



# RESEARCH AT EL ROSARIO IS MORE ACTIVE THAN EVER

University administrators, professors, students, and staff are engaged in a new cycle of research that promotes a flexible and open management model, one offering greater backing to researchers and improved practices in the way science is carried out. It aims for a commitment to interdisciplinary approaches, innovation, formative research, and internationalization, while reworking the traditional paradigms of funding and managing research.

**T**he Universidad del Rosario has recently undergone a transformation to put more emphasis on research in every aspect of the strategic vision that defines its Integrated Development Plan (IDP). This is not the first time that the University has transformed its guiding principles. On the contrary, it has done so numerous times over the course of more than 360 years since its founding. Never before, however, have such audacious steps been undertaken in implementing new strategies for the production of science at all levels.

The goals are now set clear, and university rankings are afforded the least importance, although the Universidad del Rosario has fared well in these too, with Scimago rating it in first position in Colombia in 2016 for scientific production. What is truly indispensable is the consolidation of a robust research culture through a supportive, transversal ecosystem that works not only in teaching, research, and outreach, but also in administration and organizational areas.

This is undoubtedly a time of great progress for research at the Universidad del Rosario, but who has brought about all these changes? Many people, including administrators, advisers, and staff under the leadership of the Vice President and Provost, Stéphanie Lavaux, a political scientist and researcher who “put everything on the line,” as we say in Colombia, to make this new research environment a reality. It was not easy, but positive results can already be seen. She explains the changes in the interview below.

**How did this process of transforming research begin?**

**Stéphanie Lavaux (SL).** The first step strategically was to carry out self-diagnosis. We

rethought research in the University, aware that we couldn’t continue to rely on the same concepts and tools then in use, so we had to provide the community with instruments to boost research.

In order to do this, we had to be honest with ourselves, in other words recognize our strengths and weaknesses, objectively measure where we stood, and compare our performance with that of other leading institutions in every discipline where we shared points in common with them.

We looked for inspiration in excellent international practices and then built a supportive, accompanying ecosystem that would provide substantive and practical support to all the different kinds of research carried out here. This process produced a strategic plan in which research is found at every level, from formative research enabling a more effective educational process for our students, to the more formal aspects affecting a community of consistently more efficient and competitive lecturers.

We have consciously included scientific production in all aspects of the IDP, because high-quality research requires investment.

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**How did you begin to implement the changes?**

**(SL)** With clear strategic objectives, we proposed a much more efficient organizational model that meant the transformation of a Center for the Management of Knowledge and Innovation into a true Research and Innovation Council. It went from being a service center to a higher body exercising authority over academic research.

To strengthen this mission, the University empowered three councils: the Academic Council, the Student Council, and the Outreach and Interinstitutional Relations Council, as well as the University Press and the Resource Center for Learning and Research. All these intersect on key areas, and uphold the support ecosystem.

The Councils promote research, set guidelines, and advise on the changes academic





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units wish to make. At the same time, they are supported by an administrative ecosystem that sees the strategic importance of research and strong leadership in management capable of backing up the whole organic system through effective policies and tools.

Another of the great transformations to boost this movement was the University Library, which evolved into the Resource Center for Learning and Research (RCLR), which provides important support to the junior or senior researcher, including access to bibliographic resources and a portfolio of services, both within an institutional policy of open access.

**Research is diverse and heterogeneous. How does the new model accommodate these concepts?**

(SL) They are accommodated through the new support ecosystem. We accept that research and ways of doing science are different across the disciplines. Therefore, they cannot be approached using exactly the same instruments, nor observed and measured in the same way.

Our new system of incentives for scientific production recognizes accomplishments in keeping with the discipline, and this is achieved through many different instruments. There is no longer a single fund for financing research projects; we now have several funds that adapt to different scientific cultures.

This way of accompanying research also provides new, lively, dynamic, and very flexible tools to support researchers. This means that we are going to be able to adjust and modify them based on needs, and by the year 2020 we will have diagnosed the use of these tools in order to tweak the research support system.

We are developing an environment to help researchers focus on their scientific leadership, leaving administration tasks to project managers wherever possible. As newly-defined members of the R&D team, these project managers are there to make headway with ideas from technical and administrative angles.

The important thing is to engage in science in keeping with the respective discipline, always alert to current best practices, but also innovating good practices that can have an impact out there.

**And what about innovation?**

(SL) The other great transformation was the

inclusion of innovation as part of the permanent cycle of the production of knowledge, a policy committed to technology transfer, to patents, and, in general to the transfer of scientific knowledge to society. The development of transfer processes, validation, and the social appropriation of knowledge has previously been supported somewhat timidly. But we are now working with researchers to this end, and their results are coming through in all sorts of products, not only scientific publications but also industrial design, artistic exhibitions, participation in legislation, and public policy, among other things.

Although we do have our own policy on intellectual property, we face the challenge of orienting our community on this subject and creating a culture that embraces innovation as part of academic life. Without an overt policy on innovation in the past, the Universidad del Rosario has always got involved in social innovation. Several of our research groups work directly with communities, and with the help of the Outreach and Interinstitutional Relations Council, we are officially becoming a transformative University, and this is underlined by our activities in social innovation.

Yet we have never previously had such a relationship with technological innovation, which is why we are now aiming to boost this at the University. We are developing a safeguarded technology portfolio, and arranging possible protection with a view to future negotiations. We are also endowing our management with technological monitoring of research lines, strengthening the applicability and vision of research groups in ways that will better our position as an institution both nationally and internationally.

#### How is the training process advancing in terms of internationalizing research?

(SL) This is a very important commitment since it begins at the undergraduate level with research incubators, and continues up to Ph.D. level. We place particular emphasis on transforming master's degree courses and postgraduate schools; the idea is that they can grow together with the research groups and in the near future we will be able to establish more doctorates and excellent research projects as part of international cooperation schemes.

We made a firm strategic decision to put ourselves forward and participate as an institution in multilateral consortia that plan and develop specific actions for improving the training of new generations of researchers. That is why the University, represented by the Research and Innovation Council, is the national contact point for the European Union's Horizon 2020 Programme on Health, Demographic Change, and Wellbeing. We are also part of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), a worldwide network made up of some 850 universities in 100 countries that coordinate in the areas of research, training, and management procedure. This sphere looks for efficient ways to carry out science, with new instruments and paradigms enabling new global perspectives.



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#### What are the differentiation factors associated with research at the University?

(SL) Our process of constructing a research culture and disseminating related knowledge includes several things that differentiate us. Among them, I would emphasize the interdisciplinarity that is a clear and real part of our individualized support ecosystems; our commitment to management of innovative research; an academic-administrative alliance that places lecturers, faculty heads, and administrators on the same level of involvement; and, to sum up, everything brought about by the transformation of research at the University, something that will soon see us shifting frontiers and taking a stronger place in global research. ■

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