2000—not least the accusation that it was a "return to Apartheid" because most of the historically black higher education institutions (universities and technikons) would fall under type III and most of the historically white universities (but not technikons) would fall under type I. Because of this controversy, the NPHE of 2001 came out with its interactive processes via program niches and three-year plans. However, the National Working Group, now going round the country suggesting in some regions quite significant mergers and forms of cooperation, could end up proposing far-reaching changes to the minister. Perhaps the major thrust of change will come from this working group rather than from the NPHE's "plans, negotiations and consensus." We shall know the results soon after the end of 2001.

The NPHE document of 2001 and the Council on Higher Education document of 2000 signify an end to what might be termed the period of "symbolic policymaking." Prior to 2000, the new democratic government's most important policy document on higher education, the white paper of 1997, as well as key advisory documents before this, were involved primarily in symbolic policy—outlining the values, missions, and broad frameworks required to transform the higher education system but without any specifics on policy choices, implementation, or evaluation of results. In contrast, Council on Higher Education 2000 and NPHE 2001 signal a shift toward what can be termed "substantive, procedural, and material policy" approaches, incorporating concrete actions, implementation procedures, and resource allocation mechanisms.

For the first time, the new approaches stress efficiency and globalization and the knowledge economy. The earlier stress found in policy documents between 1992 and 1997 on equity and redress (especially in terms of "earmarked funds" for historically black institutions) has been greatly downplayed. In this sense, South African higher education policy is coming more into line with the international higher education discourses about the "market university"—like our post-1996 national economic policies, which emphasize growth and foreign investment over economic reconstruction and basic socioeconomic needs.

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University Reform in El Salvador: A New Chapter

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The reform of Salvadoran higher education, initiated in 1996, has a new set of challenges to address. Aided by the integration of education with the peace process, beginning in 1992, the reform is now approaching the end of a decade aimed at alleviating the poverty and extremes of wealth that fueled the civil war. The reform, which linked education research with public policy and created a law implementing the proposed changes, currently faces new circumstances and must adapt in order to maintain the support of the government and private sector. A real danger exists of the reform movement's falling from favor and losing ground in the advancing democratization, modernization, and globalization of the country.

The Crisis of Higher Education

Higher education in El Salvador endured a long cycle of protest and repression. The crisis of higher education in El Salvador deepened during the 1980s. The military's closing of the national University of El Salvador (UES) between 1980 and 1984 led to a sudden surge in the number of private universities and other postsecondary institutions. The four existing private universities were unable to meet the demand. Faculty at the UES founded alternative institutions to meet the needs of their students. The success of these small, specialized institutions spawned an entrepreneurial growth spurt in higher education.

The closing of the national university came at a time of rising demand for postsecondary education. El Salvador had been the Central American nation most committed to economic modernization. Its burgeoning middle class and growing need for an educated workforce put the education system under increasing scrutiny and stress. During the 1970s student enrollments grew to about 30,000 students at the UES and another 10–12,000 at the four privates. By 1996 this number expanded to over 108,000 students.

By the end of the 1980s there were more than 40 universities licensed to operate in El Salvador. The national university remained the principal public institution, although the military created the Military University in 1988 to compete with the UES. The remaining institutions were private universities of varying sponsorship—churches, professional organizations, or academic faculties. Their facilities varied, but the upper tier consisted of well-established, full-service academic institutions. Some of the lower tier were accused of profiteering, despite a law prohibiting such practices.

The number of postsecondary *tecnologicos* (one- and two-year programs) also grew. By 1996 there were 29 of these schools, 16 public and 13 private. As with some newly

created universities, a number of these institutions failed to meet even minimal standards and were little more than names on a letterhead or storefront operations of questionable quality. A number were, however, serious attempts to establish comprehensive, high-quality institutions.

The Reform

The initial goal of the 1996 higher education reform law was to create standards to improve or eliminate substandard institutions. The constitution guaranteed a university education to all qualified citizens and autonomy to the UES. The higher education law of 1965 granted the power to create private institutions, and a 1972 update of the law restricted the administrative autonomy of the UES. However, these laws provided no control over quality, no means of evaluation, and no procedures for dealing with substandard facilities, programs, or personnel.

Higher education in El Salvador endured a long cycle of protest and repression.

The end of the civil war in 1992 was accomplished in an atmosphere of conciliation and commitment to a new society, with education designated as a major element of this change. An education sector assessment (1993–94) was initiated by the Ministry of Education, funded by the United States Agency for International Development and led by a team from the Harvard Institute for International Development. The follow-up policy analysis commissioned by the ministry (1995–96) resulted in the new higher education law (1996).

The law created standards and procedures for evaluation and reporting, and recommended an accreditation system. The standards measured the facilities of the institutions, including academic support facilities—library, athletic and recreational, and computer and scientific facilities. The reform law also established the criteria to judge program curriculum, requirements for matriculation and graduation, and qualifications of faculty and staff. The law empowered the ministry to license and evaluate postsecondary institutions, including the power to withhold licenses from applicants and to close substandard institutions. The same criteria were applied to universities, *tecnologicos*, and specialized institutions. The reform law has been highly successful in setting standards for new institutions and has led to the closing of eight universities following the first round of evaluations, in 1997.

El Salvador is the size of Massachusetts, with a population of just over five million. The figure of eight closings actually represents 21.6 percent of the nation's universities (37 were operating in 1996, 29 remained following the first evaluations in 1997). The struggle to close these institutions was intense. Faculty and students had much to lose in terms of employment and future earnings. Entrepreneurial interests and political personalities applied pressure. The protests ranged from political and personal persuasion to death threats against the minister of education, Cecilia Gallardo de Cano.

The Next Step

The needs of the national university and the upper tier of privates were not addressed in the 1996 law. The national university has suffered from inadequate budgets from the time of its reopening in 1984, when its enrollment was reduced by half and it was required to become more self-sustaining. While budgets grew during the 1990s, they have not matched the growth in enrollments (to nearly 29,000 students). Earthquakes in 1986 and 2001 added severe problems for infrastructure: since 1986, four large classroom buildings have been unusable and construction of one new building was abandoned. The budget has allowed for constructing temporary space, but not for the repair or replacement of the damaged buildings.

The need to repair the infrastructure and add to the budget of the UES is recognized, as is the fact that the rigidity of the evaluation system is stifling the higher-quality institutions. These issues and the success in applying standards have become the focus for updating the law. The consensus is that the top universities have been forced to sacrifice creativity in order to respond to demands for minimum standards they already meet.

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The proposed adjustments in higher education reform will implement the voluntary system of accreditation for institutions that have attained or maintained satisfactory evaluations, freeing them of the onerous statistical evaluation. It is hoped the accreditation process, with its self-evaluative format, will spark the creativity of these institutions and lead them to expand and improve programs, facilities, and faculty.

Higher education reform in El Salvador has achieved its original goals of instituting minimum standards. The Superior Council for Higher Education now labors to continue the reform, adapting to present needs to improve the substance of higher education beyond the statistics and encouraging further growth and development.

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