



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *This article is the first in an occasional series on international partnerships with higher education institutions in different regions of the developing world.*

# Latin American Partnerships

# CROSS BORD



SHUTTERSTOCK

**P**INNED BETWEEN THE ANDES MOUNTAIN CHAIN AND THE Pacific Ocean in South America, Chile is an indisputably remote location. But over the past decade it has nonetheless become a thriving locale for international student partnerships, with many of its higher education institutions (HEIs) receiving and sending students and faculty to and from much of the rest of the world.

“When I came to Universidad Mayor in 2003, the university didn’t have any international agreements, but in the past 10 years, we have established cooperative agreements with 373 universities in 52 different countries,” says René Lara, vice president of international programs at Universidad Mayor (UM), Chile, a private university with more than 18,000 students. “During this period, we have mobilized more than 8,500 students (incoming and outgoing students). This trend is increasing every year.”

Universidad Mayor is not an outlier. The HEIs of Latin America, long among the least internationalized higher education regions in the world, are increasing and diversifying their international partnerships as they become further plugged into the world landscape, with partnerships between themselves and foreign HEIs moving beyond novelties and student exchanges to more sophisticated approaches to advancing their institutions’ presence on the world stage. In many cases, national internationalization strategies and support from abroad are driving their efforts.

### **An Explosion of Latin American Internationalization Efforts**

A total of 48 percent of Latin American and Caribbean HEIs surveyed in a 2013 report by the International Association of Universities that was cosponsored by NAFSA, the *IAU 4th Global Survey*, had discrete internationalization policies, with another 28 percent preparing such plans, and another 15 percent already including internationalization as part of their overall institutional strategy. Thus, 91 percent of the region’s HEIs have specific or general internationalization plans.

Latin American HEIs participating in the IAU survey ranked Europe and North America as their co-first priority regions for internationalization, followed by, second, elsewhere in Latin American and the Caribbean, and third, Asia and the Pacific.

The top three benefits of internationalization reported by participating Latin American HEIs in the IAU survey were, first, increased international networking by faculty and researchers; second, improving the quality of teaching and learning; and, third, increasing the international awareness of students.

“Undergraduate international mobility is the main interest of the majority of the universities from Latin American and Brazil,” says Sonia Pereira Laus, former president of FAUBAI (the Brazilian Association for International Education) and former director of International Cooperation of Santa Catarina State University,

# ERS

**Latin America is opening the door to increasing international partnerships with higher education institutions worldwide.**

**BY DAVID TOBENKIN**



Brazil, and currently an independent researcher on the internationalization of higher education. “There is also increasingly government introduction of dual-degree and research-collaboration programs, mainly in some areas considered as strategic for the development of the countries in the region.”

“Partnerships between Latin American higher education institutions and higher education institutions in other regions are now no longer a new phenomenon or a novelty; they are a common strategy,” Francisco Marmolejo, the World Bank’s lead tertiary education specialist, founder of the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration, and the first Mexican fellow of the American Council on Education. “You are seeing more two-way and multiway partnerships given that more institutions across the world see Latin America as a partner to build with and to do business with.”

But challenges to Latin American HEI partnerships and internationalization remain, with declining economic fortunes in some countries limiting national initiatives to support student exchanges; issues of fairness with respect to providing access to such international study opportunities to all students; and challenges in creating adequate capacity and appropriate conditions to receive foreign students. For many, there is also the added challenge of being a late-comer to the higher education partnership dance: many potentially desirable partners have already struck partnerships.

Indeed, some say that Latin American HEIs still have a lot of ground to gain in increasing their internationalization. “The interest of Latin American students in studying abroad is less than for students in China, India, or Europe for reasons that are a combination of culture and finances,” says Jason Lane, a professor and codirector of the Cross-Border Education Team at the State University of New York, Albany. “For many institutions in Latin America, faculty have historically been slow to internationalize the curricula and the lack of teaching English as a second language can limit international engagement opportunities. There are also limitations in the capacity of their institutions to host large numbers of foreign students.”

As Hans de Wit, director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, Latin American specialist, and former vice president, international, at the University of Amsterdam, reflecting upon the IAU Global Survey Results, observes: “This primary focus on Europe and North America [as desired partners], combined with a call for more intense networking, reflects the traditional view of internationalization as capacity building funded by external donor funding still largely held by the academic

community in the region. It does not recognize the changing position of Latin America as an economic power and with that the more important role of higher education. In contrast, some Latin American private universities are now looking for new opportunities, in their own region and in other parts of the world.”

Colombia, conversely, is a positive example where the government, the private sector, the accreditation agency, and the public and private universities together invest in promoting the country as a study destination, in internationalization of the curriculum and in scholarship schemes, and have included internationalization as one of the key indicators for accreditation, de Wit says. Other countries, he states, lack such a comprehensive approach, and there is also not a regional strategy to stimulate internationalization, for instance for recognition of credits or support for intraregional mobility.

