

Chile's Education System: Crafting Policy for the Modern Era

An Honors Thesis for the Department of International Relations

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Tufts University, 2018

Acknowledgements

This study would not exist today if it were not for the support I received from faculty members, my friends, and my family throughout my time at Tufts University. As such, my work would not be complete without first expressing my gratitude to all who helped get me to the finish line. Thank you to my mom for instilling in me a deep sense of responsibility to work as hard as possible and to value education. Additionally, thank you to Professors David Proctor and Brian Roach. It was their passion for teaching which inspired me to pursue a career in academia and write a thesis in the first place. To Professors Peter Winn, Consuelo Cruz, and Richard Eichenberg, your encouragement and critiques made this thesis stronger than would have been possible had I gone through the writing process alone. Thank you. Lastly, I must express how fortunate I am to have such a wonderful group of friends. Lahna Sheron, Adam Allen, Garrett Robinson, Nathaniel Melvin, Christina Lee, Cassidy Driscoll, and Jeremy Colebrook-Soucie, time spent with you has been time well spent. Thank you for helping to keep me in a positive frame of mind during my college career.

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Abstract

This study outlines potential avenues for policy reforms in Chile's higher education system under the Piñera Administration. Data is drawn from international organizations like the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development to compare Chile's quality assurance model and financial assistance resources to those found throughout the developed world. While the country's academic system has a history of being prohibitively expensive and unable to provide students with the skills necessary to smoothly enter into the job market, recent policy changes have shown that the government is on track to successfully address these problems. Therefore, I will show that the objective for future policy implementations should be to continue this positive trajectory during the Piñera Administration. I plan to demonstrate that the key to achieving this goal is by putting forth policy that can appeal to President Piñera's conservative ideology while still promoting greater government influence in the academic field.

Introduction: Understanding Quality Assurance and Public Funding in Education

Since 2011, students throughout Chile have organized demonstrations in opposition to their government's efforts to financially neglect higher education and the government's inability to revolutionize quality assurance mechanisms. As more young adults decide to attend university in Chile, the instruments that were developed to accommodate demand, fund higher learning, and ensure that curriculums provide graduates the skills necessary to obtain well-paying jobs upon completion have not evolved with the country's growing market. This phenomenon has produced an academic system where students are held responsible for paying for an expensive education with inconsistent government accreditation. In return, students still remain uncertain that their efforts will lead to well-paying positions after graduation. The question remains: what remedies can be provided to ensure that students cannot slip through the cracks and become forgotten victims of this antiquated academic model?

The problems with Chilean universities can be divided into two parts: public funding and quality assurance. Many students today are forced to withdraw loans to afford the cost of tuition. Protestors often point to the era governed by Presidents Frei and Allende, when the government made significant strides towards socializing the education system, thus allowing many working-class families to send their children to college for the first time. Although the economic situation has changed dramatically since the 1970s, this era still proves influential when analyzing education policy in Chile, as it exemplifies the possibility for affordable tuition throughout the country.

During the Frei and Allende administrations, the quality of education provided to young adults was easier to monitor and evaluate, which made the costs of attendance a worthy investment. In the current government's defense, only 8 institutions of higher learning existed in

Chile before the 1980s. The rising demand for a college education throughout the country would have placed too much stress upon the academic system, such that so few universities could not have accommodated all the students that are now enrolled in higher education institutions. Arguably, the easing of regulations allowed for the growth of the academic market, thus providing more students with the chance to learn. However, the government has been irresponsible with the laws that are in place which dictate the qualifications necessary to be deemed an institution of higher learning. Laxed quality assurance legislation has led to the creation of many institutions of higher learning of questionable credentials, thus making it significantly more challenging for students to determine which academic programs will provide the tools necessary to succeed in the job market. Unarguably, the debt associated with higher learning would be an easier pill to swallow for prospective students if tuition costs were still perceived to be a worthy investment. Although no one should have expected 8 universities to maintain their monopoly, it is evident that there is more that the government should have done and should still do to address the quality problem that faces Chilean academia, regardless of whether the government pursues increased financial assistance for students from under-privileged families.

In this thesis, I examine education policy and the forces behind it with a focus on the period from 2011 until today. Listening to the rhetoric being produced by leading Chilean politicians, especially from former president Michelle Bachelet, it is well understood that the government has taken notice of the student led protests that have occurred since 2011. Bachelet had made it very clear that she wanted to use her last year in office to protect existing laws and further produce legislation aimed at providing more resources to working class students. Unfortunately, President Bachelet left office with a relatively low approval rating, which when

coupled with the victory of the conservative candidate, Sebastián Piñera, in the December presidential election, indicates how the following several years will most likely be very divisive with respect to education policy.

I will attempt to provide a forecast for what changes to education policy could possibly look like in the following years, in addition to providing my own recommendations for innovations, which will be based on examinations of the Chilean government's willingness to change and policies that have been implemented in developed countries. Additionally, it is vital that we understand what grassroots movements were occurring in Chile during the rise of socialism in the mid-20th century and how the protests of today may replicate the pressures that the public placed on the government in the past. Such an examination will prove useful while dissecting the policy implementations that have been put in place in recent years and whether those measures can survive under a post-Bachelet government. I will examine recent measures, deduce how they would seek to remedy the students' grievances, and describe how they compare to policies found in other member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This international comparison is particularly enlightening because the OECD has sought in recent years to take notice of the education problems that are harming Chile and to provide advice. Examining countries that are experiencing academic success may provide a framework upon which Chile could build reformations in the future.

In order to quantify the financial problems facing Chileans, I will analyze the levels of debt that students are being required to accept to attend universities. With this information, I will be able to compare the debt that students have in Chile to debt levels in other countries. In addition, it will be useful to look at such statistics as GDP per capita in Chile and other countries, as well as current salary projections for Chileans with and without a college degree. By looking

at debt per student and GDP per capita, we can compare debt relative to GDP, which will offer us a more baseline approach to examining countries of different economic sizes. By doing so, a comparison between countries like Chile and the United States, for instance, begins to hold more relevancy. Comparisons such as these work towards quantifying how the economic situation in Chile compares to the experiences faced by students across the world. In addition, comparing the salaries between college graduates and individuals with a secondary education helps to determine what the return on investment is for higher education in Chile. These two parameters seek to determine whether the financial situation in Chile is unique and to what extent student debt is or is not a manageable burden. However, these are only two aspects of a significantly more complex economic problem facing Chile.

To further examine the underlying economic issues behind Chile's education situation, I will compare the amount of public funding present in the country to levels seen in other countries, as well as take an historical outlook for Chile itself. Specifically, I will look at the percent of GDP spent on higher education in Chile and other OECD countries to determine if academia is prioritized in the government budget to an adequate level. If the Chilean government provides the same percentage of its budget to education from year to year, the problem would lie in the rising costs of tuition throughout the country, relative to the growth rate of the economy. If, however, the government has continued to slash public funding to higher education, reformative action which be to better allocate funds to universities, which would help to remedy the financial burden currently forced upon students throughout Chile. Historical context would ultimately prove useful in determining what courses of action would be most effective in conquering this aspect of Chile's academic crisis.

Next, I will compare the varying degrees of success developed countries have had with respect to their methods of quality assurance in higher education. I feel that this method of assessment provides a more level playing field between the different OECD states due to the lower amount of economic resources necessary to produce an effective system. While public funding is reliant on the economic prosperity of the country in question, every country in the OECD has the governmental infrastructure necessary to produce a bureaucratic board responsible for regulating curriculums taught at universities. In this section, I will examine different accreditation methods employed in a variety of countries and show how the wealthiest countries do not necessarily need to have the most successful quality assurance programs. I plan to show how Chile would be able to reform the programs it has in place that are responsible for accrediting institutions of higher education without having to dramatically change the government's budget allocations. If the country can ensure that higher education remains a worthy investment, students would presumably be more accepting of rising tuition costs. Put another way, if the return on investment for higher education remained substantial enough, students would be accepting of the higher costs necessary to attend universities, without having to resort to protests and other grassroots demonstrations.

To conclude this study, I will take the results of my analysis of current policy, as well as the advice given by international institutions like the OECD, to outline different measures that Chile could consider moving forward. These legislation suggestions will take the form of both economic and bureaucratic changes which could address both the public funding and quality assurance problems which are currently impeding academic development in Chile. Within this discussion, considerations will be made regarding Chile's political future. Since the public will be expecting a more conservative leader in the next administration, I would predict that the broad

policy changes that we have seen under President Bachelet will come to an end. The question then remains is as follows: to what extent will Chile's next president adhere to or ignore the demands of the student protestors? Without the foresight to predict the future, I will provide alternative scenarios of varying degrees of policy change which may garner more reception from a conservative government, even if they may not have the backbone necessary to entirely invoke the level of change students have demanded.

Literature Review

The field of quality assurance in higher education had not started to take hold in developed countries until the 1980s. Initial pushes were made in countries like the United Kingdom to ensure that academics provided students with certain marketable skills which would prove useful once the shift was made from academia into the job market.¹ Although this field of study is rather young, many scholars hold similar opinions about what quality assurance programs should accomplish, thus leading many countries towards adopting programs that reflect each other. Chuo-Chun Hsieh and Jeroen Huisman explain that, "Introducing reform in a [globalizing] world generally adheres to looking at the policies implemented elsewhere. In this context, notions like policy transfer, borrowing, learning and policy convergence have been frequently applied to address policy adoption and the process of educational policy change."² For the context of this research, it is evident that an understanding of policy implementation in foreign countries, as well as recommendations given by academics, are vital to forming policy recommendations that could be adopted in Chile.

¹ Hsieh, Jeroen and Chuo-Chun Huisman, "Higher Education Policy Change in the European Higher Education Area: Divergence of Quality Assurance Systems in England and the Netherlands," *Research Papers in Education* 32, no. 1 (January 2017): 71.

² *Ibid.*, 71.

Two countries that have established successful, yet unique, quality assurance programs are England and the Netherlands. What makes their endeavors noteworthy to this study is how they show the variety of approaches a country can take when tackling this issue. England began to develop its quality assurance program in the mid-1980s. Before government involvement, quality in England's universities began and ended with "self-governing communities, involving academics and professional agencies."³ Rather than stripping the academic community of their autonomy, the British government sought to implement reforms gradually, opting for an evolutionary approach, rather than one which was revolutionary.⁴ Over the next two decades, England would establish the Academic Audit Unit, which examined individual universities and placed judgment on the quality of their academics, the Teaching Quality Assessment, which created reports for university investors and the public, and a system where government funding was tethered to how universities performed in academic assessments. Most importantly, assessment became contingent upon how institutions performed in extrinsic matters such as value for money and indicators of performance, rather than relying entirely upon standardized testing.⁵ In addition, the system employed to rate schools changed from a descriptive measurement to one that assigned numbers that described performance in key areas. In this respect, comparing different institutions could be achieved in a more objective manner. These changes were meant to combat the ambiguous assessment protocol which relied upon judging schools by the goals that they had produced for themselves.⁶

At the time when England and other European countries were radically changing their academic systems, the Dutch system had remained stagnant in its development from 1986

³ Ibid., 74.

⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁶ Ibid., 75.

through the early 2000s.⁷ In 2002, however, the Dutch government amended its accreditation system in a revolutionary way. The committees that had overseen accreditation in the 90s had been governed by recruits from professional fields, rather than academic appointees. Academics and government officials alike argued that this system had generally produced mixed results. Under the new Netherlands Accreditation Organization (NVAO), academic evaluation was conducted by government officials, oversight of external university assessments was controlled by NVAO, and a distinction was made between the structures of bachelor and masters programs.⁸ Accreditation was generally dependent on how institutions performed with respects to outputs, rather than the process of teaching and learning.⁹ In many ways, the quality assurance process followed the examples used in England whereby extrinsic valuation was prioritized. Under this new system, government funding was also changed to allot successful programs public money for a term of six years, at which point accreditation would need to be renewed, while failing programs were given two years to improve themselves before losing funds. Such a method of allocating resources incentivized improvements to higher education without stripping less successful schools of their means by which they could improve their academic programs. Although the new accreditation system would be revised periodically to become more diverse and better assist the needs of universities, this landmark piece of legislation highlights the rapid transformation the Netherlands were able to successfully execute to update their quality assurance procedures.

Extending outside of Europe, countries are struggling to ensure that higher education prepares students to enter the job market. The rhetoric behind the student protests in Chile has

⁷ Ibid.,75.; El-Khawas, Elaine, "Quality Assurance as a Policy Instrument: What's Ahead?," *Quality in Higher Education* 19, no. 2 (July 2013): 249.

⁸ Hsieh and Huisman, "Higher Education Policy," 75-76.

⁹ Ibid., 76.

indicated that job opportunities are the greatest problem facing students upon graduation. To assume that any other aspect of quality, with respect to higher education, was more important would be irresponsible for the context of this project. Although each country's academic system is unique, both Colombia and Ecuador face similar problems in higher education to those seen in Chile. Each country expanded their systems of higher education at relatively the same time, as demand for such institutions multiplied.¹⁰ This detail cannot be understated, as scholars generally believe that the massive increase in matriculation sizes, which grew in Colombia from 80,000 students in 1970, to 873,000 in 2000, has certainly been a catalyst for the ever-growing problems with respect to quality assurance. Furthermore, Colombia had been very adamant about following a neoliberal model when structuring their academic system, while Ecuador had been influenced by their Christian faith, both of which are philosophies which have governed the Chilean system.¹¹ As such, it is useful for us to examine Colombia and Ecuador to see if recommendations towards how these countries can improve could also be potential solutions in the case of Chile.

The questions of quality and equality are omnipotent in higher education throughout Latin America. Although Mariana Bandeira and Nadia Rubaii emphasize how academics throughout Latin America are far from homogenous, there are problems concerning student readiness for employment that extend past the borders of any one country.¹² There is a schism between the different forces at play in Latin American universities, where professors prioritize academic engagement and providing students with greater knowledge and understanding of the

¹⁰ Bandeira, Mariana Lima and Madia M. Rubaii, "El valor del análisis de discurso en los estudios comparativos de políticas públicas. El caso de aseguramiento de calidad en la educación superior en Colombia y Ecuador / The Value of Discourse Analysis in Comparative Public Policy Studies. The Case of Higher Education Quality Assurance in Colombia and Ecuador," *Estudios Políticos* 49 (April 2016): 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

world around them. Employers, however, simply value hard skills that relate directly to job responsibilities. Students generally seek to become employable in well-paying jobs that require higher education.¹³ Differences in goals and definitions have hampered the governments of Ecuador and Colombia from enforcing a universal quality system, as neither government has been able to explicitly state how quality would be measured. Furthermore, neither Ecuador nor Colombia have adequately established an obligatory assessment program. In Colombia, assessment remains voluntary, but encouraged. While the most prestigious universities are adamant about participation, they only recruit to the country's highest achievers, thus leaving all other students without options. In Ecuador, politicians may say to the public that evaluation is mandatory, but academics argue that universities are able to find ways around an accreditation system that ought to be more transparent than it is.¹⁴

Ultimately, the research with respect to these two countries indicates that there is a potential for reform in the future. While there are ongoing debates about whether change should be revolutionary or evolutionary, it's generally agreed upon that the current system is not producing results that are acceptable to the government or public. Presently, the most optimistic avenue for change appears to be a restructuring of the accreditation system utilized by both countries. Bandeira and Rubaii discuss the "division of responsibilities" in Colombia, where academic leaders play a role in this ongoing discussion with government officials, which has produced positive discourse.¹⁵ A continuation of this union in Colombia, as well as its extension into other parts of Latin America may prove useful, especially if officials working on quality assurance are able to find remedies to problems in places where this partnership is established.

