Abstract: When we speak of youth participation in politics, one tends to imagine activism within diverse types of organizations, associations or movements. Political participation is in fact a complex phenomenon which takes many forms. Amongst these types of manifestations, questioning, researching and writing is a way of being active in political spheres. Thus, the academic production of political science students is a topic worth reflecting upon. In the following paper we will question why and how academic production in our discipline is important, what are the main obstacles this activity faces and which is the role played by universities in promoting it amongst undergraduate students. These questions will be answered within the context of three Latin American countries: Argentina, Colombia and Peru.

Key Words: Academic Production, Investigation, Publications, Students, Universities

1. Introduction

This paper has been developed by two undergraduate political science students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP). The objective of the investigation has been to recollect the perspectives of students and professors of political science in relation to student participation in investigation and academic production within the discipline. This investigation has been limited to the insights in relation to three Latin American countries: Argentina, Colombia and Peru.

We have chosen to study student participation in academic production because we have the belief that investigation and publishing oriented activities provide students with tools and abilities that make them professionally and academically more competent. As two political science students interested and involved in these types of activities, we have experienced first hand the benefits obtained and the difficulties confronted in the process of completing investigative projects.
This research is descriptive and exploratory. It has been designed to obtain perspectives of professors, career directors and students. Thus, it is an investigation that seeks to compare and contrast opinions of two very different groups of people: experimented academic and professional figures and young undergraduate students. Furthermore, we seek to compare and contrast perspectives of groups from different national realities (Argentina, Colombia and Peru). Through this exercise we hope to find both transversal ideas (common in all three countries), as well as opinions related to the particularities of each country’s academic sphere.

As part of the International Association for Political Science Students (IAPSS), this investigation has been elaborated with the help of the institution’s Latin American Regional Center and its Regional Agents. The countries chosen for this investigation were the first to count with institutional presence of the Regional Center (Peru being the Regional Center’s base, Argentina and Colombia the first countries to have Regional Officers).

2. Methodology

The universities taken into consideration are the following: University of Buenos Aires-UBA (Argentina), National University of Cuyo-UNC (Argentina), University of the Andes-UA (Colombia), National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Pontifical Catholic University of Peru-PUCP (Peru), and University Antonio Ruiz de Montoya–UARM (Peru). These universities were chosen in part do to presence of the LARC-IAPSS community, but mainly because of the important and distinct role each one of them has played in the development of political science within their country.

In Argentina, the UBA is one of the most important public universities in the country, and one of the first to reincorporate the study of political science in 1983 with the country’s return to democracy (during military governments careers in social sciences were closed and professors persecuted) (D’Alessandrom Leiras, Medina, 2005:79). Argentina has a long history of teaching and investigating in political science. The UC was the first to offer in 1950 studies in the field (D’Alessandrom Leiras, Medina, 2005:78). In Mexico de UNAM was the first university to open a School of Political Science founded in 1955 (Loaeza, 2005:192). In Colombia the UA was the first to offer an undergraduate program of political science and for a period of twenty years was the only university teaching the discipline (Bejarano, Wills, 2005:113). This is a university of renowned trajectory in political science and held in 2008, in collaboration with the Colombian Political Science Association, the first National Political Science Congress. In Peru, political science is a new profession. In 2005, the PUCP was the first to offer a political science undergraduate program within its social science faculty. This became a triggering event that led other universities to either create new political science programs or separate it from other disciplines such as the study of law (in Peru it is commonly thought that political science is part of the discipline of law). The UARM is a university that has recently opened a political science undergraduate
program. The purpose of including the UARM in our sample is to collect perspectives of an institution that is completely novel to the discipline.

For this study both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used. To obtain the perspectives and opinions of professors and directors, 8 in depth interviews were conducted. From Argentina the following people were interviewed: Jorge Mayer (Director of Political Science in the University of Buenos Aires), Miguel De Luca (President of the Argentine Political Analysis Society-SAAP), and Amelia Barreda (Director of Political Science of the National University of Cuyo). From Colombia the following people were interviewed: Angelika Rettberg (Director of Political Science of the University of the Andes) and Maria Emma Wills (former Director of Colombian Political Science Association- ACCPOL). Form Peru the following people were interviewed: Rolando Ames (Director of Political Science in the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru-PUCP), Jorge Aragon (Director of Political Science of the University Antonio Ruiz de Montoya-UARM), and Martin Tanaka (Investigator of the Institute of Peruvian Studies –IEP and prestigious professor of political science at the PUCP). The interviews lasted from 15 to 50 minutes.