Many HEIs in Brazil, in particular, have greatly expanded their international partnerships over the past 15 years, notes Laus. “We have seen a big growth in international activities at UDESC during the last 10 to 15 years,” says Laus, former director of International Cooperation at Santa Catarina State University, Brazil (UDESC). “UDESC now has about 78 partnership agreements signed with universities from abroad, the majority of them from Europe (Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Slovenia, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Norway, and Sweden). More significant than the growth in the number of bilateral agreements is the significant increase in the number of students, teachers, and researchers involved in partnership activities, which reflects a more aggressive UDESC institutional policy of internationalization, based not only upon co-financing but also through newly created institutional programs to support academic mobility.”

Laus says that the majority of the partnership agreements at UDESC, a multicampus university with more than 15,000 students in the State of Santa Catarina in southeast Brazil, were created in order to support academic and research activities and that 70 of them give support to academic mobility at the undergraduate level.

“The main benefits for UDESC are through creation of opportunities for students and researchers in undergraduate and post-graduate courses to be in touch with other cultures and academic environments, to improve their academic and languages skills, and to open the university to students and researchers from abroad, in order to also promote its process of internationalization at home,” Laus says.

Latin American HEIs are extending partnerships throughout the world, and though there are no hard numbers on the aggregate number of partnerships, there are



**Arelis Palacios, assistant director in the International Office at the University of Texas at Austin, with students in Brazil**

UT AUSTIN

some trends. “Related to Brazilian universities, the main partners continue to be the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, but there is an increasing interest in traditional European country partners like Germany, Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, but also in Canada and Australia,” says Laus.

While interest in partnerships with U.S. HEIs still remains high for many Latin American HEIs, on balance, the diversity of that approach was described by many as likely representing a net loss for the U.S. higher education sector, given the historic prestige and capacity of U.S. HEIs, and the proximity to, and longstanding influence of, the United States in Latin America more generally.

### **Ambitious Agendas**

As for the nature of the partnerships, Marmolejo agrees with Laus that exchanges and otherwise promoting mobility of students are drivers for many of them, though, he adds, “it’s interesting to see how some of the partnerships evolved into something else.” He says it also depends on the institutions involved. “For traditional research institutions, student exchanges are less important than research collaborations,” Marmolejo says. “There is also the trend of dual- and joint-degree offerings as part of the partnership programs, which has increased the number of partnerships for that purpose in particular. Another trend is interest in nonacademics focused opportunities, such as providing research, and employment training-related opportunities such as internships.”

While many earlier collaborations between Latin American and foreign HEIs have tended to evolve and broaden from simple

exchanges of students, many Latin American HEIs now have the confidence and ambition to approach partnerships with an intent to develop them broadly from the get-go.

At Universidad Mayor, a new collaboration between that institution and Montclair State University (MSU) of Montclair, New Jersey, that was proposed in 2014 was subsequently launched with reciprocal planning visits.

“Teams of five faculty members and the director of international affairs of each institution worked to develop joint interdisciplinary research projects and a course for undergraduate students in both countries,” Lara says. “During the planning visits, the MSU/UM team developed preliminary plans for a joint research project and development of a course designed to facilitate a wide range of activities, including (1) preparing students to be active in international research; (2) engaging students in international-based research projects in Chile and the United States; (3) encouraging interdisciplinary collaborations between MSU and UM scientists; and (4) providing a model for an interdisciplinary, international STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) course that can be adapted at other institutions.

The course that was developed, a biotechnology research project involving the use of genetic modification technique called “CRISPR-Cas” in different animal models, took place in 2014 and 2015 with eight U.S. and six Chilean students, providing them with opportunities for cultural, linguistic, and academic growth, Lara says.

Universidad Mayor’s relationships include some with institutions at the pinnacles of the academic rankings. Since 2012, Harvard University has sent University Mayor pre-med program students to participate in internships, with 53 students participating in the program from 2012 to 2016, Lara says. The Harvard students support health professionals working in the areas of general health, veterinarians vaccinating and caring for animals, educators teaching classes, and others helping to repair houses, buildings, and schools.

### **National Initiatives**

The Montclair-Universidad Mayor partnership is part of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative. That program is one of several national and international initiatives that are helping to drive higher education mobility involving Latin America and the formation of partnerships.

Launched in March 2011 by U.S. President Barack Obama, the 100,000 Strong initiative was designed to enhance study abroad opportunities for students, with a goal of moving 100,000 students in both directions by 2020. The goals for the program were ambitious: when launched, 40,000 U.S. students studied in Latin America and the Caribbean and 64,000 Latin American and Caribbean students studied in the United States each year. The program thus seeks to roughly double those numbers in less than 10 years.

