

**Lehigh University**  
**Lehigh Preserve**

---

Colombia: From Crisis to Renewal

Perspectives on Business and Economics

---

1-1-2013

# A History of Colombia's Tertiary Education System and the Struggle to Pass a Modern Reform Plan

Peter Orlando Weigel  
*Lehigh University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://preserve.lehigh.edu/perspectives-v31>

---

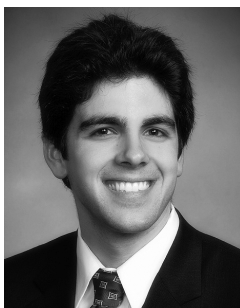
## Recommended Citation

Weigel, Peter Orlando, "A History of Colombia's Tertiary Education System and the Struggle to Pass a Modern Reform Plan" (2013).  
*Colombia: From Crisis to Renewal*. Paper 4.  
<http://preserve.lehigh.edu/perspectives-v31/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Perspectives on Business and Economics at Lehigh Preserve. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Colombia: From Crisis to Renewal* by an authorized administrator of Lehigh Preserve. For more information, please contact [preserve@lehigh.edu](mailto:preserve@lehigh.edu).

# A HISTORY OF COLOMBIA'S TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE STRUGGLE TO PASS A MODERN REFORM PLAN

*Peter Orlando Weigel*



## Introduction

Although more Colombians are obtaining university degrees than just ten years ago, Colombia's higher education<sup>1</sup> system urgently requires reform. As Colombia moves toward becoming a more active member of the global economy, it must keep pace with the rapidly changing world, shifting the focus of its tertiary education system by emphasizing education and training in such high-demand areas as natural resources, engineering, life sciences, retail trade, and finance (Baracaldo). In 2010, the Santos administration announced an education reform plan with a goal of increasing public university access from 35 percent to 50 percent of high school graduates. However, this reform was met with protests and student strikes; students and university leaders alike found the president's proposed reform unacceptable. They believed it put too much empha-

sis on technical training for the sake of the work force and not enough on learning for the sake of learning (Guzmán).

Outside the borders of the country, the World Bank attempted to aid the country's struggling higher education program through a loan in the amount of \$200 million<sup>2</sup> during the period 2002–2008, specifically to be put towards tertiary education (World Bank, 2009). As a result of this loan—and with the inception of Acceso con Calidad a la Educación Superior (Quality Access to Higher Education), henceforth called the Access Project—the total number of students enrolling in tertiary education increased by 30 percent, the number of Ph.D. students tripled, and the percentage of low-income students receiving educational loans increased from 30 percent (of all loan recipients) to nearly 70 percent (World Bank, 2009) between 2002 and 2008. More specifically,

---

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this article, higher education and tertiary education are treated as synonyms.

---

<sup>2</sup>All currency values may be assumed to be in U.S. dollars unless otherwise noted.

the World Bank's assessment of the country's tertiary education quality had focused on two points: enrollment demand at accredited universities and faculty research. The former saw an increase over the loan period (2002–2008), which meant that competition for financial support and general academic opportunities also increased, thereby raising the quality of the institution. The latter, faculty research, can be numerically measured to show how the loan improved quality in tertiary education. From 2002 to 2010, the portion of faculty holding Ph.D.s increased from 2.9 percent to 4.1 percent, total faculty size expanded by 32.6 percent, and the portion of full-time faculty grew from 23.7 percent to 30.1 percent (World Bank, 2012). In spite of these improvements, as of 2011, only three of Colombia's 125 universities were recognized among the top 600 universities in the world. Consequently, while more Colombian students than ever before are given the opportunity to attend college, the quality of education they are receiving is not comparable to that available abroad (U.S. News. "World's Best Universities: Top 400").

Education is the foundation on which a modern, industrialized country must be built. Without a strong system to educate its citizens, a country cannot experience sustained economic growth and higher living standards. In this article, I look at the history of higher education in Colombia and how it is faced with a decision that will have an impact for years to come. I also discuss the need for stronger university programs along with the potential adverse consequences if Colombia does not manage to improve the quality of its higher education system. One of the crucial issues at the heart of the struggle between the academic community and the Santos administration to form a bipartisan reform plan is how to improve the quality of Colombia's tertiary education so that its workers are competitive with those from more developed countries.

