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■ AQ FEATURE

Ask the Experts: Higher Education

BY [Arturo Cherbowski Lask](#), [Francisco Suarez Hernandez](#), [Amgad Shehata](#) and [Salvador Alva Gómez Salvador](#)

What should be done to improve standardization for degrees and disciplines for higher education in the Americas?

Artur Cherbowski Lask answers:

It's important to keep in mind that a region consists of different countries, each with its own needs and strengths, and bound to its particular culture and history—although tied firmly to a common, shared history

and culture. In this mosaic, universities try to respond to their regional, national and local demands. Thus, the fields of knowledge and particular disciplines that each university develops answer to specific needs.

For this reason, instead of speaking about standardization of degrees and disciplines, it would be more fitting to speak about creating an international quality standard—broad and flexible enough to include all of the particular differences in disciplines and degrees that emerge in a region—and that, at the same time, provides a firm, trustworthy metric by which to measure the quality of each degree from individual universities. Since governments have not taken a decisive lead on creating an international standard, individual universities have taken a one-to-one approach, creating the basic trust and establishing the minimum quality standards for joint degrees, credit validations and exchanges. But it's a slow and complicated process, and one that doesn't necessarily pave the way for a unified, international framework.

To have a real regional impact, states must be willing to provide adequate resources to encourage universities to join forces and truly work together as a group. The time is ripe: the issue is being discussed passionately in international forums, and there are many interesting projects underway, including, for example, *Universia's* own presidents meeting that will bring together more than 1,100 university rectors and presidents from all over the world in Rio de Janeiro to discuss, among other pressing matters, the internationalization of higher education.

The table is set; hopefully, the opportunity will be seized.

Francisco Suarez answers:



The Campus of Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education) in Monterrey, Mexico. Photo: Gildardo Sánchez (flickr)

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Fomento Económico Mexicano, S.A.B. de C.V. (FEMSA) has always had a close relationship to the development of higher education in Latin America. During the 1940s, our then CEO was the leading founder of *Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey* (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education—*Tec de Monterrey*, ITESM), today Latin America's largest private

university and ranked in the top 10 universities regionwide. Over the years, FEMSA has expanded this effort to standardize and develop higher education across our region and, through a series of ongoing initiatives, continues to do so today.

One such initiative is “Preparing Business Leaders for a Sustainable Future,” led by the World Environment Center, FEMSA and a collaboration between *Tec de Monterrey*’s business school and the Institute for Global Sustainability. The programs seek to accelerate the transfer of knowledge from the private sector to the classroom by providing students with real-time opportunities to work with companies during their undergraduate studies—and by doing so, enable companies to identify talent at an early stage.

Another example is *Tec de Monterrey*’s “*Modalidad de Liderazgo para el Desarrollo Social*” (MLDS) that has students participate in the design, development and evaluation of social impact projects. The program consists of four phases: training in social responsibility, identifying needs and opportunities, developing a project and analysis of experience, and systematizing evaluation.

A second FEMSA initiative is “The New Leader: Transforming Sustainability Challenges into Core Business Opportunities.” This program, developed by the Stanford University–World Environment Center in collaboration with FEMSA, works in multiple countries to teach students how to better understand people, their context and decision-making, help them adapt to changing circumstances, and develop the capacity to generate, disseminate and scale up new ideas.

In all of these cases and others, FEMSA and institutes of higher education—especially the *Tec de Monterrey*—are seeking a core set of curricula and programs that will train students in practical skills and habits. By working with partners and focusing on hands-on, real-world problems, these efforts are easily transferable to other programs, schools and countries.

Amgad Shehata answers:

According to a 2014 study by the United Nation’s International Labour Organization, about 21 million of Latin America’s 108 million 15- to 24-year-olds fall into an economic classification known as NEETs—not in employment, education or training. The NEET crisis not only has an immediate impact on Latin America’s economic growth and sociopolitical stability, but also on the region’s future prospects. Innovative policy solutions that involve the private sector in educational design and programs are essential to solving Latin America’s youth unemployment crisis. A recent program in UPS, a leading global logistics provider, may offer a good case study in how to develop generalizable, transferable skills beyond the classroom.

Given the massive scale of UPS’s operations, several years ago the company faced an employment shortage gap at several U.S. supply-chain facilities. To solve the problem, UPS collaborated with state and local governments, as well as local educational institutions, to create a public-private “earn and learn” partnership in key cities. Students willing to enroll full-time at local colleges, universities and vocational schools are offered the opportunity to work in part-time positions with UPS. Not only do the students earn a salary and valuable work experience, but UPS and the government partners jointly fund the students’ tuition.

After four years, the students graduate with a degree, valuable work experience and, for top performers, career opportunities with a major corporation. The program now has over 2,100 participants each year and an excess of graduating candidates to choose from.

These programs, currently in place at UPS facilities in suburban Chicago, IL and Louisville, KY, are models of public-private partnerships that can be leveraged by Latin American governments working together with the region’s private sector leaders. This solution helps governments meet their responsibility to provide quality education and work skills transferable across sectors and countries.

Salvador Alva Gómez Salvador answers:

Instituto Tecnológico y Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education—*Tec de Monterrey*) was founded in 1943 to offer the highest quality education in engineering and business management to train a cadre of Mexican professionals to lead Mexico's growing global industries. Its reputation grew as its alumni succeeded in reaching high-level management positions and starting their own companies.

These alumni urged us to set up *Tec de Monterrey* satellite campuses in their own states to increase the pools of local talent and to upgrade skills of current employees as technology and practices changed. Today there are 31 campuses in 25 cities in Mexico, with 20 offices in Latin America, the U.S., Europe, and Asia. We now function as an integrated system of quality education where each campus plays an important role. To achieve this, we needed to pay close attention to how to guarantee standards of excellence no matter where in the world our students study.

One important lesson we learned was that one central administration cannot give the guidance and support needed to all campuses. So, we set up a new organizational structure to ensure consistency across our 31 campuses in performance.

Certifications, too, are very important in ensuring quality. The whole *Tec de Monterrey* system is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, but we require each campus to comply with the standards on its own. The same is true for various other national and international certifications. Since each campus has to fulfill all of the requirements for accreditation, every campus offers the same quality in education.

Today our students must be able to compete internationally. As we increase opportunities for students to study abroad and to attract the best international students to our campuses, we apply the same approach to ensuring high quality by using external accreditations and asking stakeholders about their expectations. As we and our partners comply, we ensure our global prestige grows as well. This has fostered initiatives like the Yale-*Tecnológico de Monterrey* Honors program, which expanded to universities such as Stanford, UC Berkeley, Georgetown, the London School of Economics, *École Polytechnique*, Cambridge, and the University of Chicago, among others.

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