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**“It takes a lot to  
get to  
university...”**

**Emma Harden-Wolfson**



**McGill**

Faculty of  
Education



*Faculty of Architecture, University of the Republic  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson*

Flag of Uruguay, Punta del Este  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson



Mural, Montevideo  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson

# Higher education equity in Uruguay

01

Build the empirical base on key higher education equity issues and challenges in Uruguay

02

Analyse government and institutional perspectives on the right to higher education

03

Learn from and suggest recommendations for access, financing, and 'success'

**Respondent: “It takes a lot to get to university, right?”**

**Emma: “What do you mean?”**

**Respondent: “Not everybody makes it out of high school and also [higher education is still]... concentrated in Montevideo. Not everybody makes it here, right? So just... not having tuition doesn't make university free.”**



*Former Lycée Français, Montevideo  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson*

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# Methods

## Government

- Higher Education team, Ministry of Education and Culture x 2
- Fondo de Solidaridad x 1

## University

- Universidad de la Republica (Udelar) x 2
- Universidad ORT x 2
- Universidad Tecnológica del Uruguay (UTEC) x 1

## Other organizations

- Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social (CERES) x 1
- Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) x 1

## Interviews

- 9 in-person, 1 online interview in Montevideo, August 2025
- 8 in Spanish, 2 in English
- Supported by UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America & the Caribbean (IESALC)

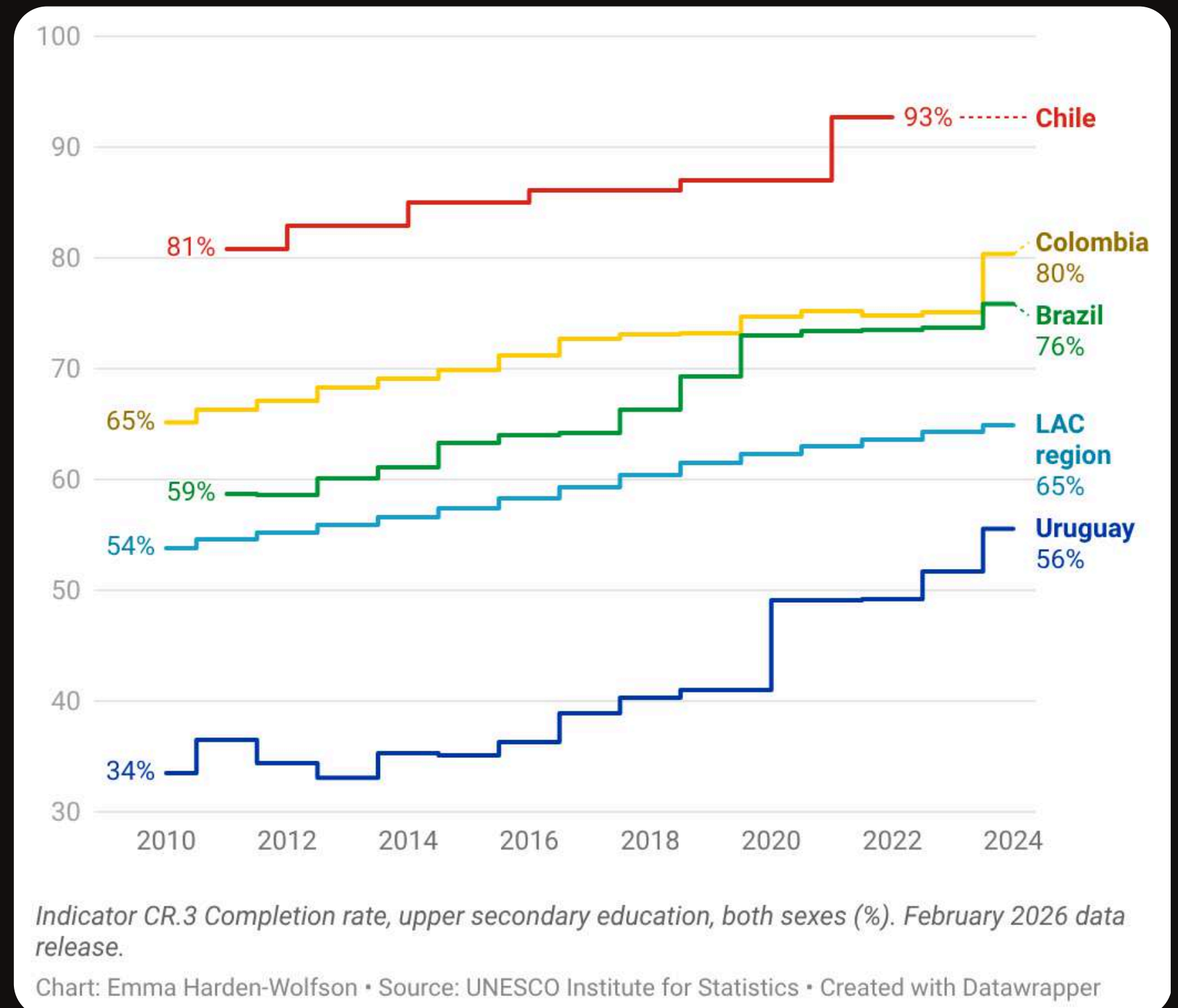


UNESCO IESALC and McGill team at the Ministry of Education and Culture  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson

# Not everybody makes it out of high school

**Multi-causal:** “primarily **social** and **economic** factors that contribute to **low income** levels or a significant **delay** in completing secondary education, as many young people start **working** at that age”

For those that do progress to higher education, the **transition** “brings with it a number of challenges, one of which relates to **academic reading and writing**”



# Concentrated in Montevideo

The '**macro-university**' phenomenon: "It is a distinctive feature of Uruguay that, even today, with **seven universities, Udelar accounts for 85% of student enrolment**"

**Limited privatization:** **Public universities** serve the regions, whereas "in other countries in Latin America, that gap is filled with private universities"

**Territorial inequality:** "Those who study in the **interior** have a lower offer of diversity and options"



Map of Uruguay on the Escuela Grecia building, Montevideo  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson

# Not having tuition doesn't make university free



Udelar Campus Luisi Janicki: pioneras universitarias, Montevideo  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson

**Other costs:** “Our University is in the interior of the country, so travelling from one place in the interior to another is costly; **transport** costs money, **staying in another place** costs money, and **eating** costs money.”

**Free higher education** “also hides behind it some debates such as justice or efficiency at the societal level... everyone pays for it, because it is financed with the national budget... and **those who end up using it are a few**”

**Solidarity Fund:** “For the first time, this year **we did not cover all the scholarships** with what we receive from the fund contribution”

# Higher education as a right and public good... yet still inequitable



## Government view

"In the last 25 or 30 years, there has been a very marked effort, especially in public universities, to **advance policies of equity and regional integration.**"



## Public sentiment

"In Uruguay we believe and are convinced that access is free and equal for everyone and **in reality there are already impossibilities of access**"



## Changing the narrative

"I think it involves **recognising the university's contributions as a public good for national development in a different way**... I don't see it as being that difficult, but something just isn't quite happening."



Sunset in Montevideo  
Photo by Emma Harden-Wolfson



# Thank you! ¡Gracias!

Dr Emma Harden-Wolfson

 [emma.harden-wolfson@mcgill.ca](mailto:emma.harden-wolfson@mcgill.ca)

 [www.mcgill.ca/x/5QD](http://www.mcgill.ca/x/5QD)