ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF
RESEARCH IN THE COLLEGE OF PHILOSOPHY AND LETTERS
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL (COSTA RICA)

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1. BACKGROUND

The College of Philosophy and Letters is one of the founding Colleges of the Universidad Nacional (UNA by its Spanish acronym), Costa Rica, which was established in 1973. Originally, it was almost the only one in charge of developing the humanistic areas of our University. It was responsible for cultivating the arts and education, while the necessary specialized centers were created, in accordance with the University’s Organic Statute. At present, the College of Philosophy and Letters is composed of the following Schools and Institutes:

- School of Library and Documentation Sciences
- Ecumenical School of Religion Sciences
- School of Philosophy
- Latin American Studies Institute
- Institute for Women's Studies
- School of Literature and Language Sciences

Our continuous effort in different fields has resulted in a significant, top-level academic production and in undergraduate and graduate programs that include almost all the strategic focal points defined by the academic community: Philosophy, Culture, Central American and Spanish-American Literature, Translation, General and Applied Linguistics, Information Organization, Gender Studies, Religion and Society, Ethics, Human Rights and Latin American Studies.
The following are the graduate programs offered by College:

- Regional Master’s Degree in Women's Studies
- Master’s Degree in Domestic Violence and Gender
- Master’s Degree in Cultural Central American Studies
- Master’s Degree in English-Spanish Translation
- Master's Degree in Human Rights and Peace Education
- Master’s Degree in Latin American Studies
- Master’s Degree in Theological Studies
- Master's Degree in Second Languages and Culture
- Master’s Degree in Bioethics

Two of the four doctoral programs offered by the Universidad Nacional are part of our academic fields:

- Doctoral Program in Latin American Studies with a specialization in Latin American Thought
- Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Letters and Arts in Central America with a specialization in Literature, Linguistics and Artistic Culture.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The importance of this analysis is based on the possibility to understand and study our College and plan the future upon identifying the main characteristics of the College's outline, identity and “traditional” line of research. This study will also make it possible to identify changes of direction and include scientific indicators in future projects for measuring outcomes and achievements; particularly in those projects related to the generation of knowledge, implications of knowledge in the scientific communication contexts and the use of specific methodologies in the College's areas of knowledge.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. Conduct an assessment to have an overview of research in our College from 2007 to 2011, using the appropriate methods and techniques for measuring our contribution to the development of knowledge.
2. Identify the communication media used in our College to disseminate research results.
3. Identify the procedures used to make projections, based on the information and analysis processes currently available for decision-making.
4. Identify the existence and application of national and international standards to measure the research activity in the College.

4. **FOCUS OF STUDY, INDIVIDUALS AND INFORMATION SOURCES**

The focus of this study is the research activity evidenced in the research projects conducted by the College of Philosophy and Letters in the last five years. This study will contribute to determine the characteristics, identify the methodology used and describe the advancement of such research activity. In addition, it will make it possible to recognize and document not only the University’s intellectual contributions, but also unattended scenarios and pending commitments.

The following individuals and information sources were considered to determine the focus of this study:

Information was obtained from 30 analysis sessions conducted in 2011, with an average of 6 participants per project (the information sources): a) the academic members responsible for the project; b) Director or Assistant Director of the academic unit; c) representative of the Office of the Vice-president for Research; d) two reviewers; d) Associate Dean of the College (coordinator of the session).

The documentation used included 106 programs, projects and academic activities available in three types of documents: a) Brochures with a description of the project including title, term, type of approval, objectives, person responsible for the project and participants, justification, outcomes and abstract; b) Progress reports; c) Systematization or final reports.

The following helped to define the sample:
- Review of program, project and academic activity catalogs (2007-2011)
- Analysis of the research project designs (2007-2011) found in the catalogs. This 5-year information was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and a database, according to the following variables: a) term; b) type of project; c) number of participants; d) objectives; e) outcomes and/or results, f) achievement indicators; g) abstract.
Such data was compared to the current data of 2012 to have a historical reference. This will be very useful for decision-making, considering the opportunity to propose a five-year plan covering 2013-2017, which is strategically important to the College’s positioning.

