

## The Priority Access System for Educational Equity at the University of Chile

### El sistema de ingreso prioritario de equidad educativa de la Universidad de Chile

Rosa Devés, Claudio Castro, Maribel Mora and Rodrigo Roco

Prorectoría, Universidad de Chile

#### Abstract

As expected due to its mission and the challenges of our society, the University of Chile is undertaking actions to ensure equal opportunity of access, retention and graduation for all students who aspire to be part of the University and who come from different social realities. For this reason, an equity and inclusion policy is being developed that is intended to contribute to the generation of a quality educational environment across the University, to encourage integration, and to foster capacities to live together and be effective in contexts of high diversity. This purpose calls for the design of specific strategies to ensure equal opportunities for all students, while promoting strong collaboration between the fields of academic and student affairs to favor an environment that enhances the development of individuals. This article describes the foundations, characteristics and implementation process of the "Priority Access System for Educational Equity". This special admission program is aimed at public school graduates from underprivileged backgrounds and is an innovation at the nation level.

**Keywords:** access to higher education, admissions, equity in higher education, diversity

---

**Post to:**

Rosa Devés  
Prorectoría, Universidad de Chile  
Diagonal Paraguay 265, Santiago, Chile  
Email: rdeves@uchile.cl

---

© 2012 PEL, <http://www.pensamientoeducativo.org> - <http://www.pel.cl>

ISSN: 0719-0409      DDI: 203.262, Santiago, Chile  
doi:10.7764/PEL.49.2.2012.5

## Resumen

Como se espera de su misión y los desafíos de nuestra sociedad, la Universidad de Chile está emprendiendo acciones para asegurar la igualdad de oportunidades de ingreso, retención y graduación para todos los estudiantes que aspiran a ser parte de la Universidad y que provienen de diferentes realidades sociales. Por esta razón se está desarrollando una política de equidad e inclusión que tiene por objetivo contribuir a la generación de un ambiente formativo de calidad en toda la Universidad que fomente la integración y el desarrollo de capacidades para vivir juntos y ser efectivos en contextos de alta diversidad. Este propósito insta a crear estrategias específicas para asegurar igualdad de oportunidades para todos los estudiantes, en tanto que promueve una estrecha colaboración entre las áreas de los asuntos académicos y asuntos estudiantiles, con el fin de favorecer un ambiente que potencie el desarrollo de los individuos. Este artículo describe los fundamentos, las características y el proceso de implementación del Sistema de Ingreso Prioritario de Equidad Educativa. Este programa de admisión especial está orientado a establecimientos educacionales públicos de contextos desfavorecidos y representa una innovación a nivel nacional.

**Palabras clave:** acceso a la educación superior, admisión, equidad en educación superior, diversidad

In recent decades Chile has faced the challenge of expanding the coverage of higher education. Thus, the number of students enrolled in higher education in Chile grew from 117,000 in 1980 to 988,000 in 2010. Between 1990 and 2009 the proportion of the group between 18 and 24 years of age that enrolled in a higher education institution increased from 12% to 29%, according to estimates based on the 2009 CASEN survey (MIDEPLAN, 2010). The proportion of this age group entering this educational level is expected to reach 50% within the next few years (OECD-WB, 2009).

However, since the reform of the university system implemented by the dictatorship in 1981, Chilean higher education has moved towards increasing degrees of privatization. This is reflected in the relative decrease in public funding of state universities and the decreasing proportion of enrollment in public universities as part of total enrollment at the tertiary level. The OECD and World Bank (2009) estimate that in terms of comparative purchasing power Chilean higher education is, on average, the most expensive in the world, while 82% of spending on higher education is made by families and 18% by the state. In addition, state benefits for students are lower than in other OECD member countries. As a result, the education of young people from lower-income sectors takes place mainly in institutions with very low or no selectivity, while those who manage to overcome the barriers set by higher quality universities have greater cultural capital and better socioeconomic levels (Torres & Zenteno, 2011).

The data in Table 1 show that, in spite of the improvement observed in the last 20 years, a high degree of inequality persists in university enrollment. Overcoming this problem is a national challenge and universities should play an active role.

Table 1  
Percentage of students between 18 and 24 years of age attending higher education within each per capita income decile

Year / Decile	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
1990	3.8	3	4.4	6.5	7.9	10	11	22	25	40
1998	5.6	6.6	9.1	9.6	15	18	23	34	46	61
2003	8.3	12	12	18	22	24	29	42	51	65
2006	12	15	15	20	21	27	31	40	47	60
2009	16	17	20	22	25	26	29	39	49	62

Source: MIDEPLAN, CASEN Survey 2009.

The University of Chile, being a highly selective institution, is the second most socially elitist within the group of traditional universities that integrate the Rectors' Council (CRUCH). As shown in the OCDE-WB Report (2009), approximately one in every four new admissions to the University belongs to the lowest family income sector of Chilean society (\$0 to \$270.000 Chilean pesos).

University of Chile data indicate that in 2010 and 2011, the percentage of students coming from the 40% lowest per capita income groups (\$0 to \$106.214 Chilean pesos) was 29.3% and 25.8%, respectively. The data presented in figure 1 also show that between 2002 and 2011, approximately one in five students of the University of Chile came from municipal schools, while nearly four in five came from either subsidized or private schools. Nationally, the numbers of high school graduates in 2010 reached 45.2% for the municipal sector, 47.9% for the subsidized private sector, and 7.0% for the private sector.

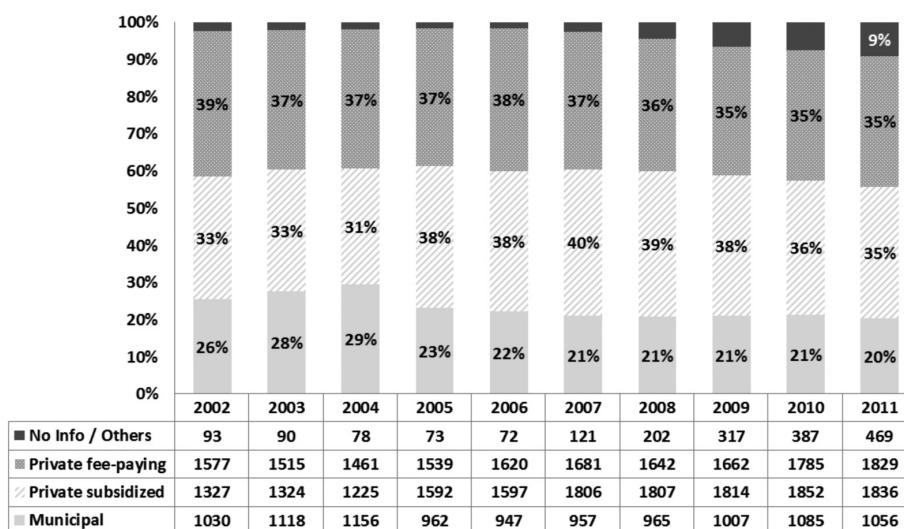


Figure 1. Cohort enrollment by school dependence, 2002-2011. From Database of Undergraduate Department, University of Chile.

