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# Unanticipated Development:

Perspectives on Private Higher Education's Emerging Roles

By

**Daniel C. Levy**

*Distinguished Professor, State University of New York (SUNY)  
Department of Educational Administration & Policy Studies, University at Albany-SUNY*

WP No. 1 April 2002

PROPHE Working Paper Series

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**PROGRAM FOR RESEARCH ON  
PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **Program for Research on Private Higher Education**

Educational Administration & Policy Studies  
University at Albany, State University of New York  
1400 Washington Ave  
Albany, New York 12222  
Fax: 1-518-442-5084; Email: [prophe@albany.edu](mailto:prophe@albany.edu)

## **ABSTRACT**

The global explosion of private higher education, astonishing in extent and intensity, often catches government and most other observers by surprise. Rarely is the private surge centrally designed or even widely anticipated (despite being related to visible and broad economic, social, political, and international trends). Public policy commonly emerges only in delayed fashion.

Although not all private growth is unanticipated, the unanticipated share is large and it encompasses a startling range of otherwise contrasting settings. It is useful to identify and analyze the settings, quite common ones, where unanticipated development is most characteristic. These settings include demand-absorbing institutions, which dominate private growth in most countries. They include countries with little or no private higher education tradition, particularly in the developing and post-communist worlds. They also include situations in which private higher education is notably different from public higher education.

## ANALYZING THE UNANTICIPATED

While interest and debate surround the roles that private higher education plays, analysis lags far behind. Promoters routinely glorify roles, which critics demonize. Policymakers tend to adopt simple views of what private higher education does, or what they want it to do, while participants tend to generalize from their own institution. Public discussion thus revolves around oversimplified and misleading declarations. When it comes to private higher education and the roles it plays, the gap is large between self-serving or ill-informed views and more complex reality.

Roles are most poorly understood in countries where private higher education has just recently gained prominence--and that is much of the world. A few decades ago, private higher education was absent or marginal in most countries. Today it captures a major or fast-increasing portion of enrollments in Eastern and Central Europe, the Middle East and both North and Sub-Saharan Africa, East and South Asia, and Latin America.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, new roles emerge where private higher education has long existed.

This working paper aims to advance analysis of private higher education's roles by focusing thematically on a crucial and common but generally ignored characteristic: *Private higher education's roles emerge mostly unanticipated, not following a broad preconception or systemic design.*

Surprise is common. This is true even for those actors most engaged in higher education, as policymakers, participants, or analysts. Some of the surprise comes as actors anticipate a certain size and shape for private development that then fails to correspond to reality. Mostly, surprise comes against the background of little serious anticipation of any sort. Private higher education did not seem to be an important topic. Few imagined a large-scale future. Indeed, surprise is often such that shock is an apt description.

A corollary to the theme of surprise concerns public policy (henceforth "policy," or "central policy," except where stated as referring to multiple policies at institutional or other

micro-levels.) For the most part, *central policy does not create, design, or even anticipate emerging private sector roles*. This point goes beyond the important but less remarkable finding that implementation and outcomes differ from plans. It is not so much that major explicit policy gets derailed, though that happens. It is more that government gets caught off guard, not having much contemplated massive private emergence. It is more about a lack of vision than about a concrete vision dashed.

If governments have rarely launched private higher education sectors by specifying what roles private higher education should or would play, neither have scholars or other higher education actors drawn up guiding blueprints or foreseen what and how roles would develop. On the contrary, roles have more often emerged from a generally uncoordinated multiplicity of choices and constraints.<sup>2</sup> Some identification of these choices and constraints is needed to show the lack of central design but elaboration is a research challenge beyond this paper. Research on how roles really emerge is especially pressing in systems where vibrant change was barely anticipated before the 1980s or 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

As the paper's approach is empirical and conceptual—identifying and providing analytical perspectives on emerging private roles—it is not normative. It does not defend or criticize any role and it does not call for any role to be abandoned or to be paramount. Unlike much commentary on private higher education roles, the tone is not one of rousing injunction.<sup>4</sup>

The paper develops its theme globally, and thus will require testing and adaptation for national or even institutional cases. National experts must work through history, political context, the pertinent characteristics of evolving public sectors, and many other factors.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, private configurations are changing rapidly. This is true even in systems with a continuous private higher education history, such as Japan and the uniquely longstanding U.S. case. Change is much more dramatic in systems like the Chinese and Turkish, where private higher education re-emerges after a period of non-existence, and the Russian and Pakistani, where it first emerges. Amid such change and because this paper's observations about private higher education's emerging roles are so broad, the observations should be

taken largely as hypotheses and generalization to be explored and revised by research colleagues in different countries. The generation of such hypotheses and generalizations is a suitable “role” for a working paper. <sup>6</sup>

Our analysis of the mostly unanticipated, undirected emergence of roles covers diverse private higher education realities. We consecutively consider three inter-related contrasts:

1. Roles linked to various types of private higher education
2. Roles in new and established private sectors
3. Distinctive and non-distinctive roles, compared to public roles

## **TYPES OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION**

The lack of anticipation and central policy in determining (or even usually trying to determine) private higher education roles is impressive across different types of private higher education, where mixes of motivations, actors, and forces vary greatly. Particular mixes translate into different roles. Where there are sufficient patterns and a sequential sense to the mixes, we discern “waves” of growth evolving into different types (or sub-sectors) of private higher education.

The region about which we have the closest analysis of private growth against the background of public monopoly is Latin America. For decades, this was the leading region in private growth, as the sector jumped from 3 percent of enrollment in the 1930s to 34 percent by 1975, then moving modestly higher. <sup>7</sup> Even simplified analysis of this growth specified three basic waves, each leading to a concomitant set of roles. The three-part categorization is a useful starting point for global analysis of how growth leads to roles in contemporary private higher education. Latin America’s first wave of private growth usually involved Catholic universities with a religious role. A second wave was more a reaction to the perceived “massification” or decline in quality of public higher education, and often assumed elite roles in social class, academics, or high positions in especially the private job market. A third wave mostly captured rising demand for higher education that exceeded the supply of

public, “free” higher education; this means roles related to access, but different institutions offering such access undertook a different mix of tasks. It is mostly the third wave that foreshadowed for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century the fresh growth of private higher education in Latin America—and the startling growth in much of the rest of the developing world and the post-communist world (whether by post-communist we mean the collapse of the former political system, as in Eastern and Central Europe, or radical economic change without political collapse, as in China and Vietnam).

