

Demand-absorbing institutions as enhancers of access to higher education in Mexico

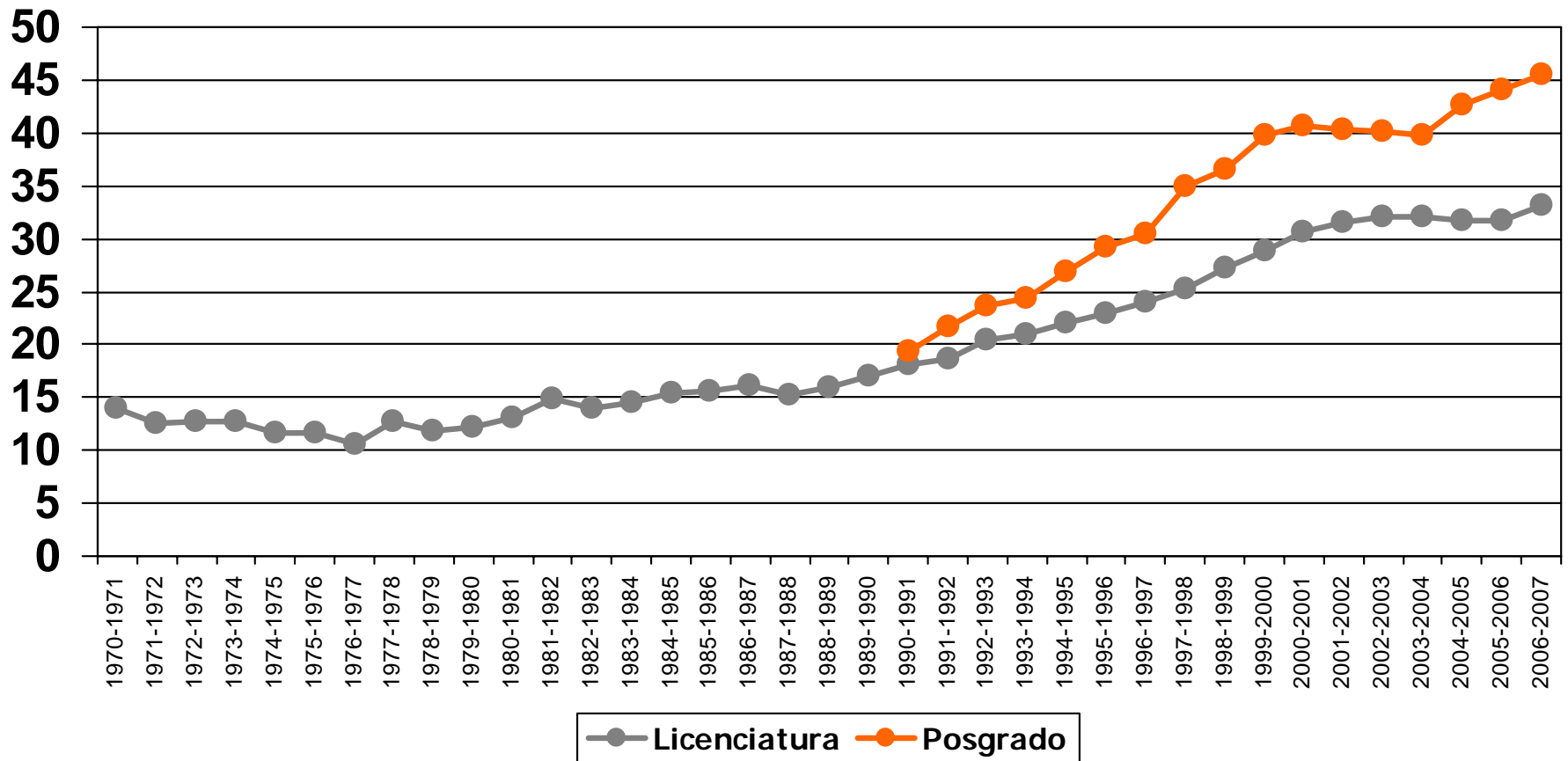
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Program for Research on Private Higher
Education (PROPHE)

New Century Scholars

Universidad de Monterrey

Private enrollment in México (%)



