

## CURRENT STATUS OF PSYCHOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA

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PSYCHOLOGY IS BOTH A SCIENCE AND A PROFESSION. ITS DEVELOPMENT IN ANY geographical area can be roughly gauged by such manifestations of scientific and professional activities as training, research and publication, and professional structures and organizations. The following analysis is based on a mail survey of schools of psychology conducted in late 1964 and personal visits by the author to thirty-two psychological institutions in Latin America in the summer of 1965.\*

### SCHOOLS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Education in psychology is widespread in Latin America. Courses in psychology are offered in nearly every Latin American University, usually in the faculties of philosophy and letters, humanities, pedagogy, and medicine. Psychology courses are frequently a regular part of the curriculum of the secondary schools, and have been for many years. These courses, both at the secondary and university level, are usually of a general nature, designed to present the subject matter of psychology to the student as a part of his over-all education. The emphasis is on theory and knowledge with less attention being given to application and practice of psychology.

The development of more-or-less autonomous schools or departments of psychology is more recent, occurring since World War II. A large proportion of Latin American schools of psychology are quite new, having been organized within the last five years. These schools are designed to turn out professional psychologists, and they offer a degree in psychology. The recent founding of so many schools of psychology all over Latin America is a clear indication of the rapid expansion of psychology in this area.

The program of studies in these schools ranges from four to seven years, with most having a five year curriculum. The typical program calls for two years of general studies, including not only basic psychology but also physiology, biology, anatomy, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, mathematics, etc., followed by three years of specialized, professional courses in psychology. There is usually some opportunity for practicum work, although an internship is rare. During the last year or two of the program the student usually may specialize in

\* There are undoubtedly omissions and errors of fact in this article, for which apologies are made. The author would appreciate corrections or additions.

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one of the fields of psychology, such as clinical, social, industrial, etc. Some schools, however, have a fixed curriculum for all students. A thesis is almost universally required, though in most instances the thesis need not be a report of research carried out by the student. At the end of this program the student receives his degree, which may be called *Licenciado*, *Psicólogo*, or a *Titulo* in Psychology. This degree permits the holder to begin his career in academic or applied fields. Advanced degrees, such as the *Doctorado*, are offered in a few schools, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule. The accepted professional psychological degree in Latin America is the five year *titulo*.

There are approximately seventy professional schools of psychology in Latin America. Most of these schools or departments are listed by countries in an appendix to this article. These range in size from very large (more than 1,000 students) to very small (less than 25 students). Many schools, being recently founded, have yet to turn out their first graduate, but all the schools combined are probably graduating several hundred professional psychologists per year. This number can be expected to increase rapidly as new schools begin to turn out graduates and the older schools continue to increase in size.

The faculties of the schools are, in large part, made up of teachers who are not themselves psychologists. Clinical methods and psychopathology is likely to be taught by psychiatrists, statistics by mathematicians, physiological psychology by physiologists, educational psychology by educators, social psychology by sociologists, etc. The rapid expansion of psychology in Latin America has called for a "boot-strap" operation, with "catedras" being held by professors with psychological interests from other disciplines. Since training in professional psychology is so recent in Latin America, almost all of the psychologists on the faculties received their training elsewhere. Many hold degrees from European universities, with French influence being particularly strong. Many more have taken advanced work in the United States, and this proportion is rapidly increasing as fellowships for Latin American psychology students become more easily available. The number of "first generation" locally-trained psychologists is rapidly increasing as well. Some of the psychologists on the faculty of schools of psychology hold degrees from other, longer-established Latin American schools, and some of the younger professors are recent graduates of their own schools.

