

CONTEXT FOR THE NATIONAL DATA: URUGUAY

Until 1985, the dominant actor in the higher education system was the National University, (Universidad de la República) as a large, comprehensive public university. There were other public post-secondary institutions, basically teacher training and military institutions. The authorization of the Catholic University in 1985 marked the end of the public monopoly in the higher education system.

A decree from 1995 regulates private universities and post-secondary institutions. The regulation makes a distinction between universities and so called “university level institutes.” The regulation states that universities should have academic programs in at least three fields of study. University level institutes develop programs in one or two areas of study at the university level and the programs count towards a degree. Both universities and university level institutes act at the “university level” granting degrees. Non-university post-secondary institutions can ask the Ministry of Education for a licence to act as “tertiary institutions,” but they cannot grant university level degrees.

The face of higher education has changed dramatically since 1995. The system has diversified with increasing enrolments and the development of new academic programs in the private sector.

The State has different roles in policy and coordination. In the public sector, autonomy is the basis for the relationship between the National University and the State. The Universidad de la República is regulated by a law passed in 1958 with the highest degree of autonomy under the principles of the traditional Latin American “Córdoba model.” The decree of 1995, regulating the private sector, gave the Ministry of Education the authority to oversee private higher education institutions. This greatly increased State responsibilities in terms of policy.

Public institutions, whether university or not, are fully subsidized by the State and no tuition is charged. On the other hand, private institutions do not receive any public funding and, instead, charge tuition fees. All universities (but not all other public post-secondary institutions) are open, without entrance exams, to students who have finished secondary studies.

Currently, Uruguay does not have an accreditation agency, despite agreements in the regional free-trade zone, MERCOSUR, which call for such agencies at the national level.

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