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵ Ibid., 28-29.

Chile's move towards higher education evaluation began in the late 1990s with a trial system that would become a precursor to further government reform in the mid-2000s. Although the initial push for quality assurance had been viewed as quite informal, Chile's universities had been willing to participate in the system.¹⁶ Since the 1990s, the accreditation system has evolved into a more established procedure, which can be broken down into two parts: a self-evaluation process and a peer review assessment in academics and management. Accreditation extends further into three categories: research, graduate courses, and community engagement.¹⁷ In 2006, the government agency, the National Commission of Accreditation (CNA), was established to bureaucratize the accreditation process. Under the CNA, institutional accreditation is awarded for a term of somewhere between two and seven years. In a study conducted by a team of Chilean scholars, fifty-two out of fifty-eight universities examined had received accreditation, with universities which were eligible for public funding being accredited for a longer period on average than private universities which were ineligible for funding. It has been noted that longer accreditation periods are generally given to institutions that have the funds necessary to produce high-profile research and advanced graduate programs.¹⁸ This phenomenon has created a greater divide between the wealthier, older universities which receive financial support from the government, and the newer, privately funded universities which arose after the academic legislative changes of the early 1980s that dissolved the eight university system.

Although quality assurance measures have continued to develop in Chile for almost two decades, there is general agreement that these programs have been unable to ensure a sufficient standard of quality in higher education. The number of universities in Chile has grown from

¹⁶ López, Daniel A., Maria Rojas, Boris A. López, Daniel C. López "Chilean Universities and Institutional Quality Assurance Processes," *Quality Assurance in Education* 23, no 2 (2015): 167.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

eight in 1980 to sixty in 2013, in addition to the monumental growth seen in other forms of higher education, specifically professional and technical schools.¹⁹ While universities have been generally accepting of the accreditation procedures, other institutions of higher learning have often decided to opt out of the process, due in large part to its voluntary nature. This had led to issues where the amount of funding dedicated to improving academics has been disproportionately low, relative to the cost to attend these institutions. Evaluation in Chile has often been dependent on qualitative analyses, with a strong emphasis placed on the fulfillment of institutionally determined goals and values.²⁰ Much of the self-evaluation report used in Chile is determined through the “experience and capability of the peers and the council to interpret the facts and decisive factors” of these qualitative valuations.²¹ While studies have been conducted which show that quality assurance has been successful in individual cases in Chile, there has been no agreement that it has improved higher education at large, which may be attributed to the voluntary aspect of academic assessment.²² If the only universities opting into the quality assurance protocols already maintain adequate academic programs, the regulations will not actually work to improve academia in Chile.

Quality assurance remains a widely debated topic in academia, due in large part to its novelty. How, for instance, can quality assurance programs be implemented that offer legitimate assessments when higher education institutes maintain a broad array of goals and methods of reaching those goals?²³ It’s apparent that quality assurance is a vital part of ensuring students receive an education that prepares them for job opportunities, but, as exemplified by Ecuador and

¹⁹ Ibid., 167.

²⁰ Ibid., 177.

²¹ Ibid., 177.

²² Ibid., 176.

²³ Skolnik, Michael L., “How Do Quality Assurance Systems Accommodate the Differences between Academic and Applied Higher Education?” *Higher Education*; Dordrecht 71, no. 3 (March 2016): 361.

Colombia, identifying how quality should be quantified is not as simple as it may appear.

Although agencies devoted to quality assurance have been generally well received by established universities and their investors, other institutions like technical schools have not garnered the same legitimacy, which may have negative impacts on the diversity of higher education, or the inconsistent application of quality assurance programs.²⁴ One policy implementation that may remedy the differentiation in goals between institutes is to offer multiple definitions for quality in the academic sphere. Extended definitions could set out to describe how job placement, professional background of academic faculty, and expected learning outcomes play important roles behind professional institutes and other schools of applied learning, in addition to the more traditional definitions prescribed to academic universities.²⁵ Such measures may help to ensure that higher education remains diverse enough to appeal to the various needs of a country's student body.

Today, the methods in which countries establish quality assurance frameworks are relatively homogenous, which has allowed governments to continue to improve these systems, rather than reinvent the wheel.²⁶ Governments typically establish third party organizations which assess universities on their own accord. These organizations are then utilized by governments to determine public finance. It has also become common place in recent years to see these agencies collaborating with organizations on an international scale, which has led to more consistent outcomes across developed countries.²⁷ For these reasons, there are compelling reasons to remain optimistic regarding the field of quality assurance.

²⁴ El-Khawas, "Quality Assurance as a Policy Instrument," 248.; Skolnik, "How Do Quality Assurance Systems," 361-362.

²⁵ Ibid., 374-375.

²⁶ El-Khawas, "Quality Assurance as a Policy Instrument," 250.

²⁷ Ibid., 250.

While there has been initial success for countries that have adopted quality assurance measures, the practice of continuing to adapt and support regulations remains vital to the success or failure for the agencies responsible for carrying out these measures. Some scholars have argued that the agencies placed in charge of assessing institutions of higher education have proven their merit and therefore deserve greater autonomy in their proceedings.²⁸ The question remains whether such policy would increase the efficiency and independence of these agencies, or whether it would allow politics and university influence to greater control the accreditation process. Furthermore, governments could choose to allocate funds towards research regarding the effectiveness of quality assurance systems thus far. While compelling, there may not be large enough motivation on the government's behalf to provide such funds or autonomy. As circumstances currently stand, the accreditation process remains a product of government action, and therefore subject to the individual goals of politicians. Where concern is mostly held in this respect is with government priority. If governments were to determine that quality assurance was no longer a worthy cause, relative to its costs, programs could very easily be undercut by future government actions. For the momentum seen in this field to continue to break grounds in higher education, populations will need to vocalize their approval of these measures and pressure governments to continue to expand upon them.

Differing Chilean Finances from Quality Assurance

Beyond quality assurance, government finance plays a significant role in shaping higher education in any country. Although these two fields are often connected, with government funding being entwined with university accreditation, they are often viewed as separate entities,

²⁸ Ibid., 253

due in large part to the greater variability in money allocation. While a government may follow international norms by establishing an accreditation process, this does not guarantee that sufficient funds will be set aside for higher education. Furthermore, countries with similar quality assurance systems may not provide similar quantities of monetary assistance nor distribute funds in similar ways. As such, the two fields will be examined separately throughout much of this study.

An issue to recently garner academic attention out of Chile's higher education system is retention rates at institutions. Many students who initially enroll in universities and technical schools ultimately drop out within the first few years of their studies. Many politicians, academics, and non-governmental organizations have recently become concerned with the role that financial aid plays, not just within the scope of expanding access to higher education to a greater number of people, but also towards student persistence in their respective fields and graduation rates.²⁹

The question of financial aid has been broken down into two parts: the amount of financial aid that is provided to students and the types of financial aid that are provided. The common rhetoric given by some scholars, the student protestors, and even President Bachelet is that higher education of adequate quality should be offered to students for free.³⁰ Presumably, this would mean that all students would be offered grants which would cover the cost of tuition at a higher education institute in full. However, a study which examines the different forms of financial aid in Chile noted that the most successful forms of aid, with respect to student

²⁹ Santelices, María Verónica, Ximena Catalán, Diana Kruger, and Catherine Horn "Determinants of Persistence and the Role of Financial Aid: Lessons from Chile," *Higher Education*; Dordrecht 71, no. 3 (March 2016): 324.

³⁰ Leihy Peodair, and Jose M. Salazar, "The Moral Dimension in Chilean Higher Education's Expansion," *Higher Education*; Dordrecht 74, no. 1 (July 2017): 155.

persistence in an academic program, are the state-backed unsubsidized loan program, denoted as CAE, and need based government grants.³¹ Both the OECD and World Bank have expressed interests in investigating the impact of these types of aid, but if studies continue to be produced which replicate the results found here, one could conclude that an entirely free education program may not be the only way to yield the desired results of increasing retention rates and producing a greater quantity of college graduates.

Much of the past decade has been unintuitive for expanding higher education in Chile in a healthy manner. In 2006, Chile's expansion of private market control of academia was put into effect. Initially, this change was viewed positively by economists who pointed to the growing number of students who were able to finance their education and the outpour of international funds into the system.³² Economists believed that the investment in higher education was sound and that any detriments accrued through private loans would be worth the expansion of highly educated students in Chile, who would earn higher wages, consume more goods, and pay more taxes.³³ Although some stipulations have been made, where it was argued that monthly payments ought not be too high and loans should not be administered in discriminatory ways, this transition to privately funded education was generally viewed as a positive way to remedy the rising costs of tuition in the mid-2000s. Unfortunately, hindsight has not been as kind to this program.

Recently, there has been a growing concern towards the privatization of Chile's education system, with scholars and politicians urging for a pullback on some of the more

³¹ Santelices et al., "Determinants of Persistence," 339.

³² Larrain, Christian and Salvador Zurita, "The New Student Loan System in Chile's Higher Education," *Higher Education* 55, no. 6 (2008): 683.

³³ *Ibid.*, 686.

controversial policies. Currently, higher education institutions are run as businesses, which seek to be profitable, rather than schools which are meant to promote the development of students.³⁴ Although it would be nice to see a Chile where these two aspects of academia could coexist, the reality of the situation thus far has indicated that institutions which seek to produce a profit have been less academically rigorous and have produced students who are largely unprepared to enter the workforce. The rise of the for-profit institution is generally viewed as a byproduct of the growing rates of enrollment in universities and technical schools. While rising matriculation levels should not be viewed as a problem by themselves, it is clear that the Chilean government had not prepared higher education for the growing pains of such an expansion. For years, the amount of money that was given by the government to support education has remained relatively unchanged, even as the number of students who require support continues to grow. This explains the decline in public funding as a percent of total funds devoted to education from over 63% in 1981 to 28% in 2007. In this same period, the percent of revenue raised from tuition fees increased from just over 13% to 25%.³⁵ In addition, many institutions have found ways around the laws which prohibit schools from profiting off their students. In a collective study led by Gustavo Gregorutti, Oscar Espinoza, Luis Eduardo González, and Javier Loyola, they argued that for-profit actions of schools, coupled with decreasing government assistance, has made equal opportunities for access to education impossible, despite what the initial economic forecasts had stated.³⁶ These scholars ultimately argue that “it is not improved learning practices but economic reforms that hold the solution to the education-jobs gap,” which thus highlights

³⁴ Gregorutti, Gustavo, Oscar Espinoza, Luis Eduardo González, and Javier Loyola, “What If Privatising Higher Education Becomes an Issue?,” *Compare*; Oxford 46, no. 1 (2016): 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

that the problems faced by higher education are inherently tied to how financial aid is being allotted, in addition to the issues that have been noted with respect to quality assurance.³⁷

Under President Bachelet, there had been room for optimism for academic programs that were affordable for the working classes, considering her determination to address the student protestors. Although her administration has made some steps in the right direction with promises that higher education will be made free for students from families who were most in need of assistance, 2017 marked the last full year of her term in office. Because of this, the question of education remains unanswered, especially as it becomes increasingly likely that her successor will share very different opinions about the future of higher education.

After corresponding with Diane Brown, the social sciences librarian at Tisch, I have determined that I will utilize a succinct handful of sources which have been producing data regarding government expenditure on education and economic levels in Chile over the past several years. These sources include the OECD, which maintains an ongoing effort to measure fiscal policy in member states and annual evaluations of higher education, and the World Bank, which monitors government finance projects on a wide variety of fields. My plan is to explore the different analyses produced by these organizations to create a narrative of how government funding has evolved over time and how these changes have affected students. My analysis will primarily explore levels of funding students have received over the years, the different types of funding that are offered, and how the debt accrued by students compares to the anticipated differences in salaries between graduates and those who have received partial or no higher education.

³⁷ Ibid., 152.

Most of the research produced about higher education in Chile focuses on explaining the problems that are currently being faced, with possible policy solutions being presented more as an afterthought. My goal for this paper is to present my analysis of current academic affairs in the context of how policy measures could be addressed in the future and examine the likelihood that solutions that have been implemented abroad could be incorporated and succeed in Chile. It is notable that President Bachelet has been elected to the presidency twice in her career, but the problems that plague students have persisted. This unfortunate reality stands to show that solving these problems will require more than an administration's desire to seek reform. While some laws have been enacted or recommended which would transition the burden of financing tuition away from students and onto the government, there are still legitimate reasons for the student protests, which have yet to subside.

As President Bachelet's term comes to an end, there is cause for concern for student activists. The transition to the more conservative Piñera Administration does not bode well for socialized education, especially if his first term in office can be viewed as a precursor for what is to come. I plan to document Piñera's time in office and attempt to determine if this second term will be influenced by the pressures from the student movements, and whether these protests could possibly change his attitude towards government sponsored education reforms. In addition, I will consider a wide array of policy and monetary options which could offer varying degrees of success, but at the benefit of increasingly probable chances of being enacted by a conservative presidency. My hope for this analysis is to offer a more practical view of education policy, which extends past the theoretical recommendations of scholars and provides context for what is genuinely possible in the years to come.

Developing a Study about Policy, Economics, and Higher Education

This study will be divided into three sections: an analysis of public finance for higher education in Chile and other developed countries, an examination of policy related to quality assurance both within Chile and abroad, and an analysis of President Piñera and his approach towards the student protests during his first administration and during the 2017 election.

Throughout the paper, I will also take a historical approach, discussing how Chile's history under the more socialist administrations of Frei and Allende provide context for the modern student protests. Each of these themes take on different aspects of the higher education debate and will therefore require different methodologies. As such, I will discuss these topics separately, beginning with the historical aspect.