Shock is evident in the reaction to each such wave—shock over the end of public monopoly, shock over the end of clear public superiority, and shock over a major shift in enrollment proportions from public to private as well as from “high” university to “low” or non-university institutions. None of the waves has been predominantly planned either in Latin America or in most of the world.

Rarely did a negotiated plan between state and church deprive the church of its traditional role in Latin American universities in exchange for a church right to create its own (private) universities; such creation generally surfaced as the church’s second-best alternative, after being pushed aside within existing universities. As religious or other culturally oriented roles often dominate in a first wave of private growth in other regions as well, with examples from Indonesia to Tanzania to Ukraine, we need more research to explore the parallels. This is certainly true where the first private institutions blend aspects of waves historically experienced more sequentially elsewhere, as with religious or other cultural initiative coupling with either access or socioeconomic elite roles.

Regarding most elite undertakings, we do not imagine that policymakers in any region set out to make public universities less attractive in order to create a demand for private institutions pursuing elite roles. Such creation surprised most observers in the first Latin American countries in which it occurred, and then (however surprisingly in retrospect) managed to surprise observers in other countries of the region. Elite roles have emerged in only some countries in other regions, and in only some private institutions within those countries. But attempts from Bond University in Australia to Bilkent University and Ko◇

University in Turkey to Moscow International University usually do not follow state policy designs.<sup>8</sup> Instead, wealthy entrepreneurs have often initiated these recent elite efforts and, as the Chinese case shows, there sometimes is a mix of initiative by businesspeople and leading academics or administrators with public university experience. Such private actors do indeed have plans for their institutions, sometimes executed successfully, but this micro planning takes most others by surprise.

Regarding what was the third wave for Latin America, but varies in whether it appears initially or subsequently in other regions' evolution, a key is that (more than other private growth) this growth involves small and also non-university institutions. This helps explain why the sense of unanticipated proliferation is greatest here. And this is crucial since in recent decades this has been the most common form of private higher education growth worldwide. Where public budgets do not meet the still rapidly growing demand for higher education, students pay for alternatives.<sup>9</sup> But there is great diversity even within this growth—a diversity that goes beyond the original identification of the third wave (and thus demands fresh research globally). Some of these private institutions play a “role” of little more than taking in tuition while dishing out poor education and then weak degrees to those who do not drop out; thus the “role” is perhaps one of making profit. More positively, many have roles of providing access for those who could not otherwise get into higher education. This may be seen as an equity role. Others provide a choice related to access.<sup>10</sup> They rarely assume or claim to assume academic elite roles complete with doctoral education, basic research, large laboratories or libraries, or mostly full-time academic staffs. This provides an opening for critics to belittle these institutions as not “true universities,” not fulfilling university roles.<sup>11</sup> Yet the same private institutions may assume leadership roles in fast-growing entrepreneurial fields. These include business, administration, accounting, management, tourism, English, and areas of computer or informational sciences. For their business-oriented roles they are simultaneously vilified by many and increasingly attractive to many others. Either way, the key initiating force is not a government blueprint so much as an entrepreneurial mix involving either big or small business (often family business) and quite uncoordinated student demand.

Today's sudden growth of for-profit higher education strengthens the notion of third wave or demand-absorbing growth as essentially market-driven rather than government designed.<sup>12</sup> Rarely did a plan or debate launch or anticipate the for-profit surge. In fact, this is an eruption in certain respects against the law, or on its fringes. That is one reason many essentially for-profit higher education institutions declare themselves nonprofit, not going "public" onto a stock exchange or formally distributing profits to shareholders but nonetheless generating profits from their core activities. Legislation often proscribes for-profit higher education but the key point here is how rare it is that legislation specifically allows for-profit institutions; where no mention is made of for-profits, this reflects the reality that they were not envisioned. For various reasons, then, for-profits often arise in legally ambiguous settings, not contemplated in the legal framework. As in China, Hungary, and many other countries, it is unclear how much rulemaking will eventually come from laws on higher education, on business, or on non-profit organizations.

The for-profit surge dramatically illustrates certain facets of legal status that have for some time characterized unanticipated non-profit private higher education emergence. The lack of legal foresight or provision has frequently meant decades of de facto existence amid legal ambiguity, as in Greece and Malaysia. Many examples of private functioning in legal limbo come in the early years of movement away from communist systems with their clear proscription of private institutions.<sup>13</sup> A common pattern in such cases is that institutions function, admitting students, teaching courses, and so forth, but without the right to issue the national degree offered by institutions in the legal mainstream, or offering degrees or diplomas that lack state recognition. Notable in this respect is that the power of such diplomas has often proven far stronger than predicted for these academically non-elite institutions. This relates in part to the diminished importance of the state as employer and to the rise of a private sector of employment, most startlingly in post-communist settings. Employment success also reinforces the common opposition of public universities—and sometimes of entrenched private universities—to the rise of private institutions with entrepreneurial roles. Where the established institutions belong to officially recognized associations, the entrepreneurial growth assumes a sharpened sense of thriving *against* mainstream policy for higher education.<sup>14</sup> The basic idea of development against policy

intent, interest groups, and often much public opinion reinforces our theme of unanticipated, undirected growth.

Internationalism is a related development in which the recent for-profit surge dramatizes a longer-standing phenomenon of private emergence outside government policy. Indeed, the international and for-profit tendencies increasingly overlap. As Sylvan Learning and other large companies open or buy up private higher education institutions around the world, and as increasing numbers of for-profits are parts of international networks, both policymakers and scholars scamper to figure out what to make of this, or how to respond.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, certain actors involved in a particular wave or type of private higher education development are not totally surprised. On the contrary, as already suggested, some may be planners of change but usually micro-planners, operating at the level of one or a few institutions, with neither authority nor necessarily even concern to envision a sector overall. However successfully they may plan their own growth and change, they surprise others and are surprised themselves by what transpires elsewhere in the private higher education sector, including its scope and variation. Thus, for example, managers of Chile's established private and public universities acknowledge their great surprise at the success of the new private institutions and the vibrancy of the sector overall.<sup>16</sup> Initiators' actions are rarely coordinated and are more often competitive or just isolated as they involve different terrain, means, and purposes.

