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# Ecuador as an Academic Destination: Building a National Strategy

Silvia Donoso
*SIT Graduate Institute*

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**BUILDING A NATIONAL STRATEGY**
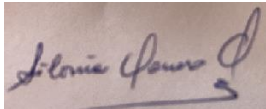
Silvia C. Donoso

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Advisor's name: <u>Lynée</u> Connelly

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May, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this capstone paper is to identify key stakeholders that can contribute to the design of a national strategy to increase academic mobility to Ecuador and, at the same time, support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in their efforts to internationalize their campuses. This is an International Education Policy Advocacy course-linked capstone (CLC), which has been developed using concepts studied in the International Educational Policy course. The first phase provides a conceptual framework of the internationalization of higher education processes in Latin America and Ecuador. The information for this phase comes primarily from HE policy documents and publications available to the general public, as well as from articles and official Ecuadorian higher education policy documents available in government sites. The second phase focuses on identifying issues of the Ecuadorian international education policy related to inbound mobility, as well as key actors that can collaborate in designing a strategy to bring about changes and find solutions to the real problems faced by HEIs in their efforts to attract faculty and students from other countries. The methodology to be used in this phase is a stakeholder analysis with a transdisciplinary approach, which will identify actors from different institutions and disciplinary backgrounds. The third phase analyzes short-term programs, Spanish language and service learning as the pillars of a national strategy to increase international student and faculty mobility to Ecuador.

This CLC proposes the establishment of a national council constituted of key stakeholders to work on such a strategy, which should be closely connected with other national priority areas including economic development, tourism and trade. This capstone paper concludes that Ecuador lacks a well-defined and coordinated strategy at the national level for advancing the internationalization of higher education processes, including mobility.

## 1. Introduction

Internationalization of Higher Education (IoHE) has become an inevitable key policy at institutional, national and regional levels in many countries. However, from the data gathered for this analysis, an IoHE national policy still needs to be developed in Ecuador. Since 2007, Ecuador has advanced various initiatives, such as student and faculty mobility programs and joint research projects with international faculty, geared towards improving the quality of its higher education system. However, the concept of internationalization is not clearly defined in the current Ecuadorian HE policy and it is mainly addressed in terms of mobility and the capacity of the institutions to produce research publications.

During the past three years, after returning from SIT, I have had the opportunity to work with international officers from Ecuadorian universities and higher education government officials to promote greater student exchange between the U.S. and Ecuador. Through this experience, I have witnessed the challenges that Ecuador faces to internationalize its higher education system, as well as the potential it has to attract international students and faculty from other countries. For example, private universities with established study abroad programs have to deal with cumbersome paperwork and changing visa regulations, while public institutions face the challenges of the lack of autonomy to design and implement programs due to the strict government oversight. Should a coordinated national strategy be in place, Ecuador would be able to realize the full potential it has because of its rich culture, geography and biodiversity. This analysis of the current state of the Ecuadorian higher internationalization policy intends to support the efforts of the Ecuadorian government to internationalize its HE system and promote Ecuador as an academic destination by creating institutional partnerships that build a strong foundation supported by a collaborative network of different sectors.

After providing a conceptual framework of IoHE and an overview of the process in Latin America and Ecuador, this capstone paper focuses on identifying stakeholders from different disciplinary backgrounds -spanning from higher education to commerce and foreign affairs- that can find a common ground for inter-institutional cooperation and integration of their interests, power and knowledge to address the common goal of increasing study abroad in Ecuador. This policy and stakeholders' analysis highlights the importance of working in networks and aims to contribute to the creation of spaces for collaboration and partnerships in support not only of the ongoing internationalization processes and efforts to increase inbound mobility, but also of other areas of national priority.

The next section will provide a conceptual framework that will serve as the basis for the analysis of the current state of the internationalization policy in Ecuador and to identify potential stakeholders that could come together to work on a comprehensive strategy, which is the main contribution of this analysis. The first step is to clarify the concept of "Internationalization" because, despite the efforts in the region to increase international collaboration and implement new scholarship schemes to train human capital to improve scientific, economic and social development, Latin America, including Ecuador, still faces the challenge of addressing IoHE in a comprehensive manner.

## 2. Internationalization of Higher Education: An Evolving Concept

Internationalization of Higher Education (IoHE) is an evolving concept and it is understood and managed differently, depending on the motivations for internationalizing of a given institution, country or region. Hans de Wit (2015) states that IoHE is shaped by the globalization of economies and societies and driven by a dynamic combination of evolving political, economic, socio-cultural and academic rationales. De Wit mentions that there is no

model that fits all nations and that regional and national contexts are varied and changing (Inside Higher Ed Blog: The world View). Although the understanding of the concept IoHE varies across countries and institutions, in regions such as Latin America, it is still often perceived as an equivalent to international student mobility. However, IoHE is a much more complex process and its meaning and scope have evolved in the last 25 years, as shown in the following summary:

According to Jane Knight (1994) the term internationalization has been used since ancient times in political science and government relations. However, its popularity in the education sector has soared since the early 1980s. "Prior to this time, international education or international cooperation were the favored terms and still are in some countries" (Arum and Van de Water, 2009, p. 19). In the late 1980s, internationalization was mainly defined at the institutional level in terms of a set of activities, as seen in the definition proposed by Arum and Van de Water as "the multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation" (p. 202).

By the mid-1990s, Jane Knight approached internationalization as a process that needed to be integrated and sustainable at the institutional level and saw it as "the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution (1994, p.7).

In the late'1990s, Van der Wende pointed out the limitations of an institutional-focused definition and proposed internationalization as "any systematic effort at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets" (1997, p.18). Nevertheless, in the first decade of the 21st century, new terms, such as transnational, cross border or off-shore education, emerged relating mainly to the concept of borders and leaving out the key concept of culture.

According to Knight and referring to Van der Wende's concept, she stated that "while this definition includes important elements, it only positions the international dimension in terms of external environment -specifically globalization- and therefore, does not contextualize internationalization in terms of the education sector itself" (2008, p.20). Knight proposes then a definition generic enough to apply to different countries, cultures and education systems, which states "Internationalization at the national/sector/institutional levels is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels" (2008, p.21).