## **The Importance of Higher Education**

Although it is a commonly accepted principle that the more educated a person is the better off he or she will be, for a government to overhaul an entire higher education system there needs to be indisputable evidence proving

that the benefits of such a reform outweigh the costs. If the Colombian government is to change its country's higher education system, it must first know why it is worthwhile to do so. That said, the benefits of a higher education degree can be analyzed from the point of view of the individual as well as from the perspective of society.

Probably most important is that the advantages of attending higher education do not end with a larger paycheck. Although the average college graduate with a bachelor's degree in the United States makes a lifetime salary 46.9 percent higher than that of an average high school graduate, men and women who have graduated from a college or university also tend to be more active in society (Baum et al.). They are more likely to participate in public activities, put their children in extracurricular activities, and enjoy their careers than their less-educated peers. In short, holders of a college degree are richer, happier, and more sociable than those without a college degree.

In the United States in 2009, the economic recession hit its nadir, and every sector of society felt the impact. Nevertheless, college graduates experienced a lower unemployment rate than both high school graduates and average Americans: the unemployment rate for college graduates aged 25 or older was 4.6 percent whereas that rate for high school graduates was 9.7 percent and the national average unemployment rate was 7.9 percent. Other economic differences include a 4 percent poverty rate for college graduates versus a 12 percent poverty rate for high school graduates, health insurance coverage for 68 percent of college graduates as opposed to 50 percent for high school graduates, an 8 percent participation rate in the Food Stamp Program for high school graduates compared with 1 percent for college graduates, and a higher presidential voting rate by 32 percentage points for college graduates than high school graduates between the ages of 25 and 44 (Baum et al.).

A college degree not only improves the lives of those who obtain the degree but also improves the society in which the degree-holders participate. If the Colombian government is able and willing to dedicate additional national resources toward reforming its higher education system, it should be able to reap the

benefits in the long run. In the United States, federal and state governments already know the worth of investing in higher education, for it has been shown that they earn \$10 for every \$1 they put into higher education (Blumenstyk). Although Colombia may not immediately experience these sorts of rewards, over time and with committed dedication from those involved in the education reform process, college graduates as well as the society as a whole eventually benefit.

## **The Beginning of Colombian Higher Education (pre-1819)**

Colombian universities have existed since the founding of the Universidad de Santo Tomás in 1580, although at that time, the region now known as Colombia was nothing more than a Spanish colony. The Universidad de Santo Tomás was established as a private university and still functions as one today. This university and others of its period were intended primarily for the education of church clerics and state officials, although colonial Spanish gentry were also able to afford a university education. The number of Spaniards attending universities in the region was small compared to the total population of the colony, but it was enough to initiate the disparity between the upper and lower classes of the country. The economic and social gaps caused by educational differences have since grown into what is now a dominant political, economic, and social issue.

## **Tertiary Education after the Revolution (1819–1930)**

After Simón Bolívar led Colombia to its freedom in 1819 from Spain, the concept of tertiary education became a topic for debate between the conservative and liberal parties. The former group—followers of Bolívar—believed in keeping the higher education system religious and private, whereas the latter group supported secular public universities. Although the dispute was never resolved, there were distinct periods in which one party had considerably more control over the government than the other. One such period was during the mid-1860s, when the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNC) (National University of Colom-

bia) was founded. This was the first public university established in Colombia and coincided with a period of liberal control of the government.

Shortly after the founding of the UNC, the liberal party lost power and the Conservative Republic was established. This Republic lasted until 1930, during which time it oversaw and implemented two major changes. Foremost was the signing of an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church in 1887, known today as the Núñez Concordat, after the country's president of the time, Rafael Núñez. The Núñez Concordat granted the Church political powers within Colombia (Núñez). The second great change overseen by the Conservative Republic was a new Constitution in 1886, which also happened to be due in large part to Núñez (Froysland). These changes lasted until the worldwide Great Depression of 1929.

## **An Attempt at Modernization (1930s–1980s)**

The 1930s saw several attempts to improve Colombia's higher education system. From 1934 to 1946, government funds to the UNC increased more than tenfold, resulting in UNC's enrollment more than tripling from 1,159 to 3,673 students (Briceño). Additionally, new programs, such as agriculture, chemistry, economics, business administration, and architecture, were added to the university's curriculum. Despite the political and life-threatening troubles caused by *La Violencia*,<sup>3</sup> the international push toward modernization carried Colombia into an era of a growing middle class that saw education as the most effective route for moving up to a higher standard of living. This widespread realization led to the formation of numerous new universities, which in turn sparked higher education policies by the government to regulate higher education and to promote study abroad programs beyond Colombia's borders (Briceño).