To collect student input, a survey was applied to the universities mentioned above. Of these six universities, the students from the PUCP were the ones that answered the most. The survey consisted of 35 questions, 5 of which were control questions used to identify characteristics such as country of residence, university, age, number of semesters passed in the career, and specialization (area of concentration within political science). The remaining 30 questions were related to academic production and investigation at undergraduate level. The survey was applied within a period of 10 days, through an electronic version, sent to the student’s e-mails with the institutional support of the universities mentioned above. In total, the poll was applied to 150 students. This sample is not representative because it was not realized in a random manner.

The interviews and the survey were designed to obtain insights in relation six variables: political science academic production in general (at a national level), the role of universities in investigation and academic production, student interest in investigation and academic production, importance of methodological courses, facilities (opportunities) offered for student investigation, and platforms (spaces) available for presentation and publication of papers. In the survey additional questions were asked in relation to the perception of difficulty in regards to the publication of student work.

3. Theoretical Frame

Student participation in investigation and academic production is not a commonly studied topic. To define the variables taken in consideration, bibliography was revised in relation to themes such as: political science as a discipline, political science in Latin America, academic production in the field, think tanks in Latin America, youth participation in
research, profile of the political science student, student journal writing and editing, the teaching of undergraduate research methods, and the importance of research method courses in the political science curricula. In addition, data was collected to identify characteristics of the discipline in each country: universities that teach political science, associations and institutions related to the discipline, local political science journals, national political science congresses, and methodological courses included in the university’s political science curricula.

In light of our bibliographical revision, variables and research questions were elaborated based on the idea that student academic production is dependent of three main variables: the characteristics of the discipline as a whole in national academic spheres (level of institutionalization, autonomy from other disciplines, infrastructure, etc.), the role played by universities in creating an effective bridge that links the professional academic circles to undergraduate students, and an interest in research amongst the students.

To better understand how political science as a discipline attains specific characteristics a case study elaborated by John Trent and published in the International Political Science Review in 1987 was taken into consideration. This paper presents a model that identifies factors which influence the development of political science. These factors include: Distinctive Characteristics of the Discipline (discipline infrastructure, discipline orientation, discipline development), Impact of the Discipline on the Society and Polity (elite perception of political science research, motivation of scholars to influence political agenda, etc), Influence from the Indigenous Society and Culture (discipline autonomy, resources, national consensus on values, norms and institutions, impact of political issues, level of socio-economic development, etc), Influences from the International Social Science Environment (dependence of foreign training and methods, movement of scholars and ideas), and Impact of the Discipline on International Social Science Knowledge (use of international language, mechanisms for wide spread dissemination, new methods and theories, leading scholars, institution and publications). These factors are essential to understand why the discipline develops in a unique way in each country, and if looked at closely, also determines elements that directly affect the possibility of encouraging student’s participation in investigation. These factors will be evaluated in the following section through the interviews conducted.

To better distinguish the characteristics of the discipline in Latin American countries, we took into consideration Dieter Nohlen’s article “Political Science in Latin America” published in Diccionario de Ciencia Política. In this paper, the author sustains the following ideas: the development of political science in the region has been unequal, in most cases the topics researched by political scientists have been influenced by the nation’s politics (in detriment of pluralism within the scientific community), efforts must be made to create spaces for debate and critical dialogue amongst the academic community (journals and congresses for example), efforts must be made to diversify methodology (there is an
absence of comparative studies and too much historical descriptive work), ideological tendencies have been since the 1980s less influential within the academy (in the 1960s political scientists were tempted to participate actively in politics which was detrimental in creating a professionalized discipline). This article is helpful to understand some common problems in the region. Nevertheless, to better understand the specific characteristics within each academic reality, other texts were taken into consideration.

In 2005, the 25th volume of the Chilean Journal, *Revista de Ciencia Política* dedicated this edition to the study of political science in Latin America. Academics from each country described how the discipline was created and how it has developed over the years. These studies allow us to understand the main obstacles faced and the level of institutionalization and academic autonomy reached in each study case. These differences are important to keep in mind if we wish to fully understand the information collected through the interviews and surveys. In the following paragraphs we will provide information taken from these articles to better understand the state of political science in the three Latin American countries studied.

From the article titled “La Ciencia Política en Argentina: el camino de la institucionalización dentro y fuera de las aulas universitarias”, D’Alessandro, Leiras, and Medina sustain that the scientific study of politics in Argentina is the result of the professionalization and differentiation from other social sciences; a process where the universities have played key roles. The problem in the case of Argentina is that the study of politics has been highly vulnerable to changes in political regimes (D’Alessandro, Leiras, Medina, 2005: 112). Interestingly both characteristics are completely different in the case of Colombia. In Colombia political science was never part of another discipline. In the text “La Ciencia Política en Colombia: de vocación a disciplina”, Bejarano and Wills sustain that due to the fact that the University of the Andes (where political science as a discipline was first taught) did not teach law, the curricula of political science was always autonomous, thus never dependent or influenced by other disciplines. Furthermore, political science in Colombia has not been vulnerable to influence or pressure from the state, the church or the traditional political parties (Bejarano and Wills, 2005:113). In Peru, in 2005 the career of political science opened its first under-graduate level program at the Pontifical University of Peru. In December of 2008, the first promotion of political scientists graduated.

