



university of  
 groningen



# UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO & UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS  
OF INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

# **UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO & UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN**

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Prof. Dr. Elmer Sterken and Prof. Dr. Enrique Graue

# FOREWORDS

## UNAM AND UG: A DECADE OF FRIENDSHIP

Higher education institutions that value the plurality of ideas from different cultures owe their success to international collaboration. This characteristic is essential for them to remain competitive and innovative in today's globalized world. To successfully overcome the world's most trying obstacles, it requires innovative thinking from universities as organizations with perspectives and pledges that go beyond geographic, financial, and governmental boundaries.

With great joy and appreciation, I am proud to commemorate the ten-year dedication between the University of Groningen and UNAM. These two have shared an invaluable bond of trust and support throughout their collaborative journey. Thanks to their daily exchange of ideas, both universities have developed a wide range of cooperative relationships that culminated in creating one of UNAM's strongest double-degree doctoral programs.

By exploring the prospects of complementary imagination, both universities have successfully formed long-term partnerships that will benefit the faculties and research centers. These collaborations are expected to yield great results as they leverage one another's intellectual strengths.

While we still face immense challenges in this ever-evolving world, we possess the necessary framework, strategy, and institutional measures to provide our communities with economic and environmental advantages. With these resources at our disposal, we can significantly reinforce our institutions' work. Both universities are dedicated to providing quality academic training with an emphasis on equity and environmental sustainability, ensuring that our social commitment is upheld.

Prof. Dr. Enrique Graue Wiechers  
**UNAM Rector**



Connections between UNAM and UG date back to the 1970s, but no period has proven to be more important to our relationship than the past decade. Coincidentally, this development largely coincided with my and Dr. Enrique Graue's time as Rectors.

Despite my conviction that we should not place too much value on the role of single individuals in moving large and largely self-regulated organizations such as universities, I find that Dr. Graue and I shared two important things: our belief that good science is inherently international as well as a strong human connection.

My first personal memories of UNAM go back to 2008, when I had the pleasure of joining a delegation led by our then-Rector, Frans Zwarts. I remember that Professor Zwarts had a personal friend, the astronomer Dr. José (Pepe) Franco, who introduced our Groningen colleagues to their UNAM counterparts. Ever since, many delegations have visited back and forth. However, quantity does not necessarily equal quality, and in my experience, it is quite unique that two institutions on different continents and in their own political and cultural contexts have been able to develop such a strong and academically significant bond.

In our complex world, societal challenges are everywhere. Single universities, by definition, are too small to solve these challenges on their own. I would like to thank Dr. Graue for his continuous support of our relationship, as well as that of all the other people whom I do not have space to mention here; without them, we could not have done it. We need international collaboration, academic friends, and trusted partners. In short, the University of Groningen needs UNAM!

Prof. Dr. Elmer Sterken,  
**UG Rector 2011 - 2019**



1.

# HOW IT ALL STARTED

"It has already been 10 years of this joint adventure when our Rectors, Graue and Sterken, decided to push forward this ambitious joint project. Along the way, we had to overcome many administrative and academic challenges in order to offer our students a truly innovative academic program. Today, with already-graduated students and many more in the process, we can all be very proud and satisfied with the results. Let this joint program live for many more years to come."

Prof. Dr. Francisco Trigo

**Vice-Provost for International Affairs, UNAM.**

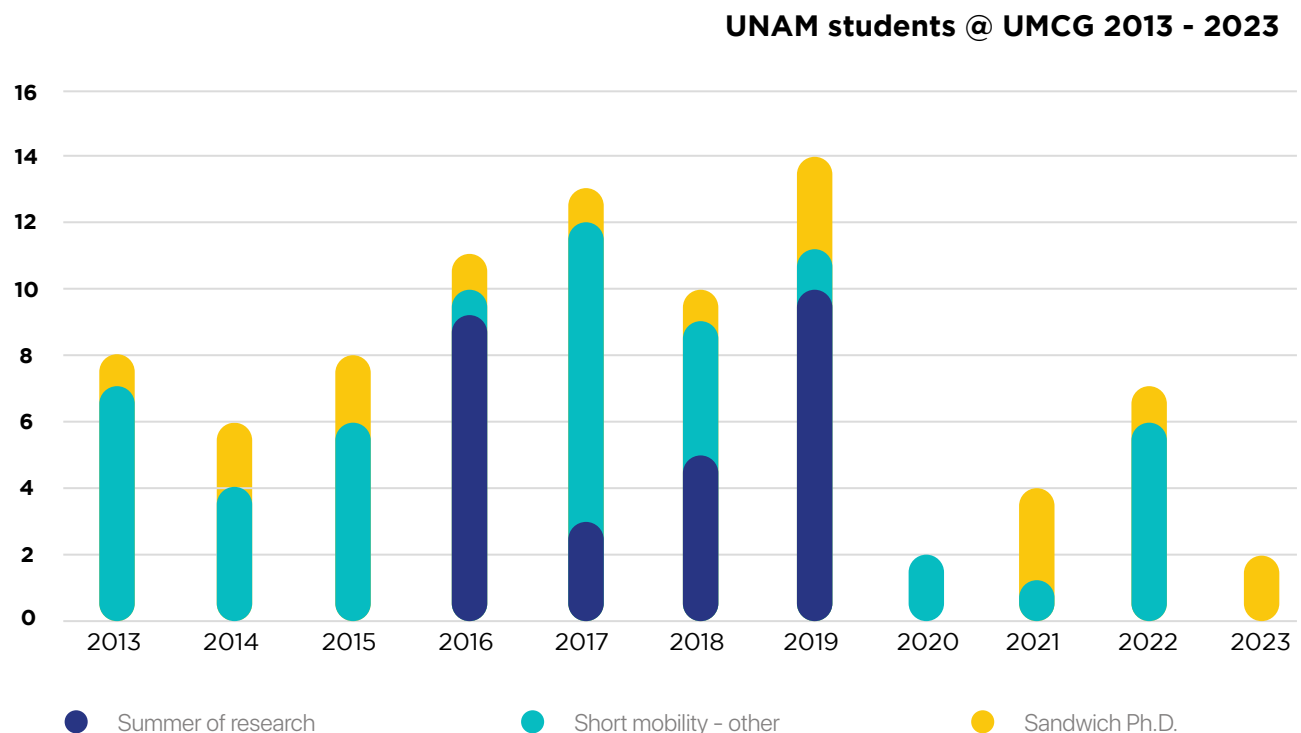
# A Meeting of the Faculties of Medical Sciences

