

Private Colleges Open 82,000 Places for the Poor in Brazil

Contributed by Cristiane Peres
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Of Brazil's 1,652 private higher education institutions, 1,001 have already adhered to the University for All program (ProUni). According to the Brazilian Minister of Education, Tarso Genro, the "expectations were surpassed."

The initial goal of the program was to make 70 thousand places available, annually, for low-income students, and so far 81,791 places have been offered.

"The ProUni is a program for the creation of full and partial scholarships. It aims to expand the number of students in higher education. With the increase in places, expectations also grow," Genro explains.

48 thousand scholarships will be full, that is, the students won't have to pay anything for their schooling. The rest will get partial financial assistance.

The program offers full scholarships to students from families with a per capita monthly income of up to one and a half minimum wages (US\$ 138, or 390 reais) and partial scholarships to students from families with a per capita monthly income of less than three minimum wages (US\$ 276.00, or 780 reais).

To qualify, students must have received all of their secondary education in public schools or, if they attended private schools, have been the beneficiaries of full scholarships.

Lula's Backing

As presented in May by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the ProUni program reserves a certain number of places in private universities for needy students with per capita family incomes of less than one minimum wage, preferably public school graduates and basic education teachers in the public school system.

Selection is based on the results of the National Secondary School Examinations (Enem), instead of the usual university entrance exams.

"The project combines two fundamental components, first offering an extraordinary opportunity to basic education teachers and young people from public schools, and, within this, applying the quota system," Genro commented.

The program also sets the percentage of places for black, mulatto, and native students in accordance with the figures contained in the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics' (IBGE) most recent census.

"This totally eliminates the possibility of self-classification as a member of the black community," he said.

The Prouni will permit private universities, philanthropical or profit-oriented, to prefer to grant these students full scholarships in return for an exemption from taxes for which they are currently liable, such as the Social Security Tax (ISS) and the Social Contribution on Net Profit (CSLL).

The institutions that choose to adhere to the Prouni will also guarantee the participation of students enrolled in programs such as Student Credit (Fies).

Minister Genro advised that the project will "separate the wheat from the chaff," compelling phony philanthropical universities to adapt themselves.

"Those institutions that are genuinely philanthropic will have an easy time adjusting, since they will not be making any sacrifices. But the bogus philanthropical ones will not make the adjustment, because they will have to be forthright and will have to change a lot of things," the Minister said.

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