In relation to discipline’s outreach, Colombia proves to be an interesting case. Bejerano and Mills state that between 1982 and 1990, publication and investigation became the new imperatives within the discipline (Bejerano and Mills, 2005: 114). Thus, many existing institutions included studies in political science, institutions were created exclusively for the study of political science, and journals were created to publish work in the field. Between 1990 and 2005, Bejerano and Mills explain that the discipline diversified its themes investigated and experienced a multiplication in the number of studies offered
throughout the country. In Argentina authors state that there is pluralism in relation to institutions that study political science, and thus, plurality of themes researched. Authors state that throughout the military governments and into the 1980s investigation was done in the private sector. Investigation in political science has returned to universities in recent years (D’Alessandro, Leiras, Medina, 2005: 79). Furthermore authors assure that in recent years there has been growth in the number of programs offered in the field, mainly due to efforts of public universities. Thus, academic autonomy has been obtained through instances such as universities, institutions, and publications (of which many are dedicated exclusively to political science), yet professional autonomy is still lacking. In Peru, the number of universities that offer the career has grown moderately, within both public and private universities. As for the plurality of themes and institutions, the discipline is still battling to gain autonomy from other social science disciplines. In the 1990s the first texts dealing with Peruvian politics were published and the scientific study of politics began to be professionalized (Tanaka, 2005: 227). As we can see, realities are dissimilar.

In relation to participation of students in academic production, John Ishiyama in his text “Participation in Undergraduate Research and the Development of Political Science Students”, presented in 2002 at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, establishes a relationship between the better development of the political science student (dependent variable) and the student’s participation in collaborative research (independent variable). With collaborative investigation the author refers to work done between faculty members and students. In this sense, it is sustained that this type of investigation offers various benefits. These benefits include: gaining experience in investigative processes, obtaining abilities in the application of knowledge, the opportunity to define and redefine personal interests within the discipline, and the chance to fully be part of university life; academic integration (Ishiyama, 2002:2). Ishiyama makes reference to other authors which give their own perspectives of the importance of research at an undergraduate level. In general, authors agree that research is of great importance at academic (critical thinking, retention of concepts, intellectual growth), professional (curricular purposes for graduate education), and personal levels (personal satisfaction) (Ishiyama, 2005:1). In general, the author proposes a change in strategy within universities, from a passive form of learning to an active form of learning (Ishiyama, 2005:14).

Furthermore, Sharon Barrios and Lori Weber in their study “Recognizing Exemplary Student Writing: A Model for a Student Journal of Politics”, presented in 2003 at the American Political Science Association, sustain that student publication of papers is an activity which offers many academic and profession benefits for authors. In this study, Barrios and Weber assure that the writing and re-writing process before submitting a paper for its publication helps students to develop thinking skills and a sense of academic competitiveness. Furthermore, authors believe that public scrutiny is a key factor that
makes potential authors more rigorous in their work. Hence, Barrios and Weber explain that the sense of ownership when one publishes, the idea that one is making a public record of personal arguments and ideas, is a key source of motivation. Furthermore, this study also evaluates the benefits received by editorial groups that administer these student journals. Such benefits include an improvement in one’s capacity to revise papers and suggest solutions as well as the development of critical thinking skills. Furthermore, authors point out that student editors are exposed to a large diversity of studies, with different topics, writing style and techniques. This exposure is beneficial for undergraduate students who are still relatively novel to the discipline.

The following investigation attempts to evaluate this relationship between investigation and students within a Latin American context. Thus it was important to take into consideration texts that situate our study in the Latin American reality, as well as texts related directly to the topic of academic production and student participation.

4. Interviews

4.1. Academic production in three Latin-American countries

4.1.1 State of academic production

From the perspectives of the professors that were interviewed we found a shared opinion that the level of academic research in Latin American countries is low in comparison with first world countries.

