ACADEMIC POLICY

The purpose of this document is to establish general university policy guidelines directed towards the fulfillment of the institutional commitment which, as part of the mission of the Ana G. Méndez University System, we have imposed upon ourselves: academic excellence. The extent of academic excellence is established within the basic principles of an academic-administrative nature which impose the conditions to achieve it. The general guidelines to achieve this excellence are outlined in the areas of academic programs, educational process and faculty.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Academic excellence refers to the educational process in its multidimensional and dynamic nature. Excellence seeks to improve the quality of life of the human being in all its dimensions, for which reason it presumes critical rigor, well-informed thinking and, in general, an atmosphere of intellectual discipline.

The University System must distinguish itself for offering an education of excellence that prepares its graduates to contribute to the processes of change of our socioeconomic reality. To achieve this, it must strive to develop the students’ critical capacities so they may express intelligent and prudent judgments, solve problems and make proper decisions. Furthermore, it must train them to exercise command of the most advanced technology, without losing sight of the importance of the balance that must exist between the development of their skills and abilities and their full, integral and harmonious formation. Likewise, it must concern itself with the development of the students’ creativity throughout their professional career.

The foregoing may be achieved provided that the University System complies with its function as an institution of higher education, such as: (1) depository and diffuser of the cultural values; (2) donor of the techno-scientific resources that society needs; (3) forger of the educated and integral person; (4) creator of new knowledge through specialized services; and (6) forger of a critical conscience in society.

1. Definition of Academic Excellence
Excellence is defined in terms of the full, integral and harmonious formation of those who attend our classrooms and of their efficient participation in society. By the full, integrated and harmonious formation of the individual it is understood as their maximum development according to their interests and intellectual, cultural, social and emotional potential. This way, our students may act efficiently in, and positively affect, the social environment in which they are immersed as citizens.

An education of excellence enables the student to become rooted in his time, his country and his environment, in turn, it exposes him to the realities of global culture. It provides him a sense of value of things, of human beings, of their own ideas and those of others.

SUAGM evaluates the effectiveness of its social participation in terms of the ability of its graduates to become employed and their productivity and positive behavior as citizens in the political, social and economic dimensions. Both the full formation and social participation are the result of an educational environment that facilitates the student’s integral, harmonious development. Excellence is a value that, like all social values, is immersed in a cultural and historic environment and must be viewed as part of a particular context.

2. Relation of Academic Excellence with the Mission of the University System

To comply with what has been stated herein to this point, the University System has the responsibility of establishing some indicators that would allow it to achieve excellence and that guarantee: (1) the provision and promotion of a favorable educational, social and cultural environment; (2) the implementation of the use of resources, methodologies and technologies that facilitate education, learning, creativity and research; and (3) the contribution to the consciousness of our social reality by interpreting and generating changes in accordance with its historic trajectory.

The foregoing is feasible only if the academic management undertaken in the institutional units of the University System is coordinated and integrated in a coherent manner, in courses of action consistent with their respective missions. This is only way that the System will be part of the effort in the search for academic excellence.

The University System guides its operation and development in the light of the following principles:

a. In a democratic society, any citizen who meets the academic requirements established by the university, has the right to an education, regardless of race, gender, color, origin, age, physical and social condition, political or religious affiliation.
b. The development of human potential demands an educational policy that promotes the development of the student’s talent through academic offerings in accordance with his aptitudes and motivation.

c. Academic excellence must be the fundamental aspiration of educational institutions, resulting in the formulation of attainable academic and professional goals.

d. The student’s educational development must establish a balance between the development of academic skills and personal growth, so that he is thereby trained to become a part of and contribute effectively to his community.

e. Universities must analyze and understand the needs of the community, so that they may contribute effectively to the enrichment of their human resources and the improvement of the quality of community life. They must also integrate themselves into the community, without losing sight of the critical perspective.

f. Academic institutions must maintain congruence between their goals and objectives of excellence and the means they use to recruit, retain and reward the best academics and professionals.

These principles are articulated, implemented and developed through the principles of educational policy of the University System, as well as of the mission and the specific programs and services of each one of the institutions.

In this context, the institutions of the University System include, as part of their mission, to expand the educational opportunities of academically and economically disadvantaged students, among others, opening doors for them to the academic world and offering them specialized services and programs to help them overcome their limitations. They aspire to offer a pluralistic education that helps students serve their families, society and themselves, well.