Despite the asymmetries with respect to the national population, undergraduate enrollment at the University has increased in diversity during the last decade. For example, from the point of view of demographic composition, between 2002 and 2011 the proportion of first-year students who came from outside the Metropolitan Region increased from 12.9% (520 students) to 20.5% (1063). Likewise, the percentage of students who identify themselves as belonging to some indigenous population increased from 1.9% (75) to 4.1% (213) in the same period. In terms of gender there is also a positive evolution towards parity in total enrollment, rising from 44.6% of new students being women in 2002 to 48.5% in 2011. However, although a tendency is observed towards greater degrees of diversity, the pace of these changes is considered insufficient.

Significant internal differences are also observed regarding the student composition of different programs within the University. For example, whereas the percentage of students belonging to the first two income quintiles in programs such as Forest Science, Mathematics and Physics Teaching, or Midwifery, ranges between 45% and 35% (2010), there are 11 undergraduate programs (with direct enrollment) in which this percentage is less than 10%.

This article describes the underlying principles and the process that has led to the implementation of a special admission pathway at the University of Chile that is aimed at increasing the participation in the educational experience of young people graduating from public schools from underprivileged contexts. The Priority Access System for Educational Equity (SIPEE, by its Spanish acronym) is the first step in a wider equity and inclusion policy and is being developed through collaborative work between different faculties and at the central level. The data presented have been gathered during the development of the program, and all authors have been directly involved in the experiences that are described.

### Equity, a necessary condition for quality

The mission of the University of Chile, as a public, secular and republican university, includes pluralism among its central guiding principles. It is understood that the university cannot be pluralistic if it does not welcome diversity. It cannot fulfill its role as a public institution if it does not take notice of the social and educational inequalities that exist within this diversity and it cannot claim an academic leadership role if it does not provide high-quality education that ensures the development of all students.

During the last decade, there has been increasing concern regarding the educational effectiveness of diversity and a dynamic research field has developed around this problem. The theoretical link between diversity and educational outcomes has been provided by the work of Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin (2002) on the basis of seminal theories of cognitive development and social psychology. The authors develop “*a framework for understanding how diversity introduces the relational discontinuities critical to identity construction and its subsequent role in fostering cognitive growth*”. Exposure to experiences of diversity would have the potential to challenge beliefs at a critical developmental stage, producing meaningful educational outcomes. In this study, Gurin et al. (2002) distinguished three different ways in which students could be exposed to racial and ethnic diversity. The first is the *structural diversity* and it refers to the numerical representation of diverse groups, the second considers *informal interactional diversity* and refers to the frequency and quality of intergroup interaction, and the third has been termed *classroom diversity* and is associated with learning about and/or with diverse people in the classroom. With regard to educational outcomes, two general categories were defined: learning outcomes and democracy outcomes. The study compared the effect of different types of diversity experiences on the learning outcomes of students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and the results showed that informal interactions between different groups were especially important in producing educational outcomes. Thus, structural diversity was shown to be a necessary, but insufficient condition.

In recent years a large body of evidence has been quantitatively analyzed in three comprehensive meta-analytic studies (Bowman, 2010, 2011; Denson, 2009). The first of these studies (Denson, 2009) explored the relationship between curricular and co-curricular diversity activities and racial bias considering four dimensions: attitudes, cognition, emotions, and behavior. Although in general, studies have reported positive effects, a more thorough investigation was necessary to estimate the magnitude of the effects. Other concerns were to describe possible heterogeneities in the results and, if they were found to exist, to investigate their causes. The analysis confirms that there is an overall positive effect of curricular and co-curricular diversity activities in reducing racial bias. The effect is moderate and effectiveness depends on the characteristics of the programs. This remains true even after controlling for quality of study design. Although all the activities analyzed included content-based knowledge as an approach to reduce bias, interventions were more effective when there was also an interactive component.

The second study (Bowman, 2010) examined the relationship between college diversity experiences and cognitive outcomes, which encompass *cognitive skills* and *cognitive tendencies*. Cognitive skills include dimensions such as critical-thinking and problem-solving, whereas cognitive tendencies reflect an inclination towards certain types or styles of thinking. The analysis showed that diversity experiences are positively related to cognitive development. As in the previous study, it was found that the activities that involve interpersonal interactions were those that showed the highest degree of effectiveness. Another conclusion was that the size of the effect for cognitive tendencies is more than twice that for cognitive skills. The authors suggest that the novelty and challenge of the diversity experience may stimulate a general disposition to more complex thinking.

Similar conclusions were reached in a meta-analytic study that explored the relationship between college diversity experiences and civic engagement (Bowman, 2011). A significant relationship was found for several types of civic outcomes, such as attitudes or skills, behaviors, and behavioral intentions. The relationship was found to be stronger than in the case of cognitive outcomes (Bowman, 2010). The study also showed that the civic benefits of diversity experiences cannot be replaced by teaching about diversity in courses or workshops. As in all the other studies cited, it was found that to achieve educational benefits from exposure to diversity, there must be meaningful interactions. A more recent study (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012) has empirically examined the theoretical framework proposed by Gurin and collaborators (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002) through analysis of the educational outcomes of service-learning courses. The study offers evidence to support the important role that diversity experiences

that are contrary to students' expectations play by challenging beliefs, and thus fostering attitudes toward social responsibility.

Taking into account the research and advances in the field of university teaching and learning, the pioneering programs developed from the inclusive perspective, and the current demands of higher education, the University of Chile is facing the challenge of establishing equity and inclusion as a new paradigm for education at all levels of the institution.