By contrast, John Hudzik states that the conceptual and operational tent for internationalization has to be large if it is to accommodate all of its possible dimensions, and introduces the term Comprehensive Internationalization (CI) as the big-tent label for doing this. He defines CI as "a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education". It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units embrace it. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility. (2012, p. 3).

More recently, in the framework of a European Parliament (2015), through a Delphi panel process, the definition is redefined as follows: "Internationalization of higher education is the **intentional** process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (De Wit, F. Hunter & R. Coelen, 2015).

According to Hans de Wit et al. (2015), the rationale behind this definition is that it reflects the increased awareness that internationalization has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on mobility but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes. The 'abroad' component (mobility) needs to become an integral part of the internationalized curriculum to ensure internationalization for all, not only the mobile minority. It re-emphasizes that internationalization is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance quality, and that it should not focus solely on economic rationales. (p. 27).

De Wit & Leask (2015) state that the new terms used to refer to IoHE, like "comprehensive internationalization" suggest that the outcomes of internationalization include ways of thinking, doing and being in the world for institutions as well as students. They are consistent with using internationalization as a driver of quality and innovation and reflect growing interest in ensuring the majority of students and staff are engaged in and changed by the internationalization agenda. They also have the potential to develop approaches that address existing inequalities in educational opportunity and outcomes in the world today. "Haphazard approaches to internationalization focused on a minority of students or on profit rather than education are not consistent with such terms and insufficient in universities operating in a globalized world". (De Wit & Leask, 2015, p. ix-x).

Finally, the concept that I will use for the development of this analysis is the one stated by Hans de Wit during a HE conference at the ESPOL University in Ecuador (February 2017). He described Internationalization of Higher Education as a "Concept and a Strategy, driven by a dynamic combination of political, economic, socio-cultural and academic rationales and stakeholders." Furthermore, he pointed out that IoHE has an impact on regions, countries and

institutions according to particular context and that there is no single model that fits all. (ASESEC-ESPOL, 13 Feb 2017).

### 3. The Latin American Context

In 2005, the World Bank published a study 'Higher Education in Latin America, the International Dimension' (De Wit et al., 2005). The study noticed that internationalization was still in an early stage of development, focused more on the mobility of students and staff than on other dimensions and activities. De Wit also stated that, for many years, universities gave no strategic priority to internationalization; those activities that did exist were initiated by individual faculty (p.95). Nevertheless, in the late 1990s some Latin American universities began to declare internationalization as a strategic objective and started to make it as part of their strategic development plans, although in most cases this was not matched with concrete actions or budgetary allocations for pursuing such an objective.

De Wit also states that the strategic development plans of most universities were related to institutional evaluations conducted by government accreditation entities and the international dimension included in the development plans was an area that should be developed. It was also pointed out that coordination at the institutional, national and regional levels was more directed to linkages with North America and Europe than in the own region and towards other parts of the world (De Wit et al, 2005).

According to de Wit, the main challenges for internationalization in Latin American higher education were being connected with the global higher education community, trying to find a balance between, on the one hand, the increasing competitiveness and commercialization in higher education and HE as a public good, on the other hand.

After more than ten years from this publication, the landscape of IoHE in Latin America has changed significantly in terms of academic collaboration. According to a recent study "The State of the Art on Internationalization of Higher Education in Latin America", it is common in the region to see institutional efforts towards international collaboration, still primarily with North America and Europe, but increasingly also within its own region and with other parts of the world, in particular, Asia. (De Wit, Gacel-Avila, and Knobel, 2015).

De Wit et al. (2015) reported that the leading activities of internationalization are outgoing mobility opportunities for students, followed by international research collaboration in tune with global average and consistent with the regional increasing student mobility. Nevertheless, other sources report Latin America as the region of the developing world with the least number of students abroad (6.1%), behind Africa (11.6%) and Asia (52.7%) (OECD, 2013) and of international students (1.8%); as well as the world lowest outbound mobility ratio (0.9%) (UNESCO-UIS 2012).

According to the authors of this study, almost every country of the region launched study abroad scholarship programs thanks to the resources of the oil boom and favorable international prices of commodities in the last decade. The purpose of the scholarship schemes was to provide the region with highly trained human capital to boost scientific, economic and social development.

Generally speaking, these programs have been administered through education ministries or national organisms devoted to the promotion of science, technology and innovation. However, there are very few examples of countries that monitor and routinely assess the impact and effectiveness of their scholarship programs abroad. There are no concrete data on student performance during their training abroad, on any change in performance after their return, on the

perception of faculty of the possible benefits (academic, motivational, change of perspective), or the impact on job opportunities. (UNESCO-UIS, 2012, p.24).

In sum, despite the advances in international collaboration and multiple mobility schemes implemented in various countries, internationalization strategies, at both the institutional and national levels, are still in a developmental stage and lack support in Latin America.  As Jocelyne Gacel-Ávila (2011) pointed out in her article "Comprehensive Internationalization in Latin America", IoHE continues to be focused on traditional activities of student and faculty mobility, without taking into account the broader concept of **comprehensive internationalization**.

### 4.  The Ecuadorian Context

Several major policy developments have changed the landscape of higher education in Ecuador since 2009. When the leftist Rafael Correa became president in 2007, he led the adoption of a new constitution a year later. In the constitution, public higher education became free for Ecuadorian citizens, thus removing tuition dollars as one source of funding and placing an increased reliance on the government for resources (Herdoíza, 2015).

Before 2007, higher education institutions in Ecuador historically had limited government oversight, but due to the reform efforts, the sector currently operates within a highly state-regulated environment (Herdoíza, 2015; Saavedra, 2012; Van Hoof et al., 2013). According to government rhetoric, one of the main achievements of the reforms has been the decommodification of the system, allowing for greater control in order to advance research that contributes to the development of the country (Ramírez, 2016).

