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Evaluating Design Education in Mexico: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The Mexican Board for the Accreditation of Design Programs (COMAPROD) is an organization devoted to the quality of higher education in design in Mexico. COMAPROD has as its main objective the accreditation of design programs at the undergraduate level. Because of the broad definition of the term *design*, COMAPROD has been confronted with the challenge to identify which of the programs that apply for review are suitable for evaluation and accreditation. In order to maintain a high standard of quality in the services offered, the dilemma for COMAPROD is how to develop a complex and flexible system of criteria for evaluation that will prove effective and inclusive for the review of existing and emerging design programs in Mexico. The COMAPROD experience is contextualized with a comparison of five international agencies of accreditation.

Keywords: design education, evaluation, accreditation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The first undergraduate design degree in Mexico was offered by the Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico City) in 1968. During the 1970s a dozen other design programs were created, mostly concentrated in the same geographical area. From then on, a significant number of programs in design were created around the country. In 1991, ENCUADRE, the Mexican Association of Graphic Design Schools was established. To date, more than 50 design schools in Mexico are part of ENCUADRE, now affiliated to ICOGRADA. During the association's 2002 annual reunion, the idea

of an evaluation system to monitor the quality of design education was discussed. In May 2003, a group of design educators and scholars created COMAPROD to act as the board in charge of developing the evaluation system. Before any evaluation process could take place, COMAPROD had to be evaluated and accepted by COPAES (*Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior*) a civic association validated by the Ministry of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) that confers official recognition to accreditation agencies in Mexico. These agencies conduct evaluation and accreditation in specific knowledge domains.

II. EVALUATION OF DESIGN PROGRAMS IN MEXICO

THE COMAPROD EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

COMAPROD's mission is to generate a culture of quality in design programs through continuous evaluation based on reference frameworks that motivate the creation and propagation of design knowledge.[1] Following international standards of quality assessment, COMAPROD created an evaluation framework composed of eleven categories. Three categories, educational program, faculty and students, are specific to the design program. The remaining categories concern the institution as a whole.

1. Declaration of Principles
Universities must have a document stating their mission, vision and principles. All this information must be known by the university community.

2. Planning
Universities must ensure effective planning so that distribution of resources are geared towards the fulfillment of the institutions' purposes.

3. Rules, Government and Administration
Universities must have a clear power structure and regulations to measure their processes both qualitatively and quantitatively.

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4. Educational Program

All aspects of the educational program must be congruent with the university's mission. Parameters evaluated in this category include curriculum, pedagogical methods, research topics, publications, graduation requirements and community social services.

5. Faculty

Quantitative and qualitative characteristics are evaluated as well as policies and programs that encourage academic development of part-time and full-time professors.

6. Students

Admission policies and processes are reviewed as well as programs that promote the academic development of students.

7. Administrative, Technical and Support Staff

Universities must have clear rules and regulations in place for hiring processes, personnel development, promotions and evaluation of administrative, technical and support staff.

8. Academic Services

Libraries, multimedia and academic research facilities are evaluated in this category.

9. Student Services

This category evaluates the opportunities available to students to participate in activities and programs that generate a stimulating environment.

10. Facilities and equipment

Universities must provide optimal facilities and equipment and manage them accordingly.

11. Finances

Budget planning, control, accounting, audits, inventory controls, investments and insurance programs are evaluated.

EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The evaluation and accreditation process consists of five stages. The goal is to assess a program not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. The process has to be initiated by the program interested in the evaluation.

Application

The evaluation of a program is on a voluntary basis, which means that a design school authority requests COMAPROD to evaluate the program.

Self study

The university conducts a self study based on the evaluation framework. This self study must be completed by a group composed of all the actors in a design program such as university officials, professors, students and alumnae. This community enables COMAPROD to obtain a more holistic view of the program. All the questions in the framework must be answered and evidence must be provided in response to each question. Working collaboratively, the school has approximately six months to gather all of the information for the self study. It is important to note that six weeks before the self study is sent to COMAPROD, the evaluating team's leader visits the program. The leader clarifies any questions and addresses concerns that may have arisen during the gathering of information and evidence. Once completed, the self study document is sent to the evaluating team.

On-site visit

The COMAPROD team has one month to revise the self study before the on-site visit takes place. The team is composed of five design professors from different universities that have been trained as COMAPROD evaluators. University officials or designers with administration positions within a program are not allowed to be evaluators. This is done for objectivity and to avoid conflicts of interests.