*In 2009, a delegation from the University of Groningen (UG) visited the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).*

One of the delegates was Professor Dr. Han Moshage, who at that time was the Director of the Graduate School of Medical Sciences at the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG). Professor Moshage has a particular fondness for the liver, a hobby he shares with Doctor David Kershenobich of UNAM, who convinced the then-Dean of UNAM's Facultad de Medicina (FacMed), Doctor Enrique Graue, to connect with the Groningen delegation. During a lovely dinner at his home, two new positions in international relations were created at both medical faculties. The rest is history.

# Facts & figures: UMCG & FacMed

Between 2013 and 2023, the Graduate School of Medical Sciences at UMCG has registered visits from 85 UNAM students.



Graph 1: UNAM students at the UMCG from 2013 to 2023.

We distinguish the following broad categories of students: short-term mobility (internships), the Summer of Research, which consists of 1.5 months of activities in June-July, and Sandwich Ph.D. mobility. Both the Summer of Research and "Sandwich Ph.D." deserve some additional attention.

# Summer of Research

*UNAM and UG have supported non-degree mobility since the beginning of their formal relationship.*

Within both institutions, the faculties of Medicine were among the first to ask themselves the question: “How can we connect individual student mobility with types of cooperation that have a more lasting institutional impact?” The answer: research.

Medical faculties may not intuitively be the most logical place to start a discussion on research mobility, considering the professional nature of their education; most students aspire to a clinical career. Nevertheless, UNAM and Groningen did consider that, as highly selective research universities, they also have an important role in fostering research competencies in students. Moreover, there is ample evidence that those who have the abili-

ty to translate research findings into the clinic are simply better medical doctors.

In 2016, “Summer of Research” was born. UNAM and UG jointly supported student participation in Summer Schools, in combination with participation in the biomedical research conference ISCOMS, and a research internship at a department of the student’s choice. About twenty-five students have participated so far.

Did it stop there? No, a core element of cooperation has since become the Double Degree Ph.D. Program.

# The “First” Double-Degree Ph.D.

In 2014, UNAM and UG, through their medical faculties, signed a landmark agreement that enabled the first Double Degree Ph.D. student to enroll. This initial agreement focused on UNAM’s Master and Doctoral Program of Ciencias Médicas, Odontológicas y de la Salud, and the UMCG Graduate School of Medical Sciences. It laid the groundwork for a university-wide agreement that was signed in 2016.

As for the medical faculties, we are not sitting still in 2023 either. At the time of writing these reflections, we are about to accept the first candidate into our MD-Double Degree Ph.D. Program. Moreover, looking ahead, we have plans for a larger project on the importance of developing research competencies among medical students and graduates.



Dr. Jose Narro and Professor Dr. Han Moshage signed the first double-degree Ph.D. agreement in 2014.

# UG Representation at UNAM

*In 2019, UG initiated its global journey by opening an office at UNAM's Coordinación de Relaciones y Asuntos Internacionales.*

This invitation from Dr. Francisco Trigo provided UG with the perfect platform to expand its reach abroad and increase opportunities for international collaboration.

The Office contributes to the development and implementation of actions relating to the six Key Objectives that we have agreed to aim for together. In response to an evaluation of the Office's performance in relation to these objectives, the UG Board confirmed the significant benefit its representation

at UNAM brings to our efforts at enhancing the impact of our internationalization strategies. At the end of 2022, the UG Board has committed to continue funding for at least another five years, until 2017. With this history, we know our friendship is like no other.





Prof. Dr. Elmer Sterken and Prof. Dr. Francisco Trigo

*“I only arrived at the University of Groningen in mid-2020 to become the Director of the Department of International Strategy and Relations. By that time, the partnership with UNAM had already been firmly established. The question of how our strategy can bring concrete benefits to our students and staff is at the core of what we do, and in that sense, I am proud of our exemplary relationship with UNAM. It is an optimal mix of trust, friendship, and science. With the recent extension of our Representative Office at UNAM for another five years, we are incredibly excited to see what the future holds for us.”*

Mervin Bakker, M.Sc.,  
**Director for International Strategy & Relations, UG.**



2.