The commitment towards equity has been raised by the University Chancellor, who has expressed that: "We will open our doors to a greater number of talented students from municipal and subsidized schools. Our goal is that in five years, 20% of the students entering the University of Chile, that is, 1,000 students do so through the 'extra quota'<sup>1</sup> and new forms of enrollment. This effort must be accompanied by an academic program that ensures that these students have equal opportunities during the course of their studies"<sup>2</sup>. This intention is also expressed in the University's Institutional Development Plan.

### Special admission programs at the University of Chile

In order to move towards the consolidation of pro-equality initiatives across the institution, the most immediate task has been to set up institutional mechanisms for equitable access that can recognize the skills necessary for good academic and professional performance beyond the University Selection Test (PSU), and at the same time to enable improvements in teaching and a series of support and monitoring mechanisms to enhance the educational experience of students. This has led to the creation of the Priority Access System for Educational Equity" (SIPEE), which is based on the pioneering program implemented by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Chile in 2010 and 2011, and which is generally known as the "Equal Admission Quota (*Cupo de Equidad* in Spanish)" (Castro et al., 2012).

### The "Equal Admission Quota (*Cupo de Equidad*)" Program at the Faculty of Social Sciences

In 2009 the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Chile decided to take action to increase the number of students coming from municipal or public schools. As shown in Figure 2, since 2003 a progressive relative reduction in the number of students from the municipal school sector had been observed. The aim was to correct the composition of the student body to resemble the existing proportions in the school system.

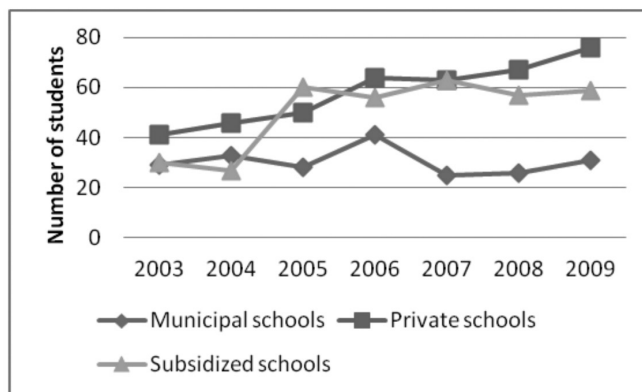


Figure 2. Number of Students Enrolled in Psychology by Type of School at the Faculty of Social Sciences in the Period 2003-2010. From Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chile.

<sup>1</sup> Since 2007 the University of Chile has offered extra places on its undergraduate programs in order to allow the entry of disadvantaged students below the cut-off score. These students receive the Academic Excellence Scholarship (BEA) granted by the Ministry of Education to students ranking in the top 7.5% of their cohort, belonging to quintiles I-IV in family income and coming from municipal or subsidized schools.

<sup>2</sup> Assumption Speech of Chancellor Víctor Pérez, June 23, 2010.



The decision was made to increase enrollment in the Psychology undergraduate program by opening 10 vacancies via the “extra quota”, as well as by creating the “Equal Admission Quota” special access program with 20 vacancies, specifically to promote access by students attending municipal schools.

The following application criteria were considered for the “Equal Admission Quota” program:

- Belonging to the first three quintiles of family income.
- Having studied in a municipal school for at least the last four years.
- Applying for state economic benefits.
- Applying to the Psychology program at the University of Chile as first option the same year as school graduation.
- Obtaining a weighted score of 600 points on the PSU, which is the minimum required by the University of Chile.

In 2010, 102 high school graduates applied and 59 were preselected because they met the application requirements. These students were ranked according to the weighted score obtained in the PSU. Only 28 (47%) obtained scores above the 600 points minimum requirement for selection, and at the end of the process 18 students were enrolled in this way. With the implementation of the “Equal Admission Quota”, in 2010 the Psychology program was able to balance the composition of the student body, breaking the trend of previous years (Figure 3).

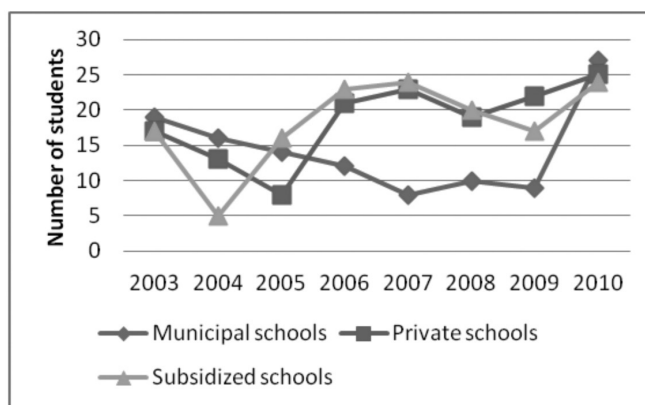


Figure 3: Number of Students Enrolled in Psychology by type of School at the Faculty of Social Sciences in the Period 2003-2010. From Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chile.

The program was also seen as an opportunity to improve undergraduate teaching through the creation of a monitoring system of student performance, while providing support for teachers in the development of innovations in classroom practices. This approach taken was to systemically address the access, retention, academic achievement and results of university education, which in turn are expressed in employability, wages and political influence exerted later. This approach was based on the systemic model proposed by Latorre and collaborators (Latorre, González, & Espinoza, 2009).

#### **Academic results of first year students entering via the “Equal Admission Quota” program.**

A comparison of the grades of students of the first three quintiles who entered via the regular admission system (PSU) with those of students that entered via the Equal Admission Quota (Figure 4) shows that there are no great differences between groups in any of the obligatory subjects in the first semester of 2010. A complete study of student performance and a thorough description of the program can be found in Castro et al. (2012).