In 2009, the Ecuadorian government embarked in an unprecedented Higher Education reform, which was guided by a set of principles, the most relevant being Pertinence and Access to Quality HE. Under the principle of "pertinence", meaning that higher education must address

the needs of Ecuadorian society, the Correa administration pushed for more students in the

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields in an effort to change the productive

matrix of the country. Ecuador's economy has been heavily reliant on oil, mining, fishing and

agriculture, but, in the knowledge that some of its natural resources have a limited lifespan, the

government have been trying to diversify the economy and instill a culture of research and

innovation by switching to a knowledge-based economy. The principle of "Access to Quality

Higher Education" was addressed by offering scholarships for students and faculty to obtain

undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees abroad from universities around the world

(universities must be in a list of the top-ranking universities worldwide). The purpose of these

study abroad scholarship programs was to provide the country with highly trained human capital

to boost scientific, economic and social development.

Amidst the oil boom that favored the first term of the Correa administration, the

Ecuadorian Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT by

its acronym in Spanish) reported that, by 2013, the government had invested in the higher

education system 30 times more than the last seven governments together. According to

the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2013–2014, "Ecuador experienced

a 32 position rise in improvement of quality educational systems, from 103 in 2007 to 71 in 2013

out 148 countries. It went up 38 places in the innovation factor and 20 in improvement of HE". It

was also one of the countries in the world with the highest public investment in higher education

and also the highest rate of access to HE for low-income students in Latin America. According to

this report, Ecuador invested 1.86 per cent of its GDP in higher education making it number two

in the world for public investment in HE, with Denmark being the country with the highest

public investment in the world (2.19 per cent of its GDP).

The latest report by SENESCYT (July 2017) states that more than 20,000 university students and faculty have gone abroad on scholarships to pursue undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees. In numbers, 12.938 scholarships awarded by the SENESCYT, 2.942 scholarships from public and private institutions, and 4.202 were awarded in 2015 exclusively for faculty to study master's programs.  Students who get the scholarships agree to return to Ecuador when their studies are finished and remain here for at least twice the time the government paid for them to be abroad. The government hopes they will become university professors or work in the private sector.

**Number of Scholarships awarded by the Ecuadorian Government from 2007 to 2017**
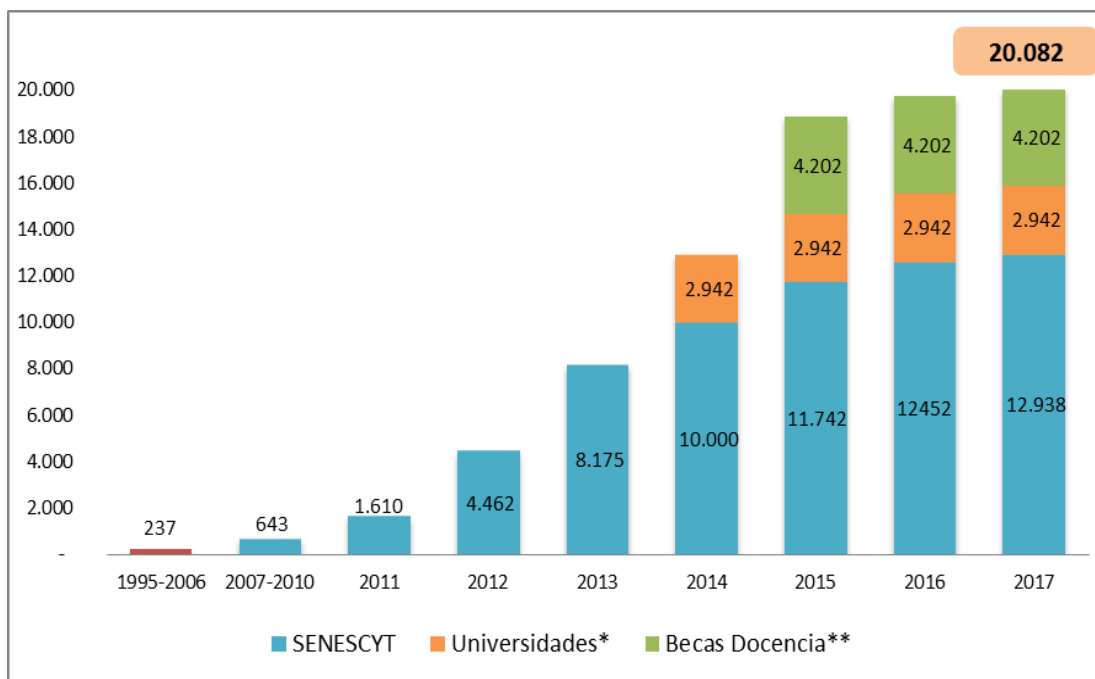


At the same time that the government was heavily investing in sending students abroad, since 2010, it sponsored the PROMETEO initiative, which funded academics from other countries to pursue research and teach in Ecuadorian universities. "It is aimed at universities, polytechnic schools, public research institutes, and other public or co-financed institutions that

require assistance in the development of research projects in areas of priority" (SENESCYT, 2017). Furthermore, Ecuador invested $7 million into the PROMETEO program (Ballas, 2016). As of 2016, this program has incorporated approximately 1,000 international scholars with doctorates into public universities and research institutes around the country (Pazos, 2016). However, some debate exists among public university administrators concerning the foreign scholars about faculty from abroad taking jobs from Ecuadorians.

In 2012, the Ecuadorian government launched the "Go Teacher" program, which was designed to prepare 3,000 educators to be highly qualified teachers of English to students who are learning English as a second language. This scholarship program created opportunities for eligible teachers to head abroad for periods up to nine months for further study in the theory and practice of English language teaching. The Minister of Education has officially announced that over 1.100 teachers have been incorporated to the education system, after they finished their studies abroad. (Andes Newspaper, 2015).

In another ambitious effort to create a more diversified, high-tech and knowledge-based economy, in 2013, the government of the former President Rafael Correa, started building what he hoped would become the nation's very own Silicon Valley. With a budget allocation of US$1 billion, a new hub for education, innovation and industry known as 'Yachay' – the City of Knowledge – was born. It was labeled as the most ambitious project that Ecuador had embarked on  and the aim was for Yachay to become the most important research institute in Latin America.  The heart of this project is the Technological Experimental University or Yachay Tech, which opened in 2014. The idea is that focusing on higher and postgraduate education will help to deliver the high-level skills needed to transform the economy and society. Additionally, the Ecuadorian government has actively sought for international partnerships, which were widely

publicized by public media (Saavedra, 2012). As of 2018, this project is under the public scrutiny and being criticized for putting all that money into one university and not spread it around the other public universities in the country, as well as for the lack of transparency in contracts and oversized expending.

