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## The UNAM San Antonio at Eighty

Establishing a National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) campus abroad opened the possibility of reflecting about its symbolism in the university and the country's history. The site where our campus was founded in 1944 in the city of San Antonio is fundamental for explaining a large part of bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States. It has already been eighty uninterrupted years of activities directed at the community residing here.

Our most important national university also celebrates other important anniversaries in 2024: the 140 years since the foundation of the National Library, currently managed by the Institute for Library Research (IIB), and the seventieth year since our first *Gaceta UNAM*, the official means for disseminating the institution's cultural, academic, and scientific activities, was first published. To this series of commemorations, we add ours, a unique projection of the university in different dimensions.

The National Library of Mexico, including the National Newspaper and Periodicals Archive, is not only the repository of books and periodicals, but also holds, together with other institutions like the National General Archives (AGN), the entire country's bibliographic memory, which is a large part of our national identity. Both these institutions represent a joint effort by two political rivals: while the AGN was born of an initial project by Viceroy Güemes and Azanza in about 1790 and consolidated by the Conservative Lucas Alamán in 1823, the BNM was a victory of Benito Juárez's Liberal republic in 1867.

Under the presidency of Porfirio Díaz (known as the *porfiriato*), the library reached a level of organization that allowed it to offer consulting services; after the outbreak of the 1910 Mexican Revolution and throughout the armed conflict, it continued operating in the former San Agustín Monastery in the heart of Mexico City's Historic Center. In that period, it was directed by people such as Rogelio Fernández Güell, Luis G. Urbina, Martín Luis Guzmán, and Enrique Fernández Ledesma.<sup>1</sup> The latter was to oversee the transition in 1929 that transferred control

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of the library to the fabulous National Autonomous University of Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, the changes brought by the revolution were not only felt in the political or social realm. Education was one of the first to be dealt with as a sort of historic debt to the Mexican people by individuals like José Vasconcelos (1882-1959). Vasconcelos, an attorney originally from Oaxaca and a fervent supporter of President Madero, served the victorious faction of the Revolution. In 1920, he collaborated with the administration of Adolfo de la Huerta (1881-1955) as the rector of what was then named the National University of Mexico and promised not to work for the university but to ask that the university work for the people.

Moved by a civilizing spirit, Vasconcelos made teaching people to read the badge of his rectorship. His crusades against illiteracy and for the massive distribution of the classics of universal literature among the population are famous. They took on epic proportions when, in his educational endeavor, he loaded little mules with the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Euripides, Plutarch, and the Evangelists to take them to every last corner of the country. With his slogan "Only books will take this country out of barbarism," he dedicated to the very last his efforts to promote education and social action to restore Mexico.

## Our History

In his last year as rector, Vasconcelos brought his thinking about Mexican nationalism in line with that of Latin America, which encouraged the union of all the countries of the region. Like many others in the Southern Americas, he thought that Mexico's homeland should be one with the rest. Based on that idea, he proposed making the phrase "For my Race, the Spirit shall speak" as the National University of Mexico's motto. He added the foundation of an institution that would be important in the UNAM San Antonio's history, none other than the Summer School, which offered courses for foreigners.

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Founded in July 1921 at Mexico City's old House of the Mascarons, the Summer School boasted distinguished directors and professors such as Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Julio Torri, Carlos Pellicer, Vicente Lombardo, Manuel Toussaint, Adolfo Best, Daniel Cosío Villegas, and Jaime Torres Bodet, all central to Mexican letters and culture of the first third of the twentieth century. Vasconcelos's fundamental idea was to show the splendor of the nation's literature, art, and history to foreigners in order to change little by little the negative image that the revolutionary destruction had projected abroad, especially in the United States.

In 1923, the University Council accredited the courses given to foreigners at the Summer School, for which it requested and received certification and recognition by the state universities in California and Texas. In 1929, when autonomy was granted, the school was brought under the aegis of the University Exchange Department, dedicated mainly to university cultural extension and dissemination outside Mexico City. Starting then, the Sum-



House of the Mascarons.

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mer School frequently collaborated with the Ministry of Foreign Relations, especially with the consulates in Austin and San Antonio.

In 1942, one of the students who benefited from this was Manuel Pacheco Moreno, an army coronel and graduate of the UNAM Law School who also studied at the University of Texas at Austin. Once here, he realized that Mexicans and their descendants had no access at all to basic services like health, housing, and education. He therefore proposed starting courses in Austin like those at the Summer School so that local Mexican residents could take them; his first efforts were not successful however, and he sought other ways of meeting these needs.

A year later, he attracted the attention of several enthusiasts who also were working in favor of the Mexicans living in Texas, even though they were in San Antonio and not Austin, as he had originally planned. In the old capital of the province of Texas, he received help from Ignacio Lozano, the founder and proprietor of *La Prensa*, an influential San Antonio daily, and Rómulo Munguía, an old Made-ro supporter from the state of Puebla who had lived there for many years and worked at Lozano's daily. He also got recommendations from people like Pablo Martínez del Río and Carlos Eduardo Castañeda, both prestigious academics.

