

Content, Structure, and Growth of Mexican Legal Education

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I. Introduction

In 2001, a United Nations Human Rights Commission visited Mexico to assess the degree of independence of its judges and lawyers.¹ The commissioners' final report, among other findings, concluded that "[the] total want of organization of legal education and qualification for practice, and the lack of organization of the profession, without any disciplinary procedures to ensure accountability, may have been the cause of the many ills in the administration of justice in Mexico over the years."² The report added, "It is imperative that the Government undertakes without delay a study of the system of legal education and qualification to practice the legal profession in Mexico, at both the federal and State levels."³

Although the information would have great bearing on the quality and efficiency of the legal system, little is known about Mexican legal education. Few studies have been carried out on this topic; most consist of anecdotal accounts or personal points of view on the current characteristics of, or suggested improvements for, legal education at particular universities. There

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1. Civil and Political Rights, Including Questions of: Independence of the Judiciary, Administration of Justice, Impunity. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Dato'Param Cumaraswamy, Submitted in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2001/39. Addendum. Report on the Mission to Mexico, U.N. ESCOR, 58th Sess., at 4, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/2002/72/Add.1 (2002).
2. *Id.* at 41.
3. *Id.* at 45.

are few empirical studies on point; even if such studies provide valuable information and an interesting analysis, many other topics need exploration.⁴

What do I mean by Mexico's system of legal education?

In a broad view, the legal education system consists of formal and informal educational experiences that prepare lawyers to practice law.⁵ Such experiences begin before students enroll in a law program and continue throughout their careers. In addition to studying for a bachelor's degree in law, the *Licenciatura en Derecho*, these experiences include: any law courses taken before the bachelor's; internships, pro bono work, and extracurricular activities during the undergraduate study; graduate programs, continuing education, and other courses; and educational programs focused on specific legal activities, like those for the judiciary and notaries.

In a narrow outlook, Mexico's system of legal education could be viewed only as those things most closely surrounding the *Licenciatura en Derecho* (LED), the basic educational program that ultimately will allow graduates to practice law. This focus would be on the creation, operation, and development of institutions of higher education that offer the legal bachelor's; the regulatory framework for higher education and professional practice; student profiles and interests; professor training, performance, and experience; the structure and content of the curricula and programs; and the educational context in which the teaching-learning process takes place.

This study takes a narrower approach. This article analyzes Mexico's system of legal education, focusing on three issues: (1) the procedure to obtain the license to practice law in Mexico; (2) the content and structure of law degree programs; and (3) the increase in the number of law degree programs, concentrating on the causes and characteristics of this growth.

For those unfamiliar with legal education in Mexico and the law bachelor's, it is important to clarify characteristics that I will later discuss more fully:

a) The *Licenciatura en Derecho* is, unlike in the U.S., an undergraduate degree earned after graduation from high school. It is the basic law degree.

b) At the beginning of the 2006–2007 academic year, there were 930 institutions offering the legal bachelor's, and in general, these institutions⁶ functioned only as centers for transmitting knowledge; fewer than 20 percent of them were involved in research or other scholarly activities. Some facilities

4. See notes *infra* Section II, Methodology.

5. This study employs the English word "lawyer" for the terms "Abogado" and "Licenciado en Derecho," as used in Mexico.

6. For this study, an institution is each higher education establishment, campus, academic unit, or center. University systems and most public universities are formed by two or more such institutions, and even if some are part of the same university and share the same administrative structures and some educational elements, each operates in a different context, so each is studied separately.

offer two or more legal bachelor's by putting students on full-time or part-time schedules, teaching them during different times of day and for varying periods of study, and with different educational approaches.

c) In most institutions, the curriculum is rigid. Students at each level are assigned courses, professors, and schedules without choices. In every law program, students take between forty and seventy mandatory courses in the three to five years required to earn the legal bachelor's.

d) More than 90 percent of the law professors combine teaching with professional practice; most law degree programs do not have full-time faculty.

e) The cost to open and run a law degree program is low. All that is required, generally speaking, is a few badly paid lecturers, one classroom for each level of students, and a library with the books recommended for each course.

II. Methodology

My first step in researching how the Mexican system operates was to identify and analyze the relevant laws, regulations, and agreements on legal education and legal practice.⁷

Next, I consulted the available literature on the subject. There is, as mentioned, a dearth of materials, though one of the first efforts on topic was Charles Eisenmann's 1954 work, *The University Teaching of Social Sciences: Law*, which included Mexico as one study country.⁸ Several other studies came from five conferences of Latin American law schools organized by the Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe between 1959 and 1972; these works addressed topics such as curriculum content, teaching, and pedagogy, legal research, and institutional organization. Some of that material made its way into two of the most influential books on Mexican legal education: Héctor Fix-Zamudio's *Metodología, Docencia e Investigación Jurídicas*, and Jorge Witker's *Antología de Estudios sobre Enseñanza del Derecho*.⁹ These works describe Mexican law schools and legal education in the 1960s and 1970s, pointing out their advantages and problems, and suggesting improvements. Most studies published thereafter address the same problems, are mostly based on anecdotal

7. At the federal level, the most relevant are: Const., Articles 3 and 5; General Education Law (*Ley General de Educación*, hereinafter "LGE"), D.O., July 13, 1993; Law for the Coordination of Higher Education (*Ley para la Coordinación de la Educación Superior*, hereinafter "LCES"), D.O., December 29, 1978; Regulation Law of Article 5 of the Constitution, Related to Professional Practice (*Ley Reglamentaria del Artículo 5º Constitucional*, hereinafter "LR5º"), D.O., May 26, 1945; Agreement Number 243 which Establishes the General Bases for Authorization or Recognition of Official Validity of Studies (*Acuerdo 243*, hereinafter "Agreement 243"), D.O., May 27, 1998; and Agreement Number 279 which Establishes the Formalities and Procedures Related to the Recognition of Official Validity of Studies (*Acuerdo 279*, hereinafter "Agreement 279"), D.O., July 10, 2000.

8. Charles Eisenmann, *The University Teaching of Social Sciences: Law* (Rev. and enlarged ed., UNESCO 1973).

9. Héctor Fix-Zamudio, *Metodología, Docencia e Investigación Jurídicas* (12th ed., Porrúa 2004); *Antología de Estudios sobre Enseñanza del Derecho* (Jorge Witker ed., UNAM 1976).

accounts or personal points of view, or focus only on a single university, a specific legal area, or a geographical region.¹⁰ The limited number of empirical studies (e.g., the work of Héctor Fix-Fierro, Sergio López-Ayllón, and Ana Laura Magaloni)¹¹ do not focus on the situation nationwide.

The third step was to contact representatives of the entities and organizations related to legal education and practice.¹² I identified those in charge of enforcing the regulatory framework and conducted semi-structured interviews with them to learn their functions and the way they applied the rules.¹³

I gathered all available data on legal education and the legal profession regarding public and private entities.¹⁴ I developed an updated list of all

10. *See, e.g.*, *La Enseñanza del Derecho en la Universidad Iberoamericana* (Víctor Manuel Rojas ed., Univ. Iberoamericana 2002); *Diagnóstico sobre la Educación Legal en Derechos Humanos en México* (Univ. Iberoamericana et al. eds., American Univ., Washington College of Law 2002); David Cienfuegos Salgado, *Breve Introducción sobre la Enseñanza del Derecho en Guerrero*, *Lex, Difusión y Análisis*. No. III, Tercera época, Año VII (Sept. 2004).
11. *See, e.g.*, *Del Gobierno de los Abogados al Imperio de las Leyes. Estudios Sociojurídicos sobre Educación y Profesión Jurídicas en el México Contemporáneo* (Héctor Fix-Fierro ed., UNAM 2006).
12. In late 2003, I attended conferences held by the associations of more than 200 law schools in Mexico and Latin America, including the Association of Law Colleges, Schools, and Institutes in Latin America (Asociación de Facultades, Escuelas e Institutos de Derecho de América Latina, hereinafter AFEIDAL), and the National Association of Law Colleges, Schools, Departments, and Research Institutions in Mexico (Asociación Nacional de Facultades, Escuelas de Derecho, Departamentos de Derecho e Institutos de Investigación Jurídica, hereinafter ANFADE). I spoke with experts in the field who helped me develop the best approach for the study.
13. In March, 2004, I visited the offices of the Undersecretary of Higher Education of the federal Ministry of Education (Subsecretaría de Educación Superior, hereinafter referred to as “SSES”, formerly known as the Undersecretary of Higher Education and Scientific Research). I also visited SSES’s general offices, like the General Office of Higher Education (Dirección General de Educación Superior, hereinafter DGES), which includes the Office of Private Institutions of Higher Education, the Office of Planning and Evaluation of Higher Education, and the Office of Subsidy to Universities; and the General Office of Professions (Dirección General de Profesiones, hereinafter referred DGP), which comprises the Office of Authorization and Professional Registry, and the Office of Professional Associations. During my visit, I interviewed the undersecretary as well as all the heads of the general offices with their corresponding offices. I also interviewed the directors of the General Register’s Office and the General Office of Incorporation and Validity at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
14. The main sources of information were the Ministry of Education’s General Office of Planning and Programming and the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior, hereinafter referred ANUIES). This was a rather complex process in view of the limited and sometimes unreliable information available. The federal government gathers information about students, teachers, and institutions nationwide by means of the Ministry of Education’s Statistic Questionnaires on Higher Education (Telephone interview with Fernando Ulises González Colorado, Director, Dirección de Sistemas de Información de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (Nov. 16, 2006)). Based on this, ANUIES annually publishes catalogs with data on different aspects of higher education. From the federal

the institutions that offer the *Licenciatura en Derecho*, with information on the institutions, their students, and their programs.¹⁵ After months of labor to overcome the absence of information, I compiled a list of 930 institutions that offered 1,130 law programs at the beginning of the 2006–2007 academic year.¹⁶

I concluded after finishing this part of the study that there were no field studies that described legal education throughout the country. Moreover, no basic and updated information exists on institutions that offer the bachelor's in law. Analysis, evaluation, and planning of legal education is based on guidelines specific to each institution, mainly built on the individual perceptions and opinions of faculty members and administrative staff there. No agency regulates or provides guidelines for legal education. Finally, faculty, deans, and practitioners generally agree that the problems and challenges of legal education and legal practice must be addressed urgently.