# ACADEMIC RESULTS

*The longstanding collaboration between the universities is now clearly visible through several academic results.*

Both the Office of the University of Groningen in Mexico and UNAM's Bureau in Berlin have been constantly evaluating these through what we call key performance indicators to achieve our key objectives.

As previously mentioned, we currently have six key objectives.

- 1.** The Double Degree Ph.D., that aims to develop a sustainable and comprehensive program;
- 2.** Non-degree mobility, which looks into how to facilitate non-degree mobility;
- 3.** Co-funding, aiming to maximize awareness and the practical use of funding for collaboration;
- 4.** Academic Matchmaking facilitates the potential collaboration for research between both institutions.
- 5.** Educational innovation that promotes new, creative ways for collaborative teaching; and
- 6.** Visibility, in terms, is a tool to create awareness of all of the above.

These are all represented in the actions we have taken together over this ten-year friendship.

# Matchmaking

For us, it all starts with a click: when we are able to find a colleague at the partner university with whom we share our goals. From then on, we can start working together. Therefore, the UG and UNAM put a lot of effort into facilitating matchmaking (KO4) for both students and administrative and academic staff.

In 2021, we hosted the First Academic Matchmaking and Strengthening Event online. While this event formally took place on October 21st, UNAM Germany and ISR in Groningen had planned for months to ensure its success. Our objectives were to discover scholars collaborating with their peers at a partnered university as well as those looking for potential new partners there. With

these goals achieved prior to the event day itself, it was an ultimate triumph.

Fifty-seven scholars, students, and administrative personnel connected virtually at the time of the event, with several having already been in contact prior to its commencement. Afterwards, the coordinators requested feedback from all parties involved to identify any frequently asked questions or general worries for their Executive Report.

As a result of these events, numerous delegations from UNAM have traveled to Groningen and vice versa. Most recently, the Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health received UNAM's team from the Department of Epi

demiology and Population Health, and Professor Wouter Roos in the Faculty of Science and Engineering at Groningen welcomed Dr. Armando Hernández García, who will now be transforming this into a Summer School at UNAM. Historically, however, more than one hundred people have visited back and forth between UNAM and the University of Groningen. There have been presentations by

various fields of study, administrative reunions, and even peer meetings between Rectors (and friends).

By exchanging best practices and experiences with one another, universities have pushed the boundaries of international collaboration. This goes beyond simply academics publishing or co-supervising projects together; for instance, in 2022, representatives from the administrative staff at the



Prof. Dr. Elmer Sterken and Prof. Dr. Enrique Graue, both as rectors of the University of Groningen and the National Autonomous University of Mexico, respectively, agree to expand the double doctoral degree program to all areas of knowledge.



Academic matchmaking event for strengthening international cooperation.



Postgraduate event at Groningen to exchange best practices and advance in international cooperation.

University of Groningen came together for a Postgraduate Event aimed toward Latin America. Here, Vice Provosts and Rectors responsible specifically for postgraduates met to increase cooperation between institutions.

Furthermore, we are committed to ensuring that students and researchers have access to resources at partner institutions. This involves facilitating research stays for short periods or even creating double-degree Ph.D. programs. UG's Academic

Ambassadors are essential to our success. These learned scholars have united in support of our institutional plan, specifically forming links between students and researchers while simultaneously establishing grassroots support for partnerships.

Our relationships have been carefully cultivated over the last decade, and with continued effort, we are confident that our collaboration will yield even greater results.

*“The role of Dr. Lautaro Roig Lanzillota as an Academic Ambassador and liaison between UNAM and UG is of great importance in connecting UNAM students and their supervisors to Groningen co-supervisors. Institutional agreements and programs are fundamental to the internationalization of our programs; however, it is only when dedicated people with such experience are willing to put in the effort that we can make things happen and bring about results.”*

Dr. Karla Valverde,

**Coordinator of the Postgraduate Program in Political and Social Sciences, UNAM.**





Prof. Dr. Elmer Sterken, as Special Envoy, and a delegation from the University of Groningen visit UNAM's Rector, Dr. Enrique Graue and fellow authorities of the University.







# Postgraduate Cooperation

*“It has been such a great pleasure working with UNAM in the development of our Double Degree Ph.D. program. The quality and institutional support of both our institutions provide us with so many opportunities. I am confident that collaboration of this type will only become more important, and that UNAM and Groningen can play a leading role in setting the standards.”*

Prof. Dr. Petra Rudolf,  
**Dean of Graduate Studies, UG.**

Another highly visible result of our work together is Groningen and UNAM's active collaboration at the postgraduate level. Both for short- and long-term mobility, the institutions are proud of their exchange beyond undergraduate programs. Furthermore, under the strategic collaboration that the institutions hold, there is a particular interest in their collaboration at the doctoral level.

As we have already explained, although co-supervised Ph.D. trajectories between both institutions existed prior to 2016, it was in that year when Dr. Enrique Graue and Prof. Dr. Elmer Sterken, as Rectors, signed the framework agreement to host double degree Ph.D. trajectories in all areas and pro-

grams across both institutions.

Since that moment, the UNAM-UG Double Degree Ph.D. Program has been one of the most successful for both universities. In terms of numbers, for instance, it is the biggest of its kind amongst any of UNAM's partners, having more than thirty historic co-supervised trajectories including three graduated double degree Ph.D.s. It also includes four graduate schools at the University of Groningen and ten postgraduate programs at UNAM.