5. METHODOLOGY
For the diagnosis, the research methodology used combined the qualitative and quantitative approaches as follows:

a) **Quantitative research:** a documental analysis was performed to identify, determine, classify, organize and summarize the data, and establish the variables. The descriptive methodology was used to identify, quantify, identify and measure the research projects in relation the variables that were used to characterize them.

b) **Qualitative research:** it was specifically used with the focus group, following the procedure established in the “Lineamientos para la gestión de programas, proyectos y actividades académicas en la Universidad Nacional” [Guidelines for Management of Programs, Projects and Academic Activities at the Universidad Nacional], which provides particular instructions to conduct the project “analysis sessions” and take them as “expert focus groups” that analyze each proposal and its final reports.

A triangulation of specialists was achieved in these sessions analyzing each one of the projects from the different perspectives of the participants.

6. OUTCOMES
The diagnosis of the research activity carried out in the College from 2007 to 2011, revealed the following results:

**Research capacity:** Considering that the total number of research, outreach, teaching, integrated and academic management projects conducted from 2007 to 2011 was 314, **106 of which were research projects**, it may be affirmed that the research activity represents 33.54 percent of the College’s total academic activity. Therefore, it may be concluded that this number should be increased, since it is in this area where new knowledge is generated, and that should have a direct impact on teaching, outreach and management. The following table shows the distribution of these projects according to the College’s academic units:
The School of Literature and Language Sciences reports the highest number of research projects: 41 in total. It is expected, considering that it is the largest academic unit of the College, with the highest number of study programs, students and staff. The number of research projects in the rest of the academic units, as in the case of the School of Literature and Language Sciences, is consistent with the number of study programs, students and staff.

The following table shows the relationship between the academic unit and the total number of projects in 2011:

### Table No. 2

**Universidad Nacional**  
**College of Philosophy and Letters**  
**Number and Percentage of Research Projects in relation to the Total Number of Projects**  
**2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Unit</th>
<th>Number of Research Projects</th>
<th>Total Number of Projects</th>
<th>% Dedicated to Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School of Library and Documentation Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical School of Religion Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Philosophy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American Studies Institute</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Women’s Studies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Literature and Language Sciences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>39.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It may be concluded the existence of the following trends:

1. Research is not the strongest area of the College, although it almost doubled the number of research projects in 2011, in reference to 2007-2010. However, it is important to indicate that the reason for such increase was an internal reorganization, through which all the permanent projects were closed in 2011 and reopened for five more years in 2012. The proposals for those projects were considered as new projects in 2011.

2. The number of projects dedicated to research is falling. Research is minimal in five academic units considering the number of projects being conducted. For example, the School of Library and Documentation Sciences has nine projects, but only one of them is a research project. Only the School of Literature and Language Sciences changes the view and has an impact on these data, because research represents more than half of the projects undertaken.

Research Lines: By gathering all the information in one document and sorting the titles in alphabetical order, we were able to determine the relationships and subject areas and to identify the Research Lines, which are shown in the following table. This table includes the original ideas of ongoing projects, their classification group and the eight lines or subject areas of this College: Women's Studies; Quality and Academic Excellence; Alternative Popular Cultural Identities in Costa Rica, Central America and Latin America; Logic; Linguistics; Indigenous Languages; Translation; Theology; Religious Trends and Literature.
Table No. 3  
Universidad Nacional  
College of Philosophy and Letters  
Research Lines and Strengths of the  
College of Philosophy and Letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area of the Projects</th>
<th>Lines (strengths)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Studies</td>
<td><strong>Women’s Studies:</strong> Gender, violence, relationships, cohabitation, fairness, equal rights in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies on study programs, labor market</td>
<td><strong>Quality and Academic Excellence:</strong> Assessment and self-assessment of study programs, accreditation and re-accreditation of study programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities and culture</td>
<td><strong>Alternative Popular Cultural Identities in Costa Rica, Central America and Latin America</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistics Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>Linguistics Indigenous Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Sciences and Theology</td>
<td>Theology, Religious Trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By making a relationship between this table and the previous one, we are able to establish the third trend: there are academic units with experience and a background in research. They have clear research lines characterized by subject, expansion and scope. There are 58 projects following this trend, which are conducted by the following academic units: School of Literature and Language Sciences, School of Philosophy, Institute for Women’s Studies and Ecumenical School of Religion Sciences.