---

<sup>3</sup>La Violencia was a period of massive political strife within Colombia between the years 1946 and 1964. It began when a conservative rose to the presidency in 1946 and used that power to attack the liberals. This, along with the assassination of a prominent liberal leader in 1948, began an 18-yearlong period of violence during which over 200,000 Colombians died (Garavito et al.).

In order to bring an end to the bloodshed of La Violencia, an agreement known as the National Front was reached in 1957 between liberals and conservatives and dictated that the presidency would alternate between these two parties every four years until 1974. During this period, the country made an effort to restructure higher education to meet its goals of national development through economic growth, akin to the trickle-down effect. To aid in this goal, foreign allies (primarily the United States under Kennedy's Alliance for Progress program) gave \$25 million to Colombia for higher education between 1960 and 1967 (Briceño).

In spite of these reforms to rid Colombian universities of their more traditional aspects and refocus them on growing the country's economy, university professors and students consistently opposed any changes. Throughout the 1960s, university professors and students gained strength against the National Front, leading to the Crisis of 1971, the climax of the university movement against the National Front's education reforms, at which point higher education activities all but ceased—nearly all higher education establishments shut down in protest of the government's attempts at change. The Crisis evolved from a clash among three different perspectives on higher education at the time. Of these, the first came from powerful national groups that pushed for changing higher education to support national businesses. The second came from the middle class, who desired equality and justice in Colombia as well as in the country's public universities. The third came from a much smaller segment of society who believed in restructuring the entire Colombian government but were so few in number they had no influence on the debate between the country's national groups and middle class (Briceño).

The effects of the Crisis were so widespread that primary and secondary school teachers and students, as well as workers and members of the lower class, went on strike. The main conflict was focused on finding a way to modernize the higher education system when there were multiple opinions on what it meant to modernize.

Although the Crisis eventually died out and students and professors went back to work, no real solution to the problem was offered until

the Reform of 1980 (formally referred to as Decrees 80 to 84), which was responsible for introducing a legal framework to assist in regulating higher education. The most important feature of this reform was that it divided post-secondary education into four separate areas: technical-professional, technologic, university, and advanced/graduate education. These areas continue to define the different segments of higher education in Colombia today (Briceño).

## **Recent History: Law 30 (1990s)**

The next major reform in Colombia's history occurred in 1992, when reforms were put in place in many different areas of national importance. Law 30, which was part of this reform, made several changes to the structure of the higher education system in Colombia, including the creation of different fields of study—humanities, philosophy, technical, technology, science, and arts—at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Under Law 30, all programs offered by any higher education institution in Colombia were required to be classified under one of these fields of study (“Organization of Higher Education in Colombia: Act 115 of 1994”). In addition, under Law 30, degrees could only be awarded by institutions recognized by the Ministry of Education. Students also had to first obtain a high school diploma to enter an institution of higher education. Article 69 of the law made universities autonomous, and Articles 28 through 30 further specified the rights of the universities, including the freedom to create academic programs, to institute a system for hiring/keeping/firing professors, and to manage their own funds (Oviedo León).

Along with these specific changes, the passing of Law 30 foreshadowed an increase in the availability of tertiary education across all income quintiles.<sup>4</sup> Colombia has always struggled with socioeconomic inequality; for example, in 2010, the poverty rate was lower

---

<sup>4</sup>The first income quintile is the poorest 20 percent of society, and the fifth income quintile is the richest 20 percent of society. The intermediate quintiles increase in income from the first quintile to the fifth. This is the categorization most commonly used when dividing Colombia's population by economic standing.