Furthermore, no claim is made that roles emerge in different types of private higher education without any central policymaking whatever. A change in legislation is often required for private higher education to be born or at least to gain official status. State-church accords are part of what allows the first private institutions to evolve in certain countries, or to have survived in a few European instances under communism.

And probably the major sense of state policy leading to private roles concerns the demand-absorbing growth in several Asian countries--Japan and then others. Government looked ahead to expanding enrollments and decided to maintain public university selectivity,

simultaneously or later allowing an emerging private sector or subsector to handle multiplying demand.<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that government created the private sector or shaped its mix of roles; a policy that allows private growth is not necessarily a policy to initiate that growth or determine the particular roles it comes to play. Nonetheless, surprise about private growth is at least somewhat limited after government ends policies that prohibited private higher education or made its growth very difficult. In any event, the mix of government policy and other forces varies by country. The greater shaping by several Asian states is offset by the lesser role in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America as well as by Asian countries without repressive or otherwise strong states. Indonesia, and the Philippines have resembled the less-designed cases common outside Asia. Even in China, the picture is more one of policymakers and analysts trying to track, judge, and modify surging phenomena than of their having specifically envisioned or designed the roles that are blossoming in private higher education.

So even where there is state planning of roles for one or another type of private higher education, it is usually limited and reactive. It often involves recognition of trends—including roles--already developed outside any central vision or policy design. This includes the clarification of, or at least tinkering with, the fuzzy legal status cited earlier. With the recognition sometimes come policy efforts (as in China) to facilitate the trends and roles, as in using private institutions to absorb a major enrollment growth that the public sector could not accommodate financially or could not accommodate without further loss of quality.<sup>18</sup> Legislation sometimes lifts barriers that impede private growth or were intended to impede it.

The reactive character of state action is strongly shown by a widespread pattern of *delayed regulation*. Private higher education growth catches government by surprise and then government tries to figure out what roles are played and what roles should be curbed. Lack of regulation followed within a few years by a strongly reactive government hand characterizes Romania, Ukraine, Georgia, Russia, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, South Africa, and Quebec, and many other cases.<sup>19</sup> National accreditation systems are prominent examples of mechanisms springing up or being revamped in part to respond to unanticipated private growth.

A final consideration here about the limited policy detailing or anticipation of emerging roles in different types of private higher education concerns the influence of the roles pursued by public higher education. (Later in the paper we consider how the public sector may condition the distinctiveness or non-distinctiveness of private roles.). Although the influence of the public sector's roles can be great, it is often ignored in academic and policy discussions of emerging private roles. This ignoring reflects the fact that public sector roles—however much they are or are not themselves centrally prescribed—are rarely hatched in terms of how they will influence private roles.

In fact, private roles often turn out to depend on what roles public sectors do not undertake. The public unawareness or purposeful avoidance allows some groups, including entrepreneurs, to perceive a need or opportunity for private action. The point is relevant to all types of private higher education. For “academically light” roles the public sector does not deign to undertake, there is sometimes a true sense of intentionally leaving roles to private institutions; our major example concerns the Asian cases where public sectors did not take on major demand-absorbing access roles. However, even refusal to assume such an access role has not always been with a keen eye on what the private sector might do. Instead, refusal is often based simply on what the public sector prefers to do or thinks it can do well or what government thinks it can do. Or it is less about refusal and rejection of potential roles than about the absence of serious consideration of additional roles. Where public universities in Eastern and Central Europe do not “lower” themselves to fields such as accounting or business management as new economies are created, they do not always consider or approve of private institutions assuming those roles.<sup>20</sup> The same holds for related roles of serving business or pursuing profit. And where the public sector secularizes itself or pursues multiple cultural roles, it is usually not with intention or expectation of the rise of private institutions with cultural niche roles. Most clearly, public universities in regions like Latin America did not undertake massive access roles with the intention or expectation of giving rise to private institutions with elite roles.

## NEW AND ESTABLISHED PRIVATE SECTORS

The breadth of unanticipated role emergence, not dictated by policy, holds not just within countries, concerning different types of private higher education, but also across countries with either new or established private sectors. The tendency is more pronounced where sectors are new. On the other hand, it is striking that role changes would be largely unanticipated and undirected even in systems where private higher education has existed for some time.

Higher education systems with traditions of public sector pluralism and differentiation of institutional forms and missions may accept private growth and its accompanying roles as a natural extension of the system's dynamics.<sup>21</sup> But most systems have traditional realities of standardized institutional missions and practices, often with centralized policy making. Or they at least have myths of such state-directed and guaranteed practice; notwithstanding considerable reality to the contrary, Latin Americans tend to expect states to design systems, which leads to surprise and even chagrin when they fail to do so. But (leaving aside systems that still have no private higher education), centralized traditions may be strongest in systems with new private sectors. This is then where private development has usually seemed most shocking. Post-communist countries are spectacular cases. Citizens long had strong reason to expect major developments to stem from central planning. Now they see private business schools and many other novel entities spring up all around them.

The post-communist experience of course shows that massive higher education change may result from broader political-economic change. That broader change may itself be quite unanticipated and shocking. But even where political economic tendencies evolve with a degree of regime continuity, they involve transformation—and bring major change to higher education. That change increasingly includes the emergence of private roles.

