The Education-Work Transition of Venezuelan University Students
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University students in Venezuela constitute about ten percent of the corresponding age group (calculated from Universidad Central de Venezuela 1970: 19, Table 5), and leadership of the country's economic and social development is increasingly in the hands of university-trained professionals. University enrollment has quadrupled since 1958, and young professionals who have graduated over the past fifteen years already represent a majority among university graduates in Venezuela. Research on students and elites, however, in Venezuela as elsewhere in Latin America, has concentrated on their divergent political attitudes while paying scant attention to the transformation of university students into members of the elite.¹

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This paper reports on an exploratory survey of student and elite attitudes toward higher education and professional employment in Venezuela. Our findings provide some insight on the extent to which employment of high-level manpower is influenced by modern, achievement-oriented criteria, as compared with traditional, ascriptive criteria. A better understanding of the transition from higher education to professional employment should help advance the study of high-level manpower and its role in economic and social development. For example, our findings suggest that the typical assumption in manpower and education planning models of a smoothly functioning neoclassical labor market does not coincide with actual labor market behavior in a developing culture.²

Our research was guided by two hypotheses: (1) if economic development is accompanied by a change from ascriptive to merit criteria in employment practices, this change should be reflected in the attitudes of both students and members of the elite toward professional employment; and (2) if traditionally in Latin America the attainment of a university title was more important than either the content or the quality of a university education, rising discontent with educational content and quality among both students and members of the elite would also indicate a change from ascriptive to merit criteria in employment practices. Our findings reveal a coexistence of modern and traditional criteria, but we do not know if this signifies a period of transition or whether it indicates a more permanent aspect of social dualism.³

We introduce the following analysis with an explanation of our survey method. Interpretations of our findings on student and elite attitudes, in turn, are preceded by brief references to the relevant research literature. In a concluding discussion, we briefly summarize our analysis and suggest its implications for manpower and education planning. We also comment on previous interpretations of the political attitudes of students and members of the elite in the light of our findings.
Universe and Survey Method

Venezuela's stock of high-level manpower in 1971 included approximately 50,000 university graduates. Of this total, about seventy percent were below the age of forty and thus had graduated since 1958, or since the advent of democratic government and the beginning of rapid expansion in higher education. Medical doctors and lawyers constituted forty percent of the total, although their proportion was higher among older professionals and lower among more recent graduates. The fields of civil engineering and administration, which we chose for sampling of fifth-year student attitudes, represented 8.9% and 6.4%, respectively, of the university-trained manpower stock and were the next two numerous professions (Grajal, 1972).

University enrollment in 1971 totaled 87,260 students. The public Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV) and the private Universidad Catholica Andres Bello (UCAB), from whose schools of civil engineering and administration we drew our student samples, accounted for 33% and 7.3%, respectively, of total enrollment. Venezuela's ten universities graduated approximately 4,000 students in 1971, with about half of this total accounted for by UCV and UCAB (from unpublished data compiled for us by the Planning Office of the Venezuelan Council of Universities).

We limited our selection of student samples in this exploratory survey to the two professional disciplines that we regard as most practical and informative for our purposes. Civil engineering is a traditional field, and administration is a relatively new professional discipline in Venezuela. Both are well defined professionally, although in both cases graduates also are likely to find a diverse spectrum of employment opportunities in the public and private sectors of Venezuelan economic life. We did not choose medicine because the field has a very specialized labor market, and we did not choose law because its graduates are most widely dispersed in their professional activities.

We also selected the two disciplines and the two universities in the expectation of finding significant socioeconomic and attitudinal differences. For example, we expected students with
lower-middle-class backgrounds to be concentrated at the public university (UCV) because of its lower tuition, and in the field of administration because of its lower social prestige. Also, the two universities are generally regarded as distinctly different institutions. UCV, the center of student political activity in Venezuela, frequently experiences interruptions in its academic programs. The university is for this and related reasons considered by many employers to be of lesser quality than UCAB. The latter was founded to provide a less political, more stable academic environment that would foster a high level of academic quality. Recent experience at UCAB indicates, however, that it is not immune from political activity and resultant unrest. Moreover, we did not detect any clear indications of qualitative differences between the universities. Yet, the public-private dichotomy does reflect largely intangible differences between a liberal populist orientation at UCV and a more conservative, elitist inclination of faculty and students at UCAB.