than it had ever been and was still at 37.2 percent of the total population (World Bank, "Colombia"). Law 30 was passed with the hope that an increase in tertiary education availability would decrease the income gap between the different social classes. Unfortunately, this has not been the result. As more students progressed through secondary education, more tertiary institutions were created to support the growing demand from high school graduates. However, these students were almost entirely from the upper and middle classes of society, and, as a result, the level of education between the highest and lowest income quintiles actually widened. For example, the difference between higher-education "coverage" of the first and fifth income quintiles actually increased from 1992 (the year Law 30 was passed) to 1997. "Coverage" is used to mean the number of persons (generally between the ages of 18 and 24) able to attend higher education if they so choose and is synonymous with "availability" (King et al.). The fifth quintile jumped from 23 percent to 40 percent coverage, whereas the first quintile saw an improvement from 2 percent to a little under 6 percent (World Bank, 2003). Thus, although Colombia saw an average annual increase in higher education enrollment of 8.5 percent during the 1990s, that increase was not reflected evenly across all income quintiles.

Despite the overall growth in the number of higher-education institutions, coverage of higher education in 2002 stood at only 20 percent in Colombia, which meant that only 20 percent of college-age Colombians could attend a university if they wanted to do so. In comparison, the Latin American average hovered around 25 percent and that of all developed countries was near 54 percent (World Bank, 2003).

Not only was Colombia still below average in coverage but also attempts made in the 1990s to increase the coverage of tertiary education led to sacrifices in the quality of education. One way to measure the level of quality in a higher-education system is the number of professors at a university who hold a Ph.D. degree rather than a master's or bachelor's degree. If more universities and programs are created in a short span of time—as was the case in Colombia during the 1990s—then the density of professors with Ph.D.s decreases. This problem did not

exist solely in Colombia; Argentina, the Netherlands, Mexico, and Romania (among others) all experienced a decline in education quality as coverage increased.

Paired with this decrease in the density of professors with Ph.D.s was the loss of many of Colombia's brightest and most qualified—Ph.D. and master's degree holders who made the decision to work overseas instead of in Colombia. This phenomenon has commonly been referred to as the "brain drain" of the 1990s (Villavicencio). These Colombians were thought to have left the country because there were better research opportunities abroad and because within Colombia there was no guarantee of long-term government research funding. Furthermore, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), an active terrorist organization in Colombia, adversely affected the political stability of the country during that time, further encouraging the country's elites to leave. The instability associated with the FARC culminated in 1999 with the worst recession Colombia had experienced in 60 years. Real GDP that year fell by 4.5 percent, the unemployment rate peaked at 20.4 percent in June of 2000, and a full recovery took several years (Arias). As a result, an estimated 100,000 potential students did not attend tertiary education from 1999 to 2001 because they could not afford it. Although Law 30 improved the coverage of higher education in Colombia, a decade after the law had been passed there was still much room for growth, particularly in terms of the quality of institutions of higher education.

## **The Crash of 1999 and Its Aftermath**

The Colombian government was slow to rebound from the crash of 1999. To support the country's tertiary education system, the World Bank approved a project to distribute a loan of \$200 million on a quarterly basis from 2002 through 2008 via the Access Project, an organization founded to handle and distribute these borrowed funds. The objectives of this project were threefold. The first was to provide financial support for intellectually capable students from underprivileged backgrounds, thereby helping them attend higher-education programs they would otherwise be unable to afford. Yet

these programs would not be worth the money if they were not of a sufficiently high quality. Therefore, the second objective was to improve the quality of tertiary education institutions by providing funding for the following: graduate-level programs, research facilities, master's and doctoral programs for the brightest Colombian students, and research professors' salaries. The final goal of the project was to make the national administrative systems and organizations, which governed tertiary education, more efficient (World Bank, 2009). Colombia's national higher education information system, known as Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior (SNIES) (National Information System for Higher Education), was updated to automatically obtain census information. Furthermore, the process for an institution to become accredited was revised to include SNIES as a primary evaluator. On the international level, Colombia was selected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to participate in a project called Map of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Because of its information system, Colombia was able to readily provide statistics and data on higher education in the country back to UNESCO (World Bank, 2009).

The overall outcomes of this project were a reduction in the brain drain between 2002 and 2008 and an increase in students from lower-income quintiles receiving tertiary education. From 2001 to 2009, college enrollment in Colombia increased from 24.3 percent to 29.4 percent of college-age citizens. In response to the second goal of the project, the percentage of faculty members holding Ph.D.s increased from 2.9 percent to 4.1 percent from 2002 to 2010, and the total faculty size increased by 32.6 percent. A more indirect way of measuring the effects that the Access Project had on quality is to observe the performance of graduates after they leave school. It was reported by the World Bank that students who had received loans to attend a higher-education institution were, on average, performing just as well in the labor market as students who had not received loans. This meant that poorer students who went through the tertiary education system came out at the same level as their wealthier peers (World Bank, 2012).