For the historical dimension of this study, I will create an analysis which compares the student protests of the mid-20th century to the movements of today, and which presents changes in policy which were enacted as a response. Examining the student protests that occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s in Chile should provide context for the student movements that exist today. I plan to examine whether the pressure placed on the government by such inflammatory demonstrations acts as a catalyst for progressive change, with respect to higher education. Historically, student protests led to increased financial support from the government, which in turn increased matriculation levels from working class families in the universities. My intention is to show how this phenomenon may continue in the 21st century.

There are some important distinctions that must be addressed when discussing protest movements. Presidents Frei and Allende, who held office from 1964-1970 and 1970-1973 respectively, held distinctly different ideologies to the current president-elect, President Piñera. I plan to break down the beliefs of these three individuals because it is important to acknowledge

whether their ideologies would make them more, or less, sympathetic to student demands. Fortunately, President Piñera has already been president of Chile once, which means his first term in office can be studied extensively and compared to his more liberal presidential counterparts, Frei and Allende, who also needed to answer to university students. In addition, President Piñera was elected before the onset of the modern student protests. Part of the historical analysis will discuss how the student protests may have played a role in the rejection of conservatism in 2014, when Chile chose to elect a more liberal candidate, President Bachelet, and whether President Piñera would now view the protests as a legitimate political movement which would need to be addressed.

In addition to differences in ideology between candidates, an explanation of the shift in the university system will be required. Under Pinochet, the qualifications required to be labeled an institution of higher learning changed to allow for the creation of more universities and technical schools. This shift in academic structure has led to many changes regarding quality assurance and public finance which did not exist during the Frei and Allende administrations. Therefore, any historical analysis of Chile's higher education will need to address this staunch difference in legislation that did not exist during the prior student movements.

Policy recommendations are split into increases to public finance for higher education and bureaucratic changes to quality assurance. This latter category has become an important field of discussion internationally over the course of the past few decades. When determining how the Chilean government can ensure that its citizens are receiving a quality education, it will be useful to examine how other countries are tackling the same problem. Therefore, the quality assurance programs utilized abroad, and how they compare to Chile's own system, will be the focal point of this aspect my discussion about policy.

Before examining the approaches used to judge academic quality in universities and technical schools, it is important to provide some basic views regarding the subject. At the most foundational level, “quality” does not have a singular definition when describing academic curriculums. With the variety of student needs across academic programs, types of institutions of higher education, and countries involved in the analysis, no single definition for quality can be employed. Baring this in mind, there appears to be a consensus regarding what Chilean students want to receive from their studies. In general, students want to receive an education that will permit them to enter into the job market with greater ease. Later in this study, I will examine the differences in job prospects between students who have attended different forms of higher education, which will show how students who receive degrees from tertiary education institutions are dramatically more likely to receive well-paying jobs than those who attended technical schools. While some deviation should be expected, the wage gaps and differences in employment rates are astounding. The demands made by students will therefore play an important role when I examine what the Chilean government should expect from academic programs and the institutions that provide them. Further explanations will be provided for the different types of institutions, from universities to technical and professional schools, and how they are legally defined in Chile. A description of these fundamental aspects of the quality debate will provide the context for all subsequent analysis.

The purpose of examining the implementation of quality assurance in other countries is to provide possible solutions for the quality problem being faced in Chilean academia. Although placing regulations on the curriculum taught in institutions of higher learning is inherently in opposition to the capitalist notions upon which Chile based its academic system, I plan to prove that quality assurance is the less politically radical way to alleviate the problems faced by

students. Part of presenting quality assurance as a more conservative solution to the problems at hand is presenting examples of how other countries have adopted measures to reform their own academic institutions and determining the success that these measures have had. Countries that have effectively implemented quality assurance programs could act as prime examples for Chile in the future, especially since the Chilean government has already tried to reform their academic policies over the past few years. My hope here is to present changes to quality assurance measures as the bare minimum to policy reform, with changes to public funding for education more as stretch goals, due to their costlier nature.

Examining public funding of education will also take on a comparative element, as much of the research that has been done on this subject looks at Chile in relation to developed countries. Chile is a member of the OECD, which means there is an abundance of factors related to higher education which are examined and compared to other OECD countries annually. Furthermore, the Chilean government enlisted the OECD to help determine what steps can be taken to improve the country's higher education system. Much of the work that has already been accomplished looks at the amount allotted to funding higher education and how much families are required to spend. While both factors are useful and will be incorporated into this analysis, there are some issues that should be addressed. Although a member of the OECD, Chile does not have the same economic resources as other developed countries like the United States or parts of Europe. Therefore, a comparative analysis will need to account for such differences to present fair expectations for Chile's economic capabilities with respect to funding higher education.

I will show that even though Chile's economy is not the same size as those found in wealthier countries, there is still more that can be done to support students who are trying to attend institutions of higher learning. An examination of how much students are borrowing from

the government and private loan providers and comparing this figure to median GDP per capita will work to offset the differences in economic size between countries. Although the average family income may vary depending on country of origin, examining debt as a percentage of GDP can work to negate these factors. Incorporated in this part of my paper will be a discussion regarding the cost of tuition and how much the government is investing in higher education for each student. In addition to the amount of money students are borrowing to acquire an education is the financial burden being placed on families to pay for tuition before taking out loans. The amount of money being used for higher education and the amount being paid by families are both measured by such organizations as the OECD and the World Bank. Their data will prove crucial for the bulk of this analysis.

In the same vein, I will look at how wage projection increases for individuals who complete their studies and examine how their wages compare to those who never attend institutions of higher learning or attend but do not complete their curriculums. Such an analysis will seek to determine whether enrollment in an academic program is a worthy investment in Chile. This kind of analysis can also be extended to incorporate other countries to determine if the initial economic losses of attending an institution are more detrimental in Chile, relative to other developed countries. Again, the anticipated changes in wages can be viewed in terms of percentages, with expected wages for non-attendees being established as the baseline, rather than solely measuring increases and decreases in terms of specific monetary values. Examining these values as percentages will continue to establish an analysis where countries of different economic sizes can be compared on a more equal standard.

The information gathered from quality assurance programs and levels of public funding will ultimately be presented as a spectrum of potential reforms to policy which the government

can pursue to varying degrees. The main goal is to provide options which the government could take to appease the student demands, once it is determined whether the protest movements create enough pressure on the government to justify action.

If the scope of legislative change historically can be an indicator of how reforms would likely occur in President Piñera's second term, it's rather likely that this debate will move rather slowly. By breaking down policy reform into quality assurance and public funding, it becomes more likely that some level of compromise can be met which starts to alleviate the problems which students bare, rather than making students and politicians alike endure an all-or-nothing scenario, where neither side is able to compromise. It would be good to see the forthcoming administration do something to make strides in the right direction, which could help students in the near future, even if complete alleviation of the students' demands cannot be accomplished until much farther into the future.

The Finances Behind a Chilean Education

The conflict between students and their government has been an ongoing dilemma in Chile for decades. Concerns regarding tuition costs have fueled student protests since the late 1960s, when Chileans participated in the global activist movement of the Generation of 68 by taking to the streets to demand greater accessibility to higher education.³⁸ A core proponent to the protests was the belief that tertiary education was the stepping stone by which working class youths could elevate their socioeconomic status and reform a Chilean government whose legislative goals often favored the country's elite.³⁹ The rhetoric of the student protests during

³⁸ Salazar Vergara, Gabriel and Julio Pinto, *Historia Contemporánea de Chile*. LOM Ediciones. Santiago, Chile (1999): 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

the 1960s and 70s contains many of the same arguments and goals as the movements of today. This fact is important because the changes in policy made during the prior movements have since become the desired results for the current protests.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, students found political allies in the presidencies of Frei and Allende. Under these two administrations, universities received government support which ultimately helped to expand access to higher education to a greater number of students, primarily from the country's working class. President Frei attempted to increase accessibility to higher education for working class families by increasing the amount of money set aside to subsidize tuition costs. The effects of this policy decision are abundantly clear, as the size of matriculating classes increased by approximately 12% annually during President Frei's time in office.⁴⁰ It's apparent that the efforts made by President Frei to increase the affordability of higher education compelled more youths to pursue a tertiary education in Chile. Additionally, this change in financial policy set a precedent that President Allende would follow, whereby spending towards higher education would continue to increase until the point where students could obtain a tertiary degree entirely through government aid.

At the onset of the 1970s, only 2.1 percent of students in Chilean universities were from the working class, while the rest were from the middle and upper classes.⁴¹ Furthermore, private universities consisted of only members of the middle and upper classes. A major goal of the Allende Administration was to shift the pursuit of higher education towards a meritocracy, rather than continuing admissions based on wealth. To accomplish this, President Allende included

⁴⁰ Brunner, José Joaquín, *Informe Sobre La Educación Superior En Chile*. Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales. Santiago, Chile (1986): 48.

⁴¹ Fischer, Kathleen B., *Political Ideology and Educational Reform in Chile, 1964-1976*. UCLA Latin American Center, University of California. Los Angeles, California (1979): 63.

more spending to universities in the government budget than seen during any other period from the 1960s through the 1980s.⁴² Such increases in financial assistance led to an almost doubling of the number of matriculating students over the course of four years from 76,979 individuals in 1970 to 145,663 in 1973.⁴³ Where matriculation levels increased by 12% annually under President Frei, they increased by approximately 23% annually under President Allende.⁴⁴ More importantly, government spending had increased to a level where students were obtaining their tertiary degrees without having to pay tuition, which would ultimately symbolize the main goal of protests in the modern era. Chilean protestors today look back on the history of student protests in their country and they see an era where students demanded free education, and free education they received. This phenomenon continues to be a driving force behind today's student movements, whereby the demand for free education appears to be a possible outcome. If activists were able to achieve this demand in the 1970s, it would make sense to believe that such goals could be achieved again.

Setting aside the possibility of providing free tertiary education to all students, it is necessary to examine the financial situation behind tertiary education throughout Chile. Many students argue that the costs to obtain a tertiary degree are prohibitive for lower income prospective students, and that such a degree is also necessary for acquiring a well-paying job. To determine the legitimacy of such claims, I will examine the costs to attend an institution of higher learning in many OECD member countries, which will help provide context concerning whether tuition and auxiliary expenses are higher in Chile than abroad. Additionally, I will compare the wages of individuals who have completed a tertiary education to those who stopped

⁴² Arriagada, Patricio R., *El Financiamiento de La Educación Superior En Chile, 1960-1988*. Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales. Santiago, Chile (1989): 31.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁴⁴ Brunner, *Informe Sobre La Educación Superior En Chile*, 33.

after completing a secondary education, as the difference between the two groups will help to quantify the benefits accrued by students for completing a higher education program. Such information will benefit us two-fold, as we may explain whether the costs of education are restrictive to lower income families, and whether economic mobility is contingent upon higher education.

To break down the costs of education, I will start by discussing the financial assistance provided by the Chilean government. Since Chile is a member of the OECD, there is ample data available which breaks down public financing for higher education, and which is updated annually. For the purposes of this analysis, data extending as far back as 2010 will be used. Since the university protests began in 2011, this will provide context for the onset of the student movements, as well as the changes made by the government since. Additionally, 2010 marked the beginning of the Piñera Administration, meaning we receive additional context regarding President Piñera's financial history concerning Chilean academia.

The OECD reported in *Education at a Glance 2017* that “public funding for tertiary education increased by more than 50% between 2010 and 2014” in Chile.⁴⁵ Looking at this figure alone, it would appear that President Piñera's government had been vigorously responding to student demands and that any effects the 2008 financial crisis may have had on financing higher education were being addressed. During this same period, however, the number of students deciding to pursue higher education had substantially increased. Using 2010 as a baseline, the number of students enrolled in tertiary academic programs has consistently increased annually through 2015, the most recent year where data has been made available. This

⁴⁵ OECD, “Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators,” OECD Publishing, Paris, France (2017): 194.

information shows that from 2010 to 2015, there has been a total increase in students of approximately 23%. This increase in enrollment may be a positive indicator for the increases in government expenditure towards higher education. In 2013, the OECD had noted that Chile, which had a graduation rate of 17% for tertiary type-A programs, was well below the OECD average of 32% for the same degree type, which may indicate that there is room for a larger number of graduates if Chile is to be competitive on the global stage.⁴⁶ Such an increase in

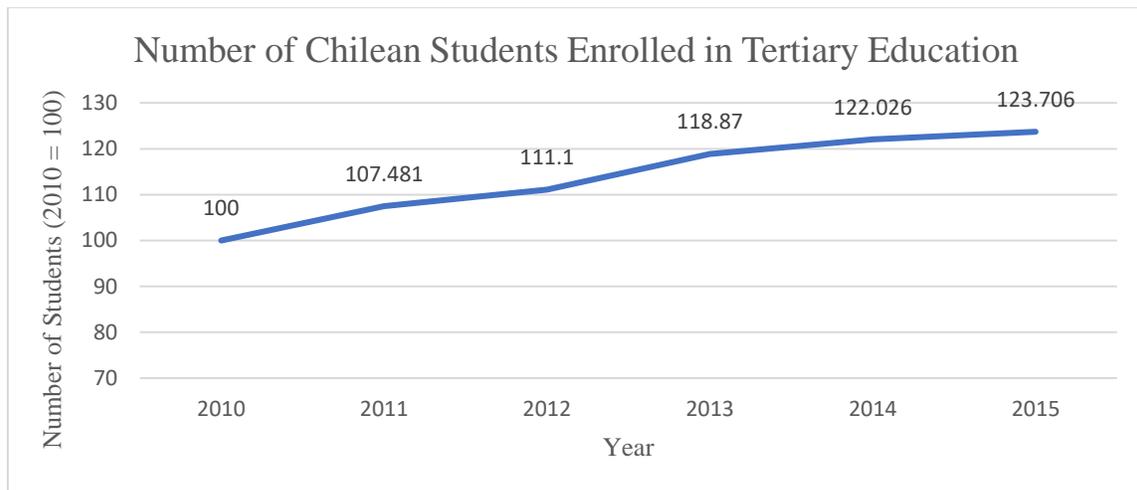


Chart 1: The chart above displays the data provided by the OECD, which highlights the increase in matriculation rates in Chile from 2010 through 2015.⁴⁷

enrollment rates could increase the percentage of youths which graduate from tertiary programs, which could bolster Chile’s economy by expanding the pool of citizens in high wage positions.

Where things get difficult is when examining how this increase in matriculation affects the amount of money spent per student. Where things get difficult is when examining how this increase in matriculation affects the amount of money spent per student. While it’s true that the government increased the total amount of money spent on tertiary education by 50% from 2010

⁴⁶ OECD, “Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators - OECD,” OECD Publishing, Paris, France (2013): 35.