A dramatic emergence of private higher education is also common where major or “neoliberal” economic change occurs in non-communist settings. Until the 1980s and even

1990s, private higher education was rare in sub-Saharan Africa and absent in some Asian countries. Sudden change results in part from powerful global tendencies that limit the financial role of the state, privatize, and internationalize in overall development policy. These are tendencies from beyond higher education policy. Naturally, no country pursued such political-economic policies in order to lead to private higher education consequences (or to public higher education consequences, but private higher education is often more shaped by the new economy). Instead, the consequent private higher education roles have been little designed, however logical their fit with the new political economy, or their response to it. Examples include low-cost provision by private suppliers, fees, and emphasis on fields of study such as English, accounting, and business law.<sup>22</sup>

A variation on the meaning of new sectors comes when private higher education re-emerges after periods in which it is proscribed.<sup>23</sup> This is a higher education counterpart to the broader phenomenon of private re-emergence, though many fail to perceive the private precedent.<sup>24</sup> The prior existence of private higher education may make the fresh growth less shocking and more easily legitimized. A contrast between China, with its pre-revolution history of private higher education, and Russia, with no such tradition (despite the existence of seminaries and of private, secondary boarding schools) is striking. Nevertheless, sectoral re-emergence typically involves roles largely different from those pursued in an earlier era. Today the roles are more likely to be quite entrepreneurial, though Turkey's leading new private universities (non-profit) pursue elite roles whereas earlier Turkish private higher education was of an academically unimposing for-profit kind.<sup>25</sup> Whether the re-emergence of private sectors stems from a kind of post-communist dynamic, as in China, or neoliberal political-economic policies in other settings, as in Turkey, a key similarity exists with most contemporary cases of totally new private higher education: Private roles largely emerge outside higher education policy, from non-higher education changes.

Furthermore, dynamics of decentralized responses to broader political-economic change operate--only somewhat less dramatically--where private higher education enjoys a continuous history. These private sectors also grow and assume additional roles in response to a shrinking state, expanded market, and internationally oriented economy. Latin American

and Asia provide many examples. Indeed a distinction between countries with new or pre-existing private sectors of higher education dissipates once the “new” sectors are in place and then evolve in response to wider political-economic trends in much the same way as their counterparts in countries with more private higher education tradition.<sup>26</sup> One could refer to elements of continuity, newness, re-emergence, and evolution as some South African private technical and vocational institutions created in the 1970s reinvent themselves in the contemporary period.

Although political-economic change leading to undirected development of private higher education roles is most striking in “transitional” and less developed countries, the basic point holds for many developed countries. There too the role of the state changes, as does its interface with the market.<sup>27</sup> Crucially, just as some transitional and less developed countries have a major history of private higher education, so some developed countries do not. In Western Europe political-economic change can involve either the creation of private higher education or its evolution beyond a niche role, though to date this region continues to stand out comparatively for the limited presence of private higher education. But Australia has seen a “remarkable” number of new private institutions since the mid-1980s, despite government policies continuing expansion with low tuition in the public sector, and Japan is a leading case of a much more ample and established private higher education sector evolving in roles largely in response to wider (non-higher education) policy changes.<sup>28</sup>

And the U.S. case, despite vital exceptional characteristics in other respects, bolsters our observation about systems with established private sectors and, moreover, bolsters our general thematic points about private roles that are neither determined nor anticipated by central policy designs. At first glance the temptation might be to exclude the U.S. from our consideration of emerging private roles. U.S. private higher education is now well below its mid-twentieth share of private/total enrollment (around 50 percent); for decades it has hovered only a bit above 20 percent. The country long looked to as the world leader in private higher education has today only a rather average share of its enrollments in private institutions.

Yet stagnation would be a quite misleading description for the U.S. First, the U.S. private sector has grown substantially, while the public sector has also grown. Second, the sector remains vibrant by other measures as well—including in elite roles so rare in other countries. Third, and most important to our analysis, the roles pursued by U.S. private higher education have continued to increase and change. This has occurred partly through evolution of existing institutions, as when religious ones become more secular or liberal arts colleges become job-oriented institutions. And even while religious roles have mostly diminished, there is now new variety, including institutions with marked religious missions. Moreover, as some private institutions die, others are born, and the mix of roles changes. As Breneman finds, “grim forecasts” about the fate of private liberal arts colleges have repeatedly proven inaccurate and their persistence and evolution continue to surprise many.<sup>29</sup>

The most striking recent U.S. growth, as in many countries with much less private higher education tradition, lies in for-profit higher education. The University of Phoenix, Sylvan Learning, and others epitomize the trend. Although the U.S. appears fairly rare in that legal acceptance of for-profit higher education is rather clear, the present for-profit surge comes as a surprise—especially after many observers thought a surge of “diploma mills” had led by the 1980s to a legal and media reaction that undermined for-profit roles. Key works about the for-profit surge note the surprise element.<sup>30</sup> In many U.S. states, there is no special provision for for-profit higher education, leaving it to be treated *de facto* like non-profit private higher education or like businesses. At the same time, private nonprofit institutions (like public two and four year institutions) become much more entrepreneurial, in many respects like for-profit institutions. This tendency again fits the point about private higher education roles reflecting broader political economic trends involving a diminished financial state, invigorated market competition, and so forth.

For such major evolution in U.S. private higher education roles, no higher education master plan inaugurates or basically maps the way, notwithstanding the common existence of statewide coordinating boards and plans for higher education. And even though there is much more literature on U.S. than on other private higher education sectors, analysis of roles is

essentially reactive: scrambling to try to figure out what is going on.<sup>31</sup> This is a common sign that change gets far in front of preconception.

## **DISTINCTIVE AND NON-DISTINCTIVE PRIVATE-PUBLIC ROLES**

In both the new and older private higher education sectors, some roles assumed by private higher education have been associated with public higher education whereas other roles are largely new for higher education. The balance between distinctiveness and non-distinctiveness, and the reasons for each, are explored elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> The focus here is the lack of anticipation or overarching design for the evolution of both the more and the less distinctive roles.

It is comparatively easy to understand why distinctive roles would bring surprise. Some of these roles have not hitherto been contemplated or deemed legitimate for higher education, let alone practiced. Thus, there is a relationship (though inconsistent) between the dimension of new versus established private sectors and the dimension of distinctive versus non-distinctive roles: private roles distinctive from public ones are more common in new than established private sectors. New and distinctive sectors often assume roles that surprise many, especially practical market roles outside the academic gold standard.

