students tend to be full-time. Finally, as expected, income differentials persist in spite of the growth in enrollment. Twenty-six percent among the lowest income quartile, for instance, completed the secondary educational cycle, but almost half continues beyond that level.

The emerging landscape is of a rapidly changing student body, but within the parameters of the Latin American country that first experimented with massive access on the basis of what in practice is an open-admission system for most of the public sector. In this context, high levels of attrition and low graduation rates are a normal source of concern. Another source of concern is the unusually long time-to-degree in Argentina, in the absence of financial or administrative incentives in the public universities. These patterns are also reflected in the age composition of the student body and the high proportion that studies part-time while already in the labor market. Although most mature systems have recently developed policies to expand the enrollment of nontraditional, older-age students, through special access programs of higher or further education, the Argentine system incorporates this demand within the normal operation of the system, with no special attention to the different needs of nontraditional students.

Comparative studies of the professoriate in recent years, in particular the pioneering survey of the academic profession conducted in fourteen middle- and high-income countries,¹³ throw light on a key aspect of the emerging mass systems of higher education at the center of most reform plans: the education of educators. A recent edited volume by

13. Philip G. Altbach, ed., *The International Academic Profession: Portraits of Fourteen Countries* (Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1996).

Philip Altbach, *The Decline of the Guru*, includes three excellent chapters on Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, two of them (Mexico and Brazil) by the same authors included in the Carnegie comparative survey.

Manuel Gil Anton finds one source of continuity vis-à-vis the academic profession in Mexico: the obsession with the never-fulfilled need for training at the doctoral level. The vision of a modern university in 1910, when Justo Sierra (who had in mind the University of California at Berkeley as a model) founded UNAM to merge pre-existing and new schools, was largely based on building a full-time, highly qualified teaching staff with doctoral degrees. In 1910, the quick solution was to produce a list of up to one-fourth of the total number of professors with several years of experience and a proven commitment to teaching and award them doctoral degrees, together with all directors of the schools. In 1997, the Mexican government launched a new program to improve the quality of teaching staff, only 5 percent of whom had doctoral degrees. The new program, PROMEP (Programa para el Mejoramiento del Profesorado), is intended to raise the percentage of full-time positions from 30 to 70, with up to 25 percent of the instructors having doctorates. The major obstacle, of course, is that a rapidly expanding system with a huge demand for new professors has resulted, as Gil Anton indicates, "in a process characterized by speed, hasty recruitment, abrupt changes of direction, and an endless succession of models" (30).

While the chapter on Mexico focuses on failed policies, it also offers a vivid picture of the actual differentiation of the professoriate. Income differentiation, under a system of evaluations and rewards for research, has become firmly established. Additional sources of income are also linked to different incentives (i.e., for permanence on the job, for advanced degrees, for productivity, and the like). Carlos Marquis, in his chapter on Argentina, and Balbachevsky and Quinteiro, writing on Brazil, find similar systems of faculty incentives pushing towards greater differentiation and lack of transparency, in spite of the prevailing view of an equal pay schedule within the public system.

In all cases, the most rapidly changing aspect of the workplace for the professoriate has been the growing opportunities in the private higher education sector. This sector has expanded, competing at times with the public universities to attract qualified professors. In part, this reflects government policy focusing attention on faculty's academic credentials for accreditation purposes. In Brazil, for instance, at least one-third of the faculty must have a master's or doctoral degree for a private higher education institution to be accredited as a university, thus stimulating the demand for graduate studies. Unfortunately, with the partial exception of the chapters on Mexico and Brazil, unionization and political mobilization of the professoriate receives scant attention in this volume.

There has been just too little attention paid to the transformation of the student body and of the professoriate as well as to the political roles these actors have been playing in the region's higher education policy. It may well be the case that students and professors, unlike the usual description of their active role in the reforms of the 1950s and 1960s, have been mostly reactive in recent decades, ceding space to governments and politicians in the role of university administrators. Why, how, and with what effects this is happening, if in fact it happens, are the kind of questions that need to be addressed.