

# COMPARATIVE & INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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**HIGHER EDUCATION SIG**  
COMPARATIVE & INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SOCIETY

# COMPARATIVE & INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

## Philosophy for *Comparative and Int'l Higher Education*

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### Contact Information

*Comparative & International Higher Education*

Higher Education SIG

5714 Wesley W. Posvar Hall

Pittsburgh, PA 15260 USA

Direct +1 (412) 567 2517

Fax +1 (800) 327 8203

Website: <http://www.highered.org/newsletter.html>

Email: [submissions@highered.org](mailto:submissions@highered.org)

**HIGHER EDUCATION SIG**  
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# New Patterns of Crosscultural Learning in Chinese Higher Education

Hong ZHU<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Northeast Normal University, China*

In the *Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development* (2010-2020) the Chinese government announced its intention of raising the number of inbound international students in the coming ten years. By 2020 the number was targeted to reach 500,000, which would make China the destination country attracting the largest number of international students in Asia (China Association for International Education [CAFSA] 2010).

This ambition has resulted in significant changes in international student education in China. In 2010, the number of international students studying in China reached 260,000. They came from five continents, including 194 countries and regions (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2011). A total of 107,432 international students were studying for academic degrees, accounting for about 40 percent of the total of 260,000. In response to the increasing number of international students coming for degree programs, the language of instruction has also changed. China's universities began to set up academic courses taught in English in 2006, and has gradually expanded the fields of knowledge and the number of students enrolled year by year.

In 2008, the first English instruction program for graduate study in education and applied psychology was launched in China. The program is mainly delivered by Chinese faculty who are non-native English speakers in a non-English environment. It is thus an adventure in education, a learning journey that deserves exploration in depth. Here I make an attempt to present some of the issues from the perspective of international students, with a focus on their cross-cultural learning experience.

## A Case Study of Northern China

My study used such qualitative methods as participant observation, interviews, and focus group meetings, to understand the experience of a cohort of international students involved in an English language graduate program at a Chinese university.

North University (a pseudonym) is a comprehensive university established in 1946, funded and administered by the Ministry of Education. Since 2003, NU has hosted about 1,000 international students, scholars or trainees annually, from about 75 countries and regions. The number studying for academic degrees is on a steady upward trend. In the fall of 2008, NU started full English instruction graduate degree programs, which are authorized and funded by the MOE. In 2008, 2009, and 2010 these programs have hosted 75 full time students from 21 countries and three continents in the Schools of Chemistry, Education, and Life Sciences.

Of the 75 students, 41 have been studying in the School of Education, in programs in Education and Applied Psychology, and 37 have received full scholarships from the Chinese government, while 12 are senior scholars who had already obtained either MA degrees or doctorate degrees before they came to China. This group of 41 comes from 14 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. All of them were working in tertiary education institutes, governmental offices or non-governmental organizations before coming to China.

## The Participants and Methods

The voluntary participants in the study were a group of 24 students in the Classes of 2008 and 2009, who were in the full English instruction program majoring in education and applied psychology. They are from 14 different countries and of diverse religious back-

\*Corresponding author: Email: [zhuh320@nenu.edu.cn](mailto:zhuh320@nenu.edu.cn);  
Address: School of Education, Northeast Normal University, Changchun 130024, China.

grounds. All have participated in the interviews and eight of them participated in focus group discussions as well.

The interview questions were designed on the basis of previous participant observation in both academic and social activities. The questions asked were very general, such as “What do you hope to achieve at the end of your program?” and “What are your observations and learning in the context of a contemporary Chinese university?” Focus groups were organized for the purpose of triangulating the data collection and analysis. One additional interview with two officers of NU’s International Student Office was held for supplementary information on government policy and school administration issues relating to international student affairs.

The descriptive analysis adopted Knight’s working definition (2004) of the internationalization of higher education, as a process of integrating international, intercultural or global dimensions into the development of post-secondary education and focusing on students’ cross-cultural learning. The data was analyzed around broad cross-cultural learning approaches, which include language, academics, and socio-cultural experiences. Here I present a summary of some of the findings, in these three areas.