III. The Process to Obtain a License to Practice Law

The process to obtain a license to practice law in Mexico, at first glance, seems straightforward. After graduating from high school, students begin the *Licenciatura en Derecho* at an institution in the National Education System. There, students take required courses, meet the institution's requirements to graduate and earn the degree and diploma. They then register the diploma at the General Office for Professional Practice, and finally get a license (*cédula profesional*) that lets them practice law anywhere in Mexico.

Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, hereinafter SEP), I obtained the data from the statistical questionnaires on IHE offering the *Licenciatura en Derecho* from 1997 to 2007, and on LED students in the 2004–2005 academic year. However, these statistical questionnaires do not cover all institutions offering the LED because the Ministry of Education does not have a complete and updated list of all institutions that offer this degree.

15. I combined several existing sources to compile this database including, Subsecretaría de Educación Superior de la SEP (www.ses4.sep.gob.mx); Dirección General de Planeación y Programación de la SEP (www.dgpp.sep.gob.mx), ANUIES (www.anui.es.mx); Universia (www.universia.net.mx); UNIoportunidades (www.unioportunidades.com.mx), Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas de la UNAM (www.juridicas.unam.mx/navjus/esc/), Guía Universitaria Reader's Digest (Edición Especial, Año 2, Número 2, 2004). I also consulted lists of the private institutions and their programs that have been awarded recognition by the authorities and accreditation bodies, such as federal government lists (example: Subsecretaría de Educación Superior, SEP, in www.ses4.sep.gob.mx); State governments (example: Chiapas, in www.educacionchiapas.gob.mx/1024/es3.htm); and autonomous universities (example: UNAM, in www.dgire.unam.mx). Dozens of phone calls were made to lawyers and law faculty members and a wide Internet search was conducted. When this list was ready, it was confirmed through the official web page of each institution offering the bachelor's in law. For those lacking a web page, the information was confirmed with a phone call. Finally, in the case of not having the phone number for an institution (or in the case it lacked a phone line, as occurred in some cases), I tapped personal contacts, lawyers, some authority or another institution in that region that might be related, so I could verify the information.

16. <http://www.educacionjuridica.org>.

However, each step may present variations depending on the institution. Therefore, I will analyze each one to explain any nuances. It is very important to analyze the way each institution enters the National Education System because that determines the requirements their students must meet to obtain a license to practice law.

1. Which institutions belong to the National Education System?

Any institution may offer higher education programs, but only those belonging to the National Education System are authorized to award diplomas for the corresponding academic degrees, which are valid throughout the country.¹⁷ Public institutions join the system at their founding.¹⁸ But private institutions require special recognition, the *Reconocimiento de validez oficial de estudios* (RVOE), or they must be incorporated in a public institution, the *Incorporación de Estudios*, to join the system.

The RVOE required for private institutions is the explicit recognition by the federal or state authorities of the validity of the academic program offered by a private institution, at a specific location, and with a qualified faculty.¹⁹ The incorporation is the authorization awarded to a private institution by a public one to use its curriculum, system, and methods, in which case the public institution takes charge of academic and administrative supervision of the private one.²⁰

2. How can a law program obtain official recognition or incorporation?

The amount of academic and administrative freedom or flexibility a private institution gets is determined by how it obtains its official recognition or incorporation. That recognition or incorporation can be granted by²¹ a) the

17. Art. 60°, LGE.

18. Art. 10°, LGE.

19. Art. 3° frac. X and Art. 5° of Agreement 243. For further information on procedures and the application of the RVOE, see Luis Fernando Pérez Hurtado, *El Marco Jurídico de las Instituciones Particulares que Ofrecen la Licenciatura de Derecho en México*, in *Evolución del Derecho en América Latina*, Tomo II (UANL 2006).

20. Examples of procedures and requirements include, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Dirección General de Incorporación y Revalidación de Estudios, *Instructivo de Incorporación 2007* (2007), available at http://www.dgire.unam.mx/contenido/inc_est/inc_est.htm; Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, *Reglamento de Incorporación y Revalidación de Estudios de la Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro* (approved on Dec. 7, 1984), available at <http://www.uaq.mx/leyes/rire.html>; Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, *Reglamento de Incorporación de Estudios* (approved on Dec. 14, 1999), available at <http://www.uaeh.edu.mx/universidad/rie.htm>; Universidad de Colima, *Reglamento de Incorporación de Estudios* (2002) (approved on Feb. 27, 2002), available at www.ucol.mx/universidad/sria-general1/doctos/Acuerdos/2002/acuerdo_01.pdf; Universidad de Sonora, *Reglamentos de Incorporación de Estudios* (1999) (approved on May 19 and June 3, 1999), available at http://www.uson.mx/la_unison/reglamentacion/reglamento_incorporacion_estudios.htm.

21. Art. 14° frac. IV, LGE, and Arts. 16° and 17°, LCES.

federal government by presidential decree; b) the federal government through the Ministry of Education; and c) state governments through their respective ministries of education, but only for institutions and programs within that state. Those who may grant incorporation for law programs are²² a) public institutions of higher education that are decentralized entities created by the federal government; and b) public institutions of higher education that are decentralized entities created by the states, but only for private institutions and academic programs within that state.

In rare cases, the President of Mexico may award, by presidential decree, recognition to an institution, giving it a level of academic and administrative freedom.²³ However, few institutions go this route.²⁴ According to González Avelar, recognition by presidential decree is awarded to “[e]ducational centers of major interest and academic solidity, to which the State wishes to award a special statute because of their responsibility and reliability.”²⁵

Federal and state recognitions are awarded by the secretary of education and education offices in each state, respectively. While institutions recognized by presidential decree may freely develop their academic programs, the federal or state recognition is granted to an institution only for a single academic program in a specific location.²⁶ If that institution creates another program, or the same academic program elsewhere, it must seek new recognition for it.

22. *Id.*

23. Arts. 5º and 8º, “Reglamento para la Revalidación de Grados y Títulos Otorgados por las Escuelas Libres Universitarias,” D.O., June 26, 1940, available in Miguel González Avelar & Leoncio Lara Sáenz, *Legislación Mexicana de la Enseñanza Superior 182-84* (UNAM 1969). This replaces the Reglamento para la Revalidación de Grados y Títulos Otorgados por las Escuelas Libres Universitarias, issued on March 8, 1932, which in turn replaced the Ley Reglamentaria de las Escuelas Libres, issued on Oct. 22, 1929. Some other characteristics of this recognition are that the recognized schools may award officially valid diplomas, once they are authenticated by the education ministry (Article 9º); the ministry is in charge of inspection to determine whether institutions comply with the regulations and presidential decree awarding recognition (Article 10º), and; the recognition can only be derogated by presidential decree if institutions do not comply with the regulations and the presidential decree awarding recognition (Article 11º).

24. Some examples of presidential decrees are: Decreto por el Cual se Concede a la Escuela Libre de Derecho el Reconocimiento y los Privilegios a que se Refiere la Ley Reglamentaria de Escuelas Libres (issued on Jan. 28, 1930); Decreto que Dispone se Reconozca la Validez Oficial a los Estudios hechos en el Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (issued on July 24, 1952), Decreto Presidencial que Concede al Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México el Reconocimiento Oficial y los Privilegios Contenidos en el Reglamento para la Revalidación de Grados y Títulos Otorgados por las Escuelas Libres Universitarias de 1940 (issued on April 10, 1962). These decrees are included in Avelar & Sáenz, *supra* note 23, at 219-20, 387-88, and 242-43.

25. Miguel González Avelar, *La Legislación Mexicana de Enseñanza Superior*, in Miguel González Avelar & Leoncio Lara Sáenz, *Legislación Mexicana de la Enseñanza Superior* 33, 55 (UNAM 1969).

26. Generally, to obtain the federal or state recognition, the institution submits a request to the authorities that contains: (i) general information about the institution and the studies seeking recognition; (ii) information on the study plans and programs including a bibliographical

Federal and state public universities, with the authority stipulated in their charters and bylaws, may incorporate a law program in a private institution. The private program remains under the academic and administrative supervision of the public university that grants the incorporation. One may say that the private program afterward becomes an extension of the public one; it must offer the identical curriculum and adopt the same academic, evaluation, and graduation requirements.

