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Assessment of Higher Education in Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands: Enhancing Quality or a Regulation Instrument?

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Introduction

The report entitled “Six ways to ensure higher education leaves no one behind,” released in 2017, showed that the number of higher education students in the world has doubled from 100 million to 207 million between 2000 and 2014 (UNESCO 2017). The report states that higher education is fundamental to sustainable development, as it creates new knowledge, teaches specific skills, and promotes fundamental values, such as freedom, tolerance, and dignity. It further states that the demand for higher education will continue to rise and that governments need to respond by introducing a number of new policies that does not leave the most vulnerable behind.

In this sense, this study aims to reflect upon the role of the state regarding higher education and the challenges of democratizing access and quality at this educational level. Here we assume that higher education offer

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models in different countries are designed with consideration given to state responsibility. In this sense, two models can be presented: the public model,¹ when the state takes responsibility for an offer, and the private model, when the state passes this responsibility to a private initiative. To measure and ensure the quality of higher education, countries have developed national assessment systems. In these systems, two models can be presented: one focusing on institutional improvement and the other on regulation. Therefore, we question which assessment model various systems assume, in terms of the role of the state in higher education.

In this sense, this study analyzed and compared the relationship between offer configuration and assessment models used in Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands. In order to select these countries, the following criteria were considered: the need for a developed country in Europe providing a larger percentage of public offers (Netherlands), the requirement for a developed country in North America with a larger percentage of private offers (the United States), and the need for a developing country in Latin America with a larger percentage of private offers (Brazil).

This study examined the following: (1) how is the responsibility of making offers in higher education configured (public or private); (2) what are the proposed higher education assessment systems; and (3) how systems use the assessment results. This chapter presents empirical research using documentary information as its basis, sourced from the censuses of higher education, and considers regulations that institute and implement the national assessment systems of higher education.

Literature Review

Relationship Between State and Higher Education

According to Sguissardi (2002), the late twentieth century was marked by a profound crisis in social democracy and the welfare state in most

¹In this chapter, the public offer model is that which is maintained and financed by the state. The private offer model, however, refers to those of private initiatives or by means of tuition, even if they receives subsidies from the state through scholarships, student financing, or fiscal waivers.

central countries and a crisis of national development and the populist state (or military-authoritarian) in many of the Latin American peripheral countries. To resolve these crises several measures were applied: budget balancing through the reduction of public expenditure (with social services); trade liberalization (reduction of import tariffs); financial liberalization (elimination of barriers to foreign capital); deregulating domestic markets (elimination of state intervention instruments, such as price controls, incentives, etc.); reforming social security or the social security system; reforming the labor market; and privatizing enterprises and public services.

Sguissardi reveals a reconfiguration of the format and power of the state as well as its implications for education.

Citizenship rights, transformed into social services that are not exclusive to the State and are competitive, would be deregulated in the same way as other commercial services, exploitable by the private initiative or enterprise. Higher education – seen as private before public – was an essential part in the changes that made the reforms in the State apparatus and was an important element in the new modality of capital accumulation. (Sguissardi 2002, p. 2)

Sguissardi defines that state reconfiguration goes through a cycle of being subsidiary and controlling. Here, the state is deprived of its role as provider of social services (education, health, and security) and presents itself as a regulator and a controller that is only interested in the reestablishment of the hegemony of the market and the integration of its country into the world market.

The effects of this scenario on higher education reveal themselves, according to Sguissardi (2002), in the concretization of university projects, compromising their own autonomy. “Many universities had lost important portions of their institutional autonomy and were being constrained to adjust a large part of their activities to the demands of the State” (p. 7).

Therefore, the right to education presents itself as key to the implementation of offer models and the expansion of higher education. One such model, driven by essentially public offers, has the state act as the provider

of the social right to education, and the other model, with offers being mainly private, has the state as a regulator of market activity.

Once the role of the state has been defined in each model, it makes sense to reflection on the role of assessment in each of these models, as an instrument of legitimacy of implementation. Thereby, this chapter argues that the assessment models developed by systems of higher education are related to the offer and expansion models of this educational level as well as to the role the state plays in such models.

Models and Trends in the Assessment of Higher Education

The models and trends in higher education assessment referenced here are derived from the study of Verhine and Freitas (2012), which aimed to analyze and compare national and transnational higher education assessment systems, identifying possible points of convergence and antagonism between them, mainly in relation to the characteristics of universality and specificity of assessment practices.