Our random sample of fifth-year students in the two disciplines at UCV and UCAB was selected so as to include standard-size groups of about twelve students each. This approach was determined by our research technique in which the completion of written questionnaires was followed immediately by intensive group discussions with our respondents, each of which lasted about two hours. The questionnaires sought information on the students’ socioeconomic background, their reasons for career choices, their evaluation of the adequacy of the education they had received, and on their work experiences and approaches to seeking employment in their fields. The group discussions, led by a Venezuelan moderator, probed further into how students went about finding employment and whether they preferred to work in the public or private sector and why.

In order to obtain information on elite attitudes toward higher education and high-level manpower employment, we conducted individual interviews with 36 members of the Venezuelan elite, including twelve each in the public, private, and university sectors. Our selection criterion was adapted from
Bonilla and Silva Michelena, who chose their respondents for a study of Venezuelan elites from "those near—but not at—the apex of power in the several spheres" because they considered respondents at this level "most likely to prove 'efficient' evaluators as contrasted with the most powerful individuals...or the powerless" (Bronfenmajer, 1967: 214). A committee of senior administrators from the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración and the Planning Office of the Venezuelan Council of Universities selected our respondents.

The sample of elite respondents included alternates, who were used in about one-fourth of the interviews when the first-choice respondent was unavailable. Each of our leader interviews lasted about one hour and was conducted jointly by a Venezuelan and a U.S. interviewer in accordance with a standard outline of questions. The themes of questioning were the same as for students, namely the individual's views of employment practices for high-level manpower, and his assessment of the adequacy of university education as preparation for professional and managerial work. The two samples gave us a basis for analyzing elite and student attitudes on a comparative basis.

**Student Attitudes Toward Education and Employment**

Latin American university students are frequently described as being strongly oriented toward social change and as being politically radical. From this one might infer that they would be relatively unconcerned with maximizing their individual welfare and instead seeking employment opportunities that would involve them in advancing social change more generally. For example, one would expect students to prefer public sector employment because of the involvement in social programs and the potential influence on policy and resource allocation that it is more likely to offer than the private sector. Our findings indicate, however, that students are more conservative and members of the elite less tradition-bound than many commentators have suggested.
Students in Venezuela typically choose a career while still in high school. Little is known of what influences their career choices, but parental influence, often thought influential, does not appear to be important. Students regard medicine and engineering as highest in social prestige, and also most demanding academically. Law and administration are considered less prestigious as well as less demanding academically. It also appears that students from upper-middle-class backgrounds make earlier career choices and tend to favor medicine and engineering, while lower-middle-class students vacillate longer and are more likely to enroll in law and administration (Albornoz, 1968; Ruscoe, 1968).

Once enrolled at a university, the principal preoccupation of the Venezuelan student appears to be his adjustment to the socially diverse and politically charged environment in which he finds himself. A recent study of Venezuelan university students (Escotet, 1969) found that “students are most concerned about their problems in human relationships, particularly those of personal status in their college environment.” The study also found that a university student’s principal reference points appear to be his peers, and it confirmed that family influence—at least on career choice—is weak and that university counseling is nonexistent.

Personal and political socialization appear to be more important to students during their first two or three years at the university than professional development, despite the early career choice. Arnove (1971) in his study of student attitudes at one of Venezuela’s regional universities, suggests that “anticipatory socialization into professional roles is not characterized by the same degree of concreteness as induction into political roles.” He also found, however, that political and professional efficacy are highly correlated. Students in medicine and engineering scored higher on Arnove’s political activism scale than did students in administration and the social sciences, as well as being more certain about their professional futures. If and when a student reaches his fourth and fifth years of studies, however, he is compelled to devote his attention and energies toward serious professional preparation, which may deter him
from political involvement at this stage.

The research literature thus deals predominantly with student socialization. It is largely devoid, however, of insights on the forces that influence students’ career choices, or on the means by which university graduates seek employment as professionals. Each of these variables, in turn, should be related to students’ socioeconomic backgrounds if one is concerned with social mobility and cultural change. Our field research was designed to provide new insights on these particular aspects.