A distinctive characteristic of the Mexican system of higher education is the various ways private institutions obtain their recognition or incorporation.²⁷ In the 2006–2007 academic year, of the 1,006 bachelor's in law in private institutions, 70 graduates received presidential decrees;²⁸ 301 were recognized by the federal Ministry of Education; 576 received recognition from a state ministry of education;²⁹ 34 were incorporated into the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México;³⁰ 25 were incorporated to a public institution at the state level.³¹

In total, the law programs offered at the beginning of the 2006–2007 academic year obtained their recognition or incorporation from thirty-six different sources.

list; (iii) a description of the facilities; and (iv) information on the faculty's qualifications. Afterwards, a visit is made to verify the institution's hygienic, security, and pedagogical conditions. Recognition is awarded, or not, based on the outcome of the verification of the documents submitted by the institution and the verification visit. *See, e.g.*, Article 5, format 1 and Appendix 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Agreement 279 and Art. 5 of Agreement 243.

27. There is no rule that prevents institutions from obtaining incorporations or recognition from different sources for different academic programs. An institution can have, at the same time, programs with incorporation, programs with federal recognition, and programs with state recognition, as long as they guarantee academic-administrative continuity and independence for each program. For example, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México establishes that, "An institution with study plans incorporated to the Ministry of Education or other educational entities, may request the UNAM incorporation of studies, as long as it has the needed facilities for teaching plans from another entity, independently, and that there is sufficient administrative-academic separation from the enrollment, study plans, and authorized groups from UNAM." *See* Disposition 1.9, UNAM, Dirección General de Incorporación y Revalidación de Estudios, Instructivo de Incorporación 2007 (2007), available at http://www.dgire.unam.mx/contenido/inc_est/inc_est.htm.
28. These are the programs at Escuela Libre de Derecho (in Mexico City), Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, and the campus of the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Universidad Iberoamericana, Universidad La Salle and Universidad del Valle de México.
29. In some states, it is difficult to confirm which institutions have state recognition since there is no accessible, updated list.
30. To date, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México is the only decentralized entity created by the federal government to award incorporations to law degree programs.
31. The public autonomous universities with incorporated law programs are Universidad de Guadalajara, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Universidad Autónoma de Morelos, and Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala.

How does this affect Mexican legal education? As mentioned, because the source of recognition or incorporation sets the extent of academic and administrative freedom or flexibility, institutions that obtain their recognition by presidential decree are as free to define their academic programs as their public counterparts are. These institutions decide the content of their law curriculum, as well as the requirements their graduates must satisfy to obtain a license to practice law. In other words, the institutions decide what their students need to do to practice as lawyers. Institutions with federal or state recognition submit their curriculum to the corresponding authority; that authority can reject the proposals or may require the schools to modify them.³² At first glance, this approach might seem to promote the homogenization (or standardization) of law programs. Yet, each of the thirty-two authorities that may recognize or incorporate the institutions sets its own criteria for curriculum approval.

Institutions specify graduation requirements—and consequently the licensing requirements—in their internal policies. Authorities may not modify these and can only verify that the institutions have defined their rules. Thus, even if the federal or state authorities can influence the content of the legal education in some institutions, these places have freedom in their graduation rules to determine what requirements students must meet to practice law. Incorporated institutions must teach the same curricula and programs and they must have the same graduation requirements as the institution that awarded the incorporation.³³

Every institution, public and private, must register with the General Office of Professions,³⁴ providing it with documentation so it can validate professional diplomas and, thereby, issue licenses to practice. Of course, only graduates holding a diploma from a registered institution may be licensed.

3. *What requirements are needed to obtain a law diploma?*

Public and private institutions with the required recognition may award a professional diploma to students who meet their graduation requirements.³⁵ Obtaining the license for professional practice is simply an administrative

32. In general, there are three essential areas of recognition and incorporation requirements: curriculum structure and content; security and functionality of facilities and; the faculty's qualifications and dedication.

33. There are other operative differences. Federal and state recognition allow private institutions to issue their own diplomas, but they must be authenticated by the authority that awarded recognition. As for incorporation, diplomas are issued by the public institution, though they include a note saying that the studies took place at an incorporated institution. There is no time limitation for federal recognition and for some state recognitions, but incorporation usually must be renewed each year.

34. Art. 19° of LCES and Art. 9° frac. I of RLR5°.

35. Art. 1° of LR5°, Art. 12° of RLR5° and Art. 1° of LGE.

process which consists of registering the diploma with the appropriate authorities. The law diploma is the difference between a law graduate who cannot practice and one who can.

All institutions of higher education share certain common requirements to earn the degree and diploma.³⁶ Students must have passed all the courses in the required curriculum, completed mandatory pro bono service, and met the institution's graduation rules.

The federal government established the pro bono service for all bachelor's degree programs in Mexico. Students perform a temporary job "for the benefit of society and the country."³⁷ Each institution determines how pro bono service is done, considering the curriculum, the nature of the profession, and the social needs to be met.³⁸ Students must complete the service in not less than six months and not more than two years.³⁹ For the bachelor's in law, as with other programs, the pro bono service takes 240 to 400 hours over a six-month period.⁴⁰ Most students complete this service during the final years of their program.

Each institution determines its graduation requirements. In other countries—the United States, for instance—the local bar association or the judicial branch of government determines the requirements a graduate must fulfill to practice law. Generally, in these countries, graduates must pass a standardized exam designed by the professional association or the judicial branch. However, in Mexico, institutions determine the requirements their own law graduates must complete to be able to practice.

These requirements are called "options for degree conferral" or *opciones de titulación*. This phase must be completed at the end of studies and after completion of the pro bono service. In past years, the traditional option for degree conferral was a long research paper, dubbed a professional thesis, defended orally before an evaluation committee. Now several options qualify and students choose the thesis option less frequently.⁴¹ Three options have become common.⁴² The "automatic degree conferral" or "option zero," includes the sole requirement that students must pass all courses and complete

36. Art. 8° of LR5°.

37. Art. 53° of LR5°. For further details, see Lourdes Ruiz Lugo, Benjamín Salvo & Alejandro Mungaray, *El Servicio Social en México* Colección ANUIES, Temas de Hoy en la Educación Superior (ANUIES 1995).

38. Art. 85° of RLR5°.

39. Art. 55° of LR5°.

40. Lourdes Ruiz Lugo et al., *supra* note 37, at 42.

41. Some examples of current choices include possessing a high grade point average, taking seminars, or starting a graduate program.

42. Interview with Héctor Luis Navarro Pérez, Director, Dirección de Instituciones Particulares de Educación Superior de la SEP (Mar. 19, 2004).

pro bono service.⁴³ A second option, a standardized general exam to graduate, or *Examen General para el Egreso de la Licenciatura en Derecho*, was first administered in 2000 by the National Center for the Evaluation of Higher Education.⁴⁴ Some institutions rely on this exam to determine their graduates' academic accomplishment while others use it as an option for degree conferral.⁴⁵ The third option for degree conferral is "professional experience," which means the law graduate has worked at least five years in a law-related job. Different institutions—most of them public—have tapped this method in an effort to increase the number of licensed graduates in their programs. Further, this "professional experience" option adds income for institutions since they charge considerable fees to the students who choose it.⁴⁶

4. How is a license to practice law obtained?

Obtaining a license to practice law is a simple administrative procedure that consists of registering the diploma with the federal authority that issues professional licenses,⁴⁷ which are valid nationwide.⁴⁸ Anyone holding a

43. Some institutions with presidential decree recognition initiated this option, arguing that their graduates have proved their quality in regular exams throughout their years of study. But other institutions offer this option to attract more students to their programs, with one noting on its web site, "Due to our prestige and our excellent level of education, here you can obtain your [professional] diploma without writing a thesis or taking a final overall examination." See <http://www.uvmnet.edu/ventajas/index.asp>.
44. According to the information on its web page, the national center "...offers evaluation services to hundreds of schools and universities, companies, education authorities, and professional organizations in Mexico, as well as to other private and government entities." See www.ceneval.edu.mx. The exam is a "specialized evaluation instrument whose purpose is to evaluate in a global, useful, transparent, substantive, specific, valid and reliable manner the degree of indispensable knowledge, skills and values a law graduate must have in order to initiate his/her professional life." See <http://www.ceneval.edu.mx/portalceneval/index.php?q=info.fichas.ficha13>. According to this site, the exam is developed by the center "with the collaboration of a scientific council, a basic academic committee, and an extended committee formed by experts on different areas of law, from the academic sphere, from professional associations, and from the private and public sectors."
45. In any case, the number of examinees has increased from 3,800 in 2000 to 7,215 in 2004. CENEVAL, Reporte de Resultados de los EGEL 1994-2004 (Reporte Estadístico Año 2005, No. 6) 11, available at www.ceneval.edu.mx.
46. Some institutions are now asking for other requirements beside the "graduation options," for instance, knowledge of a foreign language or participation in an entrepreneurial project.
47. There are two other ways to obtain a law license without a law degree from an institution incorporated in the National Education System, but they are rarely used. One is to register a diploma from a foreign institution issued to a Mexican law graduate. See Agreement 286 where Self-Acquired Knowledge or Working Experience Knowledge are Accredited, D.O., Oct. 30, 2000, and its modification by "Agreement 328," D.O., July 30, 2003. The other is for a person to validate self-taught legal knowledge through working experience. See http://www.sep.gob.mx/wb2/sep/sep_1285_acreditacion_de_cono.
48. Art. 23° of LR5°.

diploma from an institution registered with the agency can obtain a license.⁴⁹ Authorities check that institutions comply with the requirements for degree conferral, as well as that the diploma is valid.⁵⁰

While lawyers are required to possess the license to practice, it is truly necessary only when working with judicial authorities and in administrative disputes when acting as an agent, employer, or adviser,⁵¹ except when acting as an agent in labor, agrarian, or cooperative law matters.⁵² While those lacking a license cannot present themselves as lawyers or act in the instances just described, they may give legal advice and express their opinion in legal matters without engaging in the unauthorized practice of law.

