

Multi-Campus Teaching-Oriented Private Higher Education Institutions in Colombia. An Analysis of Four Cases

Jorge Enrique Delgado^{a*}

^a*University of Pittsburgh, United States; Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia*

*Corresponding author: Email: jed41@pitt.edu; Address: Department of Administrative and Policy Studies, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, United States

Introduction

Colombian higher education is considered a mid-size system with a medium-low massification that enrolls 26-35 percent of the college-ready population (Arocena and Sutz 2005; García-Guadilla 2005). In 2013, there were 345 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Colombia, of which 212 were different types of private HEIs (61.5 percent) and 131 were public and private universities (38 percent). Among private HEIs, 49 were universities (14.2 percent of the total HEIs in the country). Regarding enrollment, in 2012 there were 1,877,378 students in HEIs, of whom 62.4 percent attended universities and 46.5 percent studied at private HEIs (Colombian Observatory of Universities 2014; National Ministry of Education—MEN 2015; Universia 2014).

Starting in the late 1970s and before the writing of the current Political Constitution in 1991 and the enactment of Higher Education Law No. 30 of 1992 (that restructured the system, defined the principle of academic freedom, and established the conditions for the creation of the quality assurance and accreditation system), Colombian higher education experienced an important growth through private HEIs (Revelo and Hernández 2003), even though the information and accreditation system did not evolve at the same pace (Mockus 1998). As a result, several HEIs evolved from professional schools and technical/technological institutions into universities. Despite the growth of the system, HEIs were still concentrated in the four major capital cities, Bogota, Medellin, Cali, and Barranquilla. However, some institutions expanded by opening several campuses and/or smaller branches in other department (province) capitals

and mid-size cities. Research on private universities in Latin America has tended to focus mainly on world-class research-oriented institutions and those included in university rankings (Delgado 2015; Delgado and Weidman 2012; Gregorutti and Delgado 2015). Less attention has been given to teaching-oriented or smaller universities. The growing Colombian HEIs are not necessarily research-oriented institutions. Therefore, this paper aims at looking at those institutions to start covering the research gap. The purpose is to characterize a group of multi-campus teaching-oriented private HEIs in Colombia and analyze the factors leading to their expansion and the risks of such growth. The argument is that even though the creation of campuses in more cities gives more students access to higher education, issues of quality and corruption undermine the potential benefits of the system's expansion.

Methods

This paper analyzes the cases of four institutions, Cooperative University of Colombia (UCC, *Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia*), Antonio Nariño University (UAN, *Universidad Antonio Nariño*), San Martin University Foundation (FUSM, *Fundación Universitaria San Martin*), and Minute of God University Corporation (CUMD, *Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios*). It uses data from institutional websites, the Colombian Observatory of Universities, the website Universia, news outlets, and government and other documents. After a categorization and description of this group of institutions, the discussion moves to analyzing higher education expansion and diversification and how it conforms

to the institutional rules of the game (Ostrom 1999) in Colombia, resulting in institutions like the ones depicted in this paper. In this case, the rules were established by Law No. 30 of 1992. However, some negative consequences such as low quality, politics, and corruption initially exposed by Constaza Cubillos Reyes (1998) in the book, *Red Balance. Crisis in Higher Education (Saldo Rojo. Crisis en la Educación Superior)*, are still prevalent in the Colombian higher education system (maybe with one exception). The article also analyzes the HEI monitoring legislation that was enacted after a series of scandals involving some private institutions have erupted in recent years.

Findings

HEIs in Colombia are classified on the basis of their academic focus and legal nature. From the academic point of view, HEIs can be technical professional institutions, technological institutions, university institutions/technological schools, or universities, which depend on the types and levels of programs they offer. Technical professional institutions and technological institutions provide technical and technological undergraduate and specialization programs. University institutions/technological schools can offer professional undergraduate programs (somehow the equivalent to four-year college degrees in the US), specializations, and even, with specific approval by the MEN, master's and doctoral programs. Universities have the capacity to offer the entire spectrum of programs from undergraduate to postdoctoral. Regarding their legal nature, HEIs can be either public or private. Private HEIs in Colombia should be created as mutual-benefit non-for-profit legal entities, organized as corporations, foundations, or institutions of solidarity-based economy, even though the latter have not been regulated yet (MEN 2015).