The on-site visit lasts four days. It starts Sunday evening at the designated hotel. Two meetings take place. The first meeting is with university authorities where the Development Plan of the Academic Program is presented. The second is a team meeting to share impressions about the self study and to reach agreements about the criteria to implement during the following days.

On Monday, the team visits classrooms, labs and workshop spaces, computer centers and libraries available to design students. The team then attends an exhibit of student design projects. This allows the team to observe the students' progressive development of design knowledge, skills and capabilities. In the evening, the team reunites with the group in charge of gathering information to revise the evidence provided and to ensure that there are no missing documents. At the end of the day, the team exchanges impressions about the review process of the day.

Three separate interviews take place on Tuesday morning. First, the team interviews design school professors. At least 75% of faculty must be present for the interview to happen. After interviewing the faculty, a second meeting takes place with students and alumnae. COMAPROD requires that 50% of the total student body or a maximum of 150 students be present. No professors or design school program authorities are allowed in this meeting. The last interview that takes place is with the program authorities. The rest of the day is devoted to the revision of documents and evidence. In the evening, the team begins to structure the evaluation report.

Wednesday morning is devoted to the composition of the evaluation report. The goal is to develop a draft that will be revised and reworked after the visit is over. At noon the team meets with the group of people involved in the evaluation process. This ceremonial meeting is to thank the university community for their hospitality and to congratulate them on completion of this stage of the evaluation and accreditation process. The report with recommendations will be sent ten days after the visit concludes. This document contains the recommendations proposed by the team to improve the growth of the program, based on the analysis of the self study and its evidence, the interviews and the visit to the design program facilities.

Evaluation Report

The team elaborates an evaluation report that contains the recommendations proposed to the program.

Final resolution

Based on the team's evaluation report, COMAPROD reaches a final resolution in which the program can either be accredited or non-accredited. In cases where a program does not fulfill the quantitative and qualitative characteristics to attain a sufficient quality level, the school can request the evaluation process two years after the unsuccessful accreditation.

III. INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION EXPERIENCES

Five international accreditation agencies were chosen to frame the design school evaluation process globally. These are the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (China), the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Norway), the *Comité National d' Évaluation des Établissements Publics à Caractère Scientifique, Culturel et Professionnel* (France), the National Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation (Argentina), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (USA). Their similarities and differences with COMAPROD are highlighted in the discussion below. The selected agencies are members of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The network's purpose is to "collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education".[2] COPAES, the Mexican board for accreditation of higher education is also a member of INQAAHE.

CHINA - HONG KONG COUNCIL FOR ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION (HKCAA)

The council was established in 1990 to provide academic accreditation in Hong Kong and to advise governmental agencies on educational standards. Over the years, the council has established liaisons not only with mainland China's accreditation agencies but has also been active in networking with accreditation agencies in other countries.

In the HKCAA's process, the accreditation is divided into two main stages, an institutional review and the program accreditation. First the institution as a whole is evaluated following an assessment of institutional issues. These issues include "institutional structure, governance and management, academic plans, program development, scholarly activity, student admission and student services, resources, program evaluation and quality assurance, community links, etc."[3]

Once the HKCAA determines that the institution is offering the appropriate conditions for the program to operate, the second stage of the accreditation is launched. During this stage, called program validation, the evaluation consists of reviewing the program structure, teaching and learning

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[2] www.inqaahe.org
[3] www.hkcaa.edu.hk

process, academic staff and their development, links with industry and society and all the issues relevant to the design program.

The main difference with the Mexican system is that the accreditation of an institution may be requested by the government, the funding board or the design institution itself. Another important difference is that the evaluation is not specific to design. Of the eighty-five programs accredited by the HKCAA, only five are design programs.[4]

NORWAY - NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION (NOKUT)

In Norway, the accreditation process is divided into two fields: accreditation of institutions and accreditation of courses.[5] In this educational system, it is required by the government that all universities and colleges maintain an *internal* system of quality assurance. The NOKUT evaluates the institution's system periodically at intervals of no more than six years. The NOKUT reviews the quality assurance system's structure and the information generated by the self evaluation. This is the process followed by institutions to achieve accreditation.