The student sample included 39 men and 13 women (Table 1). The proportion of women was greater in administration (34.6%) than in civil engineering (17.2%) and greater at UCV (33.3%) than at UCAB (16.0%). The literature on elite and student attitudes makes virtually no reference to male-female distinctions, except implicitly to accept the notion that business and public affairs in Latin America are dominated almost exclusively by men. We noted during our field research, however, that in Venezuela women occupy many professional positions, although primarily in the public sector, and our sample accurately reflects the proportion of women among

**TABLE 1**

SEX COMPOSITION OF FIFTH-YEAR STUDENT SAMPLE BY INDIVIDUAL SAMPLE GROUPS AND BY ACADEMIC FIELD AND UNIVERSITY COMBINATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Sample Groups</th>
<th>Total Students in Sample (n)</th>
<th>Males in Sample (n)</th>
<th>Females in Sample (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UCV Engineering</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAB Engineering</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCV Administration</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAB Administration</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combinations of Sample Groups</th>
<th>Students Total</th>
<th>Males Total</th>
<th>Females Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCV</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAB</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% values are rounded to one decimal place.
fifth-year students. Thus, one may assume that in Venezuela at least, women will increasingly be represented as professionals in the country's elite. Although we are cognizant of the timeliness of this observation, it was not possible in our exploratory survey to pursue this important element of social and cultural change. We only note that the larger proportions of women in administration and at the public university (and apparently in the public sector) conform to the widely held view that these are avenues of social mobility.

Elite status in Venezuela requires either an advanced level of education, substantial property ownership, or a position of political leadership. The proportion of the student sample whose fathers either do not have a university education or do not have elite status as evidenced by their stated occupation may therefore serve as a measure of social mobility. Of fifty respondents who answered this question, the fathers of 21 (42%) were university graduates (Table 2). Several fathers with only a secondary education may also be members of the country's elite. By comparing fathers' educational levels with their occupations we conclude, however, that elite status is likely in only four additional cases. The remaining fifty percent of respondents' fathers, most of whom were small businessmen or skilled workers, can be classified as members of Venezuela's lower-middle class. This indicates that the expansion of higher

![](https://table.png)

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combinations of Sample Groups</th>
<th>Number of Respondents to This Question (n)</th>
<th>Fathers' Level of Education</th>
<th>University (n)</th>
<th>Secondary (n)</th>
<th>Primary (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCV</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ucab</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The actual sizes of our randomly selected groups and the respective proportions of fifth-year enrollments (in parentheses) they represent are as follows: UCV Civil Engineering, fifteen (6.2%); UCV Administration, twelve (3.4%); UCAB Civil Engineering, fourteen (56.0%); UCAB Administration, eleven (23.9%). The combined sample size is 52 (7.8%).
education in Venezuela has had a favorable effect in terms of upward social mobility.

Our comparison of fathers' educational attainment and students' fields of study contradicts the widely held view, also supported by Arnove (1971) in the case of Venezuela, that students with upper-middle-class backgrounds tend to choose engineering over administration, and that students from lower-middle-class backgrounds choose administration over engineering. Only 36% of the engineering students in our sample have fathers with a university education, compared with fifty percent of the administration students. It may be that only very able students from lower-middle-class families are upwardly mobile, that they are ambitious and therefore choose the more difficult and prestigious field of study. Many upper-middle-class students may feel that management training will suffice as preparation for the employment opportunities that their social standing will afford them in any case. The social distinction between public and private universities is confirmed, however. Only 27% of all students in our two UCV groups had fathers with a university education, compared with 58% of all students in our UCAB groups.