The countries considered more advanced in this area are Brazil, Chile, and Argentina; secondly the case of Colombia. However, despite certain advantages in the case of Argentina and Colombia, the academics from these countries are not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the investigations realized. Although Argentina is considered by other countries a model of how research and academic production should be done, the local perspectives obtained give a more critical analysis of the state of academic production, thus Chile and Brazil are considered to be one step ahead of Argentina. In addition, professors, Jorge Mayer and Miguel De Luca consider that Uruguay has substantially improved its academic production in quality, (Mayer specifies that it has yet to improve in terms of quantity). Furthermore, Argentine academic production has increased with the return to democracy (De Luca specifies that this change in regime led to creation of many political science journals) and in recent years due to an increase in financial support. Mayer specifies that this financial support consists mainly of an increase in grants offered for PhD programs by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Investigations (CONICET) and the grants offered by the UBA. Thus, improvement in academic production has been the result of an increase in state funding. Furthermore, Professor Amelia Barreda suggests that although political science is growing substantially in numbers (many new political science programs), the discipline seems to be enclosed. That is to say, the discipline has little interaction with other social sciences, which is made clear in the journals of social sciences where few political science authors are published. Barreda mentions that this
tendency towards isolation causes roles that should be occupied by political scientists to be occupied by professionals of other disciplines. Barreda sustains that this is due to many factors (academic culture, competition from other disciplines) that have created within the discipline a divorce between practical political activity and the academy.

In Colombia Academic Production is considered by Professor Angelika Rettberg poor and deficient. In this respect, Rettberg mentions that countries such as Argentina, Chile and Mexico are ahead of Colombia. Furthermore although the number of undergraduate level programs has increased, Rettberg affirms that this does not imply an improvement in scientific investigation. Wills sustains that Colombia is in a middle point. In Colombia an important public institution that supports academic production in social and political science is the Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (COLCIENCIAS). In addition to this institution Wills affirms that since Colombia is a country at war many international funds are received for academic production in political science. Thus, funding for political science studies has a dual characteristic: national and international. Wills affirms that a scarcity of funds at a national level is complemented by funds received from international institutions. In this sense, topics related to Colombia’s internal conflict have been the center of academic production and is the topic that counts with most funds. In relation to this, Wills sustains that projects oriented to have an immediate impact on society are given preference (particularly from international funding) than those that seek to explanations (and not impact or change). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that both Colombia and Argentina have associations and institutions specifically created for the study and promotion of political science, whilst in Peru these institutions are yet to be created.

In Peru, academic production in political science is considered by the three professors interviewed, a project in its initial stages. Political Science in Peru is a new discipline that was initially introduced through a Masters program in 1998 and through an undergraduate program in 2005. Professor Martin Tanaka states that the creation of political science at an undergraduate level is a breaking point that can be expected to improve the state of academic production in the field. Furthermore, professors agree that the study of politics has been for decades the work of academics from other fields (mainly sociology, anthropology and law). However, in recent years scholars have begun to study politics using the theoretical and methodological tools of political science. This is a new trend within Peruvian academic spheres. Professor Jorge Aragon sustains that the Peruvian Studies Institute (IEP) has played a key role in publishing books of political scientists that share certain methodological, theoretical and thematic perspectives; books that are written either by Peruvian authors or by groups of Latin-American researchers. Nevertheless, Aragon states that there is still certain rivalry between political science and other disciplines since the discipline is still not entirely understood. On another hand, the professors interviewed consider that the institutionalization of the discipline is a work in progress. As for the role of universities in this sense, Professor Ames states that these institutions have centered their efforts in teaching political science and not in academic production. In general, Professor Rolando Ames perceives that investigation in political science is still organized in relation to specific projects, and not in a systematic manner.
Evidently, the Peruvian case is dissimilar to the rest. Argentina and Colombia are countries where political science has had a longer trajectory, thus the discipline is far more institutionalized.

4.1.2 Obstacles in academic production

The professors interviewed were asked about the obstacles that academic production and research projects face. The main obstacles mentioned were: lack of funds, lack of data, administrative and organizational problems, lack of time, and lack of spaces for publication. De Luca mentions that finance does not necessarily cover all the stages of a research project, thus the amounts given are not necessarily enough to cover salaries for investigators. Furthermore, De Luca mentions that in Argentina there is no custom of making data accessible for the general public. Martin Tanaka on the other hand sustains that it in Peru, the problem is not necessarily the lack of data, but the lack of coordination within institutions to use this data. Mayer’s perspective is more optimistic, he states that in Argentina one finds both people interested in investigating as well as adequate incentives and facilities for research to be realized. Nonetheless, a weakness pointed out by Mayer is that support for investigation is given to individual initiatives, and there has yet to be a program that offers support for long term projects that include both novel and experienced investigators. This is an idea shared by Ames who states that investigation is being financed and carried out by specific individual initiatives; academic production in political science has yet to be systematic. Furthermore, Rettberg states that institutions often have difficulties in assigning funds due to administrative problems. This evidently makes funding a far more difficult and tedious process (money is available but obtaining it is far too difficult). Another difficulty mentioned by Rettberg, and directly related to the Colombian reality is the impossibility of obtaining data in areas related to the armed conflict. The armed conflict in Colombia has been an important theme for investigation in certain NGOs in Colombia. Wills sustains that although in the late 90s, there was a set back in academic production within universities (do to the persecution and assassination of university professors), the academic production in relation to the armed conflict, from a political science perspective, will strongly increase. Furthermore, Wills, Ames and Aragon on the other hand mentioned the difficulty in relation to time. Both students and teacher have little spare time to dedicate to additional work such as investigation. According to Aragon, it is very unlikely that teachers expected to teach three different courses, (who must prepare, dictate and assess students) will have additional time to research. Wills sustains that an appropriate balance between investigation and teaching has yet to be found. Furthermore Aragon states that the courses must be designed so that students learn how to integrate courses and the topics discussed. Instead of producing 5 different final papers (for 5 courses), student may benefit more from the creation of one well done and integrated paper. On another hand, Ames sustains that in the case of the PUCP, there are few teachers and teacher’s assistants available (the Peruvian academy has few political scientists). This is problem that is being solved by employing young political science graduates.