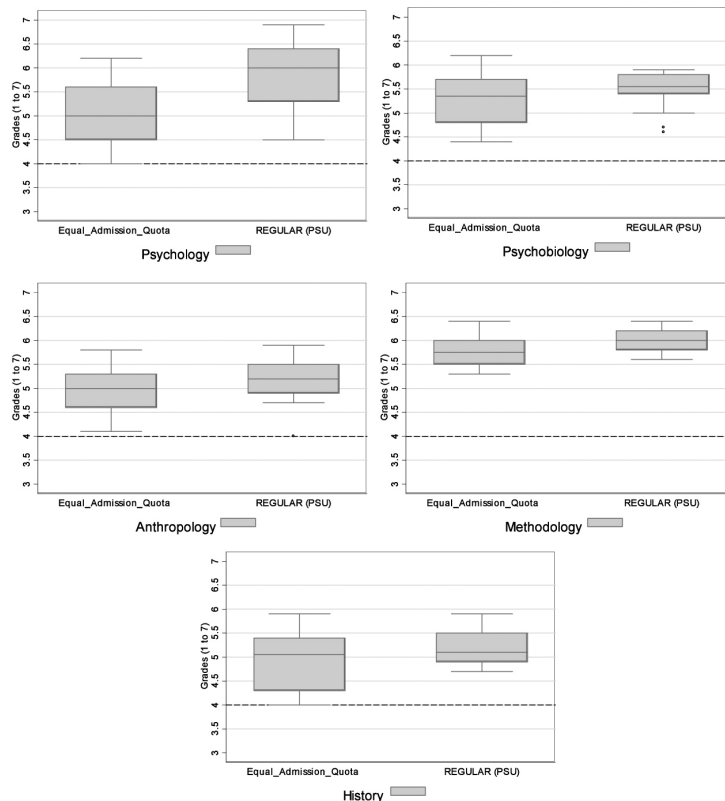


Figure 4. Comparison of Academic Performance Distributions in First-Year Students of the First 3 Quintiles Entering the University by the Regular process (PSU) or the “Equal Admission Quota” process, 2010. From Faculty of Sciences database. For all subjects considered, the Equal Admission Quota has 18 observations, whereas the Regular (PSU) process has 22. Differences are not significant (at  $p < 0.05$ ) in History, Anthropology and Psychobiology. For Methodology and Psychology there are significant differences at  $p < 0.05$ . Boxplots show the distribution of all grades for each admission method. Medians are showed by the lines in boxes. Note: In Chile, the grading scale is between 1 and 7 and 4 is the minimum grade required to pass a subject.

### Refocusing of the “Equal Admission Quota” program and extension to other undergraduate majors within the Faculty of Social Sciences

After being applied for one semester, the criteria for the Equal Admission Quota were revised and, at the same time the program was extended to Anthropology and Sociology undergraduate majors. The revised program eliminated the use of the weighted score of the PSU as a criterion to rank the applicants and three new variables were introduced, which in order of importance were:

- Income quintile: belonging to I, II or III quintiles, giving priority to applications in that order.
- Ranking of graduation: giving priority to those who are within the top 10% of their generation of school graduates.
- School Vulnerability Index (IVE, by its Spanish acronym)<sup>3</sup>: giving priority to those who come from educational institutions with more than 50 points in this index.

<sup>3</sup> The IVE is an index that determines the vulnerability context and is estimated by the Ministry of Education. It ranges from zero in the least vulnerable places to 100 for the most vulnerable places.

In 2011, the PSU score was only considered to meet the requirement of the University (a minimum of 600 points), but not to rank the students as had been the case the previous year.

The results of the selection process for 2011 are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2  
Selection process for “Equal Admission Quota” Program, 2011

	Psychology	Anthropology	Sociology	Total
Vacancies	26	5	10	41
Applicants	67	21	22	110
Preselected candidates	51	18	16	85
Candidates meeting the requirement of PSU score of 600	31	12	11	54
Students enrolled	23	5	7	35

Source: Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chile.

With respect to the socioeconomic background, it is found that 83% of the new students belong to the first two income quintiles, 17% come from regions other than the Metropolitan Region and only 30% come from educational institutions with more than 50 points in the IVE.

The following features of the program were considered to recommend its extension to the entire University:

- It is an open and objective admission system; all those who qualify may apply, because the selection mechanism is based on predefined criteria and fixed weights.
- Unlike the other systems analyzed, the focus is national, that is, it is open to all talented students from low-income contexts in the country.
- While the system currently requires great efforts in communication, background analysis and selection processes, it can be centralized and automated, thus facilitating its management and administration.
- With regard to tuition, the program is funded, as one of its requirements is that the students must have applied for the national scholarship system that is available to them (quintiles I to III).
- It preserves the minimum standard set by the University of Chile for its regular entry process that is 600 points weighted between the PSU and NEM<sup>4</sup>.
- It requires the establishment of a process to monitor the performance and psychosocial status of all students and, by this means it creates the need to strengthen the system of quality assurance of undergraduate teaching. In accordance with this, the Equal Admission Quota program is not only a means of selection for admission, but is also necessarily complemented by a support and leveling system.
- It has shown positive results in its current phase of implementation.
- Although implementation requires both academic and financial investment, it appears to be the most effective alternative to achieve the objectives, impact public policy, and improve the learning environment. At the same time, from the economic perspective, it appears to be more efficient than other options, as it is based on processes that are embedded in the core educational activities of the University.

Considering the above, in September 2011, the University of Chile formally approved the Priority Access for Educational Equity System (SIPEE) to be implemented for admission in 2012.

<sup>5</sup> NEM is calculated based on the average grades for the last four years of schooling.



### The Priority Access System for Educational Equity, a University-Wide Program

The SIPEE Program represents the adaptation and extension of the “Equal Admission Quota” to five other faculties and two institutes of the University of Chile, covering a total of 10 undergraduate programs. As a result, 131 special admission vacancies were made available in 2012.

The implementation of the new program is being undertaken through the collaborative work of different faculties and institutes and at the central level. The academic units that joined the program did so under the commitment to work systemically to enable fulfillment of the objectives of the program and, through these efforts, increase the quality of the educational processes.

The application requirements were those already considered for the “Equal Admission Quota” program, that is: (i) taking the PSU test in the same year as graduation, (ii) applying in the same year as high school graduation, (iii) having completed four years of secondary education in a municipal school, (iv) belonging to the first three income quintiles, and (v) having applied for the Ministry of Education student benefits. Each academic unit defined the minimum weighted PSU score required for SIPEE admission. The numbers of vacancies and the score requirements can be seen in Table 3:

Table 3  
Undergraduate Programs associated with the SIPEE, 2012

Program	Vacancies	Score required
Public Administration	10	600
Anthropology	5	600
Law	10	650
Civil Engineering	20	650
Commercial Engineering	20	650
Information Engineering, Management Control and Accounting	10	650
Veterinary Medicine	10	600
Journalism	10	600
Psychology	26	600
Sociology	10	600

Source: SIPEE database, University of Chile.