From these data it can be seen that the changes the Access Project intended to make were indeed attained. By the end of the loan period,<sup>5</sup> in 2008, however, there was still need for improvement in the quality of the higher-education institutions available in Colombia. Still more professors with Ph.D.s were needed in academic institutions, and more funding was necessary to improve the quality of education at these schools. The World Bank project worked toward these improvements by funding graduate programs and graduate students to keep the country's most talented youth within its borders, but there was a need for a more permanent fix that did not rely on loans from external sources. In order to push Colombia's higher-education system to a level where it could compete with its neighbors, such as Brazil, Argentina, and most of the industrialized world, further changes needed to be made so that Colombia would be capable of sustaining the resulting structure of higher education on its own.

### **Tertiary Education in the Early 2000s**

When Juan Manuel Santos became President in 2010, one of his proposed reforms focused on higher education. His administration intended to update the most recent reform law of 1992, Law 30, to modify higher education so that it catered to industry. According to student representatives, Santos' reform would not improve the quality of tertiary education in Colombia. Instead, they say, it would simply provide future workers for companies already established in the country (Guzmán). Based on data collected in 2012, the top university in Colombia is the UNC, followed closely by the Universidad de Antioquia, the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and the Universidad de los Andes ("Universities in Colombia"). Only two of these top Colombian universities, Universidad de los Andes and UNC, were listed in the top 20 of all Latin American tertiary institutions in 2011. In comparison, Brazil has eight universities in the top 20 in the Latin American region, Chile has three, Argentina has five, and Mexico has two (U.S. News. "World's Best Universities: Latin America").

---

<sup>5</sup>The \$200 million was disbursed in portions between the years 2002 and 2008.

Comparing Colombian universities to other universities across the globe, as of 2011 Colombia only has three in the list of the top 600 universities in the world (UNC, Universidad de Antioquia, and Universidad de los Andes). All three of these universities rank between 500th and 600th. Colombia is striving to become a first-world country, but its higher-education institutions do not reflect those efforts. Its colleges and universities are not making an impact at the international level.

The rankings presented above are an appropriate indicator of the current quality of the higher-education system in Colombia because they are standards set at national, regional, and international levels. What that means for Colombia is that of all its universities, only a handful rank regionally. At any higher level (Latin America or internationally), Colombian institutions are barely noticeable. This is the situation that President Santos was trying to improve with his 2010 reform plan, which proposed to increase higher education spending by \$1.3 billion over the span of three years (2011–2014). Of these planned funds, \$224 million were to go to institutions, and \$422 million to students as loans and subsidies on a need-based system (Downie). This would be in addition to the \$3.2 billion put aside for public institutions for the 2011 year.

In 2011, the proponents of Santos' plan believed it would increase the number of tertiary students from 1.6 million to 2.2 million by 2014, and many of these students were expected to come from the lowest income quintiles. Unfortunately, the plan was not well received by the Colombian academic community. Many students and academics believed that Santos' reform plan would not only treat education like a business but also be unable to achieve its own goal. For example, the rector of the UNC, Moisés Wasserman, doubted the government's ability to follow through with its proposals. Wasserman pointed out that Santos' plan would attempt to increase the number of students by 38 percent yet increase the higher education budget by only 16 percent (Downie). Students grew agitated because of the government's inflexibility on the reform plan and went on strike in the fall of 2011 to protest it. After five weeks of student protests, a congressional committee unanimously voted to end the

reform plan; it also agreed to begin work on a novel education reform plan that would integrate the demands of the students and professors into the government's proposal (Wells).

As of September 2012, no progress had been made by the government to work together with the academic community on a new solution. Meanwhile, students are trying to put together a plan that does not stop government subsidies for their education. Many students and professors also believe the government was violating the autonomy—a legal right provided to them by Law 30—of their academic institutions by trying to impose Santos' plan the year before (Alsema, 2012). Additionally, students believe the Ministry of Education is not only ignoring them but also continuing to propose a plan similar to Santos', one that does not address their concerns (Alsema, 2012). As a result, tens of thousands of students and professors once again went on strike during September 2012 and marched through the cities of Colombia protesting the lack of effort by the government to reach a compromise on the education reform plan (Scott).