This study focuses on international literature, considering lessons regarding the relative roles of two predominant assessment models (one centered on institutional improvement and one on regulation) and their relations with the processes of homogenization and differentiation that characterize the modern world.

According to the Verhine and Freitas (2012), in order to understand the transformations of education, in the context of globalization and the internationalization of higher education, it is necessary to observe assessment practices, since current governments have given assessment an important role in the reform of education systems.

According to the vast amount of literature analyzed, Verhine and Freitas (2012) highlight two models of higher education assessment—one, being external to institutions and emphasizing regulation, the other, of internal character, emphasizing the process of self-assessment. From this, we have the characterization of each model.

Model of Internal Assessment Centered on Institutional Improvement

Verhine and Freitas (2012) say that the higher education assessment that happens inside institutions is disseminated in the literature directly linked as self-assessment or internal assessment. In this literature, internal assessment is presented as an essential element in the quest for quality of institutions.

This model argues that the objective of assessment is institutional improvement, either individually or collectively. This must be done by means of collegiality practices, since Verhine and Freitas consider that verification and external control are not enough to ensure the quality of higher education institutions and also do not promote a permanent improvement.

In this perspective, more than simply measure efficiency and productivity of an institution or a course, the focus of the assessment processes is the socio-educational relations and the internal interactions. The assessment processes are centered on the participants and seek to apprehend the phenomena and their movements in their relation with reality, aiming at the transformation of this same reality. (Verhine and Freitas 2012, p. 25)

Methodologically, Verhine and Freitas define that this model adopts a qualitative approach, since it uses dialogic and participant methods, using mainly free interviews, debates, testimonial analysis, participant observation, and documentary analysis.

Assessment Framework Centered on Regulation

To characterize an assessment model that focuses on regulation, Verhine and Freitas (2012) define regulation as:

- The establishment of rules of conduct and control, with the purpose of restricting or changing the behavior of people or institutions which are supported by sanctions in case of disrespect.

- The intervention of the state in private activity to achieve public purposes to establish the balanced functioning of the market.
- The adjustment of several actions where there are different logics that depend not only on authority but also on initiatives taken by a variety of factors and actors that contribute to the regulation of the system.

Regulation forecasts an increase in the normative apparatus and emphasizes the results or products, as well as the use of instruments that produce objective information and that allow comparison and wide dissemination for the interested public.

Based on regulation logic, the normative assessment comes from control mechanisms, exercising the function of inspection and accountability.

This assessment model based on systems that are mainly quantitative refers to the efficiency and inefficiency of institutions. In this context, the assessment is performed as a predominantly technical activity that seeks to measure the results produced by the institutions in terms of teaching, research and community services provision. (Verhine and Freitas 2012, p. 27)

In this model, systems use educational assessment on a large scale, enabling the exchange of information and research at the international level. However, Verhine and Freitas report the establishment of “rankings” of institutions that produce direct effects on the policies of allocation of financial resources and also affect the social organizers of students and institutions. “Assessment articulates concepts such as efficiency, quality, performance and accountability and it is focused on instruments that seek the homogenization and standardization of criteria, the quantification and measurement of academic products” (p. 28).

In this sense, the assessment model centered on regulation, by emphasizing the standardization of results and products, promotes the affirmation of the controlling state, which maintains regulatory activity at the expense of the actual execution of state activity, with the technical intermediation of agencies specially created for this purpose. The results of the assessment are valuable to provide objective and reliable data for the effectiveness of government regulatory policies of the system.

Trends in the Assessment of Higher Education

Verhine and Freitas (2012) report that the tension between internal assessment centered on the improvement of institutions and external assessment centered on regulation is accompanied, on the international scene, by a tension between homogenization tendencies and differentiation. The first emphasizes a diversified and differentiated assessment, while the second, a standardized and homogeneous assessment.

Analyzing these two categories, Verhine and Freitas verified that the two systems have traces and characteristics of these two international tendencies and, consequently, this study advocates their integration and complementarity, instead of their dichotomization. For Verhine and Freitas, the idea of complementarity is used to achieve international goals and improve quality, considering the different characteristics of institutions of higher education and the courses they offer. At the same time, this idea represents an effort to make higher education and assessment responsive to the requirements related to a globalization of society, the economy, and the labor market.

Finally, Verhine and Freitas (2012) argue that institutional assessment, assuming its differentiation, has great relevance in higher education institutions, permitting various academic actors to construct forms of collective accountability around the educational and scientific tasks they develop.