Once the preselection of the candidates that met these requirements was completed, they were ranked according to three indicators, as illustrated in Table 4:

Table 4  
Ranking criteria for the preselected candidates, 2012

IVE	Quintile	Ranking	Hierarchy
76.7 – 100	1	10%	1
		no 10%	2
	2	10%	3
		no 10%	4
	3	10%	5
		no 10%	6
53.4 – 76.6	1	10%	7
		no 10%	8
	2	10%	9
		no 10%	10
	3	10%	11
		no 10%	12
30 – 53.3	1	10%	13
		no 10%	14
	2	10%	15
		no 10%	16
	3	10%	17
		no 10%	18

Source: SIPEE, University of Chile.

Ranking is done within groups, so the first student to be granted access is one who, having passed the minimum weighted score for the program to which he or she is applying (600 or 650 points), comes from a school at the higher end of the School Vulnerability Index (IVE), belongs to the lowest income quintile, and comes from the top 10% students in his or her cohort in academic performance.

The criteria determining preselection and ranking are summarized in Figure 5.

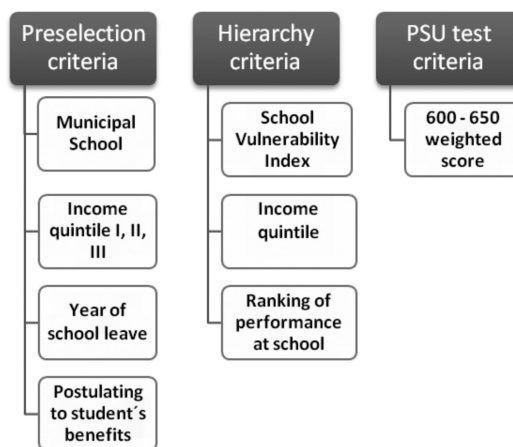


Figure 5. Application and Selection Process for the Priority Access System for Educational Equity, 2012. Source: SIPEE, University of Chile.

The difference in the average selection score obtained by students entering via the Priority Access System for Educational Equity and those entering by the regular admission (2011) system to the 10 undergraduate programs was 64 points, as shown in Table 5:

Table 5  
Comparison of the minimum weighted scores required for admission via the Priority Access System for Educational Equity (2012) and regular admission (2011)

Program	Vacancies	Score of last selected in 2011	Score SIPEE	Difference
Public Administration	10	656.0	600	56.0
Anthropology	5	696.3	600	96.3
Law	10	697.9	650	47.9
Civil Engineering	20	728.3	650	78.3
Commercial Engineering	20	715.5	650	65.5
Information Engin, Manag. Control and Accounting	10	680.1	650	30.1
Veterinary Medicine	10	633.0	600	33.0
Journalism	10	650.7	600	50.7
Psychology	26	693.1	600	93.1
Sociology	10	689.7	600	89.7

Source: SIPEE database and Undergraduate Department database, University of Chile.

### Process of information and application

The time available for dissemination of the program was less than two months and therefore the main strategy used was to contact all students from municipal schools that had registered for the PSU test via email. Thus, 64,000 students, from a total of 836 municipal schools across the country, received emails with information about the Priority Access System for Educational Equity and were invited to apply and complete the forms on the program website ([www.ingresoequidad.uchile.cl](http://www.ingresoequidad.uchile.cl)). School principals and teachers from target schools were also contacted and invited to the University. Students from the Metropolitan Region were also invited to an Open House event at the University. During November 2011, nominations were received from 916 students from 233 educational institutions across the country, mainly in the Metropolitan Region (Figure 6).

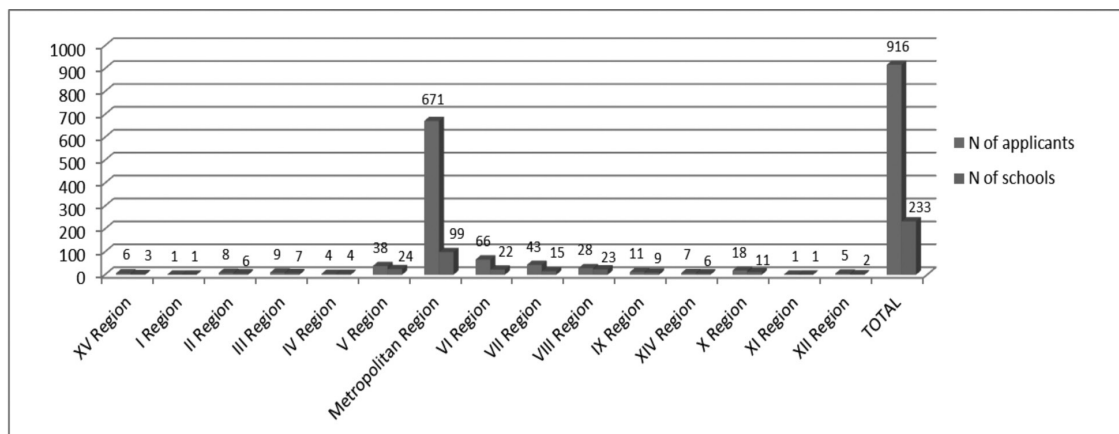


Figure 6. Number of Applications to the SIPEE Admission System and their Geographical Distribution, 2011. From SIPEE database, University of Chile.

**Preselection and ranking.**

The information provided by 916 applicants was checked to confirm their income quintile and the municipal dependence of the school. After completion of the accreditation process, 457 students were found to meet the requirements.

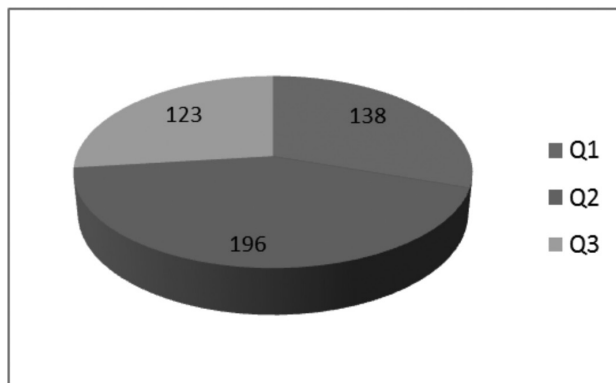


Figure 7. Quintile Distribution of Preselected Applicants, 2011. From SIPEE database, University of Chile.