In 2022, Dr. Manuel Torres, the General Coordinator for Postgraduate Studies at UNAM, was able to witness the consolidation of this program by mee-

ting the students who were already in Groningen developing their double degree trajectories. He heard about their experiences and the top-tier advances they were making in science for both Universities and countries.

*“The consolidation of the UNAM-Groningen double degree doctoral program has been fundamental for the internationalization strategies of UNAM’s postgraduate studies. In the last decade, an increasing number of our students have enriched their academic pursuits by developing a substantial part of their projects in a wide range of frontier research topics at the University of Groningen, and they have enjoyed the exciting and challenging intellectual atmosphere as well as the generous reception from the Groningen academic community. May this decade mark only the beginning of a long-term, fecund, and mutually beneficial UNAM-Groningen alliance.”*

Dr. Manuel Torres

**General Coordinator for Postgraduate Studies, UNAM.**



Dr. Manuel Torres, General Coordinator for Postgraduate Studies at UNAM (far left), meets double degree students in Groningen.

The double degree Ph.D. is now expanding with its first Medical Doctor Double Degree Ph.D. trajectory in conjunction with the Program of Combined Studies in Medicine (PECEM) of UNAM. Upon completion of their trajectory, this student will be successfully awarded degrees as a Medical Doctor and Doctor in Medicine from UNAM, as well as a Ph.D. from the University of Groningen.

The impact of a double degree trajectory on a student's future professional and academic life goes

beyond simply holding degrees from two institutions. For young researchers, it becomes a big milestone, and by publishing under the affiliation of both universities, the impact of their thesis output is significantly increased. Cynthia Fernandez Lainez is an example with her paper "Multilevel Approach for the Treatment of Giardiasis by Targeting Arginine Deiminase".



International Journal of  
*Molecular Sciences*



Article

## Multilevel Approach for the Treatment of Giardiasis by Targeting Arginine Deiminase

Cynthia Fernández-Lainez <sup>1,2,3</sup>, Ignacio de la Mora-de la Mora <sup>4</sup>, Itzhel García-Torres <sup>4</sup>, Sergio Enriquez-Flores <sup>4</sup>, Luis A. Flores-López <sup>4,5</sup>, Pedro Gutiérrez-Castrellón <sup>6</sup>, Lilian Yépez-Mulia <sup>7</sup>, Felix Matadamas-Martínez <sup>7</sup>, Paul de Vos <sup>2</sup> and Gabriel López-Velázquez <sup>4,\*</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CONACYT-Instituto Nacional de Pediatría, Secretaría de Salud, Ciudad de Mexico 04530, Mexico



Coverpage for "Multilevel Approach for the Treatment of Giardiasis by Targeting Arginine Deiminase" by Cynthia Fernandez Lainez (et al.), DD Ph.D. student, UNAM - UG.

*“My experience in UNAM’s double degree program with the University of Groningen was exceptional. In addition to learning uni-laterally, I also contributed by sharing my experience with my colleagues at UMCG. I am thankful to both universities for giving me the opportunity to go through this academic formation, which has already yielded results and has allowed me to establish collaborative networks for my future life as a researcher.”*

Cynthia Fernandez Lainez

**Double Degree Ph.D. Graduate, UNAM & UG.**

*“The collaboration with Gabriel Lopez and Cynthia Fernandez was a real pleasure both on a personal and professional level. It changed our research focus, bringing new technologies and insights to both of us. Our partnership at UNAM is very strong in bioinformatics and has brought in motivated researchers, which has allowed us to do unique research that we as individual institutes could never have done.”*

Prof. Dr. Paul de Vos

**Double Degree Ph.D. Supervisor, UMCG.**

The benefit of the collaboration is also a professional boost for the co-supervisors of the student in question: Prof. Paul de Vos and Dr. Gabriel López Velázquez have become good partners, and they expect their collaboration to remain far beyond Cynthia.

*“It is a fact that Cynthia’s participation in the double-degree program has been of great added value to my own research lines, and has consolidated an excellent collaboration (and friendship) with Dr. De Vos and his working team.”*