### **Language: Mandarin and English**

The study found that language ranked as the most crucial dimension in the cross-cultural learning process. This was true for both English and Mandarin. These students were different from most other international students in China in that they were not prepared in Mandarin before coming to China. The English instruction curriculum included only a 60 hour beginning Mandarin course, which gave them minimal linguistic skill training. None of the students felt the Mandarin course was adequate for their needs. Neither was the time allowed enough nor was the pedagogical approach satisfactory.

Nevertheless, the students made great efforts to overcome barriers in Mandarin communication. This included using sign language and seeking help from friends who were bilingual in Mandarin and English,

also exchanging language lessons. The most efficient strategy reported by many was seeking help from their English speaking Chinese friends. To assist the students with more Mandarin learning resources, the program coordinator organized extra non-credit Mandarin classes, given voluntarily by Chinese graduate students. For those who are determined to pursue further academic studies in China, they will have to continue their Mandarin education.

As the only language medium for academic work, English had a more critical and direct impact on their learning experience. None of the students speaks English as their mother tongue. They acquired their knowledge of English in various contexts, while the English used in the program has its own unique characteristics. This has resulted in some additional barriers in the initial communication among the students and with their teachers. However, the main difficulty has been caused by a lack of sufficient English language resources for their studies.

NU enjoys rich resources in terms both of faculty and of such academic facilities as libraries, laboratories, and IT equipment. However, most resources and the main channels of access to the resources are in Mandarin, which makes them inaccessible to the students in the English instruction program. As for other services, there has been a lack of administrative personnel who could communicate in English. Concerned about the need for a more internationalized management, the students taking part in this study suggested the school should deploy more English speaking people.

Moreover, all the participants expressed their concern about the future of English for academic purposes in a Chinese context. Currently, NU’s doctoral programs are all offered only in Mandarin. The international students who intend to continue their doctoral study have to take one year mandatory Mandarin course. The participants in this study observed the insufficient academic Mandarin competence of many other international doctoral students after their one year Mandarin training in NU.

Many MA students wish to do their doctoral study in English. Therefore they hope the university can have more faculty qualified to teach in English at the gradu-

ate level. They believe that English instruction programs will give less stress to international students who are here for graduate study and make Chinese universities highly attractive around the world as well.

The school has made efforts to overcome English language barriers. For example, the school provided simultaneous interpreters to work with those instructors who were not comfortable with English. The school has also recruited a group of bilingual graduate volunteers to assist the non-Mandarin speaking students and deployed a special bilingual faculty member to coordinate the program.

### **Academic Experience**

The students' professional objectives are very diverse, including some of the following roles: curriculum specialists, administrators of higher education, musicologists, psychological consultants, language therapists, experts in early childhood education, ICT experts, and language assessment specialists. The first barrier to their academic progress was the "one size fits all" curriculum. The second academic barrier came from the supervision system. The supervisors were assigned to the students on the basis of mutual research interests. However, sometimes the communication between the students and their supervisors was hindered by language difficulties. The third barrier which was crucial to academic work was the library and other learning resources. As mentioned in the section on language, the students found it extremely tough to find appropriate academic literature in English in a timely and satisfactory way.

To overcome these barriers, the program has drawn on various resources. Though the courses were mainly given by the faculty of NU, the program has invited both domestic and international guest professors who enjoy academic prestige in particular fields. The faculty made special efforts to support the international students by giving extra consulting time, sharing their social and academic connections, and their personal library collection. This high degree of commitment was appreciated by the students and has proved effective. Of the two Classes of 2008 and 2009, 15 MA students have

accomplished their thesis research and defended successfully with three external examiners, who are internationally well established scholars in education. Nine senior scholars have completed the research papers they had been commissioned to do by the UNESCO and the Great Wall Scholarship. Only two students had to drop out for family reasons.

Another significant initiative of the program was the setting up of an "International Seminar series on Educational and Psychological Research." Supervised by the program coordinator, an autonomous student standing committee takes full responsibility for this series of seminars, including inviting papers, evaluating proposals, and organizing each meeting. The seminars have hosted about 100 speakers from 22 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. The experience of developing and organizing these seminars has helped to build up a special culture for the program itself, that values independence, tolerance of difference, listening, and cooperation.