Although the School of Library and Documentation Sciences has 14 research projects registered, it does not show maturity in this sense, since the variety of subject areas does not have an impact on the development of knowledge. The results of the Latin American Studies Institute are similar to those of the School of Library and Documentation Sciences. The subject areas studied in the Latin American Studies Institute are the following: human rights, migration, geostrategy, development and cultural policy.
We may say that these eight research lines are the strengths of the College, achieved after a very careful work and many years deepening and broadening the scope of the research subjects.

4. The fourth trend is the diversity of subjects in the rest of the projects: 58 projects have different subject areas, which are not interrelated or related to the research lines.

5. Qualitative analysis of the proposals: the process of analyzing the research proposals in the College is highly enlightening, but only within the University. This analysis is carried out in an academic setting, with the participation of internal and external reviewers who evaluate the new proposals, final reports and those proposals competing for funding. The project’s outcomes are presented every year in the academic conference “Jornadas Académicas”, to which the university and national communities are invited; however, there is low attendance and no international impact.

The problem is that this methodology is limited to the review and control periods, the process is isolated from reality, it is not possible to document entirely the impact of research in the communities with the form being used, and there is no relationship between theory and the application of new knowledge.

**Structure of document references on research projects:** From the three types of documents used to record project’s information (proposals, progress reports and final reports), we distinguished the following: 1. Identification, term, person responsible for the project and participants, 2. Management information, and 3. Description and outcomes.

This research was particularly interested in the “Description and outcomes”, which includes objectives (actions and achievement indicators), results, keywords, abstract, observations, target population, interaction with other individuals/organizations, and scope including subject area, time and location. Standardized submission guidelines were used for recording this information. The Academic Information System (*Sistema de Información Académica, SIA* by its Spanish acronym) was established in 2010 to regulate and classify all the information related to programs, projects and academic activities of the Universidad Nacional.

The following table compares the sections of the project’s structure in relation to parameters that facilitate visibility and measurement of scientific development:
Table No. 4  
Universidad Nacional  
College of Philosophy and Letters  
Elements not included in the Research Project Reference Forms of the College of Philosophy and Letters, in relation to those indicated in the Academic Information System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of the Reference Record</th>
<th>Elements not Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Description                       | - International identification through standardized bibliographic description (ISBD)  
- International production and academic publications measuring national and international impacts  
- Academic production follow up:  
  o Quoting  
  o Indexing  
- Documental control, national and institutional bibliography  
- International exchange of academic products  
- Copyrights and patent authorizing UNA to use the research results  
- Measurements for control and follow up of outcomes and their impact on outreach, teaching and community development |
| Content Specification             | - Analysis of trends and achievements based on the outcomes and reports |
| Record Content                    | - Scientific and academic approaches  
- Scientific methodological framework including instruments, techniques and stages |
| Analysis of Contents from Documents Submitted | - Analysis of results based on the academic production |
| Identification of Crucial Elements| - Some descriptive elements are identified but it is complicated to be used, training is required, the SIA system is not user-friendly and it is not designed for searching, it is not an open system, search repository  
- Restricted access to information; institutional codes are required |
| Reading and Comprehension         | - Narrow fields make typing very difficult. The researchers may include their documents but it is not the usual practice, since the system is still very new. |
| Access Points                     | - There are seven search options, which agree with the description and content data. It is possible to make six different kinds of searches and reports. |
| Release: International Visibility | - The access to the information that generates the data on programs, projects and academic activities is limited in SIA. The College of Philosophy and Letters publishes and disseminates digital and printed catalogs every year.  
- The information on project results is not disseminated appropriately, it is |
Structure of the Reference Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements not Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>necessary to follow up outcomes and make a subject analysis on them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There are no references on the scientific model used for creating the forms, guidelines, systems and products; therefore, it may be concluded that the inputs are institutional instruments to control the use of resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is no international impact plan to be part of world rankings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Scientific, technological and social indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Legislation: there are measures regarding copyright provisions, patent assignation and use of research results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. CONCLUSIONS