In response to why they chose their respective fields, engineering students at both universities were divided among those who considered prestige or income as important, and others who maintained that personal aptitude was the most important reason for their career choice. Administration students at both universities did not at all consider income expectations as an important consideration in their career choice. Almost unanimously they emphasized prestige as the most important determinant in their choice of administration as a career. This attitude contradicts the more generally held view that administration is a low-prestige field, but we suspect that our respondents had attained a high degree of self-justifying pride in their career choice by the time they were about to graduate. Relatively little concern with income may be due to the fact that there is little variation of starting salaries both within and between these two occupations in Venezuela.
Students tended to evaluate their university education as inadequate preparation for their professions, except for a majority of UCV administration students who found their training to have been adequate (question 1, Table 3). This difference in evaluation may be due to their greater maturity, gained through more extensive work experience (their average age is the highest among the four samples). In contrast, students' evaluation of their professors was predominantly favorable (question 2, Table 3). Although many students wished their professors had more time for personal encounters and were better prepared for their lectures, they seemed to respect them as professionals and to regard them as role models. These insights suggest that students regard the attainment of professional skills as important, which was strongly confirmed in the group discussions.

Student's criticism of their educational experience centered on the primarily theoretical nature and lack of flexibility of their curricula, both in civil engineering and in administration. An overwhelmingly strong consensus among all students was found in their desire for more practical experience as part of their professional training. In written replies as well as in the group discussions, the need for internships was strongly emphasized. It appears that professors, whose practical experience students admire, do not find it possible to relate this experience to their teaching.

Our findings did not bear out the notion of students as being strongly oriented toward social change, although this may be due to our choice of disciplines, with law students more likely to be socially concerned. Only civil engineering students at UCV gave any indication of an attitude of social concern. Several of our respondents in this group expressed themselves critically about the public sector's construction priorities, which in their opinion did not sufficiently emphasize low-cost housing and public works in slum areas. All other respondents indicated quite candidly that they were principally concerned with their own personal and professional futures, lending support to the arguments of Silvert and Hennessey (see note 6).
### TABLE 3
EDUCATIONAL AND WORK EXPERIENCES OF FIFTH-YEAR STUDENT SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>UCV Engineering</th>
<th>UCAB Engineering</th>
<th>UCV Administration</th>
<th>UCAB Administration</th>
<th>Total Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Do you believe your education has prepared you adequately for your profession?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4 (28.6)</td>
<td>2 (14.3)</td>
<td>9 (75.0)</td>
<td>3 (27.3)</td>
<td>18 (35.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10 (71.4)</td>
<td>12 (85.7)</td>
<td>3 (25.0)</td>
<td>8 (72.7)</td>
<td>33 (64.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>12 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>51 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) What is your opinion of your professors as teachers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>7 (58.3)</td>
<td>10 (71.4)</td>
<td>10 (90.9)</td>
<td>6 (54.5)</td>
<td>33 (68.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>5 (41.7)</td>
<td>4 (28.6)</td>
<td>1 (9.1)</td>
<td>5 (45.5)</td>
<td>15 (31.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12 (100.0)</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>48 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Have you had work experience in your field of study?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8 (53.3)</td>
<td>7 (50.0)</td>
<td>12 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>38 (73.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7 (46.7)</td>
<td>7 (50.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14 (26.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 (100.0)</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>12 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>52 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Do you already have a job offer following your graduation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4 (26.7)</td>
<td>2 (14.3)</td>
<td>6 (54.5)</td>
<td>8 (72.7)</td>
<td>20 (39.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11 (73.3)</td>
<td>12 (85.7)</td>
<td>5 (45.5)</td>
<td>3 (27.3)</td>
<td>31 (60.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 (100.0)</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>51 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) How do you perceive your prospects for professional advancement?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>14 (93.3)</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>47 (90.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>1 (6.7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (9.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 (100.0)</td>
<td>14 (100.0)</td>
<td>12 (100.0)</td>
<td>11 (100.0)</td>
<td>52 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: In cases where the total number of responses does not add up to the total number of students in the sample (Table 1), the difference is the number of no responses.
In response to an open-ended written question, students gave only vague replies about what they thought was the most important problem facing Venezuela as a nation. If one particular concern can be identified from these responses, it is with Venezuela's external dependency. This type of reply reflects a preoccupation with international issues of economic and social injustice, and it indicates support for the current government policy of gradually nationalizing petroleum exploitation. It does not, however, indicate a strong concern with the problems of economic inequality and social misery that remain prevalent within the country despite Venezuela's economic and social development in recent years (Schuyler and Zschock, 1971).