What programs are considered to be a bachelor's in law and thus allow their graduates to practice as lawyers? While this may appear to be an easy question, it is not. Information I collected from the 2006–2007 academic year reveals that bachelor's in law programs actually run under twenty-one different names. Of the 1,130 law programs in operation that year, 1,046 were called "*Licenciatura en Derecho*"; the other eighty-four law programs used other names.⁵³

Are there significant differences among these programs with different names? If so, what are they? Analyzing each program goes beyond the scope of this study, but there are differences among them, mainly at their more advanced levels where specialized courses are included.

Who can practice as a lawyer? A license allows the professional practice in accord with the name of the curriculum, and this cannot be modified by the licensing agency. If a student's program earned him a bachelor's in social and constitutional law, that is how his license will read. As the head of the Department of Registration and Issuance of Professional Licenses explained, "It is the official in each specific situation who decides whether the license allows for that specific professional practice."⁵⁴ This means that each local, state, or federal judicial authority decides if a license presented by the "legal representative" allows him to practice in that specific jurisdiction. What will

49. Art. 3° of LR5°. See Articles 14°, 15° and 18° of RLR5°. The documents submitted with the application include a birth certificate, high school diploma, pro bono service certificate, final overall examination act, or waiver of final examination, and the professional diploma. For further information on the procedure, see *Requisitos para el Registro de Título y Expedición de Cédula Profesional*, available at http://www.sep.gob.mx/wb2/sep/sep_Registro_de_Titulo_y_Expedicion_de_Cedula_Prof.
50. The number of licenses to practice law has increased in the last years, from 14,699 in 1999 to 19,958 in 2003. Dirección de Autorización y Registro Profesional (Mar. 17, 2004). The increase will continue, not only because of the increased enrollment in legal bachelor's programs, but also because institutions are simplifying the degree conferral process.
51. Arts. 27° and 28° of the LR5°.
52. Art. 27° of LR5°.
53. Some examples include the Bachelor's in Legal Consulting, Bachelor's in Legal Sciences, Bachelor's in Tax Law, Bachelor's in Corporate Law, and Bachelor's in International Law.
54. Interview with Ligia Desiree Álvarez Góngora, head of the Departamento de Registro y Expedición de Cédulas de la DGP (Mar. 17, 2003).

a judge from the state of Yucatan decide when a “legal representative” with a license from a “bachelor in indigenous law” offered only in the state of San Luis Potosí appears for a criminal case? Can a graduate licensed with a bachelor’s in bureaucracy law from Mexico City accept a family law case in the state of Coahuila? Answering these questions requires a deeper analysis that may define which programs formally allow students to represent clients when a license to practice law is required. At present, authorities have discretionary powers to decide.

5. *What about the quality of law degree programs?*

Each institution, and not bar associations nor the judicial branch, generally determines its curriculum as well as the requirements for graduates to become licensed lawyers. The process to incorporate an institution into the National Education System is not intended to achieve specific quality standards; rather, its purpose is to assure basic educational conditions for a higher education program.

The government uses two means to determine program quality, the diagnostic assessment and the accreditation of academic programs.⁵⁵ The diagnostic assessment compares indicators proposed by a government organization, the Inter-Institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education, taking into consideration the characteristics of the educational program when the evaluation is done.⁵⁶ This is a voluntary process that includes self-evaluation, a visit from academic peers, and a report on the achievements and deficiencies in a program. It analyzes the causes of problems and presents recommendations for improvement. One limitation of the diagnostic assessment is that evaluation results link directly to the amount of resources the government assigns to public institutions, so they try to only fulfill the demands without striving for innovations or new developments. The evaluations also are flawed because they rarely are performed on private institutions since they do not receive federal funding and have no incentive to be evaluated.

As for the accreditation of academic programs, there are two recognized agencies for law programs, both approved in April 2006: the *Consejo Nacional para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior en Derecho* (CONFED), and the *Consejo Nacional para la Acreditación de la Enseñanza en Derecho* (CONAED).⁵⁷ At first glance,

55. For further information on the subject, see Luis Fernando Pérez Hurtado, *Evaluación, Reconocimiento y Acreditación Educativa en México: Espacios para la Innovación en la Enseñanza del Derecho*, in *Derecho y Democracia II* (Universidad Metropolitana de Caracas ed., Universidad Metropolitana de Caracas 2008).

56. See *Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior*, available at <http://www.ciees.edu.mx>. The Social and Administration Sciences Committee is the committee in charge of evaluating the bachelor’s of law and law graduate programs. It establishes the indicators on which the evaluation is based, and that are included in “Criterios para Evaluar Programas Académicos de Licenciatura y Posgrado,” and further explained in “Marco de Referencia para la Evaluación de Programas Académicos de Licenciatura y Posgrado.”

57. According to the Council for the Accreditation of Higher Education, accreditation

the accreditation of law programs looks like a direct effort to raise the quality of legal education, since the accreditation agencies emerged from lawyers' associations and law schools, and their sole activity is to accredit law programs. However, accreditation agencies do not freely determine the form and content of this process; rather, they must follow a framework set by the Council for the Accreditation of Higher Education (COPAES), which governs almost every academic program in higher education. The accreditation of law programs aims not specifically to bolster legal education but is part of a broader, more general push, to improve all higher education programs.

The process for law program accreditation by the two agencies also is new. By April 2009, only thirty-five of 1,050 or so institutions with law programs had been accredited,⁵⁸ so it is impossible to know the effect that accreditation may have on the quality of legal education. So far, the only visible effect of the process is public recognition of some programs' quality. That is key for private institutions to distinguish themselves and to promote their graduates with possible employers. It also aids public institutions in seeking more government funding.

IV. Curricula of a *Licenciatura en Derecho*

We now turn to what law students are taught by analyzing the law curriculum. There is no single national model but many, albeit with common characteristics.

1. Basic legal education.

The content of the academic programs are defined in the curriculum. As mentioned above, public institutions, private institutions with a recognition by presidential decree, and, to a certain degree, private institutions with federal or state recognition, are free to define their own curriculum. That might lead to the misapprehension that, combined with the absence of a standardized bar exam, Mexico's legal educators offer a wide variety of curricula and instructional methods for students seeking a bachelor's in law. However, such is not the case. An analysis of several institutions' curricula finds many similarities. They generally differ only in some courses each law school adds according to its approach or ideology, or in areas of specialization at upper levels of study. Ana Laura Magaloni notes, "[i]n our experience...we could see that there is a strong idea in Mexico that a set of substantive law courses is the hard core, let's say, for lawyers' education, and, thus, its modification

means, "public recognition awarded by a non-governmental accreditation agency formally recognized by the COPAES (Council for the Accreditation of Higher Education), since it meets certain criteria, indicators, and quality parameters within its structure, organization, operation, supplies, teaching processes, services, and results. It also means the program has social relevance." COPAES, Marco General para los Procesos de Acreditación de Programas Académicos de Nivel Superior 3, *available at* http://www.copaes.org.mx/documentos/Documentos/3_Marco_general.pdf.

58. See COPAES, Programas Acreditados al 30 de abril de 2009, *available at* <http://www.copaes.org.mx/oar/oar.htm#Programas%20Acreditados>.

or reduction would mean, practically, not to train lawyers.”⁵⁹ Moreover, when analyzing the curricula for seven leading institutions in the country, she adds, “variations in the programs are subtle, and the emphasis is on the substantive law courses that intend to soundly describe branches considered ‘fundamental’ in the regulatory system.”⁶⁰

What produces this curricular homogeneity, despite the relative freedom institutions have to define their programs? There are several explanations. The first derives from Magaloni’s idea—that lawyers themselves have standard notions as to the basic education a law graduate must get. These lawyers are deans and faculty at the law schools. They define what and how to teach in their institutions. They also eventually will employ their students, so they expect them to have that basic knowledge.

Another explanation is the lack of opportunities for change. Research on Mexican law schools is almost nonexistent, so there is virtually no new knowledge that may affect legal education.⁶¹ In addition, because most professors both practice law and teach, they do not have enough time to prepare their classes. Consequently, they end up teaching what and in the manner they were taught when they attended law school. Finally, in the case of private institutions with federal or state recognition, government agencies are in charge of their curricula. In institutions with federal recognition, the education ministry’s Department of Curricula Evaluation determines whether the study plans and programs submitted with the application for federal recognition are suitable. Every year, this department must review an average of 1,000 submitted curricula with a staff consisting of only the director, four analysts, and one secretary.⁶² With such limited resources, and a lack of specialized knowledge by staffers, the federal approval process becomes mechanical, with submissions compared against a pre-established format. If there is a match of 80 percent or better, the curriculum is approved.⁶³

If there is a “hard core” or a basic education in law, what are its characteristics? I will now address this question by describing the common courses in the curricula, examining their basic structure, and by looking at students’ exposure

59. Ana Laura Magaloni, *Cuellos de Botella y Ventanas de Oportunidad de la Reforma a la Educación Jurídica de Elite en México*, in *Del Gobierno de los Abogados al Imperio de las Leyes* 61, 83 (Héctor Fix-Fierro ed., UNAM 2006).

60. *Id.* at 64.