General Level:

1. Research has strengthened academic spaces and it plays a strategic role in the College of Philosophy and Letters; therefore, it is important to promote the planning of programs in order to connect the development areas of the academic units to maximize and streamline the outcomes.

2. These research projects are developed by each academic unit independently. Therefore, it is necessary to design inter-unit projects linking similar subject areas.

3. It is necessary to promote and favor the design of a higher number of research projects, considering that knowledge generation is essential for teaching and curriculum updating.

4. All the research project funding comes from the institutional budget. It is not part of the College’s culture to seek external funding for research. Although there is a special institutional fund to compete for research project funding, the College does not take advantage of that system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General Level

1. Inform about external funding sources and personnel training to submit research projects for funding outside of the institutional budget.

2. Identify the aspects of formal and informal, oral and written communication that are studied in the programs, projects and academic research activities of the College. (Infometrics)
3. Identify the procedures used in the College to communicate the social aspects of research. (Scientometrics)

**In terms of the Quantitative Analysis:**

1. Adapt institutional formats to international formats in order to participate in the information services that measure the scientific-technological progress, creating networks of specialists, topics, production and geographic areas.

2. Complete information records following the international requirements indicated in Table No. 4

3. Use indicators to access the international ranking. Compare the procedures used in the Universidad Nacional with those used in advantageous positions, in the developed countries, to determine the changes required, make use of the experience and compete for better positions.

4. Assign an international unique identification number to distinguish each project and link it at the international level. In this sense, it is necessary that the personnel, systems and project formats meet the requirements and quality standards.

5. Studies in Infometrics and Scientometrics

6. Follow-up of research projects from the design phase, to include the indicators that will help to identify the project’s impact.

7. Improve the indicators used in order to meet the following requirements
   a. **Accuracy:** stable and replicable
   b. **Communicability:** with other stakeholders involved
   c. **Resistant for manipulation**
   d. **Economy in data collection and processing**
   e. **Support to decision-making**

7. Associate the projects to the strategic plan and to national and international scientific trends to facilitate the assignment of relevant indicators to:
   a. Evaluate trends and conditions
   b. Compare places and situations (impact)
   c. Evaluate achievement of goals at the site
   d. Anticipate trends and situations
In terms of the Qualitative Analysis:
1. Broaden the community participation in the analysis of research projects: students, academic members, the community being studied and the community impacted.
2. Strengthen the process to analyze proposals within the focus groups, which is highly participatory and enlightening.
3. Have international reviewers in the analysis of research projects.
4. Analyze the contents and contents in each of the projects to determine quality, completeness, scope and visibility.

In terms of Visibility:
1. Make it easier to search and use the Academic Information System. It should be interoperable, visible and based on a “green way” to guarantee the free access to information.
2. Develop information systems on the researchers, associated those organizations that manage such information.
3. Promote the participation in social networks and other collaborative systems to increase the visibility of research projects conducted in the College of Philosophy and Letters.
4. Supply better resources to communicate research results in the academic conference “Jornadas Académicas”, develop marketing strategies to disseminate the College’s research activity.
5. Study the impact of research results in teaching, in the College of Philosophy and Letters.
6. Make a bibliometric study on the documental production of the College of Philosophy and Letters, to determine its impact through global visibility.
7. Carry out academic activities to present the research results among colleagues, particularly publications.
8. Provide warning information on the advancement of knowledge globally, and the existence of similar or equal research projects.
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES


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Recuperado de http://funredes.org/gopher/a/6/6.1/6.1.1/6.1.1.1/lb.html