FRANCE - *COMITÉ NATIONAL D' ÉVALUATION DES ÉTABLISSEMENTS PUBLICS À CARACTÈRE SCIENTIFIQUE, CULTUREL ET PROFESSIONNEL* (CNE)

In France, the system of evaluation is similar to Mexico's, although it is not clear whether all of the experts appointed for the evaluation teams are design educators. The CNE states that evaluators may be "experts who are university professors, higher education administrative or technical senior executives, key economic professionals, be they French or not".[6]

Another difference is that the final evaluation report of a program is published with a circulation of about 600 copies and made public to the university community, to the Ministry of Higher Education, to the press and to the general public. To date, there are 162 *rapports d'évaluation* available on the CNE internet site.[7] In contrast to COMAPROD's methodology, in France the team

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[4] www.hkcaa.edu.hk (last update April 3, 2007)
[5] www.nokut.no
[6] www.cne.fr
[7] ibid.

revisits the institution approximately 18 months after the report to see what effects and changes the evaluation has provoked.

ARGENTINA - NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION (CONEAU)

Created in 1996, CONEAU is the only government agency authorized to evaluate and accredit universities in Argentina. The evaluation process is similar to that of COMAPROD, consisting of a self study, and an on-site peer review. The resolutions differ in that there are three possible outcomes for an evaluated program.

a) Accreditation for six years to those programs that meet the required quality standard.
b) Accreditation for three years for a program that does not meet the required quality standards but whose developmental plan shows that the program will be able to reach the standard in a reasonable period of time.
c) Non-accreditation for those programs that fail to reach the standards and whose developmental plans are in too early a stage.[8]

CONEAU has been actively collaborating with international evaluating agencies. At a bilateral level, the agency serves as the Secretariat of the *Red Iberoamericana para la Acreditación de la Calidad de Educación Superior* (RIACES) that is composed of seventeen Latin American countries and Spain. At a regional level, CONEAU contributes to the MERCOSUR experimental accreditation mechanism (MEXA) whose full members are Argentina, Brasil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. Other Latin American countries including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru are associated members.

USA - COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA)

The CHEA is the largest education organization in the United States. Approximately 3,000 colleges and universities are associated with the CHEA. The association also has sixty recognized accrediting organizations for specific domain programs.[9]

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[8] www.coneau.gov.ar
[9] www.chea.org

As for the Mexican evaluation experience, CHEA evaluation is on a voluntary basis. The process is also similar. It consists of a self study, a peer review of the institution and a resolution granting or denying accreditation.

There are four types of accrediting organizations for higher education in the United States:

Regional accreditors evaluate and approve accreditation for public and private, mainly nonprofit and degree-granting, two- and four-year institutions.

Faith-based accreditors evaluate and approve accreditation for religiously affiliated and doctrinally based institutions, mainly nonprofit and degree-granting.

Private career accreditors evaluate and approve accreditation mainly for for-profit, career-based, single purpose institutions, for both degree and non-degree programs.

Programmatic accreditors evaluate and approve accreditation for specific programs, professions and free-standing schools, e.g., design, law, medicine, engineering and health professions.[10]

In the last category, programmatic accreditors, CHEA recognizes the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) as the specialized agency for evaluating art and design programs.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN (NASAD)

Funded in 1944, to date NASAD has accredited 248 institutions and programs.[11] To be accredited by NASAD requires an annual membership fee paid by participating design schools. In Mexico, the application fee covers the evaluation process and is the only expense during the five year period for which the accreditation is granted. Furthermore, COMAPROD is independent; it is not an association and therefore does not entail membership fees.

The NASAD handbook, available online, includes the association's standards for degree-granting and non-degree-granting institutions in art and design, as well as its constitution, bylaws, and code of ethics. The handbook, explains in detail the standards for the different programs that variously have a major concentration in design, visual arts and design, art history, art education or a combination of studio art and design. The handbook states what is expected from different design specializations to provide detailed objectives, curricular structure, recommendations for general studies, the essential

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[10] www.chea.org
[11] www.nasad.arts-accredit.org

competencies, relevant competencies for specialized programs and essential opportunities and experiences. In order for a program to be considered by NASAD as a degree with a concentration in art or design, not less than 25% of the total credits have to be specialized in the discipline.