Based on the aforementioned typology, FUSM and CUMD are considered university institutions, while UAN and UCC are universities. Beyond the previous classification, three of these institutions (UAN, UCC, and FUSM) could be seen as proprietary-like institutions since they were created and/or are mainly governed by an individual, a board, or a family. They were founded in

the Colombian capital, Bogota, and later expanded nationwide. The four institutions enrolled in 2011-2012 close to 18 percent of the total number of higher education students in Colombia. Their main focus is teaching. They offer programs in a wide variety of majors mostly at the undergraduate level. Some of them have graduate programs, being very few or none at the doctoral level. There are also modest developments in research.

UCC: Cooperative University of Colombia

UCC has experienced a series of transformations throughout its history. It starts in 1958, when a group of cooperativists founded the Moses Michael Moady Institute (named after a famous Canadian cooperativist) based on the principles of solidarity economy, cooperativism, and adult education. The Moady Institute became the Institute for Social Economy and Cooperativism (INDESCO: *Instituto de Economía Social y Cooperativismo*) in 1961, the University Institute for Social Economy and Cooperativism INDESCO in 1968, and the Cooperative University INDESCO in 1974, all of which were recognized by the National Superintendence of Cooperatives (the latter through Resolution No. 0501). In 1983, the MEN gave HEI status to the University Institute for Social Economy and Cooperativism Corporation INDESCO, which became UCC in 2002 (MEN Resolution No. 1,850). Beginning with headquarters in Bogota, the institution expanded to have five main campuses in the cities of Medellin, Barrancabermeja, Santa Marta, and Bucaramanga in the 1990s. As of 2014, UCC has campuses in 18 cities of 13 Colombian departments, which enroll 47,712 students (UCC 2014). The institution offers undergraduate majors in agriculture, arts, education, health, engineering, social sciences, law, and management. It also has some specialization and master's programs but not doctorates (UCC 2014).

UCC has faced some public scrutiny in recent years. It became a university under the directorship of César Pérez García, a politician who is currently serving prison time accused of being the mastermind of a political massacre in the department of Antioquia in 1988. In the past (1994), Pérez García had been removed from his elected position as congressman of the Colombian House (Chamber) of Representatives. At that time, the State

Council (*Consejo de Estado*) found that he promoted and voted to include an article (No. 132) in Law No. 30 to allocate 50 percent of funding for cooperatives to solidarity economy HEIs, which was ruled as self-benefit (El Espectador 2013; El Turbión 2011). Pérez García's son, César Augusto Pérez González, served as UCC president until January 2015 when he was succeeded by Maritza Rondón Rangel and continued as advisor for strategic affairs. Other family members hold top positions within the institution, which has prompted inquiries from the media and the government (Herrera 2015).

UAN: Antonio Nariño University

UAN was founded in 1976 (charter) by a group of 23 individuals as Colombian Independent University "Antonio Nariño" (*Universidad Independiente de Colombia "Antonio Nariño"*) with the purpose of meeting the growing demand for higher education mainly among low-income students from the southern neighborhoods of Bogota. MEN Resolution No. 4,571 of 1977 granted the institution legal status. UAN started classes in 1978 with undergraduate programs in business, accounting, mathematic-physics education, and chemistry-biology education (UAN 2002, 2005). In the 1980s, the institution became the Antonio Nariño University Corporation (UAN 2002, 2005) and created new programs in fields like engineering and several specializations, opened nine branches in cities such as Armenia, Neiva, and Ibagué, and initiated distance education programs. UAN obtained university status in 1993 through MEN Resolution No. 3,277 and changed its denomination to its current name in 1994 (MEN resolution No. 5,846). The 1990s brought new programs mainly in the social sciences, biomedical disciplines, and emerging fields, and the project of creating the first Master's in Mathematics Education (UAN 2014b). In 2014, UAN had 31 branches in 28 cities, grouped in five regions (Amazonia and Orinoquia, Andean, Pacific, Coffee-land Belt, and Caribbean) along with the main campus, offered 121 undergraduate and 34 graduate programs (two doctoral, one in mathematics education and one in applied science), and enrolled 14,368 students. (UAN 2014a, 2014b).