Compared with this not altogether conclusive analysis of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and their attitudes toward education, student attitudes toward employment stand out as rather more sharply definable. In the past, employment at all levels in Venezuela has been subject to personal influence and to political considerations. Characterized in Venezuela by the term *palanca*, which literally means leverage but which is colloquially used to mean favoritism or "pull," one obtained employment, was promoted, and changed jobs in a social and political system of patronage. Although our student respondents maintained that palanca is still very much in evidence, they felt that this system is gradually being replaced by a system of merit considerations more characteristic of an advanced economy.

Not surprisingly, the sharpest accent on palanca came from students who had not yet obtained professional employment. These students were predominantly those from lower-middle-class backgrounds in engineering. Administration students, both at UCV and UCAB, also emphasized the persistence of palanca, but less emphatically so than many of the engineering students. All of the administration students worked daytime and attended courses at night, in contrast to engineering students whose classes were during daytime, and of whom only 52% had had practical experience in their field (question 3, Table 3).
More than half of the administration students in our sample had offers of employment (question 4, Table 3). The group at UCAB, however, had fared proportionately better than the group at UCV, even though members of the latter were older and probably had longer work experience. It is also noteworthy that most students in our sample were optimistic about their professional future (question 5, Table 3); only among the administration group at UCV was there a significant proportion of skeptics. These observations suggest that it may still be relatively more difficult for lower-class than for upper-class students to find employment that meets their expectations. This conclusion gains support from students' replies to questions of what they thought career success would depend on and how they obtained or expected to obtain their first professional positions. Students at UCV tended to emphasize their professional capability as most important and that they expected to find employment through direct personal effort. Students at UCAB agreed that professional capability was increasingly important for personal advancement, but most allowed that they expected to obtain their positions through palanca.

We also learned, however, that employment references from peers were as likely to be influential in finding employment as patronage or nepotism by older members of the elite. Indeed, we would infer from our group discussions with students that mutual assistance among peers is an element of growing importance in labor market behavior of young Venezuelan professionals. This observation may help explain why students are preoccupied at the university with developing their interpersonal relations. These ties are referred to by the term amistad, meaning friendship. Amistad, we infer, represents a relationship among equals which involves the expectation of mutual assistance throughout one's professional career. Palanca, in contrast, is a relationship between higher and lower positioned individuals, and thus resembles the more widely known custom of patronage in Latin American labor market behavior. Although our findings do not clearly substantiate this, we have the impression that palanca is more prevalent in the private sector and that amistad predominates in the public sector.
In sum, it may well be that in keeping with the view of Venezuela as a dualistic society, a growing appreciation for professional competence will for some time coexist with a continuing tendency to prefer personal to impersonal employment practices.

We observed with some surprise that students in our sample almost unanimously denied that political party affiliation or even political influence had any bearing upon their immediate employment prospects, either in the public or the private sector of the economy. Judging from the literature on students' political attitudes, and from the fact that in Venezuela student politics is linked to national politics through a vertical party structure that reaches into the universities, we had thought that students' political affiliation or views would influence their employment preferences and prospects, but found no evidence to support this notion.

In filling higher positions in the public sector, political considerations certainly are important, in Venezuela as anywhere else. At the entry level of government employment, however, professional competence appears to be considered of principal importance. Neither leaders nor students felt that party affiliation was necessary or important in entering the public sector as a professional. Students who have been active politically and who wanted to pursue a political career would enter politically oriented positions through one of the party hierarchies. Thus, there appears to be a distinction now in Venezuela between political and technical employment in the public sector.

The majority of students in our sample expected to obtain their initial employment in the public sector, but their reasons for this choice contradicted our assumptions. Neither public university (UCV) nor private university (UCAB) students were seeking public sector employment in order to influence public policies and programs. Only civil engineering students at UCV indicated that their profession would enable them to make a socially useful contribution. As noted above, most of our respondents were primarily concerned with attaining status, security, and self-fulfillment. These are socially acceptable
objectives, but they do not conform with the all too often generalized image of the Latin American student as a political radical. A more balanced interpretation of student attitudes might be that many are prone to vocal radicalism but that in practice most students choose to pursue professional rather than political careers.

