

# Letter from the Director

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## The Myth of Research

It is clear that universities must contribute to scientific development of countries. The transformation of the learning and teaching process has become urgent in Colombian universities, since the enactment of the Law 30 of 1992 (Ley 30 de 1992). It is expected to go from passive students that just memorize- in most of the cases- to students that are more active in the absorption of knowledge.

However, that would suppose a change of professors' mentality, so they should stop being simple class "dictators", in order to become tutors, advisers, and leaders in the academic activities. Nevertheless, the fact that this process has been carried out and if it has been successful at all, still has to be proven.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that this general approach constitutes the basis of an effort to create a research culture, even if it is very basic in the case of graduate students and a little more elaborated in the case of master and doctorate students.

That is why the criteria established by the CAN and later by the Ministry of Education with its CONACES mechanisms, have recognized research as the only criteria to be taken into account in order to grant, on one hand, an excellence certification to Academic Programs, and on the other hand, the qualified registry.

This situation, as an imitation of a lot of things that happen in Colombia, has forced in multiple cases to improvise in the not easy task of finding talented human resources for research; not only in Bogota, Medellin, Cali and Barranquilla, but also in universities of regions with fewer resources.

A common complain in our country regarding doctorate programs, is that it is not easy to find one in our surroundings and that the cost of obtaining a doctorate degree and hiring a person with such degree, exceeds in a significant amount the budget of several universities.

For best or for worst, nowadays, most universities spend their budgets in creating different research groups in their academic units, without obtaining the expected results. This, as consequence of the

new policies of Colciencias, in the sense that nowadays research is expected to show “products of new knowledge”, such as patented products, utility models, registered products (software, new varieties of animals or vegetables, registered designs), and technical rules based on research results, among others.

After consulting patent headings, the Observatory of Colombian Universities, asserted that: “In 2008, 155 patents were granted, of which 127 are from individuals that do not reside in the country, meaning, transnational corporations that want to protect their products. Many scholars do not even know the procedure of how to obtain a patent”.

However, the aforementioned issues are not the only ones that have to be analyzed. Another issue that raises question marks is the one regarding postgraduate students. These students in Colombia normally hold a full-time job. Therefore, labor, economic and family efforts should be taken with the purpose to successfully finish their studies. Due to these circumstances, there is neither the tradition nor the possibility of scholarships that allow students to focus only in studying. At most, students obtain a financing in tuition costs.

This situation is not compatible with a serious doctorate program or even with a research masters program; at least as demanded by prestigious universities elsewhere.

Therefore, the time dedicated to academy is marginal, incompatible with research required by high levels in academy, thus a great doubt arises: Do students enrolled in specialization programs –applicable in Colombia– have vocation, time and interest in doing research? We seriously doubt it. However, CONACES’ academic arbitrators insist in this matter. This is an issue of academic policy that the Ministry of Education should clearly define.