Finance has been a transversal preoccupation in the interviews conducted. In this sense, Aragon states that resources are not at the disposition of an ample community. This is related to the fact the universities spend little in investigation. Aragon states that there are two types of funds: those open to all types of research projects (depending on the quality of
the proposition presented) and those that have a predetermined question that needs to be answered. The second of the two seem to be most commonly offered by specialized institutions, and the first usually present in universities. Financial opportunities that exist outside universities from institutions like think tanks, NGO’s and government organization, have their own criteria, themes and perspectives. Although universities also have tendencies and orientations, the risk of producing bias approaches is less when there are multiple approaches (multiple universities) to the problems discussed in society.

4.2. University’s role in academic research

4.2.1 What is the university’s role in promoting student participation?

Through the interviews we tried to identify common views amongst the directors and professors in relation to the role universities play in increasing research and publication. The response was the same in the three countries, it plays a key role. Its role consists of two main responsibilities: forming new investigators (giving students the necessary tools to investigate) and offering facilities for teachers to research.

Martin Tanaka states that teaching should be accompanied by investigation. In his opinion, Peruvian universities are not accomplishing this goal, and the reasons are financial and organizational. The ideal scenario is what Tanaka refers to as a chain, where professors investigate and employ students as assistants, who in turn gain experience in field work and in data recollection.

“La situación ideal es una situación donde hay una especie de cadena donde los profesores investigan y tienen equipos de investigación, que contratan a estudiantes como asistentes. Estos se involucran en trabajos de campo y en el recojo de datos. Esa una experiencia de investigación que puede servir para hacer tesis.”

Tanaka sustains that if this is achieved, spaces will be created for student participation in investigation. This is important for Tanaka because he perceives that investigation is a difficult task to be handled by undergraduate students alone. Tanaka sustains that this practice in investigation will make students less reluctant to investigate by their own. This is essential when students reach higher levels and are expected to conduct their own investigation and present a thesis.

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1 Interview with Martin Tanaka, 1 of May, 2009
In Colombia and Argentina this collaborative research (professor-teacher) has been offered and is considered the most appropriate way for students to introduce themselves in research. In Peru, the scarcity of political science professors is key to understand why teachers are not investigating (most required to teach at both graduate and undergraduate levels).

On another hand, Aragon affirms that in order to give students the tools they need to complete research activities, universities need to work on three different levels: the revision of the curricula and of the theoretical tools offered (revise also the way in which classes are being taught), the creation of institutional platforms that offer spaces for presentation and publication of student written papers such as congresses and journals (with the objective of teaching students to compete academically, to follow guidelines and deadlines, and to acquire capacities for investigation), and the assignation of financial resources for investigation and publication (grants). Tanaka states that a good professional reputation in political science is based on what one writes and publishes, thus it is important to assign part of the budget of political science programs to investigation and publication. In this respect, Wills sustains that funds only permit a limited amount of student-assistance per project. Thus, it is inevitable that only few students are chosen from a vast majority. In addition, Wills affirms that not all students are cut out for investigation, hence, professors must chose those they think capable. However, Wills believes that investigation is essentially a mental order, which consists of a capacity to make questions that can be answered by a systematic and rigorous recollection and systematization of data. Wills sustains that this is an ability all political science undergraduate students should acquire.

A facility offered in the case of Argentina, are grants for investigation projects. The grants described by both De Luca and Mayer are offered by the UBA. Students must present investigation projects jointly with a professor. Mayer sustains that the problem with this grant is that senior investigators complete the task of investigating, but do not necessarily train and form new investigators.

In Peru, Ames sustains that national universities are facing what he refers to as a process of redefinition. However, these universities are facing this process with difficulty due to their limited budgets, making strikes common. Ames states that it is a common belief that in public universities the contact with reality allows students to think of interesting research questions. However, the disadvantages in regards to budgets and facilities available for research frustrate research proposals. This is an important factor because Ames believes that national universities hold much potential, perhaps more that private universities, in selecting themes for investigation.