Furthermore, the emergence of distinctive roles typically involves voluntary choice by non-state actors. These actors include religious institutions, large or small or international businesses, family enterprises, or foreign universities; or they are former or current public university personnel, whether faculty or administrators. These voluntary actors may scoff at extant public (or private) roles, sometimes seeing them, the public universities, or the state (or the church, enterprises, or other extant private providers) as limited in legitimacy and appeal. Or they at least see the range of roles covered as limited compared to what is viable or even vital for one or another social group or economic activity. Where new roles target a particular group or activity, that is another reason that it may come as a surprise to those not contemplated in the undertaking. Enrollment, funds, and legitimacy may then be sought from those targeted, allowing new roles to flourish even while the wider public or state may be

unaware of them. Alternatively, if aware, they may be dismissive or aghast. Situations in which the legitimacy or illegitimacy of roles is not determined by law may reflect our earlier point about private roles existing in a space not covered or recognized by law, yet not forbidden by it.<sup>33</sup> Especially considering the ambiguity of higher education missions and the multiplicity of ways to pursue them, there may be ample latitude for private actors to choose roles. Non-state actors can pursue roles not provided for by central policy and even roles that may run counter to what policymakers had in mind. The point is pertinent to both new and established private sectors.

Matters like fields of study and job orientation provide considerable evidence of the emergence of private roles substantially (though not uniformly) distinctive from traditional public ones. As indicated above, private higher education institutions worldwide typically concentrate in fields of study relatively inexpensive to offer. (Or the fields have rather rapid pay-off in the job market; this point sometimes allows expensive fields like medicine to join alongside the common entrepreneurial fields.) The field concentrations thus relate to the entrepreneurial roles and ties to changing political economies discussed above. Again such emergence might appear logical when seen retrospectively in the context of macro political-economic transformation, but initially the public and the state are often caught off guard by the distinctive fields. And so they react more than they anticipate or initially design. The reactions range from efforts to curtail the fields and related curriculum, to affiliating with this private surge, to trying partly to emulate it within the public sector.

On the other hand, private institutions do not always pursue roles very distinctive from public ones, especially in established private sectors. Where the market for “more of the same” is strong, private places do not have to undertake novel roles with disputed legitimacy. What separates private and public higher education is sometimes the private finance or governance of the former; however important such a difference may be, it does not by itself speak to basically different *roles*. Still, blanket non-distinctiveness of roles is rare. So what we must really consider is the overlapping of non-distinctive with distinctive roles. For example, new private institutions may appeal to previously untapped clientele with a fairly

traditional curriculum—or they may undertake to compete for traditional clientele with a fresh curriculum. They often pursue a niche of distinctiveness amid much emulation.

Whether non-distinctive roles are dominant or subordinate, one could imagine that they bring less surprise than the distinctive roles bring. And that is true regarding the roles per se. However, private institutions typically assume even the non-distinctive roles through processes that neither follow a national policy blueprint, nor are predicted. How and how much to mix distinctive and non-distinctive roles is often a choice of individual actors and institutions.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, voluntary action is a key to understanding the undirected and surprise nature of even non-distinctive growth. Much role emulation is voluntary as private actors decide what roles to copy. A modified perspective is that they choose within perceived opportunities, realities and constraints. This leads to differing mixes of emulation and innovation, mixes not set forth in a national or sectoral plan. The mix often depends on decisions by individuals moving from public to private institutions. Prominent are professors socialized in the public higher education sector, and carrying with them certain norms, practices, curriculum, and even lecture notes. Or they do not leave; they work simultaneously in both sectors. Retired professors from China's public universities establish many private institutions and serve as their managers. In sum, voluntary role emulation means that even non-distinctive roles (which are not themselves startling) emerge through largely undirected, unanticipated processes and it means that mixes of non-distinctive and distinctive roles vary in undirected, unanticipated ways.

Additionally, however, there are non-voluntary processes that force private institutions to emulate roles common at public institutions. This is where the emergence of roles in the private sector is most planned and brings the least surprise. Government allows the creation and growth of private higher education but mandates and proscribes roles, or manners of pursuing them. Roles may have to follow those of the public sector. Alternatively, a niche is allowed for something different in one explicit sense or another, perhaps governance by religious authorities rather than public officials, but within norms

approved in the public sector. Even distinctive roles are possible but only if they gain approval of government or perhaps public bodies dominated by public university interests and norms.<sup>35</sup> In any of these processes, latitude for surprise is limited--provided state policies play out more or less as projected.

Insofar as a strong state can mean designed roles, then, it is important to underscore three empirical tendencies identified in our analysis. One is that the state's effective presence in higher education planning is often less than its formal presence. The second tendency is the major political-economic change that diminishes state centrality in many realms, including higher education. Thus, for example, a decrease in state finance as a portion of total finance means increased ability for multiple and largely uncoordinated actors (domestic and foreign) to construct roles for the higher education that they fund for themselves or others. A third tendency is that the state reacts. Regulations often respond to developments, whether to curb, legitimize, or promote emerging roles. Curbs often respond not only to undirected growth but also to interest group pressure, commonly from public universities. Such processes smack more of uncertain pluralist politics than surefooted planning.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Unanticipated emergence of private higher education roles characterizes reality over a wide breadth of contexts. Highlighting where the surprise is strongest, usually where central policy least determines the emergence, is a way to summarize several points in this paper and allow a few suggestive comments about policy implications.

Regarding types of private higher education, the sense of surprise is naturally sharp for whatever type is the pioneer, introducing a private sector to the higher education system. Further surprise may come when types of private higher education challenge the public sector either for elite standing or, more often, enrollment share. Additionally, unanticipated mixes of private roles emerge over time, as when institutions seek elite roles with revenues generated from entrepreneurial roles. The emergence of different types and mixes of private roles often involves fresh participants for the higher education system, including religious,

business, or international actors. For-profit and non-university institutions provide striking examples of private roles not usually launched by national laws or policy.