### **Socio-cultural Learning**

Crosscultural learning in the context of this study is not limited to interaction between Chinese culture and the student's culture of origin, but involves multiple cultures, in fact a wide range of cultures from the different parts of the world. Just as the English used for most interpersonal communication is not "standard" English, there is no "standard culture," but multi-cultures. Therefore diversity or multiculturalism is a main characteristic of this program.

All the students in the program enjoy practicing and sharing with other people their chosen cultural and religious beliefs on and off campus. All get opportunities to compare how others' culture varies from their own. Through academic and social interaction, especially through the research seminars and other social activities of the program, cohort members have established special ties with each other.

### Lessons from the Case of NU

The cohort studying in the English instruction graduate education program of NU have explored new patterns of cross cultural learning in higher education in an era of global transformation. The new patterns they've experienced in China are taking shape in collaborative activity between developing countries, in a non-native English language context. During the process the most challenging barriers they faced were the gaps between the "one size fits all" curriculum and the diverse needs of individual students, the lack of language and other academic support from the faculty and the inadequacy of academic facilities such as the library, with its limited English language service and professional literature.

To solve these problems and overcome the barriers, various efforts have been made by both the students and program faculty to ensure that the academic goals could be met. The strategies they adopted included seeking voluntary bilingual learning buddies, language exchange lessons, peer academic sharing and exchange through public seminars organized by the program and inviting international guest professors. Throughout the process, the students have played an active part in co-constructing an academic culture which is unique to this particular program. This jointly constructed culture is characterized by sharing, cooperating, listening and being tolerant, also constructively critical attitudes crossing cultures and borders.

### Note

1. This is the summary of a longer and more detailed academic article on this subject, which will appear in *Frontiers of Education in China*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 2011.

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## Public Intervention in Argentina: The Homogenous Expansion of the Private University market

Marcelo Rabossi<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Universidad de Torcuato Di Tella, Argentina*

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, growing fiscal deficits pushed governments to find alternative ways for funding higher education. Many public universities started charging tuition to close the funding gap from the government. On the other hand, a fast growing private sector that was now able to absorb the main bulk of a new demand for post-secondary education brought relief to public accounts. Both situations implied that parents and students now share costs. Also, the inability of governments to fulfill students' preferences in a highly politicized public university brought private institutions to the forefront.

In countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, for example, there is a long tradition of private education providers. In Latin America, since the 1980s, a tremendous shift from public to private higher education helped the region to change the paradigm of a dominant public provider (Altbach 1999). In some countries, the expansion of non-public options was also a State strategy for defending its role as the elite of the system. Brazil and Chile are two main cases in Latin America where the high bulk of students were absorbed by the private sector. Thus, in a hierarchical system, public institutions were able to remain at the top of the pyramid. In others countries of the region, such as Argentina and Uruguay for example, public institutions positioned themselves as the main suppliers for higher education while keeping its place as the elite of the system.

In this article, I analyze the expansion of the private market in Argentina. I begin by giving a broad overview about the early stages and late consolidation. The

expansion of the private university sector was from the very beginning a major public policy issue. Thus, it never took the state by surprise as happened in many Latin American countries. According to Levy (2006), private's roles surge mostly unanticipated, not following a systemic design. In the Argentinean case, the government was never taken off-guard. However, public policy measures were far from fostering private alternatives. Thus, we will see how, in a market with asymmetric information between providers and consumers of higher education, public intervention was effective to mitigate adverse selection situations (bad and good universities are perceived as equals by potential enrollees).

### Early Attempts

The market for private university education in Argentina never found a fertile ground to challenge the public dominance. From the very beginning, the State perceived private options as a menace to the public objective of reaffirming a national identity. Several attempts to breaking the public monopoly systematically failed. The first one, led by the Catholic Church during the early 1900s, faced strong opposition. An anticlerical attitude from some members of the executive power was evident. Several decades later, there was again an attempt from the country's elite to overcome the public supremacy of higher education. This time some members of the scientific community during the mid 1940s tried to open a private option in order to isolate their academic work from the political struggles that dominated the national university (del Bello et al. 2007). They failed again. Only after difficult negotiations with the government, the first private university was allowed to open its doors in 1959.