- Access -- equity
- Economic – academic stratification

Mexico: 2006-2007

- Private enrollment:
 - 33.1% of the 4-year undergraduate
 - 45.5% of the graduate education
 - 31.7% of the teacher preparation (Normal education)
 - 5.4% of the 2-year education
- 88% of the private higher education institutions in Mexico can be identified as “demand-absorbing”.
- Enroll about 16% of the national total and about half the private enrollment

Demand-absorbing (Levy, 1986)

- Provide higher education to wider sections of the population by “absorbing” the unsatisfied demand
- Conservative institutions -- do not play a prominent role in the academic arena or the society
- Focus on traditional professions
- Caters to young adults who already hold a job and traditional students with lower academic expectations
- Owned by businesspeople and/or families
- Reasons for starting them:
 - pure vanity of an affluent owner
 - quest for financial gain
 - legitimate attempt to train technicians for private enterprises or offer educational opportunity for underprivileged students
- Teaching staff comes usually from established public or some elite/religious institutions who want to complement their earnings
- Tuition based and do not receive donations
- Hold operation and capital costs to a minimum.

Formula

- Large unsatisfied demand from secondary education diploma-holders trying to further their education
 - Lack of appropriate regulation for limiting the development of lower-quality institutions, and
 - Financial constraints preventing public institutions from enhancing their intake of qualified students
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- In a context of mass higher education and vocational credentials
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- The result: invariably the establishment of institutions frequently offering vocational-like and affordable education that would provide opportunities to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds for obtaining a college degree.

What scholars have said?

- A response to both existing religious and elite privates and public institutions (Levy, 1986)
- Some of them play a “role” of providing access for those who could not otherwise get into higher education, which can be assumed as an equity role (Levy, 2002)
- They very rarely assume academic elite roles, seldom offer graduate education, conduct basic research, have well-equipped laboratories, well-stocked libraries, or full-time academic staff (Levy, 2002)
- Institutions that carry out their teaching activities in low-cost disciplines and in professional tracks in line with labor market conditions and the corresponding demand for higher education credentials. They develop neither graduate programs nor research, and the faculty is part time, normally hired on an hourly basis, offering evening courses adapted to a lower-middle-class clientele that study while keeping its day jobs. Accordingly, they tend to have low tuition fees, and pay their faculty less well (Balan & Garcia de Fanelli, 1997)

- Castro & Navarro (1999) divided the demand-absorbing sector in two categories:
 - A large group composed of common and conventional schools mimicking the traditional elite universities in their curricula and intentions. “Chalk and talk” subjects
 - An ill-defined category of institutions offering technical degrees
- The candidates come from lower socio economic status families and are often the first in their families to aspire to tertiary education groups
- Given their modest resources and infrastructure, as well as lower academic abilities of the students, their graduates rarely obtain jobs corresponding to their degrees.

- Function of professional development -- preparing people for specific job markets and transmission of skills of a well defined occupation.
- Does not require professional educators but skilled practitioners who, most likely are unable to do research, but well prepared to polish job-related skills
- Demand-absorbing institutions structure their operation and marketing strategies on the fact that their students can obtain a valid degree in equivalent or lesser time than a public or elite private, with a lesser effort, a considerably lower tuition and a more laid back atmosphere

Regular & extended demands

- Students make rational choices about the program and the institution they wish to enroll to according to their estimation in terms of:
 - “return” to their educational investment
 - direct costs and
 - the cost of opportunity
- Students often choose study programs related with the more dynamic sectors of economy such as business, communication and services
- Obtain the credentials from institutions that:
 - will facilitate their entrance into the job market without thinking about the institutions ability to generate knowledge
 - represent a reasonable balance between the economic investment and their needs and expectations.

- Two related phenomena (Didriksson, 2005):
 - “Economic Reductionism” that gives a higher value to the technical-administrative competences and devaluates social, humanistic and even scientific skills or knowledge
 - “Educational Darwinism” favoring the owners of technical and professionally oriented training made evident in “the right credentials.”

Formula Plus

- Virtual stagnation of governmental funding +
 - Lax regulatory framework +
 - Augmented demand for higher education +
 - “economic reductionism” +
 - “educational Darwinism”
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- A licensed institution which provides the appropriate credentials for joining the job market at an affordable price (meaning money and time) will be a highly demanded type of institution.