Most students interviewed expected to work in the public sector because they considered government employment for professionals more plentiful than in business and also less demanding professionally. The choice is not a difficult one inasmuch as starting salaries appear to vary little between sectors. Compared with the private sector, students also considered the public sector to require less palanca. When pressed for their sector preference, however, most students favored private sector employment. Our group discussions concluded in each case that students regarded public sector employment as a training ground and springboard for eventual transfer to the private sector, if given the opportunity.

Several students pointed out that public sector positions are likely to offer opportunities for graduate education, as well as other opportunities to gain specialized knowledge. Private sector companies in general, and small establishments in particular, they claimed, prefer to employ professionals with advanced and specialized skills. Students also felt that many private firms are too small to employ university-trained professionals. Instead, small firms employ specialists on a part-time or occasional basis. This tendency, according to some of our respondents, leads them to consider independent professional activity as a career goal.

**Elite Attitudes Toward Education and Employment**

The Venezuelan elite has been described as culturally traditional, politically conservative, averse to taking risks in economic affairs, and preferring personal to impersonal arrangements, including an extended form of nepotism in its employment practices. The country's traditional society is disintegrating, however, resulting in social dualism that separates the modernizing upper-middle and lower-middle classes from an
impoverished lower class of urban workers and rural peasantry. Social dualism also is reflected in the coexistence within the elite of modern and traditional value orientations. There are three pyramids of power in Venezuelan society, moreover, each with its own apex of leadership. Economic, political, and cultural elites command respective areas of influence that overlap but do not coincide. Modern and traditional values coexist within each pyramid of Venezuelan elites, often reflected even in the behavior of their individual members (Silva Michelen, 1971).

Public sector employment has been the path of upward mobility for the present generation of political leaders, many of whom started out from lower-middle-class beginnings and experienced political repression under the dictatorial government prior to 1958. Venezuelan businessmen, on the other hand, typically have avoided direct political participation. Perhaps for that reason, among others, they have been upwardly mobile longer than contemporary political leaders. Thus, according to one observer, second and third generation private sector leaders now “bear visible traces of inherited status,” and although “some few still make the hard climb to business eminence largely on their own, the steady progression through a well-delineated path of advancement within the family firm, the business syndicate or the large corporation is probably becoming more typical” (Bonilla, 1970: 93-94).

These observations support the view that the public sector is more likely to offer employment opportunities for young professionals with lower-middle-class backgrounds, while the private sector is more likely to favor graduates with elite backgrounds. This would remain so long as traditional attitudes prevail among both employers and young professionals. If a change from ascriptive to merit criteria in employment practices were noticeable, however, one would expect university graduates with lower-middle-class backgrounds to find employment opportunities in the private sector as well.

The 24 university and public sector leaders whom we interviewed drew a picture of labor market entry and subsequent mobility of high-level manpower that largely coincided
with the views of students. The picture is one of high preference among students in civil engineering and administration to enter the public sector first, gain experience there, possibly including fellowship support for advanced education, and then to seek private sector employment because of the better working conditions, greater job security, and more plentiful economic rewards it offers. University and public sector leaders also thought that young professionals begin their careers with a spirit of participation in national development for which they consider public employment as the principal means. But after several years of experience, after which they have also reached a salary limit that is difficult to exceed in the public sector, the most capable young professionals are readily drawn into the private sector.

The twelve private sector leaders in our sample strongly emphasized the importance of merit in their employment practices. The information they provided indicates that not many recent graduates are being hired in the private sector and that employers definitely prefer to employ professionals who have had several years of experience. The reason given for this cost-minimizing employment policy is that private enterprise labors under a cloud of political uncertainty and cannot make long-range plans. Nevertheless, it appears that larger private companies are more likely actively to recruit young professionals and managers than smaller firms. We also learned, however, that many private companies, especially those with foreign capital participation, prefer to employ Venezuelan professionals trained abroad, thus discriminating against students represented in our sample.