⁴⁷ OECD, “Education Resources - Number of Students - OECD Data.” OECD Publishing, Paris, France.

to 2014, the increase in enrolled students has led to a peaking in financial aid per student in 2012, followed by subsequent decreases in 2013 and 2014.⁴⁸ As shown in table 1, there was a

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Amount Spent Per Student (Chile)	USD 6,863	USD 7,101	USD 8,333	USD 7,960	USD 7,880
Amount Spent Per Student (OECD Average)	USD 13,528	USD 13,958	USD 15,028	USD 15,704	USD 16,143

Table 1: The data above was collected from annual *Education at a Glance* reports from 2012 through 2017. The OECD average for each year is included to provide context regarding how Chile compares globally. Each value has been converted by the OECD from the Chilean Peso into USD using PPPs for GDP.

substantial increase in funds given to students in 2011 and 2012, relative to public funding in 2010, but a continuous decrease during 2013 and 2014, even as trends throughout much of the OECD have been to continually increase the amount spent per student. However, data has not yet been provided by the OECD for subsequent years. Since 2014, the government has made a concerted effort to expand financial aid through the Gratuidad program, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this study. For this reason, it will be interesting to see what data for spending per student will show in the future.

The implications behind the decline in the amount spent per student are worth considering. Earlier, it was suggested that the increase in government spending may have been the cause for the consistent increases in matriculation levels in Chile. If, however, the amount spent per student continued to decrease in 2013 and 2014, the conclusion that students were seeking to attend higher education institutions due to greater financial resources would not hold. As we will see during the discussion about the benefits of higher education in Chile, the job

⁴⁸ OECD, "Education Resources - Education Spending - OECD Data." OECD Publishing, Paris, France.

market currently favors those who have obtained a higher education with higher rates of employment and greater salaries. It is entirely possible that this reality is driving youths to enroll in tertiary academic programs, in spite of government funding. Essentially, the rise in demand for education may offset the decline in the amount spent by the government per student. This could mean that enrollment rates would continue to rise at a greater rate, had the government provided even greater resources, which could in turn lead to a larger percentage of Chileans obtaining tertiary degrees and finding more lucrative job positions. Nevertheless, without any further information on the subject, concrete conclusions will be avoided.

Throughout the period examined in this study, the financial burden to pay for higher education has been placed primarily upon families and other private sources of funding. In 2010, Chile had the highest private share expenditure of tertiary education in all the OECD at 77.9%.⁴⁹ During the same year, the average private share of tertiary education costs in the OECD was 31.6%. Starting in 2011, however, the Chilean government made strides to change this situation and shift a greater portion of the financial burden onto public funds. By 2014, Chile was moved to fourth place for highest private share of tertiary education expenditure, which was a significant improvement over being the highest in the OECD, and private expenditure was down to approximately 64%, a sizable decrease from 77.9%.⁵⁰ Regardless of this effort, the fact remains that students and their families in Chile pay substantially more to obtain an education at a public institution, relative to other OECD countries. Additionally, this grim conclusion is drawn before taking into consideration the fact that wages in Chile are typically smaller than

⁴⁹ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2013," 207.

⁵⁰ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2017," 198.

those seen across the OECD, thus making the financial burden placed on students and their families even greater.

The data given by the OECD shows that Chile has had repugnantly high tuition rates for its public institutions, especially once average wages have been considered. In 2011, after the increase in public finance to higher education, the annual cost to attend a public university, working towards a first degree, in Chile was USD 5,885 per student.⁵¹ The only country in the OECD, where data is available, that surpasses this value was Ireland, which had average tuition costs for the same degree type at a public university of USD 6,450. Every other country either failed to report their data or had tuition costs which were lower than those seen in Chile. This tendency has continued through at least 2015/2016, where the average annual cost to attend a public university in Chile was USD 7,654 for a bachelor's degree and USD 10,359 for an advanced degree.⁵² Again, these values are notably high, relative to the other OECD member states for which data has been made available. The only country which maintained higher tuition rates for public institutions in 2015/2016 was the United States, which charged an average annual rate of \$8,202 for a bachelor's degree and \$11,064 for an advanced degree. What's most notable about this comparison between the United States and Chile is that the United States maintains significantly higher average salaries than those seen in Chile. For a simple comparison, the average salary for an individual in the United States in 2016 was \$60,154, while in Chile the average salary was only \$28,434.⁵³ This means that while the United States may have had slightly higher tuition costs than Chile, the cost relative to average wages, and therefore average household income, was incomparable.

⁵¹ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2013," 232.

⁵² OECD, "Education at a Glance 2017," 220.

⁵³ OECD, "Earnings and Wages - Average Wages - OECD Data," OECD Publishing, Paris, France.

To put this situation into greater context, we can examine how the annual cost of attendance compares, relative to GDP per capita in Chile and abroad. When comparing countries by this metric, we see that Chile has the second lowest GDP per capita in the OECD, at USD 23,210.90. In many ways, this helps explain why metrics like spending per student would be so low. Without a larger economy, the means by which spending per student could increase are harder to come by than in countries like the United States, which has a GDP per capita of USD 56,420.40, or almost double what is seen in Chile. Baring this in mind, the costs of higher education in Chile become even harder to explain. Although wages in Chile are substantially smaller, which ought to lead to reduced higher education expenditures across the board, tuition costs remain among the highest in the OECD. It is evident that the financial reality of attending an institution of higher education in Chile is heightened by the disparity between GDP per capita in Chile and tuition costs, which are more comparable to countries with double the economic capabilities.

Something notable regarding the rising costs of tuition in Chile is how they correlate to the decreasing values of spending per student during the same period. From 2011 to 2016, the government decreased spending per student by just under USD 1,400 on average. In 2011, the cost paid by students to attend a public university, pursuing a first degree, was USD 5,885 annually. By 2016, the costs to pursue the same degree had risen to USD 7,654 annually, thus marking an increase of approximately USD 1,800. This may show that the overall costs for a student to attend an institution of higher learning are stable, at least in the public sector. When the total costs from the public and private sector are added together, the overall rise in tuition over the five-year span from 2011 to 2016 is only USD 388. Relative to the OECD average,

where public expenditure alone on education increased from USD 13,958 per student in 2011⁵⁴ to USD 16,143 per student in 2014,⁵⁵ marking an increase of USD 2,185 per student over a three-year period, the cost of obtaining a higher education in Chile has been relatively stable. What this data shows is that if the cost of tuition remains relatively stable, there may be the possibility for the Chilean government to commit a set amount of money per student annually. This would create a certain amount of consistency for the price of a tertiary degree, even if the amount provided per student was not enough to cover the tuition costs in their entirety. Such measures could help to provide stability for lower income students trying to find the resources to fund their pursuits of higher education.

An area where Chile continues to lag behind other OECD countries is in expanding the portion of students who receive any government assistance to fund their education. Considering the great expenses regarding annual tuition costs, one may conclude that there are many students who require some level of public assistance to supplement the funds provided by one's family. In 2015 in the United States, approximately 84% of students received government support in the form of public loans and grants to fund their education.⁵⁶ During the same year, only 41% of students in Chile received similar public aid. Considering the increased financial burden faced by families in Chile, relative to the United States, once the difference between tuition costs and average wages are taken into consideration, it would make sense for the government to provide public finance options to a similar portion of the population, if not an even greater percentage of students.

⁵⁴ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2014 OECD Indicators," OECD Publishing, Paris, France (2014): 216.

⁵⁵ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2017," 178.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

A factor that needs to be considered is that a large number of students in Chile attend private institutions. While the majority of issues concerning private education will be reserved for this study's chapter on academic quality, a relevant matter here is that students attending private institutions receive significantly fewer public finance options relative to those students who are able to attend public universities.⁵⁷ If nothing else, an expansion of the public loan program in Chile to a greater number of students enrolled in programs through private institutions would help to ensure that students receive the support necessary to complete their degrees. Something to consider is that a study performed in Chile by researchers at the Pontifical Catholic University, the University Adolfo Ibáñez, and the University of Houston showed that public loan programs produced a greater retention rate than public grants.⁵⁸ This could help prove that such an expansion in a public loan program has the possibility to allow more students to complete their degrees, thus producing a more educated population and all the economic benefits that are tethered to that.

Data distributed by the OECD has shown that the pursuit of a higher education produces relatively greater advantages in Chile than in other developed countries. In 2013, the most recent year where data is available, the OECD calculated that the net financial benefits for a man obtaining a tertiary education in Chile were approximately USD 500,000 over a lifetime, with net financial benefits for women being greater than USD 250,000 over a lifetime, when compared to completing an upper secondary education.⁵⁹ The net returns seen by Chilean men are the highest in the OECD, while the benefits seen by women also rank among the highest in the organization. Additionally, data gathered in 2015 shows that wages in Chile for those who have obtained a

⁵⁷ OECD, "Education in Chile, Reviews of National Policies for Education," OECD Publishing, Paris, France (2017): 55.

⁵⁸ Santelices et al, "Determinants of Persistence," 335.

⁵⁹ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2017," 118.

tertiary education are over double the wages seen by those with only an upper secondary degree.⁶⁰ Although this figure has decreased over time, as data from 2013 showed that those with a tertiary degree were projected to earn two and a half times the wages seen by those with an upper secondary degree, this value can still be used to determine that there are significant economic incentives in Chile behind earning a tertiary degree.⁶¹ In fact, this disparity in wages between these two social groups is second only to Mexico in all of the OECD. As such, it should be recognized that although education in Chile is expensive, this data appears to predict that the costs accrued by its pursuit would almost certainly be compensated in the long run to those who are able to finish their academic program.

In addition to greater wages, it has been shown that those in Chile who hold a tertiary degree have greater participation in the country's job market. In 2016, the employment rate for 25-34-year-olds in Chile with a tertiary education was 85%, compared to 69% for individuals with an upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education.⁶² This marks both an above average employment rate for individuals with a tertiary education and a below average rate for those without a higher education, across all the OECD. Something else of note is that those who do not have a tertiary degree experience high levels of inactivity in the job market, meaning they are neither employed, nor are they attempting to acquire a job. In Chile, this percentage of the population is 24% for those with an upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary degree and 32% for individuals who have not receive an upper-secondary degree. To put this in perspective, the OECD average for these measurements are 16% and 30% respectively.⁶³ The data tend to show that individuals who have completed higher education programs generally have a more

⁶⁰ Ibid., 104.

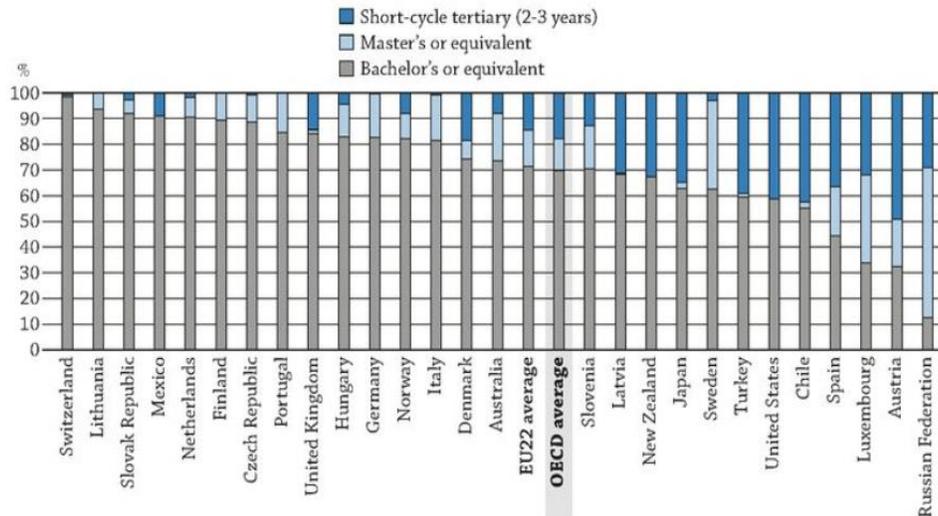
⁶¹ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2013," 100.

⁶² OECD, "Education at a Glance 2017" 103.

⁶³ Ibid., 103

successful experience maneuvering through the job market. As such, these figures help show how pursuing higher education in Chile generally leads to better job prospects, both by improving employability and by increasing projected wages.

Figure A3.2. Distribution of first-time tertiary graduates by level of education (2015)



Graph 2: The data above organize the OECD member states by the percentage of students who receive a bachelor’s as their first tertiary degree. This graph shows that a significant number of students in Chile earn a short-cycle degree, relative to other developed countries. This graph was originally presented by the OECD report Education at a Glance 2017 on page 67.

A distinction needs to be made when discussing projected changes in wages and employability. The OECD divides tertiary education into two specific categories: Tertiary-type A programs are generally “theory-based” and prepare students for advanced professions such as medicine, while Tertiary-type B programs offer more practical and occupational teachings, which are meant to provide students with the skills necessary for “direct entry into the labor market.”⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ To be classified as type A, a program must be offered at a university and must last for at least three years, while a type B program does not have such an institutional requirement and generally only lasts for two years. As can be seen in Graph 2, there is a significant portion of

⁶⁴ OECD, “OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms - Tertiary-Type A Education (ISCED 5A) Definition,” Web.

⁶⁵ OECD, “OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms - Tertiary-Type B Education (ISCED 5B) Definition,” Web.

Chilean students who graduate from these tertiary-type B programs.⁶⁶ The percentage of students who graduate from these programs, approximately 40% of all first-time tertiary graduates, is unusually high, relative to other OECD countries. While these programs are relatively cheap, when compared to earning a bachelor’s degree from a public or accredited private university, the projected salary outcomes and employability for students who enroll and graduate from type-B programs are noticeably less lucrative in Chile.

	2011	2013	2015
Employment Rate (Short-Cycle Degree)	80%	81%	80%
Employment Rate (Bachelor’s Degree)	86%	85%	86%
Earnings, relative to average for upper-secondary education (Short-Cycle Degree)	151	132	142
Earnings, relative to average for upper-secondary education (Bachelor’s Degree)	290	282	264

Chart 2: The data above shows the employment rates for individuals with a short-cycle degree and a bachelor’s degree, and their earnings relative to individuals with an upper-secondary education in Chile in 2011, 2013, and 2015. For relative earnings, individuals with an upper-secondary education have earnings represented by 100. The data provided was originally from the OECD Education at a Glance reports for 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. The first two reports provided data for the year of 2011, while the third and fourth reports provided data for 2013 and 2015 respectively.⁶⁷

As shown in Chart 2, students who earn a bachelor’s degree earn significantly more and experience higher employment rates than individuals who receive a short-cycle degree. Since short-cycle degrees are the cheaper alternative to earning a bachelor’s degree in Chile, it would be clear to determine that this option is the most accessible for students from working class

⁶⁶ OECD, “Education at a Glance 2017,” 67.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 85, 114.; OECD, “Education at a Glance 2016 – OECD Indicators,” OECD Publications, Paris, France (2016): 103, 125.; OECD, “Education at a Glance 2015 – OECD Indicators,” OECD Publications, Paris, France (2015): 125.; OECD, “Education at a Glance 2014,” 114.

families. In Chile over the past several years, the public and private accredited universities have admitted a disproportionately large number of students from the higher socioeconomic classes. These are the same universities that grant the majority of bachelor's degrees and all advanced degrees. Therefore, the universities which offer the easiest access to higher paying jobs, which are necessary to rise into the higher economic classes, are reserved for students who are already from wealthy families, therefore stifling the potential that higher education has to produce social mobility for the working classes.