It is critical that a decision be reached soon because the education system has major problems that need to be fixed. For example, the average number of Ph.D. holders is 2.3 for every million citizens, lower than almost every country in that area of the world (Mason). This statistic can be tied directly to the amount of funding distributed by the government to higher education. Only 0.4 percent of Colombia's GDP is invested in higher education, compared to the Latin American average of 1.2 percent (Mejía). When coupled with the fact that the 2010 GDP of Colombia was 33rd highest in the world and 5th highest in South America, it becomes clear that not enough money is being spent on the tertiary education system in Colombia. This lack of adequate funding is the fundamental issue with which Colombian students and professors are concerned, especially those from public universities where government funding is much more crucial (World Bank. "Gross Domestic Product 2010").

Not only is funding currently lower than the regional average but also the reform presented by the Santos administration proposed allowing public institutions to become funded by private companies and allowing for-profit



universities to be set up in the higher education system. Currently, nonprofit private institutions exist in Colombia and, according to the country's former Minister of Education, Cecilia María Vélez, these nonprofit private institutions are more flexible and able to reach poorer sections of society than public institutions. During her tenure as Minister of Education (2002–2010), Ms. Vélez helped to expand the country's higher education system by helping to create private institutions in locations where there was insufficient funding for public institutions (Sharma). In regard to Santos' failed reform, she believes that by allowing private companies to invest in public education, poorer sections of the population can be reached because of the additional funding.

What students and academics fear is that a sudden increase in the number of universities will lead to a lower quality of education, especially if for-profit private universities and private funding for public universities become commonplace, as was the case with Brazil in the 1990s. The Brazilian government allowed for private financing within higher education, and that resulted in a rise in higher-education student dropout rates (Downie), which is what many Colombian students and academics believe will happen in their country if Santos has his way (Downie). Allowing private companies to fund academic institutions is not the direction the academic community wants the reform to take. Instead, the academic community believes education is a right that should be provided to them by the government (Alsema, 2011). Students and professors alike are fearful of their public universities being turned into degree-producing factories without a genuine interest in the sharing of knowledge. This scenario seems valid, because the Santos administration planned to push the reform law through regardless of their protests in 2011. A student organization, Mesa Amplia Nacional Estudiantil (MANE) (Comprehensive National Student Board), was created in 2011 to combat Santos' reform plan and was largely responsible for organizing the strikes that led to a halt in the higher education reform process (Bejarano).

Since that time, MANE and its young leader Sergio Fernández have been pushing for a plan they call their Minimum Program.

This plan possesses six core tenets that form the foundation for the organization. For a new MANE chapter to be established, that chapter must accept the six-point plan. The first of these points is financing. Based on the idea that education is a human right and a necessity for national development, MANE demands that the government be able to financially support the public higher education system without the assistance of private investors. The student organization suggests that this be done by increasing taxes on foreign companies, such as gold mining companies, that wish to use Colombia's natural resources. The second point of the plan is autonomy and democracy. Latin American higher education institutions commonly fall victim to influence from the private sector, so that private companies have the power to make decisions about the governance of public universities. MANE is against this sort of private sector influence and desires an institutional democracy that involves students, faculty, and staff of the university.

The third tenet is academic quality. Not only does MANE seek to secure adequate financing for public institutions but also it is attempting to redefine the meaning of academic quality to fit the idea of social transformation. University welfare is the fourth point of the Minimum Program and includes both the welfare of the students and job security for campus workers. MANE wants to make higher education more accessible to poorer students and believes the public universities should offer cheaper meal plans, on-campus housing, transportation and health services, and sport, cultural, and artistic activities. The fifth tenet is democratic freedoms for all students, faculty, staff, and workers at public institutions, such as freedom of speech and freedom to organize. Finally, the sixth point of the Minimum Program is university society. MANE wants the university system to be restructured to address the needs of Colombian society, which suffers from a high unemployment rate, fiercely segmented demographics, and an armed conflict between the government and guerrilla groups (Suárez-Boulangger).