Dr. Gabriel López Velázquez

**Double Degree Ph.D. Supervisor, UNAM.**

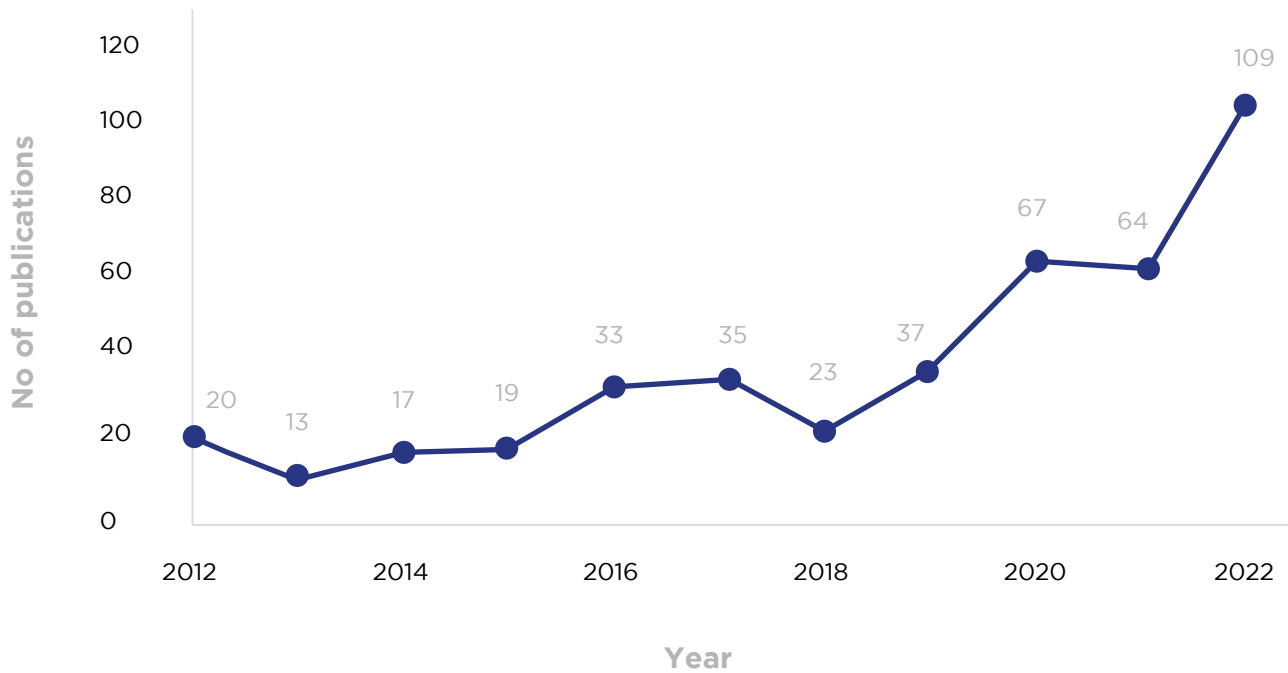
# High Impact Publications

*Ultimately, the most noteworthy result of this extensive alliance between The University of Groningen and UNAM has been a substantial number of publications of great significance.*

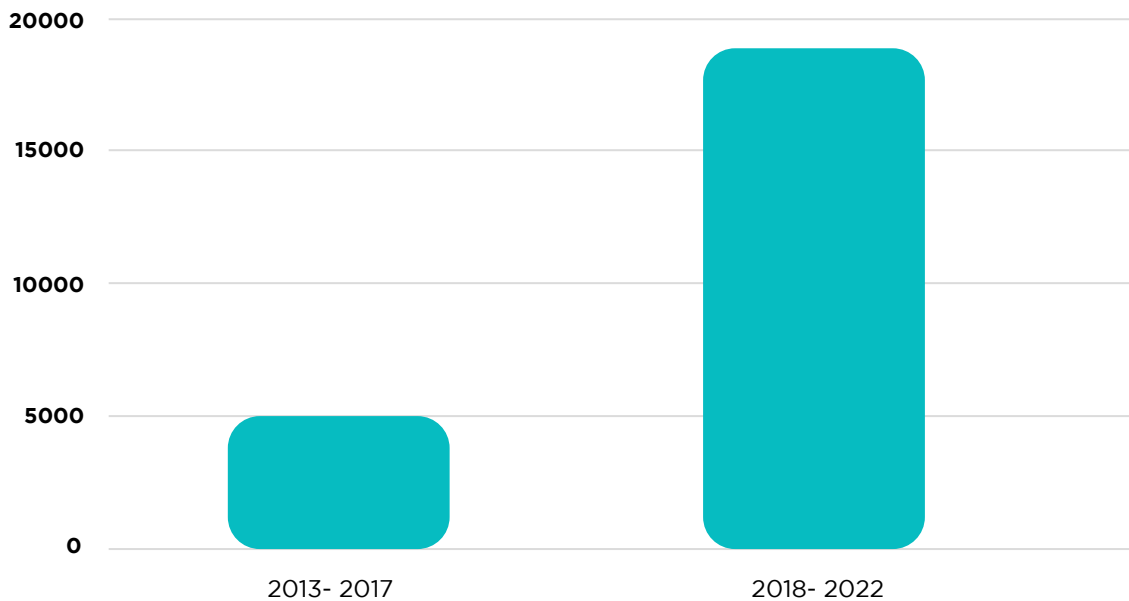
Since the opening of UG's Representation Office at UNAM in 2019, and under UG and UNAM's Strategic Partnership 2020-2023, the relationship between the two partners has further strengthened their commitment to cooperate towards internationalization of education as a broader concept, including joint output. Following this thought, there has also been an increasing number of co-editions with a significant tenfold increase over the past ten years.

We are not only witnessing an increase in the number of publications, but also a more meaningful impact that they have on society. As a case in point, if we sort our collaborative publications into two categories of five years each - 2013-2017 and 2018-2023 - then joint articles published in renowned journals like Science, Nature, PNAS, Lancet, etc., escalated from 24 to 93. In just a decade, citations for manuscripts published in these exceptional journals have quadrupled.

