

DECLARATION UNIVERSIA RIO 2014

**Key Points and Proposals for
Ibero-American Universities**

3rd Universia International Rectors Meeting

Rio de Janeiro

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The “3rd Universia International Rectors Meeting” has reflected on the University of the 21st century in the light of the strategic priorities of the 2010 Guadalajara Universia Agenda and new university expectations and trends, in order to promote a socially responsible Ibero-American Knowledge Space.

The transformation is integral to universities, and today notable, far-reaching emerging trends are producing a distinct change in the academic world, as we know it.

Thus, notable among these trends are: *the expansion, diversification and renewal in demand for teaching, qualifications and models of education; increase and differentiation of the educational offer and transnational education; growing and unstoppable internationalization; consolidation of new competition schemes and university cooperation; the need for efficient management of generation, transmission and transfer of knowledge for social development and cohesion; the emergence of digital educational components; and the transformation of organization and financing schemes.*

That is the challenge Ibero-American universities must know how to respond to in the coming years and the core of the ideas and analysis triggered by the “3rd Universia International Rectors Meeting” that through the meetings held in Rio de Janeiro on 28 and 29 July 2014, has culminated with a large, open and dynamic process of votes, discussions and participation via a network over the past two years, making it an unprecedented forum within the area of international universities.

Based on this collective reflection on the present and future of Ibero-American universities, their limitations and potential, and the needs and aspirations of societies in the region with an outlook for the 21st century, a common action strategy is formulated around the key factors, proposals and commitments contained in this **Declaration Universia Rio 2014.**

TEN STRATEGIC KEY FACTORS

1. Consolidation of the Ibero-American Knowledge Space

In recent years, there have been significant and strengthened initiatives to create this Space, but its consolidation requires new, larger and firmer commitments in areas such as: academic mobility; recognition and transfer of credits; equivalency of teaching structure and recognition of qualifications or accreditation of institutions and studies.

This strategy requires both a strong intergovernmental commitment and sustained action by universities to continue building the Ibero-American Knowledge Space on the basis of agreements and arrangements that remove administrative, budgetary and academic obstacles that still determine how things are done.

In addition, it is necessary to carry out actions involving participation by governments, institutions, companies, associations and social organizations in order to take advantage of opportunities offered by the current and varied instruments of regional and transnational cooperation.

2. Universities' social and environmental responsibility

This must be an unwavering commitment by university institutions if they aspire to respond to the sensitivities of their time and place, in order to serve as a unique instrument in pursuit of poverty alleviation, social inclusion, wellbeing, development, creativity, the transmission of values, social transformation, equal opportunities and environmental protection.

This commitment is to be deployed through various initiatives and actions, among which the following should be prioritized: increasing access to universities, particularly for students from disadvantaged families; training in principles, values and skills; strengthening gender policies; attention to groups with special needs; defence of social inclusion and care of more sustainable and balanced development, where environmental protection becomes an unwavering centrality.

The impact of Ibero-American Universities also has an undeniable importance in its closest institutional, economic and social environment, establishing itself in this way

as the main driver of local progress in many cases. The role of universities in close cooperation with governments, companies and other institutions and players is crucial for the implementation of local development projects that fruitfully connect training and research with the needs of the environment, while establishing linking mechanisms with the production system and facilitate entrepreneurship and employability of graduates.

3. Improvement of information on Ibero-American universities

Ample and thorough information about each institution and the various national systems as a whole is imperative for transparency, efficiency, equity and governance. The objective is to present the characteristics of the institutions themselves, their activities and programmes for the benefit of students, employers, and, therefore, also of governments and civil society itself.

It is a task of particular importance now that the vision of the overall university environment and the position that each university occupies in it today is dominated by a few rankings that are biased and deficient and sometimes wrongly appear as arbiters of universal academic excellence.

Ibero-American universities, without sacrificing improvement in their position in international assessments, propose working on improving and creating better tools for information and comparison, thereby giving them a multidimensional character that correspondingly reflects the diversity of institutions, their missions and organizational cultures, their different objectives and impact on their social and academic environment.

4. Attention to students' expectations

The attitudes, aptitudes, profiles, abilities and methods of communication of younger generations of students are rapidly evolving, which poses numerous challenges for universities.