61. According to Miguel Carbonell, “If we want to renew legal education in an important manner, we will first have to create a new model of intellectuals with the ability, intelligence, devotion, and academic rigor that allow them to successfully undertake such a complicated and difficult task.” Miguel Carbonell, *La Enseñanza del Derecho* 61 (Porrúa 2004).

62. Based on a visit to the DIPES and information provided from that office (Mar. 18, 2004).

63. It must be pointed out that this procedure of approving the study plans and programs has the purpose of achieving a certain degree of uniformity in legal education, but it also inhibits the possibility of new or different forms of legal education. See Luis Fernando Pérez Hurtado, *Evaluación, Reconocimiento y Acreditación Educativa en México*, *supra* note 55.

to learning—whether in full- or part-time schedules, classes at different times of the day, and the duration of their overall educational programs.

2. *Basic courses in the curriculum.*

What is taught in the *Licenciatura de Derecho* in Mexico? In general, law students take between forty and seventy mandatory courses as part of the law program. This considerable number confirms the idea that Mexican law students receive an “encyclopedic” education.⁶⁴

In its curriculum, each institution integrates some courses that reflect its identity or ideology, as well as courses in one or several specialized fields of law, if the program has a particular focus. However, a set of courses considered the basic legal education is included in every law program.⁶⁵ The first level usually includes offerings like Introduction to the Study of Law, Civil Law (Individual Rights and Family Law), Roman Law, Sociology of Law, Economic Theory, and Legal Methodology. Courses in the rest of the levels include,

Civil Law II—Property and Succession Law	General Theory of Procedure
Civil Law III—Liabilities	Civil Procedure Law I
Civil Law IV—Civil Contracts	Civil Procedure Law II
Criminal Law I—General Theory	Criminal Procedure Law
Criminal Law II—Specific Crimes	Commercial Procedure Law
Commercial Law I—Corporations	Administrative Procedure Law
Commercial Law II—Com. Paper & Secured Credit	Labor Procedure Law
Commercial Law III—Commercial Contracts	Constitutional Appeal Proceedings (<i>Amparo</i>)
Commercial Law IV—Bankruptcy	Mexican Legal History
Individual and Social Rights	Local and State Legislations
Constitutional Law	International Public Law
General Theory of the State	International Private Law
Administrative Law I—Structure of Federal Gov.	Philosophy of Law
Administrative Law II—Gov. Legal Functions	Legal Ethics
Tax Law II—Income and Property Tax	Social Security Law
Tax Law I—General Theory	Notary and Registry Law
	Labor Law I—Collective Labor Rights
	Labor Law II—Individual Labor Rights

64. Magaloni points out that, “[In law programs] prevails a teaching model based on the transmission of a great amount of information about the content of rules, and about key legal concepts to understand those rules. The idea that a good lawyer is one who knows lots of laws is still deeply rooted in Mexican legal education.” Magaloni, *supra* note 59, at 64.

65. The names of the courses may vary in some programs, as well as the level at which they are taken, but the content is generally the same.

Some of the courses introduced recently in a number of programs are Electoral Law, Human Rights Law, International Commerce Law, Securities Law, Environmental Law, and Intellectual Property Law. At advanced levels, some programs offer groups of courses designed for students specializing in an area, as well as elective courses, seminars, and law clinics.

The curricula of different institutions also offer “trademark” or “institutional identity” courses. Because these courses are meant to define or distinguish the institution, they often are mandatory, are given in the first levels, and are oriented toward human, social, religious, or entrepreneurial education. They focus on certain skills deemed common to all professionals, including oral and written communication, computer skills, or English as a second language.

After analyzing the curricula of seven leading institutions, Magaloni concludes that most of the courses focus on areas of law traditionally considered “fundamental” while fewer courses deal with new areas of law or the practice of law (i.e., clinics or seminars).⁶⁶

3. Modality

The modality of the legal bachelor’s degree determines the learning rhythm, class attendance, and scheduling of classes.⁶⁷ The modality of a program can be full-time, part-time, open, or via distance education.⁶⁸

Most law programs in Mexico are full-time (see Table 1).⁶⁹ A program’s modality primarily depends on the type of students an institution wants to attract and, to a certain extent, the other modalities available in the region.

66. Magaloni, *supra* note 59, at 67.

67. See Fernando del Río Haza, *Glosario de Educación Superior* (Subsecretaría de Educación Superior), available at <http://www.ses4.sep.gob.mx/>.

68. By full-time study, I mean students attend classes on campus and they all follow a common calendar and schedule. In open study, students are on campus only for tutoring or exams. In the part-time option, students attend classes on certain days for short periods, but also may be tutored at other times. In distance learning, while students may have some contact with professors and their peers, mostly they are off campus and employ various means, especially technological ones, to get instruction.

69. In 165 institutions, the bachelor’s in law is offered in two options; and in four institutions, three options are offered. Some institutions offer two, three, and, in one case, up to four law programs in a single modality, but they are different in terms of duration, structure, or the entity awarding the RVOE or the incorporation. Each student must decide at the beginning of the program which option he or she will take.

**Table 1. Bachelor's in law in the 2006-2007
Academic Year, by Modality**

	Public Programs %	Private Programs %	Total %
Full-time	94 (75.2)	798 (79.4)	892 (78.9)
Part-time	17 (13.6)	133 (13.2)	150 (13.3)
Open	13 (10.4)	63 (6.3)	76 (6.7)
Distance	1 (0.8)	11 (1.1)	12 (1.1)
Total	125 (100)	1005 (100)	1130 (100)

Source: Data collected by the author.

From this point on, I will focus only on full-time programs since they are the most prevalent and offer the “traditional” educational structure: students and professors have constant class attendance as they work through a curriculum.⁷⁰

4. Curricular structure.

Among law programs, there are curricula that are rigid, flexible or specialized. A rigid plan establishes the courses the students must take each academic term. Some institutions with a rigid plan offer students the opportunity to choose from a set of optional courses, but the curriculum dictates how many and when these can be selected by the students; they generally represent less than 20 percent of the courses for the bachelor's in law. In contrast, a flexible plan allows students to choose the courses they want in each academic term, although there are required classes, established sequences, and a minimum and maximum number of courses that can be taken each term. A specialized curriculum usually starts rigid, but in the last terms, students can select courses focusing on a specific area of law. There also are mixed options in a single study plan, which can start rigid and later become flexible.⁷¹

Most law programs in Mexico follow a rigid plan, mainly due to two factors. First, there are “hard core” courses that must be included in every lawyer's education and these make up 80 percent of the *Licenciatura en Derecho*. The rigid approach lets institutions ensure that every student receives that “essential” knowledge. Second, most institutions have few students, so they cannot offer a wide variety of electives. Their facilities also are small and faculty salaries are tight. In some small institutions that offer electives, the student body votes a term ahead on the electives they want and they all then take the courses that win the most votes.

70. Full-time programs represent almost 80 percent of all the law programs and their students represent more than 90 percent of the total law school enrollment. See database from the Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información, SEP, on file with the author.

71. There also are a few programs targeted at mature students or working professionals. These programs reduce the number of courses by offering only those relevant for law practice, and adapt the program to fit into the short time available to these students. Two examples are the Executive Programs at the Universidad del Valle de México, <http://www.uvmnet.edu>, and the Adult Education Program at the Universidad del Noroeste, <http://www.uno.mx>.

The more populous public institutions and the wealthier private ones tend towards more flexible programs and more curricular specialization. This approach addresses the issue of specialization in certain areas, as well as institutions' concern about high dropout rates. Institutions have experienced increasing student retention rates by allowing students to choose the courses they want to take, and by offering individualized help to guide them in the selection process.

5. Division and duration of law programs.

In general, each institution decides the academic terms and the duration of its curriculum. Still, Agreement 279, which aims to standardize certain aspects of higher education, states that the minimum amount of time for learning activities under the direction of an instructor in a full-time program is 2,400 hours.⁷²

Traditionally, law programs had lasted five years, but since the 1980s, shorter programs have been developed. By the 2006–2007 academic year, only 23 percent of full-time law programs were five-year programs.⁷³ In contrast, 33 percent of the full-time law programs that year were less than four years long.⁷⁴ A few full-time bachelor's in law may now be completed in two years and eight months.

The reduced time to earn a degree is chiefly due to the way academic terms are structured. Study plans used to be divided into year- or semester-long terms, but nowadays more programs are divided into four-month periods or quarters. Instead of offering the bachelor's in law in five year-terms or in nine or ten semesters with long breaks in December-January, and in June-August, these programs offer the degree in nine or ten four-month terms, with only one- or two-week breaks between terms. Institutions, thus, have attracted more students who work and are eager to finish their degree as quickly as possible. If these institutions must sacrifice courses to reduce the time it takes to earn a degree, they discard non-substantive law courses. There have not been studies analyzing the qualitative impact of reducing the law programs' length.

6. Class shifts.

A law program's "class shift" refers to the period of the day when most classes are scheduled. Full-time law programs currently offer six different options for class shifts. In the mixed shift, students must attend morning and evening classes. Flexible shift classes are offered all day and students choose their own

72. Art. 15° of Agreement 279. Study plans for all bachelor's degrees, including law, will consist of at least 300 credits. One credit equals sixteen hours of effective learning activities. A learning activity is any action in which the student participates to acquire the required knowledge and skills in a study plan, either under academic staff supervision or independently. Arts. 13° frac. II and 14° of Agreement 279.

73. However, this corresponds to 55 percent of the law programs in public institutions and only 19 percent of the law programs in private ones.