Reflecting on the amount of resources that the government has allocated to outward mobility programs, such as the "Becas Senescyt" and "Go Teacher", the question goes beyond numbers to examine long-term outcomes and broader impact, which is more complicated. A 2014 British Council/DAAD study on government-funded scholarship programs for outward mobility in 11 different countries around the world noted that "there seems to be little debate about the value of investing on the overseas education of a small number of citizens," however there are "enormous gaps by country in terms of documented proof of the tangible outcomes of these significant investments"

In sum, there is no doubt that several major policy developments implemented by the Correa administration changed the landscape of higher education in Ecuador in the last decade. Overall, there is a positive outlook on the reform higher education experienced and the actions taken to improve quality and access. However, after 10 years of the government praising such reforms, with a heavily controlled media and limited sources of information about the outcomes, such policies and programs are under severe scrutiny by the new administration that took office in 2017. Serious issues regarding the planning and execution of the reform are arising and the outcomes and real impact are yet to be analyzed from a neutral standpoint.

**5. State of the Internationalization of Higher Education Policy in Ecuador**

Based on the information available in government sites and academic research on the matter, the primary areas of focus of Ecuador's internationalization agenda have been student and faculty mobility, English language learning, and research development and collaboration. It is worth noting that, although the government has implemented policies and programs to improve the access and quality of higher education, IoHE has not been addressed from a comprehensive approach. The term "internationalization", it is not even explicitly stated in policy documents, nor addressed in national conversations or understood as an undertaking to face the challenges of globalization.

Same as for almost every country in the world, the global phenomenon of IoHE has had an impact in Ecuador. However, from the information available, while in other countries and regions, IoHE has increasingly become a driver for the agendas of national governments and higher education authorities, Ecuador does not seem to have a coordinated internationalization strategy, which should also advance other national development objectives such as tourism, trade and economic development.

**6. Challenges for Collaboration with Latin America and Ecuador**

According to the World Bank report released in May 2017, higher education in the region has expanded dramatically in the last 15 years as the average gross enrollment rate has grown from 21 percent to 43 percent between 2000 and 2013 (Ferreyra et al, 2017, p.3). This extraordinary expansion of higher education creates great opportunities in terms of internationalization such as increasing international research networks and collaborative projects. This expansion is also a challenge for governments and institutions that must be able to create

educational environments where students are aware of the complexity of global integration and develop skills to successfully navigate it.

In May 2012, NAFSA (Association of International Educators), the world's largest nonprofit association dedicated to international education and exchange, held the two-day invitational forum "New Approaches to Cooperation with Latin America." Representatives from public and private higher education institutions, research institutes and government agencies representing Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and Mexico met with U.S. counterparts, including the Department of State, to discuss current challenges and opportunities for institutions in both regions.

Participants in the forum concluded that the main challenges on the U.S. side to sending students and scholars to Latin America included risk management and safety concerns, a lack of course offerings in English, lack of awareness of educational and research capacity in the region, accreditation and credit transfer and a different school calendar when compared to the one in a northern hemisphere. The challenges identified at this forum also apply for collaborating with Ecuador.

In order to collaboratively address IoHE in Ecuador, including the challenges mentioned above, the presidents of 15 public and private Ecuadorian universities came together and officially signed an agreement to create the Ecuadorian Network for the Internationalization of Higher Education (REIES, for the Spanish acronym) in May 2017. Besides the challenges that were identified at the NAFSA forum, the REIES, the Ecuadorian Association of Spanish Languages Centers (AECCE), and third-party providers came together to discuss the obstacles they have been facing to attract international students. One of the main concerns focused on the enforcement of the recently enacted Law of Human Mobility whose implementation causes more

bureaucratic hurdles: from applying for the right visa type through the absence of standardized procedures in consulates abroad, to complying with additional levels of background checks and increasing visa prices. REIES members and other organizations involved in recruiting international students are working to find ways of reaching out to government entities to address the issues that are making it difficult for any foreign student to consider choosing Ecuador for an academic international experience. There is a consensus about the lack of coordination among government entities, private organizations and higher education institutions and, specifically, the absence of a coordinated national strategy that support this efforts.

## 7. The Advocacy Strategy

National strategies for the internationalization of higher education differ from one country or region to another. Same as for an institutional strategy, there is no "best model" to follow and each country develops one that fits its values, priorities and circumstances. Having an international education strategy is a vital step in developing quality education services that can compete globally. If managed strategically, international education offers a unique opportunity for Ecuador to benefit from the increasing global demand for international education and become one of the sectors contributing to Ecuador's transition from a resources-based to a knowledge and services economy, which aligns with the existing national higher education policy.

Ecuador already has a well-deserved reputation for its unique biodiversity and culture, however, to fully develop its potential, there must be a strategy in place. Such a strategy should be built on the existing strengths and aimed at delivering high quality, innovative services that meet and exceed the expectations of international students, especially by developing rigorous quality assurance and student protection systems.

Collaboration and partnerships should be a key focus of this strategy and informed by consultation with sector stakeholders. The government should have a clear role in facilitating its development and by ensuring that the interacting policy levers, such as student visas and country entry requirements, are compatible with the strategy goals and competitive at the international level. All government-initiated policies and programs are implemented by entities or organizations with varying degrees of influence and connectivity with the national government, andthe actions (or lack) to implement such policies can support or hinder their effectiveness,coming in the way of the intended outcomes. For example, programs that are being implemented by Ecuadorian universities or education providers to recruit international students are hindered by cumbersome visa regulations or country entry requirements. Any strategy effectiveness may be threatened because of the disconnect between the priorities established for other policies and the interests of the actors in the field.

In sum, there should be an alignment between national-level policy and the realities of the stakeholders' practice. The stakeholders involved must be willing to implement and advocate the policy, which should be firmly rooted in the needs of the HE system and focused on advancing institutional and national objectives. All relevant stakeholders should commit to collaborate regularly and effectively and undertake consultations to advance on an agreed upon agenda.

