



EL ROSARIO CHAMPIONS THE TRAINING OF COLOMBIA'S FUTURE RESEARCHERS

The University set up a research training program that starts at undergraduate level, and offers young people the chance to build and develop careers as scholars.

Throughout its history, the Universidad del Rosario has unquestionably been a vehicle for scientific progress in Colombia, and the legacy of the intellectual, José Celestino Mutis, points to this institution's commitment to fomenting knowledge.

University President, José Manuel Restrepo, explains that over the years the institution focused on becoming a university of excellence in teaching, yet around twenty years ago it made the decision to return to its origins by strengthening its research agenda.

A specialist in Finance with a master's degree in senior management and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration, Restrepo says that El Rosario "is an example of a university that has managed to rapidly boost its research capacity, and it has done so through a distinctive and successful management model." He fleshes out his point of view in the following interview:

How does the University del Rosario integrate research activities into its academic program?

José Manuel Restrepo (JMR). The University's project led off from our acknowledgement that we are an institution devoted to excellence in teaching, and that it was indispensable for us to become a university of teaching and research.

We have been finding out that a key element is to take on full-time lecturing staff with exclusive dedication to academia, and that we needed to attract outstanding people from the greater world of science while simultaneously training up our own talents. This led El Rosario, for the first time in its history, to

establish scholarships at Master's degree and doctorate levels.

This means that as young people make their life plans they need just one overriding priority: research. As a result, we developed a research training program starting at the undergraduate level, one offering students the chance to work with full-time professors in conducting research.

What was the role of research incubators in the orientation of this strategy?

(JMR) There were different models of research incubators, since each school or faculty within the University enjoyed autonomy and independent administration. We generate a culture of research so that young people studying at undergraduate or even postgraduate level will fall in love with the idea of creating new knowledge and feel keen to build their own academic projects.

What results have you seen so far from this commitment to research by the Universidad del Rosario?

(JMR) The most significant result is the understanding at the University that research is not just another focus, but a central



SOME UNIVERSITIES MAY NOT VALUE EFFORTS TO GET THEIR RESEARCH ACROSS AND MAKE IT VISIBLE. HERE WE DO, BECAUSE THAT IS PART OF OUR PHILOSOPHY



**José Manuel Restrepo
President**

one. There is a genuine concern that it is not enough to pass on knowledge; we must also have the capacity to produce it.

The Universidad del Rosario is focused on matters of interest to universities around the world, such as how intellectual production functions, how it generates impacts within the academic community, and how society is transformed by the knowledge it creates.

This strategy has also led to a profound institutional transformation, because you cannot aim to carry out research without a library up to the task and without a dedicated and properly-developed publishing setup.

So, as this pathway to training and the creation of new knowledge advances, what else is needed and in what direction should it be moving?

(JMR) I think it is indispensable to become increasingly better-integrated within the scientific community. This necessarily involves our measuring our efforts in the international context and ensuring that our research becomes progressively more relevant to the needs of society.

We should continue building the institution and recruiting young talent that will add to the life of the university, while we train up their skills from the very first day of classes.

And we must certainly keep raising standards for intellectual output, and continue to feature in the most prestigious academic journals and publications.

What know-how does the University del Rosario have now that distinguishes it from other universities in terms of research and training?

(JMR) We have definitely seen life projects dedicated to academia, as well as enough intelligence to define scholarly projects as an institution, well linked to teaching, to the curriculum, society, and to educational approaches.

At El Rosario, we are building a school, and this is valuable because it entails our own unique vocabulary and a special way of carrying out research. We have managed to put together life projects dedicated to academia from undergraduate to Ph.D. level, bringing in all the experience of research groups, and in interaction with lecturers, thus genuinely creating generations of people trained at this institution.

In addition to health sciences, El Rosario has also been involved in social research.

(JMR) What has been valuable is that the University has done research not only in the traditional basic health sciences, but has also focused other areas that have traditionally tended to foment research, such as jurisprudence and administration.



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Colombia and the world have drawn closer through conducting research into both human and political sciences, and even in economics. In the latter field, for example, El Rosario introduced a new school of research thinking in microeconomics, and I could name several similar developments in each of our schools and faculties.

The university has been smart in recognizing that the scientific outcomes from this commitment to research must necessarily seek impacts on society. Jurisprudence is a good example of this. The University now features high in the context of environmental rights issues, and not only in research but in teaching too.

In the human sciences, we have been able to set up a relatively new interdisciplinary project for the Colombian university sphere, one involving philosophy professors working as part of a network with sociologists, anthropologists, and other researchers. This is the case



That said, there are indicators in any process, including in teaching. In terms of research, those benchmarking systems can indicate whether a University is on the road to excellence, or if its scientific output is increasing and proving relevant. Along these lines, I believe such benchmarking systems must be seen as indicators.

In the case of the Universidad del Rosario they indicate that the institution has undertaken a research strategy that combines a small number of research groups with high standards of excellence and growing productivity, teams progressively more oriented to the frontiers of knowledge, with more and more concern about the impact of research on society, and with a desire to display its achievements not only in the academic world but in society as a whole.

They show a growing urge to train future generations of researchers and attract and keep the best possible talent in each specific area of research. Similarly, research groups at the University are increasingly interconnected in order to carry out interdisciplinary projects that will impact the needs of the country and obtain higher levels of productivity and feedback to foment knowledge.

in gender studies, ethics, and social responsibility, which are relatively new subjects to the scientific debate, but which have a bearing on our national context.

In political science and international relations, interdisciplinary areas have been identified in urban questions, national security, and in political participation. Within management we have made a different commitment to company strategy and direction.

There are currently several ranking systems used to compare universities. Do you think that they reflect the state of research in the country?

(JMR) A university cannot worry about ranking systems, because this should not be the purpose behind work in teaching, nor in research, nor behind university tasks. If we fix them to a ranking we limit ourselves severely.

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Finally, what challenges still face the University?

(JMR) Getting research groups to evolve by feeding off other groups either inside or outside the institution, or beyond their own networks, embracing new interdisciplinary problems where they can contribute new knowledge, and continuing attempts to bring in both domestic and international funding.

There is also the challenge of keeping up the drive for a diversified university that strives for fairness and the aforementioned variety, as well as strengthening everything that surrounds re-

search in its environment, and making sure that spaces for clinical practice are really centers of knowledge. ■