In the 1980s and 1990s, UAN was investigated and/or sanctioned by the MEN, the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES, *Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior*), and the National Council of Higher Education (CESU, *Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior*) for several irregularities. They included offering programs not registered at the ICFES, accepting students who did not take the national high school examinations, and offering low-quality programs. CESU's commission recommended precluding UAN's legal status, closing six programs, and reimbursing tuition to students. UAN was the institution that opened the largest number of programs after the enactment of Law No. 30 (Jerez 1998). It is not clear why all the recommendations of the investigation commission were not implemented, but one reason could have been the amount of students who could have been affected by the measure. However, UAN student enrollment decreased from near 50,000 in the late 1990s to 14,368 in 2014. In recent cases, the Colombian government has been sentenced to compensate former UAN students who could not graduate from non-authorized programs in the 1990s (El Espectador 2015; Semana 2015).

FUSM: San Martin University Foundation

FUSM was founded in 1981 by Mariano A. Alvear Sofán, Gloria Orozco de Alvear, and Arturo Ocampo Álvarez (FUSM 2014)). It started as an institute to grant high school diplomas to adult individuals (Semana 2011) that became a dental school and later expanded to include 13 schools in other health sciences, business and administration, engineering, and social sciences. In 1998, FUSM created the distance education school (FUSM 2014). The initial search about FUSM showed the institution had 19 national and 2 international—Panama and Brazil—campuses and 26,164 students enrolled. The number of campuses, programs, and students enrolled at FUSM have decreased substantially after a crisis recently arose that prompted the MEN to intervene the institution. Before the intervention by the MEN, Alvear Sofán was the head of FUSM and several family members were part of the leadership in different capacities.

There is a history of investigations for irregularities at FUSM that precede the current events. Between 2000

and 2005, the MEN fined the institution for offering non-authorized programs, charging non-authorized tuition increases, obstructing monitoring and control, and providing misleading information about programs. In 2011, several lawsuits were filed against the institution for not paying to contractors. A judge ordered to seize FUSM accounts to which banks informed accounts were emptied and there were other simultaneous seizure orders. However, the investigation showed that students paid tuition through parallel accounts registered under another entity, which is considered fraud. Other irregularities include document forging, tax evasion, and not paying salaries to faculty and staff (Semana 2011).

The FUSM case prompted the government to issued Decree No. 2219 in 31 October 2014 to give the MEN legal tools to monitor and control HEIs undergoing investigations for irregularities. As a result, the MEN suspended current and in-process qualified registrations (*registros calificados*) to all FUSM programs—thus the institution could not enroll new students, and ordered FUSM to manage finances only through an authorized bank. In addition, the MEN designated a committee to take over academics, management, and finances, and to design a development plan. Prior to these measures, the MEN closed several specialization programs in medicine and commissioned a technical group to evaluate the situation in all FUSM campuses. That investigation showed that several campuses owed utility, rent, and faculty/staff salary payments. Campuses like Valledupar and Cúcuta were closed and others were partially open (MEN 2014).