It is worth noting that, despite the lack of a coordinated strategy in place, the Open Doors report 2017 reports that Ecuador ranked 16th in the world as study destination for U.S. students in 2014, 17th in 2015 and 19th in 2016 (Institute of International Education, 2017 ). Referring only to Latin American countries, Ecuador was outranked by Costa Rica, Mexico and Brazil until 2014 and by Argentina and Cuba, besides CR and MX, according to the latest report. The

reasons for Ecuador being such a popular destination is because it is home to a vibrant local culture and boasts a diverse natural landscape. Ecuador as a whole is considered among the 10 most biodiverse countries in the world by the Sustainability for All portal and it hosts 70% of the world's biodiversity. According to the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, Ecuador ranks 11 out of 136 countries in natural resources.

Developing a strategy that builds on the existing competitive advantage is crucial to promote Ecuador as a quality destination for international students and, beyond the economic benefits, to offer opportunities to build enhanced bilateral and multilateral relationships, which increase cultural awareness and social engagement.

The analysis of the Ecuadorian context of its IoHE policies raises the need of a coordinated advocacy strategy to influence the current policies being implemented by the government. As stated in the introductory section, the objective of this analysis is to identify and leverage strategic capabilities of various stakeholders to gain widespread support and participation in the design of a policy that supports the objective of increasing international student and faculty mobility to Ecuador.

## 8. Proposed Elements of the Strategy

After identifying the main challenges for academic collaboration with Ecuador, the next step is finding the elements around which the proposed strategy could be built. The next step is to gather support from the interested parties to collaboratively develop solutions for the common challenges they face. The resulting agreed solutions can be presented to government officials and influence or generate policies that ensure that the desired changes take place. The main elements proposed in this analysis are short-term (non-degree) programs, the Spanish language and service learning, as an attractive model of collaboration.

**8.1 Focus on Short-Term Programs**

One of the challenges for collaboration with Ecuador, and Latin American countries, include degrees from our universities not being attractive for international students. According to de Wit et al (2016), one of the challenges for Latin American universities is the fact that none of them appears among the top 100 of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) prepared annually by the Shanghai Shiao Tong University. This fact accounts for Latin America not being appealing for undergraduate or graduate programs as students always look at receiving degrees from universities that appear in world rankings. Therefore, non-degree short-term programs are models of collaboration to explore more in-depth.

The American Council of Education has defined two main types of mobility: "degree mobility" and "credit mobility." Degree mobility involves the international movement of students in pursuit of a full degree at an institution in the receiving country. Credit mobility occurs when students take courses — and typically earn credits for their home country degree — from an institution in the host country, but generally are mobile for a shorter time, and do not earn a full degree (American Council on Education, 2015, p. 20).

Since 2008, short-term programs have seen a steady increase in participation rates. The 2016 Open Doors Report, published by the Institute of International Education, states that 63% of students studying abroad during the 2014-2015 academic year did so on a short-term program (a summer program or one that is up to eight weeks in length). According to analysis of the report, reasons for this trend include: increasingly rigid major maps making it more difficult to fit in a longer study abroad experience; the perception that a short-term program is more affordable; and the increased college enrollment of more diverse students, including ethnic and

racial minorities, first-generation college students, and non-tradition aged students attending college, who believe a short-term program is a better fit (EdEx MOOC, 2017).

Ecuador has an untapped potential to increase credit mobility and could make it one of the pillars of a strategy. Thus, instead of undergraduate or graduate programs, Ecuador has the option of offering short-term programs (credit mobility) and take advantage of its unique biodiversity and culture. If strategically promoted, it could become a hub for scientific research and social projects.

**8.2 Use of Spanish Language**

As identified by the 2012 NAFSA Forum on Cooperation with Latin America, foreign language proficiency, among both students and faculty, is one of the main barriers for academic outbound and inbound academic mobility. For instance, the lack of English-speaking faculty in Latin American institutions translates into a lack of courses offered in English, limiting the number of international students as their Spanish or Portuguese skills are also weak. This barrier to increasing inbound mobility can be overcome by focusing on Spanish language teaching.

The importance of the Spanish language is growing worldwide as it is spoken by over 420,000,000 native speakers, which makes it the second most spoken language in the world, ranking higher than both Hindi and English. According to Don Quijote (2017) Spanish is also the world's third most used language in the media in its various formatting: radio, television, paper and internet. Moreover, the importance of Spanish as a language of business has been increasing in the last few decades, due in large part to the constant economic growth Latin American countries have been experiencing. As the site reports, 530 million Spanish speakers from around the world make up a group of consumers that no company can ignore. Another pertinent phenomenon has also occurred in the last few years: the Spanish language itself has become a

significant economic resource. The various courses that cater to the different needs of Spanish learners have helped elevate the number of people studying Spanish around the world to nearly 20 million, including study on an official level in high schools and universities, as well as education on a private level in schools that specialize in Spanish as a foreign language instruction and study abroad experiences.

As an example, the British Council's Languages for the Future Report (2013), identified Spanish as the first of ten languages that have the potential to add most value to the UK's strategic interests (p.19). According to this report, the number of people studying Spanish has increased steadily – to the extent that it has now overtaken German as the UK's second most popular language to learn (p.9).

While English has been, and continues to be, a language of fundamental importance in terms of international communication, it is also true that in our constantly globalizing world Spanish is becoming an obligatory second language for anyone who wants to be competitive in the international business sphere. It may be a fact that today the international community speaks English, but considering the latest estimates from the U.N. and its various organizations on population and economic growth in Spanish speaking countries, in the future it will also speak Spanish. In sum, making learning Spanish an essential component of the curriculum of a short-term program can make it more attractive to international students.

**8.3 Focus on Service Learning Model**

Another challenge for collaboration with Latin American countries, identified in the 2012 NAFSA forum, was the lack of innovative models of collaboration. One of the pillars of the proposed strategy to attract international students to Ecuador will be the integration of

international students into the Ecuadorian higher education system through innovative and meaningful community outreach projects known as Service Learning.