There are three major problems facing almost all the schools of psychology in Latin America, all stemming from inadequate financing. Physical facilities rarely approach what is needed. Many schools are housed in old buildings or houses, and lack sufficient classroom and office space. Some exceptions exist, of course, usually in the universities that have a "ciudad universitaria." Even in these instances, where the buildings are new and sometimes strikingly beautiful, there is likely to be overcrowding in classrooms and shortage of space. Library

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facilities are also inadequate. Most schools have their own small psychological library, but these usually consist mostly of outdated books in a variety of languages—many times gifts to the school. Library budgets for new acquisitions are usually extremely limited, and books are very expensive in Latin America. Libraries also lack sufficient subscriptions to current psychological journals, and again frequently must rely on gifts of back issues. The inadequate facilities found in the schools' specialized libraries are not remedied in the larger university or national library. Here again, psychological materials are likely to be scanty and out-dated. Neither are textbooks readily available for purchase by most students. Lack of available published material is probably the greatest single hindrance to education in psychology in Latin America.

Another shortage in physical facilities concerns laboratory equipment. As with library facilities, laboratories are usually scantily equipped, and what apparatus exists is for the most part out of date. There are very few animal laboratories, again because of the expense. Electronic data processing equipment is also scarce in Latin America. Even where the university has a computer center these facilities are either not available or not used by the schools of psychology. Testing kits and materials are likewise in short supply.

The second major problem faced by Latin American schools of psychology is inadequate salaries and the lack of full-time professors. As a general rule, teaching salaries are so low that the professor must make his living elsewhere. The typical "catedratico" has time only to come to the school to deliver his lecture; he may not even maintain an office there. Thus, the opportunity for individual student-professor contact is almost nil. Similarly, time for research in the schools is severely limited. What little time the professor has is used up by the teaching demands of ever-increasing enrollments. Many schools are pushing hard for higher teaching salaries and full-time positions, especially for assistants and younger professors. While some success is being achieved, the usually inadequate budget for the entire university makes the struggle a difficult one.

A third major problem facing the schools is the lack of internship facilities. In many areas of psychology, such as clinical, counseling and guidance, industrial, and educational, a period of closely supervised actual work experience is considered essential to the preparation of professional psychologists. This internship is usually done in hospitals, clinics, schools, factories, etc., under the supervision of the psychologist working in that institution. Since there's a marked shortage of qualified psychologists in Latin America and limited psychological service facilities, it follows that internship opportunities are few. Most schools spread what facilities are available out over too many students for only brief periods of time. Supervision in these work settings is frequently inadequate or non-existent, and this burden falls back on the faculty of the school.

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Since the faculty is already over-worked and hard-pressed for time the student is likely to receive little individual supervision from any source. The nine-month or one-year paid internship supervised by a qualified practicing psychologist is indeed a rarity in Latin America. Frequently, students must find their own opportunities to gain practical experience and do the best they can without supervision.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL INSTITUTES**

A recent development that holds some promise for alleviating some of the problems in the training of psychologists is the semi-autonomous psychological institute. These institutes are usually within the university structure, but separated physically and administratively from the school of psychology. Examples are the Instituto de Psicología of the Universidad de Chile and the Departamento de Orientación of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. The personnel of these institutes usually overlap with the faculty of the school of psychology, offering the professor an opportunity to piece out his income within the university setting. The institutes are also likely to have more full-time positions than the academic school.

These institutes usually offer service to the public: child guidance, vocational and educational counseling, clinical diagnosis and psychotherapy, personnel selection, etc. Of greater importance to the education of psychologists, however, is the training and research orientation. The institutes can offer practicum and internship facilities under adequate supervision for psychology students that is otherwise hard to find. There is also more research activity, usually with student participation, in the institutes than in the schools. Many times, the facilities of the institutes are available for student research and give him the opportunity to collect the data for his thesis.

Not all psychological institutes with training and research activities are university affiliated. An example is the large Instituto de Seleção e Orientação Profissional in Rio de Janeiro, a private institute founded by E. Mira y Lopez. These professional institutes, both university and non-university affiliated, appear to offer a structure that is potentially very useful in both the training of psychologists and the development of psychology as a profession. It should be noted, however, that for the most part these institutes are small, inadequately financed, of recent origin, and few in number.

### **RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION**

Psychological research in Latin America is growing rapidly despite tremendous obstacles. One of the barriers rapidly being overcome is the intellectual one of the traditional, theoretical, arm-chair approach to psychology that is part

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of the European heritage. The younger generation of Latin American psychologists, particularly, are becoming more and more active in the research field. In addition to the usual motives of scientific curiosity the Latin American psychologist is spurred on by the desire to make psychological knowledge and principles available to his own developing country, which is usually possible only through revalidation by local research.

Obstacles to research efforts are principally the same ones encountered in the training area: lack of time, facilities, and financial support. As is usually the case, the majority of psychologists interested in research in Latin America are found in university settings. Here the training demands of students, the lack of library and laboratory facilities, and the shortage of time due to the catedra system severely handicaps the researcher. The institutes offer some opportunities for the research-minded psychologist, but as indicated earlier, these institutes are limited in number and facilities. The lack of access to computer and mass data processing equipment is also a handicap to the researcher. Almost all Latin American countries have computer centers, either in the universities or some governmental agency. With few exceptions, such as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and the Universidade do Estado de São Paulo in Brazil, these facilities are not used in behavioral science research. This is due partly to administrative or technical difficulties, but is also related to the fact that the use of the computer has not been part of the training of most Latin American psychologists. This situation seems destined to improve, however, as more and more electronic computation centers are being established in Latin America, and more and more Latin American psychologists are becoming interested in their use.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to research in Latin America is the lack of financial support. The large philanthropic foundations which support so much social science research in the United States are virtually without counterpart in Latin America. Similarly, there is little governmental support for research in most Latin American countries, particularly for basic scientific research. Thus, the investigator must turn to his own university for research financing. Here he usually gets a sympathetic hearing, but finds research has a very low priority in an already inadequate university budget. Other than relatively small university and government support of psychological research, the only Latin American source is business and industry. Some funds are available here, but usually only in restricted areas. Some research support is available from foreign sources, both governmental and private, and from international organizations such as UNESCO. Generally speaking, however, funds are more readily available for training fellowships or exchange programs than for research purposes. The Latin American investigator usually finds himself with very limited or no financial resources. Considering this lack of financial support, the psychological research output in Latin America is remarkable indeed.

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Professional and scientific publications serve as an index of psychological activity in a given area. In Latin America, there are many outlets for psychological publications, but all are limited in circulation. Some schools or faculties publish psychological journals, such as the *Revista de Psicología* of the Instituto de Psicología of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and the *Anuario de Psicología* published by the Facultad de Humanidades of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Other psychology journals are published by government agencies or ministries, such as *Psicología y Educación*, published by the Departamento de Psicología Educacional del Ministerio de Educación de Cuba. There are almost no independent journals, however, or journals published by psychological organizations. Exceptions are the *Revista Mexicana de Psicología*, published independently, and the *Revista Venezolana de Psicología*, published by the Colegio de Psicólogos de Venezuela.

Another outlet for psychological publication is the monograph series published by many universities or faculties. These series are not limited to psychology, but may be in encompassing areas, such as humanities, education, or social science. Examples of these monograph series are the *Ediciones Filosofía y Letras* published by the Consejo Técnico de Humanidades of the Universidad Nacional de México, and the *Boletim* series published by the Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências, e Letras of the Universidade de São Paulo. As with the journals, however, these monograph series are frequently published irregularly and reach only a limited audience.

The published proceedings of congresses and scientific meetings are still another means by which the Latin American psychologist can publish his work. Examples are the *Trabajos* of the Jornadas de Psicología held by the Sociedad de Psicología del Uruguay and the *Cuadernos de Psicología* of the Primer Seminario de Psicología en Venezuela. These publications also are irregular and reach only a limited audience.

Although there are many publications relating to psychology in Latin America, none of them provide for effective scientific and professional communication. The Latin American psychologist has no means through which he can reasonably hope to reach a substantial portion of his potentially interested audience. Scientific communication depends to a great extent on informal means —personal communications to friends, mailing of reprints and monographs, and visits to other institutions.

One hopeful step in the direction of improved scientific communication is the planned publication in 1966 of the *Revista Interamericana de Psicología* by the Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología. If successful, this journal should provide a psychological outlet that cuts across national boundaries.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Another indication of the development of a profession is the way in which

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its members band together in organizations. There is one psychological organization that includes all of Latin America (as well as the United States and Canada), the Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología, founded in 1953. This organization provides for communication among psychologists in the Americas by holding congresses, distributing a *Boletín de Noticias*, and by a program of translation of psychological textbooks. Although it carries almost 500 Latin American members on its rolls, it is doubtful if this number represents a majority of the total group of qualified psychologists. This organization also has autonomous branches in some countries, notably Argentina and México. Most of the other countries have psychological organizations, many of them affiliated with the Sociedad Interamericana. A partial listing of these organizations includes:

Associação Brasileira De Psicologia  
Federación Colombiana de Psicología  
Sociedad de Psiquiatría y Psicología de Nicaragua  
Sociedad Isthmeña de Psicología (Panamá)  
Sociedad Salvadoreña de Psicología  
Sociedad de Psicología de Uruguay  
Colegio de Psicólogos de Venezuela

These organizations vary tremendously in size and structure. For example, the Sociedad de Psicología de Uruguay includes non-professionals interested in psychology, while at the other extreme the Colegio de Psicólogos de Venezuela is not only a professional and scientific organization, but also serves as the accrediting body for the country.

Brazil is the only country with legal recognition of psychologists. The 1962 law that established the curriculum and new schools of psychology provided for examination and certification of qualified psychologists. There are some 600 officially certified psychologists in Brazil at present, with another 300 applications pending. Interest in legal certification or licensing exists in many countries, but active efforts are being made only in Mexico and Panama. In most countries a degree from the national university (or validation of a degree from another university) is considered to be the only requirement for the practice of psychology.

## AREAS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology in much of Latin America is viewed from a general, theoretical approach, almost as a part of philosophy. The influence of the German laboratories, of such great importance in the United States in the first part of this century, was felt only slightly in Latin America. The French psychiatrists, and later the work of Sigmund Freud, did have a strong impact. It is not surprising,

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then, to find that clinical psychology, with a strong psychoanalytic orientation, is the most highly developed area of specialization in Latin American psychology. There are many strong programs in clinical psychology throughout Latin America, with much of the training carried on by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, México, and Venezuela all are highly developed in clinical psychology. Not all of this training is carried out in schools of psychology; some medical schools and psychiatric hospitals have training programs also.

Educational psychology is also an important area of psychology in Latin America, and is one that is developing very rapidly at present. As Latin American governments are placing more and more emphasis on education, the demand for educational psychologists is increasing rapidly. Particular emphasis is being placed on counseling and guidance and on psychological test development. Some noteworthy programs in this area are at the Universidad de Costa Rica, the Universidade de São Paulo, and the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

Another area in which there is a great press for expansion is industrial psychology. With the rapid industrialization taking place in many Latin American countries there are many demands for psychological services to business and industry. This area is so new in Latin America that no really significant programs have been developed, although they are beginning in many schools.

The least developed area is that of experimental psychology. Experimental equipment costs a great deal, and animal laboratories are expensive to maintain. This, plus a traditional theoretical orientation, has greatly stunted the development of psychological laboratories. A significant exception was the Universidade de Brasilia, closed in 1965, where a very strong experimental program was developing.

Other areas of psychology, such as social, developmental, personality, and physiological, stand midway between these extremes. Some schools emphasize some areas, while other places show strengths in different fields. Criminology and social pathology, traditionally in the camp of sociology in the United States, is an important part of the psychology curriculum in many Latin American schools.

### SUMMARY

Psychology in Latin America has shown a tremendous burst of development in the last two decades. It is clearly becoming a significant and established member of the sciences and professions. This development is marked by autonomous, degree-granting schools of psychology in nearly all the major Latin American universities, by the existence of scientific and professional organiza-

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tions, and by a significant amount of research and publication activity. The major obstacles to further expansion are lack of financial support for education and research, a dearth of published materials, difficulty with scientific communication across borders, and the inhibiting influence of an outmoded European heritage. There is encouraging evidence that these barriers are being overcome, at least partially. There is no lack of interest in psychology, as evidenced by overcrowding in all the training institutions. Here is also a growing demand for psychological services, which may be expected to continue as the Latin American countries develop economically and socially.

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