Based on the theoretical proposition presented here, our study started with the following hypotheses: (1) in higher education systems in which provision is given primarily by private institutions, assessment systems are centered on regulation and external assessment; and (2) in higher education systems where provision is given primarily by public institutions, assessment systems are focused on institutional improvement and internal assessment.

Thus, we sought to analyze and compare the relationship between the configuration of the offer and the assessment of higher education in Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach that originated with the use of the comparative research method. The aspects investigated and compared in each country guided this approach. Research was conducted using documentary sources about the systems used for assessing quality in Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands. These countries were chosen because they met the required criteria: the need for a developed country in Europe providing a larger percentage of public offers (Netherlands), the requirement for a developed country in North America with a larger percentage of private offers (the United States), and the need for a developing country in Latin America with a larger percentage of private offers (Brazil). Data for these countries were collected and analyzed using identical methodological procedures.

Results

The following key questions guided all the analytical procedures: (1) how is the responsibility of making offers in higher education configured (public or private); (2) what are the proposed higher education assessment systems; (3) how systems forecast the assessment results uses.

Higher Education Offers in Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands

Brazil

In Brazil, the higher education institutions, according to their organization and respective academic prerogatives, are accredited as: **universities; specialized universities; university centers; integrated colleges and colleges; higher education institutes or higher education schools; and technological education centers.**

All Brazilian higher education institutions are organized according to administrative categories (or legal forms), thus:

Public—created and incorporated, maintained, and administered by public power. They can be at the **federal level**, that is, maintained and administered by the federal government at the **state level**, that is, maintained and administered by state government; or at the **city level**, that is, maintained and administered by the public power held by cities.

Private—maintained and administered by individuals or legal entities under private law. They are organized into **private for-profit institutions** or **private institutions in the strictest sense**, that is, established and kept by one or more individuals or legal entities under private law and private non-profit institutions. **Private non-profit institutions** can take the form of **community centers**, established by groups of individuals or one or more legal entities, including teachers and student cooperatives that include representatives of the community in the maintenance of the organization; **confessionals**, established by groups of individuals or one or more legal entities fulfilling a specific ideological and confessional orientation; or can be **philanthropic**, that is, are education or social assistance institutions that provide a specific service and make it available to the general population, complementing activities of the state, without receiving any payment.

The offer of higher education in Brazil originates mainly from private institutions in standard modality or distance education modality, covering the following types and levels of courses:

Undergraduate courses—these courses are open to candidates that have completed high school and have passed some form of selection process. Undergraduate courses award diplomas to graduating students. Courses include **bachelor's degree courses, licensures, technological or higher education technology courses; sequential courses, and extension courses.**

Graduate courses—these include master's and doctoral programs (graduate level *stricto sensu*) and specialized courses (graduate level *lato sensu*). They are open to candidates with undergraduate degrees meeting additional requirements set out by teaching institutions.

Post-graduate courses—these include specialized courses (graduate level *lato sensu*), **academic master's degrees; professional master's degrees (MP), and doctoral degrees.**

Table 10.1 Number of higher education institutions in Brazil by administrative category and institutional type

Administrative category	Level	Number	Universities	University centers	Colleges	IF and CEFET
Public		296	108	10	138	40
	Federal	107	63	0	4	40
	State	123	39	1	83	0
	Municipal	66	6	9	51	0
Private		2111	89	156	1866	0
Total		2407	197	166	2004	40

Source INEP (2017)

Table 10.2 Number of enrollments by administrative category (2017)

Administrative category	Level	Number of enrollments
Public		1,990,078
	Federal	1,249,324
	State	623,446
	City	117,308
Private		6,058,623
Total		8,048,701

Source INEP (2017)

As already said in this text, both public and private institutions comprise the Brazilian higher education system, the greatest number of offers coming from private institutions.

As shown in Table 10.1, there are 2407 institutions of higher education in Brazil. Colleges make up the greatest number with a total of 2004 institutions, 91% of them being private. This situation changes when analyzing the number of universities—there are 197 universities with about 55% (108) of them being public.

In Table 10.2, we note that about 75% of the 8,048,701 students in the Brazilian higher education system attend private institutions.

The United States

Higher education in the United States is strongly marked by its diversity. This diversity encompasses both the modalities of courses and the types of institutions of higher education.

There are four major categories of degrees available for postsecondary students:

1. Associate degrees.
2. Bachelor's degrees.
3. Master's degrees.
4. Doctoral degrees.

In terms of the types of institutions, the U.S. Department of Education describes the following classification:

1. *Public institutions.* In addition to having governing boards appointed by state authorities, they also receive some annual allocation of state budget funds; some of their property may be state owned; and they may be subject to state regulations of other kinds depending on the nature of their relationship to the state as defined in their charters. Public institutions are internally self-governing and autonomous with respect to academic decision-making.
2. *Private institutions.* These are independent of state control even though they are licensed or authorized by state governments. They may be non-profit or for-profit and may be secular or affiliated with a religious community. Some private institutions may be authorized by state governments to receive state operating funds and to provide some public services, such as operating publicly funded academic programs or function as a state land-grant institution receiving federal funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

These institutions are also classified according to the type of course they offer:

1. *Community and junior colleges.* Community colleges are comprehensive public institutions that provide a wide variety of educational services, ranging from adult and community education services, through post-secondary career and technical education, to academic and professional studies at university level, permitting transfer to higher level studies.

Table 10.3 Number of higher education institutions in the United States by administrative category

Total	Public	Private total	Private non-profit	Private for-profit
4,147	1578	2569	1400	1169
100%	38%	62%	34%	28%

Source Digest of Education Statistics 2016

Table 10.4 Total undergraduate fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control of institution

Enrollments	Public	Private total	Private non-profit	Private for-profit
17,036,778	13,145,720	3,891,058	2,819,174	1,071,884
	77%	23%	21%	38%

Source Digest of Education Statistics 2016

Some community colleges have started to offer accredited bachelor's degree programs.

2. *Public and private colleges and universities.* Institutions that offer bachelor's and higher degrees are often called "senior" colleges or universities, to distinguish them from "junior" colleges and other institutions offering associate degrees as their highest qualification. However, some colleges and universities offer studies at all degree levels from the associate to the doctorate.

There is no unique ministry responsible for centralization of higher education in the United States. In the majority, the system is composed by institutions of the American states, which have academic and administrative autonomy. The U.S. Department of Education has the role of the regulatory agent of the system (Table 10.3).

Furthermore, the data shows that institutions are predominantly private, while enrollments are mostly public (Table 10.4).

Although most enrollments are in public institutions, there is no free tuition in higher education in the United States. According to ACE (2004), colleges and universities are financed in ways consistent with the ideal of limited government and the belief that market competition tends to improve quality and efficiency. American colleges and universities are sup-

ported further by diverse revenue sources that reflect the market choices of students and parents as well as other consumers of the goods and services that institutions provide.

The Netherlands

According to NVAO, the higher education system in the Netherlands is based on a three-cycle degree system, consisting of a bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and Ph.D.'s. Two types of programs are offered: research-oriented degree programs offered by research universities, and professional higher education programs offered by universities of applied sciences. So, these cycles are in line with the European Higher Education Area:

1. Bachelor's degrees. Incorporating bachelor's programs of both professional and academic orientation.
2. Master's degrees. Incorporating master's programs of both professional and academic orientation.
3. Doctoral degrees. Incorporating doctoral studies.

Higher education in the Netherlands is offered by research universities and universities of applied sciences. Research universities include general universities, universities specializing in engineering and agriculture, and the Open University. Universities of applied sciences include general institutions as well as institutions specializing in a specific field, such as agriculture, fine and performing arts, or teacher training. Whereas research universities are primarily responsible for offering research-oriented programs, universities of applied sciences are primarily responsible for offering programs of higher professional education, that prepare students for specific professions. These tend to be more practically oriented than programs offered by research universities (NVAO 2016) (Tables 10.5 and 10.6).

There are three categories of higher education institutions in the Netherlands:

1. *Recognized public institutions.* There are two types of recognized public institutions: universities and universities of applied sciences ("hogescholen"). Both universities and universities of applied sciences can offer programs with an academic as well as a professional orientation.

Table 10.5 Number of higher education institutions in the Netherlands by type

Total	Academic higher education	Professional higher education	International institutes for education
62	13	43	6 ^a
100%	21%	69%	10%

Source NUFFIC (2015); www.studyinhollland.nl

Note ^aThese 6 are big, but there are some small ones that work with multicultural groups

Table 10.6 Total number of enrollments by type of institution

Enrollments	Academic higher education	Professional higher education
686,000	240,000	446,000
	35%	65%

Source www.studyinhollland.nl. There is no available information about total enrollment in international institutes for education

2. *Recognized private institutions.* These institutions do not receive public funding. However, after having completed a special institutional procedure and initial accreditation of their programs, these institutions are allowed to offer bachelor's and master's programs.
3. *Privately funded institutions that are not recognized.* These institutions are not recognized and are only allowed to offer postgraduate programs. These programs have to get (initial) accreditation.