CUMD: Minute of God University Corporation¹

CUMD, or Uniminuto, is a Catholic-affiliated institution (Catholic Congregation of Jesus and Mary, whose members are referred as Eudists) with a social service-oriented philosophy. Eudist priest, Father Rafael García-Herreros, led the creation in 31 August 1988 (charter) of Uniminuto through a partnership between the *Minuto de Dios* Corporation, the *Minuto de Dios* Charismatic Center, and the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. In 1 August 1990, The MEN granted the institution legal status through Resolution No. 10,345 and the first 220 students started classes in the Bogota campus in 1992. The initial

undergraduate programs approved by the ICFES were informatics education, philosophy education, elementary education, business, civil engineering, and social communication-journalism (Uniminuto 2014a). CUMD growth started in the 1990s with the creation of the Antioquia and Tolima campuses. However, the main expansion took place in the 2000s with the creation of new campuses and branches and online programs. The latter account today for 52 percent of the current enrollment. This has been the result of the implementation of five strategic lines of development that CUMD established by the end of the 1990s, which included: education of the person as a whole, search for innovating funding sources, education quality, diversification of academic programs, and presence in the regions (Uniminuto 2014a). Uniminuto is a multi-campus system that consists of a main campus, sectional and regional campuses, branches, higher education regional centers (referred as CERES) and a virtual and long distance education institute in 14 Colombian departments and more than 100 municipalities (Uniminuto 2014b). In 2013, CUMD enrolled 85,462 students mostly in technical, technological, and professional undergraduate programs as well as specializations and masters. In addition, Uniminuto has some research developments of which the creation of the Scientific Park for Social Innovation is among the most promising ones (Uniminuto 2013).

Discussion

This article explores a topic that has not been much studied in Latin America, multi-campus teaching-oriented private HEIs, particularly in Colombia. Most of the available material is the result of journalistic work. This type of institutions has the role of making higher education accessible to populations in capital and smaller cities where there is not enough offer from public and/or traditional prestigious private universities. This article argues that the expansion and diversification of HEIs in Colombia conform to the rules of sector (Ostrom 1999), resulting in institutions like the ones depicted in this paper. However, it raises concerns about issues of quality and other factors like politics and corruption that undermine the potential benefits of the system for the students and

the society. In Colombia, the rules of the higher education sector are given by the country's political Constitution and the Higher Education Law No. 30 of 1992. The law established principles like university autonomy that opened the door to the creation of new institutions or the expansion of the existing ones. The four HEIs described here, UCC, UAN, FUSM, and CUMD are examples of these institutions. Law No. 30 also sets the basis for the creation of the quality assurance system for which sufficient legal regulations had not been completely developed yet to give the MEN tools to act in cases of irregularities. Only after the trouble at FUSM reached a critical condition the Colombian government enacted Decree No. 2219 of 31 October 2014 and later the Higher Education Monitoring and Control Law No. 1740 of 23 December of 2014.

However, the implementation of measures to monitor and control HEIs and to correct anomalies still faces cultural and political challenges and needs to be tested. In 1998, Cubillos Reyes published a commissioned book on the problems of the higher education system in Colombia. The author provides a detailed analysis of those issues including the for-profit use of institutions that by law should be mutual-benefit non-for-profit legal entities (MEN 2015). Cubillos Castro also describes cases of corruption and the role of politicians in the ownership, legal circumventing, and policy influencing of private HEIs. It is worrisome that almost two decades after the publication of *Red Balance. Crisis in Higher Education*, those problems persist. The cases of UCC, UAN, and FUSM exemplify this situation. Institutions like UAN and UCC have been the focus of investigations but intervention attempts by the MEN have not been fruitful (El Tiempo 2014). That could lead to the scrutinized political affiliation and activity of those institutions' leaders. The fall of FUSM raises questions about whether the institution did not have a strong political clout or the problems were so evident that it was impossible to cover up.

On the other side, CUMD seems to be the only exception to the corruption and political influence issues found among the HEIs studied in this article. This could be explained through the nature of the corporations that supported its foundation and development, which would be an interesting topic for further research.

Note

1. The name *Minuto de Dios* could sound a little intriguing. It comes from Father Rafael García-Herreros who, for several decades, used to talk one minute every week night at 7:00 p.m. in the Colombian national television to share some thoughts from the Catholic perspective.

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