The 2017 edition of Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses defines that "education abroad counts for service learning, internships, research experiences, and other classroom-based activities that take students to other countries and contribute to their learning and development" (p. 3). Sharon Shields, from the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University states that community engagement pedagogies, often called "service learning," are ones that combine learning goals and community service in ways that can enhance both student growth and the common good.  Shields argues that service learning is "one of the most significant teaching methodologies gaining momentum on many campuses."  In fact, when done well, teaching through community engagement benefits students, faculty, communities, and institutions of higher education.

In the words of the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, service learning is "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."  SL requires students to apply course content to community-based activities, which gives them experiential opportunities to learn in real world contexts and develop skills of community engagement, while affording community partners opportunities to address significant needs.

In Ecuador, the Higher Education Law requires that all university students participate in community service practicums or internships before graduation. This requirement translated into all universities, public and private, creating units or departments dedicated to support students to comply with the law. All practicums or internships are monitored by the Council of Higher

Education and are coordinated with community organizations, the commercial sector and public entities, depending on the nature of the academic program. Since the referred law came into effect, universities have developed successful community outreach programs in collaboration with these sectors, thus providing a strong network that can support service learning programs for international students.

At the same time, many colleges and universities around the world are making greater efforts to involve students in study abroad experiences as part of their internationalization efforts, which offers great potential for Ecuador not only as a destination to learn the Spanish language but also for Service Learning. Currently, there are some private universities, as well as for-profit and non-profit organizations working on this area; however, having a national strategy in place to support the ongoing efforts would benefit not only the interested stakeholders but the country as a whole. A comprehensive national strategy that takes into account service learning as one of its pillars would not only benefit students, academic institutions but also the communities where the programs take place.

## 9. Stakeholders' Analysis

As previously mentioned, the Ecuadorian government has incentivized outward mobility as part of his national development agenda through scholarship schemes for students and faculty, English language learning, and research development. However, it has overlooked inbound mobility, which not only contributes financially both to host institutions and to the local communities where incoming international students reside, but also enrich the campus culture and provide the students, who are unable to travel abroad, with the opportunity to interact and exchange experiences with international peers.

Taking into account that mobility is only the more visible component of almost every internationalization of higher education policy, this analysis takes a narrow approach on the broad policy and focuses on inbound mobility as one of the action lines of a more comprehensive policy that still needs to be developed. The first step is to identify government bodies and other entities that can play a crucial role in designing and making a strategy successful, which will be realized through a stakeholders' analysis methodology. The key point is to find a way in which policies being implemented by those different entities and actors may be articulated into a national strategy, whose goal is to promote Ecuador as an academic destination for international students enrolled in credit-bearing short-term programs.

So far, HEIs have developed their own mobility programs without any government support or a national policy that backs their recruitment efforts. Contrarily, universities and other organizations have to face red tape and lack of coordination among government entities, which sometimes hinder their efforts. A successful strategy should involve government offices, particularly at the implementation stage, along with independent organizations. Bringing on board key stakeholders with shared interests will impact the operationalization and outcomes of such a strategy.

According to M. Lelea et al (2014), stakeholder analysis is a methodology to aid in the process of identifying who should participate in a transdisciplinary research project. In this case, the core idea is to find people/entities that can cooperate most effectively to accomplish the goal of promoting Ecuador as an academic destination for short-term exchange programs. Even though stakeholder approaches have been used extensively, mainly in development projects, their application in transdisciplinary research projects is more recent.

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Lelea et al states that "transdisciplinary research aims at finding solutions to 'real world' problems and challenges, an at increasing relevance of the 'academy' to 'real world', by cultivating a research practice which has a high potential for meaningful impact. Wiesmann et al (2008) indicates that a key feature of a transdisciplinary approach is the emphasis on integrating different types of knowledge: "Tenets of transdisciplinary research include: searching for solutions to complex problems; creating connections between areas of specialization; connections between 'science' and the 'real world'; joint problem definition; participation and mutual learning; and knowledge integration and collaboration." As a broader assumption and based on the analysis of actor profiles that will be conducted, "transdisciplinary research aims at generating transformation knowledge: the knowledge needed to change a situation that is perceived as problematic into another, improved one" (Kaufmann, Arpke and Christinick, 2013, p. 115).

Using the transdisciplinary approached described above, this analysis will determine who are the relevant stakeholders that need to be considered. The primary concern here is to identify those who are important to the design of a national strategy and those stakeholders who can influence the strategy's outcomes. With information on the stakeholders' position on the reform issue, their level of influence (power) and interest, we can choose how to best accommodate them, thus assuring the strategy is realistic and sustainable.

**The Issue:** The issue to address with the stakeholder's analysis is the lack of a unified formal strategy to promote Ecuador as a destination for international students. Existing practices are driven mainly by private universities, Spanish schools and third-party providers without a nationally-driven approach. This stakeholders' analysis will focus on: (1) identifying key actors that should be included in the strategy design; (2) characterize their roles; (3) prioritize and

classify them according to their power and interest in the issue; and (4) practical ways for integrating selected stakeholders into the strategy design.

## 10. Stakeholders Identification

Based on the experience from the past three years and the interaction with higher education officials working on mobility programs in various universities, I have identified the following stakeholders, their competences and scope of action:

**The Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR)**

**Competence**: MINTUR is responsible for the regulation, control, planning, management and promotion of Ecuador as a tourist destination. One of the objectives of this entity is making tourism a driver for sustainable social and economic development.

**Importance and Influence**: The tourism industry has become increasingly important for the national development agenda and is now involving communities in the design of regional "circuits", which can be incorporated to the programs offered to international students. The Tourism and Services sectors have an important stake in the strategy design and can influence the broader HE policy.

**Ministry of Foreign Relations and Human Mobility**

**Competence:** The Ministry of Foreign Relations and Human Mobility is responsible for foreign relations and foreign policy. Through the consulates abroad, the ministry provides consular and visa services to foreigners who want to visit the country. In coordination with competent institutions, it is also responsible for establishing human mobility regulations for the protection and enforcement of the rights of Ecuadorians abroad, as well as foreigners in the country.

**Importance and Influence:** Visa policies that support immigration laws have a significant impact on international students because they regulate international mobility. The implementation of the new Law of Human Mobility, which is in force since early 2017, is causing problems for higher education institutions and other organizations working with international students.  The Ministry should take steps to ease regulations by simplifying the application process and minimize red tape with the explicit intent of attracting international students.

**Ministry of Interior**

**Competence**: The Ministry of the Interior, through the Border and Immigration Agency, exercises control over the entrance and exit of all persons, nationals and foreigners in and out of Ecuador. Its mission includes the analysis and verification of records to identify potential risks for the national security.

**Importance and Influence:** It enforces laws and regulations governing the different types of temporary or permanent visas for people entering the country, in accordance with the circumstances that motivate their presence in Ecuador. The current Law of Human mobility requires that the persons entering the country under temporary visas, namely students, present a federal background check, which poses cumbersome and costly processes for most of prospective international students. As law enforcement entity, the immigration control agency needs to be informed and trained on new regulations that might result from a coordinated strategy that ease some of the requirements for international students.

**The National Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT)**

**Competence**:  SENESCYT designs and oversees the implementation of the higher education public policy and promotes the development of human talent, research, innovation and technological transfer.

**Importance and Influence**: Since 2009, SENESCYT has led an unprecedented higher education reform to improve quality and access. However, its internationalization approach mainly focused on outbound mobility of students and faculty, with limited work on designing policies that support the existing efforts to attract international students. SENESCYT is key to the design and implementation of a national HE internationalization policy that supports a strategy for attracting international students.

**Ecuadorian Council of Higher Education (CES)**

**Competence:** Together with SENESCYT, the Council on Higher Education is responsible for planning, regulating, and coordinating the Ecuadorian higher education system and its relationship with the executive branch and the society.  CES is the government entity that regulates credits recognition and oversee that quality academic standards are being met.

**Importance and Influence**:  Given that there is no credit transfer system in place in Latin America and that the transfer works on inter institutional agreements basis, it is of utmost importance to establish clear rules and policies regarding the accreditation of academic courses. Having a transparent and practical system of credit recognition in place will help to stimulate and promote student mobility.

**Local Governments**

**Competence**: Municipal governments are responsible for looking after the welfare of citizens living in their territories, as well as for the planning and driving of local development.

They also issue ordinances to improve the quality of living and security, and also promote cooperation between public and private agents.

**Importance and Influence**: Local governments have an important role to play in fostering the right environment to enable an enriching experience for international students . Collaboration among different levels of government is crucial to provide security and community integration for international students.

**Ministry of Foreign Commerce (Pro Ecuador)**

**Competence**: Proecuador is an agency of the Ministry of Foreign Commerce in charge of designing and implementing exports and investment-promotion policies aimed at inserting Ecuador in the international market. It has 6 agencies in various geographical districts in Ecuador and 31 offices abroad. For the last three years, Pro Ecuador has been promoting educational services as an alternative source of income for the country and to move away from a commodity-based economy.

**Importance and Influence**: Pro Ecuador is extremely important to advance the internationalization of the country's exportable higher education services and promote Ecuador as a great destination for international academic mobility. However, its level of influence in the strategy design will be modest, unless the efforts to promote Ecuador as a destination are tied to broader foreign trade policies.

**The Multinational Federation of Community Tourism in Ecuador (FEPTCE)**

**Competence**: FEPTCE brings together indigenous communities across Ecuador that offer tourism, guiding and lodging services. The initiative has especially targeted the country's indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, peasant, and *montubio* (mestizo) communities, who are traditional

stewards of Ecuador's cultural and natural heritage. It provides guidance on best practices and quality services to its members.

**Importance and Influence**: Local organizations like FEPTCE are very important at the operationalization level of the strategy and should be part of the conversations. Indigenous communities can provide support to students in the field and help them to achieve enriching learning and cultural experiences.

**The Ecuadorian Network for the Internationalization of Higher Education (REIES)**

**Competence**: Officially established in 2017, the REIES is constituted of 21 public and private universities. Its main objectives include collaborating in the formulation of public policies for the internationalization of higher education, develop institutional capacity for comprehensive internationalization, provide professional training and development for IE practitioners, promote Ecuador as an academic destination for international students and foster academic collaboration among the Ecuadorian HE institutions. It should be noted that each university could be its own stakeholder, with its own constituencies that may be for or against the proposed strategy.

**Importance and Influence**: Develop academic cooperation to collaboratively design quality programs that can be offered abroad as well as facilitate the credit transfer process to home universities. The individual experiences of the universities can inform the strategy and the broader internationalization of higher education policy.

**Receiving Communities**

**Competence**:  Receiving communities are key for implementing a service learning or study abroad program that provide educational end culturally enriching experiences for

international students. Communities can help developing activities that provide students the structured support to engage fully in these activities.

**Importance and Influence**: Receiving communities have an important role in the design and implementation of any international service learning or study abroad program. Communities can influence not only a strategy but broader policies at the regional or national level in ways that encourage local initiatives. The ability of a community to engage in the political process and create relations with local governments and other organizations can foster quality programs or initiatives that can be replicated among new communities in new locations.

**Ecuadorian Association of Spanish Languages Centers (*AECEE)***

**Competence**: It is a private non-profit organization, which includes 12 Spanish schools that combine the teaching of Spanish with cultural programs in order to guarantee the best experience for international students in Ecuador.

**Importance and Influence:** AECEE is a key stakeholder at the implementation / operationalization level. Spanish school have been providing education services for many years and have the field experience to make a strategy successful.

**Students**

**Competence**: The role of students, international and domestic, does not seems to have a major impact as stakeholders in the design of a national strategy. However, they should have a voice because the major focus of the strategy should be student-centered.

**Importance and Influence:** Students are of utmost importance and must be placed at the center of any strategy in order to provide them with enriching experiences, both cultural and academic. They will have a positive influence upon their return on campus, within their own communities (work, societies) as interculturally sensitive, global minded agents of change.

