

The CONEAU and its influences on the process of curriculum design in Argentine Universities

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Introduction

In Argentina, the creation of the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU) dating from 1995, the year of enactment of the Law on Higher Education². The decision to create a National Accreditation agency was aimed at finding the so-called academic quality. Since then the assessment process were in charge of the Dirección Nacional de Gestión Universitaria (DNGU), unit of the Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias (SPU) of the Ministry of Education.

These processes prior to CONEAU were limited to evaluating curricula undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate universities sent to the Ministry for official recognition and national validity. These awards were not due and only allowed to be valid when the universities had another curriculum for the same career.

The initiation and development of evaluation processes and university accreditation through CONEAU involved a series of negotiations, procedures, discussions, policy decisions, organizational, curricular and techniques that could be said; they changed the academic life of our country.

CONEAU, since its inception, and as defined in the law, is a decentralized body whose functions are:

- a) Coordinate and carry out institutional external evaluation (Article 44)
- b) Accredit undergraduate courses that Article 43, as well as graduate programs, whatever the field they are developed in accordance with standards established by the Ministry of Culture and Education in consultation with the University Council refers to
- c) Rule on the consistency and feasibility of the institutional project that is required for the Ministry of Culture and Education authorized the launch of a new national university after its creation or recognition of a provincial university
- d) Prepare reports required to grant provisional authorization and final recognition of private universities, as well as reports on the basis of which the period of temporary operation of these institutions will be evaluated

The National Assessment and Accreditation shall be composed of twelve members, appointed by the National Executive on a proposal from the following organizations: three (3) by the National Inter-University Council, one (1) by the Council



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of Rectors Private universities, one (1) by the National Academy of Education, three (3) for each of the Houses of Congress of the Nation, and one (1) by the Ministry of Culture and Education. They will remain in office for four years.

Perspective

From the responsibility that took the Argentine state with this decision it is important to consider the characteristics assumed by the various evaluation and accreditation - institutional, undergraduate and graduate - because the perspective taken from Argentina university community allows a view on some today issues raised tensions at the regional level:

- ✓The evaluation is conducted by peer reviewers.
- ✓The standards are defined by the institutional actors.
- ✓The starting point of all is self-evaluation processes, both careers and institutions.
- ✓The directionality arises from the improvement plans that are funded by the State in the case of national universities.
- ✓The invisibility of poor performance
- ✓The absence of any kind of ranking of universities and / or performance.
- ✓The evaluation of processes, procedures and institutions rather than individuals.

Initiations and conflicts

The first years of operation of the CONEAU were filled with conflict and opposition to its actions, because much of the university community did not agree with its creation. Among other things, it was interpreted as an invasion or a limitation on university autonomy, and autonomy is one of the main identity Argentinian notes university, with free and unrestricted income.

Article 43 of the Ley de Educación Superior, already mentioned, defines the obligatory, by all the Universities in Argentina, to submit accreditation degree courses that compromise the public interest³, understanding by public interest those professions that may put health, safety, rights, goods or training of the students at risk inhabitants of the country.

From this definition, there was a first discussion about what these careers would be. After this, it was initiated the process of defining accreditation standards that would constitute the main instrument to carry out this evaluation.

The need to define standards for accreditation - especially career degree of public interest - brought together representatives of these careers to negotiate the minimum requirements that institutions must meet to obtain official recognition and national validity of their titles.

These standards covered and cover not only the curriculum. They require institutions, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure and equipment, but also required that curriculum design includes the main requirements to the universities they face when presented to demonstrate: total hourly minimum loads, partial loads time areas and subareas, contents of each characteristic of pre-professional practice, requirements of entrance and exit, profiles of graduates and scope of titles.

Today in Argentina, they have standard careers:



Medicine N°535/99 - Anexo - RM N°1314/07
 Certified Public Accountant Resolución 3400-E/2017 | Anexo I
 Advocacy Resolución 3401-E/2017 | Anexo I
 Licensed in Genetics Resolución 901-E/2017 | Anexo I
 Biotechnology in Engineer Resolución 903-E/2017 | Anexo I
 Licensed in Biotechnology Resolución 1637-E/2017 | Anexo I
 Architect Res. MECYT N° 498/06
 Biologist, Licensed in Biological Sciences, Licensed in Biology, Licensed in Biodiversity and Licensed in Basic Sciences – Orientation in Biology | Res. ME N°139/11
 Licensed in Nursery | Res. ME N°2721/15
 Lic. in Biochemistry or Biochemistry | Res. MECYT N°565/04
 Lic. in Pharmacy or Pharmacist | Res. MECYT N°566/04
 Licensed in Computer's Science, Licensed in Systems/Information's Systems/System's Analysis, Licensed in Computing, Computer Engineer and Informations System Engineer | Res ME N° 786/09
 Aeronautic Engineer; Food Engineer; Environmental Engineer; Civil Engineer; Electrical Engineer; Electromechanical Engineer; Electronic Engineer; Engineer in Materials; Mechanical Engineer; Mining Engineer; Nuclear Engineer; Oil Engineer, and Chemical Engineer | RM N° 1232/01
 Surveyor Engineer and Industrial Engineer | RM N° 1054/02 | RM N° 13/04
 Biomedical Engineer and Bioengineer | RM N° 1603/04
 Metallurgical Engineer RM N° 1610/04
 Telecommunications Engineer | RM N° 1456/06
 Agricultural Engineer RM N° 334/03 | RM N° 1002/03 – Modification of the RM N° 334/03
 Natural Resources Engineer | Res ME N° 436/09 | RM N° 476/11– Modification of the RM N° 436/09
 Forestal Engineer | Res ME N° 436/09 | RM N° 476/11– Modification of the RM N° 436/09
 Zootechnicist Engineer | Res ME N° 436/09 | RM N° 476/11– Modification of the RM N° 436/09
 Odontologist. Anexos. RM N°1413/08 and Anexos
 Psychologist | RM N° 343/09 RM N° 800/11– Modification of the RM N° 343/09
 Licensed in Chemistry RM N° 344/09 | Hourly Charges – Clarifications (Reference to the Resolution ME N° 344/09).
 Veterinarian | RM N°1034/05

As an example

The first career that entered grade accreditation - the so-called "Article 43" - was medicine, and has four calls today. The start marked a 92% non-accredited career, this meant a strong policy plans for improvement and modification and training reform proposals currently that allows the percentage had turned without losing any training centre.

What were the reasons that led to face these results?

Among the main ones could enter:

- ✓ The lack of experience of the university system in standardized accreditation processes.



- ✓ Tensions in the processes of curricular transformation in institutions that involve tensions, negotiations regarding the academic trajectories of students, the conformation of academic teams, the budget and financing, among other aspects.
- ✓ The organization and management CONEAU itself - rules, procedures, tools.
- ✓ A university budget up to that moment insufficient for the requirements that the same accreditation process required.
- ✓ The lack of specific sources of funding for undergraduate courses in accreditation.

What were the reasons that helped reverse and improve unfavorable results?

Among the main ones could enter:

- The institutionalization throughout the university community of the processes of institutional evaluation and accreditation of courses.
- Improving the university budget occurred in the last decade.
- The creation of specific funding programs for the improvement plans developed from self-assessments.
- The creation, modification and adjustment of the regulations necessary to address the processes of evaluation and accreditation.
- The creation, modification and setting of tools and technical procedures for the accreditation of the CONEAU

Today

Argentina is going through a very strong political change that this year 2016 has shown that is not going to continue with the same educational policies developed since 2003.

According to the University policies, the territorial expansion of universities, funding agreements with the Ministries for studies, research and services, the creation of national universities, the university budget, have been slowed and diminished.

CONEAU is perhaps the institution that has had fewer changes against this background, which perhaps suggests in sustaining policies evaluation and accreditation who have reached 20 years.

This also suggests the continuity of the pending, pointing out absences, achievements, problems and trends in curricular changes.

The pending

- ✓ Accreditation of technicalities as part of the degree titles (there is already a first accreditation that is included in the degree in Nursing)
- ✓ ARCUSUR - Internationalization - regional convergence
- ✓ Accreditation of races belonging to the Social Sciences and the Humanities (The process of organization of the accreditation of the careers of Lawyer and Public Accountant has begun)
- ✓ Evaluation of the standards in those areas that have already proved more than three times.
- ✓ Consistency of educational and instructional signs in the reports and resolutions of accreditation. There is no emphasis on the pedagogical or didactic



perspectives, the indications that appear in the processes of curriculum design and evaluation are minimal, basic and only technical: number of hours, teacher qualifications, bibliography updates, among others.