Comparing across nations, the frequency of unanticipated, undirected emergence of private higher education roles is logically greatest where the state role in planning higher education is limited; on the other hand, surprise is great where undirected emergence occurs within systems in which the state presence is normally or at least normatively large. Whatever the state presence historically, the unplanned emergence of private roles has increased where state activity has been circumscribed, notably amid post-communist or neoliberal change. Surprise, even bewilderment, is especially common in systems with little tradition of differentiation and pluralism of institutions and roles in the public sector of higher education. And of course it is sharp in systems with no tradition of private higher education or at least no recent private higher education. At the same time, even more established private higher education sectors witness unanticipated, undirected additions and changes of roles.

Where private higher education undertakes roles distinctive from those associated with the public sector, especially if the roles are hitherto unknown, the notion of surprise is quite persuasive. Reinforcement of the notion occurs where voluntary, non-state actors undertake the distinctive roles, pursuing roles that catch others off guard. The notion of undirected surprise then works well even when such voluntary actors pursue non-distinctive roles. It works less well when non-distinctive roles stem from strong state or public higher education rules—but these are becoming less common.

Our depiction of unanticipated roles is consistent with pluralist over corporatist or planning concepts of political economy. Regarding counterpart higher education literature, the depiction defies not only a State Control model but probably stretches out of shape key tenets of even a State Supervisory model.<sup>37</sup> State policy is sometimes thwarted. More than that, the state involvement in our subject matter is too limited, often reactive more than initiating. There is too little central vision, direction, and steering. There is too little coordination and too little sense of a coherent system. Like other actors, the state finds itself

scurrying to catch onto what is happening outside its direction, things it often regards as having gotten out of hand. The real world of private higher education development partly contradicts state policy and mostly it just gets way out in front of it.

Consistent with pluralist or market initiatives from elements of society not commanded by the state, roles emerge basically from below. Different actors choose according to how they read the opportunities and the constraints. Constraints limit the range of viable choices, but constraints for some are opportunities for others, and broad contexts (such as a new political economy) also often open new possibilities, as with commercially oriented fields of study at non-university institutions. A retrospective ability to understand fresh private higher education roles as consistent with changing political-economic (including international) environments, especially market environments, does not mean we anticipated the roles. Furthermore, the changing environments themselves are often surprises.

The reality of contexts and constraints—from laws, regulations, traditions, norms, resources, supplies, and demands—is a qualification to our theme about undirected, unanticipated private roles. It may be sobering for those who think that roles should come simply through their choices, values, and goals. That illusion often stimulates demands from governments, scholars, or public opinion that private higher education undertake this or that role. The illusion also sometimes leads to swagger within the private sector. On the other hand, where private higher education leaders recognize constraints, they can either lament how roles are dependent or they can extol the fact that their institutions are relevant, enmeshed, and accountable to realities, constituencies, and tendencies within the wide range of higher education or well beyond it.<sup>38</sup> Just as private roles do not emerge mostly from overarching government policy, they do not emerge mostly from unfettered choice based solely on what private leaders might ideally like to do. Private roles often emerge on the margins of what is allowed, in gray area that policy did not foresee.

Neither the last point nor our overall theme argues against deliberation about what roles should emerge or be encouraged within the private sector.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, such deliberation makes sense where there is a range of options and where no dominant policy

simply imposes roles. However, scholarly perspectives and empirical analysis should carry weight in such normative or policy discussion. The discussion should take stock of forces and tendencies. This is a different, more realistic and humble approach than sitting down to design what the role of private higher education will or should be. The roles of private higher education in most countries are determined by diverse choices made by private institutions and their supporters, users, and constituencies within particular realities, constraints, and opportunities.<sup>40</sup> Roles that make most sense for some goals, values, traditions, resource levels, and so forth make little sense for others. If public policy seeks to shape private roles more or more thoughtfully than it has, it should proceed in large part from an understanding of the realities through which private roles have emerged, mixing this with feasible ideas about how to modify, limit, or promote certain aspects.

If the future resembles the past and present, however, the roles of private higher education will continue to emerge mostly in unanticipated ways, often bringing great surprise, even confounding central policymakers. By paying attention to this reality to date, we can in the future at least avoid being surprised that we are surprised.

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## NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> PROPHE—Program for Research on Private Higher Education—is accumulating data across countries and will post them on its website: <http://www.albany.edu/~prophe/> Meanwhile, an introduction to PROPHE’s mission, scope, structure, and mobility appears in the website’s Overview and Background papers. PROPHE aims to help fill the void in analysis of private higher education globally. The two key single-authored books that attempt to understand private higher education beyond just one country were both published back in 1986: Geiger 1986a; Levy 1986. Levy 1992 attempts to come to grips with private higher education institutions as mostly specialized organizations, which suggests narrow roles. Altbach 1999 provides the most recent book overview of private higher education in selected countries.

<sup>2</sup> The mix of choice and constraint is a concern about the private sector that also merits ongoing research in the public sector as well. Closer to our theme would be attention to the public sector’s degree of unanticipated, undirected role emergence; while we hypothesize that it is significantly less characteristic than in the private sector, we do not assume anything like its absence. Evidence appears in works on such topics as “academic drift” or the history and politics of U.S. higher education development compared to that of Europe, and so forth. See, for example, Clark 1995 and 1983.

<sup>3</sup> More on multiple private roles and choice and context appears in the author’s related piece in Chinese journals (Levy 2002a). The piece links these and other points to the Chinese case.

<sup>4</sup> This approach will be less gratifying to many than zealous calls for private higher education to fulfill or assume—whether voluntarily or through rules thrust upon it—a role of “academic excellence” or of “serving society.” Unless tied to the particular realities and possibilities of particular institutions, such statements lack analytical meaning. Such statements can serve valid purposes of generating enthusiasm, pride, and effort inside the ranks of the committed, protecting legitimate private higher education from attacks by its detractors, or pressuring private higher education toward desired ends.