To implement the president’s vision, the U.S. Department of State established a public-private partnership with NAFSA and Partners of the Americas, a development agency with more than 45 years of

experience in the Americas. A matching grant program leverages private and corporate giving so that universities and colleges can expand study abroad programs and make international study more broadly available. According to Jill Welch, deputy executive director for public policy at NAFSA: Association of International Educators, “the matching grant program helps to foster institutional commitment to study abroad.”

Several Latin American countries have launched their own student and researcher mobility programs. In 2011 Brazil established The Brazil Scientific Mobility Program (BSMP), formerly known as Brazil Science Without Borders, a one-year, nondegree program of scholarships for Brazilian undergraduate and graduate students and researchers to study abroad in the United States. BSMP is part of the Brazilian government’s larger initiative to grant 100,000 Brazilian university students the opportunity to study abroad at leading U.S. and other global HEIs in mostly STEM fields. Students are required to return to complete their degrees in Brazil.

Mexico’s Proyecta 100,000, launched in 2013, is a government program designed to send 100,000 students to the United States and receive 50,000 U.S. students by

2018. A similar program was launched to send 10,000 students to Canada. And under the U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation and Research (FOBESII) Scholarship program, in 2014, 27,000 Mexican students and instructors participated in a scholarship program to allow Mexican students to study in the United States, which, according to the U.S. State Department, represented a doubling of the recent number of Mexicans studying in the United States.

Likewise, the Chilean government has also been aggressive in supporting international programs, Lara says. “The Chilean government financially supports students of English language education, providing scholarships that are very generous and cover virtually 100 percent of their stay at universities in the United States,” Lara says. Lara says that Universidad Mayor adds to such support for its students participating in international exchanges by funding all airline ticket fees.

The national mobility programs have reflected and helped fuel growing internationalization, says Marmolejo: “The initial target of Brazil’s Science Without Borders was the United States, but they soon realized that the program was creating interest elsewhere, so the second edition of



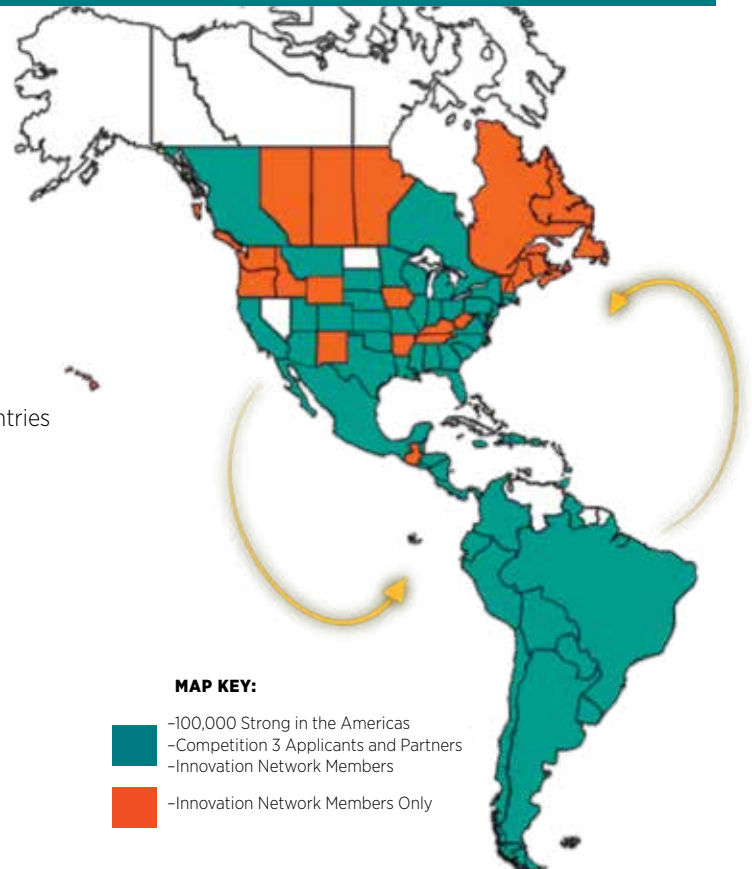
[www.100kStrongAmericas.org](http://www.100kStrongAmericas.org)

#100KStrongAmerica

## Innovation Fund Accomplishments 2014 to Date

- 1,500 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have joined the Innovation Network
- 594 unique HEI’s have applied for grants in partnerships from 30 countries
- 70 grants have been awarded to teams of 153 HEIs from 19 countries
- \$7.65 million in public and private sector contributions have been committed to the Innovation Fund, and \$1.9 million has been awarded to date
- \$2 million committed in matching funds by winning institutions and their partners, a 1.6:1 match.
- Each \$1,200 invested will allow a student to study abroad and will produce systemic change to allow greater number of future opportunities.

