



# IEM Spotlight

A RESOURCE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

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## Education in Mexico

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In 1965, for my junior year, I transferred to the Fundación Universidad de las Américas, then located on the highway to Toluca, outside of Mexico City. I fell in love with Mexico: the people, geography, history, anthropology, art, architecture, and literature. I remained for my senior year, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. It was not until some 15 years later that, as a credentialist, I learned in depth about Mexican education, including the anomaly of a *título de bachiller en artes* as a tertiary credential. Likewise, it was not until years after my graduation that I understood why adding a third year to *preparatoria* – the buzz while I was a student – was so significant to upper-secondary academic education. What I have learned since then is that Mexican education continues to evolve, to innovate, and to seek solutions to issues and challenges.

Patterned on the French model, Mexican education increasingly incorporates some aspects of the U.S. model, including degree majors, testing, textbooks, and the use of a credit system. Although

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Spanish is the official language of instruction, English is commonly studied as a second language, fostered in part by the long border with the United States. The Universidad de las Américas A.C. in Mexico City via its *Modelo Educativo Bilingüe/Bilingual Educational Model* exemplifies universities which promote bilingual instruction and skills. In addition, at the pre-tertiary level, there are many private bilingual, binational, bicultural institutions whose other language may be English or another language.

*Instituciones particulares/private institutions need Reconocimiento de Validez Oficial de Estudios (RVOE)/Recognition of Official Validity of Studies in order for their degree programs to be recognized nationally and thus for their students to earn a título/degree and cédula profesional/degree registration card and licensure. RVOE for degree programs at private institutions is obtained through the federal Secretaría de Educación*

*Pública*/Secretariat of Public Education or through one of the state secretariats of education; such programs can be researched at <http://www.sirvoes.sep.gob.mx/sirvoes>. RVOE for degree programs at private institutions may also be obtained via *incorporación*/program incorporation through a public institution of higher education; the list of RVOE-granting public institutions is available at <http://www.sirvoes.sep.gob.mx/sirvoes/jspQueEsRvoe.jsp>.

RVOE indicates fulfillment of the minimum requirements established by the *Ley General de Educación y el Acuerdo Secretarial 279*/General Educational Law and Secretariat (of Public Education) Agreement 279. *Acreditación*/accreditation, as a process of quality assurance for both institutions and programs of study, is obtained through such entities as the *Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior (COPAES)*/Council for Higher-Education Accreditation (<http://www.copaes.org.mx/>); *Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior (CIIES)*/Inter-Institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education (at program level) (<http://www.ciees.edu.mx/>); *Consejo de Acreditación de la Enseñanza de la Ingeniería (CACAIE)*/Council for Accreditation of Engineering Instruction (<http://www.cacei.org/>); and *Federación de Instituciones Mexicanas Particulares de Educación Superior (FIMPES)*/Federation of Mexican Private Institutions of Higher Education (at institutional level) (<http://www.fimpes.org.mx/>).

Some Mexican institutions of higher education also hold regional accreditation in the United States through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (<http://www.sacscoc.org>):

1. Fundación Universidad de las Américas (since 1959), Cholula, Puebla, for Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate.
2. Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (since 1950), Monterrey, Nuevo León State, for B, M, and D.
3. Universidad de las Américas A.C. (since 1991), Federal District, for B and M.
4. Universidad de Monterrey (since 2001), Monterrey, Nuevo León State, for B and M.

In terms of school structure, Mexico follows a 12-year pattern, with length-of-studies variations at the upper-secondary level. At the post-secondary level, the academic year is flexible, mainly based on *semestres*/semesters, *cuatrimestres* (also called *tetramestres*)/four-month terms (for continuous study), and *veranos*/summer sessions (including *cursos intensivos*/intensive summer programs designed to provide teachers with licentiate-level qualifications).

Early childhood is composed of *educación inicial*/initial education and *educación preescolar*/pre-K and kindergarten. Although kindergarten is not compulsory, it comprises the first year of the 10-year sequence called *educación básica*/basic education.

*Educación primaria*/elementary education consists of 6 years of academic study, begun at age 6; the successful student receives a *Certificado de Educación Primaria*/Certificate of Elementary Education. *Primaria* is followed by *educación secundaria* (also called *educación media básica*)/lower-secondary education which requires 3 years of study. The successful academic student earns the *Certificado de Educación Secundaria*/Certificate of Lower-Secondary Education. Education is compulsory and free through *secundaria (educación media básica)*. It is advisable to translate *secundaria* as *lower-secondary* as this word does not refer to upper-secondary study in Mexico.