**No. of publications between UG - UNAM during 2012 - 2022**



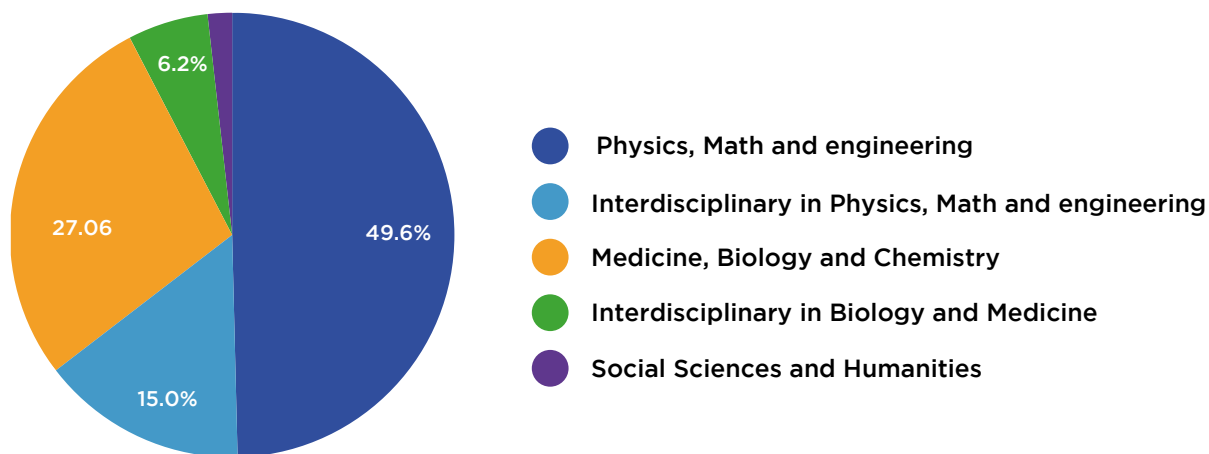
Graph 2: Number of co-publications between UNAM and UG from 2012 to 2022.



Graph 3: Citations of UNAM-UG joint publications in high-impact journals from 2013 to 2022 grouped by five-year increments.

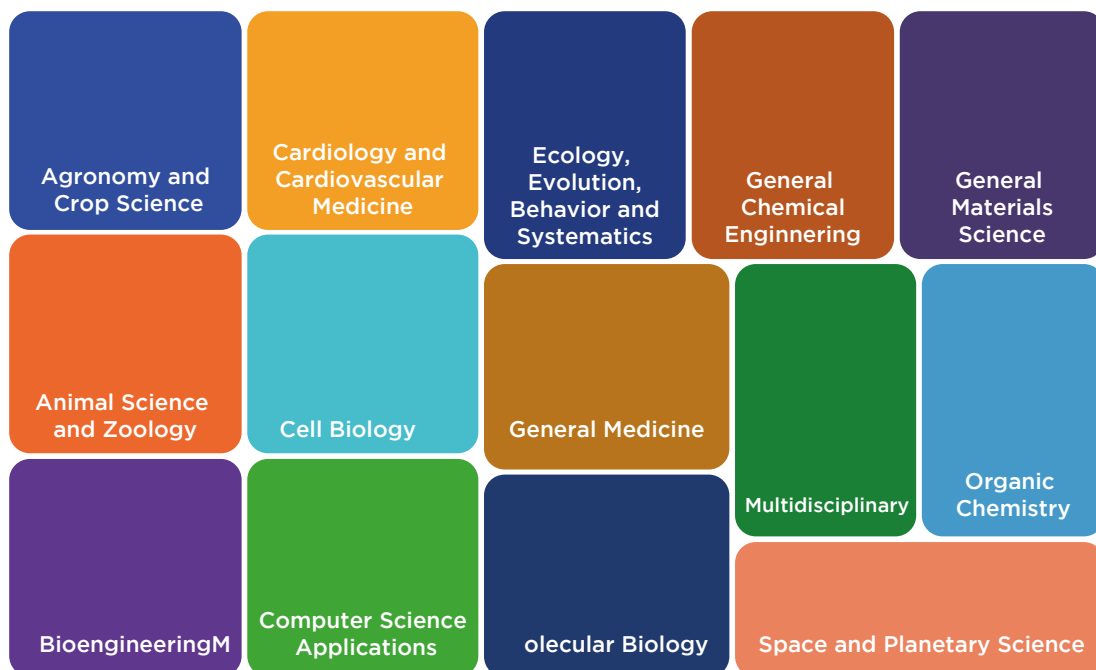
Moreover, in the last three years, the diversity of thematic research areas of co-publications has increased in editions with fewer than ten co-authors. This is particularly relevant since it is a result of close academic collaboration compared to other re-

search topics, such as space and planetary science research areas, which generally correspond to multi-author publications where the institutional relationship between scholars is not necessarily established. Throughout 2019 and 2020, nume-



Graph 4: Total number of joint publications between scholars from UG and UNAM from 2013 to 2022 clustered into main thematic areas.

#### Main research thematic areas of publications with less than 10 co-authors 2019-2022



Graph 5: Total number of joint publications between scholars from UG and UNAM from 2013 to 2022 clustered into main thematic areas.

rous academic fields saw an increase in research contributions; particularly medicine, biochemistry, and multidisciplinary studies.

Our collaborative publications have demonstrated an inclination to diversify in the subject matters of research. Scopus reported that in 2013, our papers were published across eight distinct topics; however, by 2022 this number had grown dramatically to fourteen fields ranging from Astronomy and Medicine to Material Science. This tendency signifies the escalation of partnership in diverse areas of knowledge between UG and UNAM, as well as cooperation on a variety of topics that pertain to both countries.

The brilliant book, *El Futuro de los Sistemas de Protección Infantil en América Latina y Europa: Revisión de países seleccionados, lecciones e impactos*, a collaborative effort between Prof. Dr. Mónica López López of UG, Dr. Hilda Paredes Dávila of UNAM and Dr. Beatriz Vizcarra Larrañaga from Universidad de La Frontera, is an exemplary example that reflects the collective hard work as well as the shared international perspective on this topic in our countries.

