

The University Program “Mexico, a Multicultural Nation”

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UNAM programs foster the development of particular areas of multidisciplinary research and the formation of human resources, strengthening the existing infrastructure to resolve complex problems in the interests of society. Examples are the University Food Program (PUAL), the University Program for the Science and Engineering of Materials (PUCIM), the University Energy Program (PUE), the University Program on Research and Health (PUIS), the Uni-

versity Environmental Program (PUMA), the University Gender Studies Program (PUEG), and the University Program for Studies of the City (PUEC), among others.

The Mexico, a Multicultural Nation University Program, created December 2, 2004 by Rector Dr. Juan Ramón de la Fuente, is headed by ethnologist José Manuel del Val Blanco. The program structure includes the Research Coordination Office, the Teaching Project Coordination Office, the Scholarship System for Indigenous Students, the Information Systems and Collections Coordination Office, the Office for the Coordination of Special Projects, and the Administrative Coordination Office.

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Photos in this article by Elsie Montiel.



PUMC work focuses fundamentally on and draws its vocation from the Constitution's recognition of the importance of exploring in depth certain fields of study. But it is also based on the knowledge that certain national and international laws that Mexico has signed identify us as a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multicultural nation with very rich, complex intercultural relations.

The PUMC's research, coordinated by Carlos Zolla Luque, involves diverse and fundamental tasks:

- a) Researching the themes, scenarios, and mechanisms that express interculturality, capturing what we have characterized as "the dispersed social demand," and seeking to articulate and coordinate academic, institutional, and social efforts. The aim is to design projects with sizeable participation of the subjects involved: mainly indigenous and Afro-Mexican indigenous peoples and groups of immigrants, women, and students.
- b) Identifying and studying the work of collective or individual actors whose historic and current activities decisively contribute to multi- and interculturality, that is, to the wide diversity that characterizes us. These actors include Mexican indigenous peoples and those from other parts of the Americas, as well as communities of non-indigenous immigrants, including Mexico's Black population, struggling today for recognition in the Constitution.
- c) Fostering new partnership models with government researchers and institutions for projects conceived of as collective, transdisciplinary, and useful for students, and, above all, for public policy design.
- d) Generating instruments for first-level, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional systematized information.

This means information systems that, together with its conventional-format publications (books, magazines, manuals, technical reports), make the PUMC expert in interculturality.

In the field of teaching, headed by Evangelina Mendizábal García, the coordinator of the Teaching Project and Scholarship System, the main tasks have been:

- a) Designing innovative teaching and training mechanisms to systematically present multiculturalism to students, teachers, researchers, national and international institutions, social organizations, and the general public;
- b) Fostering in the university and other academic areas the study of interculturality with a crosscutting strategy that does not confine the topic to the humanities, but delves into other non-humanistic disciplines;¹
- c) Promoting access for indigenous youth to a quality university education on all levels and in the different majors available in our institution's curriculum. The Scholarship System for Indigenous Students currently has 400 students registered in 72 of the UNAM's majors. This system is the most consistent initiative for achieving not only access to higher education for a sector of society that has been left behind for many years, but also in contributing to the training of a critical group of indigenous intellectuals and professionals. To date, 54 scholarship students have graduated in 24 majors (21 women and 33 men), mostly in economics, law, biology, psychology, medicine, nursing and obstetrics, dentistry, chemistry, geophysical engineering, and mechanical electrical engineering. Aware of the various difficulties these students face, the program has

organized a Tutoring Program to facilitate their insertion and performance in the community.

- d) Contributing through teaching to solving the nation's central problems as an essential objective set by our highest university authorities in the fields of science and the humanities.

The PUMC vocation for teaching and contributing to society is also expressed in a series of proposals for strengthening indigenous leadership, such as a diploma course about indigenous women and the ethno-political initiative "The Becoming of Indigenous Peoples."

In the sphere of broadened diversity, the PUMC sees special importance in the study and information systems about the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the rest of the Americas. The projects and their systems balance quantitative, statistical information with qualitative studies with the help of a fundamental tool: geo-referential systems. All the projects mentioned below contribute data to our multicultural information systems and the information systems of Mexican indigenous peoples and those of other countries of the Americas:

- a) The Pedregal Pact, signed by Rector Juan Ramón de la Fuente and 25 indigenous leaders from all over the hemisphere. This implied the UNAM's commitment and that of our program to developing technical evaluation reports about the UN Decades on the Indigenous Peoples of the World and designing indicators for the development and well-being of indigenous peoples.
- b) Aware of the fundamental situation of Mexican indigenous peoples' economic and social development, the PUMC decided on a line of research on the topic. This has already produced results: the System of Economic and Social Development Information of the Indigenous Peoples of Guerrero, the Social Development Index (SDI), and the specialized report that was recently published in two volumes are all derived from it.²
- c) The study of the impact of development mega-projects in indigenous and Black regions of Latin America and the Caribbean takes a hemispheric view of the process of economic globalization there. It has gathered a large quantity of information about a topic of immense concern for the peoples of the Americas: the destination and use of their natural and cultural resources.
- d) Health is a privileged field for the observation of interculturality. The Mexican Traditional Medicine Digital

