

Towards a University of the Future

The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) is the nation's most important center of higher education. Currently in the midst of a period of reform, the UNAM is trying to make changes that will allow it to meet Mexico's new needs as we move towards the close of the century. There is no lack of variety in the opinions about exactly what changes the University should make. Thus, *Voices* presents this series of articles by outstanding scholars and members of the University community. They are meant to explain some of the basic facts about this great University, its current role in Mexican society, the student protests on campuses during late 1986 and the first months of 1987, as well as ideas on the future of teaching and research

Important Dates in the University's History

- 1551 Sept. 21: Foundation of the Royal Pontifical University of Mexico.
- 1823: Establishment of the National Pontifical University.
- 1910: Opening of the National University of Mexico, through the efforts of the distinguished historian, educator and sociologist Don Justo Sierra.
- 1929 July 22: University autonomy granted; the National University becomes the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).
- 1953: The UNAM takes up residence in its present main campus site of University City, located in the south of Mexico City.
- 1970: Establishment of the first Sciences and Humanities High School (CCH).¹

UNAM, One of the Oldest Universities in the Americas

The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) goes back to 1551, when the Royal Pontifical University of Mexico was founded. This makes it, along with the University of Peru, the oldest institute of higher learning in the Americas.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the University was governed by the Spanish colonial administration. With independence, it became involved in the power struggles of the different factions seeking to gain the upper hand in the new nation's politics.

The 1867 Liberal Party triumph meant important reforms for national education. Especially significant was the boost given to high school education with the founding of the National Preparatory School. During this period, programs and teaching methods at both Prepa and undergraduate level were based on the precepts of French positivist philosopher Auguste Comte. In 1910, the Prepa and the undergraduate schools were combined to form the National University of Mexico.

In 1929, The University was granted autonomy, after a long struggle that had begun

at the time of its foundation. Autonomy guarantees non-intervention by the State, political parties or outside interests, and hence has permitted ideological pluralism in teaching, research and cultural extension.

In 1944, the Autonomous National University of Mexico Law was passed, and is still in effect today. This law defines the University as a national, autonomous institution, a decentralized State body, whose functions are to offer higher education to train professionals, researchers, university professors and technicians who will serve society; to carry out research, especially on Mexican problems and conditions; and to make the benefits of culture widely available. The law also guarantees academic freedom in teaching and research and the free analysis and discussion of ideas.

The autonomy granted in 1929—and subsequently incorporated into the Mexican Constitution in 1980—empowers the University to govern itself; that is, to name its own authorities, draw up its own internal regulations, design its own programs and curricula and determine its own hiring procedures for academic and administrative staff.

Today's Statistics

1.- UNIVERSITY SCHOOLS AND DIVISIONS Undergraduate level (Academic Year 1985-1986) Graduate level (1st Semester 1986)	23 20 Total 43
2. UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL MAJORS Professional Technical	63 7 Total 70
3. STUDENT ENROLLMENT (Academic Year 1985-1986) Senior High School ¹ Technical ² Undergraduate Graduate (1st Semester 1986)	120,243 4,469 136,870 11,655 Total 273,237
4. PROFESSORS AND RESEARCHERS Professors and Assistant Professors Researchers and Assistant Researchers Academic Technicians Others ³	31,111 1,527 2,436 581 Total 35,655
5. RESEARCH CENTERS AND INSTITUTES Humanities Sciences	17 14 Total 31

¹ Including freshman enrollment.

² Includes high school and undergraduate level technical students.

³ Includes, among others, untenured and part-time teachers and researchers, and visiting professors. (Information from the *Agenda Estadística 1986*, National Autonomous University of Mexico UNAM), Department of Planning, Mexico City, 1986.

The UNAM's governing structure is made up of the Board of Governors, the University Council, the Technical Councils, the Internal Councils and the University Finance Board. Ultimate decision-making is in the hands of the University Council, composed of University authorities and faculty, worker and student representatives.

The UNAM has a four-level education system, incorporating high school, technical education, undergraduate and graduate levels.

At the high school level, students may choose between the Prepas and the Sciences and Humanities High Schools (CCHs). There are, at present, 120,243 students enrolled in the 14 Prepas and CCHs located around Mexico City (UNAM Statistics Assistance, 1986).

There are 136,870 students enrolled in the UNAM at the undergraduate level. In addition to the 17 undergraduate schools located on the UNAM's main campus at University City, there are five Schools of Professional Studies (ENEPS) situated in different parts of the metropolitan area, offering a variety of different majors. The ENEPS were established to decentralize the UNAM.

In graduate studies, the UNAM offers 109 postgraduate diplomas, 129 master's programs and 57 doctoral programs. Currently, the UNAM accounts for 31% of Mexico's graduate students.

The UNAM has several research centers

and institutes attached to either the Humanities Coordination or the Scientific Research Coordination. Research is also carried out in its different schools. The UNAM leads the Mexican research field in terms of financial resources, equipment, personnel, variety of fields of study and training. Hence it plays a vital role in Mexico's scientific, technological and cultural development. In some fields, the UNAM accounts for some 60 to 90% of the research being carried out nation-wide.

The UNAM's third basic function is university extension services. University extension takes the form of academic and cultural activities both on and off campus. On-campus activities provide students, professors and researchers with the opportunity to gain practical training and broaden their professional specializations. Off-campus extension activities enable the University to keep in touch with the world outside, and to publicize and share advances in scientific knowledge and the humanities. The University also promotes the arts, sponsoring theatrical productions, dance, musical performances, painting, sculpture and film.★

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The UNAM plays a vital role in Mexico's scientific, technological and cultural development

1972: Open University System created.

1974: First step taken in the decentralization of undergraduate level teaching with the establishment of the Cuautitlán National School of Professional Studies, (ENEP), first of nine ENEPS now operating in the metropolitan area.

1975: Establishment of the Scientific Research Center on University City campus.

1976: Inauguration of the University Cultural Center with the opening of the Nezahualcóyotl Concert Hall.

1979: 50th anniversary of university autonomy.

1985: 75th anniversary of the university's national character.

1985 August: Inauguration of the UNAM Research Center in Cuernavaca, State of Morelos.

¹ A highschool system designed along the lines of so-called "active learning" to allow students to combine work and study.

(Information from the *Agenda Estadística 1986*, National Autonomous University of Mexico UNAM), Department of Planning, Mexico City, 1986