- ✓ The lack of recognition of the university towards tertiary non-university institutes that result in leveling instructions when the students are not all university students (eg nursing).
- ✓ The years that are taking to define the standards in the professors (although not only), are already 6 years and with little perspective in the short term (It should be clarified that the same resistance is not observed in the accreditation of Postgraduate careers in Humanities)
- ✓ This marks another absence: the participation of pedagogues in the work of definition of standards, and not only in the careers that compromise the humanities.
- ✓ The participation of institutional actors.
- ✓ The technical documents of the MEN for the presentation of the curricular designs (in search of official recognition and national validity) do not ask for neither foundation, nor objectives or graduates' profile, although it is clear that they do request them from CONEAU (which could indicate a lack of consistency)

The achievements

- ✓ The institutionalization of accreditation and evaluation processes in all universities.
- ✓ Linking the self-assessment with improvement plans that have consequently guided the increase in university funding or have served to create specific improvement programs from the Ministry of Education (today the picture is different)
- ✓ The influence this has had on the reorganization and redefinition of triangle I-DD-PG in private universities (although not only).
- ✓ The work on the category "quality" from a model that does not stigmatize, that does not punish but tends to guarantee levels of quality expected in all institutions and that evaluates and accredits without taking the students or the teachers.
- ✓ The achievement of ARCUSUR accreditations, which are regional although not yet covered by all the countries of Latin America.

The Problems

- ✓ Low graduation rates in general, and especially in so-called hard careers (Engineering, experimental sciences - factual, basic sciences)
- ✓ The over sizing of traditional careers in Argentina as Advocacy and Psychology (There were 11 psychologists for every 1 engineer)
- ✓ The limited link of university offer linked to regional economies and local developments.



- ✓ The delay in the accreditation of humanities and social degree courses that is perhaps an intentional delay, a way of expressing disagreement regarding these processes (perhaps the best way would be to give the discussion)
- ✓ The achievement of broader agreements that would allow the accreditation of the entire region.
- ✓ The few advances in accreditation and curricular agreements for distance education.

Trends towards curricular changes

- ✓ The restructuring of the standards in search of the possibility of including intermediate undergraduate degrees (nursing).
- ✓ The redefinition of some standards that have been defined for more than 10 years (engineering, medicine) and that are beginning to think about the possibility of organizing joint training sessions, based on the standards agreed between the actors per career, that will improve the mobility of students in the national territory (especially in the degree courses)
- ✓ The growth of practice hours with simulation devices, especially in careers that put people's lives at risk, which continues to bring with it discrepancy with regard to its consideration when it comes to accrediting the workload of the Professional Practices that are exit of the races.

The perspective (retaking the idea of De Alba)

Pedagogues in general and dedicated to curricular particular field we have the challenge and responsibility to project ideas, concepts, approaches that build a vision for the pending accreditation that achieves new levels of solution to some problems and tensions that we find today:

- Accrediting teacher education including tertiary and university, seeking mutual recognition of training paths, surpassing the marks of colonialism, which often exerts college on teacher training institutes, especially considering that in Argentina 75% of the teaching forms in ISDF.
- Deepen the model of accreditation without renouncing the theoretical and epistemological perspectives on the educational and pedagogical, but rather trying to gain relevance and depth in the judgments that peer evaluators also emit about teaching and learning processes.
- Find regional identity in the process of evaluation and accreditation achieve mutual recognition among Latin-Americans both countries and improve the mobility of professionals in our territories and then, perhaps as a bloc or region, working for even greater convergence.

Finally [and retaking the conception of curriculum as "... the synthesis of cultural elements, that is, knowledge, values, beliefs, customs and habits, that make up a particular political proposal - educational ..." (De Alba, 1995)], it is possible to consider that the evaluation processes and university accreditation that our countries are going through can promote the search for answers and new questions about the identity and direction of our universities. The common and diverse in the training of professionals,



scientists, technicians the allowing thinking of the constitution a territory that we share from history, from politics, from the language, from the culture.

Notes

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² Ley 24.521 de Educación Superior, art. 46 /funciones) and 47 (integrantes).

³ Article 43: In the case of titles corresponding to professions regulated by the State, whose exercise could compromise the public interest by directly putting the health, safety, rights, property or training of the inhabitants at risk, it will be required that they be respected, In addition to the workload referred to in the previous article, the following requirements: a) The curricula must take into account the basic curricular contents and the intensity criteria of the practical training established by the Ministry of Culture and Education, in agreement with the Council of Universities: b) The respective courses must be accredited periodically by the National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation or by private entities established for that purpose duly recognized. The Ministry of Culture and Education will determine with a restrictive criteria, in agreement with the Council of Universities, the nomination of such titles, as well as the professional activities reserved exclusively for them.

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