The lower-secondary level includes private vocational programs, often in business/technology at an *academia/academy*, usually bearing the designation of *media (básica) terminal/(basic) terminal lower-secondary study*.

*Educación media superior/upper-secondary education* is diversified. Academic education, which may be studied at an *escuela preparatoria/university-preparatory school*, provides eligibility to seek undergraduate admissions. Most programs require 6 terms of study; in northeastern Mexico (e.g., Nuevo León State), *bachillerato general/general academic upper-secondary education* (and similar programs) may run 4 semesters instead of 6. There is no official credential issued upon completion of upper-secondary although private institutions may provide a diploma; consequently, a final transcript indicating successful completion of the program suffices to establish the equivalent of high-school graduation.

Upper-secondary technical/technological instruction usually consists of dual academic-vocational programs called *bachillerato tecnológico/technological upper-secondary education* (also called *bachillerato técnico/technical upper-secondary education*). Successful students earn a technical qualification, usually *título de técnico/title of technician* in the vocational stream, and may seek undergraduate admissions in an appropriate field of study. The conferred *título de técnico* is registered with the *Secretaría de Educación Pública/Secretariat of Public Education* which issues a *cédula/registration card* serving as licensing in Mexico. The *cédula* indicates that the credential is at the *técnico/upper-secondary technician level*.

Full undergraduate education in Mexico is professional, designed to lead to a *título/title* as a professional in the target discipline or to a *título de licenciado/title of licentiate* in the target discipline. For example, a business student may be conferred a *título de contador/title of accountant* or a *título de licenciado en contabilidad/title of licentiate in accounting*, both referring to the same major. The conferred *título* is registered with the *Secretaría de Educación Pública/Secretariat of Public Education* which issues a *cédula/registration card* serving as licensing in Mexico. The *cédula* indicates that the credential is at the *licenciatura/undergraduate level*.

Undergraduate degrees are available in the same or similar disciplines as offered in the U.S. The variety and duration of *carreras/degree programs* are too numerous to detail herein, but the list of undergraduate and graduate programs with RVOE dates and sources can be found at [www.sirvoes.sep.gob.mx/sirvoes/](http://www.sirvoes.sep.gob.mx/sirvoes/). Full undergraduate degrees average 4 to 5 years; however, by means of continuous study in *tetramestres* or *cuatrimestres* (4-month terms), some *licenciaturas/licentiates* may be completed in three years. Professional degrees, including law and health sciences, are undergraduate. The *cédula* bears the terminology *con efectos de patente/valid as a professional license* and thus serves as occupational licensure. Students who have completed the *plan de estudios/degree plan* but have not graduated are called *pasantes*; they lack a graduation requirement such as *servicio social/public service*, *tesis/senior report* or graduate coursework in place of a senior report (*a opción de tesis*) and/or *examen profesional* (also called *examen de titulación/degree exam*). Registered students may request a document to indicate enrollment in a particular year or class of students (called *generación*), with the document often bearing the calendar years and dignity honored by the class of students; a *generación* document does not prove satisfactory completion of any coursework much less degree completion.

Increasingly available are undergraduate *carreras cortas profesionales*/short professional fields of study, 2 to 3 years of study beyond the *bachillerato* level:

1. The academic *carrera corta* may lead to a *título de profesional asociado*/title of associate professional which marks the completion of the first cycle of a two-cycle *licenciatura*/licentiate. The conferred *título* qualifies for a *cédula* and entry to the workforce as well as to further study in the same/similar *licenciatura* degree plan at the same institution.
2. The technological *carrera corta* may lead to a *título de técnico superior*/title of higher technician, similarly called a *título de técnico superior universitario*/title of higher university technician. The studies are completed in a specialized program designed to lead to the workforce; thus, a *título* is awarded and a *cédula* is issued.

Mexican graduate education encompasses 3 levels, each of which culminates in the awarding of a *título* and issuance of a *cédula*:

1. The *Título de Especialista*/Title of Specialist requires 1-2 years beyond a full undergraduate degree in most fields except medicine which requires 1-5 years. The specialization may be a stand-alone program or may fulfill part of a master's degree.
2. The *Maestría*/Master's (also called *Grado Académico de Maestro*/Academic Degree of Master's or simply *Grado de Maestro*/Master's Degree) requires 2 years beyond a full undergraduate degree in most fields.
3. The *Doctorado*/Doctorate (also called *Grado Académico de Doctor*/Academic Degree of Doctor or simply *Grado de Doctor*/Doctoral Degree) requires 2 years beyond a qualifying master's degree.

