Republic, Chile, and Uruguay. Each presents a wealth of institutional background and descriptive data (I focus this review on the education case studies).

When authors make empirical inferences concerning the relation of organization to outcomes, the volume is somewhat weaker. Cristian Aedo compares the achievement of students in public and private schools in Chile, where a voucher-type system has functioned since 1980. Data are aggregated to the school level (as in other studies of Chile). The chapter’s sample includes 866 schools, apparently chosen because they are not missing any data. But the original data set for 1994 includes over 4000 schools. We are left guessing as to how this might bias results. He concludes that some private schools mostly religious or operated by large businesses are more effective than public schools, while non-religious private schools are equally effective. Aedo acknowledges that selection bias could be a serious problem and reports some attempt to model it. But almost no details of data or methods are given, and the correction inspires little confidence. The chapter does not report descriptive statistics (including the standard deviation of the dependent variable) so it is difficult to assess whether effects are large or small in magnitude.

The chapter on Brazil by Paes de Barros and Mendoza is by far the most thoughtful. It describes three unique education reforms: (1) increased financial autonomy for schools, (2) local election of school principals; and (3) the creation of school councils. The reforms were implemented at different times in each of Brazil’s states, which allows for a clever empirical strategy. The authors estimate the impact of reforms on outcomes, controlling for a vector of background variables and unobserved, time-invariant heterogeneity of states (using fixed effects in their panel of data). They find that the first and third reforms have the most impact; the second has no or slight impact. However, the magnitude of effects is not overwhelming, accounting for “only half of the modest improvement in educational performance that took place in Brazil during the 1980s” (p. 127).

The study of Venezuela by Juan Carlos Navarro and Rafael de la Cruz compares three types of schools: private Fe y Alegría schools that are publicly-subsidized and religiously-affiliated, state-operated Escuelas Integrales, and nationally-operated public schools. Analyses are based on a non-random sample of 17 schools (two of which are Fe y Alegría). Expenditures of all the schools are similar. Based on simple estimates of a production function (with a single dummy variable controlling for poverty), the authors find that the private students have greater achievement. They carefully state the exceedingly preliminary nature of the results.

Based on the preceding evidence, the introductory chapter states that chapters “have shown that schools in Venezuela, Brazil and Chile that had greater autonomy and accountability tended to perform better, even after controlling for socioeconomic background of their students” (p. 16). Further, “the new lenses provided by Theories of the Firm are tested in these studies, and demonstrate that addressing incentive problems through better organization can improve performance” (p. 30). My reading of the empirical studies is more agnostic. The evidence does not really support such broad conclusions, nor does it adequately justify the policy implications which the Inter-American Development Bank may wish to draw. The book’s title might have been more suitably phrased as a question: one for which empirical answers are still pending. Nevertheless, all the chapters provide fascinating background on Latin American social services which will interest many researchers. The book should provide a valuable impetus to further research.

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This is the sixth edition of the OECD Indicators series. Like its predecessors, it has much to offer to individuals and agencies interested in various aspects of education in OECD countries. It provides new data on old indicators, as well as several new indicators.

For readers not familiar with earlier editions of the Indicators, this serial offers aggregate measures of educational variables and other variables related to education for OECD countries and, occasionally, for non-OECD countries that participate in OECD surveys. Data are provided, for example, on educational attainment school-age populations; staff-pupil ratios; school attendance, dropout and completion rates; youth unemployment by educational level; teachers’ salaries; mathematics achievement; labor-force activity by schooling; and relative mean earnings by level of schooling completed.

New indicators for the 1998 volume include the transition from education to work, adult participation in training, decision making responsibilities in education, and internal rates of return to tertiary education. In addition, this volume contains for the first time trends in upper secondary and tertiary enrollments and in educational spending relative to GDP. Other indicators have been improved or expanded, e.g., mathematics achievement and teachers’ compensation.
I have found the *Indicators* to be very useful in my own work. For example, in completing a review of rates of return to schooling in OECD countries, I have used the earnings-by-schooling indicator to compute “short-cut” rates of return to schooling for OECD countries (Cohn and Addison, 1998). This was particularly useful because rate of return studies were not available for many of the countries, especially for recent years. But it should be emphasized that the data are extremely aggregative, providing only an overall glimpse of the structure of education in OECD countries. For serious decision making analyses, more detailed data are required.

Finally, the data are available on the Internet. The URL is: http://www.oecd.org/els/stats/els_stat.htm

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Reference


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PII: S 0 2 7 2 -7757(99)00047-3

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**Handbook for the College Admissions Profession;**
Claire C. Swann and Stanley E. Henderson (Eds.);

Since the mid-1970s, in American higher education, the interrelated offices of admissions, records (the registrar), financial aid and student accounts (the bursar) have undergone a sea of change in organizational philosophy and operational mechanics. In the registrar’s office and student accounts, this change has been largely an operational adaptation to technological changes in data storage and information processing. Admissions and financial aid, however, have evolved from institutional shepherds of student quality and social justice to complex marketing functions at the nexus of institutional decision making. In both instances, this evolution occurred before admissions and financial aid practitioners, faculty and other administrators, and other observers within and without academia had fully grasped these offices’ changed roles. For the financial aid officer, this role evolution tracked a course from dispenser of institutional charity to, after the founding of the College Scholarship Service and the profession’s wide acceptance of a uniform methodology for determining student financial aid need in the 1950s, to an agent of social equity in apportioning student financial assistance to, more recently, the institutional implementer of variated pricing policies. Today, understanding within academia of the changed nature of financial aid is still piecemeal and haphazard.

Similarly, admissions evolved from an adjunct of the registrar’s office to a counseling center and recruitment center to a sales and marketing operation of considerable, if not sophistication, then, at least, complexity. Reactions to this change within the academy, in general, and the admissions profession, in particular, have ranged from denial to blind acceptance. The former has resulted in more than a little hypocrisy; the latter has resulted in egregious marketing and ethical faux pas that would make even the most cynical carnival Barker blush. The appearance of Swann and Henderson’s *Handbook for the College Admissions Profession* under the aegis of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers, with contributions from representatives of the other major admissions associations (The College Board and the National Association for College Admission Counseling), signals a profession’s coming of age.

This new professional maturity manifests itself in two ways. First, the acceptance by admission practitioners that their’s is a craft that combines both counseling and recruitment (sales). Rather than fighting this apparent paradox, admission practitioners have come to realize that these activities are not mutually exclusive, but rather the obverse and reverse of the same dual responsibility – serving the interests of students and institutions. Secondly, in order to serve these dual responsibilities, admissions practitioners have realized that their craft really is a profession in the strict sense of the word – it has a history, a philosophy of professional behavior and an organized body of knowledge and skills both common to the craft and required of anyone who would be a member of it.

As a primer of that history, philosophy and body of knowledge and skills, Swann and Henderson’s handbook advances the profession. Consisting of 19 essays by veteran admissions and enrollment professionals, the handbook provides a broad overview of the newly emergent profession. The handbook is subdivided into six subsections: 1) Perspectives and History, 2) The Admissions Officer, 3) Understanding Enrollment Management, 4) Admissions Tools, 5) Admissions Programs, and 6) Perspectives on the Twenty-First Century. As to be expected in such a collection, the quality ranges from the banal (former College Board President Donald Stewart’s “Perspectives on Educational Reform” and Greta Mack’s “Students of the Future”) to the obvious but useful (Michael Dolence’s “Strategic Enrollment...