<sup>5</sup> This is a major rationale for PROPHE as an emerging global network of researchers in different countries. Its initial national foci are on Chile, China, Japan, Poland, Russia, South Africa, and the United States, several of which are drawn upon in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> The broad literature on organizations has much to say about the birth of new organizations, transformation versus persistence in existing organizations, and what influences (e.g., technology, funding) shape organizations’ functioning. Most of the specific discussion of “roles,” however, concerns actors inside organizations, including groups’ or individuals’ conflicting or changing roles (Barley 1986; Ashforth 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Levy 1986, especially chapter 2. The other leading region into the 1980s was Asia (Wongsothorn and Wang 1995a and 1995b). But it is harder to generalize about Asian growth and roles because of the much greater variation across national cases. Several countries—including India, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand—developed huge private sectors, proportionally larger than almost any Latin American counterpart, but other countries remained with public monopolies. Japan and the Philippines are among countries analyzed in Geiger 1986a. While his work does not treat “waves” of growth, it identifies multiple private roles (mass-based, or peripheral or parallel to public roles); the identifications by Geiger and Levy (1986) mostly reinforce one another, though Geiger deals more with peripheral and parallel roles whereas Levy deals more with elite and religious roles. See Marginson 1997.

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<sup>8</sup> These Australian, Turkish, and Russian examples involve attempts to achieve elite roles with academically strong universities of some breadth. Outside the United States, such roles have been seldom achieved or even pursued, though public university difficulties (as in Turkey) offer openings. Additionally, as the Russian case indicates, a second-tier status is possible, where private institutions do not match the public elite leaders but slip in behind them, yet ahead of most institutions, or they seek elite status in niches. Another variant of elite roles is an elite socioeconomic role with academic elite status limited to teaching (without advanced research) as well as to certain fields of study. Such variants push us to think about mixes of elite and non-elite roles and to explore “semi-elite” institutions. These then are major tasks on PROPHE’s agenda. The emergence of semi-elite institutions is briefly considered in the author’s forthcoming working paper on South Africa (Levy 2002b).

<sup>9</sup> An alternative occurs where public institutions allow in extra students as paying students alongside the non-paying (or low-paying) majority.

<sup>10</sup> “Choice” is more often identified with the first or second waves. In the first, students choose a religious or other value preference, and in the second they choose something perceived to be superior to the public mode in academic, social, or economic terms. The third wave has been depicted more as the access option for those who had no choice. But that underplays the growing frequency of students who can gain admission to non-elite public higher education but choose non-elite private higher education, often for job and other economic considerations. Scholars need to analyze the unfolding mixes of choice and access involved in emerging private roles in different countries. This scholarly task relates to the task of exploring semi-elite roles.

<sup>11</sup> Especially in developing countries, this critique often overlooks the frequency of public higher education playing roles other than the mythically enshrined ones of academic leadership or advanced professional training (Castro and Levy 2000). The belittling of the job-oriented roles sometimes expresses a view that knowledge should be for knowledge’s sake; the unholy opposite of that is viewed as crass materialism. In contrast, views of private higher education’s religious or other value roles are often more benign (though historically the legitimacy of those roles was often challenged). Where prospective roles have already been debated publicly, their eventual emergence may involve only limited surprise, but often the debate mostly follows the emergence.

<sup>12</sup> A minority of the for-profit effort is more elite, as in the Turkish and Australian examples cited earlier. Legal for-profit status appears unlikely to overlap with basic religious or other value-centered roles. In South Africa, the religious institutions constitute a non-profit presence within a private sector that is predominantly for-profit. U.S. private higher education institutions with religious roles also populate the non-profit sub-sector (which is the predominant one in the U.S. private sector). The author’s forthcoming working paper on South Africa (Levy 2002b) is mostly about exploring the for-profit phenomenon, a concern also pursued by PROPHE’s Collaborating Scholars in South Africa and the U.S. Ukraine, Jordan, and now Brazil are among other countries with legally for-profit higher education.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding Ukraine, for example, Stetar (1996) refers to a legislative vacuum and the absence of clear rules on how to establish institutions, though then licensing and accreditation were established. Vietnam had non-public institutions before 1993 measures provided legal approval. China recognized the legal standing of private education in 1995 at the National People’s Congress and regulations were issued a few years later but legal status still remains cloudy. In other countries, private

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institutions await official authorization. South Africa's legal and regulatory reach remains unclear and subject to fears, claims, and counterclaims.

<sup>14</sup> Pressure from higher education interest groups, even where not trying to block private higher education or proving inadequate to that goal, may keep private higher education from certain classic roles. Private institutions may function at what UNESCO would call level 5, rather than traditional level 6 first-degree education. This is the case for the bulk of Chinese private higher education. In South Africa, ambiguity and debate concern such categories and some would hold private institutions to just the "further education" level. Relevant to our thesis is the fact institutions grow and roles emerge before the higher education system has clear rules defining and determining the process.

<sup>15</sup> Additionally, where the international and for-profit trends do not coincide, the international trend spans additional types of private higher education, and adds new variants. Both elite and religious higher education institutions, usually from advanced countries, have opened branches and recognized courses in other countries. The startling reach of institutions such as Monterrey Tec not only around Mexico but also into South America and the U.S. shows that developed countries do not monopolize energetic private international penetration.

<sup>16</sup> Bernasconi (forthcoming). The growth of chains or other networks of higher education institutions—whether domestic or international or a combination—introduces another sense of planning but planning that is sometimes internationally "above" government planning and usually institutionally "below" it. Government comes into the picture more to decide how much to ignore, explicitly allow, or block such planning.

<sup>17</sup> In some North African and Middle Eastern countries, governments appear to be promoting private growth for purposes of both enrollment expansion and elite options.

<sup>18</sup> An example more related to elite growth occurs when government officials decide that the private growth is an economic, social, or even partial political boon, and tacitly "plan" a relative neglect of public universities.

<sup>19</sup> The Philippines moved from laissez-faire to regulations in 1969 but recently to deregulation (Bray 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Beresford-Hill 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Historian Daniel Boorstin, while emphasizing the pluralist dynamism characterizing U.S. colonial society and reflected in its higher education, nevertheless notes elements of fragile legitimacy. Thus, colleges like Dartmouth were attacked as "nurseries of inequality" (Boorstin 1958: 191). Compared to civil law counterparts, common law societies have more often created nonprofit institutions through voluntary (non-state) efforts and resources and oriented to competitive markets. See, for example, Anheier 1990: 377.