\*DATA FROM 6 COMPETITIONS







Students from the Center for Higher Education and Technical Education (CETYS) double-degree students with CityU in Prague, Czech Republic.

the program was expanded to include other regions of the world,” says Marmolejo. “The same happened with the similar program established in Mexico.”

The 100,000 Strong initiative has had a major effect on making Latin American HEIs more desirable for partnerships, Lane says. “The 100,000 effort drew a lot of attention to a lot of Latin American institutions and led HEIs in many countries to see Latin American institutions as viable partners.”

Reductions in funding in both the Brazilian and Mexican programs, however, are leading to questions as to the future of the programs and about internationalization in general. “My main concern with the Brazilian and Mexican programs is what happens when the champion behind the project leaves or funding is reduced—will they be sustained or not,” Marmolejo says. “My second concern is that they reflect the idea that internationalization is just about movement of people, when internationalization is about much more than that. Given only a small percentage of Latin American students are likely to study abroad, who will tend to be the wealthier students, there is the need for a much broader set of actions that will provide university and college students with relevant international perspectives they will need once they graduate from higher education. We need to benefit a broader segment of institutions, students, and society.”

## Lofty Ambitions

The approach of Latin American HEIs toward partnerships depends upon their nature and goals. For some Latin American institutions, such relationships are nothing new. Some of the top research universities in Latin America have long had robust partnership programs with other foreign institutions. An example is National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), among that country’s top regional universities, which recently established a new center at the University of Arizona, while the University of Arizona moved its office in Mexico City to UNAM, says Sean Manley-Casimir, executive director of the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC) and director for Latin American Collaborations for the University of Arizona.

Another is Mexico’s Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, also known as Tecnológico de Monterrey.

“In general, we started establishing relationships strongly with other universities 20 to 25 years ago and now we practically have relations with institutions all over the world, with more than 500 agreements in over 50 countries, though not all are fully active,” says Joaquín Guerra Achem, director of international affairs for Tecnológico de Monterrey. “As for regions, North America and Europe are very important parts of our internationalization strategies. More recently, in the last 10 years, we have strengthened our relationships with universities in Asia, particularly in East Asia and Australia.”

“To deploy our internationalization strategy, we have established key liaison offices around the world, some located in universities with which we have important relationships, such as University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Yale University, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya and University Pontificia Comillas in Spain, University of Hull in the United Kingdom, and in Fudan University in Shanghai,” says Guerra.

A key example of an innovative partnership established by Tecnológico de Monterrey was a 2014 collaboration commenced with MIT on nanotechnology research. “This is an international project focused on research capacity,” says Guerra. “We asked MIT to help us with our research capacity, which benefits us. For MIT, this is about partnering with one of the leading research universities in Latin America, one with which they have had strong ties for many years, and their ability to use us as a foothold in Latin America to address many regional issues and establish relationships.”

Many other Latin American institutions are at an earlier stage in their development and are seeking to move beyond local and national instruction to become research institutions or to integrate more effectively into the regional economics of their countries, which often involves interactions with multinational corporations.

Once they are more fully plugged into the international higher education world, they swiftly become aware that partnerships are key to moving up the international rankings and/or to increase capacity in program areas in which they are weak. The same dynamics are leading many foreign higher education institutions to seek to partner with all regions of the world, including Latin America. Given many already have relationships elsewhere, filling in the Latin American holes is a logical evolution, many say.

A case in point is CETYS University (Center for Higher and Technical Education), an HEI located in Baja California, Mexico, with 7,200 high school, undergraduate, and graduate students.

“We have moved from understanding and pursuing internationalization as student mobility to an approach where the emphasis is for the institution to become internationalized and globally competitive,” says Fernando Leon-García, CETYS’ president. “Accordingly, this has led to a diversification of strategies and partnerships. This includes seeking greater and more diverse geographical coverage, broadening the nature of activities to also include faculty development and collaboration, and increasing program development. We have slowly but surely migrated

Carlos González Gutiérrez, Consul General of Mexico in Austin, Janet Ellzey, Vice Provost of International Programs, and program staff stand outside the International Office at The University of Texas at Austin with four Mexican undergraduate engineering students on a special research and internship program made possible by the US-Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (COMEXUS) and the 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative.



from [memoranda of understanding] covering general collaboration and student mobility to more focused agreements that include more dynamic and strategic initiatives. These include value added mobility such as dual- and double-degree programs and certificate programs, as well as group-based, short-term programs.”

A good internationalization strategy requires a good sense of situational awareness of the university and of what the university is trying to become, says Leon-Garcia. “We are located in a dynamic binational region with many multinational corporations, so we are mindful of the economic blocks that are relevant to the region,” Leon-Garcia says. “Most of our mobility five years ago was to Spain and the rest of Europe and we reflected and realized that most of what we deal with in this region is most relevant to Canada and the United States. Now about 50 percent of our internationalization efforts relate to the United States. We are also trying to increase our relationships with the Asia Pacific region, given the growth of that region and our location,” Leon-Garcia says.