In general the professors interviewed agreed that investigation at undergraduate level should be seen as an exercise. In this sense, we distinguish two perspective: one that sustains that investigation is a transversal activity that should be promoted by universities amongst each branch of political science, within classrooms and through platforms that give students the opportunity to research, and another that sustains that investigation should not be strongly promoted at an undergraduate level because this is not a role that should be assumed by students who are still in an initial stage of academic formation.
Furthermore, when asked to compare the emphasis put in research at undergraduate and graduate levels, it was a common belief that investigation should be more strongly emphasized amongst graduate students. Mayer sustains that there are few incentives to promote investigation at undergraduate level because the number of students enrolled (Mayer makes reference to the more than 2,000 political science students at UBA). The reduced number of graduate political science students, makes offering incentives easier. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that whilst some affirm that a Masters program is propitious for investigation, other sustain that it is only at a Doctorial level where students are expected and are obliged to produce. Those that support this affirmation sustain that at a Masters level students are preoccupied with other responsibilities.

4.2.2 Facilities and spaces for presentation and publication

Those interviewed identified two spaces required if research habits are to be developed by political science students and if the discipline is to obtain prestige in academic spheres. The first is a magazine of political science. This is useful for both teachers and students, who wish to participate and show different achievements in their researches, who wish to promote the career as a science, and who wish to gain experience in research and publication. Furthermore, political science conferences are considered essential for the interaction amongst members of the political science community.

In Peru, Aragon sustains that a strong investment must be made to create spaces for the publication of political science studies. Aragon sustains that many local investigators prefer to send their work to journals abroad because of the lack of local platforms. This is for Tanaka a serious problem because many topics, relevant on a national level but not on an international level, are lost. This is not the case in Argentina or Colombia. Both countries count with various journals specialized in political science. In the case of Argentina most of these journals obtain institutional support from universities. However, in the case of Argentina, De Luca affirms that these journals do not frequently publish student papers, there are only few exceptional cases.

In relation to student organized journals, Aragon sustains that this is an excellent exercise which familiarizes students with the process of publishing. Although these journals do not necessarily reach the same standards as do other important journals in the discipline, solid and interesting student papers are published. Furthermore De Luca sustains that despite the difficulties, these journals give those who administer it an opportunity in terms of editing. One of the main obstacles these journals face is sustainability. It is common for these publications to have short life spans. Rettberg mentions that in the University of the Andes, a student journal exists, but it depends financially on the Political Science Faculty. Rettberg considers it a disadvantage that makes the publication less independent. Furthermore Rettberg mentions that these types of publications have difficulties in collecting papers or articles. Tanaka states that although these types of journals are interesting and valuable initiatives, they demand far too much effort. Thus, Tanaka sustains that journals that wish to rigorously publish papers in political science and assure its presence in the long term, must be organized by faculties and not in a decentralized manner by students. Aragon adds that this type of initiative has more possibilities of succeeding if
done on an inter-institutional level. That is to say if journals are administered and financed by more than one university.

In relation to political science conferences, in Argentina De Luca sustains that the National Political Science Congresses organized by the Argentine Society of Political Analysis (SAAP) are key events that allow the political science community to discuss themes that are being researched. These conferences include student panels. In Colombia, the first National Political Science Conference was organized by the Colombian Political Science Association en 2008, and counted with strong student participation. Students not only assisted but also participated as paper givers. In Peru, a National Congress is yet to be organized. In PUCP, political science student symposiums have been organized since 2006.

Aragon sustains that these spaces form part of a process. The input received by the presentation of a paper in a conference should give students ideas for improvement. After its modification, the paper may be turned into an article submitted for publication. This article if published could be a good starting point for a thesis. Thus, access to a variety of spaces of presentation and publication, is essential in fomenting a gradual approach to investigation.

4.3. Methodology courses

In relation to this issue we found two main ideas. The first that methodological courses are essential for the development of the political science students, and the second, that more courses in methodology does not imply more interest in research. It has been agreed that one of the hardest subjects to teach is methodology; because students are resistant in learning methodology and because teachers find it hard to transmit this knowledge without it being perceived as difficult and complex.

Aragon believes that one of the main problems in teaching methodological courses is that a strong and unnecessary distinction is made between quantitative and qualitative methods. Instead, Aragon proposes an integrated perspective of methodology, by teaching the logic behind methods and research. Thus, a transversal perspective of methodology should be adopted. In these terms, Tanaka, Ames and Rettberg sustain that investigation should be done in all courses. Retteberg sustains that methodos should be present in all courses so that students understand that behind every investigation there is a structure and a methodological strategy.

