

**Program PROUNI:
Changing the panorama of access to higher education in Brazil**

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Although more than 4,000,000 students are enrolled in higher education in Brazil, only 11% of the young people in the range of 18 to 24 years attend higher education schools. The National Plan of Education establishes that this rate should increase to 30% by 2011 and that the government should take the appropriate actions in this direction. More than 80% of the higher education schools are private. Young people from less wealthy families are often not able to compete for the relatively few openings in public universities, while at the same time they are not able to pay for their studies in private schools.

Program PROUNI - *Universidade Para Todos* ("University for All") was institutionalized by Law 11.096 of January 13, 2005, with the goal of expanding the number of higher education openings for students from less wealthy families in Brazil.

PROUNI promotes the exchange of scholarships in private higher education schools by the exemption of federal taxes for the participating institutions. Although participation is voluntary, the number of institutions engaged in the program is increasing. A total of 1,142 private schools engaged in the first year (2005) of the program. This number increased to 1,232 in the second year (2006). Each of these schools should offer a number of scholarships that is regulated by Law 11096, corresponding to approximately 10% of the number of its regularly paying students. The total exemption of federal taxes for the year 2005 amounted to approximately R\$ 105.6 millions (approximately US\$ 48 millions).

There are two types of scholarships: full (awarded to students whose family monthly earnings per capita amount to at most 1.5 times the minimum wage) and partial (50% of the monthly fees, awarded to students whose monthly earnings per capita amount to at most three times the minimum wage). A total of 112,275 scholarships (71,905 full and 40,370 partial) have been awarded in 2005. Furthermore, 91,609 scholarships (63,536 full and 28,071 partial scholarships) have already been awarded in January 2006, with an estimation of 40,000 additional scholarships to be awarded in July 2006. The yearly cost of the program is very small: since the 112,275 scholarships awarded in 2005 cost US\$ 48 millions in tax exemptions, the yearly cost per student to the country amounts to less than US\$ 430.

Candidates to a scholarship must necessarily pass the national ENEM examination at the end of the high school. Students are ranked by their grade on this examination and the best students get the scholarships. Recent feedback from a significant number of participating

schools show that the students benefited by a PROUNI scholarship have average grades that are better on average than those of the students selected by the entrance examinations of these schools. Students selected for a scholarship come from less wealthy families, but have merit and potential. They fight for an opportunity and once the chance is given, they grab it. The students are also receiving the monthly amount of R\$ 300 (approximately US\$ 136) for educational expenses since March 2006.

Traditionally, the Brazilian public federal university system (government funded) welcomes approximately 125,000 new students every year. With the creation of PROUNI, more than 120,000 new openings are being created every year at private schools through the new tax-funded scholarships. PROUNI is an affirmative action program and is doubling the number of government-funded openings in higher education. All students that get the scholarships come from less wealthy social classes and normally would not be able to have access to the university without this program. Furthermore, a fraction of the scholarships is reserved to afro-descendants, indigenous people, and handicapped citizens, corresponding to the percent of the population that fits in each of these groups. In 2006, a total of 45,037 scholarships have been awarded to afro-descendants and 174 to indigenous people (corresponding to 49.6% of the total).

The figures related to the program are huge. There were almost 900,000 candidates registered for the scholarships awarded in 2006. The attendants received and answered more than 1,700,000 phone calls and 170,000 emails with inquiries about the program during the three-week registration period. There were 167,000 phone calls and 65,000 emails in the peak day. At some time, there was a record of 53,000 simultaneous accesses to the program web site at <http://prouni-inscricao.mec.gov.br/prouni/>. The program is completely computerized, using modern technologies of database administration, web applications, and digital signatures for authentication.

PROUNI is promoting a significant change in the access to the university and changing the panorama of higher education in Brazil. In addition, the federal system of public universities is being expanded to create ten new universities and 42 new campuses. The young people who could not even dream about going to the university one year ago, are now attending the university with their studies funded by the government. Federal taxes are being used to support an affirmative action program that benefits very good students that otherwise would not have this chance.