In CETYS’ case this strategy also reflects a long-term plan to move beyond instruction into research and more academic pursuits, says Leon-Garcia. That has led it to [obtain] international accreditations with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), and to increase the percentage of faculty with PhDs from 17 percent five years ago to 50 percent currently and toward a goal of 70 percent by 2020.

### **Patterns and Trends: Europe-Latin American Partnerships**

In addition to the United States, many Latin American HEIs have long had robust partnership programs with institutions in Spain and Portugal. Linked by language, culture, and a colonial past, Spain and Portugal and their higher education institutions have invested heavily to support such relationships.

An example is banking conglomerate The Santander Group, the 10th largest bank in the world and one of the largest spenders in world educational spending. Santander sponsors “Universia,” a network of 1,345 universities in 23 countries in the Ibero-American region, representing 18.3 million students and faculty members. Universia is a major effort by Banco Santander to promote collaboration among universities within Latin America, and increasingly between Latin America and the rest of the world. As part of its commitment, Santander supported with 350 million euros through Universia activities of the network during the 2010–2014 period. For 2014–2018 there is an additional pledge of 800 million euros to support this initiative.

Many Spanish and Portuguese HEIs have deep roots in Latin America. Universidad de Murcia, an HEI located in Murcia, Spain, with 33,343 students, has collaboration agreements with 139 institutions of higher education in Latin America, says Ramon Minguez, a professor at the university. Minguez notes that the University of Murcia leads the international mobility program “Cruz del Sur” (Southern Cross) with other HEIs of Latin America and



Europe. “Cruz del Sur” is an Erasmus Mundus Action 2 project run by a consortium of 19 European and Latin American Institutions of Higher Education, funded entirely by the European Union. It involves 13 HEI partners in nine Latin American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Panama, and Uruguay), and, on the European side, six partners from five European countries: Spain, Italy, Latvia, Poland, and Portugal.

Exchanges under the program range between six and 12 months in a host center, Minguez says, and are focused on creating mobility for undergraduates, graduate students researchers, teachers, and administrative staff and services between Latin American and European HEIs.

The cachet of Latin America among European higher education institutions has broadened to other parts of Europe. One trend is the emergence of Spanish as the second lingua franca after English in Europe.

“There is more interest in Europe in Latin America from countries like the U.K., France, the region of Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and the Belgium Catholic side with the opening of more joint- and dual-degree programs,” says de Wit. “Interest has been stimulated by European programs like Erasmus Mundus and the Alfa Programme, including European funding for scholarships and joint- and dual-degree programs. Latin American HEIs, for their part, look to Europe to seek a high quality of education in countries like the UK, Germany, and Scandinavia.”

Many European countries have been aggressive in sponsoring national partnerships, Lane says. “Germany is a great example, as there is free education for everyone and Germany’s international organization [German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)] funds government scholarships to live in Germany and to come to Germany,” Lane says. “They are recruiting globally and they want more researchers to work in Germany and more students to pursue their undergraduate and graduate degrees in Germany.”

Reutlingen University is a University of Applied Sciences in southern Germany with a total of approximately 5,800 students and 170 partner universities globally that in recent years has expanded its partnerships with certain Latin American HEIs. That in particular includes deepening relationships with HEI partners in Brazil, as the BRIC states are a new key area of focus in Reutlingen University’s internationalization strategy, as set out in the Structure and Development Plan (SEP) in 2012, noted Claudia Frank and Max Alber, staff members of the International Office at Reutlingen, in an AlfaPuentes report, *National and International Strategies: European Higher Education Institutions’ Collaboration with Latin America*, published in 2014. The key goal is to establish stable student mobility in both directions, they say.

“The main focus is on Brazil, the economic motor of Latin America. Brazil is by far Germany’s most important trading partner in the region,” say Frank and Alber, adding that the country also offers enormous potential for German universities in the academic field, and a youthful population, as do also HEIs in Chile and Argentina.

“Whilst there have been contacts between Reutlingen University and Argentina, Brazil, and Chile for more than 20 years, and although partnerships have existed during this period between individual schools and universities in the region, nonetheless the potential for developing the cooperation agreements with Latin American countries has so far not been fully exploited—with the exception of Mexico,” note Frank and Alber. “We therefore wish to step up the cooperation from now on, and thus increase the mobility of students and academics.”

Frank and Alber report that Reutlingen University is pursuing the strategy of extending existing partnerships to additional schools within the university and consolidating them. Financial resources generated through participation in various projects are being utilized to increase student mobility and to maintain contacts between the academic staff of the universities involved. Reutlingen University cooperates with the Universidad Austral in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, Brazil; and with the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile.