Although the number of students enrolled in higher education has continued to rise throughout Chile, approximately 40% of the students who ultimately graduate are obtaining degrees which only marginally increase projected wages. In *Education at a Glance 2014*, the OECD provided data which showed that young individuals, from 25 to 34, earned smaller wages than the total average at all levels of education.⁶⁸ In 2011, for a type-B education, young adults earned only 33% more than adults with a secondary education, relative to the total average of a 51% for individuals with a type-B degree. For a type-A degree, the values for young adults and the average for all adults were 161% and 223% increases respectively, over adults with an upper-secondary education.⁶⁹ These smaller increases in wages are provided during the period when students will be responsible for paying off their student loans. Considering the high costs of tuition, even for private universities which offer short-cycle degrees, it becomes even more difficult for working class families to justify pursuing higher education. These grim factors only bolster the arguments made by working class families and student protestors that higher

⁶⁸ OECD, "Education at a Glance 2014," 141.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

education in Chile does more to solidify social norms, rather than to aid individuals willing to put in the required work to rise out of their lower income upbringings.

All of these factors lie at the crux of the student protests. The central argument that tertiary education in Chile stratifies the population into different socioeconomic classes certainly appears to be true when one examines the differences in wages between those who have acquired a bachelor's or advanced degree and those with only an upper-secondary degree. Chile is second only to Mexico in terms of income inequality in all the OECD, which only continues to legitimize the arguments propagated by the student protestors. Although it may be true that the cost of attending an institution of higher learning will pay for itself over time, such costs accrue immediately, with gains being felt slowly and farther into the future. With the largest differences in salary between individuals of differing education levels appearing at the end of an individual's career, it becomes more difficult to initially repay funds for tuition, especially when most students are forced to find private sources of financial aid.⁷⁰ Considering the history that Chile has with education as a means by which individuals could ascend out of poverty, it appears imperative that the Chilean government seek to produce legislation which may alleviate the student body's dependency on outside revenue to fund academic pursuits. Whether the solution come from student loans, preferably with some system put in place where debt could be forgiven after some period of time, grants, or tuition reduction remains to be speculated. Naturally, the implemented solution will hinge upon the ambition held by the government to address the students' demands. Specific predictions regarding how the government progresses under the Piñera Administration will be provided in a subsequent section of this analysis.

⁷⁰ OECD, "Education in Chile," 141.

Quality Assurance Measures in Chile and Abroad

For many years, for-profit institutions have taken advantage of loopholes in the law to extort money from their students. Although the legal system has prohibited such practices, it has been relatively easy to bypass the law due in large part to the opt-in measures behind quality assurance. Because of this, education has continued to become a more lucrative field for investors, rather than for students.⁷¹ While the government has recently made another attempt to outlaw for-profit education, which will be discussed later in this study, this phenomenon symbolizes the problem with quality assurance in Chilean higher education: while basic laws may be in place to promote a specific path of higher education institutions, a lack of enforcement prohibits regulations from providing positive results. This chapter will focus on the measures that are in place to promote higher quality academic programs, where the measures fall short, and what other countries are doing to achieve similar goals in their respective institutions of higher education. It's my goal in this section to provide greater context behind the recommendations that will conclude this study.

The field of quality assurance in higher education is still a relatively new concept internationally. A study discussing the future of quality assurance noted, “the so-called ‘Quality Revolution’ offers a dramatic story of expansion over the last three decades. From a little-understood concept promoted by a few advocates, quality assurance today occupies a central place in higher education policy.”⁷² Initial movements were made in countries like the United Kingdom and Denmark to establish “performance indicators” and review academic programs,

⁷¹ Gregorutti, et al, “What If Privatizing Education,” 143.

⁷² El-Khawas, “Quality Assurance as a Policy Instrument,” 248.

with the expressed goals of expanding higher education and ensuring that academic programs were competitive on the international level.⁷³

This second goal is notable because the pursuit of greater academic quality led countries to borrow successful practices from each other. In a study which compares the quality assurance mechanisms in England and the Netherlands, it's explained that "Introducing reform in a [globalizing] world generally adheres to looking at the policies implemented elsewhere. In this context, notions like policy transfer, borrowing, learning and policy convergence have been frequently applied to address policy adoption and the process of educational policy change."⁷⁴ The study continues by explaining that such an approach to quality assurance led many European countries to work together in establishing the European Higher Education Area. Essentially, countries both work together to improve the mechanism that govern quality assurance protocols, while also working to provide higher quality academic programs than their neighbor countries. In this way, competition works to improve the quality higher education, rather than simply reduce its cost. In comparison, this latter objective has often been the goal of for-profit institutions in Chile. The distinguishing factor is the pursuit to increase demand through providing a superior academic experience, rather than focusing entirely on producing diplomas which fail to hold significance, but which are cheap to acquire.

Although much of this section will be devoted to how Chile could greater regulate higher education to improve the quality of academic programs throughout the country, it remains important to recognize that Chile, and much of Latin America for that matter, have made bold pursuits in recent years to adopt new practices. Although the progression of higher education

⁷³ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁴ Hsieh et al, "Higher Education Policy Change," 71.

legislature will be explored in a subsequent chapter, it's important to recognize that researchers devoted to the development of higher education have remarked that “substantial progress has been made in terms of the development of a ‘culture of evaluation in [higher education institutions]’, largely overcoming the conflicts raised in the 90s” over the state of autonomy in academia.⁷⁵ In this respect, further improvements to higher education seek to expand upon the work that has already been accomplished. While there is reason to view this strategy with optimism, as it means that Chile would have an overarching policy plan, it could be seen as futile to continually amend a broken system. A point of contention, then, would be to decide whether it would instead be more beneficial to start over with a new system.

The Chilean government established the National Accreditation Commission (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación [CNA]) to handle the issue of accrediting higher education institutions. However, the government’s inability to separate its procedures from the laissez faire approach to education regulation that was adopted during the 1980s has limited the commission’s ability to enforce its procedures and provide equitable scrutiny among different types of higher education. Among the problems faced by CNA and its subsidiaries are as follows: 1) Accreditation remains optional, with the incentives of compliance being greater access to government aid, 2) The former secretary of CRUCH had once been appointed as a board member of an accrediting organization, and 3) accrediting agencies often “have consulting committees that advise institutions or [programs] to get accredited.”⁷⁶ The consequences of the first issue are that non-university institutions often forego accreditation, as the process would be costly, and the benefits would be rather inconsequential when their programs are already among the cheapest in Chile.

⁷⁵ López et al, “Chilean Universities and Institutional Quality,” 167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 146.

The latter two problems create a conflict of interest between the universities that would seek accreditation and the organizations that provide it. Another issue that can be seen within this current accreditation system is its bureaucratic disparity. Currently, the CNA, which only handles one aspect of quality assurance in Chile, tasks independent agencies with providing accreditation. The sheer number of separate bodies working to promote quality in higher education prohibits the country from creating a single vision for what their end goal ought to be, a problem which has been heavily criticized by the OECD in recent years.⁷⁷

The lack of a coherent vision for academic quality in Chile can be juxtaposed to academic regulation in Scotland, where the government has explicitly laid out what it expects of higher education throughout the country. In a single, concise document titled *the Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance*, a complete explanation for the vision of Scottish higher education is presented. The government makes it clear that providing a vision for higher education does not encroach upon the independence that institutions are meant to enjoy. The code states that while universities may “have in common the core activities of teaching, research and knowledge exchange, as autonomous institutions their missions, strategic priorities, institutional histories, and constitutions may differ.”⁷⁸ Although it is important to uphold these differences between institutions, the government notes that there is still a responsibility to provide a certain level of quality in the programs that are offered to students. This responsibility stems from the simple observation that schools receive funding from both private individuals and the government. Because of this, there is a basic level of service that institutions need to provide to make the monetary investment given by society worthwhile.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ OECD, “Education in Chile,” 176.

⁷⁸ *Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance (2017 Edition)*, 2017 Leg.. (Scotland 2017): 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

With respect to compliance, Scotland takes a different approach from the optional status that accreditation has in Chile. To balance the desires of institution adherence to the principles of the law and the preservation of academia's autonomy, the Scottish government has implemented what they call a "comply or explain" procedure.⁸⁰ Under this basis, all institutions of higher education must adhere to the overarching principles behind the Scottish code, but they can obtain the liberty to operate outside of the more specific details of these guidelines if they are able to successfully justify their methods of operation. Such justifications are expected to be presented annually, as they are to be incorporated into the institution's audited financial statements, which are given to the government every year. Although the specifics in the Scottish code and a potential Chilean code may differ, as the needs of the people in each country would not be the same, the "comply or explain" enforcement clause could be implemented into a future quality assurance program in Chile, as it would provide higher education a greater degree of government regulation while still giving institutions the possibility to maintain their individualized methods of providing education to students.

As governments continue to improve the quality of their higher education systems, which has become increasingly more popular since the 1980s, the body of literature and government legislature pertaining to academic quality will only continue to become more refined. In this regard, Ireland has made significant advancements in the field of quality assurance. Of interest for this study is the process by which Ireland formed their quality assurance procedures. Just like Scotland, the Irish government drafted a single, concise document outlining the principles behind their vision for higher education. The Irish equivalent to the *Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance*, however, explicitly relies on standards that have been outlined through

⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, and the National Unions of Students in Europe, thus exemplifying the phenomenon explained above whereby countries look abroad to find mechanisms that can be used to improve upon their own quality assurance pursuits.⁸¹ Historically, Chileans have drawn inspiration for the development of their education system from what had been successfully implemented abroad. As this practice becomes more ubiquitous internationally, it only continues to become more logical for Chile to follow suit. The methods used to draft the guidelines for quality assurance in Ireland and elsewhere indicate that such a practice can yield effective results.

Another crucial aspect of the Irish guidelines to higher education is that they were drafted by a group that consisted of both government officials and a diverse body of academic representatives. In the introduction to their guidelines, it's noted that the Irish Higher Education Quality Network, which drafted the document, is comprised of individuals from the Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology, the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the Higher Education Colleges Association, the Union of Students of Ireland, the Irish Universities Quality Board, the Higher Education Authority, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Department of Education and Science. All of these organizations played a significant role in outlining the principles that would be considered valuable to the Irish people, thus indicating the diversity of minds behind the country's guidelines.⁸² This body of representatives from the administration levels of the various forms of higher education institutions, the student

⁸¹ IHEQN, *Quality Assurance/Quality Improvements in Irish Higher Education and Training*, 2005 Leg.. (Ireland 2005): 2

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

bodies, and the teachers is very similar to the push made by the Allende Administration during Chile's education reformation movement of the early 1970s, which thus poses an interesting dilemma in Chile. On the one hand, seeking the assistance of individuals from all levels of academia when drafting higher education policy means the policies that are employed better reflect the needs and desires of those who will be governed. Such a practice should always be pursued when possible, especially in a democratic country. On the other hand, the Allende Administration remains a polarizing time in Chilean history. Whether the government would be apt to pursue policies that were originally defined by President Allende is difficult to predict, or even recommend. While the formation of a similar body to the Irish Higher Education Quality Network in Chile would be a legitimate way to ensure the future of quality assurance in Chile takes an approach that is supported by the people, the replication of a movement similar to the Nationally Unified School (Escuela Nacional Unificada [ENU]) under President Allende is very difficult to recommend.

When designing quality assurance mechanisms, it's important to recognize that different types of schools will have different goals and necessities. As such, regulations that seek to govern under strict guidelines will often undercut some institutions of higher education. As seen in the Scottish and Irish codes which govern tertiary education, there are overarching principles that guide policy, in addition to finer details. As mentioned earlier, this is the reasoning behind the "comply or explain" clause in Scotland. When viewed under this light, there is sound reasoning behind the optional compliance of accreditation in Chile. While it would be easy to object to this policy choice outright, it's important to acknowledge that technical schools in Chile may not have pursued accreditation because the process would be too cumbersome. If the qualifications required to receive accreditation are geared towards research institutions, which

have greater resources to provide better facilities and more qualified instructors, the burden for new institutions to reach similar standards may be prohibitive to the successful operation of the schools. As such, an examination of the requirements behind accreditation is required to ensure that the policies put in place are equitable to all types of education. If quality assurance indicators, as defined by the government, pose an insurmountable goal, it would make sense that some institutions would decide to forego the pursuit of quality, opting instead to become competitive through providing the cheapest option for attaining a tertiary education.

The CNA has outlined broad guidelines for the assurance of quality which generally tether themselves to the expressed goals of each institution. The criteria used for academic evaluation is divided into four categories: mission and purpose, mechanisms for assuring quality, conditions of operation, and capacity to adjust.⁸³ These first two categories generally require institutions to present a clear mission that guides the school's operations and ensure that the administration makes movements towards upholding said mission. These two aspects should be the easiest for an institution to follow, as they simply require a purpose behind the establishment of the school. The second two categories become more difficult to uphold. For a newly formed institution, acquiring the funds necessary to maintain exemplary school conditions and faculty members whose express responsibilities are to analyze and evaluate quality assurance may be difficult. However, that does not mean that such aspects should be withdrawn from the requirements for accreditation. The CNA does a fair amount to ensure that their accrediting procedures are inclusive to different forms of higher education. The organization has provided information about the evaluation process for universities, professional schools, and technical

⁸³ CNA, *Operacionalización de las Pautas Evaluación para la Acreditación Institucional*, Leg 2014 (Chile October 2014): 3.

schools, and has shown a firm understanding of how the purposes and needs will differ between these three groups.⁸⁴ Regardless of this exhibited understanding on the part of the CNA, only 10 out of 45 professional institutes and 8 out of 90 technical schools have succeeded in acquiring accreditation.⁸⁵

All of this begs the question: what should be done to ensure schools are working towards improving the quality of their academic programs while maintaining considerations towards the diversity of responsibilities and goals? Currently, government funding is tethered to accreditation, which presumably should incentivize more professional and technical schools to abide by the CNA's requests. However, a lack of public funding could also make it difficult for institutions to develop the improvements necessary to receive accreditation. It may be possible that accreditation through positive reinforcement, the procedure that has currently been adopted by Chile, should be replaced with mechanisms which require accreditation but also provide smaller schools with the resources necessary to improve their practices. It's possible that a system whereby schools are given public funds with the explicit purpose of funding projects which seek to improve academic programs could be proposed. One possible solution could be a loan system, where the government provides monetary assistance in the form of loans to schools. If the schools can prove that the money went towards quality assurance practices, the loans are forgiven. Otherwise, schools could be forced to pay back the loans plus interest at the end of some predetermined period. While such a proposal would require serious overhead to ensure that institutions were complying with government regulations and to collect on debts that were not

⁸⁴ CNA, *Pautas de Evaluación Acreditación Institucional Centros de Formación Técnica*, Leg 2013 (Chile December 2013): 7

⁸⁵ Gregorutti et al, "What if Privatizing Education," 146.

upheld, this could be a way to bolster greater quality in Chilean higher education in institutions that lack the resources to pursue quality assurance on their own.

