

INTERNATIONALIZATION IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

A New Paradigm for Higher Education Internationalization in Brazil?

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This article discusses the new Brazilian government strategy aimed at the internationalization of higher education—the program Networks for Institutional Internationalization (CAPES-Global.Edu)—launched in July 2025. The objective is to analyze the directions of the internationalization of Brazilian higher education over the past 10 years, with some initial reflections on the characteristics of the new initiative and, specifically, its prospects for marking a new paradigm of internationalization for Brazil.

The internationalization of Brazilian higher education over the past 10 years suggests a shift in understanding of this process from being synonymous with international mobility, directly focused on individuals, to representing a broader phenomenon that affects the *raison d'être* and values of universities. National strategies, such as the Science without Borders program (SwB) and the Institutional Internationalization Program (CAPES-PrInt), have reflected the significant influence of the Brazilian government in the direction of internationalization, and the former CAPES-PrInt program has confirmed a historical pattern in which higher education is conceived as an instrument for achieving broader developmental goals.

This article presents and discusses the Brazilian government's new internationalization strategy, the program Networks for Institutional Internationalization (CAPES-Global.Edu), which launched in July 2025 and is scheduled to run from 2026 to 2031. It also offers some initial reflections on the characteristics of the program, specifically its prospects for establishing a new internationalization paradigm for Brazil.

Internationalization Through Networking: CAPES-Global.Edu

CAPES-Global.Edu is managed by CAPES, the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education, an agency affiliated with the Brazilian Ministry of Education. The program was conceived after several months of preparatory meetings and discussions, with high expectations from the Brazilian academic community. Its target audience is Brazilian higher education and research institutions (both public and private non-profit) that offer graduate programs.

The general objective of CAPES-Global.Edu is to contribute to Brazil's international projection and consolidation as a strategic partner in global initiatives, promoting mutual cooperation,

intercultural dialogue, and sustainable development. More specifically, its objectives involve: a) encouraging the creation of partnerships between institutions from different regions of Brazil and with different levels of internationalization; b) consolidating strategic internationalization plans; c) encouraging collaboration with civil society institutions; d) promoting opportunities for international experience in Brazil and abroad; e) fostering a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming culture of internationalization; and f) improving institutional governance of internationalization. The program aims to achieve these goals through the creation of networks that will enable institutions to join forces around strategic research themes.

A Network Approach

This program marks the first time that a Brazilian government program focused on internationalization has been explicitly structured around the creation of networks of national institutions. The purpose is to reduce inequalities in the levels of internationalization between institutions in the five geographic regions of the country.

Networks within the program must follow one of the following formats: be composed of a coordinating and three associated institutions, ensuring the presence of institutions from at least three regions of the country; or be composed of a coordinating and four or five associated institutions, ensuring the presence of institutions from at least four regions of the country. In both cases, institutions from the North, Northeast, and Central-West regions—the first two representing the highest poverty rates in Brazil—must participate.

Coordinating institutions must meet a series of requirements, such as having at least one graduate program with the highest CAPES evaluation scores and including graduate programs with lower evaluation scores in their proposals. They must also

demonstrate expertise in the defined strategic research themes, with international partnerships being prospected or underway; have an office or individual within their structure responsible for managing internationalization; and offer language training initiatives.

International Partners

Unlike CAPES-PrInt, CAPES-Global.Edu does not specify preferred regions or institutions for collaboration beyond national borders; it merely mentions the purpose of promoting international cooperation with “institutions from the Global North and South.” Thus, as long as the required format is respected, each network will be responsible for defining its national and international partners, considering their adherence to the strategic research themes.

Financial and Budgetary Resources

The program will receive a total investment of up to R\$1,400,000,000.00 (one billion four hundred million reais), with an estimated annual investment of up to R\$350,000,000.00 (three hundred and fifty million reais), to be distributed among the approved networks over the first four years. State Research Support Foundations may also participate by providing funding directly to institutions in their states.

The funding may be used to support international work missions to facilitate agreements and execute projects; participation in conferences; and scholarships that can be used both within and outside the country. Scholarships used abroad can cover “sandwich doctorates” (i.e., doctoral programs in which a student carries out part of his research at an institution abroad), senior and junior visiting professor programs, and short-term training. In Brazil, the scholarships aim to attract researchers from other countries.

Reflections on Advances in the Concept of Internationalization

CAPES emphasizes that CAPES-Global.Edu represents a paradigm shift in the internationalization of Brazilian science, having been built “from the ground up” through dialogue with institutions, with the aim of subverting inequalities. At least in its design, a paradigm shift can be identified, as the program seeks to include members of the university community who have been marginalized from the internationalization process, such as the technical staff. The brief mention of outreach, an important university function that is often neglected in

internationalization initiatives, also signals an important departure from past norms.

However, the internationalization objectives pursued by CAPES-Global.Edu do not differ significantly from those defined by its predecessor program, CAPES-PrInt, as that initiative also sought to consolidate strategic internationalization plans at the institutional level, create international research networks, support the internationalization of graduate programs, and promote an international environment in participating institutions. CAPES-Global.Edu also focuses on the idea of institutional transformation, although it now recognizes the importance of partnerships between Brazilian institutions with different levels of internationalization as the path toward that goal. In this sense, the greatest difference between these two strategies appears to lie in the means by which the objectives are achieved, rather than the objectives themselves.

Overall, CAPES-Global.Edu appears to be structured on a less competitive basis than the previous initiative. However, the primary focus remains on research, which means it is likely that the university functions of teaching and, especially, outreach will remain overshadowed within internationalization efforts.

Reflections on the Inclusion of the Global South

In contrast to CAPES-PrInt, CAPES-Global.Edu explicitly emphasizes the importance of cooperation with the Global South. CAPES statements about the new program recognize internationalization as a means to subvert inequalities and achieve broader social justice goals, with [Heleta and Chasi's](#) positioned definition of internationalization being frequently highlighted as an inspiration for the program. It is unclear, however, how the operationalization of relations between Brazil and other institutions in the Global South will occur. The following questions deserve attention and could serve as a useful guide to the organization of networks involved in the program: Despite CAPES' good intentions, will participating Brazilian institutions choose institutional partners from the Global South, given their historical preference for the Global North? If so, will this be sufficient to ensure reciprocal relationships and promote a different perspective on internationalization? At the national level, how will relationships between coordinating and partner institutions within each network work, given their inequalities? Without sufficient attention to such questions, it remains unclear if the program will actually represent a paradigm change in the internationalization of Brazilian higher education.

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