“Realmente el método debiese formar parte de todo los cursos para que los estudiantes entiendan en todo tiempo que tras una publicación, tras una investigación siempre hay una estructura, una estrategia metodológica.”  

2 Interview with Angelika Rettberg, 13 of May, 2009
When asked about methodology, Tanaka and Aragon brought thesis writing to correlation. Aragon sustains that for a thesis to be required, universities should first evaluate to what extent they offer the tools necessary for students to successfully approach the task at hand. If these conditions are not adequate (example: advisors with time to fully guide the student), then other possibilities should be explored. Wills reveals a different reality in Colombia. In contrast to the Peruvian case, most universities in Colombia do not require a thesis at an undergraduate level. Universities ask for smaller investigations that are developed through out the period of one semester. According to Wills it is important to maintain a balance between level of education (tools and abilities) and level of requirements asked of students. Furthermore, Wills considers that the extra time taken for students to produce a thesis is not beneficial to them. A student that takes six years in finishing their undergraduate degree is not at an advantage when entering the labor market.

Both Argentine professors sustain that the UBA offers solid preparation in general knowledge of the discipline, but seriously lacks methodological courses in its curricula. In the PUCP, Ames sustains that efforts have been made to offer more methodological courses, in particular those related to quantitative methods. In UARM since the career is just beginning, they have planned to offer one introductory course in methodology and additional more specific courses such as statistics. In the case of Colombia, Retberg sustains that methodological courses have been very efficient and successful in the University of the Andes.

4.4 Student Interest

In this regard, the professors sustain that not all students show interest in investigation. This seems to be related to the branch of concentration. Those specializing or inclining towards comparative politics or political theory tend to be interested in research. This has much to due with the fact the research and academic production is the main source of employment for this branch in the discipline.

In Argentina, in the UBA although most students graduate with some experience in research, very few of them graduate with a publication. In Colombia students that publish before graduating are also exceptional cases. In Peru, in the PUCP Ames believes that around one third of the students have some interest in research and that these students are often those interested in studying one semester abroad. In PUCP students also show their interest through their choice of internship. Those interested in research choose jobs as assistants in investigations, in and out of the university.

5. Student polls

5.1 Polling Stage

In the following section we will give the results of a poll applied to Latin American political science students from the six universities mentioned previously.
Of the students who took the poll, 86.1% of them are between the ages of 18 and 24. Amongst them, the group between 21 and 24 represent 54.3% of the sample. This is not surprising considering that it is an age group commonly found at an undergraduate university level. Furthermore, we found that those who responded are in the final stages of their career, that is to say, most have already passed several semesters in their political science faculty.

In second place, the most common areas for specialization in political science chosen by students interviewed were Public Management in a 42.4% and compared politics 19.2%. These two areas are followed by International Relationships and Political theory and philosophy with 14.6% and 12.4% respectively.

Finally, it is important to mention that more than 80% of the students who answered are interested in continuing their careers in the areas of research or teaching. This shows that although students choose a more pragmatic area of interest or specialization like public management, they still acknowledge the fact that research is necessary for the development of their political science career.

5.2 Different perceptions about publication

When asking students about the importance of publishing before graduation, most of them believed that this is important. We ask students to indicate in a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is not important and 5 is very important, the importance of publishing before graduating. 89.3% gave a score between 3 and 5. Between this range 43% marked 5, thus publishing at this stage is highly important to almost half of the sampled students.

When we asked students why they consider publishing an important exercise, two main ideas were commonly repeated. The most frequent response was that publishing is an exercise that allows students to put to practice what is learned in class. Secondly, publishing is seen as a required element for one to obtain better jobs when entering the labor market, in other words, publishing is a positive element for a student’s curricula.

When asked about the level of difficulty in publishing an article, paper, working paper or book; most of the students think, based on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is not difficult and 5 is very difficult); that the level of difficulty of publishing this kind of work is between 4 and 5; particularly higher in the case of the books.

If we cross the difficulty related to publishing a working paper to the level of satisfaction with the amount of methodological courses offered in the career, we found an association. Those who think publishing a working paper is difficult also coincide with those who think there are not enough methodological courses offered.
When asked why publishing is considered difficult, the most common answer was the difficulty in obtaining funds for research projects, followed by the lack of time available.

Furthermore, when asking students which institutions should take more responsibility in promoting research and investigation within the discipline, we found a general perception that this support must be given by universities. The second institution or sector considered responsible is the private sector (think tanks, NGO’s, businesses) that should invest more in further developing of the career. Finally the role of the state is consider important, but only for minority of the students asked.