<sup>22</sup> The privatizing consequences have included not only the growth of private higher education but also increased private finance and management of legally public institutions, a major and multifaceted topic beyond our focus on legally private institutions. A pertinent observation here, however, is that private higher education roles are often scarcely directed by policy even where more policy directs efforts to partly privatize existing public institutions, as with system-wide imposition of tuition fees.

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<sup>23</sup> Our concept of re-emergence requires that private higher education existed earlier. However, most countries have at least a dose of private precedent insofar as many higher education institutions were historically more mixed or fused private-public entities than the clearly public forms that came to dominate later on (Levy 1982). See also the next endnote below.

<sup>24</sup> The U.S. is the extreme case in which private higher education developed at least as early as public higher education. However, analysts often exaggerate the atypical nature of the U.S. case in this respect, as many countries had elements or forms of private higher education (and other levels of education) before they had clearly public forms (Levy 1982). See Roth 1987 on the broad sweep of goods that historically came through private providers, though they are widely perceived today as appropriately delivered publicly.

<sup>25</sup> On Turkey, see Oncu and on China see Lin. On the critical legitimacy challenges in Russia, and the sense of Russian private growth *against* expectations, public opinion, and regulations, see Suspitsin (forthcoming). That the entrepreneurialism can extend to fields other than common ones like business is shown, for example, by the inclusion of medicine and other expensive fields in Chile.

<sup>26</sup> The Chilean example from the last endnote also works well here. The broader point is that role changes within extant sectors are often surprises, even stunning ones. An example for both China and South Africa is the evolution of novel (and controversial) relationships between extant private colleges and public universities. Another example is the effort by some academically maligned institutions to use resources generated from profitable fields of study to cross-subsidize costly fields and thus build broader academic credibility.

<sup>27</sup> In all these settings, there is variation in how the state role changes. In some post-communist, African, and other cases, the state weakens overall and lacks the will or capacity to try to control or run many significant aspects of social and economic change. Societal space opens for private initiatives outside detailed and overarching policy for higher education. In other instances, the state diminishes its financial role but attempts to steer systems or demand increased accountability, including at times from private sectors.

<sup>28</sup> On Australia, Marginson (1997: 468) and on Japan, Yonezawa (forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> Breneman (1994: 137).

<sup>30</sup> Ruch (2001: 2); Kelly 2001; Sperling 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Several works by William Zumeta track and analyze the shifting contours of the U.S. private higher education sector. See, for example, Zumeta 1999. On the shift from religious to secular see Jencks and Riesman 1977 and on a liberal arts conversion to job-market roles, see Breneman 1994. Also, if we look back to the early formation of the U.S. private sector, even pre-nationhood, the reality is mostly one of individual institutional histories, not a planned sector (Whitehead 1973). Something similar holds regarding the subsequent rise of private universities (Veysey 1965; Geiger 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Levy 1999 and 2002c.

<sup>33</sup> Often, the law neither looks to nor forbids non-state actors from seeking accreditation for their institution from a foreign agency, often an agency from a more developed country. The relationship between accreditation and legitimacy is discussed mostly in terms of academic quality but it is often

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intertwined with the legitimizing of roles, as when private institutions offer job-targeted education with a curriculum not contemplated in national law.

<sup>34</sup> Especially in systems where the legitimacy of private institutions and their novel roles is challenged and lacks solid legal status, private leaders may portray their roles as less distinctive than they really are—less deviant from public norms and expectations. As in Ukraine, Russia, and China, private leaders (as well as surprised and uncertain government officials) often avoid the word “private” in favor of blander or vaguer terms such as “non-state” or “people-run.” At the same time, private leaders in countries with a bias toward private activity may have incentives to exaggerate the distinctiveness of their institutions’ roles, to attract students and contributions; but outside the U.S. the incentives would usually appear to favor understating the distinctiveness of private roles. Thus, if distinctive roles fit our notion of role emergence better than non-distinctive roles do, it is important to appreciate the mix and the fact that rhetoric from the private institutions may understate the true degree of distinctiveness.

<sup>35</sup> The state may even promote certain distinctive roles. Common examples occur where it blocks private institutions from traditional academic roles while allowing or more directly encouraging their pursuit of novel non-university roles. Planned differentiation as well as non-differentiation is consistent with corporatist as opposed to pluralist modes of system organization. See Schmitter 1974.

<sup>36</sup> Interest group lobbying often feeds off and exacerbates internal differences within the state (as when finance ministries are more sympathetic than education ministries to the growth of distinctive private roles). Such internal differences further undermine a sense of coherent designing of systems.

<sup>37</sup> On these higher education models, see van Vught (1992: 13-23). Granted, advocacy of the State Supervisory model includes the claim that the effective influence of the state to shape developments would in certain ways *increase*, but that point underscores how limited the state direction has sometimes been even in systems called statist. For one classic depiction of policymaking in pluralist systems, see Dahl and Lindblom 1992.

<sup>38</sup> A common tension exists between the attractiveness of more autonomous choice and more “fitting in.” In systems that lack deep and wide traditions of legitimacy for private roles, there is reason for private leaders to highlight how they fit in.

<sup>39</sup> There is nothing inherently wrong with crafting normative statements about roles private higher education should undertake. Indeed some such discussion is both natural and desirable inside private higher education, among policymakers, and in society at large. But such discussion is no substitute for analysis of private higher education’s actual roles, and analysis should inform partisan discussion. Furthermore, we must be wary of declarations about “the role” private higher education plays or should play, an approach unsuited to the common multiplicity of roles.

<sup>40</sup> In at least one normative pluralist perspective, neither the lack of a dominant state policy nor the lack of full rein for a private sector to plan its role from above is disheartening. On the contrary, the reality of multiply roles selected by multiple actors from among multiple considerations might reflect a dynamism, competition, and innovation ideally associated with a decentralized private sector of higher education.