



**BUILD ON  
WHAT YOU  
HAVE BUILT:  
always be innovating**

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For vice president and provost, Stéphanie Lavaux, interdisciplinary research is one of the pillars on which the University must stand over the coming years if it wants to compete in the national and international sphere.

**S**téphanie Lavaux is walking with hurried steps. She has emerged from one meeting and is bound for another, solving strategic issues at all of them. She is the vice president and provost of the wealthiest university in Colombia, a reason that makes innovation a crucial element to develop here, though without it feeling like a break with the history that fills the Universidad del Rosario's academic community with such pride.

Lavaux took her post in December 2014 at a ceremony in the presence of the University's president, José Manuel Restrepo, and key officials. In her speech, this professor of French origin underlined that she was at the beginning of a new era of great challenges and projects to develop to the advantage of the Universidad del Rosario community.

In the view of this political scientist, who until 2014 held the post of dean of the School of Human Sciences, the key to it all is 'building on what you have built'. "Nothing gets going from zero; it stems from what previous teams achieved as part of a cumulative process. We cannot say that we have finished setting up the research cycle, because it has really only just begun," affirms Lavaux.

Pointing out the great importance of pushing for transformation of what is already set up, she explains that to date this has brought maturity; transformation is then added, followed by the idea of innovation to turn it into something different.





IT HAS BEEN IMPORTANT TO PUSH FOR TRANSFORMATION OF WHAT HAS BEEN SET UP, OF THE MATURITY SO FAR ACHIEVED, AND TO ADD TRANSFORMATION, THE NOTION OF INNOVATION TO TURN IT INTO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.” - STÉPHANIE LAVAUX

Along this route, one aim was to boost the University’s scientific talent at all levels and for all members of the academic community. This has translated, for example, into grants for young PhD students (research scholarships and graduate assistantships). This has seen the University seek innovative ways to keep supporting professorial science talent through grants for teaching and research stays, internships in innovative projects, and for field work, among other experiences. More than 30 grants have been handed out in the last year. “This means a tremendous added value that few universities in Colombia have,” she adds.

Added to this is the idea of attracting new talent through initiatives such as associate professorship programs, which have helped create far stronger links between researchers. The University has also transformed its administrative processes and “today our full-time faculty is just one click away from accessing resources through a services website with a new management information system that gives them diverse options so they can develop their talent and bring initiatives into play.”

### INNOVATION AS A KEY CROSS-CUTTING ELEMENT

The second major innovation, following on from supporting scientific talent among professors, is complementing talent and research with an innovation policy that allows their basic or applied science products to make their way into society. “We believe it is fundamental to get this knowledge out to society in the form of technological or social innovation,” maintains Lavaux.

So, the Universidad del Rosario is now beginning to acquire a culture of innovation. The vice president and provost stresses that knowledge needs to go further than occupying space in scientific journals and actually reach society in the form of registering patents, creating software, or through social innovations, for example.



One specific case is the creation of spin-off organizations that stem from others already set up, thus utilising scientific knowledge generated at the University, and turning it into companies that might prove profitable and make very relevant contributions to society’s problems. In this respect, the Universidad del Rosario is interested in getting leverage from its findings so they impact on society in productive and social spheres. “This is a process that has been fomented in recent years, little by little reaching the stages required for acquiring a set of very solid strengths,” she adds.

### BREAKING MOULDS TO ACHIEVE INTERDISCIPLINARITY

For Lavaux, innovation should arise not only from engineering programs, but also from any other areas. Although it is true that plans are being considered for setting up a Faculty of Engineering at the Universidad del Rosario, one aimed at innovating and strengthening research, innovation must also be present in all fields of social sciences, humanities, health, and basic sciences. And it should be built on the idea of interdisciplinarity.

A clear example of this approach to innovation will be the appearance of a Faculty of Creation to integrate knowledge fields such as architecture, design, and the arts. “The next phase of innovation is not possible without these fields, and this is even more obvious given the human talent we have to achieve it.”

Now, “the challenge for the University is to break moulds, promoting team work that transcends academic barriers. This means innovation along interdisciplinary lines. Universities cannot be merely the sum of their individual units, so we must try to get faculties to interact more. To this end, the institution

is working on building bridges for ‘transfaculty’ relations, but from an intellectual perspective, not from a hierarchical or bureaucratic angle,” Lavaux explains.

Clearly, the big challenge here lies in the belief of many professors that it is difficult to establish a dialogue with their peers in other disciplines, but the vice president and provost has been working with the thought that, despite the presence of interdisciplinarity within any one field, for example within health sciences, it is also worth wondering: “what about achieving interdisciplinarity between fields of knowledge?”

The virtue in this reflection that chimes so well with the Universidad del Rosario is that through interdisciplinarity something more than discourse is achieved. Academics do not just have the idea; they actually develop it. There are subjects whose essence means they should be dealt with by different disciplines so that each one can produce knowledge within its own discipline, but also for consideration in a global sense with other fields of knowledge.

In order to be consistent with this concept, and with the belief that both the Universidad del Rosario and Colombia might be world leaders in the so-called ‘global’ sphere, ‘interfaculty’ academic units were set up to foment joint reflection. To provide a framework for this, the University took the UN Sustainable Development Goals (which are the result of the agreement reached by UN member states, leading to the Declaration of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets) and from these made a selection of those the University identified as most in line with its talent.

Using a dynamic typical of entrepreneurship, they initiated *start-up academic units* to tackle global challenges from local

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The Universidad del Rosario supports its professors’ talent in science.

angles. This is how the University and its faculties and professors came up with initiatives such as JANUS, the Group for Interdisciplinary Studies on Peace, Conflict and the Postconflict Period; Tic Tank, a think-tank for promoting technological innovation at the service of the public through consultation processes and involving mathematicians and lecturers in law and economics. A similar process was used for setting up initiatives related to climate change, democracy, gender, and an analogous think tank on ageing, the latter currently at an incipient stage.

As Lavaux sees it, one of the ways to support all this right now will involve strengthening the administrative area to turn it into a fortress for greater efficiency in serving research. “These processes are stages of maturity, and our administrators are successfully transforming these processes to turn them into important and efficient support structures for research, teaching, and outreach.”

Stéphanie Lavaux is using these methods in her approach to research routes and new challenges, helping the Universidad del Rosario to keep building projects and contributing—as it has done constantly to date—new and pertinent knowledge for Colombian society and the rest of the world. ■