The following should be noted: the addition of new languages and support for communication; the offer of training programmes that emphasize values and specific competencies, as well as in the applied teaching component; constant revision of the teaching curriculum and promotion of new qualifications (double and joint) that do not hinder employability and entrepreneurship of young people; and collaborative learning activities and teaching, social and emotional support for all students,

incorporating specific programmes for those with learning difficulties or who combine study and work activity.

Making curricula more flexible to promote student mobility, reduce early dropping out, ensure collaboration with employers and facilitate participation in experiences and knowledge of professionals are also required.

5. Continuing education of professors and strengthening of teaching resources

Weaknesses still remain in the forming of academic bodies and in the proportion of PhD holders who teach, as well as in the availability of adequate resources for education, infrastructures and facilities for quality teaching. Fixing these issues should be a priority for Ibero-American universities.

It is essential to include rigorous professor selection systems, organize transparent promotion schemes throughout their academic career, have plans for keeping professors in service up to date, promote their motivation and evaluation, encourage innovation in teaching methods and techniques and promote the use of digital technologies and extend international teacher mobility.

In short, creating favourable conditions for retaining and attracting the best professors is a major goal that must be incorporated into the measures and actions envisaged by Ibero-American universities.

6. Guarantee for teaching quality and adaptation to social needs

These fundamental goals for Ibero-American universities require action aimed in three main directions.

First, seek a balance between knowledge, skills and competencies by incorporating interdisciplinary methodologies and facilitating the acquisition of professional skills. Teaching and learning methods should be renovated and the use of digital technologies extended.

Second, have instruments that understand social demands, have effective means for entering the job market for graduates and establish better defined plans for continuing education.

Third, ensure the quality of the curriculum through accreditation schemes and procedures, organized as public services by independent agencies and endowed with international standards and rigorous academic standards that act without imposing a heavy administrative burden on universities. It is essential that these systems operate on the basis of trust and encourage institutional self-regulation and self-evaluation, without simply becoming external control devices of academic activities.

It is therefore the State's responsibility to guarantee their professionalism, institutional support, respect for their autonomy and adequate funding.

7. Improvement of research, transfer of its results and innovation

Universities are the main source for generating quality science in Ibero-American societies. To take a leap forward in research, and impact and transfer of results and innovation, universities face challenges of the first order.

They should extend their research capabilities, improving the output and quality of their results and enabling their usefulness in innovative and transfer processes. They must work together with all stakeholders to use knowledge as an element of economic productivity and competitiveness, wealth creation and employment, innovation and social cohesion.

They should establish centres of excellence by encouraging the mobility of human resources between universities and industry; have policies to protect and transfer research results and promote international partnership programmes; and strengthen the capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as their relationship with the productive sector and seed capital programmes and the creation of knowledge-based companies.

For all this to take place, increased funding public and private, national and international is essential. It must be strategically planned to improve the organization and management of national science and technology with the cooperative participation of governments, companies, universities and research centres.

8. Extending internationalization and mobility initiatives

The promotion of internationalization is an indispensable task to be projected in three

dimensions. Firstly, by improving the visibility and attractiveness of Ibero-American universities. Secondly, strengthening the instruments and culture of internationalization in the institution and its activities, encouraging participation in international programmes, networks and alliances. Finally, exploiting the possibilities of attracting students, researchers and teachers.

Mobility is the result and driving force of internationalization and requires an additional commitment to eliminate existing financial, administrative and academic obstacles to go beyond current levels and meet the growing physical and virtual demand with a renewed vision that enables net attraction of talent, thereby fostering both intraregional mobility as well as that of other university regions worldwide.

9. Full use of digital technologies

Digital technologies are causing a major change in the current education scenario, while also generating profound changes and innovations, although at times disruptive, in methods of generation, access, reproduction, transmission and accumulation of knowledge.

Adapting to this unstoppable process of change is an unavoidable challenge for Ibero-American universities that have still not developed, as profoundly as required, a digital vision that covers its entire potential.

Inter-university cooperation is especially useful in this area for promoting initiatives aimed at research and development of models of support and development of digital educational content; promote continuing education with online resources; offer convergent research services; design policies and programmes for free dissemination of knowledge; have shared resources; develop massive open online courses (MOOCs) and networks of knowledge with proper articulation of local and global processes to ensure quality and accreditation.