We understand that life is not defined by figures alone, yet the data shows us that our efforts over these past ten years have certainly been worthwhile.

*“Our joint publication has been a very exciting learning journey for us. We are dealing with similar societal problems that can be approached in very different ways internationally. This collaboration allowed us to conduct cross-cultural comparisons of child welfare policy and practice in Latin America and Europe, so as to understand how a country’s culture impacts the way decision-making is conducted for children and families in different contexts. We have exchanged methods, theoretical frameworks, innovative policies, and interventions. This collaboration has just opened the door for new research projects between the editors and contributors of this book that will crystallize in the near future.”*

Prof. Dr. Mónica López López

**Co-author, UG**

*“The collaboration between the UG and UNAM, specifically the Faculty of Psychology, has favored the learning networks between staff and students regarding children’s wellbeing; we are continually exchanging ideas, experiences, reflections, research, and intervention protocols suitable for Latin America and Europe. Thanks to the unconditional support of several people in both institutions, we made the book, which is the first result of a joint effort to contribute to a better future for children, teenagers, and their families.”*

Dr. Hilda Paredes Dávila

**Co-author, UNAM**



3.

# JOINT PROJECTS

*it is essential that UNAM and UG not only strategically invest in their alliance but also take advantage of potential external funding options available*

It is unfortunate, yet without financial support, any meaningful collaboration becomes unlikely. Consequently, it is essential that UNAM and UG not only strategically invest in their alliance but also take advantage of potential external funding options available in both Europe and Mexico. To illustrate this point better, we have listed a few examples below.

## Erasmus Mundus Action 2: EURICA

*In 2013, UG applied for a substantial European-funded program titled “EURICA” with UNAM as co-coordinator.*

The European Commission permitted the mobility of 4.3 million euros between 20 institutions in Europe (seven) and Latin America (thirteen). By the end of the project in 2017, EURICA had provided nearly 400 individuals with scholarships.

Eureka was essential in bridging the gap between international offices, fostering a friendship-like relationship between UG’s Department for International Strategy & Relations (ISR) and UNAM’s Dirección General de Cooperación e Internacionalización (DGECI).

## Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters

UNAM is proud to be a partner in three highly sought-after Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programs, which is funded by the European Commission. Three different departments within UG—Euroculture (Arts), International Master of Innovative Medicine (Medical Sciences), and Religious Diversity in a Globalised World (Theology & Religious Studies)—coordinate these prestigious double-degree Master courses. We can take the next step towards forging a connection between our Master’s offers and existing Double Degree Ph.D. opportunities by restructuring the curriculum to allow UNAM to award their degree.

## Erasmus+ mobility

Even though EURICA ran until 2017, the program under which our joint project was awarded funding already ended in 2014. Its successor program, Erasmus+, no longer provides funding for large



EURICA Kick-off event at UNAM in 2013.

mobility projects implemented by consortia of universities. Instead, only limited funding is available for non-degree mobility between Europe and other regions of the world. Nevertheless, UNAM and UG try to make the best of things. Since 2015, the National Erasmus Agency has awarded an average of nearly 9% of its annual budget available in The Netherlands for collaboration with Latin America to the UNAM-UG collaboration. This represents a total of approximately 125 thousand euros, for 25 scholarships, that has been awarded to our partnership.

## **Collaboration with CONACYT**

UG has proudly been in partnership with the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT) for over 10 years, providing funding to Ph.D. students. With Groningen being far and away the most popular destination amongst Mexican Ph.D. hopefuls

in The Netherlands, it's clear that our institution is one of utmost esteem. Furthermore, in addition to CONACYT's monthly stipend, UG offers selected candidates a supplementary allowance for their scholarship which is on par with that of Ph.D. students (estimated at €2.000 net come 2023). This enables doctoral researchers the opportunity to concentrate solely on their research while they remain enrolled at UG.

In addition to UG's ongoing efforts to renew its alliance with CONACYT in order to support this group of students, we have started placing more emphasis on the collaborative funding of Sandwich Ph.D. scholars participating in the Double Degree Ph.D. program. By opting for a two-year Ph.D. program abroad, CONACYT has found an inventive yet sustainable solution to brain drain. Not only is there less investment required from the Mexican university, but the student also remains linked and connected with their home institution. The main goal of this collaboration between UNAM and UG lies in expanding its impact beyond just individuals;

## **Strategic Partnership Framework**

they want to foster sustained research collaborations among academics.

In 2021, the UG Board set a historic precedent by selecting nine non-European partners for its Strategic Partnership Framework. The foundation of this framework is the notion that commitment, selectivity, and reciprocity are all imperative components of internationalization policies that seek to meaningfully add value to education and research. During the pilot phase of this project, from 2022 to 2024, UG promised to provide seed funding for joint ventures with UNAM. We anticipate that financing will remain after this time frame due to our ongoing success and our ability to submit positive reports back to the UG Board which, in turn, has committed itself to continue funding its Representative Office at UNAM until 2027.

4.

# THE FUTURE?

*Despite the many distinctions in culture, history, and context, UNAM and UG have formed a cooperative relationship for over a decade.*

The backing of our Rectors is essential for achieving successful partnerships, but it's not enough to just have a desire from the top-down. These bonds must be nurtured and sustained in order to endure and thrive over time. It is paramount that those closest to the heart of universities – research and education – should be the recipients of benefit. Our presence here today, celebrating our strategic partnership, expresses how successful we have been at achieving this objective.