NASAD is an agency similar to COMAPROD in the sense that they have developed the frameworks and methodology necessary to evaluate and accredit design programs. However, NASAD has a long history in the evaluation and accreditation of programs while COMAPROD is still in the beginning stage of the process with all the challenges and opportunities this implies.

CONCLUSION

Since its creation, COMAPROD has been involved in the successful evaluation and accreditation of 28 design programs throughout the country, both in public and private universities. The total number of programs that have taken part in the evaluation process is not disclosed. This may be due to political and marketing reasons on the part of the institutions involved. Since the application for the evaluation process is on a voluntary basis, some institutions may not want to risk a publication of a low quality standard in their program.

In the short history of COMAPROD, the same framework has been applied to evaluate programs in graphic, industrial, interior, textile and fashion design. Other programs such as advertising and visual communication have also been evaluated. Programs that have different disciplinary bases but that have design as a component of their curricula such as multimedia design, film and video production and information design have been "self excluded". They have not applied to COMAPROD assuming perhaps that the accrediting agency is not the appropriate body for their evaluation. However, there is no other evaluation body or organization that could evaluate them. This creates a void in the concern for higher education quality standards.

It is important to note that the 28 programs accredited to date refer to themselves as graphic, industrial, interior, textile and fashion design. This may be the first hint that the evaluation framework that COMAPROD developed works well for the historically more classical design degrees. Problems seem to arise, however, when a design program with a different specialization applies to COMAPROD. It may be that the current evaluation framework that was developed through inspiration from international documents that were readily available, is too restrictive for the nature of our discipline. It is as if we are trying to measure every program with the same criteria,

when the reality is that design is a metadiscipline hard to encapsulate in a single meaning.

The challenge for COMAPROD is to develop a framework of high level standards that evaluates a common body of design knowledge, skills and competencies, and then apply a flexible customized framework for emerging specializations. It is important therefore to establish a minimum relevant percentage of design content in the curricula of the programs suitable for accreditation by COMAPROD. This approach will prove effective and inclusive for the review of both existing and emerging design programs in Mexico.

Following COMAPROD's philosophy of inclusion, this is important not only for the meaning of the accreditation and its consistency of standards, it is also important for the sake of the institutions to avoid failure if the applying school does not meet COMAPROD's criteria. The most important matter COMAPROD is facing nowadays is the fact that design domains with a different perspective than traditional ones are not benefiting fully from the evaluation or that they are being totally excluded from it.

The opportunity lies in the realization of the fact that at the end, the goal of the evaluation and accreditation process is to ensure that design schools provide their students with the highest quality education possible. The possibility resides in working from a restrictive evaluation framework towards a more inclusive model. This will enable COMAPROD to fulfill its dual intention of ensuring high quality in design education while supporting the growth and expansion of design programs. Only then, will the Mexican design community as a whole truly benefit from the accreditation process.

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INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

Comité National d' Évaluation des établissements publics à caractère scientifique, culturel et professionnel, CNE. <http://www.cne.fr>

Council for Higher Education Accreditation, CHEA. http://www.chea.org

Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, HKCAA. http://www.hkcaa.edu.hk

International Council of Graphic Design Associations, ICOGRADA. http://www.icograda.org/web/

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, INQAAHE. http://www.inqaahe.org

Mexican Association of Graphic Design Schools, ENCUADRE. http://www.encuadre.org/

Mexican Board for the Accreditation of Design Programs, COMAPROD. http://www.comaprod.org.mx/

National Association of Schools of Art and Design, NASAD. http://www.nasad.arts-accredit.org

National Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation, CONEAU. http://www.coneau.gov.ar/

Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT. http://www.nokut.no

Beyond the opportunities, the Paper also addresses the challenges and policy implications of introducing AI in education and preparing students for an AI-powered future. The challenges presented revolve around AI developments should be an opportunity to increase the importance of data in educational system management. Enhancing research on AI in education: While it can be reasonably expected that research on AI in education will increase in the coming years, it is nevertheless worth recalling the difficulties that the education sector has had in taking stock of educational research in a significant way both for practice and policy-making. Transformation of media education in the digital age: to the issue of training specialists in the field of communications. 2018 / Vinogradova S., Melnik G., Pantserev K. Mapping the Future of Occupations: Transformative and Destructive Effects of New Digital Technologies on Jobs. Reaping the benefits these emerging technologies could bring will depend, among other challenges, upon the capacity of labor markets to adapt.