The ubiquity of digital technology also poses new requirements such as those of creating evolution of institutional collaboration schemes by inducing international partnerships for education and open innovation; or the coordination of accreditation agencies in validating teaching in digital environments.

10. Adaptation to new outlines of organization, governance and funding

This is a necessary condition for the effective operation of Ibero-American universities and a key element for their inalienable autonomy, independence and freedom.

The strongest and most internationally renowned universities are characterized by a high concentration and attraction of talent, abundant resources and funding and flexible and professional governance. These must also be strategic objectives for Ibero-American universities, which must have an agile, qualified and responsible, modern organizational structure, with the most modern management techniques and schemes of management and administration, with effective information systems for decision taking, and which incorporate processes for improving university activity performance.

They must also have transparent management that ensures accountability to society and the State. They must have funding that meets the principles of equity, with reinforcement of policies on scholarships and grants, and adequacy, and more public effort and diversity of revenue sources, including the valuation and transfer of knowledge.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

1. System for Recognizing Studies and Degrees, as an essential item for the development of the Ibero-American Knowledge Space, and in order to harmonize the mechanisms and regulations for approval of studies and teachings.

2. Programmes for Social Responsibility (Social Cooperation and University Volunteering), to be developed by universities, with visibility at Universia to foster social action in partnership with governments, companies and the other social stakeholders and strengthen the commitment of the university community.

3. Sustainable Local Development Plans, based on programmes to promote and strengthen local and regional area sustainable development projects, linked to measures to promote entrepreneurship and innovation based on knowledge, arising from trust and collaboration between universities and companies, with government

support and that of other social stakeholders.

4. Information System of Higher Education in Ibero-America, as an integrator of national systems or existing university partnerships and networks, with the aim of collecting and analysing data and key indicators of universities and providing information on them.

5. Cross-border Academic Programmes, developed through inter-university training activities with a high academic reputation for both undergraduates and graduates, promoted by cross-border university networks and with support for mobility and digitization.

6. Professional Internship and Entrepreneurship Programmes for Students, to be developed by universities in partnership with governments, companies and institutions, aimed at promoting job training, entrepreneurship and work experience, in either governments or companies, with a specific emphasis on SMEs.

7. Ibero-American Initiative for Training Professors, aimed at strengthening the skills and continual training of professors, mobility, and updating of teaching methods and availability of open educational resources, with the support of spaces promoted by Universia.

8. "Ibero-American Research" Project for training PhD holders and research personnel, based on partnerships of universities, companies and government administrations to promote the research capacity of the Ibero-American region via, on one hand, training of researchers and PhD holders in their strategic sectors, both to develop their activities in creative as well as productive environments and, on the other hand, to give visibility and openly disseminate their results.

9. Ibero-American Programme for University Mobility, integrating and promoting the various internationalization and academic mobility activities, both physically and virtually, with the momentum of internationalization units from universities created to promote inter-university cooperation.

10. Ibero-American Digital Space, to strengthen inter-university cooperation in the development and joint use of new technologies, lessons, materials, methods and open programmes, MOOCs, based on the resources and support provided by the availability, trajectory, hold and achievements of the Universia network.

11. Plans for shared use of large facilities and premises, for the extension and the rational and efficient use of a region's infrastructure and academic and research resources in the region, based on a map of the large facilities and their management.

AND A COMMITMENT

The Ibero-American Universities participating in the 3rd Universia International Meeting of Presidents undertake to make known their thoughts and transfer, with the support of national conferences of vice-chancellors and universities and Universia, the proposals contained in this Universia Rio 2014 Charter to all governments and public bodies, business associations and social partners with whom they share the responsibility for its implementation. And, in particular, to submit it for consideration by the Heads of State and Government meeting in the next Ibero-American Summit to be held in Veracruz, Mexico, in December of this year.

This commitment starts within the universities themselves, which express their willingness to develop the guidelines and proposals contained in this Rio 2014 Charter and also extends to government officials. To this end, it calls for increased public and private investment in education and research, development and innovation, to a percentage of the GDP similar to countries with the most advanced university systems is reached.

Promoting and strengthening the Ibero-American Knowledge Space is a priority task to lay the foundations of a society based on knowledge, entrepreneurship and innovation and that aspires, from the best levels of freedom and social justice, the social welfare, cohesion and inclusion.

Rio de Janeiro, 29 July 2014