

WORLD education NEWS & REVIEWS

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SPANISH EDUCATION RESHAPED BY POLITICAL CHANGES, ECONOMIC REALITIES

by Kevin F. Rolwing

It could be argued that Spain has undergone more profound political, economic, and social change than any other Western European country in the past quarter century. Since the death of General Franco in 1975, Spain has been transformed from an oppressive military dictatorship into a vibrant parliamentary democracy.

Once snubbed by other Western European nations because of its despotic military dictatorship, Spain was admitted to the European Union in 1986. Other European countries then began to pour investment moneys into its economy and Spain increasingly adopted European Union standards and practices. After years of political and social isolation, Spain has emerged as a European and world player.

The transition has seen a continual shift and transfer of power from the central government to the regional and local governments. In the realm of education, Spain has been strengthening and diversifying educational structures, programs, and goals to adhere to European Union guidelines and to improve quality, and has been carrying out a policy of decentralization by giving more financial, administrative, and curricular responsibility to the regional governments.

Spain under Franco

Economic decline and resulting worker discontent and labor strife had led to a victory by a coalition of left-leaning and socialist parties in the elections of 1931. The coalition was both strongly anti-monarchical and anti-clerical, and proposed, among other things, abolition of the monarchy, transition to a socialist form of government, separation of

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Church and State, state-control of education, and more regional autonomy.

In 1936 General Franco took control of a military uprising and united all anti-government groups—monarchists, fascists (the Falangists), and conservative Church authorities—to form the Nationalist front. Abetted by the critical aid of the Continent's other two Fascist dictators, Mussolini and Hitler, Franco's forces defeated the Republican loyalists in the brutal Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939.

Franco ruled Spain with an iron fist for 36 years from 1939 to 1975 as *Caudillo por la gracia de Dios*, Leader by the grace of God, which was stamped on every Spanish coin. Political parties were banned, trade unions were outlawed, and strikes were declared acts of treason. The only political organization allowed was the National Move-

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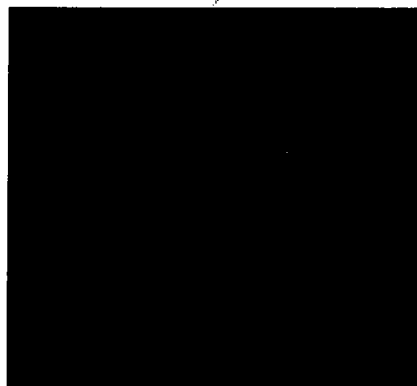
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U P D A T E S

A R G E N T I N A

MEDICAL EDUCATION: A dispute about admissions policies at Argentina's largest university has focused national attention on the need for changes in medical education.

The University of Buenos Aires is a public institution with more than 150,000 students. Its Governing Board and its rector, Oscar Shuberoff, staunchly support the idea of unrestricted admission for all high school graduates who wish to enroll. Before beginning specialized training in one of the university's 14 faculties, the students must complete a one-year, core-curriculum program known as the C.B.C., its initials in Spanish.

Leaders of the faculty of medicine, however, say that the university's open enrollment policy allows far too many students to enter the medical school (30,000 currently studying) and makes it extremely difficult to insure the quality of their training. The issue of quality is a sensitive one, since a university degree in medicine is also a license to practice.

The medical school has taken advantage of legislation passed by the congress last year to substitute its own four-month course, called the Pre-University Entrance Course, for the university's core curriculum program. The medical school requires its prospective students to pass the course before being admitted. More specialized and rigid than the university's program, the course is expected eventually to reduce the number of students entering the medical school to fewer than 1,000 each year, from the current level of 12,000.

The debate over open admissions has brought to the attention of the Education Ministry problems now common to medical schools across the country: outdated programs, high dropout rates, and the need for tighter quality controls. The ministry has appointed a nationwide committee to study the problems and propose solutions within the year.

Medicine is now one of the five most popular programs at Argentina's 80 universities, along with computer science, economics, journalism, and law. Some 60,000 students attend publicly financed schools of medicine across the country, and an additional 3,000 are enrolled in private institutions.