The university is developing programs that enable students to attend the partner university for exchange semesters, internships, and also to write their thesis there. At the same time the linguistic and intercultural resources offered to students as preparation for a study period at a partner university are being expanded and a university-wide information campaign is being started, Frank and Alber note. In addition, Reutlingen’s Institute for Foreign Languages (IfF) now offers two language courses in Brazilian Portuguese and a workshop on “Regional Competence Brazil.” Frank says, however, that Brazilian governmental funding cuts will limit certain partnership efforts starting in 2016. In addition, funding for a portion of the project will be curtailed on the German end in 2015 due to the end of funding from a German foundation.

Many European institutions bring much to the table both in funding their own students and, in particular, in funding the fees of foreign students spending time in their universities. “The European governments make partnerships much more affordable and the issue of fees is not as significant as in the U.S.,” Marmolejo says. “Many times students don’t pay or pay a modest fee. Institutions have more flexibility and, of course, students are much more attracted to attend those institutions.”

Partnership programs between the University of Murcia and Latin American HEIs have been financially supported by grants from the Spanish government and the European Union on a regular and continuous basis for more than 10 years, says Universidad de Murcia’s Minguez.

## **Partnerships With North America**

The United States, like Spain and Portugal, has longstanding and deep-seated ties to the region based upon the long presence of the United States in the hemisphere and its strong role as a global leader in higher education.



But it is a relationship that in recent years has been strained by some tensions, including a perception by Latin Americans and HEIs there that it is an uneven relationship in which there is relatively less interest and investment by their American partners, says de Wit.

In Mexico, for example, U.S. students studying abroad at all education levels in Mexico dropped from 10,022 students in 2005–06 to 3,730 in 2012–13, before rebounding to 4,445 in 2013–14, according to International Institute of Education's *Open Doors* data, published by the Institute of International Education, which is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Over the same period, Mexican students studying in the United States rose modestly from 13,931 in 2005–06 to 14,779 in 2012–13, before leaping to 17,052

sive partnership campaigns on a national basis like some other regions. "We don't have a true national strategy and while the 100,000 Strong program is a great symbolic gesture, it relies on the good will of partnering companies to provide funding," Lane says.

In particular, in Mexico, many partnership arrangements have withered with U.S. institutions reluctant to send faculty and students to Mexican partner HEIs. A May-June 2013 *International Educator* article, "Shared Solutions," examined Mexican-American partnerships.

Still, for many U.S. HEIs, relationships with Latin American HEIs are vital to their mission, in particular those in the southwestern United States, whose proximity to Mexico and Latin America, similar geographic issues, and large Latino student and state populations, make such collaborations a natural fit and growth trajectory.

"Foreign partnerships [with Latin American HEIs] have been established to support the university's mission and values and to specifically contribute to student learning outcomes," says Heather Thompson, director of study abroad at the University of Texas-Austin. "The benefits of these educational opportunities are twofold: (1) to increase opportunities for learning, personal growth, and career network development for the Austin students as well as the foreign students that come to our campus, (2) to support faculty in their teaching, research, and publications with targeted partners.

"Many of these partnerships provide faculty and students exposure to academic pursuits that cannot be fully realized in Austin. For example, we can't complete an in-depth study of rainforest ecology from Austin. We can only go so far to study the political revolutions of Central America from a textbook. These partnerships give our faculty direct contact within their field of expertise and allow them to bring that knowledge back to the Austin classroom and lab to further expand the learning of our students. These partnerships facilitate students' learning in context and prepare them for their careers in ways that staying in Austin simply can't."

But Thompson says such relationships require particular care: "Partnerships in Latin America require commitment. They require taking a long-term approach. They require face-to-face collaboration and discussion. Unlike European partnerships that can be maintained virtually and seem to flourish, this is not the case in our opinion with partnerships in Latin America. UT Austin understands this dynamic and has invested the resources to develop and maintain these partnerships."

One leading University of Texas-Austin collaboration has been with Tecnológico de Monterrey, Thompson says.



Students from the University of Texas at Austin with Gerardo Hernandez of Casa de las Americas in Cuba.

in 2013–14. The number of Brazilian students studying in the United States was 13,286 in 2013–14, compared with 4,226 U.S. students studying abroad in Brazil.

Some U.S. students studying in Brazil, such as those from the University of Texas-Austin, participate in language and culture training programs through specialized cultural institutions, as opposed to HEIs. Since 1999 ACBEU Language School (The Associação Cultural Brasil-Estados Unidos) has partnered with U.S. HEIs to teach Portuguese and Brazilian Culture through one- to 10-week programs to more than 3,000 U.S. university students, says Clara Ramos, coordinator of the Portuguese and Culture Program at ACBEU.