The data presented in Figure 7 show that 73% of the preselected students belong to the lower two income quintiles. However, only 8.3% come from the 30 schools that lie within the lowest IVE range (> 76.6) whereas 59.5% come from schools in the highest range (Figure 8).

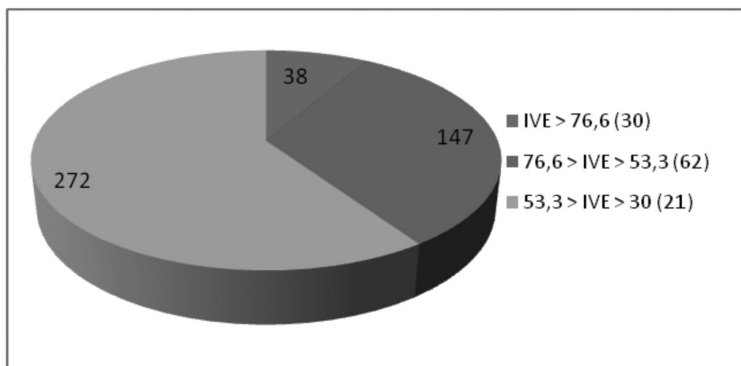


Figure 8. Distribution of Preselected Applicants by School of Origin (IVE), 2011. From SIPEE database, University of Chile.

One reason for the low participation of candidates from schools in a vulnerable context, even before publication of the PSU results, is that the available information and context conditions lower their expectations of pursuing higher education, let alone at a university known for its high selection scores such as the University of Chile. Therefore, only 1 or 2 students per school, usually those with the best academic performance, are encouraged by their teachers or family to apply. At the other extreme, among the schools with low IVE, there are many students who have the information and expectations to encourage them to apply. These schools include the so-called flagship schools, renowned for their high performance in the PSU.

### Applications and enrollments.

Once the results of the PSU were available, simulations were performed taking into account the weighted scores of all applicants for each of the 10 undergraduate programs associated with the Priority Access System for Educational Equity. This analysis gave a perspective on potential access through this pathway. Of the 457 candidates shortlisted, only 348 achieved the minimum score for at least one of the 10 programs. With this information, each of the applicants was contacted in order to inform them of the possibility of access via this system and reinforce the information for final application, which included that they apply to University of Chile as their first choice. After receiving the final applications, and after checking the information for each applicant, the total list of candidates meeting the requirements was reduced to 240. These were candidates that met all other requirements, had applied to the University of Chile as their first choice, and had obtained at least 600 or 650 points in the PSU as required by the program. The progress of the selection process is shown in Figure 9.

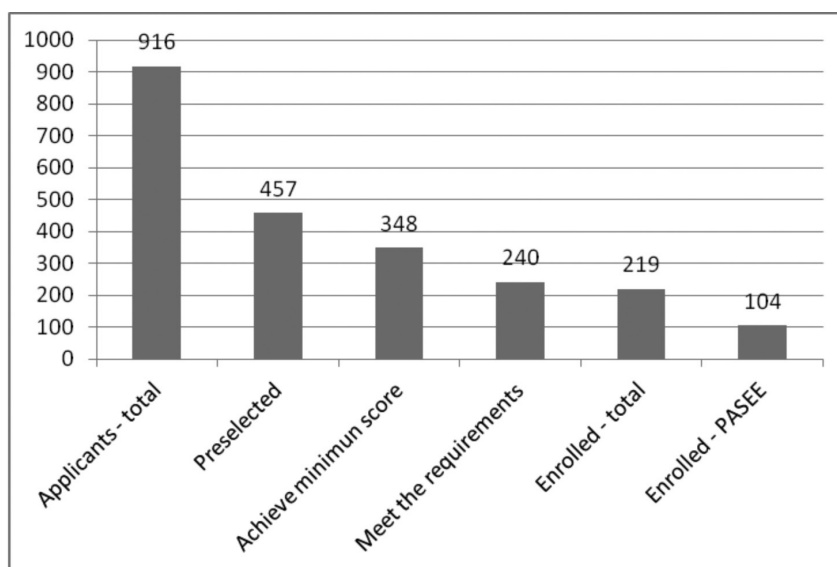


Figure 9. Number of Applicants in Each Phase of the SIPEE Admission System, 2011. From SIPEE database, University of Chile.

### Characteristics of the students that entered via SIPEE.

It is important to note that there were 102 students who applied via SIPEE and who were admitted to one of the undergraduate programs of the University of Chile via the regular entry process, that is, they were above the cut-off point of the weighted PSU score. Another 13 were admitted by way of extra quotas and 104 did so with SIPEE vacancies and would not have been admitted to the University of Chile if this program had not existed (Table 6).

Table 6  
Undergraduate Programs and Enrollment of Students That Applied via SIPEE, 2012

Program	Extra Quota	SIPEE	PSU	Total
Public Administration	1	11	2	14
Anthropology- Archaeology		7	2	9
Architecture			1	1
Law		10	16	26
Nursing			1	1
Philosophy			1	1
History			1	1
Agricultural Engineering			2	2
Commercial Engineering	4	21	9	34
Biotechnology and Mol. Eng.			1	1
Information Eng, Management Control and Accounting	2	3	2	7
Civil Engineering	2	21	39	62
Food Engineering			2	2
Spanish Language and Literature			1	1
Medicine			2	2
Veterinary Medicine		1	8	9
Obstetrics			1	1
Journalism		3		3
Bachelor Program			10	10
Psychology	2	20		22
Pharmaceutical Chemistry			1	1
Sociology	2	7		9
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>219</b>

Source: SIPEE database, University of Chile.

An analysis of the characteristics of the 104 students enrolled via SIPEE confirms that the program fulfils the objective of focusing on the first two income quintiles, with more than 85% of the students coming from this segment (Figure 10).

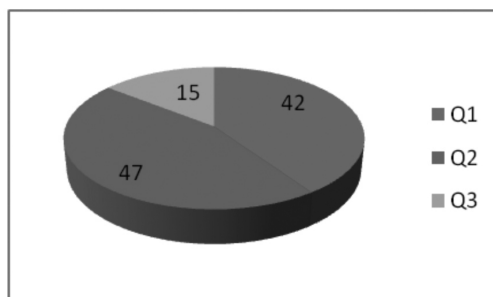


Figure 10. Quintile distribution of students enrolled through SIPEE, 2012. From SIPEE database, University of Chile.



