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NOTES

- 1 This definition was published by FORPO-REX (the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Public Universities in Brazil), an organization dedicated to articulating and defining academic policies on extra-mural studies, committed to social transformation for the full exercise of citizenship and the reinforcement of democracy, an organization that is dedicated to articulating and defining academic policies for extra-mural studies.
- 2 See <http://www.renex.org.br/documentos/Colecao-Extensao-Universitaria/01-Plano-Nacional-Extensao/Plano-nacional-de-extensao-universitaria-editado.pdf>.

Inside View IV.7.3

The social responsibility of higher education in Chile: AEQUALIS, the higher education forum

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The day at the dawning of the 21st century on which we created a consortium of 13 universities as part of the 'Universidad Construye País' (University Builds Country) project now seems far off. At the time, we defined the social responsibility of universities as:

the university's ability to disseminate and put into practice a set of general and specific principles and values, through four key processes: management, teaching, research and university extension, in response to the university community and the country in which it is based. (Universidad Construye País, 2006)

For many years, higher education institutions in Chile operated reactively. In other words, they tried to survive in the face of increasing student demand and to adapt to the resulting requirements. However, this role was challenged by a reduction in state involvement in education and the emergence of a highly deregulated market, the appearance of private educational offerings, the diversification of funding, internationalization, rankings and accreditation for quality assurance.

Despite the slow pace of the transformations, a new, more proactive attitude and greater commitment can today be observed. Universities are trying to anticipate society's

demands. To achieve this, universities need to be close to society and interact with it. They must listen to, join with and even be an agent of the diverse voices of which society is composed. Despite the various forces that aim to diminish this effort, we can see a strengthening of the universities' social role, which has begun to transform all of their main functions, including 'university extension'. In the past, the public were considered to be 'consumers' of culture in extension activities, rather than active, participating agents who can create and generate it.

Talk of the 'social and civic commitment' of universities involves fostering and promoting a more equal relationship of mutual need and interdependence. Universities are no longer seen as institutions that have and 'generously share' knowledge. They are institutions that are learning, that are open, that listen and discover more relevant ways of serving society. In other words, there is a paradigm shift at whose heart is the joint creation of knowledge. We are moving on from the 'ivory tower' to modes of relations characterized by a continuous interaction with actors situated in the surrounding area. Thus, universities will become important agents of the synergistic development of knowledge.

The challenge of interacting with relevant actors in the surrounding area is not limited to universities; it also applies to vocational schools that provide professional training at all levels. Such schools form relations in a different way from universities as a result of their function and mission. Their objectives focus on helping students to join the labour market and on promoting technological innovation. Consequently, the challenges require commitment to the local and regional area in which the schools operate. Local actors will reduce the need to increase the diversity of the higher education system and thus extend the content of development beyond the universities. In fact, each function that the various institutions carry out contributes in its own way to the process of modernization of societies and the development that supports this process. To bring about this change, a new approach needs to be taken by the authorities, academic bodies, administrative organs and, of course, the students.

In Chile, the students have clearly taken the lead: they are claiming their citizenship, as well as their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. They are not only asking for better living conditions for themselves, but also organizing protests to demand profound

changes in society. They are calling for the State to play a greater role, for recognition of the right to education and health, for an end to profit in education, and for deep changes in the economy, social relations and citizen participation. In addition, they are pushing for a different conception of democracy – supported by an integral vision of human life – that would involve a series of civic responsibilities and not just politics.

In this approach, the State is associated with the democratic regime for at least three reasons. First, it is the entity that demarcates citizens' electoral participation. Second, it is responsible for the legal system that sanctions the civil liberties without which the democratic regime would not exist. Third, it is reflected in a bureaucratic structure that gives continuity and certainty to political processes.

Before the start of the student protests in 2011, a group of one hundred academics from various regions, who had a range of ideological and religious opinions and worked in different vocational and academic higher education institutions, got together and formed AEQUALIS, the Higher Education Forum.

This wide-ranging, diverse, innovative forum has systematically dealt with the various problems of Chilean higher education, and considers that social commitment is expressed in concern for the education system in general and the higher education system in particular. At this time, there is no better way to demonstrate social responsibility than by acting on the education system and by carrying out the reforms that society is crying out for.

This energy has driven the work of AEQUALIS (2013) in the last four years, in the process of which the characteristics of the new kind of students have been

discussed, as well as the changes that institutions must undergo to ensure the admission, progression and appropriate qualification of these people. The subject of equity has been conceptualized, and opinions have been formed on entry mechanisms for higher education, with a focus on the need to adapt these mechanisms to make them more inclusive and integrative as this is an essential factor in all social systems. The forum has also discussed the main supports of the higher education system's structure in order to redefine them so that the public sphere is taken into account at all levels.

One concept that should be reconsidered is that of the 'autonomy' of higher education institutions. The idea is to foster a kind of institutional autonomy that considers in internal decision-making processes the mid- and long-term effects of decisions on the entire system. In other words, we must assume that an institution is not simply a private entity that offers products and processes them for a group of 'consumers'. Instead, it belongs to a system whose survival depends on the responsible participation of all components. This responsibility is not only to the student or the internal community, but also to the rest of the actors in the surrounding area, including other institutions of the same type.

Likewise, it is essential to increase the spaces in institutions' internal communities that are available for deliberation, discussion and, of course, decision-making. A higher education system that is constituted from the public sphere must recognize joint decisions taken about strategic areas. In fact, internal communities, which are constituent parts of the institutional project, should decide on an institution's future: empower-

ment of the institution's actors is a vital device for internally legitimating the project that is being promoted. In this context, the Talloires Network, which operates worldwide, states clearly that:

something revolutionary is occurring at global level: students and teachers are working together and are becoming active agents in the life of their communities. They are feeling the solitude of the ivory tower and have opened the gates. Enthusiasm for flourishing civic commitment is common today in US colleges and universities and is redefining the relationships between academia, public interest, and all those who are concerned about social justice, the environment, human and general development, and the social and economic challenges of development. (Talloires Network, 2010)

These winds of change create a suitable setting for pursuing the structural reforms that education systems must at times undergo. Higher education institutions in Latin America have felt the pressure to change, and, each in its own context, are working to attain greater legitimation of their decisions and actions.

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Spotlight Issues IV.7.4

The role of the university in the transformation of a territory of poverty*

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This paper reflects on the role and contribution of the university in areas of poverty and discusses the case of the University of Inter-

national Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB). Recently created in the city of Redenção¹ (Ceará state), located in

northeast Brazil,² UNILAB is a federal university designed to build a historical and cultural bridge between Brazil and the Portuguese-

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