Another possible solution originates in the Netherlands, where they have implemented a system of accreditation which provides relief to many of the problems just mentioned. The Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders accredits private institutions, thus allowing their students to apply for public financial aid.⁸⁶ In addition to institutional accreditation, institutions must maintain an executive board and a board of trustees, the latter group being managed in part by the Dutch government. The Minister of Education is primarily in charge of making appointments, but there are also specific guidelines that must be followed. Appointees to the board of trustees must not have direct financial compensation from the university, nor may they have any other “associated corporate entity other than that as a trustee.”⁸⁷ Without any financial ties to influence the board of trustees, the government can expect that the administrative bodies governing higher education are basing their decisions upon what will be best for the students and other faculty members. The OECD has regarded this system positively, stating that “it makes institutions particularly responsive to external guidance and stakeholder involvement” and explaining that such a model could be especially helpful when regulating professional institutes and technical schools in Chile.⁸⁸

It seems likely that whatever steps are taken towards this goal, Chile will need to look abroad for successful policy proposals. The country has experienced significant growth in the number of matriculating students each year, and, as such, has needed to adapt rather quickly. The evolution that higher education has seen in Chile is quite remarkable when we consider how the

⁸⁶ OECD, “Education in Chile,” 204.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

country only began to enact reformation policies just over ten years ago. While an in-depth analysis of the specific policy changes will be reserved for the next chapter of the study, a brief conclusion that can be drawn is that the Chilean government probably would not have been able to accomplish this much without having the ability to use quality assurance mechanisms found in other countries as a reference point. There is no reason why this process should not continue in the coming years.

In terms of whether the next administration is willing to listen to the recommendations of organizations like the OECD or adopt measures found in countries like Scotland, Ireland, and the Netherlands, I remain uncertain. While the Chilean government formally asked the OECD last year to examine the weaknesses of the country's higher education model and to provide feedback for what the government should pursue, the effects of that study have yet to be seen. An important conclusion was that pursuing free education for the entire population "would dedicate increasing fiscal resources to higher-income students," even while under privileged students receive minimal funding for primary and secondary education.⁸⁹ However, the government passed further legislation in January of this year to continue with the plan to expand Gratuidad, the legislative platform that provides free higher education, to students from more affluent families. This only exemplifies a lasting phenomenon, whereby the OECD releases a report with recommendations for change, but the Chilean government continues with what it had already set out to do. It appears that once Chile has decided on a system, whether it be an optional accreditation system or Gratuidad, more effort is given to amending the law, rather than analyzing whether this course of action is optimal for the country. The first step, then, to solving the issue of quality assurance is for the government to determine what it wants out of its higher

⁸⁹ Ibid., 215

education system. After, work can be done to examine which countries are already achieving these goals. Then it's as simple as drafting legislation that mirrors these successful cases and abandoning practices that prohibit progress.

The Progression of Legislative Reforms in the Modern Era

Although studies have been done which show a present gap between the quality of higher education institutions in Chile and those found in other countries, many of which will be examined later in this piece, the central government has taken notice of the issue and has sought to address it. Sweeping legislative changes have been put forth with the expressed purpose of addressing the concerns of the modern student protests. Many of these proposals have since been enacted into law and have provided much needed reforms to Chile's higher education. Before we can discuss the direction Chile may pursue in the future, it is imperative to see the progress made by the government thus far.

Legislative Reforms in the Aftermath of the Penguin Revolution

Although often eclipsed by the university protests of 2011, the high school led movement, which began in 2006, proved to be the initial catalyst for a reassessment of higher education in Chile. Often described as the "penguin revolution," due to the student uniforms' resemblance to penguins, these early protests shared very similar demands to the 2011 university marches.⁹⁰ This would logically follow, considering how many of the students who marched as high school students in 2006 would have been university students by 2011. The demands at this time were concerned with the quality of academic programs at the tertiary level and the means by which students would fund their academic pursuits.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 67.

In response to the first issue, the government, under President Bachelet created the Presidential Advisory Council for the Quality of Education (Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Calidad de la Educación).⁹¹ On the creation of the council, President Bachelet stated, “Behind these demands lies a conviction that I share and which constitutes a national consensus: a quality education distributed equally is the only way to continue developing” (“Detrás de estas demandas hay una convicción que comparto y que constituye un consenso nacional: una educación de calidad distribuida con justicia es el único camino para seguir desarrollándonos”) and that “The Presidential Advisory Council must strive to present ways to reach the equal, high quality education that Chile needs.” (“El Consejo Asesor Presidencial (...) deberá esmerarse por mostrar caminos para llegar a la educación justa y de calidad que Chile necesita.”)⁹² In a document provided by the Chilean government that outlines the Council, its goals, and its methodology, there is the argument that education is a right and must be equal.⁹³ Rhetorically, this notion signifies a departure from the market driven system that has governed Chilean academia since the 1980s. In practice, the council sought to unify representatives from the universities, the student body, and the government to provide an agreement over how the country would progress academically.⁹⁴ Essentially, this panel was meant to provide the overarching vision by which further reforms would follow.

Additionally, the government established a new financial program, *Credito con Aval del Estado* (CAE), with the expressed purpose of shifting some of the financial burden of higher

⁹¹ Ibid., 67.

⁹² “Informe Final de Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Calidad de la Educación,” Leg 2006 (Chile December 2006): 5. Translated by Benjamin Corey

⁹³ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁴ OECD, “Education in Chile,” 67.

education off students and their families and onto the government.⁹⁵ Under this new program, students seeking to fund their studies are able to take out loans at interest rates of 2% a year, while repayment plans are contingent upon the salaries students obtain through employment after graduation.⁹⁶ Unlike prior financial programs in Chile, students attending private non-CRUCH institutions have the option to apply for these loans, which would mean students from lower socioeconomic classes would primarily be affected. In 2010, CAE had 216,000 borrowers, which encompassed approximately 23% of all students pursuing their first degree.⁹⁷ By 2016, this number had risen to approximately 460,000 active borrowers. While this solution is not without its faults, the largest of which being the difficulty students in Chile have with finding jobs that provide wages large enough to cover both living expenses and the costs of repaying loans, this act shows a willingness from the government to experiment and produce legislation with the distinct purpose of reforming the financial model that governs higher education in Chile.

Law 20.129 was passed in November of 2006 with the goal of establishing an accreditation system for institutions of higher education in Chile. It was proposed that such a system would improve the quality of institutions throughout Chile, like what has been seen in other countries. The law established the Sistema Nacional de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (SINAC-ES), which was given the responsibilities of compiling information regarding what is required to improve the education system, licensing new institutions of higher learning, and reviewing and accrediting academic programs offered by the various institutions throughout Chile.⁹⁸ To accomplish these goals, SINAC-ES was made an umbrella organization

⁹⁵ Education Sector, Latin American and Caribbean Region “Programa de Crédito con Aval del Estado (CAE) de Chile,” World Bank, (March 2011): 9.

⁹⁶ OECD, “Education in Chile,” 56.

⁹⁷ Education Sector, Latin American and Caribbean Region “Programa de Crédito,” 9.

⁹⁸ Ley Num. 20.129, Fed. (Chile Nov 2006): Chapter 1, Title 1.

which possessed sub-groups that focused on achieving more specific objectives. The División de Educación Superior del Ministerio de Educación (DIVESUP) was made responsible for monitoring higher education institutions and ensuring that they were following the law. Authority over licensing new institutions was given to the Consejo Nacional de Educación (CNED), while the Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CNA) was responsible for establishing accreditation criteria and other managerial services related to accreditation, although the actual accrediting of academic programs was derogated to private, for-profit agencies.⁹⁹ SINAC-ES was quite revolutionary at the time of its inception, as no system had ever been put in place in Chile with the express purpose of managing the quality of higher education. Unfortunately, the *laissez faire* approach to higher learning that dominated Chile during the 1980s persisted. This philosophy placed significant limitations on the government's ability to regulate the quality of higher education programs. As will be discussed later, this political climate has had lasting effects on the country's accreditation system and the ability for the government to put forth academic reforms.

Overall, the reforms made by the Bachelet Administration and Congress during the penguin revolution proved insufficient in quelling student demands, as indicated by the 2011 university protests. However, the political climate prohibited a more active approach to education policy, due in large part to the free market nature of academia to this point. The political climate essentially made landmark legislation incredibly more difficult to produce. Additionally, it would be unreasonable to assume that an overhaul of public finance or a first attempt at establishing an accreditation system could be implemented without subsequent

⁹⁹ OECD, "Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Chile: Reviews of National Policies for Education," OECD Publications, Paris, France (November 2012): 26.

amendments. In retrospect, the changes made in 2006 marked a significant turning point for higher education in Chile, whereby government influence in academia could now be a real possibility. Fortunately, the next steps in government reform occurred at a quicker pace, relative to what was seen in the first decade since the return to democracy.

Universidad del Mar and a Second Attempt at Quality Assurance

The Universidad del Mar was a private non-CRUCH institute, officially founded in 1989, and which gained full autonomy by 2002.¹⁰⁰ Through its efforts to attract students from lower income families, the university was able to elevate its presence in Chile, establish sixteen unique campuses, and become the fifth largest institute of higher education by enrollment numbers in the country by 2007.¹⁰¹ At the same time, however, complaints started to accumulate regarding the quality of academic programs, as well as controversy over how university funds were being spent. Such controversy persisted through 2012, when the university's rector resigned from his position and the Ministry of Education launched an official investigation. The proceedings of this event would profoundly change both the perception of academics in Chile, as well as the laws by which higher education was governed.

Once investigations began to uncover the hidden practices of the university, officials discovered that the procedures by which Universidad del Mar operated were quite unorthodox and highly unethical. Firstly, none of the properties utilized by the institution were owned by the administration. Everything from the buildings where classes were taught to all of the furniture found within them was owned by private companies, which were controlled separately by the

¹⁰⁰ OECD, "Education in Chile," 185.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

university owners, and leased to the university.¹⁰² Essentially, the university consisted of the endowment fund it had accumulated, which in 2012 was approximately US\$ 100 million.¹⁰³ These companies held leasing deals with the university, which allowed them to collect money from the institution as it became available. Although professors and other faculty members were facing foregone wages valued at over US\$ 1 million, real estate companies were still receiving payments well above what was owed to employees. What was seen in the case of Universidad del Mar is a money laundering operation where funds could be paid into the university and then quickly moved into private corporations. Since these corporations were maintained by the university's administration, money could be transferred to those in charge before any faculty members would have an opportunity to be paid. Such an operation had never been discovered in Chile before, as noted by the ex-president of the Council for Transparency, Raúl Urrutia, who stated, "I knew of nothing like this, it is inconceivable." ("No conocía nada de esto, es impresion-ante.")¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, the gravity of this scandal had not yet been realized.

In response to these initial reports, the government reversed the university's standings as a legal institution, which subsequently led to the bankruptcy of the school.¹⁰⁵ Regardless, the government sought further legal action, which led to the persecution of the university and the former president of the CNA for charges of bribery. In this case, it was proven that the university attempted to bribe the CNA multiple times to receive academic accreditation, which the school successfully negotiated in 2010. The involvement of the accreditation commission in this case only further garnered scorn from the populace. In response to the monumental scope of this

¹⁰² Figueroa, Juan Pablo, Gregorio Riquelme, and Juan Andrés Guzmán, "Cómo Lucraron los dueños de la Universidad del Mar (I)," CIPER, (July 2012).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Translated by Benjamin Corey

¹⁰⁵ OECD, "Education in Chile," 185.

scandal, many Chileans called for greater transparency between the universities, the central government, and the public. These criticisms and the distrust from which they arose ultimately forced the government to step in, both by calling for the closing of Universidad del Mar, which ultimately occurred on February 28th, 2018, and through legislation aimed at increasing transparency and greater oversight by the government concerning all higher education.¹⁰⁶

Universidad del Mar became symbolic of the weaknesses found in Chile's quality assurance system. The fact that the university was able to operate with the support of the CNA for approximately two years had shown a lack of accountability from the rest of the government and an insufficient level of transparency between the government and the people.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the public ultimately learned that the situation with Universidad del Mar was not an isolated incident. Currently, there are ongoing investigations regarding the accreditation of other private universities as well.

While the problems that were brought to light during this investigation are still being addressed by the government, progress has been made regarding other avenues of quality assurance. In December 2014, a law was passed which produced a protocol by which the government could formally shutdown an institution of higher education. In the law it states that the objective of the administrator responsible for initiating this protocol is "to safeguard the right to education of students, ensuring the continuity of their studies and the proper use of all resources of the institution of higher education."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 197.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 199.

The language employed here draws many connections to the Universidad del Mar scandal. While the ties to money have been made quite apparent, the part regarding “the continuity of [the students’] studies” appears to be in reference to the fallout after the university went bankrupt. With the announcement that the school was to close, there were several thousand students whose education would be brought into question. Ultimately, the Ministry of Education needed to intervene to provide places for affected students in other universities and to ensure that their credits transferred over as smoothly as possible.¹⁰⁹ In addition to placing a significant burden on the affected students, this process has forced the government to spend ample public resources which could have been allocated to worthier causes had this situation been originally avoided. If there is any silver lining to be had from this scandal it would be that the case of Universidad del Mar appears to have proven to Chile that there are significant, unforeseen expenses behind the pragmatic approach towards quality assurance that had been adopted under the 2006 policy reforms. Since this scandal has been brought to light, the government continues to take a more active role in education reform, with a slew of new laws being debated, and often passed, at the national level.