The Chronicle of Higher Education 1/10/97

A U S T R A L I A

DROP IN APPLICATIONS: Major tuition increases for degree programs in engineering, the sciences and technology have been blamed for a significant drop in applications to Australian universities this year. The academic year began in February.

Evidence from universities in several states suggests that many faculties of science and engineering have been forced to lower their admission standards to meet federal enrollment quotas.

At Monash University in Melbourne, the minimum score needed to gain admission to a degree program in science has fallen by almost ten percentage points compared with 1996.

The University of South Australia, the state's largest institution, has some 500 full-time places unfilled.

In the budget proposed last August, the conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard cut federal spending on universities and increased tuition for students in degree programs that cost more to offer. Students in engineering, science and technology programs now must pay fees that are 80 percent higher than last year's.

Amanda Vanstone, the federal Minister of Education, said that the drop in applications for science and engineering programs was simply the continuation of a trend that dates back several years.

The Chronicle of Higher Education 2/7/97

WINE NEWS: Griffith University in Queensland will be the first university in Queensland to provide training as part of a new Australian Center for Wine Business Management, a collaborative venture between a number of Australian universities and the Australian wine industry. An Executive Certificate in Wine Studies and an Executive Diploma of Wine Business Management will be offered by the School of Tourism and Hotel Management at Griffith's Gold Coast campus. *Study in Australia Newsletter 1/97*

B U L G A R I A

HOPELESSNESS: The economic and political crisis is producing a deepening sense of hopelessness among academics, despite the promise of new elections in April. Many lecturers have put aside plans for professional development and research in order to earn money to feed their families. There is also widespread embarrassment among many academics, who must ask for funding from foreign educational bodies to attend conferences, as their own universities have nothing in the coffers. "We have no hope," said one lecturer.

Times Higher Education Supplement 2/14/97



C H I N A

THE MBA DEGREE continues to grow in popularity, with 25 more universities adding MBA courses this year. This brings the number of institutions with MBA programs to 51 out of a total of 1,035 higher institutions. Last year, 1,500 students studied for MBA degrees.

The State Council's Academic Degrees Committee first implemented MBA programs on a trial basis at nine universities in 1991, including well-known institutions such as Qinghua University, Shanghai Jiaotong University and Fudan University.

China's National MBA Education Supervisory Committee has tried to standardize the entrance examination for students for MBA programs. Members of 26 universities helped draft a unified examination that was given in late January. The examination evaluates students' English and Chinese, and knowledge of logic, mathematics, management, and political economy. Last year, Webster University in the US established a joint program with the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, offering Webster's MBA degree on the Shanghai campus. This was the first cooperation of its kind in China, and was quickly followed by eight other MBA programs run with foreign cooperation.

China Daily 2/1/97

EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES: The State Education Commission (SEC) plans to send more Chinese scholars to study abroad and to receive more foreign students in China. More than 2,000 students have been sent abroad each year by China since such exchanges started in the late 1970s. About 170,000 Chinese scholars currently are studying abroad, most of them in developed countries and focused on engineering and technology.

China received more than 47,000 foreign students last year, guaranteeing some three- to five-year scholarships. Starting this year, said SEC Vice-minister Wei Yu, the State will appraise foreign students' academic achievements and morality each year and reallocate funds according to merit. In addition, the SEC will give greater support to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language.

Wei also said that priority will be given to eradicating illiteracy in China, which still has nearly 30 million illiterate children and adults living mainly in impoverished areas. The State will spend more than \$1.2 billion to spread its nine-year program of compulsory education and continue to collaborate with the United Nations and other international organizations which are supporting this drive.

China Daily 2/14/97

LEGAL EDUCATION: Since 1979, the legal education system has trained over 100,000 professionals, growing from .1 percent of the total number of university and college students to 2.2 percent today. This number will increase to 3 percent by 2000 and to 4.5 percent by 2010 says Huo Xiandan, vice-director of the Legal Education Department under the Ministry of Justice.

China Daily 1/6/97