Regarding the educational institution of origin, the data presented in Table 7 show that schools with a higher vulnerability context are the least likely to provide students, whereas few schools in the lower range enroll many students.

Table 7  
Distribution of Students Enrolled Through SIPEE by School of Origin (IVE), 2012

N° of schools	N° of students	IVE Range
13	60	30-53.3
18	32	53.4-76.6
11	12	76.7-100

Source SIPEE database, Universidad de Chile.

As regards the region of origin of the 104 students enrolled, 82% of them come from the Metropolitan Region (Figure 11).

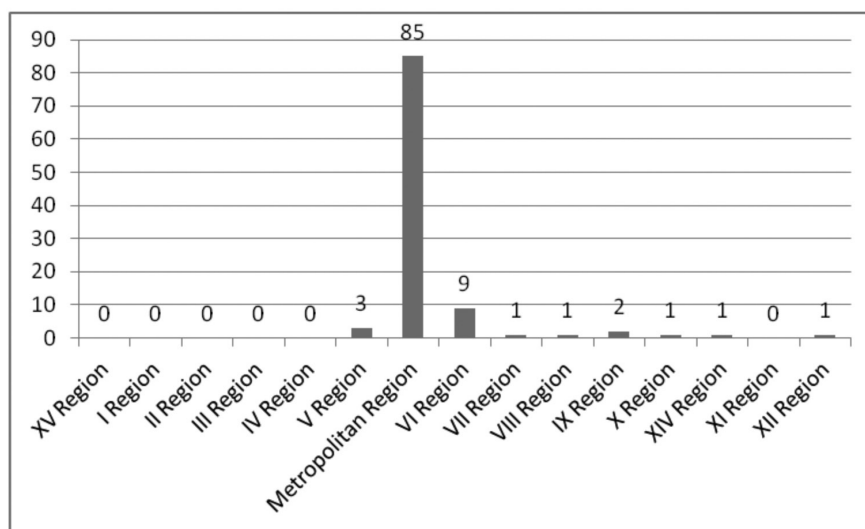


Figure 11. Geographical Distribution of Students Enrolled Through SIPEE, 2012.  
From SIPEE database, University of Chile.

Finally, when assessing the academic characteristics of the students enrolled we observe that the average score for school grades (NEM) is 658.4 points, corresponding to an average grade of 6.2 during the four years of high school education. The average obtained in the PSU between language and mathematics tests was 631.5 points, and 41 of these students (39%) were in the top 10% of the school in terms of academic performance.

### **The Priority Access System for Educational Equity as driver of institutional change.**

The systemic nature of an equity and inclusion policy for the University of Chile involves various challenges that require different strategies to be addressed. These efforts are envisioned as important drivers of institutional change.

An increase in the number of students entering the University with different characteristics from the average student who enrolls through the regular admissions process (in terms of socioeconomic level, breadth of content acquired in their school education, and cultural and social capital, among others) will

require a comprehensive improvement in the formative and educational responsibility of the institution. For this reason, the implementation of SIPEE should not only be approached from the perspective of the students, but also of the faculty and other professionals, who need to innovate in their practices, understanding the challenges of educating in diverse environments.

The purpose is to contribute a quality educational environment through the development of strategies and tools capable of ensuring equal opportunities for all students at the University of Chile. As put forward by Alexander Astin (De los Santos & Cordero, 2001), a partnership between the areas of academic affairs and student affairs is needed to help create “the ideal climate for the student,” considering that this concern should not be confined merely to cognitive aspects. This will require further implementation of support, integration and academic leveling programs for the successful development of students considering their talent, potential and needs.

To carry out these tasks effectively changes must extend to institutional management. The size of the University, the spatial distribution of its faculties and the existence of different identities and cultures in each of them, involves a major challenge in coordination.

An Equity and Inclusion Office has been established to facilitate these changes. It is expected to facilitate collaborative work through a network of Equity and Inclusion Representatives in each of the faculties, institutes or programs, who will be active members of the University’s Equity and Inclusion initiatives.

In particular, the role of the Equity and Inclusion Office will be: a) to develop –in collaboration with the Faculties and Institutes, as well as at the central level– strategies to improve equity and diversity at the University, b) to facilitate the processes related to equity and diversity that are carried out in other areas, c) to coordinate monitoring of actions and programs undertaken at different levels, d) to generate relevant information with respect to equity and diversity within the University, e) to collect best practices, both nationally and internationally, and disseminate them for wider application in the University, and f) to contribute to the education of members of the university community regarding equality and diversity.

From the experience of the implementation of the Priority Access System for Educational Equity, and especially the enrollment of the 104 students who entered by this pathway, the University has been called upon to be especially concerned with the progress of all students with common characteristics, regardless of the path they have used for admission. To advance towards this goal, we conceive the establishment of a new paradigm, which has been embodied in a series of projects that include public resources and that share the following characteristics:

- Focus on students and attention to diversity: knowledge of students, quality of life, and teaching and learning.
- Joint work between the different levels of the organization: quality of life (welfare and student affairs), undergraduate studies, and communications.
- Strengthening existing capacities: minimum standards.
- Student participation: programs for students, but also with students.
- Strengthening of networks: national and international cooperation.
- Actions based on evidence: monitoring, evaluation, and research, (U-REDES for research<sup>5</sup>).

The most important immediate goals are:

1. Consolidation and expansion of SIPEE: Maintaining the goal of achieving 20% enrollment at the University through special entry pathways that promote diversity of the student body at the University of Chile, SIPEE must grow to incorporate new undergraduate programs and new vacancies in existing programs, moving towards its consolidation as a special admission pathway for all academic units. To move in this direction it is essential to evaluate the results of implementation so far and also to incorporate these into the design of the 2013 process.

<sup>5</sup> U-REDES (or U-NET) is a University of Chile funding scheme to promote collaborative research. In 2011 a project was granted to stimulate interdisciplinary research in the area of educational equity.

- 
2. Strengthening student support mechanisms across the University: Although there are some faculties that have already put very effective support programs in place to enhance student performance, important differences persist across the University.