There is a widespread sense among experts that the United States has been a relative loser in procuring new Latin American HEI partnerships in recent years because it has not recognized the challenge and mounted aggres-

“The UT Austin / ITESM academic partnership is one of the most historic and meaningful collaborations for our campus and the UT System. The collaboration has included: resident assistant exchange; reciprocal exchange of students, staff, and faculty; collaborative research projects; exchange of publications, reports, and other academic information; collaborative professional development.

“This partnership touches all aspects of campus with a general student exchange at the forefront and special agreements for undergraduate and graduate business, undergraduate engineering and research collaborations in computer science, as well as with the UT Austin RGK Center at the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

“Our equal commitment has allowed this academic partnership to weather the last few years of turmoil in Mexico,” Thompson says. “Our colleagues in Mexico understand the difficulty of recruiting Austin students and likewise we understand the great importance of continuing to bring reciprocal exchange students and scholars to Austin during these times. In 2015 we are reengaging our partners in Mexico to once again create a positive atmosphere and high level support for mobility to this region.”

In some cases, the asymmetry in exchange programs has led organizations and institutions to replace U.S.–Latin American bilateral programs with multilateral programs. “That is one of the reasons

why CONAHEC decided to expand its exchange program to be a nonreciprocal partnership for mobility,” CONAHEC’s Manley-Casimir says. “That way, even if the U.S. could not send students to Mexico, they could send them to other countries and satisfy the requirements of reciprocity.”

“We are trying to create more multilateral relationships to supplement bilateral ones,” says Manley-Casimir. “Our organization started out encouraging bilateral relationships between the U.S. and Mexico and quickly involved Canada with the understanding that building a North American higher education community requires a regional commitment involving all parties. I think another interesting development has been greater regionalization within internationalization efforts, including efforts to internationalize as a region within a country. Work of this kind has begun in the U.S. by institutions in states such as West Virginia and Ohio. This strategy is becoming very prominent in Mexico, and is one which CONAHEC is actively supporting. For example, a little more than a decade ago a consortium was formed in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, of institutions which had historically viewed each other as competitors and had little inter-institutional collaboration to formally begin to collaborate regionally. Last year in Guadalajara, the participating institutions renewed their commitments to the Jalisco Consortium for Cooperation and In-

“Nothing comes close to sunapsis in terms of functionality. We’ve been able to accommodate a **30 percent increase** in student enrollment—over 1,000 more students—**without needing additional staff.**”

**RON CUSHING** | UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

sunapsis is the gold standard for managing international student and scholar information. Our features ensure compliance and save time and money—**to make your work better and easier.**

**SUNAPSIS**<sup>®</sup>  
AN INDIANA UNIVERSITY INNOVATION

[LEARN MORE](#)

[SIGN UP FOR A DEMO](#)

[REQUEST A QUOTE](#)

[sunapsis.iu.edu](http://sunapsis.iu.edu)



ternationalization of Higher Education, which involves the principal higher education institutions in the Guadalajara region along with the Jalisco state government. These institutions now realize that their shared geography and regional development strategies are unique strengths they can leverage in attracting international partners and that many synergies can be created by highlighting and sharing each of their areas of academic and programmatic strength.” The strengths of the various institutions were highlighted during a CONAHEC Mobility Incubator Program visit which took place early in 2015 and provided U.S. and Canadian HEI representatives the opportunity to get to know the institutions firsthand, producing numerous subsequent and ongoing initiatives, says Manley-Casimir.

A similar regional effort is underway in Puebla, Mexico. Already a higher education hub, a number of the region's strongest HEIs are now working together to increase interest in partnerships, says Manley-Casimir. In March 2015 seven Pueblan HEIs along with the state government joined forces to host the Very Interested in Puebla (VIP) visit in collaboration with CONAHEC's Mobility Incubator Program. A strong group of representatives of U.S. HEIs participated in visits to each institution that highlighted many collaboration opportunities. The same group of Pueblan HEIs also offered the International Academic Summer (VIA by its Spanish acronym) program in the summer of 2015, which permits English-speaking students to attend a 3-week summer course (for credit). Similar opportunities will be available again in both Guadalajara and Puebla, and possibly other regions of the country such as Merida and Monterrey.

From March 16–18, 2016, CONAHEC will hold its 17th North American Higher Education Conference in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, examining the potential of higher education internationalization and international collaboration in coordination with governments, the private sector, and civil society, to strengthen higher education's coordinated contribution to addressing global grand challenges.

Despite such efforts, some say U.S. HEIs may have considerable challenges in fending off international competitors for partnerships, some say. “At the same time countries in Latin America saw problems about not being welcome in the U.S. and having difficulties obtaining visas and solving financial imbalances, other countries were offering easier, more affordable pathways and students began to look at those other opportunities,” says Marmolejo.