Country	Institutions		Enrollments	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Brazil	12.1%	87.9%	24.7%	75.3%
USA	38%	62%	77%	23%
Netherlands	90%	10%	^a	^a

Note ^aThere is no available information about total enrollment

In relation to where responsibility lies in terms of offers, Brazil has a very diversified system of higher education regarding financial sources; its system is also differentiated regarding institutional models. Although its

system is mostly private, with 75% of the offers made by private institutions, financial sources, even in the private subsystem, are diversified, as has been demonstrated earlier when we considered the legal nature of institutions; that is, the country has for-profit private institutions or simply private institutions, in the strictest sense, and non-profit private institutions including community, confessional, and philanthropic institutions.

Although these institutions are not maintained by public power, they receive public funding through scholarships, tax waivers, and the student funding program.

Public institutions, created and maintained by public power, are linked to three levels of government: federal, state, and city, with some of the institutions kept by city government charging students for tuition in undergraduate courses. The federal and state institutions of higher education charge for specialized courses but keep their undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees free of charge.

In the United States, institutions of higher education systems are predominantly private, with enrollments mostly public. However, American higher education is configured as a provision of educational services. The biggest part of its funding does not come from the state, but from tuition payments.

According to the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) the Netherlands has the following types of recognized higher education institutions (NVAO 2016):

- Government-funded universities as set down by law. These are the academic universities and the universities of applied sciences. These institutions are funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and provide programs that are statutorily recognized.
- Recognized private higher education institutions. These are institutions that do not receive government funding. They may apply to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to be a recognized private higher education institution. Once these institutions have accredited programs, that is, have become a “recognized private higher education institution,” they can provide diplomas like those conferred by government-funded institutions.

Analyses of these three countries indicate that Brazil and the United States have similarities regarding the predominance of offers being private. However, Brazil presents the peculiarity that the private sector receives several incentives and subsidies from government, which denote a strong public–private partnership. In the Netherlands, even though there are private institutions, offers are mainly government-funded institutions.

Assessment of Higher Education

Brazil

Brazil has a National System of Higher Education Assessment (SINAES) that was created on April 14, 2004 by legislation 10.861, having as its goal the assurance of a national assessment process of higher education institutions, their undergraduate courses, and the academic performance of their students.

The law establishes that SINAES has among its goals the requirement to ensure improvement of the country's higher education system; to support the expansion of higher education offers; promotion and deepening of the social commitments and responsibilities of higher education institutions through enhancement of their public mission and the promotion of democratic values; to respect diversity; and to affirm autonomy and institutional identity.

The law also established the National Board for the Assessment of Higher Education (CONAES), responsible for coordinating and supervising the assessment processes, with the National Institute of Studies and Educational Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) being responsible for operationalization. The results of assessments, according to law, constitute a basic reference point for the processes of regulation and supervision of higher education, composed of authorizing acts, covering the accreditation process and the renewal of accreditation of institutions of higher education, and regulatory acts that pass through authorization for the recognition and renewal of recognition of undergraduate courses.

The National System of Higher Education Assessment (SINAES) created and uses diverse procedures and instruments to assess institutions, including self-assessment and external assessment *in loco*. External assess-

ment is done by specialist committees with different areas of knowledge, designated by INEP, assessing undergraduate courses with the goal of identifying teaching conditions received by students, through analysis of the faculty, physical facilities, and pedagogical–didactic organization. External assessment is based on the standard of quality of higher education expressed via assessment instruments and self-assessment reports.

An assessment commission for each higher education institution coordinates self-assessment. Every higher education institution creates a commission to conduct the internal processes of assessment and systematization and provides information requested by INEP. Self-assessment is guided by instructions and is scripted by the institutional self-assessment of CONAES.

An additional part of the assessment process required by institutions is to assess the performance of undergraduate students through the application of the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE), generally applied every 3 years—a compulsory curricular component of undergraduate courses; student academic records only contain their position in relation to the test.

The quality indicators of courses and institutions of higher education in Brazil are obtained through diversified means. The General Course Index (IGC) is one of the indicators INEP use to assess higher education institutions. The IGC is an indicator composed by concepts, it is the result of the weighted mean of the preliminary concept of the course (CPC), which is an assessment indicator of undergraduate courses. The IGC follows a cycle of 3 years, in combination with the results of ENADE. An institution that obtains from three to five points is considered to have provided a satisfactory performance; equal to, or below, two points represents a performance that is unsatisfactory.