74. All of these programs except one are offered at private institutions.

schedule. Morning shift classes run 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.,⁷⁵ intermediate classes run from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.,⁷⁶ evening classes run from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., and night shift classes run from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. The program's scheduling defines, to a degree, which students matriculate, especially if they have employment options in their area. Programs with morning classes attract recent high school graduates who do not work; evening and night classes attract working or older students.

Each institution determines its class scheduling, and it can even offer the full law program (that is, all the levels) at different times of the day. Three out of ten bachelor's in law are offered on two or more class schedules.⁷⁷ A single law program may combine class schedules, depending on the year of study in the program. Ten percent of all full-time law programs follow this model. For example, the first half of the program is offered in mornings, the second half during afternoons. This lets students work during the latter stages of their schooling. The structure of the curriculum influences the scheduling of classes. Institutions with rigid plans have mixed, morning, evening or night classes, while flexible plans have flexible schedules. Most law programs offer morning or evening classes.

V. Increase in the Number of Law Schools

During the 1997-1998 academic year, there were 170,210 law students in 364 institutions offering 367 bachelor's in law. By the 2006-2007 academic year, the number of law students had increased to 240,000 or so distributed among 930 institutions offering 1,130 bachelor's in law.⁷⁸ This represents a 41 percent increase in enrollment over the past decade, a corresponding 155 percent increase in institutions offering a law program, and a 208 percent increase in *Licenciaturas en Derecho*.⁷⁹ In other words, in the past ten years, approximately every week a new law school began to offer one or two new bachelor's in law to 134 new students.

Paradoxically, this rapid increase in the number of law programs has occurred simultaneously with a serious lack of job opportunities for graduates. In principle, higher education must give a balanced response to both social demand for opportunities of higher education and the needs of the job market. Still, employment prospects for most law graduates are poor. In the 1990s, the National Association of Universities examined the employment prospects for

75. As an interesting note, morning classes at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco start at 6 A.M.

76. In some institutions, the intermediate schedule is called mixed or pilot.

77. A single full-time program may be offered in up to four class schedules. The bachelor's in law at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León is one example.

78. Personal database and data from the Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información de la SEP.

79. The Mexican population increased 13 percent over the same period. See Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI).

graduates from different programs.⁸⁰ The study found that thirteen programs, including the bachelor's in law, had a high enrollment surplus, which could be critical in the job market for the near term.⁸¹ The study calculated a surplus of approximately 47 percent of the law graduates and pointed out that estimates through 2010 "further emphasize the adverse conditions expected for the job market."⁸² The study concluded that law graduates, like those in the other critical programs, "may be unemployed, and at best, they may find a low quality occupation that is not a professional career, which implies a sub-employment percentage for professionals of considerable dimensions."⁸³

However, opportunities really turn on where students study. At the federal level, the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* law school has graduated Mexico's political and judicial elite. Nevertheless, in the last decades, elite private law schools also are assuming this role, especially in the practice of corporate law.⁸⁴ In contrast, graduates of the public and private law schools outside the prestigious and elite groups compete for lower paying jobs, and a large percentage of them do work unrelated to their law studies.⁸⁵ The stratification of law schools and its impact on legal practice awaits further study.

What caused such growth in legal studies and what are the characteristics of this phenomenon? The main causes of this growth include: 1) the generally increased availability of higher education in Mexico, in response to the growing demand for higher education programs; 2) the ease with which law programs can be started, as well as the low investment required to do so; and 3) the wide range of reasons students have to study law.

80. ANUIES, Mercado Laboral de Profesionistas en México: Escenarios de Prospectiva 2000-2006-2010, Segunda Parte (ANUIES 2003).

81. Besides law, the other critical degrees are Business Administration, Accounting, Computer and Systems Engineering, Elementary Education, Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, Medicine, Political Sciences, and Public Administration, Pedagogy and Education Sciences, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Communication Sciences, Marketing, and Architecture which, according to the study, "will provide 82 percent of the total offer of professionals with a bachelor's degree during 2000-2006." *Id.* at 217.

82. *Id.* at 218.

83. *Id.*

84. For more information, see Yves Dezalay & Bryant G. Garth, *Building the Law and Putting the State into Play: International Strategies Among a Divided Elite in Mexico* (Amer. Bar Foundation, Working Paper No.9509, 1996); Larissa Adler Lomnitz & Rodrigo Salazar, *Cultural Elements in the Practice of Law in Mexico: Informal Networks in a Formal System*, in *Global Prescriptions: The Production, Exportation and Importation of a New Legal Orthodoxy* (Yves Dezalay & Bryant G. Garth eds., Univ. of Michigan Press 2002).

85. For more information about the characteristics, interests, and opportunities for law students in different groups of law schools, see Luis Fernando Pérez Hurtado, *The Next Generation of Mexican Lawyers: A Study of Mexico's System of Legal Education and its Law Students* (2008) (J.S.D. dissertation, Stanford Law School), published in Spanish as Luis Fernando Pérez Hurtado, *La Futura Generación de Abogados Mexicanos. Estudio de las Escuelas y los Estudiantes de Derecho en México* (UNAM 2009).

1. Increase in higher education enrollment in general

The rapid increase in the number of academic programs is not a phenomenon exclusive to law studies, but also extends to other higher education programs in Mexico. Higher education enrollment has almost tripled over the last twenty-five years, from 731,147 students in 1980 to 2,150,146 in 2006.⁸⁶ From 1995 to 2004, enrollment increased 53 percent, surpassing, for example, the average 41 percent enrollment increase in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.⁸⁷ Due to this growing need, for several decades the federal government's Education Development Programs have prioritized the expansion of access to higher education.⁸⁸

This growth will continue for at least another decade because enrollment in higher education is still lower than it should be. For example, the higher education enrollment rate for twenty- to twenty-four year-olds increased from 14.83 percent in 1995 to 23.9 percent in 2003, but it is less than the average rate of 28.5 percent for Latin America.⁸⁹ Compare Mexico's rate with that of other OECD countries and the difference is even greater. According to the OECD, if the trend continues, only 30 percent of young Mexicans will receive a college education at some time in their lives, considerably lower than the 54 percent average for other OECD countries.⁹⁰

Interest in enrolling in a higher education program is linked to easy access combined with the general perception that the higher the educational level individuals attain, the better their jobs and the higher their salaries.⁹¹ According to the OECD, in Mexico, having a college degree gives a 19 percent advantage in employment opportunities, reflecting an increase from 61 percent for high

86. ANUIES, Anuario Estadístico 2004. Población Escolar de Licenciatura y Técnico Superior en Universidades e Institutos Tecnológicos 4 (2004), referring to Anuarios Estadísticos de la ANUIES, 1980-2004 and SEP, Sistema Educativo de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Principales Cifras Ciclo Escolar 2006-2007 (2007) 177, available at www.dgpp.sep.gob.mx/Estadi/Principales%20cifras%202006-2007%20grisi.pdf.

87. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education at a Glance 2007, Briefing Note for Mexico 7 (2007) (hereinafter OECD, Briefing Note for Mexico), available at www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/22/37392816.pdf.

88. See, e.g., Secretaría de Educación Pública, Programa para la Modernización Educativa 1989-94 (1989), Secretaría de Educación Pública, Programa Nacional de Educación 1995-2000 (1995), Secretaría de Educación Pública, Programa Nacional de Educación 2001-2006 (1st ed., 2001).

89. International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean/Instituto Internacional para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (IESALC-UNESCO), Informe sobre la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe 2000-2005. La Metamorfosis de la Educación Superior 247 (2006) (hereinafter IESALC-UNESCO).

90. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education at a Glance 2007, OECD Indicators 286-87 and 294 (2007) (hereinafter OECD, Education at a Glance 2007), available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/4/55/39313286.pdf>.

91. One study that explores these ideas is: OECD, Education at a Glance 2007, *supra* note 90, especially the sections "A8: How does participation in education affect participation in the labor market?" and "A9: What are the economic benefits of education?"

school graduates to 82 percent for college graduates.⁹² Thus, the percentage of young Mexicans interested in higher education is greater than in other countries; 49 percent of fifteen-year-olds want to finish a bachelor's degree, while the average in OECD countries is 44.5 percent.⁹³

2. *Ease with which a Licenciatura en Derecho can be started.*

Héctor Fix-Fierro and Sergio López Ayllón point out that “opening a new establishment [that offers the bachelor's in law] does not require a large investment. All you need is a classroom and one or several part-time professors. There is no real need to invest in a library (maybe a basic one), nor [is there any need] for an ambitious research program and publications.”⁹⁴ This observation refers to institutions, mainly private ones, with a low enrollment, which at present offer more than 50 percent of Mexico's law programs (see Table 2).

Table 2. Enrollment in Full-Time Law Programs by Institution in 2006-2007 Academic Year

Enrollment	Public			Private			Total		
	LP	%	Cum.	LP	%	Cum.	LP	%	Cum.
50 or less	4	3.7	3.7	274	32.9	32.9	278	29.6	29.6
51 to 100	12	11.1	14.8	193	23.2	56.1	205	21.8	51.4
101 to 250	19	17.6	32.4	232	27.9	84.0	251	26.7	78.1
251 to 500	26	24.1	56.5	92	11.1	95.1	118	12.6	90.6
501 to 1000	12	11.1	67.6	31	3.7	98.8	43	4.6	95.2
1001 to 2500	23	21.3	88.9	10	1.2	100.0	33	3.5	98.7
2501 to 5000	8	7.4	96.3				8	.9	99.6
+ 5000	4	3.7	100.0				4	.4	100.0
(LED)	108	100.0		832	100.0		940	100.0	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información, SEP.