11. **Importance/Influence Grid for Stakeholder Prioritization**

Assessing stakeholders' importance and influence





Retrieved from: http://www.mspguide.org/tool/stakeholder-analysis-importanceinfluence-matrix
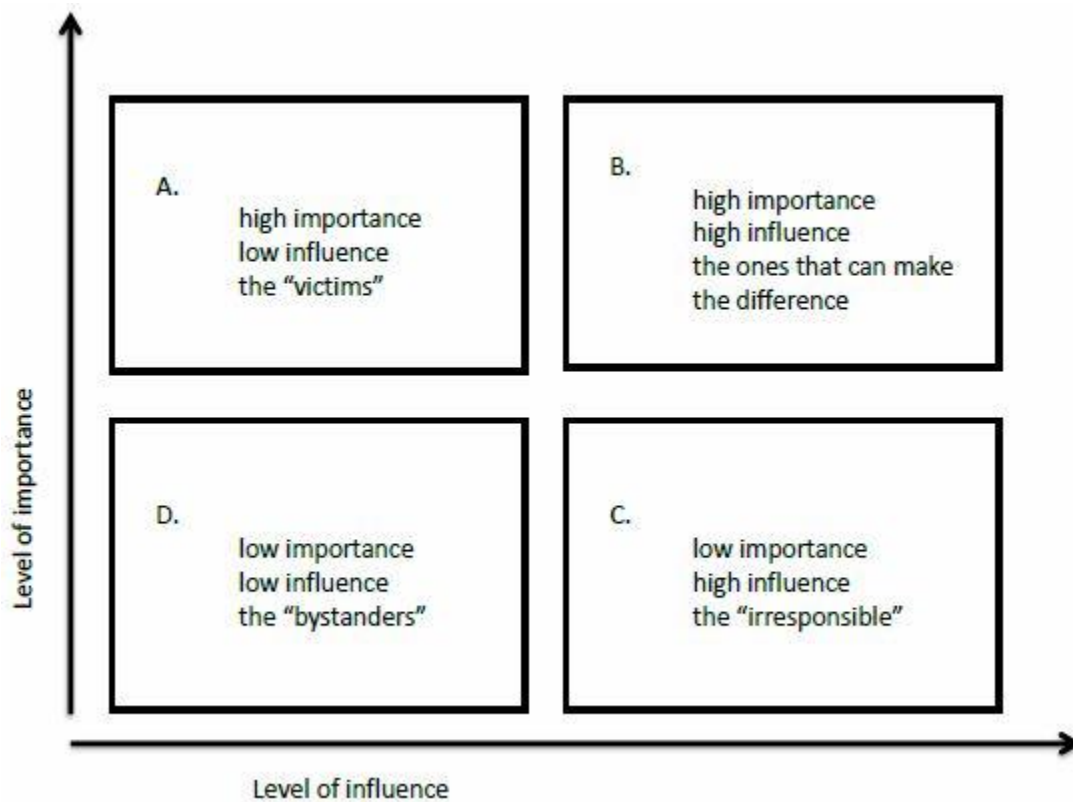
The identification of stakeholders who are important to the strategy and those who can influence the strategy's outcomes is the first step and the basis for success. The classification and placement of stakeholders in the power-interest grid will help determine, for example, cases where awareness-raising is required to turn a highly-influential but low-interest stakeholder into an interest potential stakeholder, when capacity development is required to turn a stakeholder with high interest but low influence into a stronger potential stakeholder, or how to counter stakeholders that might negatively influence the strategy outcome. A very important aspect of this phase is to identify (potential) stakeholders who might not yet be on board. This is a basic preliminary analysis to identify the primary stakeholders that should work on the design of a national strategy to promote Ecuador as a quality academic destination for international students looking for short-term experiences abroad. Further analysis will help to design a strategy that address the problems or needs that affect specific stakeholders and meet their expectations.

## 12. **Conclusions**

The government of Ecuador has made unprecedented efforts to improve quality and access to education and part of those efforts is to promote student exchange and international cooperation at the higher educational level. However, there is no evidence of a concrete internationalization of higher education policy, but internationalization programs that are part of the general higher education policy.

The internationalization component of the higher education reforms that have taken place in Ecuador in the las decade focused on outbound mobility and research collaboration. Greater efforts are needed to incorporate these approaches into more comprehensive strategies, such as internationalization at home, to shift the focus of internationalization toward the non-mobile majority of students.

During the last decade, all sectors, including higher education institutions, have been operating within a highly State-regulated environment. The national government has not shared policymaking space with other actors such as regional governments, higher education institutions, the private sector or independent non-profit organizations. It is imperative to bring all those stakeholders together to develop a comprehensive International Education Strategy that includes international education as one of the priority development sectors.

## 13. Recommendations

A future strategy to promote Ecuador as a destination for international students could build on some of the existing individual higher institutions and private organizations efforts to date, and effectively combine broader national goals to ensure effective implementation. This analysis offers suggestions regarding certain actions that a potential national strategy should include:

- Establish an advisory council with a specific focus on HE internationalization activities, with a view to an inclusive process to collaboratively develop recommendations for an internationalization of higher education national policy.  This council should include government entities, higher education institutions, provincial and community authorities, the private sector and industry stakeholders. While policy formulation may still take place at the ministerial level, this council could be responsible for developing programs and operationalizing policy goals.
- "Brand" Ecuador as a quality study abroad destination by leveraging the existing campaign launched by the Ministry of Tourism. Many countries around the world work to attract international students through "study in" campaigns, which are focused on providing clear and captivating information to potential students about the advantages of coming to their countries

(housing, insurance, visa procedures and academic options.) The campaign should highlight the international relevance of the Spanish language and service learning opportunities offered by Ecuador, as well as the access to unique social and cultural experiences.

- Promote greater coordination among provincial and community governments, education stakeholders, and the private sector to design short-term quality academic programs that can be promoted internationally. Provincial, local governments and communities should play an active role in the program implementation phase. For example, launching awareness campaigns to develop skills and sensitivity of community members and general population to interact with international students, include them in cultural and social activities and help provide a secure environment during their programs.

- Reduce red tape and facilitate student visa processing arrangements, making them simpler and easier to navigate for international students and researchers. Immigration laws and visa policies should support inbound mobility.

- Commit to enforce rigorous high-quality standards and security protocols that meet the expectations of international students and institutions, which will give Ecuador access to new markets and will provide a basis for growth.

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