During the regulation of undergraduate courses, they go through three types of assessment at different times, that is, **authorization, recognition, and renewal of recognition:**

1. *Authorization.* This assessment is made when the institution asks for authorization from the Ministry of Education to open a course.
2. *Recognition.* When the first class begins the second half of the course, the institution must ask for recognition from the Ministry of Education.

3. *Renewal of recognition.* This assessment is made according to the cycle of SINAES, that is, every 3 years. Based on the score of the preliminary concept of the course, the courses that have a preliminary concept of one or two (unsatisfactory) will be assessed by two SMEs.

The United States

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), as the United States has no Ministry of Education or other centralized federal authority exercising control over the quality of postsecondary educational institutions, the states of federation assume varying degrees of control over education. As a consequence, American educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs. To measure the quality of each institution, the practice of assessment is through accreditation.

The USDE also highlights the role of accrediting agencies (accreditors), which are private educational associations of regional or national scope that develop assessment criteria and conduct peer reviews to assess whether or not such criteria are met. So, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a private, non-profit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States. The role of the Department of Education is to recognize accreditors that apply for recognition and designate the scope of accrediting activities to which its recognition pertains.

For the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), “accreditation is a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement” (CHEA 2015, p. 1). In the document “An Overview of U.S. Accreditation” (CHEA 2015), CHEA describes the most important elements of this process as outlined in the following text.

In the United States, accreditation is carried out by private, non-profit organizations designed for this specific purpose. External quality review of higher education is a non-governmental enterprise. The U.S. accreditation structure is decentralized and complex, mirroring the decentralization and complexity of American higher education.

The roles of accreditation, according to CHEA (2015) are:

- *Assuring quality.* Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities, and programs assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or program meets at least threshold standards for, e.g., its faculty, curriculum, student services, and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if institutions and programs provide evidence of fiscal stability.
- *Access to federal and state funds.* Accreditation is required for access to federal funds, such as student aid and other federal programs. Federal student aid funds are available to students only if the institution or program they are attending is accredited by a recognized accrediting organization.
- *Engendering private sector confidence.* Accreditation status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education. Private individuals and foundations look for evidence of accreditation when making decisions about private giving.
- *Easing transfer.* Accreditation is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities. Although accreditation is but one among several factors taken into account by receiving institutions, it is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality.

Therefore, the USDE defines some important functions of accreditation, that is, to:

- Assess the quality of academic programs at institutions of higher education.
- Create a culture of continuous improvement of academic quality at colleges and universities and stimulate a general raising of standards among educational institutions.
- Involve faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional assessment and planning.
- Establish criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation.

From these values, an institution or program seeking accreditation must go through a number of steps stipulated by an accrediting organization. CHEA (2015) describes the operation of U.S. accreditation, as the following:

- *Self-study.* Institutions and programs prepare a written summary of performance, based on the standards of the relevant accrediting organization.
- *Peer review.* Primarily faculty and administrative peers in the profession conduct an accreditation review. These colleagues review the self-study and serve on visiting teams that review institutions and programs after the self-study is completed. Peers constitute the majority of members of the accrediting commissions or boards that make judgments about accrediting status.
- *Site visit.* Accrediting organizations normally send a visiting team to review an institution or program. The self-study provides the foundation for the team visit. In addition to the peers described above, teams may also include public members (non-academics who have an interest in higher education). All team members are volunteers and are generally not compensated.
- *Judgment by an accrediting organization.* Accrediting organizations have decision-making bodies (commissions) made up of administrators and faculty from institutions and programs, as well as public members. These commissions may affirm accreditation for new institutions and programs, reaffirm accreditation for ongoing institutions and programs, and deny accreditation to institutions and programs.
- *Periodic external review.* Institutions and programs continue to be reviewed over time. They normally prepare a self-study and undergo a site visit each time.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) assesses the internal quality assurance pursued by universities (academic universities and universities of applied sciences), and the quality of the programs they provide. This independent accreditation organization was created in 2005 as a result of a treaty between

Flanders and the Netherlands. The new assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands has been in force since January 1, 2017.