“Historically, some U.S. institutions had a perspective on Latin American international students that, ‘O.K., they will come—we don't have to worry too much about them,’

says Marmolejo. “But it's a much more complex, diversified, and competitive landscape now. U.S. institutions cannot take for granted that Latin American students will come. Those that don't put forth an effort into more and better outreach will be out of the game.”

## Canadian Partnerships

While learning English as the international academic lingua franca retains its appeal, the global English language competitors of the United States have become capable competitors to the United States in their own rights. The United States' neighbor to the north is one of them.

Canadian institutions have been major players in intracontinental internationalization efforts, says Manley-Casimir. An example is the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE), which is based in Canada and currently is headed up by the president of Royal Roads University of Canada, Allan Cahoon. The IOHE brokers relationships between member universities and promotes student, faculty, and research exchanges via three divisions: (1) CAMPUS, which promotes university social responsibility roles and encouraging doctoral collaboration to help more Latin American schools set up doctoral programs; (2) COLAM, a division that promotes technological innovation, fosters diversity such as groups of women leaders in postsecondary education, and supports indigenous education; and (3) IGLU, which promotes university leadership across the Americas.

Many say that Canada has established a more proactive approach toward interhemispheric partnerships that has resulted in an increased presence in Latin American higher education. A recent IOHE-sponsored conference on international education in Quito, Ecuador, had only 20 U.S. HEI participants compared with 40 Canadian HEIs, Cahoon notes.

Cahoon says his university has worked with others in Canada to provide joint education programs for Latin American HEIs. “We did a delegation in June from Canada to Chile on areas that were identified as common thematic interests, such as aboriginal education,” says Cahoon. “They've been invited to come to workshops we are doing on this. Other collaborative areas include researching oceans and mining. We are hosting an IGLU in spring [2016] where 15–20 Latin American universities will spend time with us and then go on to spend time meeting with other Canadian universities. We are also engaging in an interdisciplinary doctoral program, a new English language pathways program, organizational operational practices and technologies, and student mobility and research collaborations.

Cahoon says there are some typically different needs that are addressed through Canadian and Latin American

partnerships. For Canadian universities, there is interest in gaining more international students—in particular, talented graduate students. Research collaborations are the next area of greatest interest. For the Latin Americans, Cahoon says that areas of greatest interest include doctoral education, opportunities for internships and short-term work placements, visits of faculty members, and innovative technology. He adds that university governance systems are also of great interest, as in Latin America there is typically election of a university president, whereas in many North American institutions, authority is vested in an academic senate.

One Canadian leader in Latin American partnerships has been Université de Montréal (UdeM), which has 100 formal agreements, both general and specific, with Latin American HEIs. “UdeM has been active in Latin America for the past two decades and, like all our partnerships, there are three main objectives: student mobility, faculty mobility (aimed at teaching), and research cooperation,” says Stephanie Dion, UdeM’s director of international relations.

“One of our most active partnerships with Brazil started in 2009, when two professors, one from our Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, the other from our Faculty of Education, had collaborations with colleagues at the Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) that they wished to formalize,” says Dion. “Since 2009, there has been a grow-

ing number and type of collaborations with UNESP. Going beyond traditional student mobility, UdeM has hosted a number of graduate students and research exchanges through funding programs such as Sciences without Borders, the Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program (Canada), or the MITACS-Globalink internship program. Our Institute for Research on Cancer and Immunology (IRIC) has also received provincial funding to organize a joint international doctoral school with UNESP in Brazil in 2014. Five PhD students who participated in this school were then identified to participate in IRIC’s summer school at UdeM. In addition, UdeM and UNESP signed a joint PhD thesis supervision agreement in 2013. The fields of scientific collaboration have also diversified and now include chemistry, educational sciences, health administration, surgery, and veterinary medicine. UNESP is one of the top universities in Brazil as well as Latin America more broadly, and this partnership allows UdeM to access scientific expertise in Brazil and for each partner to conduct value-added international research collaborations.” **IE**

**DAVID TOBENKIN** is a freelance journalist based in the Washington, D.C. area. His last article for *International Educator* magazine was “New Zealand: Small Country, Big Destination,” in the January/February 2016 issue. He wrote the feature story for the France supplement accompanying this issue.



**Wherever they go, whatever their goals, we'll be there.**

We understand the unique needs of international students – we've been serving them for nearly 40 years. We also understand the challenges you face as an international educator. Whenever and wherever you need us, we'll be there.

*Call us today to find out how we can be there for your international students.*

**Ascension™**  
Collegiate Solutions

**International Programs**  
(800) 537-1777  
www.4studenthealth.com

**INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC STUDENTS • STUDY ABROAD • TRAVEL ASSISTANCE • REPATRIATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION**