

Advanced Studies at the University

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A CENTER OF higher studies is the possible synthesis of a great University. It reflects, with greater clarity, pluralism, which is the strongest feature of an academic institution, as well as the live forces of its interdisciplinarity. All the knowledge and skills that circulate on campus in their own spaces interact in the institutional space of such a center. As useful as the interaction between peers in governance bodies might be, the exclusively intellectual convergence that occurs in this forum has a priceless strength. In it, everyone learns from everyone else, sharing their research outcomes with society.

A recent symposium at Unicamp¹ discussed a model for the establishment or consolidation of a center of advanced studies in Brazilian Universities. Together with Professor Cesar Ades, director of the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) at USP, the author of these notes participated in the roundtable and summarizes, in the following lines, the essence of his intervention. Some questions raised by the event organizers have been included as parts of this essay.

The first question could not have been more straightforward: What are the main challenges to creating an IAS? The answer was: There are many. The main one is to mobilize the interdisciplinary group of specialists able to meet an agenda focused on the discussion of major national and global issues. Regardless of how qualified a university may be it cannot evaluate in the classroom the fast growing challenges facing modern society. Professors in hundreds of courses, despite their endeavor to disseminate values or formulate general analyzes, cannot stray away from strictly curricular disciplines under their responsibility. Hence the need, in academia, for Institutes with an eclectic profile and fully able to discuss major topics in the fields of Science, Culture, Politics, and Economics, for example. The Institute of Advanced Studies is a university within the university. It complements and enriches the university's mission.

What should we avoid in an academic project geared for that purpose? Within an Institute of Advanced Studies it is necessary to avoid the rigidity of certain bureaucratic procedures that are incompatible with the agility that is expected of such an institution. To be more precise: it is known that if the winner of a Nobel Prize in any field tried, by choice, to teach in a large Brazilian public university, he or she would have to sit for an open competitive examination, in spite of all his or her academic degrees and universally recognized knowledge. However, if they were to work at an Institute of Advanced Studies, there would

be no such embarrassment, since an IAS also takes into account outstanding and recognized excellence. No criticism is meant here, but rather a distinction between two selection criteria.

Academic bureaucracy is a kind of necessary evil. Despite the inconvenience contained in this example, it often helps to preserve its excellence in teaching and research. It is up to the director of an Institute of Advanced Studies to, at his or her own discretion, harness only the good side of restrictive rules which, in short, translates into a great regard for unbiased academic decisions.

An Institute such as this should not act as if it were a 'club of friends'. Its director, with all the power of the office, needs to avoid the human temptation to aggrandize him or herself before close colleagues to the detriment of the excellence of their institution. His or her role is to recruit the most qualified and talented colleagues, even when these are not his or her favorite persons.

What are the main suggestions regarding special management when an IAS is established? The management model in any academic unit is determined by the goal to be achieved. Abstract suggestions should be avoided, regardless of how good they may be. As a former manager of the *Instituto de Estudos Avançados* of USP itself as a whole, I could report my experiences in the administrative area. But that would just be an exercise in memory, without the power of the example, because each university has its own culture and parameters dictated by a specific reality.

As for the establishment of the IEA at USP, with regard to its genesis, I see two reasons to be recalled. The first refers to the fact that the concept of advanced studies was already a successful experience on European and American campuses. This naturally led USP to adapt its design to the specificities of a public and Brazilian university. The second motivation had political characteristics to be taken in their proper historical perspective. Brazil was then subjected to a military dictatorship, which forced into retirement great professors and scientists who opposed its plans. Those affected were young individuals in full use of their skills, who suddenly were forced into a lack of activity that would be harmful not only to them but also to Brazil. A kind of volunteer work was then established within the IEA to guarantee a means for them to put their knowledge into practice. This was a wise and generous initiative, which honors the history of our *Instituto de Estudos Avançados* at the University of São Paulo.

How to ensure that the activities of an IAS will benefit both academia and society in general? This question enables clarifying that we are not dealing with a product that requires a warranty certificate, but rather with an institution whose procedures restrict to the maximum any space for inaction. The verb *to benefit* must be put in perspective to avoid misunderstandings. In the world of knowledge, the critical eye of academia often generates immediate benefits to other study groups involved with the same topic, rather than to society at large. We do not, under any circumstances, separate academia from social reality and

demands. On the contrary, we provide here examples of the link between an IAS and social interest. But it is important to point out that in its field of work the IAS is not an operational body and much less a factory of proposals. It is a center for dialogue among scientists, and at the most a source of contributions that can potentially generate policies at other levels.

A free digression about the *Instituto de Estudos Avançados* at USP and its importance today to culture and scientific knowledge in our country is also appropriate in this article. This, however, requires a forceful defense of the idea of extending to all our teaching units the successful experience in the IEA with our retired professors.

By one of those unforgivable mistakes of the law, university professors in Brazil are subject to compulsory retirement at the age of seventy – precisely when they are at the peak of their mentoring capacity. Contrary to what happens in British universities, for example, which takes full advantage of the expertise and wisdom in Brazil the law prohibits closer contacts between these extraordinary talents and younger professors and students. The aim of our administration was to find a legal way to recover this connection. On February 18, 1998 the Brazilian president promulgated Law No. 9608, providing for voluntary service, which in a way was a step in that direction, although in need of improvements.