\*Corresponding author: Email: [mrabossi@utdt.edu](mailto:mrabossi@utdt.edu); Address: School of Government, Universidad de Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

By the time the private sector in Argentina was legally recognized, seven countries in South American had a private option. Only Paraguay (in 1960), Bolivia (in 1967) and Uruguay (in 1985) followed Argentina in terms of breaking the public monopoly (Levy 1986). As expected, and following the private trend that explains the expansion of the private sector in Latin America, the Church was the major force behind these early undertakings.

### Characteristics of the Initial Expansion (1959-1975)

Private higher education in Latin America secured its presence with the initial steps taken by Catholic institutions. Religious universities, according to Levy (1986), paved the way for future developments. Non-secular elite institutions and demand absorbing private entities followed catholic pioneers.<sup>1</sup> There is no clear trend that can differentiate Argentina with the rest of the region in terms of the main forces behind the first expansion. The early Catholics, together with some semi-elite private institutions, began to operate widening private options beyond public alternatives. Under these dynamics, it is possible to infer that with some limitations, the three wave's expansion model identified by Levy (1986) emerged in Argentina within a span of ten years (1959-1969).

The strong presence of Catholic institutions during this beginning was evident. More than 60 percent of all universities in 1960 embraced the Roman credo. Some semi-elite then followed, but almost none of these institutions during this period can be easily classified within the patterns that distinguish a demand-absorbing sub-sector. Evidently, the main actor in charge of absorbing the main bulk of university's students in Argentina was the public sector, and particularly after 1973 when no new private universities were allowed to enter the market. This restriction was lifted in 1989.

In short, 16 years after the first opening we find a mature and consolidated private market in terms of the number of institutions. A total of 25 universities were created as alternative universities, ending the public monopoly that was defended for more than 130 years (Table 1).

TABLE 1  
NUMBER OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTES IN ARGENTINA, 1960-1975

Year	Universities and University Institutes	Variation	Private Enrollment/ Total Enrollment
1960	13	-	2.2%
1965	20	7	8.4%
1970	22	2	17.4%
1975	25	3	12.2%

Sources: Levy (1986), Balán and García de Fanelli (1993); del Bello and colleagues (2007).

Table 1 shows the rapid expansion during the first decade, not only in terms of supply (number of institutions), but also in the ability of the private sector to absorb new students (17.4 percent by 1970). The decline in 1975 is direct consequence of a national university that opened its doors to all students with the only prerequisite of having a secondary school diploma.

### The Second Expansion: Early Freedom (1989-1995) and Late Control (1996 to the Present)

Attuned with a general reform to introduce market dynamics into public settings, with the aim of bringing about better cost efficiency, private alternatives found a friendly environment to expand. New universities were allowed again to offer their services, and the market witnessed the rise of a diversified academic alternative. Table 2 shows that from 1989 to 1995, 23 new institutions added heterogeneity to a system dominated by the public university enrollment. And although the 1990s was a decade of big expansion for non-public institutions, less than one-sixth of all students chose an education at a private university. However, for the first time in terms of supply, or the number of institutions, private universities outnumbered public ones (48 to 40).

On the other hand, the creation of the National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEAU) in 1996 put a stop to this vigorous initial growth. The CONEAU, an independent public organism that works within the Ministry of Education (ME), is the national agency responsible for evaluating



and accrediting all private universities in Argentina. Those institutions that do not get CONEAU's authorization are not allowed to operate. Thus, the agency can be seen as an attempt to set up a centralized system to control the quality of the whole system.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY INSTITUTES IN ARGENTINA, 1980-2009

Year	Universities and University Institutes	Variation	Private Enrollment/ Total Enrollment
1985	25	-	12.7%
1995	48	23	13.9%
2005	57	9	15.0%
2009	60	3	20.5%

Sources: del Bello and colleagues (2007) and Secretariat for Universities Policies (2010).