92. OECD, *Education at a Glance 2007*, *supra* note 90, at 136. See also OECD, Briefing Note for Mexico, *supra* note 87, at 8.
93. Indicator A4: What are the students' expectations for education?; Table A4.1a. Percentage of students that expect to complete different levels of education (2003), in OECD, *Education at a Glance 2007*, *supra* note 90, at 84 (Source: OECD PISA 2003). See also OECD, Briefing Note for Mexico, *supra* note 87, at 13. It is important to point out that in Mexico the percentage of women that want to complete a bachelor's degree is 56 percent, surpassing the 42 percent for men.
94. Héctor Fix-Fierro & Sergio López-Allyón, ¿Muchos Abogados pero Poca Profesión? Derecho y Profesión Jurídica en el México Contemporáneo, in *Del Gobierno de los Abogados al Imperio de las Leyes* 1, 16 (Héctor Fix-Fierro ed., UNAM 2006).

As mentioned before, the requirements to obtain official recognition or incorporation chiefly address the curricular content, structure and programs, the conditions of the educational facilities, and the qualifications and training of the professors. These last two elements, facilities and professors, make up the largest expenses for institutions offering the bachelor's in law. However, in most cases, having a classroom for each level and space for the administrative office is enough.⁹⁵ The only additional required item is a library, but a single copy of the books, indicated as the "bibliography" for each class, is sufficient, necessitating fewer than 200 total volumes.

Regarding the faculty, most institutions do not hire full-time professors, but instead use outside lecturers to teach all the courses.⁹⁶ These professors are usually practicing lawyers who dedicate a certain number of hours weekly to teaching in exchange for a meager sum.⁹⁷

Furthermore, the procedure to obtain the proper authorization is not complicated because a government goal is to increase access to higher education. For that reason, as discussed, there are multiple ways to obtain recognition or incorporation, and the procedures and requirements to open a law program have been simplified. Agreements 243 and 279 strive to simplify and clearly define the requirements and procedures to obtain official recognition for an institution. Federal recognition has stricter requirements than most states, for example, there were 194 requests for legal degree programs between 1999 and 2003; 122 of them received this designation while 72 were denied.⁹⁸ In other words, more than 60 percent of the requests were approved.

3. Wide range of reasons for studying law.

The general increase in college degrees, as well as the fact that opening a new law program is easy and inexpensive, facilitates the increased availability of bachelor's programs in law. However, it is demand for these programs that most promotes their growth. Until 2003, the bachelor's in law was the higher

95. Nevertheless, an institution's facilities must comply with the hygienic, safety, and pedagogic conditions set by the authority granting permission to operate Art. 55° frac. II of LGE.

96. Agreement 279 establishes a minimum percentage of courses schools must assign to full-time faculty depending on the program. Law and Legal Sciences programs are classified as professional programs, which are defined in Article 10 as "those whose graduates will, in general, have a professional practice, and whose study plans do not require a high proportion of basic courses in sciences or humanities, nor courses demanding a large amount of time for student attention." As a result, a full-time faculty is not required for bachelor, specialization, or master's law programs. However, for doctoral programs—regardless of the field—it is required that at least 50 percent of the courses be taught by a full-time professor. Art. 10° of Agreement 279.

97. One item in the questionnaire I administered to more than 700 law professors in the 2004–2005 academic year asked what percentage of their total income they had earned by teaching. A preliminary analysis shows that, for the most part, their payments were "a minor complement to their overall income," or "an insignificant income when compared with their other professional activities." The results of the survey will be reported in another article.

98. Information provided by the SSES of the SEP (Mar. 18, 2004).

education program with the largest enrollment in the country (11 percent of all bachelor students), and demand for this program continues to rise.⁹⁹

What makes the degree so attractive to prospective students? According to a study of almost 22,000 law students in Mexico, the high demand may result both from the wide range of ways they are exposed to law and because of the many factors that make the profession and degree attractive.¹⁰⁰ Students were exposed to law mainly through their day-to-day experiences, especially those involving violations of rights or because they perceive an environment of injustice, corruption, and impunity (almost one in every five students). They also chose to study law because of the influence of family members or acquaintances, contact with legal practice at a professional level, or interest they developed earlier in their education through a class, a paper, a teacher, or an academic conference.

Once students are exposed to the law, their attraction to the field may be due to the content of the curriculum; the legal protection that training in law can give to them or their family; characteristics of the legal professional; and associated personal benefits such as income, prestige, and contacts.

At the professional level, the *Licenciatura en Derecho* offers students a broad range of opportunities for types of professional practice and places to work. At the personal level, it represents a suitable income, access to certain social networks, as well as prestige. At the social level, it offers them the opportunity to spread democracy, social justice, and the common good. It is easy to see how one or several of those motives can attract high school graduates in Mexico.

So far, I have explained the main reasons for the increase in law programs offered in Mexico. I will now analyze some characteristics of this increase. The largest increases have occurred in private education, especially in small institutions and those that are affiliates or members of educational networks; in regions that previously offered fewer educational opportunities; and in places outside major cities.

A. Greater increase in private education

The increase in law programs in private institutions has been particularly impressive. From the 1997-1998 academic year to the 2006-2007 academic year, their enrollment increased 97 percent, the number of institutions offering the degree rose 177 percent, and the number of law programs increased 236 percent.¹⁰¹ In contrast, the increase in public institutions was modest. Their

99. ANUIES, Anuario Estadístico 2003, *Licenciatura en Universidades e Institutos Tecnológicos, Resúmenes y Series Históricas 17* (ANUIES 2003), available at <http://www.anuies.mx>.

100. See Pérez Hurtado, *The Next Generation of Mexican Lawyers*, *supra* note 85 (Chapter IV: Deciding to Study Law).

101. In private institutions, enrollment in law programs increased from 63,310 students to 124,600, the number of institutions with legal bachelor's increased from 297 to 822, and the number of law programs increased from 299 to 1005. (See personal database; and data from the Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información de la SEP, on file with the author).

law enrollment grew only 8 percent during the same period, the number of institutions offering the degree increased 61 percent, and the number of law programs grew 84 percent.¹⁰² As of the 2004–2005 academic year, private institutions enrolled more law students than their public counterparts.

One significant reason for the growth of private institutions is that the public ones have been unable to meet the large demand for higher education. The massification of public education in the 1970s affected academic quality and the ability of public institutions to function properly, causing them to limit enrollment. Fix-Fierro and López Ayllón point out that, “According to several observers, legal education in public universities (such as *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, as well as other state universities with regional prestige, such as Guanajuato, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosí) was quite good in the 1950s and 1960s. However, as their quality eroded in the 1970s, private universities grew. Later on, however, they also limited the growth of public universities, which has offered, as we have seen, new opportunities for growth for private universities.”¹⁰³

Another reason for this growth is the ability of private institutions to adapt to the demand. They grant the bachelor’s in law in a shorter time; have eliminated the thesis requirement to obtain a diploma; offer class schedules attractive to working students; have a curriculum mostly focused on the practice of law; and some provide specialized programs. A large number of these institutions are located in areas that formerly offered few or no opportunities to students to pursue a higher education, becoming increasingly more accessible to a larger number of people.

Two major characteristics of most of the private institutions established in the last decade are their low enrollment and membership or affiliation in educational networks or systems. At present, more than half of the bachelor’s in law programs in private institutions have fewer than 100 students. In contrast, in the 1997–1998 academic year, only 36 percent of the programs had fewer than 100 students (see Table 3). That year, most law programs had between 101 and 250 students, but nowadays a large number of programs have fewer than 50 students.

102. In public institutions, enrollment in law programs increased from 106,900 students to 115,400, the number of institutions with law bachelor’s increased from 67 to 108, and the number of law programs increased from 68 to 125. (See personal database; and data from the Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información de la SEP, on file with the author).

103. Fix-Fierro & López-Allyón, *supra* note 94, at 18.

Table 3. Enrollment in Law Degree Programs in Private Institutions (1997-1998 and 2006-2007 Academic Years)

Enrollment	1997-98			2006-07		
	Programs	%	Cum.	Programs	%	Cum.
50 or less	66	22.1	22.1	274	32.9	32.9
51 to 100	61	20.4	42.5	193	23.2	56.1
101 to 250	92	30.8	73.2	232	27.9	84.0
251 to 500	49	16.4	89.6	92	11.1	95.1
501 to 1000	26	8.7	98.3	31	3.7	98.8
1001 to 2500	4	1.3	99.7	10	1.2	100.0
2501 to 5000	1	.3	100.0	0	0	
+ 5000	0	0		0	0	
LED	299	100.0		832	100.0	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información, SEP

Private institutions formed in the last decade also tend to belong to or affiliate with educational networks or systems.¹⁰⁴ In the 1997-1998 academic year, there were 31 such networks of private institutions with 115 institutions and the same number of law programs. In other words, 38 percent of the private institutions and their law programs belonged to a system. In the 2006-2007 academic year, the numbers grew to 103 networks of private institutions with 457 institutions and 571 law programs, meaning that 57 percent of the private institutions and their law programs were part of a system.¹⁰⁵

The fact that most of the private schools belong to a system clearly indicates that, to a certain extent, institutions or groups with experience in higher education administration have generated the expansion in legal education. Private companies, families, or religious groups operate most of these systems. An important segment of the schools that do not belong to a system are institutions that also offer elementary and secondary education programs.