Interviews

- Open University
 - 1980 as a high school. Run by its founder.
 - 1988 started undergraduate programs
 - 1996 State Board granted permission to offer graduate education
 - Enrollment 2006: 61 undergraduate & 334 high school students
 - Eight degrees divided into three academic divisions: Administrative Sciences, Social Sciences, and Engineering
 - Open and face-to-face delivery modes
 - Night shifts
 - No entrance examination
 - Trimesters 5,200 pesos (about 480 USD)
 - Degree would cost 46,800 pesos (4,333 USD)

- **Big University**

- Created in 1989
- 265 classrooms, 20 laboratories and 10 libraries
- high school
- 17 undergraduate programs
- 4 masters degrees
- 1 doctoral
- Enrollment 2006: 5,869 high school, 14,373 undergraduate, 550 master, and 56 doctoral students
- Trimester: 3,150 pesos (about 292 USD)
- Degree: 28,350 pesos (about 2625 USD)
- Sports programs (including American football)
- Does not require an entrance exam
- Afternoon and night schedules for all degrees

- **Specialized University**

- Established in 1996
- Enrollment 2006: 75 undergraduate and 290 master students
- 4 undergraduate degrees: Law, Accountancy, Computer Sciences and Business Management
- 1 masters program in Higher Education
- Evening high school program as well as English language and Computer courses
- Does not require entrance examination
- Trimester: 6,240 pesos (about 578 USD)
- Degree: Undergraduate: 56,160 pesos (5,200 USD)
Graduate 38,400 pesos (3,556 USD)

Their students

- the lower classes: “working students”
 - Need to work
 - Bypassed older students
 - Have a family
- “We have students that come do a term and then they leave to earn some money for the next year’s term. They have a lot of perseverance” (BU).
- “The destitute, the bulk of our society” (OU)
- “It is costing him and therefore he cannot waste his time on silly things. He is dedicated to studying and he has to learn because it is costing him. What's more, many of them work so they are people who appreciate much more than someone that has been given everything by his parents or that is economically at ease” (BU).

- “We understand that the students in undergraduate degrees are workers and that they also need...they need to be in their home, with their family, they are parents of young children” (SU)
- “The educational model of our ELITE university is very expensive and it only has success where there is a very powerful and important middle class” (EU).
- “For this University the admittance criteria should be capability and knowledge, it should be the only admittance criteria” (PU)

Functions

- “I think this country has to radically change with regards to education. The focus education has is not the appropriate one for a country like ours. I believe the mission of education for work got a bit lost so education for the elite was created and this is not going to take us anywhere good” (SU)
- Demand-absorbing institutions are focusing on skills **in order to** work, to get better jobs while the Elite institution focuses on skills **for** work, to maximize working opportunities that are granted to them a priori. Public institution authorities highlighted that it is not the university’s function to guarantee work
- “We run a great danger because we have institutions that have a fast easy track and “Light” (effortless) models of education. These are going to have a negative impact in the future of human society’s development (PU)

Tensions DA - Public

- “We run a great danger because we have institutions that have a fast easy track and “Light” (effortless) models of education. These are going to have a negative impact in the future of human society’s development” (PU)
- “They’ve probably grown because of the opportunity to make business with education. I would like to think they established with a genuine mission to develop human resources society needs but primarily I think they have grown to capture all those people who did not make it to the University” (PU)

Sympathy Elite - DA

- Elite institutions are monitoring the demand-absorbing institutions' growth even though they were not presently losing students to them
- Identified a strategy used by another elite university of creating a demand-absorbing franchise of the elite University in order to deter stronger national and international demand-absorbing institutions from establishing in the area
- “Well its people (lower middle class persons) that any other way would not have higher education. I think there is place for everything; if the Public University cannot give them access, well then there should be other options. Even if they are of a lower quality it is good (EU)

State Authorities

- “We are not very clear on what a *patito* university really means. This is a problem”.
- “The private system started having an important growth as the deterioration of the public system became very obvious, when the public institutions and in particular the universities went into a crisis...and well it was natural for society to start sending their children to private institutions”
- Improvement of public institutions’ quality would bring back students to public institutions and therefore stop the private growth

Prestige / Presence / Pride

- “We have been here for far too many years for it all to be coincidence. There are thousands of graduates on the streets working that have the name of the school and we are very proud of that” (BU)

- Demand-absorbing institutions seem to play a real role in providing opportunities of accessing higher education for students who could not get into or did not wish to enter public or elite private sectors.



Thanks a lot!

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