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Library and the Indigenous Peoples and Health Indicators Project that we are carrying out together with the PanAmerican Health Organization (PAHO) are the two most visible and significant recent products of this. The library has information about 1 000 medicinal plants, monographs about 56 indigenous peoples and their medicine, a dictionary with more than 1 100 entries, and bilingual documents about the medicinal flora of 35 indigenous peoples.³

- e) Based on the recognition of Mexico's multiculturalism, which has resulted from the co-existence of indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples with members of numerous groups of people from the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, who have made Mexico their new definitive homeland, the PUMC established a line of research called "Immigration and Cultural Diversity." Within that is the "The Mexicans Who Gave Us the World" Symposium, which has been held three times, in 2007, in 2008, and in 2010.
- f) The "Half a Century of Indigenous Movements in Latin America" project analyzes the relevance, characteristics, and actions of indigenous movements in the Americas. This is because the issue of indigenous movements has become enormously important and has produced a huge amount of documents (declarations, manifestos, reports on indigenous summits, etc.), 1 500 of which are gathered together in digitalized form, open for consultation by the public.
- g) At the request of indigenous organizations, the PUMC is beginning to put the finishing touches on a proposal to develop a diagnostic analysis of indigenous businesses (about 5 000 enterprises, large and small, formally, legally established or just groups of producers in partnership for a common end) as a fundamental input for the information system about options for indigenous development.

The PUMC is working intensely in the fields of cultural promotion, publishing, and communications coordinated by

One of the PUMC's main aims is researching the themes, scenarios, and mechanisms that express interculturality, capturing what we have characterized as "the dispersed social demand."

researcher Juan Mario Pérez. The most outstanding activities and products are the following:

- a) Publishing: 26 books have been published as a result of our research and the analysis by theme for specialized technical reports. At our website, visitors can find information about the collections of reading materials related to indigenous and Afro-Mexican studies, among other topics, published by the program. Go to <http://www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx/Portal/Izquierdo/PUBLICACIONES/publicaciones.html>.
- b) The "Nación Multicultural" (Multicultural Nation) portal includes information about PUMC activities, as well as a large amount of materials on line: written documents, 55 videos of indigenous peoples, news, a few books and technical reports, and links to different micro-sites (the Arturo Warman Chair, Writers in Indigenous Languages, and the System of Economic and Social Development Information of the Indigenous Peoples of Guerrero).
- c) The "Languages of the Americas" poetry festivals. The academic extension area also carries out activities like seminars, conferences, and diploma courses. Among the latter, the most recent have been the Diploma Course on Indigenous Languages, the Fourth Diploma Course on Justice and Pluralism, and the Diploma Course to Strengthen Indigenous Women's Leadership.
- d) Given the nature of its cultural dissemination projects and activities, the PUMC is frequently asked to participate in roundtable discussions, interviews, radio and television reports, etc.
- d) Given the expansion of communications about indigenous cultural life, the PUMC maintains contact with different government and community bodies and has developed the First Diagnostic Analysis of the Audiences of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) Indigenous Cultural Radio Stations System.

WIDENING COVERAGE NATIONALLY: PUMC-OAXACA

Today, the PUMC has offices in Oaxaca, headed by Nemesio Rodríguez. It has fostered projects throughout the state like the Socio-environmental Diagnostic Analysis of Oaxaca's Costa Chica, in coordination with the University of California at Davis; series of ethnographic lectures and video presentations; workshops, roundtable discussions and talks, many of which are held under the auspices of the Black Oaxaca Festival and the Census of the Black Population of the Oaxaca and Guerrero Costa Chica. Conversations have begun with the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) to set up a Center for the Education and Training of Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Tlacolula, Oaxaca.

LIBRARY OF THE INTER-AMERICAN INDIGENIST INSTITUTE

The Inter-American Indigenist Institute (III), created in 1940 and based permanently in Mexico, has stopped operating. On the recommendation of the Organization of American States General Assembly, the III Executive Board decided to transfer its document collections, library and periodicals library to the UNAM, including the Manuel Gamio Library, home to the most important documentation on indigenous issues in the Americas. With Miguel Ángel Rubio as coordinator of collections and systems, the PUMC is responsible for preserving it, digitalizing it, and putting it at the service of researchers from all over the Americas, as well as to create the Center for Information and Research on the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. **MM**

NOTES

¹ The elective course "Mexico, Multicultural Nation," the responsibility of 15 specialists, has been taught since 2004 in many UNAM schools, in two Sciences and Humanities High Schools (CCH), and at the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH). More than 12 000 students have taken it to date.

² The SDI is a powerful tool that allows for statistical analysis all the way to the local level. Ninety-six researchers from more than 35 Mexican and international institutions of higher education participated in creating it. Similar projects have begun in Chiapas, Michoacán, Sonora, and the Totonacapan region of Veracruz.

³ The library can be accessed at <http://www.medicinatradicionalmexicana.unam.mx/index.php>. [Editor's Note.]