104. For this study, a network is a group of institutions under the same administrative, financial, curricular, ideological, and/or pedagogical structure. Each institutional network defines the characteristics or elements that unify or identify the members of the group. In public systems, institutions generally share the same administrative, financial, and curricular structure. The private networks present different kinds of structures and most are operated by corporations, or by family or religious groups. I only considered as networks those that offer law programs at two or more of their institutions.

105. In 2006, there were three networks with more than twenty private institutions: Univ. UNIVER with thirty-seven IHE; Red UVM (Univ. del Valle de México) with twenty-five institutions; and Sistema UNID (Univ/ Interamericana para el Desarrollo) with twenty-two institutions. As a basis for comparison, the public network with the most institutions was the Red UdG (Univ/ de Guadalajara), with thirteen institutions, followed by the Univ. Autónoma del Estado de México, with 10 institutions.

These institutions can use their facilities and experience to secure a large number of their own high school graduates. In summary, most of the newly established law programs are expansion projects carried out by organizations, groups, or institutions already involved in some way in education.

B. Greater increase in regions with fewer educational opportunities

The increase in enrollment in law programs is a nationwide phenomenon¹⁰⁶ with the largest growth occurring in regions with lower college enrollment per capita (see Table 4). In general, the lower the enrollment rate, the larger the growth.

Table 4. Enrollment Growth in Bachelor's in Law, by Region (and College Enrollment, GDP and Population Growth)

Region	Enrollment in bachelor's in law			College Enrollment / 1000 hab. ^a	GDP per capita (thous. of pesos) ^b	% Population growth 1995 to 2005 ^c
	1997-98	2006-07	% Inc.			
Northwest	21,823	28,045	28.5	17.1	38.0	18.5
Northeast	25,967	33,927	30.7	17.4	36.8	13.5
Central-West	27,607	40,683	47.4	10.1	25.2	10.2
Mexico City ^d	44,311	55,895	26.1	22.0	50.2	11.2
Central-South ^d	28,223	42,496	50.6	11.6	22.6	15.4
South-Southeast	22,279	37,370	67.7	9.7	20.1	13.2
Total	170,210	238,416	40.1	14.4	31.5	13.3

a) College enrollment in 1997, per 1,000 inhabitants.¹⁰⁷

b) GDP per thousand of pesos in current prices for basic values in 1997, per capita.¹⁰⁸

c) Population growth from 1995 to 2005.¹⁰⁹

106. ANUIES divides the institutions into six regions: Northwest (Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Sonora); Northeast (Coahuila de Zaragoza, Durango, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas); Central-West (Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit); Mexico City (Metropolitan Zone of Mexico City); Central-South (Guerrero, Hidalgo, Mexico, Morelos, Puebla, Querétaro, Tlaxcala); and South-Southeast (Campeche, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, Yucatán). See *Regiones de la ANUIES*, available at www.anui.es.mx/r_anui/es/index2.php.

107. Table of College Enrollment by State 1992-2003, in ANUIES, Anuario Estadístico 2003, *Licenciatura en Universidades e Institutos Tecnológicos*, *supra* note 99, at 12.

108. The figures were calculated by dividing the population in 1995 by region and the GDP per thousands of pesos in current prices for basic values in 1997, by region. INEGI, Sistema de Cuentas Nacionales de México, Producto Interno Bruto por Entidad Federativa 1997-2002 40 (2003), available at: http://www.inegi.gob.mx/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/derivada/cuentas/pib/pibef97_02.pdf.

109. INEGI, Censos de Población y Vivienda 1995 and 2005, available at www.inegi.gob.mx.

d) The college enrollment and the GDP in the Mexico City region were calculated from the proportion of the population in the state of Mexico that form part of this region.

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from INEGI and Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información, SEP.

The regions with relatively larger increases were the Central-West, Central-South, and South-Southeast. Within these regions, the states that experienced more than a 100 percent increase in law degree enrollment, taking into account their population growth, were Colima, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Morelos, Querétaro, Veracruz, and Quintana Roo. On the other hand, within those regions, the states with decreased enrollment were Oaxaca and Guerrero. Considering the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, most states with enrollment increases are at the middle or lower-middle level on the national scale.¹¹⁰

C. Greater increase in locations outside the major urban zones.

Most law students are concentrated in institutions in major urban zones,¹¹¹ even though only half of the population of Mexico lives in those areas. This is because the larger, older, or more prestigious institutions are located in these areas and attract students from across the country. Moreover, there are more opportunities in these zones for law graduates' professional growth. However, from the 1997-1998 academic year to the 2006-2007 academic year, enrollment in these zones barely exceeded the rate of general population growth, while enrollment outside them doubled (see Table 5). Most law programs are in urban areas but the largest increase in this number occurred outside them (238 percent).

110. However, Oaxaca and Guerrero, where enrollment decreased, are two of the poorest states in Mexico. Fewer educational opportunities there may be because fewer people can pay tuition at private institutions—which offer most of the new higher education opportunities—and there are fewer job opportunities for graduates.

111. The zones are the state capitals, Mexico City, and those metropolitan areas that, according to the INEGI classification, had more than 500,000 inhabitants in 2005. See INEGI, *Delimitación de las Zonas Metropolitanas de México (2004)*, available at www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/metodologias/otras/zonas_met.pdf.

**Table 5. Enrollment in Bachelor's in Law by Major Urban Zone
(1997-1998 and 2006-2007 Academic Years)**

	Enrollment 97-98	%	Enrollment 06-07	%	Population Growth	Enrollment Growth
No urban zone	19,833	11.7	46,766	19.6	8.2	135.8
Urban zone	150,377	88.3	191,650	80.4	18.3	27.4
Mexico City	44,311	29.5	55,906	29.2	11.2	26.2
Guadalajara	11,820	7.9	15,128	7.9	17.6	28.0
Monterrey	9,239	6.1	10,475	5.5	20.6	13.4
Puebla	8,032	5.3	9,058	4.7	23.9	12.8
Toluca	2,705	1.8	4,401	2.3	28.4	62.7
Other UZ	74,270	49.4	96,682	50.4	23.4	30.2
Total	170,210	100.0	238,416	100.0	13.3	40.1

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from INEGI and Dirección de Análisis y Sistemas de Información, SEP.

Relatively strong growth took place in the Toluca metropolitan zone, while enrollment in the Monterrey and Puebla areas increased less than that of the population growth. This phenomenon may be due to two factors. First, Monterrey and Puebla have had a large number of institutions for years and so may have provided adequate coverage for their population. Second, these cities have traditionally attracted many students from different regions of the country. However, these students now have more higher education opportunities close to home.

VI. Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions

The quality and structure of Mexican legal education directly affects the quality of the professional services that lawyers offer, as well as the efficiency of Mexico's legal system. Despite its importance, there are few studies on Mexican legal education. This study aims to provide crucial information by analyzing the structure of Mexico's system of legal education, specifically the content and structure of the law programs and the procedure to obtain the license to practice law.

In a narrow sense, the term "Mexico's system of legal education" refers to the necessary study and requirements for obtaining a license to practice as a lawyer. At first glance, that process seems straightforward. After graduating from high school, a student begins the *Licenciatura en Derecho* at an institution that is part of the National Education System. There, the student takes the requisite courses, meets the institution's graduation requirements, and earns the degree and diploma. The student then registers the diploma at the General Office for Professional Practice, and finally receives the license (*cédula*

profesional), which allows that individual to practice as a lawyer throughout the country. However, each of the steps may present variations depending on the specific case; for instance, there are different ways for an institution to become part of the National Education System, each with its own requirements and procedures. The way in which each institution joins the system determines the degree of academic and administrative freedom it has and, consequently, the flexibility to define the requirements that its students must meet to obtain the law degree and the license to practice law.

In general, law students take between forty and seventy mandatory courses during the law program. Moreover, each institution includes courses that reflect its identity or ideology, as well as courses in its area of specialization. Despite the relative freedom that institutions enjoy to set their curricula and programs, they do not differ significantly in the content of their offerings. This uniformity results from the strong belief among lawyers regarding a “hard core” of knowledge that every law student must acquire, the lack of good ways for promoting change, and the standardized process for recognizing curricula for most private institutions. Differences do not exist on curriculum content but rather on program structure and development, including the degree of flexibility, division, duration, and class scheduling.

Mexico’s system of legal education has dramatically increased in size. Although employment prospects for most law graduates are weak, enrollment in legal education programs has grown by 41 percent in the past decade, with a corresponding 156 percent increase in the number of institutions offering a law program, and a 208 percent increase in *Licenciaturas en Derecho*. In other words, during the past ten years, every week an institution began to offer one or two new bachelor’s in law programs to 134 new law students. The principal causes of this growth include: a) the increased availability of higher education in Mexico, in general, as a response to the growing demand for higher education programs; b) the ease with which new law programs could be started; and c) the diverse reasons that students study law. The largest increases have been in private education, especially in small institutions and those belonging to or affiliated with educational networks, regions that formerly offered fewer educational opportunities, and locations outside of major urban zones.

The rapid growth in the number of institutions that offer law degrees as well as the new role of law in Mexico require clear definitions of the desired basic legal knowledge and who can practice. Debates and initiatives addressing this challenge should rely on reliable, up-to-date data, as well as on meaningful and systematic research. This study aims to provide useful information for those endeavors and serve as a catalyst for new research.