All leaders interviewed were critical of programs in civil engineering and administration for not producing better-qualified graduates. They maintained that greater emphasis on practical training is necessary to meet the needs of industry and government. One element of great importance, according to virtually everyone we interviewed, is the role that part-time work and internships play in the professional preparation of students and in their subsequent employment. As noted above, more than half of all students interviewed worked at least
part-time, and several in administration worked full-time. One may conclude from this that work experience as a student and advanced professional training beyond graduation are important elements that influence labor market behavior. They also strongly attest to the importance attached to achievement criteria in employment practices, particularly in the private sector.

The problem of defining and coordinating the respective responsibilities of universities and prospective employers in the training of professionals remains unresolved, in part because of the weak institutional ties between university planning and planning in the private sectors. The failure of universities to design effective orientation and counseling services for students also remains a basic problem. Virtually all leaders interviewed volunteered these observations spontaneously and indicated their support for academic reform and initiatives that would more closely relate professional training and high-level manpower requirements. The fact that so many students work indicates that opportunities exist to coordinate academic studies with work experience in both the public and private sectors.

Most leader interviews, however, also revealed the social dualism in Venezuelan employment practices. There was general agreement that a merit system is emerging in both sectors, but that access to employment opportunities continues to function primarily through personal reference. Although several public sector leaders said they resented palanca, they did not claim that so far professional employment and advancement in government service functioned on a merit basis. In private sector employment, merit criteria now apparently complement but have not displaced palanca. It is probably true that young professionals with lower-middle-class backgrounds must not only develop personal ties with employers but also prove themselves exceptionally capable in order to obtain employment in the private sector. They may also be disadvantaged, if they have studied at UCV, by an apparent bias among members of the elite that UCV students are politically more radical than UCAB students.
Conclusions and Implications

Students and leaders in our samples were in substantial agreement on how the labor market for young professionals in civil engineering and administration functions in Venezuela. Our findings in this exploratory survey, however, allow only tentative conclusions. A more extensive analysis of high-level manpower allocation and professional mobility would require broadening the sample and obtaining information on employment policies and practices in a representative cross-section of public and private sector establishments. Our research, limited to small but carefully selected sample groups, provides several new perspectives of elite and student attitudes that should encourage a reexamination of their attitudes toward social change when confronted with decisions in their career choices and in their pursuit of employment opportunities.

Over two-thirds of the Venezuelan elite who are university graduates are now below the age of forty. The cohort from ages 25 to 39 has attained professional status since the advent of Venezuelan democratic government in 1958. Of the students in our sample, about half had lower-middle-class backgrounds. Most of our student respondents expected to be employed in the public rather than the private sector. This fact, as well as the increasingly young age distribution of professionals in Venezuela and their growing number, undoubtedly dilutes some of the traditional attributes of elite status.

University students from lower-middle-class backgrounds in our sample appeared to seek elite status for personal security rather than to seek influence over the orientation of national development. This may make them more conservative than many members of the present generation of political leaders in Venezuela. One can hardly fault students for their preferences, as identified in our survey, but their conservatism fails to conform with the image of the upwardly mobile student as a leader in pressing social causes, an image that students have of themselves according to a number of studies on student attitudes in Latin America (see note 1). It may be, however, that as in the past, political leadership in Venezuela is more likely to come from lawyers and secondary schoolteachers, as
well as from professionals trained in the social sciences, than from graduates in civil engineering and administration.

Yet, Silva Michelenia's criticism of traditional elite attitudes is modified by our finding of the importance attached to merit. Growing emphasis on achievement, even though ascriptive criteria remain important, and growing pressure for improving the quality of professional preparation in the universities—along with upward social mobility—are signs of social change. A further test of social change, however, will be whether professionals with lower-middle-class backgrounds will increasingly find acceptance in the private sector. Since a substantial proportion of the demand for high-level manpower is in the public sector, and since professionals from elite backgrounds are more likely to obtain private sector employment, relatively few professionals from lower-middle-class backgrounds are likely to find employment in the private sector. This might point toward a growing social dualism dividing the public and private sectors, were it not for the similarity in aspirations between lower-middle- and upper-middle-class university graduates.