The Continued Push for Education Reform

The most recent series of reforms to address the weaknesses of higher education in Chile has been influenced in part by a 2013 report elicited by the Chilean government and produced by the OECD. This document outlines many of the weaknesses which have been mentioned in this study, primarily focusing on rising costs and a lack of a centralized vision for the issue of quality assurance.¹¹⁰ It’s important to note that the government specifically asked for assistance in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 186.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 198.

assessing higher education, because it showcases an initiative from Chile to seek outside help in solving these problems. Historically, Chile has modeled its academic structures off influential models on the international stage, from the European model employed when Chile first started to embrace higher education in the 19th century, and again when Chile adopted the neoliberal model used by the United States during the Pinochet dictatorship. This mentality has been successful in many ways for the country, from producing a modernized tertiary education system, to its monumental expansion during the 80s and 90s, albeit under less than ideal circumstances. The 2016 wave of reforms, which will be discussed next, appears to have embraced the 2013 OECD report, which may ultimately prove to be a stepping stone to further legislation.

For the next phase of education reform, it appears that the government wanted to increase accessibility of higher education to more individuals from the country's working class. As previously noted, obtaining a tertiary degree from a reputable institution dramatically increases one's projected wages for the rest of their life. This would mean that providing such an opportunity to more students from less privileged backgrounds could help to reduce the excessive inequality that plagues Chile's economy, which would help to increase economic growth. Additionally, an expansion of the proportion of individuals who hold a tertiary degree may have the effect of increasing labor productivity throughout the country, which has remained at a level that is one-third less than the OECD average.¹¹¹

Beginning in 2016, with a policy move referred to as Gratuidad, a push was made to begin the process of one day providing a free education for all Chileans. That year, funds were allocated within the budget to provide students from families within the poorest 50% of the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 38.

population to pursue a higher education for free, as long as the student was attending a public university or a private university that was participating in the program.¹¹² Between those two groups, 30 institutions participated in the program, which comprised approximately 50% of all universities. In total, approximately 139,000 individuals qualified for the program during its first year. By 2017, the program had expanded beyond the 30 universities to also include six non-profit technical schools and six non-profit professional institutes with projections of 250,000 students receiving being able to utilize the program, approximately 95,000 of which were enrolled in these non-university institutions.¹¹³ While the long-term effects of this program may not yet be quantifiable, some early data can be presented. We know that the percentage of financial aid in the form of student loans decreased from 53% in 2015 to 40% in 2017, with scholarships comprising 35% of the remaining financial aid, and 25% of aid coming from Gratuidad.¹¹⁴ Such a decrease in loan dependency may prove beneficial to Chile, where students have been struggling to pay back their loans for years.

From data gathered by the OECD, we know that the majority of the students who are benefiting from these programs come from the 3rd and 4th deciles economically in Chile, meaning they originate from families who are economically in the 30th-49th percentile, with average annual incomes of approximately USD 3,042.¹¹⁵ When the average income of these families is compared to the annual cost of tuition at any of the institutions of higher education, the data for which is provided in the financial analysis section of this study, it is apparent that Gratuidad has allowed these students to pursue an education without acquiring unsustainable levels of student

¹¹² De Gayardon, Ariane and Andrés Bernasconi, “Chilean Universities: Not so Tuition-Free After All,” *International Higher Education* 86 (2016): 24.

¹¹³ OECD, “Education in Chile,” 180.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

debt. In many cases, the cost of tuition would have been more than double the amount these families were earning annually in wages. For these families, it may be possible to say that access to higher education had been made available.

While there are some examples where Gratuidad has been a success, the program is not without its faults. The overwhelming majority of underprivileged families have stated that finances are not the primary reason why their children have not pursued a higher education.¹¹⁶ Through the present inequalities in primary and secondary education, it is often harder for students from poorer families to be in a position to enroll in a higher education institution. Additionally, children from higher income households have greater access to secondary schools which prepare students for the standardized tests used to determine which universities they can attend. Since the most prestigious schools are generally the only ones participating in Gratuidad, with the exception of the addition of the technical and professional institutes in 2017, many lower income students would not have the opportunity to participate in the program.¹¹⁷ This all means that while the goal behind Gratuidad may be to expand access to higher education to a larger number of students, there are other factors, aside from tuition expenses or direct funding, that also need to be taken into consideration when developing education policy.

The bureaucracy which governs policies like Gratuidad also poses challenges for education reform. During the negotiation process for the program, there were not many direct avenues by which institutions could communicate with the government. While officials from CRUCH universities were able to voice their opinions, this group is highly exclusive to the country's Non-CRUCH private universities and other institutions of higher learning, making it

¹¹⁶ De Gayardon, Ariane and Andrés Bernasconi, "Chilean Universities," 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

difficult for students and faculty members from these places to shape this monumental piece of legislation.¹¹⁸ As such, the needs of these institutions and the students who attend them would be of lesser priority, relative to the universities that hold the most power and influence in the country.

When the proposal for such a financial assistance program was first introduced, there was the expectation that this would only be the first step of a larger reformation movement. As such, members of the government decided that the allocation of public funds should be made conditional and that assistance would only be provided to institutions as long as specific terms, which were addressed in other pieces of legislation, were met.¹¹⁹ For institutions to be admitted into the program, they would need to participate in the Common System of Access to Higher Education Institutions (Sistema Común de Acceso a las Instituciones de Educación Superior, SCAIES), produce new policies with the specific intention of expanding education opportunities to lower income families, maintain status as a non-profit institution, and obtain accreditation for four years or more.¹²⁰ While these expressed goals are well intentioned and serve the purpose of expanding higher education to a large number of students, such stipulations for receiving financial aid are misguided. Gratuidad has been funded, at least in part, through a reallocation of funds that had already been designated to financial assistance. To fund this program, AFI was dissolved and there had been debates about defunding AFD as well. Although this second proposal did not pass the legislative process, these decisions still have a palpable effect on students. To reallocate funds means that students who were reliant on the old programs would either need to apply for the new programs, which is only possible if they attend institutions were

¹¹⁸ OECD, "Education in Chile," 196.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

are eligible for funding, or they would need to find private funding for their education. The instability that comes from abrupt policy shifts such as this does little to improve the perception many students have regarding higher education or acquiring the resources necessary to attend.

The end goal for Gratuidad is also misguided. As stated earlier, the Bachelet Administration stated that it wanted to provide free higher education to all Chileans, regardless of proven financial need. Although an argument could be made for equity between social classes, especially by claiming education as a right rather than a luxury, such a program would be more expensive than necessary for its expressed purpose. If the Chilean government is trying to expand access to higher education, this would best be achieved by providing financial aid to students from the lowest social classes. However, we must keep in mind that Chile is among the most economically unequal countries in the OECD. Extreme poverty on one end of the spectrum is met with extreme wealth on the other. Students from the wealthiest families would not gain greater access to higher education by having their tuition paid for by the government because they were never struggling to find the means necessary to attend. As such, expanding Gratuidad to encompass all students, rather than keeping it exclusive to those families which are struggling, would provide nothing more than a very expensive symbolic gesture to the student protestors.

Rather than appropriate vast sums of money in such a way, when there are other programs that could use additional funding, structuring Gratuidad as a financial spectrum would be a more frugal, efficient way to allocate funds. Under this model, students from families making less than some specified amount of money annually would be provided financial aid covering all of their tuition expenses. Students from families making more than this amount would still be provided financial assistance, but at a percentage of their total costs for attendance, rather than covering expenses in their entirety. As a student's family earns greater wages, the

amount the student is given for higher education decreases until which point the student's family is expected to cover all expenses. By allocating funds in this manner, Gratuidad can maintain lower government costs, which would allow for greater investment in the other aspects of education reform.

Gratuidad was only meant to be one aspect of the much larger 2016 Reform Law. The other aspect of the proposed law was to induce greater quality throughout higher education. The law defined goals for higher education as follows: "The system must orient towards the pursuit of excellence, through assuring the quality of processes and results and promoting the development of lifelong learning trajectories. In the pursuit of excellence, higher education must be motivated by efforts to better transmit knowledge to students and promote their creativity and critical thinking."¹²¹ To compel institutions towards this vision, the government had tethered Gratuidad funding towards accreditation. Previously, institutions that provided mediocre academic programs were able to thrive by appealing to students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds, as tuition was still relatively inexpensive when compared to accredited schools. With the prospects of receiving a free education, students would be more apt to pursue admittance to accredited institutions, which would now be able to compete with lesser quality schools on the grounds of cost.

Coupled with a greater emphasis on accreditation would be greater transparency within academic bureaucracy. The OECD reported in 2017 that, "The 2016 higher education reform would establish new requirements for transparent reporting in quality assurance, admissions processes and other elements of the system."¹²² While these steps certainly address students'

¹²¹ Ibid., 223.

¹²² Ibid., 201.

complaints concerning higher education, with explicit policies appearing to be directed towards avoiding the controversies regarding Universidad del Mar, it does not seem likely that the policies behind the 2016 proposed reforms provide a cohesive vision for where Chilean academia is supposed to progress. The OECD remarked in their 2017 report that “higher education in Chile has not succeeded in developing or [actualizing] a coherent vision of the system’s role in society and its appropriate structure. Previous reforms have not succeeded in achieving this either,” which has thus produced “insufficient quality and entrenched inequities, with great consequences for many students and for Chilean society as a whole.”¹²³ Without this guiding vision for what higher education ought to become, it will be difficult to say whether the policies that are enacted will succeed, as there isn’t a single goal that Chile is trying to achieve. It may be easy to pay lip service to promoting “accessibility” and “quality assurance,” but without concretely defining these terms, stating how one will affect the other, or what the long-term strategy towards reformation will be, lasting change may remain out of reach, as it has since the Penguin Revolution of 2006.

The Transition to Piñera and the Rise of Conservatism

Although President Bachelet may have been a lame duck president throughout the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018, she did not let the victory of Sebastián Piñera stand in the way of her proposed reforms to higher education. On January 24th, 2018, the congress passed two massive laws regarding higher education. The first law, which received 102 votes in the affirmative and only two abstentions, provided the next step towards free higher education for all students.¹²⁴ It essentially built upon what was seen under Gratuidad but with a greater movement

¹²³ Ibid., 176.

¹²⁴ “Chile’s Congress Approves Free Higher Education,” Telesur (January 25th, 2018).

towards expansion. Current estimates predict that it will take Chile approximately 70 years to fully achieve the goal of free higher education for all, depending on how the economy may expand as the country moves forward.¹²⁵ In addition to government allocated funds, there is greater regulation over the costs of tuition. Under the new law, a third-party committee will be responsible for setting the costs of tuition paid by families. The government will also have the power to determine the tuition costs of students who are not eligible for full tuition financing.¹²⁶

In addition to greater financial aid, the bill places a larger emphasis on quality assurance by requiring accreditation by 2020 and by eliminating the for-profit practices that have plagued higher education in Chile for years. Under the new law, it would be illegal to maintain for-profit status as an institution of higher learning. Adriana Delpiano, the former minister of education under President Bachelet, appeared confident that the reforms would produce greater quality in Chilean academia, stating, “When in full swing, the reform will make Chile fairer but also richer because it will promote talents.”¹²⁷ Legislator and former leader of the 2011 student protests Camila Vallejo also expressed hope for the new law, declaring on Twitter, “Higher Education Law approved!! We secure gratuity by law, greater oversight, an effective end to profit and mandatory accreditation!!”¹²⁸ The popularity for the bill throughout much of the country, as made apparent by its overwhelming support in the congress, may signify its strength to persevere, even once under the scrutiny of a president who has objected to the notion of free higher education provided by the government.

¹²⁵ Hurtado, María Elena, “Major Higher Education Reforms Secured by Senators,” University World News (January 31st, 2018).

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ “Chile’s Congress Approves Free Higher Education.”

Unfortunately, there are other prominent critics of the newly passed legislation. In addition to the bill expanding investment in higher education, a second bill was passed on the same day which seeks to strengthen government run institutions. This second bill provides approximately US\$ 495 million to public universities over the next ten years.¹²⁹ Private CRUCH universities have been quick to object to the bill, claiming that such measures discriminate against them. Oscar Galindo, rector of Universidad Austral, subsequently gave a radio interview where he proclaimed, “We will meet the new elected authorities as soon as possible to insist that we must not be excluded from this special funding.”¹³⁰ Although the government is well within its right to expand public universities, the backlash towards the reforms in the private sector could pose problematic. It would be reasonable to predict a future where a conservative president like Piñera uses the demands from private universities for greater financial assistance as fodder for the argument against the program in its entirety. Any push by institutions of higher learning towards greater public assistance could be met with dramatic backlash by the government and possible instability within the academic system. Policy surrounding tertiary education in Chile has been volatile for several years, and now seems like quite poor timing for dissatisfaction within the academic community, what with the rise of an administration diametrically opposed to the current trend towards public assistance.

While it seems very likely that President Piñera will take a restrained approach to tackling education reform, his rhetoric in interviews and public speeches has been distinctly inconsistent. During this most recent campaign cycle, President Piñera was documented in November stating, “When the father contributes and feels that he is making a contribution, I have

¹²⁹ Hurtado, María Elena, “Major Higher Education Reforms.”

¹³⁰ Ibid.

observed that he feels more involved [...] things which are free generate less commitment.”¹³¹

The wording of this statement makes it appear that President Piñera is opposed to the expansion of Gratuidad, claiming that a free education disincentivizes academic commitment. From this interview, it is unclear whether he would be supportive of reversing the policy reformations achieved under President Bachelet, but there is little cause for hope for future expansions to Gratuidad if this quote is to be believed. However, President Piñera embraced a different tone once the country was readying itself for December’s runoff election. In an interview conducted by *La Tercera* on December 9th, just over a week before the runoff election, President Piñera explained, “The whole world is evolving, or you think that I believe the same thing that I did thirty years ago.”¹³² He went on to explain that “there was a change in emphasis, because the concept that no child should be left out of higher education due to a lack of resources and that no family sees the fruition of their child’s professional dream has always been in our minds.”¹³³ This second quote clearly shows a different perspective from President Piñera. If this second perspective is to be believed, it would appear possible that Piñera would be open to discussions over the continuation of Gratuidad or programs of similar objectives.

With these contradictory statements given by President Piñera, it could be difficult to gauge his enthusiasm for continued education reform. However, this is not the first time that President Piñera has reversed his public opinion regarding education policy. Remember, the student protests first arose in 2011, during Piñera’s first term in office. In the months leading up to the 2011 protests, President Piñera laid out his intentions to provide means by which all

¹³¹ “Piñera por Educación: ‘Las Cosas Gratis Generan Menos Compromiso,’” CNN Chile (November 13th, 2017).

¹³² “Sebastián Piñera Sobre Postura de Educación Gratuita: ‘Todo el Mundo Va Evolucionando,’” 24 Horas (December 9th, 2017).

