

Doctor of Political Science

Politics and Higher Education in Brazil. The case of Federal University of Latin American  
integration -UNILA

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### Abstract

Over the last few decades, the landscape of higher education in South America has undergone significant transformations, underscored by initiatives aimed at regional integration and the regionalization of Higher Education. Among these, the movements within MERCOSUR and Brazil have emerged as particularly remarkable, marking a new era of educational diplomacy and cross-border collaboration. This study delves into the role that higher education policies have played in fostering regional integration across South American countries, using the establishment of the University of Latin American Integration (UNILA) as a focal point for analysis.

UNILA represents a unique experiment in leveraging education as a conduit for regional solidarity, offering an illuminating case study on the potential of academic exchanges to bridge divides between neighboring countries. The inception of UNILA was made feasible by a specific political and economic context in Brazil, which provided a window of opportunity for its development. However, subsequent political shifts in the country have raised questions about the sustainability and future trajectory of this initiative, highlighting the fragility of educational integration projects in the face of changing political landscapes.

This manuscript employs case of study analysis through a comprehensive multilevel framework to examine the regionalization of higher education in South America, with a particular focus on Brazilian policies from 2002 to 2022. It traces the genesis, implementation, and evolution of UNILA, drawing on a diverse array of sources through a mixed-methods approach that combines literature review with both qualitative and quantitative research. Data were collected through surveys and interviews with various stakeholders, providing fresh insights into the complexities and challenges of regional educational integration.

The findings underscore the significant role that UNILA plays in fostering a supra-national regional identity, serving as a beacon of integration efforts in the continent. By examining the successes and setbacks of UNILA, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in the regionalization of higher education in South America. It also offers valuable lessons for policymakers and educators on the potential of higher education as a strategic tool for promoting regional integration and building stronger, more cohesive regional identities.