

CONTEXT FOR THE NATIONAL DATA: BRAZIL

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Brazilian higher education level is considered as a late comer in Latin America. Contrary to the situation found in the Spanish colonies, Portugal did not create universities in their colonial settlements. The first higher education institutions in Brazil date back to 1808 and the first universities were established in the 1930s, four centuries after the creation of the first universities in the Spanish Americas.

Brazil allows the establishment of public (federal, state, and municipal) and private (nonprofit and for-profit) institutions. Public higher education is fully subsidized, and thus it is free, at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The higher education system is dual, divided in university and non-university levels. The main difference between the two sublevels relates to their level of autonomy. Universities and university centers (university level) can establish new programs and decide on how many vacancies for students will be available, except on those professional fields where professional associations have to review proposals to establish new programs or change existing ones. In contrast, non-university institutions need Ministry of Education's approval to establish or change programs. Universities are the only type of institutions required to conduct research.

As of 2010, with more than 6.5 million students in higher education, Brazil is by far the largest higher education system in Latin America, more than double the size of the next systems (Mexico and Argentina). However, by proportion of the age cohort enrolled in institutions of higher education (18-24 years old), Brazil ranks 11th in Latin America.

Brazil has one of the highest private enrollment shares, not only in Latin America but also worldwide. At 72.7% (2010), Brazil trails only Chile (79.1%) within Latin America. Equally striking is the prominence of for-profit institutions within the private sector. In April 1997, President Cardoso signed presidential decree #2,207, for the first time explicitly mentioning and allowing higher education institution sponsors (mantenedoras) to be established as for-profit companies. In August of the same year, a new presidential decree (#2,306) replaced the one mentioned previously, allowing sponsor organizations (mantenedoras) to adopt any type of category allowed by tributary law. In other words, sponsor organizations could be arranged as civil (nonprofit) or commercial (for-profit) entities. Nonprofit institutions are subject to more controls from the state than for-profits since they have benefits such as tax exemptions and access to public funding.

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