The SIPEE program has added urgency to the goal of achieving similar standards for all. Thus, implementation of SIPEE is being accompanied by the design and implementation of support programs, aimed at facilitating integration and successful academic performance. These initiatives are being carried out through the collaboration of the Department of Undergraduate Studies and Department of Student Welfare and Affairs, as well as by coordinated efforts of the central and faculty levels through the Equity and Inclusion Office.

In particular, the challenges of this area can be summarized as:

- Improving the quality of student life through strengthening teams of professionals, administrators and academics involved in their comprehensive education, and modernization of the processes affecting student welfare.
  - Enhancing learning skills and improving the academic performance of students through new strategies of focused attention, especially in the first two years, taking into account their needs in a context of diversity.
  - Systematic and early identification of potential academic or social integration difficulties through the design and implementation of a monitoring system for student learning. This includes the characterization of students considering their previous educational paths, context conditions, learning styles, and writing skills, as well as pedagogical decision making and administration.
  - Improving learning achievement and integration by improving physical spaces for studying and living together.
3. Cooperation with schools in vulnerable contexts: One of the most important challenges that the University must assume is linked to how it relates to the most underprivileged schools, whose communities do not perceive the University of Chile as a place for continuing studies. Historically, the communication and information strategy of the University has been focused on relatively few schools with high academic performance, as reflected in the PSU scores and the number of students entering selective universities. With SIPEE, the University must put new strategies in place, focusing on high IVE schools throughout Chile and aiming to motivate those students who can achieve this goal. However, the relationship with schools cannot be reduced to simply conveying information on special entry programs. The University also needs to design and implement new programs in the schools that not only contribute to raising expectations, but also –and most importantly– to foster capacities.

This effort must be approached in a concerted manner with an ambitious project that the University is undertaking to expand its educational research and teacher education programs. This project considers a network of schools that share formative goals, practices and research projects with the University. It is related to the evolution of SIPEE in at least two dimensions: a) by offering a concrete link with teachers, principals, parents and students; these links will be useful for better understanding of prospective students' needs, and consequently for the improvement of SIPEE, and b) by facilitating early contact with students, contributing to improve their education through school-based programs and providing information about their diverse vocational interests, in order to devise better ways of channelling them.

### Discussion

As presented in this article, the University of Chile is facing the challenge to strengthen its commitment to equity, with the aspiration of making the student body more diverse, inclusive, multicultural, and active in promoting the changes necessary to build a fairer society. In this way the University is responding to the inequities in the national education system, and also moving a step forward in improving the quality of its formative duty. The commitment to inclusion calls for changes in various dimensions: teaching and learning, student wellbeing and benefits, and personal development initiatives.

The question of whether it is possible to be selective and inclusive at the same time cannot be avoided. Considering that the mission of the University is to educate the best professionals and graduates, its merit-based selection must be expanded to recognize the difficulties of the educational system and emphasize the potential demonstrated by students, even if they have not been benefitted with high quality education. This necessarily involves transforming the current perspective of meritocracy into one that is concerned with potentiating the qualities of all students and which offers them support to overcome the barriers they face.

In the case of a highly selective university, this calls for a paradigm shift because it involves a new way of addressing higher education that understands the complexities of the inclusive experience and the diversity of cultures as a rich source of knowledge and skills, which when adequately used and coordinated can give rise to important achievements both in terms of knowledge and in progress towards an open, comprehensive and fair society.

Achieving these objectives requires a community—composed of academics, students, professionals and administrators—that understands its role in diversity contexts, reflects on the problem and is able to implement the strategies that have been envisioned and defined together. For this reason, it is expected that the joint work towards equity and inclusion will also contribute to integration and cohesion within the University.

Finally, it should be noted that these institutional efforts to promote inclusion and equity will not be possible without a systemic effort that includes the participation and support of the Ministry of Education, in partnership with other universities and in close relationship with the schools. Also especially relevant is joint research, the establishment of networks for different purposes, and the dialogues and reflections that can take place around the various challenges of this new way of thinking by the University.

The original article was received on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
The revised article was received on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012  
The article was accepted on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012

---

## References

- Bowman, N. A. (2010). College diversity experiences and cognitive development: a meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 80, 4-33.
- Bowman, N. A. (2011). Promoting participation in a diverse democracy: a meta-analysis of college diversity experiences and civic engagement. *Review of Educational Research*, 81, 29-68.
- Bowman, N. A., & Brandenberger, J. W. (2012). Experiencing the unexpected: toward a model of college diversity experiences and attitude change. *The Review of Higher Education*, 35, 179-205.
- Castro, P., Antivilo, A., Aranda, C., Castro, C., Lizama, C., Williams, J., & De Torres, H. (2012). El efecto de la implementación del 'cupo de equidad' en la carrera de Psicología de la Universidad de Chile. *Revista Inclusión Social y Equidad en la Educación Superior (ISEES)*, 10, 161-174.
- De los Santos, E., & Cordero, G. (2001). Knowledge about students in the USA: 30 years of educational research. An interview with Alexander W. Astin. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa*, 3(1), 1-13. Retrieved from <http://redie.uabc.mx/contenido/vol3no1/contenido-eliezer.pdf>
- Denson, N. (2009). Do curricular and cocurricular diversity activities influence racial bias? A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 79, 805-838.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E.L., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher Education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72, 330-366.
- Latorre, C., González, L., & Espinoza, O. (2009). *Equidad en la educación superior*. Santiago, Chile: Catalonia.
- MIDEPLAN (2010). *Educación: Encuesta CASEN 2009*. Retrieved August 21, 2012 from: [http://www.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/casen2009/casen\\_educacion.pdf](http://www.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/casen2009/casen_educacion.pdf)
- OECD & World Bank (2009). *Revisión de Políticas Nacionales: La Educación Superior en Chile*. Santiago: Ministerio de Educación de Chile.
- Senado Universitario de la Universidad de Chile (2006). *Proyecto de Desarrollo Institucional: El Compromiso de la Universidad de Chile con el País*. Retrieved July 15, 2012 from <http://uchile.cl/ux30784>
- Torres, R., & Zenteno, M. E. (2011). El sistema de educación superior: una mirada desde las instituciones y sus características. In M. Jiménez and F. Lagos (Eds.) *Nueva Geografía del Sistema de Educación Superior y de los Estudiantes* (pp. 13-72). Santiago: INACAP and Foro AÉQUALIS.