

CONTEXT FOR THE NATIONAL DATA: ARGENTINA

By Dante J. Salto

Rooted in the Spanish colonial tradition, the first university in Argentina was established by the Jesuits order in 1613; today it is known as the *Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*. After national independence and a long period of public university monopoly, the first private university, the Pontifical Catholic University, opened its doors in 1959. In comparison to its major “Southern Cone neighbors, Brazil, Mexico and Chile, Argentina came later by 19, 25 and 71 years, respectively, in starting private higher education.

Three main laws have specifically regulated higher education in Argentina. The *Ley Avellaneda # 1,597* or Statutes of the National Universities was enacted in 1885. It mainly referred to the internal organization of the administrative system of the national universities (public) extant at that time (*Universidad Nacional de Córdoba* and *Universidad de Buenos Aires*), leaving matters not covered in the law to the universities themselves. In 1955, law #6403 allowed the establishment of private universities. A third law (Higher Education Law # 24,521) was enacted in 1995 and deals with the entire higher education system, university and non-university level, private and public.

The 1995 law introduced various reforms to the higher education system. One of the main ones was the creation of a national quality assurance agency. The National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation —CONEAU— is in charge of the institutional assessment of national, provincial and private universities. It is also responsible for the accreditation of all graduate programs and state-regulated undergraduate programs. It issues recommendations about institutional projects to create new public universities and about provisional functioning authorizations for private universities as well as their eventual full authorization, granting more autonomy.

Higher education in Argentina comprises university and non-university subsectors. Universities are regulated by the national government, with the exception of one provincial university, while non-university institutions are regulated by each province or the City of Buenos Aires. Within the

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university sector are universities (national and provincial) and university institutes. The former offer undergraduate and graduate level programs in a wide variety of studies whereas the latter offer their programs in only one field of study. The non-university sector encompasses teacher training institutes that prepare students to teach in all levels of the educational system except at universities, and professional institutes that provide practical training in the humanities, social sciences, technical, professional and artistic areas.

Public universities are fully subsidized by the national government and no tuition is charged. On the other hand, private institutions do not receive any public funding and, instead, charge tuition fees. All public universities are open, without entrance exams, to students who have finished secondary studies. In recent years, private universities have been able to compete for national research funds.