However, is this the end? Is there nothing more to grow and advance upon? Absolutely not. The world and its organizations are ever-changing; they never remain stagnant or still. In the future, what can we expect? As coordinators of international relations, how effectively can we craft our policies to create ongoing beneficial conditions and opportunities for academics and students alike?

# Back to basics

*Since the launch of EURICA in 2013, we've seen a distinct apprehension when it comes to discussing internationalization.*

It's clear that many see this process as complex and at times intimidating.

This response suggests a sentiment of "What do you mean? I'm already international, doing internationally-renowned research - why would I need you?" Although we recognize the recent trend to reject all things global and international, we strongly believe that any major societal issues can't be resolved in isolation. We must look at them from a larger perspective if real progress is to be made.

However, it does lead us to three starting points we propose we should *always* consider:

- 1.** Not everyone is cut out for the difficult task of devising and executing internationalization strategies – and that is *perfectly fine*.
- 2.** Internationalization strategies should create extraordinary opportunities for academic staff and students to explore avenues they may not have considered before.
- 3.** Taking a targeted approach means that we are careful in regard to how and where we spend our time. Since there is much beyond our control, this should become an intentional decision – both what tasks are worth investing in and which ones aren't.

Keeping this in mind, our group has identified the following substantial opportunities that internationalization coordinators can seize upon:

#### **A. ELIMINATING OBSTACLES**

Overcoming hurdles might appear to be a mundane, uninspiring task. Yet it's essential for making progress and achieving success. The truth of the matter is that our institutional systems, particularly in terms of legal and administrative structures, are not designed to unlock the potential internationalization can bring. This means we cannot fully capitalize on its advantages for institutions and societies alike.

Here are a few concrete examples:

- Streamlining and automating institutional working processes allows for a more efficient way of collaborating, eliminating the need to manually assess each case. With this approach, there is no longer any requirement for time-consuming manual labor.
- To foster continued growth, CONACYT should consider specific structures to include Ph.D. collaboration and UNAM-UG could provide joint support for initiatives that are prioritized by both institutions.
- By organizing cooperative programs that are acknowledged by national accreditation bodies and developing roadmaps to attain them, we can offer considerable value.

#### **B. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND EMBRACING INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES**

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, universities have been forced to rapidly adopt new technologies for teaching and learning. Even without funds available for international travel, connecting with people from all around the world is now simpler than ever before. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Virtual Exchange are just two examples.

Moreover, there are ample possibilities to cultivate tighter links between short-term mobility (non-degree) and talent discovery for joint degree program enrollment. Ultimately, these pathways could be implemented in a mutually beneficial arrangement over time. We have the chance to expand our exchange mobility opportunities with shorter, intensive onsite programs such as Summer Schools - even better if they are conducted jointly.

The issue at hand is that creating new courses can be a time-consuming endeavor for academics; nonetheless, this does not mean that no progress has been made in this area. For example, each year UG funds the creation of several new seasonal schools, and its faculties have successfully applied for financial support to create tens of Virtual Exchange projects from the Dutch Ministry of Education.

Given that our Strategic Partners are not involved in the production or access of these courses, we propose two distinct paths forward.



- Pool internal and external resources for new virtual/short courses, so that it becomes more attractive for staff to develop these within the context of the UNAM-UG cooperation.
- Recognize the immense capacity of non-degree mobility to find and nurture talent within the UNAM-UG partnership, which can then be materialized in subsequent degree enrollment.

### C. HIGHLIGHTING OUR EFFORTS AND GARNERING SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE NETWORKS

As we go, creating more and better visibility for our Partnership is also a definite priority.

- In order to facilitate meaningful connections, we prioritize connecting interested academics from both sides (what we call “academic matchmaking”). It is relatively limited what international coordinators can contribute in terms of support for joint applications to research funding since these are typically science-focused. Our hope is that establishing additional high-quality research partnerships based on synergy will open the door to greater access to research funding in Mexico, the Netherlands, and throughout Europe.
- On an external level, both UNAM and UG are internationally renowned institutions; particularly, UNAM is also an authority within the wider region. The UNAM-UG cooperation has the potential to become exemplary to

external stakeholders, especially if we manage to move beyond the internal barriers mentioned. (2). If that happens, we will have the potential to jointly support the adaptation of national systems and policies so they can optimally contribute to international collaboration and, ultimately, good science.

# Concluding remarks

We have crafted this categorization as a way to bring order to the chaos of experiences, opportunities, and obstacles that we have encountered during our ten-year journey together. Of course, this is merely an arbitrary attempt by two colleagues — who are also friends — to make sense of it all. It is, by definition, non-exhaustive, but we do hope that we have been able to make a case for the idea we presented at the beginning: that the UNAM-UG partnership is truly strategic. At the same time, we have to be careful to invest time and effort to remain relevant.

In our line of work, we frequently use the word “strategic”, but we may not always be reflecting enough on its true meaning. It may be exciting not to know where we’re headed, but we need to consider that this is not about us. Strategies, by definition, are long-term and serve to provide structure to things that are far beyond us. We hope that, through these reflections, we have contributed – however small – to the future quality of education and research at our universities.

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