

US - New Educational Opportunities for Latinos: Catholic Universities in the Americas

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As tuitions rise at universities in the United States and scholarship funds pay for an even smaller percentage of costs, many parents are finding college education for their children beyond their financial reach. For some, the answer has been to mortgage the home, or for the student to take out prohibitive loans. For others, the choice has been a community college or even to forego college entirely, and for the student enter the work force as untrained labor.

A program begun in 2004 now offers students another alternative. The College Board's University Recognition Initiative is engaged in the process of identifying those outstanding universities abroad which accept U.S. students' Advanced Placement (AP) and SAT grades, have affordable tuitions, and are highly ranked academically. In Latin America, there are now over 90 such universities in 18 countries, including the premier Catholic universities which have convenios or agreements with U.S. colleges such as Norte Dame, Trinity, Loyola, Boston College, and others.

For Latino students who are able to converse and read in Spanish this is a wonderful option. Not only do most of these universities give credit and/or advanced standing for AP grades, but several offer scholarships. The cost of tuition for a year at a Catholic university in Latin America is under \$10,000 on the average, and that figure includes housing and fees. All of the listed universities are fully accredited and their degrees are recognized world-wide.

For more than two decades there have been a few thousand American students studying abroad, including over 800 in medical schools (due to the cap on enrollment in the United States). Recently, with rising costs, that figure has increased more than 145%, and students with careers other than medicine in mind have begun to enroll in foreign universities. There are now over 26,000 U.S. students studying in Latin America alone, and over 170,000 world-wide. Not all study abroad for financial reasons, of course. Many chose to do so to gain a larger perspective on the world, to immerse themselves in a different culture or language, or to broaden their opportunities in a competitive global economy.

While language requirements curtail some students' efforts to attend a university in another country, that limitation does not extend to Latino students, many of whom have the requisite language skills and are attracted to studying in Latin America. In addition, the widening of their cultural perspective as they learn about the history of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile or Mexico, the commitment to service (which is a requirement at universities in Latin America), provides them with valuable skills in the international marketplace.

Many parents are attracted to this option as well. Catholic universities in Latin America are characterized not only by rigorous academics, but also by traditional values, a commitment to working with others, and a positive world-view which is absent in many secular institutions. Many of the Catholic universities are Jesuit institutions and are part of la red jesuita (the Jesuit Web) sharing resources, libraries and professors from Europe and Canada as well as the United States. Among those listed below are ITESO and Iberoamericana in Mexico. Others are what are called Pontifical universities which are essentially authorized by the Holy See to provide quality Catholic education, some dating back to the 1600s such as Universidad del Rosario in Colombia. Finally, some are Opus Dei-associated universities such as the Universidad de Montevideo in Uruguay. What all of them have in common is that they provide a safe place to learn, a rigorous curriculum, a commitment to service to the community, and strong moral values.

Since many college counselors are unaware of the opportunities for studying abroad, the College Board has created a site where students and parents can visit each of these recommended universities on-line. It can be found at www.collegeboard.com/apintl.

Over the past three years College Board staff have traveled to 18 countries in Latin America and visited over 140 universities. They have personally confirmed the information that appears on the web page listed above, and continue to make follow-up visits to these universities throughout the year.

Recently I interviewed two students who had just graduated from a Jesuit university in Mexico: Paulina Julian and Gabriela Silva. Among the questions I asked them were: What was the most significant aspect of your education at a Catholic university in Latin America?



Gabriella Silva (left) and Paulina Julian (right)

Photo by Hector Silva.

Gabriela replied: "It helped me grow, especially the community service, because I was able to come in contact with other social classes and understand Mexico from a different angle. It is alarming to me that so many students in the U.S. are living very sheltered lives and they are going to make important decisions that have a direct effect on the world while actually knowing very little about that world outside of books."

Paulina said, "It helped me develop as a spiritual person. The caring environment, the way people looked after each other, was very nourishing to my spirit. And when my spirit is nourished I am better at what I do. I am in touch with a part of me which is wise, kind, friendly, and that reflects directly on my relationships with other people and with what I do."

Paulina, who studied for a career in education, is now an assistant to the director of international education at a major university. Gaby, who studied for a career in psychology, works for an American school as an on-call psychologist. Both are people who have profited enormously from their education. They are not only successful in their chosen fields but they are also well-rounded and caring people."

"I don't know what would have happened or where I'd be today if I had studied in the U.S.," Gaby told me. "But I am glad that I chose to study in Latin America which seems to me less closed-off and more welcoming than other places."

Paulina noted, "In the long run I believe it is not really about where we study, if our university is open to other cultures and promotes the love of learning. But, I am glad that I chose Latin America. It is a part of the world that right now is most hopeful in terms of world peace. It is a place where there is little talk of war or enmity to other cultures."

List of top Catholic universities in Latin America recommended for U.S. students studying abroad:

- 1. Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.
- 2. Universidad de los Andes (Colombia).
- 3. Universidad del Rosario (Colombia).

- 4. ITESO (México).
- 5. Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina.
- 6. Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Venezuela).
- 7. Universidad Católica de Santa María (Perú).
- 8. Universidad Católica de Uruguay.
- 9. Universidad Iberoamericana (México).
- 10. Pontificia Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico.
- 11. Universidad Santo Tomás (Colombia).
- 12. Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (Chile).
- 13. Universidad Católica Santa María La Antigua (Panamá).
- 14. Ave Maria College of the Americas (Nicaragua).
- 15. Universidad Católica de Honduras.
- 16. Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Colombia).
- 17. Universidad Católica de Córdoba (Argentina).
- 18. Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (República Dominicana).
- 19. Universidad de Montevideo (Uruguay).
- 20. Universidad Panamericana (México).

NOTE: As more Catholic universities submit their policies for international students and the College Board has an opportunity to visit their campuses, this list will continue grow. It may be that several quality Catholic universities currently recognize AP and SAT scores from U.S. students and have rigorous programs, but have not yet contacted the College Board and for that reason do not appear on this list.

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