There are three steps private higher education institutions need to take if they want to become recognized institutions (NVAO 2016):

1. The organization must apply to NVAO for an extensive framework for initial accreditation which is weighted: the full curriculum of the program representing the basis of the assessment (the program must be offered for a full cycle and have graduate students). This initial accreditation is not simply a review of a plan, but a weighted extended initial accreditation. NVAO makes its decision following an assessment of a program, and this decision is made alongside the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. NVAO charges a fee for assessments.
2. The organization must also apply for a recommendation to the Dutch Inspectorate of Education that assesses the quality and continuity of candidates and the institution itself. This assessment includes the compliance of an institution with the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). Recognized educational institutions are subject to supervision by the Inspectorate.
3. If an institution achieves a positive decision from NVAO and a recommendation by the Inspectorate, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science makes the final decision whether an organization will become a “recognized private institution.” Such recognition gives an institution the right to be incorporated into the Dutch higher education system, based on policy guidelines regarding the authorization to award higher education degrees.

According to the new framework from NVAO (2016), programs are accredited for 6 years. In this way, every 6 years a program must prove that it still meets the re-accreditation standards. NVAO may decide that the program: (a) will be accredited for another 6 years; (b) will not be re-accredited; or (c) the current accreditation term be temporarily extended within the context of an improvement period.

The assessment of existing programs has as focus on the quality achieved. In this way, programs must demonstrate their educational practice meets the standard required. Assessment is focused on intended learning outcomes, the structure of the curriculum, the learning environment, student assessment, the teaching staff, and achieved learning outcomes (NVAO 2016).

The assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands considers a peer review system as the best method to verify quality. Also, the framework is based on consideration being given to the autonomy of an institution, making it initially responsible for its own quality (NVAO 2016).

Table 10.7 summarizes the main drivers behind assessment systems in Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands.

Analyzing each of the three systems, it can be concluded that they have similar and different purposes. In Brazil, SINAES purposes to improve the higher education system and regulate it. Regulation is also present in the accreditation process in the United States. It focuses on the regulation of the higher education system in terms of accountability. In the Netherlands, accreditation, on the other hand, has its focus on a comparison between the internal quality of an institution and specific quality standards.

In Brazil and the United States, assessment includes self-study and external assessment, focused mainly on external assessment. In the Netherlands, assessment is internal.

Regarding execution of the system, assessment in Brazil is executed by a governmental institution (INEP) and coordinated by a collegiate commission (CONAES). In the United States, the process is by regulatory agencies (private organizations). In the Netherlands, institutions develop their own assessment processes, based on parameters provided by the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) (a public bi-national institution).

Use of Assessment Results

Finally, we will consider the question of how different systems use assessment results. In the Brazilian context of higher education assessment, it

Table 10.7 Higher education assessment systems

	Brazil	The United States	The Netherlands
What is it for?	To improve the country's higher education system and provide a reference for the processes of regulation and supervision of higher education. It provides an assessment of both inputs and products, that is, it evaluates institutions, courses, and the student performance	To measure the quality of each institution through accreditation	To answer a key question, that is, "is the institution safeguarding its vision of good education, and is the institution continuously working on development and improvement?" (NVAO 2016, p. 6)
How does it operate?	Self-study; a National Student Performance Exam (ENADE); and external assessment <i>in loco</i>	Self-study; peer review; site visits; judgment by accrediting organization; and periodic external review	A peer review system (external panel of experts) is considered the best method to verify quality
Who makes assessments?	National Institute of Studies and Educational Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP). The National Board for the Assessment of Higher Education (CONAES) is responsible for coordinating and supervising the assessment processes	Agencies (accreditors) that are private and non-profit organizations designed for this specific purpose. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a private, non-profit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity	Self-assessment. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) assesses the internal quality assurance pursued by universities (academic universities and universities of applied sciences), and the quality of the programs they provide

can be said that results from higher education assessment are primarily used for regulation. Most notably, private higher education institutions use SINAES results to adjust themselves to the standards of the Brazilian higher education regulation system.

In the United States, the results of accreditation are used to provide assurance to students and the public that an institution or program meets at least threshold standards, and to provide evidence of fiscal stability. These results are also used for access to federal funds, to support the private sector when evaluating the credentials of job applicants, to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education, and for making decisions about private funding. Besides this, accreditation is important to students for the smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities.

In the Netherlands, the key questions are associated with the establishment of the four standards adopted in the assessment framework (NVAO 2016):

1. *Vision and policy.* Is the vision and policy of an institution, concerning the quality of education it provides, widely supported and sufficiently coordinated, both externally and internally?
2. *Implementation.* How does an institution realize its vision of quality?
3. *Assessment and monitoring.* How does an institution monitor whether its vision of quality is realized?
4. *Focus on development.* How does an institution work on improvement?