And, just as the Summer School was doing in Mexico City, he contacted the Mexican consulate in San Antonio, then headed by Carlos Calderón, who in turn requested help from the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The latter consulted with the UNAM to establish some extension courses in San Antonio, which were held in the first months of 1944, involving all the aforementioned institutions to come to an agreement on the bases for collaboration and to carry out Colonel Manuel Pacheco Moreno's initial requests.

In the beginning, May 5 (or *Cinco de mayo*) was chosen for the launch of school activities, but for different reasons, that date had to be pushed back. Once the most minute details were worked out, the organizers thought that

Mexico's Independence Day would be the best time to begin activities. So, on September 15, 1944, the first UNAM Temporary Extension Courses in San Antonio were inaugurated led by Manuel Pacheco Moreno, Arturo Arnaiz y Freg, Raimundo Sánchez, Francisco Monterde, Antonio Castro Leal, and Manuel Toussaint, who had been a professor and director of the 1937 Summer School.

This first trial was a complete success, so much so that Pacheco Moreno and the guest professors wanted to replicate it in Los Angeles, California, in 1945. They chose Los Angeles among many other cities because of the large number of Mexicans living there, and the founders thought they would get the same results as the previous year. However, a series of factors complicated the establishment of UNAM extension courses in Los Angeles, which would only be achieved sixty years later when the UNAM founded the Los Angeles Extension School (ESELA) in 2005.

Because of this, the UNAM returned to San Antonio in 1946 and, in 1948, formed the International Cultural Center with the support of Mexico's consulate in San Antonio to aid in organizing the courses. Financial difficulties plagued their existence, and, if it had not been for an opportune private donation, they would have ceased. To prevent that, in 1952, the Governing Board of Mexican University Courses in Texas was formed to take over from the International Cultural Center, which was dissolved that year. The new institution was given a new name with a new mission: UNAM University Extension Courses.

By 1955, the board had reached an agreement with Trinity University so the latter would host the extension courses; this made it possible to ensure they were held annually and the eternal problem of finding a venue for them could be solved. This stability allowed Professor Arturo Arnaiz to state in 1958 that the UNAM was able to establish a permanent school in San Antonio with the same characteristics as the Summer School in Mexico City, and with classes also targeting U.S. Americans interested in Mexico's culture and language, who had already shown great interest and increased their enrollment from 1952 on.

In 1964, the Temporary Extension Courses celebrated their twentieth anniversary with a huge event headed by Alura Flores, the Mexican ballerina and choreographer who was a frequent collaborator with the institution. She also participated in the HemisFair '68, a world fair organized to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding

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of San Antonio in 1718. Just as she had done during the temporary courses, Flores participated with folkloric dances performed in Mexico's fair pavilion.

In addition, local San Antonio officials and other, private sponsors sought out the architect and painter Juan O'Gorman. They asked him to create a mosaic at the Hemis-Fair '68 Convention Center. He called it *The Confluence of Civilizations*, and, as the façade of the Lila Cockrell Theatre, it continues to amaze as viewers can admire the history of Mexico and Texas in its 4,000 square meter surface. A curious note: O'Gorman did not approve of the mosaic's original site because he thought it was too high up to be able to easily appreciate it.

The Governing Board of Mexican University Courses in Texas negotiated with city officials for them to loan one of the exhibition sites originally created for the Hemis-Fair '68. This came about in 1971 and was formalized in 1972, when our institution changed its name to the Permanent UNAM Extension School in San Antonio (EPESA), sharing space with the Mexican Cultural Institute, under the aegis of the Mexican Consulate there. That partnership lasted until 1974, when the UNAM organized its courses without Institute participation.

The decade following these administrative modifications was marked by a cultural consolidation that complemented the courses' academic life. The heads of the institution centered their efforts on organizing colloquia and symposia about different aspects of Mexican culture. Therefore, between 1970 and 1980, major figures of Mexican and U.S. intellectual circles were constant visitors to the EPESA, coming to give public lectures; however, both the Mexican Cultural Institute and the EPESA lacked appropriate facilities.

In 1983, María Eugenia Cosío was appointed EPESA director. She set herself the task of acquiring a building for the UNAM in the Hemisfair Park and this became a reality in 1986. We still reside there today. Her administration faced huge challenges, both economic and academic, and had it not been for her tenacity, the UNAM San Antonio headquarters would have disappeared. Her teaching and material legacy continue to be remembered today due to her enormous institutional commitment.

The facilities have been slightly modified since then. In 1994, EPESA enlarged its Rómulo Munguía Library and included in its archives documents referring to the administration of Henry Cisneros, the mayor who helped



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establish the UNAM San Antonio's current building. The remodeling could not continue due to the economic crisis at the end of that year as well as later consequences such as the devaluation of the peso and the lack of resources for continuing the work.

Despite that, the site survived the end of the century, but it had to deal with another crisis, this time an internal one in the UNAM: a student strike. When that was resolved, activities were restarted little by little, until in 2006, the EPESA changed its name to UNAM San Antonio (UNAM SAT), as it is known to the community today. Since then, the site has consolidated itself as one of the most prestigious foreign academic and cultural institutions not only in the city, but in the region.

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## Notes

**1** These were all writers and politicians; Luis G. Urbina, in addition to being a writer, was a member of the Mexican Academy of Letters. [Editor's Note.]

**2** This was the same year that the university became autonomous and took on the name by which we know it today. [Editor's Note.]