In 1994, the *Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES)*/National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education founded the *Centro Nacional de Evaluación para la Educación Superior (CENEVAL)*/National Evaluation Center for Higher Education. CENEVAL is a non-profit, charitable, civil association which tests for benchmark credentials at lower-/upper-secondary, undergraduate, professional and graduate levels (<http://www.ceneval.edu.mx/>).

Admissions officers may wish to refer applicants lacking proof of degree conferral to CENEVAL for the *Exámenes Generales para la Acreditación de la Licenciatura (EGAL)*/General Examinations for Licentiate Accreditation which is approved by Secretariat of Public Education Agreement 286. Under this agreement, qualifying examinees are conferred a *licenciatura* and issued a *cédula* by SEP. Likewise, applicants lacking proof of completion of upper-secondary education may be referred to CENEVAL for the *Examen General para el Egreso de la Educación Media Superior (EGREMS)*/General Leaving Exam for Upper-Secondary Education.

Admissions officers are advised to request the following documentation:

1. At the upper-secondary level, transcripts indicating full program completion. Note: a national diploma is not available in Mexico.
2. At the undergraduate and graduate levels, transcripts, conferred degrees, and *cédulas*. Note: the *cédula* (and thus indirectly the conferred degree) may be verified online at <http://www.cedulaprofesional.sep.gob.mx/cedula/indexAvanzada.action>.

Aside from the official *certificado final de calificaciones*/final certificate of grades (i.e., transcript), most Mexican institutions have an internal record called a *kárdex* which provides such information as coursework sequencing, theoretical and practical hours per week, failures, absences, make-up exams, and challenge testing. The *kárdex incompleto* indicates coursework and grades toward an incomplete degree plan; the *kárdex completo* indicates coursework and grades toward a completed degree plan. Selective U.S. institutions may opt to request that applicants submit both the official *certificado final de calificaciones* and the unofficial *kárdex* as the latter provides useful information for admissions and placement decisions.

The grade scale below the undergraduate level is based on 0 (sometimes 5) to 10 points; usually, 6 is the minimum passing grade, but infrequently it is 7. The tertiary grade scale is based on 0 to 10 or 0 to 100 points; both 6/60 and 7/70 are commonly used as the minimum passing grade, but a few variations exist. At the graduate level, the minimum passing grade may be higher. The Mexico profile for the *NAFSA Online Guide to Educational Systems Around the World* has more detailed information on grading and possible conversions.

### **Additional Sources**

ANUIES/*Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior*/National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education: <http://www.anui.es.mx>.

Undergraduate and graduate catalogs listing institutions and programs of study: [www-old.anui.es.mx/servicios/c\\_licenciatura/index2.php](http://www-old.anui.es.mx/servicios/c_licenciatura/index2.php)

IBE/International Bureau of Education: *World Data on Education*, 7th ed., 2010/11: [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Mexico.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Mexico.pdf)

NAFSA *Online Guide to Educational Systems Around the World: Mexico*, 2008: [http://www.nafsa.org/File/\\_ges/Mexico.pdf](http://www.nafsa.org/File/_ges/Mexico.pdf)

OEI/*Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos*/Organization of Ibero-American States – Mexico: <http://www.oei.es/quipu/mexico/index.html>

SEP/*Secretaría de Educación Pública*/Secretariat of Public Education: <http://www.sep.gob.mx/>



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## Credential Survey–Institutional Analysis Mexico

Mexican Credential	IREF <i>International Education Research Foundation</i>	University of Kentucky	University of Colorado Denver	Temple University
Bachillerato General	Completion of High School	May grant access to undergraduate study	May be considered for freshman admission	Completion of Upper Secondary School
Bachillerato Tecnológico	Completion of High School	May grant access to undergraduate study	Completion of Vocational High School	Completion of Vocational High School
Enfermera	Completion of high school (Note: this is a nursing credential; however, it is completed at the secondary level)	May grant access to undergraduate study	Completion of Secondary School with specialized training in Nursing	Completion of Nursing High School
Licenciatura	Bachelor's Degree	May grant access to undergraduate and/or graduate study	May be considered for graduate admission	3-5 years of Post-Secondary Education