### A New Public Agenda

The neoliberal wave that since the 1980s dominated the scene of public administration around the globe had among its main goals to "reinvent government" (Osborne and Gaebler 1993). The objective was, among other initiatives, to increase efficiency and transparency of public institutions by emphasizing customer oriented policies, accountability for results, and decentralization (Peters 1996). In higher education, surveys began to be used to obtain information about student satisfaction (Kuh 2005). Also, the growing popularity of funding public universities according to performance demanded both external accountability and internal improvement as central goals (Burke 2002). Decentralization, on the other hand, implied more institutional autonomy. However, more freedom had as counterpart more central control, particularly when universities were facing a decline in public trust. Accreditation agencies jumped into the Latin American scene during the 1990s under this logic, but also for solving a market problem.

### A Market Problem or a Theoretical Approach Applied to Higher Education

Consumers of education need information about the quality of the service they are acquiring in order to maximize the benefit of their investments. However, if information is not symmetrically distributed between the supplier of education and the consumer of the service, the latter is facing a problem. In other words, information asymmetries can be seen as a market problem or failure. If during the transaction one party has better information than the other, we say that there is an asymmetry. This imbalance can generate adverse selection situation (individuals tend to evaluate good and bad services as equals). Then, the allocation and distribution of goods and services are subject to inefficiencies (Akerlof 1970; Spence 1973).

The theory of the "lemons market" by Akerlof (1970) departs from the idea that adverse selection situations will cause the market to be dominated by bad products (lemons). Specifically, if the buyer has insufficient or is unable to decode the information to distinguish between a good or a bad service, both will sell for the same price. When consumers are unable to distinguish the quality of the product before they make the decision of whether to buy it or not, the seller has enough incentives to pass off mediocre quality product as good ones. It is expected that if this happens, bad products will tend to dominate the market.

Although the logic of lemons describes behaviors found in the used market for cars, it may apply, with some limitations, to education. One main difference between both markets is that selling a used car is a one-shot game. The relationship between both seller and buyer finishes once the used car is sold. On the other hand, education can be perceived as a sequential or repetitive game. Universities build up their reputation for future demand based on today's quality. In other words, reputation can affect future developments. However, quality in education is not easily measurable; and if so, it is generally quantifiable only after the consumer has bought a big portion of the service. As in the used market for cars, there is a clear asymmetry between the institution and the potential buyer about the final quality

of the product. Even more, education is a complex and intangible service. University effort and quality is not fully observable to families and prospect students. On the other hand, succeeding in the university is determined by several non-organizational factors. Personal ability and motivation, and how students interact with other persons and the environment also matters (Tinto 1994). For example, if quality is defined in time to graduate, are those institutions where students take a shorter time period to graduate better than others? (Readings 1996). Thus, quality can be an elusive concept. If information between providers and customers are not symmetrically distributed and easy to decode, adverse selection problems can arise. If so, there is a need for a new actor to mediate between the university and the potential student, if the objective is to maximize both private and social benefits.

The existence of asymmetries of information between a provider and consumers is often used as a justification for government intervention, and particularly if we are dealing with a merit good as education (Mugsgraves 1959; Ver Eecke 1998).<sup>3</sup> The government is the actor that has better access to information, and much better than potential consumers of education. Also, it has the legal means to make the disclosure of data mandatory to universities. Public intervention can then mediate between both agents (universities and potential students) providing reliable information. The goal is to arrive to a better selection from the consumers' point of view, and increasing the individual utility or welfare (Mann and Wüstemann 2010).

Regardless of rankings' reliability (administered by public or private organization), they provide information to students and families. In a competitive market with available information, we can expect that consumers of education will be inclined to pay more for a better service. This type of market coordination will not deter the appearance of lemon institutions, but will screen bad from good universities. As a result, high quality institutions will position themselves better. Finally, this will lead to a kind of stratifications of education regardless of their funding system.

On the other hand, accrediting bodies can be seen as public mechanisms, or institutions, to prevent lemon

universities. The stratification will still be present, but we can expect that the hierarchical pyramid in terms of their status will be relatively flatter. Though, in this kind of public coordination, we can expect a less heterogeneous market in terms of quality than in pure or competitive market coordination.