When President Santos proclaimed his 2010 higher education reform plan, he unknowingly sparked a rebellion that has managed to halt his plan for higher education. While his

plan has seen opposition, its intentions are for the immediate good of Colombia. Both parties, Santos' administration and MANE, understand that fixing Colombia's higher education system is what will lead to the country's continued overall growth. What must be done now is for the student and academic communities to find harmony with the government and jointly decide on a higher education reform plan that best addresses the needs of the Colombian higher education system.

## **Planning for the Future**

The next few years will bring change to the higher education system of Colombia, but the question is what that change will be. Although MANE's six-point Minimum Program is well intentioned, it is far from being implemented.

At the same time, if appropriate government funding is not found to support those young adults desiring to attend public university, then Santos' plan would become a more feasible solution. Despite many students presenting a unified front to the government and the Santos administration agreeing to work with them, there is still significant work to be done to reach an agreement.

The longer it takes for a long-term plan to be mutually agreed on and instituted, the harder it will be for Colombia to continue its climb toward becoming a legitimate first-world country. But I believe that putting in the effort now to find a compromise between Santos' plan and MANE's Minimum Program will permanently benefit Colombia's youth, hence Colombia itself.

## REFERENCES

- Alsema, Adriaan. "Colombia's Cities Brace for Student Protests." *Colombia Reports*. September 5, 2012. colombiareports.co/colombia-cities-brace-for-student-protests/. Accessed November 3, 2012.
- Alsema, Adriaan. "Why Students Oppose Colombia's University Reform." *Colombia Reports*. November 4, 2011. colombiareports.co/why-students-oppose-colombias-university-reform/. Accessed November 3, 2012.
- Arias, Andrés F. "The Colombian Banking Crisis: Macroeconomic Consequences and What to Expect." *Borradores de Economía, Banco de la República*. EconPapers. September 30, 2000. EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:col:000094:003573. Accessed May 9, 2013.
- Baracaldo, Ana. "Colombia's Unemployment—Education Reform Required." *Colombia Politics*. November 28, 2012. www.colombia-politics.com/colombia%C2%B4s-unemployment-education-reform-required/. Accessed May 9, 2013.
- Baum, Sandy, Jennifer Ma, and Kathleen Payea. "Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society." College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2010. advocacy.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/Education\_Pays\_2010.pdf. Accessed November 4, 2012.
- Bejarano, Sergio. "Interview with Colombian Education Reform Leader." Queensborough Communique, May 2012. www.qcc.cuny.edu/pv\_obj\_cache/pv\_obj\_id\_FA1C5A1940CCF7CF05F38D951E1FCC48C0AD3100/filename/may-2012.pdf. Accessed December 12, 2012.
- Blumenstyk, Goldie. "A Tax for Higher Education." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. October 14, 2012. chronicle.com/article/What-if-Higher-Ed-Had-a/135074/. Accessed May 13, 2013.
- Briceño, Rosa C. "Colombia," in *International Higher Education, Volume 2: An Encyclopedia*. Philip Altbach, ed. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Downie, Andrew. "Colombian Plan to Reform Higher Education Draws Protests." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. April 13, 2011. chronicle.com/article/Colombian-Plan-to-Reform/127118/. Accessed May 13, 2013.
- Froysland, Hayley. "The Regeneración de la Raza en Colombia," in *Nationalism in the New World*. Don H. Doyle and Marco Pamplona, eds. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006.
- Garavito, Clemente, Robert Louis Gilmore, Harvey F. Kline, William Paul McGreevey, and James J. Parsons. "Colombia," in *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. 2013. www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/126016/Colombia. Accessed March 27, 2013.
- Guzmán, Katalina Vásquez. "Paran Por La Mala Educación." *Página12*. October 12, 2011. www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elmundo/4-178725-2011-10-12.html. Accessed May 9, 2013.
- King, Elizabeth, Laura Rawlings, Marybell Gutierrez, Carlos Pardo, and Carlos Torres. "Colombia's Targeted Education Voucher Program: Features, Coverage, and Participation." *Impact Evaluation of Education Reforms*. No. 3, 1997. siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079934475/547667-1135281552767/Colombia\_Ed\_Voucher\_program.pdf. Accessed November 4, 2012.
- Mason, Ann. "Doctorates, Colombian Style." *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*. Fall 2012. dclars.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/fall-2012/doctorates-colombian-style. Accessed March 27, 2013.
- Mejía, Pablo Rojas. "Education in Colombia: Underfunded, Underperforming and Undermining the Country's Progress." *Colombia Reports*. October 23, 2009. colombiareports.co/education-in-colombia-underfunded-underperforming-and-undermining-the-countrys-progress/. Accessed November 6, 2012.
- Núñez, Rafael. "Scientific Peace: The Ideology of a Reluctant Dictator," in *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America*. Hugh Hamill, ed. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995, pp. 161–2.
- "Organization of Higher Education in Colombia: Act 115 of 1994." *UNESCO Consejo Nacional de Acreditacion*. 2003. www.cna.gov.co/1741/article-197026.html. Accessed December 15, 2012.
- Oviedo León, Mónica Juliana. "Expansion of Higher Education and the Equality of Opportunity in Colombia," in María Jesús Mancebón-Torrubia, Domingo P. Ximénez-de-Embún, José María Gómez-Sancho, and Gregorio Giménez Esteban, eds. *Investigaciones de Economía de la Educación*, Vol. 5. Madrid, Spain: Asociación de Economía de la Educación 2010, pp. 538–60.
- Scott, Courtney. "Colombian Students, Professors March to Protest Government's 'Broken Promises'." *Colombia Reports*. September 5, 2012. colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/25894-colombian-students-professors-march-to-protest-governments-broken-promises.html. Accessed January 20, 2013.
- Sharma, Yojana. "Public, Private or Public-Private Higher Education?" *University World News*. March 18, 2012. www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120316164846694. Accessed June 17, 2013.
- Suárez-Boulangger, Carlos. "Colombian Students Defeat Efforts to Privatize Higher Education." *Z Magazine: The Spirit of Resistance Lives*, Vol. 25, No. 7, July 2012. www.zcommunications.org/colombian-students-defeat-efforts-to-privatize-higher-education-by-carlos-su-rez-boulangger. Accessed June 17, 2013.
- "Universities in Colombia." 4 International Colleges and Universities. 2012. www.4icu.org/co/. Accessed September 27, 2012.