Allocation of university graduates in the market for high-level manpower in Venezuela is a complex mechanism that is made even more obscure with the emergence of social dualism in employment practices. The market does not seem to remedy surpluses and scarcities through salary adjustments; entry salaries, at least, show only narrow variations. Prospective entrants, moreover, appear to base their career choices neither on parental example nor on any assessment of future manpower requirements. Instead they are concerned primarily with attaining (or maintaining) social status, personal security, and with applying their self-assessed capabilities. In pursuit of these preferences, they are quite logically drawn into the well-established disciplines of medicine, law, engineering, administration, and secondary education.

The method most extensively used by university students to obtain professional and managerial positions in the private sector still appears to be palanca. In the public sector, personal references and introductions are more likely to be arranged through amistad. This latter term characterizes social relations
among peers rather than between generations, which distinguishes it from palanca.

These characteristics of the allocative mechanism for high-level manpower in Venezuela should not be ignored in education and manpower-planning. It will be difficult to introduce new academic fields as long as students are drawn into the long-established fields through the mutual reinforcement of peer influence. Evidence of effective demand for high-level manpower in new fields must be communicated to students when they begin their university education. This will require cooperation among universities and prospective employers, which might feature orientation services and internship opportunities, in order to compete with the established fields. No such cooperation has yet evolved in Venezuela at the university level.

The market appears to solve problems of shortages and surpluses of high-level manpower not through salary adjustment, but rather through interoccupational mobility. The alleged surplus of lawyers, for example, is in practice distributed into administrative and managerial positions. The same is true for any surplus of civil engineers. As long as economic and political affairs involve extensive personal relations, which students develop at the university, this redistribution among fields remains functional. When demand for professional and managerial skills becomes more technically specialized, however, shortages will become more evident. The market currently remedies these shortages through new graduate-level and specialized short training programs which are increasingly in evidence in Venezuela, and through the use of experts from other countries.

These considerations suggest that projections of manpower requirements will not be matched by supply unless expressed as effective market demand which must be communicated with sufficient lead time to affect students' career choices. Since it is difficult to project manpower requirements accurately over any extended period of time, the timing of appropriate signals is difficult to match with the timing of career decisions. Private returns to educational investment are weak signals at best,
considering that prestige and security appear to be more important to students than income, which in any case is assured at a fairly uniform level. Also, students in a public university pay relatively low fees, and many of them do not incur the cost of foregone income inasmuch as they combine paid employment with their studies. In effect, social demand for higher education has guided the universities' rapid expansion. This demand is still heavily influenced by traditional values and expectations which have not changed much with the influx of students from lower-middle-class backgrounds, except that this group—much more so than earlier generations of students—is drawn into the public rather than the private sector as the most likely source of employment.

NOTES

1. Research on student attitudes in Latin America has recently been surveyed by Peterson (1969). Representative of research on elites is the collection edited by Lipset and Solari (1967). Research on Venezuelan students and elites is cited below.

2. Blaug (1970) has written a thorough and comprehensive exposition and critique of manpower and education planning. He does not, however, deal with the actual functioning of labor markets in developing countries. Only studies of kinship relations have, to some extent, dealt with this subject; the Latin American research literature on this subject has recently been reviewed by Carlos and Sellers (1972).

3. According to Ahumada (1967: 7), "social dualism may be defined as the existence of traditional and modern institutional structures and/or the functioning of modern organizations according to traditional norms."

4. "Administration" as taught at Venezuelan universities is essentially business administration. The field includes accounting, identified as a subspecialty in Venezuelan data sources; it does not include economics, listed as a separate field of study in these same sources.

5. Although this view predominates in the literature surveyed by Peterson (1969), it has also been contradicted (Silvert, 1964; Hennessey, 1970). Indeed, it may be that student political activity is highly associated only with upper-class background (Stern and Palmer, 1971).

6. It is probably impossible to define elites unambiguously. We refer to university-trained professionals as upper-middle-class and to skilled workers and small businessmen as lower-middle class, with the latter likely to have a primary education with some training or education at the secondary school level. In addition to the upper class, whose distinction is wealth in material assets or high positions of economic, political, or cultural leadership, we attribute elite status to all members of the upper-middle class, as defined above. We recognize that this does not adequately account for the substantial number of university dropouts who form an amorphous middle sector about whose employment and socioeconomic characteristics very little is known.
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