Another driving idea would be to create a new kind of mentoring in our teaching units. Retired professors and students could meet at the beginning and end of each semester to outline a study plan or assess the activities developed. It is inconceivable that such a large talent pool would be absent from the university. We want more than their books and their occasional lectures. We want them in our classrooms and laboratories. But how can we do that? This is a question posed addressed to the participants of this symposium.

The mission of the Institute of Advanced Studies is one of the noblest in academia. A forum to debate the fundamental aspects of science and culture and an integrating center of different units, this body is also becoming increasingly important as a communication channel between academia and Brazilian society. Over almost two decades, more than a thousand seminars have been held at USP, most of them on national and global issues of exceptional relevance. And some of its programs stand out as true proposals of public policies essential to the country.

Brazil's inclusion on the global agenda, which stemmed from the interdependence of economies and a large-scale geopolitical redesign, had strong repercussions in the IEA at USP. As a result, the Group of International Relations was established within the IEA. A specific environment for studies and debates, the Group became, within the Institute, a point of inflection in the academic debate of multilateralism and all its cultural, economic and political variables, in addition to giving rise to the Group of International Context Analysis (*Grupo de Análise da Conjuntura Internacional* - Gacint) at USP. It should be noted that the Institute of International Relations at USP began to be designed in this group.

I should also be pointed out that one of the achievements of the IEA during its first decade was the Floram Project, a pioneering initiative aimed at minimizing the risk of the greenhouse effect, long before the global mobilization around the issue. Having found the means to reforest 20 million hectares in Brazil, Floram was chosen among 1,500 scientific papers from 50 countries to receive the Prize awarded by the “International Union of Air Pollution and Environmental Association”, in cooperation with the International Academy of Science.

It is important to recall the contribution of the IEA and its area of Environmental Sciences to Rio 92. In his prolific tenure as director of the Institute, Umberto Cordani favored, strongly and with absolute accuracy, the issues of globalization and food security.

Also at the *Instituto de Estudos Avançados*, thematic projects on climate change were developed and submitted to the Research Support Foundation of the State of São Paulo (*Fundação de Apoio à Pesquisa no Estado de São Paulo - FAPESP*) covering, besides Exact and Biological Sciences, the area of Humanities, with an emphasis on International Law, Economics, Business Administration and Social Sciences. Besides the study in these areas, the projects included propositions that were useful for developing a Climate Change policy at the state level, and public policies to reduce GHG emissions in other Brazilian regions thus contributing to the country’s negotiations on the post-2012 regime.

Another project with concrete results in national life was the Education for Citizenship Program. Focusing on the problem of school failure, several of its guidelines inspired the true “tax revolution” built into the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Fundamental Education and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession (*Fundo de Desenvolvimento do Ensino Fundamental e Valorização do Magistério - Fundef*), currently consolidated in the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession (*Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica e de Valorização dos Profissionais da Educação - Fundeb*).

A working group was established at the Institute in 1988, at the initiative of the dean’s rector’s office, to produce a study in defense which aims a better understanding of public university’s mission and objectives. The final text entitled *A Presença da Universidade Pública* (The Presence of the Public University in Brazil), coordinated by Alfredo Bosi, was discussed with the university community and civil society representatives and distributed to all opinion makers in Brazil. The document provided a detailed counterpoint to the open campaign promoted by the media and some political sectors parties against our institutional model of higher education, research and community service.

Defending the current model does not imply indiscriminately defending all public universities as if they were homogeneous - and they certainly are not. But I have insisted that: a) it is not by destroying the excellence of public higher education that we will improve primary and secondary education; b) that rich

students are the absolute minority in public universities; and c) that the payment of tuition would not bring significant revenue to the public university dedicated to research, and would entail double charging society for a service already embedded in taxes. These responses were expanded in this document packed with information about the scientific and social contribution of the public system of higher education, research and university extension.

All current sophisms have been timely and specifically answered. I will not detail the contents of the text in this article, but just say that we seek to raise the issue on serene and objective terms, so as to avoid answering a pamphlet with another pamphlet and a distortion with another distortion.

The document describes some of the great achievements of the public university in science and technology, as well as the services it has provided to the communities on a regular basis, in special areas such as Health, Environment and Education. In these items, the role of an IAS in the academic body in general, and at USP in particular can be decisive for implementing public policies.

I understand that the examples provided here, highlight strongly the history of the *Instituto de Estudos Avançados*. We should mention the ESTUDOS AVANÇADOS (Advanced Studies) journal and its periodical reports on the main challenges facing Brazil and the world. In digital and printed versions, these contents make up true anthologies of academic knowledge in our country. USP and Unicamp probably have a lot to talk with one another about the models of academic chairs adopted by our IEA. I want to highlight especially the Unesco Chair in Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy and Tolerance, as a point to be examined.

The testimony which I have just summarized was based on my personal experience as director of the *Instituto de Estudos Avançados* at the University of São Paulo and then as its rector dean. Naturally, the lecture that followed, delivered by Professor César Ades, which is both more recent and updated, has brought new light on the subject, clarifying questions about the program of his prolific current administration.

Note

- 1 “*Desafios de um Instituto de Estudos Avançados na Universidade Brasileira*” (“Challenges of an Institute of Advanced Studies in Brazilian Universities”), symposium organized by the Center of Advanced Studies (CEAV) at Unicamp and held on October 15, 2010 at University City Zeferino Vaz in Campinas, State of São Paulo.

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