When asking students about their experience in investigation, we found that most of these students have done research tasks alone. This modality (individual investigation) was the most commonly marked, followed by investigation amongst peers (groups of students organized to investigate). The less common modality was investigation between students and professors. When students were asked where they would go if they wanted to publish, the most popular response was their faculty (direction or academic office). This is interesting because when we asked students that have already published, how they did this, only 18% of them sustained to have received institutional support from their university. Furthermore, when asking which student administered activities are most common, the most common were conferences and student panels.

5.3 Importance of methodology in universities

Before asking students how important they consider methodology course to be (in relation to research), we asked about the number of courses offered in their universities. In this sense, 53% of students marked 2 to 3 courses related to methodology; and 14% of the students claimed to have 4 or more.

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3 It is important to mention that we considered statistic as a course included among the courses related to methodology.
About the importance of methodology courses, 74.8% mention that the study of methodology is “very important”. Those students who do not consider this important were less than the 10%. When we crossed both questions we obtain the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of methodological courses</th>
<th>Consider the number of courses sufficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We observe that there is a clear relation between those who are not satisfied with the number of courses given, and those who consider it as “very important”. Thus, there is an association between those who are aware of the importance of methodology and those that don’t feel their needs have been fulfilled by the courses offered in their university. Since 68.2% of the students are not satisfied with the number of courses available in methodology, this is evidently a claim for more and better methodological courses.

Conclusions

1) The level of academic production in Latin America is seen by professors and directors as not acceptable. This is a common belief present in countries that are perceived as more advanced as well as in countries perceived as less developed in the field.

2) It is clear that political science in the three countries studied have distinct characteristics. Each academic sphere depends greatly on the political and social context in which it is immersed. The influence of the political regime seems to be very influential in the case of Argentina.

3) In all three cases, the level of academic and professional autonomy of the discipline is different. In Peru, since the career is new, it has just started to create its own space in academic and professional circles.

4) This distinction between public and private universities is present in the Peruvian case as financial and organizational difficulties seem to be important obstacles for realizing research initiatives amongst students of public universities.
5) In general, funding is perceived as reduced, and often conditioned to certain themes, depending on the institution that offers it. In all cases political science receives private funds from NGOs, local investigation institutes and international organizations. This is perceived by students who believe that the university is not the only institution that should take responsibility in fomenting academic research.

6) In regards to finance, political science in Argentina and Colombia receives financial and institutional support from the national government. This may be perceived as a sign of greater institutionalization of the discipline in the country.

7) The main obstacles related to academic production in political science are: lack of funds, lack of data (or its lack of use), administrative and organizational problems, lack of time and lack of spaces for publication. This last one is present mainly in Peru, where academic production has yet to be systematic, and is still based on isolated and individual initiatives.

8) Investigation is recognized as a time consuming activity. Thus when evaluating academic production, one should also evaluate if students and professors are overly charged with other academic and professional obligations.

9) Professors find themselves limited by conditions such as time, resources and themes when wanting to work in an investigation. An adequate system that foments research amongst professors is yet to be developed. This is important because the quality of the education offered to students depends greatly on the capacity of each professor to renew and develop knowledge.

10) There is vast potential for the development of investigation amongst students at undergraduate level. This potential if not exploited by faculties, are exploited by the students themselves who create their own spaces for publication. These spaces are seen as good initiatives yet have shown a lack of sustainability.

11) Students are seen as a potential solution to the problems of academic production. Training students through collaborative research (professor-student investigations) allows students to learn how to research in a highly rigorous way and gives professors the help necessary for the development of their research projects.

12) There is a gap between reality and the ideal scenarios described by professors. Despite the preference for collaborative research, students sustain that this mechanism is not the most used. Students who investigate do this alone or through student groups.

13) Student interest in investigation is generalized and includes those of different professional orientations.
14) In relation to the role universities play in creating spaces for publications, professors mention an option which helps cover costs and confront difficulties related to time. This option is the creation of a shared publication where different universities coordinate to create and administer a common space for publication.

15) There are two positions in relation to thesis writing: those who believe thesis should be written at an undergraduate level and those who take into consideration other possibilities (options less time demanding and better adjusted to the capabilities acquired by students at an undergraduate level).

16) Investigation at undergraduate level is seen more as an exercise, where students learn to ask questions and to answer them through structured methodological approaches. In this sense, investigation is not seen as an isolated activity but rather as a way of reasoning.

17) Although teaching methodological courses is considered a complicated task. In this case, we have found that students have a particular tendency to think that these courses are necessary and indispensable for the development of their career in political science.

Special Acknowledgement to IAPSS Regional Agent in Argentina, Gabriella Marzonetto, Regional Agent in Colombia, Ingrid Adelaida Rivera Peña, Regional Agent in Mexico, Elizabeth Candy Arceo Rodriguez, and Argentine political science student Agustin Vallejo.
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