### **Accreditation Agencies to Solve a Market Failure**

The rapid expansion of the private market of higher education was in many cases an unanticipated phenomenon that took governments by surprise, where the state role in planning was limited (Levy 2006). The increasing number of institutions added not only heterogeneity to the new public offer, but also different levels of quality among them. It is expected that under such situation, low quality institutions would have the conditions to thrive. In other words, and before an adverse selection situation, we expect that "lemon institutions" will tend to dominate the market, at least in the short run. Within an unregulated market, it will be difficult for a new private university to convince potential students that they are not the same as "other low quality private competitors." If informational asymmetries between buyers and sellers were high, it would be easier (and more profitable) to set up a low quality university and pretend to be an average institution.

To avoid these unwanted consequences, or market failures, the development of the private university sector during the 1990s was generally complemented with accrediting bodies to monitor the quality of programs and institutions. Their role was not only to set minimal standards, but to promote higher standards of quality among universities.

### **CONEAU: A Highly Centralized and Rigorous Public Accrediting Agency**

CONEAU plays a decisive role during the long accreditation process all private universities in Argentina must pass, where institutions need a favorable report from this entity before receiving their definitive authorization. The National Executive Power grants the final recognition. Thus, while all public universities are na-

tional entities regulated by the same body of laws, norms, and decrees, private universities are also legally regulated through a centralized mechanism. And although these rules ended up limiting public-private distinctiveness and private growth, they also favor non-public organizations by legitimizing their role in the market. So, what was handed down as a legal restriction to stop private expansion, actually, has helped private institutions as they position themselves as reliable substitutes to public universities (Rabossi 2011). The role of CONEAU as a strict supervisor is out of question. Suffice to say that since its opening in 1986 to 2009, out of 88 authorization requests only 12 institutions got official recognition (CONEAU 2010). An extremely low proportion of full-time faculty members, deficient research planning, libraries with scarce or irrelevant bibliographic material, and a cash-flow plan denoting financial fragility are some of the most common causes that CONEAU found incompatible for allowing new universities to be part of the national system of higher education. In other words, lemons were not welcomed within the high standards promoted.

## Conclusions

Previous to the creation of CONEAU, the ME in Argentina played a significant role as a tough supervisor. Strict entry rules for private options were set from the very beginning in 1959, although this regulatory trend did not imply a rational planning for the tertiary level. In any case, a rigorous legal framework prevented the creation of mediocre private higher education institutions. In contrast to what happened in Brazil and Colombia, just to mention two countries in the region where private universities were also thought as an alternative to decompress the public system, the market for private higher education in Argentina was restrictive. On the other hand, the Argentinian free-for-all public system put no entry barriers for any student holding a high school diploma. In other words, non-public options were never considered as substitutes to attract students that did not find a place in public institutions. In this environment, private alternatives also found a ceiling for its enrollment growth.

Furthermore, in comparison to other Latin American countries, these legal barriers have helped Argentina to develop a somewhat homogenous private system with high or reasonable standards of quality. We find that the quality gap between top ranked private universities and those at the bottom is smaller from other private systems in the region. In other words, dispersion in terms of quality is relatively lower. For example, this situation contrasts with what is happening in several countries of Latin America, such as El Salvador and Mexico, for example. In El Salvador, the opening of illegal institutions has not been an uncommon practice (Alba and Luna 2003). In this country, for example, the opening of more than 40 private universities during the 1980s and 1990s was a government strategy to weaken a public university controlled by the leftist guerrilla. Then, within a political more than a strategic planning, many of the new universities did not fulfill the minimum quality requirements (Elías Campos 2004). Later, the Ministry of Education closed down several institutions due to quality issues. Even today, more than half of all institutions in the current market are not accredited universities. In the case of Mexico, over the last decade the number of private universities grew considerably. By the end of 2009, there were more than 1,600 institutions that granted at least a *licenciatura* degree (bachelor), but less than half of them (538) had been evaluated in terms of the quality of their programs (Informador 2010).