¹³³ Ibid.

students would be able to obtain a tertiary degree.¹³⁴ In a public speech, he expressed the importance in revolutionizing education policy such that a quality education is available to everyone. This would have theoretically been made possible by establishing a scholarship program that could make such an objective possible.

Nevertheless, Piñera had changed his tone by the middle of 2011. In two separate speeches given during that summer, Piñera stated that “education is a consumer good” and that “nothing is free in this life, there is always someone who has to pay.”¹³⁵ In this respect the inconsistencies of President Piñera’s statements is not a new phenomenon. When Piñera feels the need to pay lip service to student demands, he is willing to acknowledge their requests and make promises to move towards policies that would improve higher education. However, these promises have only been made prior to the student protests and the runoff election. Outside of these critical moments, Piñera has been dramatically less favorable to the students and their demands. When we compare the tone Piñera has taken in 2017, it appears that he has not learned his lesson from the student protests during his prior administration, even though more recent reports from news organizations like the British Broadcasting Company have reported Piñera’s comments before the runoff election as being a success for student protestors.¹³⁶ If President Piñera is taking a similar stance rhetorically to his position during his first term in office, it may stand to reason that his actions moving forward will reflect similar beliefs and actions to those seen from 2010-2014.

¹³⁴ Alarcón, Rodrigo and Raúl Martínez, “Piñera anuncia ‘revolucionaria reforma educacional,’” University of Chile (November 21st, 2010).

¹³⁵ “Presidente Piñera: La educación es un bien de consume,” Cooperativa (July 19th, 2011).: “Piñera Sobre Educación: ‘Nada Es Gratis en esta Vida, Alguien lo Tiene que Pagar,’” El Mostrador (August 11th, 2011).

¹³⁶ “Profile: Chile’s President Sebastian Piñera,” BBC (December 18th, 2017).

From the information presented earlier in this study, it looks like our expectations moving forward should certainly be tampered, relative to what was seen under President Bachelet. In my financial analysis, I showed a trend of decreasing expenditures per student in 2013 and 2014, which corresponds precisely with President Piñera's first term in office. Although data is not yet available to determine differences in budget allocations towards financial aid under Bachelet's second term, her consistent push towards greater accessibility to higher education and the establishment of Gratuidad can lead us to predict that it did not follow Piñera's model. While I am not willing to conclude that President Piñera will be determined to completely reverse the policies established under Bachelet, as such an action would almost certainly provoke a disastrous reaction from student protestors, it does seem likely that he will not prioritize expansions to funds delegated to academia if his first term is any indicator of what is to come. It seems unavoidable that any positive changes made towards funding higher education will only be in response to continued protests from students, as such demonstrations contributed significantly to President Piñera's remarkably low approval ratings at the end of his first term in office.

With respect to quality assurance, President Piñera's first term was primarily defined by the scandal involving Universidad del Mar. As previously mentioned, Universidad del Mar had not been able to receive academic accreditation until 2010, which was the first year that President Piñera held office. By the middle of his term, in 2012 and 2013, victims of the institution's malpractice pushed for legal action which led to a heavily publicized court case. Regardless of the scope of the scandal, it was not until December 2014, once President Bachelet had reassumed office, that the government passed a law which granted officials the legal authority to shutdown institutions of higher education that were not complying with the law.

Even as pressure for reform continued to grow, Piñera's response to this scandal remained notoriously uneventful. For this reason, I firmly believe that any pursuit towards improving the quality assurance mechanisms in Chile will be faced with a difficult battle, as it seems quite likely that President Piñera will blatantly uninterested in addressing this problem.

This discussion raises the question: what future does higher education reform have under the Piñera presidency? Although much of this section has been rather pessimistic, I do not believe that Chile will experience four consecutive years without passage of reformation of any kind. Unlike during his first term, President Piñera is entering into the presidency with a Chilean population that is already in the midst of a protest movement. Without any uncertainty, we can conclude that student marches with attendance in the thousands will continue indefinitely if their demands are not met. It would seem rather foolish for a calculating businessman like Piñera to allow student protestors to strip him of his popularity, and therefore his capacity to utilize the bully pulpit, for a second time. Even if Piñera would rather ignore the problem, the combination of these protests and the example set by Bachelet during her most recent term, will make this strategy close to unthinkable. Therefore, what remains is to determine how dramatic of reforms Piñera will be willing to adopt. Considering his history, Piñera seems likely to choose a course of action that changes very little, but at least demonstrates to the public that the government is addressing the problem. However, he could also surprise all of us and embrace the student demands in a more open way. Although Piñera has a history of being contradictory in his words, his most recent stance on education policy has been more sympathetic towards the students. For this reason, I will provide multiple courses of action in my conclusion, thus demonstrating both a probable series of reforms and a best-case scenario for the coming years.

Conclusions: A Plan for Moving Forward and Concluding Remarks

During the 80s and 90s, the government helped to expand the field of higher education to accommodate for its growing demand. As this expansion gave rise to inadequate academic programs, the government instituted organizations with the direct purpose of regulating the quality of higher education. There is a history in Chile of renovating higher education as the needs of students continue to evolve. Although President Piñera's first term had not yielded optimal results for students, there is still room for optimism that policy can be put forward in the coming years that continues this progressive trajectory. What is important to determine is how student activists can negotiate a plan with the country's more conservative political factions. The student protests of 2011 ultimately eroded President Piñera's good favor with the public, indicating that activists may have some leverage against the president in the coming years. This relationship between the students and president may be the driving force for improved policy in the coming years.

While students may be able to successfully compel the government to act, it is likely that President Piñera will oppose radical changes. At the very least, the government needs to address the quality assurance system in Chile. Currently, accreditation remains optional for institutions of higher education, which does not promote an academic environment where students can confidently enroll in programs that will provide them with the tools necessary to acquire a job upon graduation. Additionally, the task of monitoring the quality of academic programs has been divided between too many organizations without an explicit, unifying goal. To remedy this problem, the government will need to rework accreditation protocol so that it is mandatory, and which follows a consistent vision.

It has been well established that governments adopt policy measures from other countries to improve their quality assurance mechanisms. To ensure that Chile has a singular vision for the future, the government must collaborate with members of the academic community to draft a code for higher education, as was accomplished in Scotland and Ireland. Although this practice may seem similar to President Allende's push for nationalized education in the early 1970s, President Piñera could be act as a moderating force, which would quell any fears from conservatives that the government was pursuing socialism. Since President Piñera is a forceful advocate for the free market, he makes for an ideal candidate to advocate for greater government regulation. Furthermore, the establishment of a "comply or explain" clause in a potential Chilean academic code would probably be very attractive for the more conservative government. Since Piñera would be likely to advocate for minimal government regulation, he would be likely to find a clause that allows institutions to act outside of regulations rather attractive. Additionally, such a clause would provide higher education institutions the liberty to pursue their own kind of quality. Since the qualifications for quality should differ from one type of institution to another, as discussed earlier in this study, a "comply or explain" rule could help to facilitate greater diversity in the academic sphere.

Overall, an academic code could provide structure to the quality assurance field in Chile. One of the primary recommendations given by the OECD was that Chile needs to determine what their way forward will be, rather than producing inconsistent legislation. Since Chile's accreditation process is run by a large variety of separate organizations, such a code could allow for consistency without having to completely restructure these governing bodies.

While establishing an academic code would certainly be the easiest first step for the Piñera Administration, it would do very little on its own. As long as accreditation remains

optional, there will be institutions that opt out of the process entirely, choosing instead to use lower tuitions as a means to remain competitive in the academic market. Although the push towards a fully implemented Gratuidad means that the cost of individual institutions will only become less important to prospective students, current projections for such a program show its completion far into the future. Regardless of the financial responsibility behind Gratuidad, quality assurance is needed sooner, rather than later. Mandatory accreditation could help fulfill this need.

Since Chile already has an accreditation process which is quite popular with the country's formal universities, the government would only need to expand this program to make it mandatory. As noted earlier, the means by which schools are judged seem quite logical in nature. Essentially, schools are required to explicitly state their objectives and then diligently work to achieve said objectives. As long as students can examine the goals of schools and be confident in the fact that the schools can deliver on their promises, they will be able to choose an institution that best fits their needs. Therefore, Chile's next step in improving their quality assurance measures will not come from reinventing the wheel, but rather applying what they already have with more consistency. While more schools would need to be processed, this could easily be accomplished by increasing the financial means given to such organizations as CNA and SINAC-ES. While changes to the academic budget may be harder to produce under the Piñera Administration, the fulfillment of a robust quality assurance protocol may be a legitimate compromise if the government is adamant about maintaining current financial assistance levels. As stated earlier, it is likely that students would be more willing to accrue student debt if there was greater certainty that higher education would lead to well-paying jobs.

Renovating the quality assurance model in Chile would be the politically easier task moving forward. While a mandatory accreditation system may lead to greater budgetary requirements from the organizations responsible for carrying out this objective, the amount of money necessary would be dramatically smaller than what is required to expand greater financial assistance to more students. For this reason, quality assurance could be an easier victory for the Piñera Administration, which would allow the president to honestly tell the public that the government is working towards a better future for the students, even without allocating more money to tuition assistance programs.

Unfortunately, greater financial assistance has been a staple of the student protests for well over a decade. While students may be receptive to the positive changes in the field of quality assurance, it seems indescribably unlikely that the students will disband their movement without receiving more financial support from the government. The question that remains is whether the government will confront this issue with sweeping changes or small, incremental changes. Although the latter option is more likely, I am going to address both scenarios.

In what would be a surprising decision for the Piñera Administration, a greater emphasis could be placed on continuing, or even expediting the trajectory of Gratuidad. It is possible, though not probable, that the increased funds given to provide free higher education provided in January of this year will be well received. It would behoove the president to continue expanding upon such a popular program, especially if it has the effect of reducing the hostilities of the student movement. If President Piñera were to view a pacification of the protestors as a worthwhile investment, perhaps to ensure that other aspects of his agenda can be addressed, then maybe an expansion to scholarships will be employed.

As explained earlier, providing free higher education to all students is not a financially responsible action. Due to Chile's dramatic levels of economic inequality, there are many students who come from families with the means to comfortably pay the cost of tuition without government subsidizations. To provide these students with a free education would be to appropriate funds that could go towards worthier investments, like increasing the quality of primary and secondary education, which would help level the playing field for students who are seeking to apply to institutions of higher education.¹³⁷ It is possible that President Piñera, being the fiscal conservative that he is, could provide the moderating voice necessary to ensure that financial aid is only provided to those students who actually require it to access higher education. As the sizes of the matriculating classes only continue to rise, learning to distinguish the students who need full scholarships from those who only need partial assistance or no assistance at all will only become more crucial.

Discussing the means by which Gratuidad should expand under President Piñera is still, however, operating under the assumption that he is in favor of the program. While his recent rhetoric has been more positive, this is not the first time that he has said that he would provide greater financial assistance to Chile's students. On this front, his first term in office yielded mixed results. While the amount of money allocated to students increased from 2010 to 2014, the amount given on average to each student decreased during the second half of his term. It seems very likely that his words will continue to be more progressive than his actions. Nevertheless, publicly backed student loans could be a more financially conservative method to aiding the students. The statistics show that more work is needed to provide publicly funded options for covering the cost of tuition. Although data has not yet been made available to determine the

¹³⁷ OECD, "Education in Chile," 221-222.

effect of President Bachelet's policy changes, the data from 2014 showed that the private sector was still contributing approximately 64% of the funds to cover the costs of higher education, which was more than double the OECD average.

Public loans could begin to close the gap between private and public expenditure while ensuring that financing higher education is not a flat financial burden placed on the government. I previously showed how publicly backed student loans also provided similar retention rates in students when compared to scholarships. If the government is able to ensure students are completing their academic programs then more individuals may be likely to repay their loans, especially if the government works to improve the quality of academic programs across the board. If the government determines that these loans are of relatively low risk, they may be an appealing way to provide greater funds to students without needing to allocate as much of the budget towards financial aid. Perhaps a system could be put in place where the money generated from students who make payments on their loans are used to fund the academic pursuits of the next generation of students.

The biggest problem with this loan solution is that it would be dramatically less popular than Gratuidad with the student population. Defaulting on student loans is already rampant throughout Chile, meaning that solely expanding upon loan programs would almost certainly be a hard plan to sell to the public. Although it is likely that improving the quality of education could lead more students to obtain the skills necessary to find higher paying jobs, which would make paying off students loans a greater possibility, students probably would not view such a policy change in this light. To focus entirely on providing student loans would mean an abandonment of Gratuidad, and therefore the rejection of one of the main pillars of the student protests.

The best move for President Piñera may be to find a compromise, where Gratuidad is continued for lower income families, but a greater emphasis on loans is placed on the financing of education for more affluent families. Since Gratuidad only focuses on providing full scholarships to the least affluent families already, the idea that not all Chileans are provided the same assistance is not novel. It could be possible for Piñera to sell the public on a financial plan where Gratuidad is continued in its current size, but that all future expansions will be in the form of government run loans. These loans would certainly require more consumer-friendly terms than what is encountered in the private sector, but they would still be easier to fund than continued increases to grant programs. Furthermore, it seems rather unlikely that President Piñera would be able to successfully negotiate the reduction of Gratuidad without facing severe backlash. If he were to acknowledge of successes of the program and promise to maintain it in its current standings, he would provide a larger degree of stability in the academic sphere, which could in turn provide students with greater confidence. Then, any increases made to public expenditure, even if the increases were to loan programs, would likely be received with greater enthusiasm from the public.

Although I have provided some potential hypothetical scenarios where the Piñera Administration takes an active approach to resolving Chile's academic problems, it seems likely, given President Piñera's history in office, that the next few years will see slight improvements made to the status quo, rather than revolutionary changes. Fortunately, President Bachelet brought many sweeping changes in her most recent term in office, meaning that the bar has been raised for what the status quo means. There have been many recent changes to the law that will likely improve the quality of life for Chile's younger generations, which means that reversals to these laws are unlikely to come to fruition. For this reason, I remain hopeful for the future.

Although progress under Piñera may slow down, his administration is unlikely to revert higher education to the neoliberal model that had been restricting quality assurance and equal accessibility. Just as Chile had seen an expansion in the 80s and 90s which allowed more students to obtain a higher education and the roots of a quality assurance model in the 90s and early 2000s which made began to make sure that an education was worth the expenditure, the country continues to be in the midst of a political movement which seeks to provide Chileans with the education they deserve. As long as Chile continues down this trajectory, I look forward to what will come next, even if there are some foreseeable difficulties along the way. Progress is a stubborn creature; once it begins it is bound to continue.

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