According to the NVAO (2016) framework, programs will be accredited for 6 years. In this way, every 6 years a program must prove that it still meets the re-accreditation standards. NVAO may decide that a program: (a) will be accredited for another 6 years; (b) will not be re-accredited; or (c) that the current accreditation term will temporarily be extended within the context of an improvement period.

We can conclude that, in the Netherlands, the main objective of its higher education assessment system is to assure quality. In each assessment cycle, institutions need to prove that their quality is in agreement with the standards established in the assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system.

General Considerations About Assessment Systems

When comparing countries, different assessment focus can be observed, as seen in Table 10.8.

All three countries have systems that sit outside their academic institutions, in order to verify quality. Nevertheless, in all three countries, the primary responsibility for quality lies with the institution itself. In the Netherlands, a quality framework exists that makes the process of assessment and the use of its results more focused on the process. In this country, there is a strong emphasis on the process of peer review, making the assessment system more qualitative than quantitative, which again focuses on the process. In Brazil, although self-assessment is a requirement of the assessment system, its results do not receive the same weight carried by external assessment. In this country, the main assessment focus is to regulate the system, bringing with it a strong component of accountability. In the United States, assessment processes focus on accreditation, as a means of accountability and regulation.

In order to analyze the characteristics of assessment models (the model of internal assessment centered on institutional improvement and an assessment framework centered on regulation), their presence in each of the evaluation systems was verified (Table 10.9).

According to these data, it is possible to observe that the characteristics of both models are present in all three countries but are manifested in different ways. In the United States, the predominantly private offer model (although institutions are public they are maintained by monthly payments) is articulated in terms of the model of the assessment framework centered on regulation. Likewise, Brazil, also with a predominantly private supply model, has its evaluative system focused on regulation. On the other hand, the Netherlands, with a public offer model, articulates the model of internal assessment centered on institutional improvement.

Conclusions

We can conclude that the role of the state regarding higher education is similar in both Brazil and the United States. In these countries private

Table 10.8 Features of higher education assessment systems

Feature	Brazil	The United States ^b	The Netherlands ^a
Considers peer review to be the best method for quality verification			X
There is a standard of quality defined by a framework and the institutions do not need to demonstrate anything other than what is stated in this framework			X
Security-based system			X
Undertakes a process of external quality review	X	X	X
Accreditation is carried out by private, non-profit organizations specifically designed for this purpose. External quality review of higher education is a non-governmental enterprise		X	X
Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for academic quality	X	X	X
CHEA has six standards by which it reviews accrediting organizations for recognition. The standards place primary emphasis on academic quality assurance and improvement for an institution or program. They require accreditors to advance academic quality, demonstrate accountability, encourage purposeful change and needed improvement, employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision-making, continually reassess accreditation practices, and sustain fiscal stability		X	

Note ^aBased on framework for quality

^bBased on an overview of U.S. accreditation

Table 10.9 Characteristics of the evaluation models

Features	Brazil	The United States	The Netherlands
External to institutions	Very present	Very present	Marginally present
Emphasizes regulation	Very present	Very present	Marginally present
Emphasizes control	Very present	Very present	Marginally present
Emphasizes hierarchization	Marginally present	Marginally present	Marginally present
Pursues efficiency and productivity	Very present	Very present	Marginally present
Pursues the establishment of rankings, for comparative purposes, between institutions	Very present	Marginally present	Marginally present
Appreciates the problems that occur within institutions	Marginally present	Very present	Marginally present
Emphasizes the process of self-assessment, based on the principles of participation and democratic management of institutions	Marginally present	Marginally present	Present
Formative and procedural orientation, which has its strongest correlation with qualitative transformation and the primary role of the university as a producer of culture and knowledge	Marginally present	Present	Very present

offers are predominant and the government takes the main role in terms of assessing and regulating its higher education system. On the other hand, in the Netherlands the state has the main responsibility for higher education offers. In this country, private initiatives represent only a small number of students.

Both Brazil and the United States focus on the regulation of the system of higher education and use assessment results for accountability. In the Netherlands, the accreditation procedures aim to improve and maintain the quality of the system of higher education.

Therefore, the results of the analysis agree with the thesis that assessment frameworks developed by systems of higher education are related to the expansion and offer models assigned to this education level, as well as the role of the state in one specific model. Accordingly, we can conclude that when responsibility for the offer and funding of higher education is public, a model of internal assessment, centered on institutional improvement, tends to develop. In contrast, when the offer is private, assessment tends to follow a model centered on regulation.

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