However, by any means the restrictive policy in Argentina had the objective of fostering private elite undertakings. Enough will be to say that Argentina was unable to generate an elite private sub-sector with real impact in the market. In a system, the capacity of generating an elite sector is generally tied to the research activity developed by each institution. In Chile, for example, a group of private universities, specifically those privates that are part of the *Universidades del Consejo de Rectores*, get direct public funding. Thus, many of them are able to conduct serious research. On the other hand, public research money for private institutions in Argentina is scarce, or non available. Nonetheless, by limiting access, both the ME and CONEAU

avoided the appearance of low quality universities, or “lemon institutions.”

We can also speculate that the limited heterogeneity found in Argentina can be the consequence of having a single and national accreditation agency that sets the rules for the entire system. Also, the for-profit sector in Argentina was not legally authorized. In general, this market is exceptionally diverse, and in some instances considered as an inferior alternative (Kinser and Levy 2005; Cárdenas 2010). Thus, this can be another major characteristic of the system that has helped to restrict even greater homogeneity in Argentina and less dispersion in terms of quality. On the other hand, in Chile and Mexico, for example, we find a more heterogeneous private market in terms of quality, where several accreditation agencies at a regional level defined the patterns.

In short, we can enumerate several factors that have helped the private university sector in Argentina to be less heterogenic:

1. A ME that has been very strict to quality issues from the very beginning.
2. A free-for-all open public university dwarfed the development of a stronger private demand-absorbing subsector.
3. Uniformity of criteria in the creation of new universities.
4. Only non-for-profit universities are allowed, limiting a more heterogeneous private market.

In a country where rankings, public or privately administered, are not generally welcomed, government control and coordination was the main force that stopped the appearance of lemon universities. And while public intervention restricted the development of a more dynamic and heterogeneous private sector, by avoiding the presence of universities with a lack of rigorous academic standards, the state actually helped private institutions to legitimize their presence in a market where the national university is still perceived as the top quality university.

## Notes

1. According to Levy (1986), the growth of the private university sector in Latin America occurred in three consecutive waves. The first one, the *Catholic Reaction*, depicted the role played by the Church in the creation of the first private institutions in the region. The second wave, the *Elite*, basically a secular phenomenon, is the reaction of a social group who saw their privileges in jeopardy by sharing their interests with lower classes in a politicized public university. The third and last wave, *Non-elite Private Alternatives*, describes the secular private development to give answer to the failure of the public sector.
2. The first post-colonial university to open their doors was the public University of Buenos Aires, funded in 1821. The current National University of Córdoba was in fact the Jesuit College, a religious institution created, among other objectives, to train officials for the Spanish crown and to dissuade the expansion of the Protestantism in the region. It began its academic activities in 1613. After the Jesuits were expelled from the continent in 1776, the institution was controlled by the Colonial government and renamed Royal University (Rebora 1987; Cano 1988).
3. In economics, a merit good is a commodity or product that an individual or a society considers to be intrinsically desirable. If left solely by market competition, the product will be underprovided. Government intervention is needed to secure its provision.

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## Awareness, Adaptation, and Alienation: Challenges of the First-Generation American College Experience

Stephanie M. Drotos<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Lakeland College, USA

As more and more American jobs require postsecondary degrees, the importance of college enrollment has increased. In 2018, approximately 63 percent of jobs in the United States are projected to require postsecondary education (Carnevale et al. 2010). This is up from 28 percent in 1974. Currently, almost 70 percent of high school graduates enroll in college within two years of completing high school (U.S. Department of Education 2009). Roughly 30 percent of entering freshmen are first-generation college students (*USA Today* 2010).

Many students who are potential first-generation college grads, especially those who also come from lower income homes, face unique challenges both in successfully enrolling in college and persisting in college. The percentage of these students beginning college immediately after high school is 55 percent, compared to 84 percent of those from high-income families (Aud and Hannes 2011). One reported finding has shown the baccalaureate attainment rate for first-generation, low socioeconomic status students is only 12 percent, as compared to 73 percent of those from high income homes (Mortenson 2007). There are several reasons for this disparity. Beyond the obvious challenges posed by financial constraints which cause student employment to consume study time, students coming from families where their parents did not attend college also must learn to navigate a new cultural arena. First, they need to become more aware of the basic logistics of college, including entrance requirements, course expectations, choices of major, and financial aid application procedures.