- U.S. News. "World's Best Universities: Latin America." 2012. [www.usnews.com/education/worlds-best-universities-rankings/best-universities-in-latin-america](http://www.usnews.com/education/worlds-best-universities-rankings/best-universities-in-latin-america). Accessed September 27, 2012.
- U.S. News. "World's Best Universities: Top 400." 2012. [www.usnews.com/education/worlds-best-universities-rankings/top-400-universities-in-the-world](http://www.usnews.com/education/worlds-best-universities-rankings/top-400-universities-in-the-world). Accessed September 27, 2012.
- Villavicencio, Daniel, and Antonio Chlapa. "The Republic of Colombia." *UNESCO*. 2005. [portal.unesco.org/education/en/files/55556/11998925415Colombia.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/files/55556/11998925415Colombia.pdf)/Colombia.pdf. Accessed December 15, 2012.
- Wells, Miriam. "Colombia's Students Win Their Battle, Education Reform Thrown Out." *Colombia Reports*. November 16, 2011. [colombiareports.co/colombias-students-win-their-battle-education-reform-thrown-out/](http://colombiareports.co/colombias-students-win-their-battle-education-reform-thrown-out/). Accessed November 3, 2012.
- World Bank. "Colombia." 2011. [data.worldbank.org/country/colombia](http://data.worldbank.org/country/colombia). Accessed November 2, 2012.
- World Bank. "Gross Domestic Product 2010." 2011.
- World Bank. Human Development Sector Management Unit. "Implementation Completion and Results Report on a Loan in the Amount of US\$ 200.0 Million to the Republic of Colombia for a Higher Education—Improving Access Project." 2009.
- World Bank. Independent Evaluation Group Public Sector Evaluation. "An IEG Comparative Review for Higher Education Reform in Latin America: Based on Project Performance Assessments of Three Projects: Chile Lifelong Learning and Training Project, Science for the Knowledge Economy Project, and Colombia Higher Education Improving Access Project." Report No. 68251. June 12, 2012.
- World Bank. "Tertiary Education in Colombia: Paving the Way for Reform." 2003. [siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079956815/ColombiaLoRes.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079956815/ColombiaLoRes.pdf).