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From issue: **Higher Education and Competitiveness** (Summer 2014)

### ■ AQ FEATURE

# Indigenous Enrollment

by

## [Álvaro José Mejía Arias](#)



Lago Calima in the northwestern state Cauca in Colombia. Photo courtesy of Flickr user ocifuen.

## **In Colombia, it's easier planned than achieved.**

Since its formation in February 1971, the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca* (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca—CRIC) has made the education of young Indigenous Colombians one of its most important goals.

The dream of creating an autonomous university for Indigenous youth was finally realized in November 2003—when the CRIC’s high council formally created the *Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural* (Autonomous Intercultural Indigenous University—UAIIN). The university, located in the city of Popayán, offers a number of certificate programs, as well as undergraduate programs in community education, law, administration and management, communication, and community development to more than 400 students. The university is administered by Indigenous authorities, and classes are taught in Spanish by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous instructors.

However, graduates struggle with a major obstacle: the university’s courses are not officially recognized by the *Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior* (Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education—ICFES), the state entity in charge of approving and registering university programs nationwide. Because its courses do not conform to the standards of conventional Colombian universities, degrees from UAIIN are not accepted in the majority of Colombian public or private educational institutions, and are useful only for working at tribal schools administered by Indigenous authorities.

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