Second, they will have to adapt to a new, typically, “middle class” cultural setting. Even more daunting, many first-generation students must complete both of these tasks with little family support. Worse than receiving little support, students may find that the process of adaptation results in rifts between family members.

### Awareness and Assistance

Parental involvement generally plays a lead role in students’ academic advancement (Davis-Kean 2005; McCarron et al. 2006). Many middle class students rely on their parents to guide them in their college preparations. Parents aid them in learning about and choosing a major, visiting and choosing a college and filling out applications. Without college experienced parents, first-generation students are more likely than their counterparts to lack knowledge about the college preparation requirements and application process (Terenzini et al. 1994; Cabrera and La Nasa 2000; Choy et al. 2000; Walpole 2007; Roderick et al. 2008).

First-generation students who have managed to successfully enroll in college have already overcome a significant barrier. However, once enrolled, they continue to face unique challenges. Some students may not be supported by family members. Parents of first-generation students do not always understand educational pursuits (Billson and Terry 1982; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Goodwin 2006; Kleinfeld 2009). Instead of praising their children for continuing their education, many first-generation students are criticized by family members. Family and friends, who did not pursue a postsecondary degree, may perceive higher education as unnecessary and costly, a luxury, or even an irresponsible choice.

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\*Corresponding author: Email: [drotoss@lakeland.edu](mailto:drotoss@lakeland.edu); Address: Lakeland College, Sheboygan, Wisconsin 53082, USA.

## Adaptation

Additionally, college as a gateway to the middle class, forces blue collar raised students to adapt to a new cultural environment. In fact, many first-generation students feel out of place in college. As Graziella Pagliarulo McCarron, Kurotsuchi Inkelas, and Karen Kurotsuchi (2006) restate Inman and Mayes (1999) notion of culture shock on the college campus:

[Lack of] knowledge of the campus environment, campus values, access to human and financial resources and familiarity with terminology and the general functioning of a higher education setting . . . may contribute to a sense of college “culture shock.”

First-generation students may feel like cultural outsiders (Granfield 1991; Aries and Seider 2005) or imposters (Jensen 2004). Wolfgang Lehmann (2007) found that first-generation, working-class students were more likely to leave university very early. Not “fitting in,” not “feeling university” and not being able to “relate to these people” were key reasons for eventually withdrawing. Pamela Aronson (2008, p. 49) explains that these students “often feel fearful or isolated in college, are aware of speaking differently from others, have difficulty making friends, question their own abilities, feel like outsiders, or feel that education institutions do not understand or respect their experience.”

Adapting to a new cultural setting is in addition to the tasks related to “learning the ropes,” including how to interact with professors, coursework expectations, and scheduling. While all new college students face adjustment challenges, those who were not aided by hearing parents’ stories of college life, have to play catch-up.

## Alienation

After students acclimate to a new set of cultural norms, there is an impact when interacting with family members and friends who have not gone through the same process. Alfred Lubrano (2005) calls first-

generation college enrollees “straddlers,” as they balance between both blue collar and white collar worlds. Students experience problems “that arise from [living] simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither” (Rendon 1992, p. 56). These students report strained relationships with family and friends who did not attend college as the college-goers are perceived as changing and separating from those who did not go (Piorkowski 1983; London 1989; Rendon 1992; Terenzini et al. 2001).

Those successful academically may even feel badly about their achievements. Geraldine K. Piorkowski (1983) describes what she terms “survivor guilt” felt by students who attempt to “make it” as they think about less fortunate peers and family members. This sense of guilt can serve to hold achievers back.

There is some evidence that first-generation college students face unique challenges in their pursuit of college degrees. Having overcome previous hurdles, many arrive on campus only to be confronted by an additional challenge of having to navigate the uncharted waters of a new cultural arena with little family support or assistance. Entrance into the middle class requires change which may reduce family cohesion and challenge the individual’s belief system. As American colleges strive to adapt to a changing student body which includes greater numbers of first-generation enrollees, an understanding of the first-generation experience is warranted. Interventions programs aimed at increasing student persistence rates would benefit from the recognition of unique challenges these students face.

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