To comply with this educational service mission, on a level of academic excellence, requires that there be harmony between the mission of the University System and the individual mission of each one of the institutions that constitute it. In other words, academic excellence has as an indispensable condition, that all our educational efforts, consonant with our mission, and in keeping with our fiscal reality, be directed to developing the student’s talent and objectives as a person and as a professional, regardless of the stage of development he is in when he starts his studies. That is, in order to achieve academic excellence, all our academic and administrative processes must be rationally postulated and directed towards achieving that our students be participants of an educational experience that promotes their full, integral and harmonious development. In order for this experience to be fruitful, it must be
tempered to their current and future interests of a humanistic, vocational, technical and professional nature.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

If academic excellence is conceptualized as the institutional ability to develop the talent of its students to the maximum extent, such as Alexandre Astin stated, then we must consider, as basic elements of this model, the academic programs, the teaching-learning process and the faculty.

There are some principles of academic-administrative management that impose the conditions to achieve academic excellence, as defined in this document. These principles are:

The educational program (curriculum, support services, administrative management) shall include all planned activities that deliberately foster the full, integral and harmonious development of the students’ talent and adds value to it.

There shall be a close relationship between the institutional goals and objectives and the educational program.

The educational program shall be much more encompassing than the curriculum of a particular academic program.

The curriculum of the professional and technical degrees shall maintain a balance between the specialization and the general education.

The effectiveness of the curriculum will be the result, primarily, of the quality of education provided by the teachers.

The provision of institutional services shall respond to the needs, maturity and years of study of the student.

Daytime, evening, Saturday and extramural students shall receive equal quality services.

The institutional organization and administration shall facilitate the teaching-learning process (education), the production of new knowledge (research) and service to the community.

The goals of the educational program shall justify the human, physical and fiscal resources assigned thereto.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE FORMULATION OF POLICIES OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

In this document, the academic program areas, the educational process and faculty have been identified as cardinal principles in the formulation of the policy of academic excellence.
It is the responsibility of the institutions that make up the University System to articulate and implement these policies, determine the indicators of excellence, establish the standards of execution for each indicator and design strategies to achieve them in the following areas:

**Academic Programs and Educational Process**

The academic programs and education must be articulated in such a way as to evidence the integration of the academic experience. They must also guarantee that the teaching-learning process is based on the effective interaction between the teacher and the student, the integration of educational methods, the organization of knowledge and the effective use of the new technological developments.

The foregoing presupposes that it is necessary to create the conditions to achieve true learning. Therefore, it is indispensable to maintain a faculty in constant professional development, an effective process of communication between teachers and students, the use of appropriate teaching strategies and a logical organization of the skills and objectives that each course pursues.

To achieve all of the above, it is necessary to comply with the following guidelines for excellence:

1. Maintain a balance between selective programs and flexible admission programs so that each academic program is consistent with the mission of each institution.

2. Design the academic programs for certificate, associate degree and bachelor’s degree, as well as the graduate programs, so that they train the students within a reasonable period of time, with the knowledge, skills and values required to discharge a profession. It is also necessary to ensure that in the academic programming, both the general requirements of the degree and the requirements for the practice of the profession are handled harmoniously, taking into account those recommended by the specialized agencies which accredit academic programs. For this, the institution shall endeavor to achieve accreditation from the greatest number of professional organizations. Furthermore, attention must be given to the incorporation of requirements for the development of basic academic skills.

3. Maintain the academic programs articulated with our historic-social reality and updated in accordance with the advances of knowledge. This calibration shall consider the interdisciplinary nature of the studies and the importance of the humanistic disciplines as the center of convergence of knowledge. When ensuring curricular relevance, the following aspects must be considered:

The desirability of conceptualizing the nature and the major or specialization of the program of studies as a measure to achieve its continuous strengthening and the possible consolidation of courses and programs to maximize the operation of the administrative structures. If necessary, the process may lead to the elimination of courses and programs if their irrelevance is determined.
That the process is an in-depth study of the structure and organization of the knowledge of a discipline of human knowledge or of a professional or technical field. This study will require the command of teaching methods and the theory that supports the approaches of the discipline in question, as well as practices that are congruent with the socio-economic demands of the country.

Direct all the efforts of conceptualization of the major, for the purpose of requiring from the graduates that they demonstrate a command of the discipline at the pre-established level in each academic program, in accordance with the established goals and standards of quality. This conceptualization is conceived not only for the specialization, but also for the entire degree, including general education and its function therein. The purpose of the task of conceptualizing the entire curriculum is so that it responds to the expectations of society, both socio-economic and techno-scientific, to the internal logic of the disciplines and professions and to the development of knowledge, as well as to the needs, interests and abilities of the students.

4. Comply with the standards of quality that are maintained for the regular academic offer of the institutions in the extramural academic programs offered and through special academic modalities.

5. Periodically evaluate the academic programs. This implies that they must be evaluated as soon as one (1) year has passed since its first class graduated and, periodically, after this first evaluation.

6. Review the relevance of the academic offer so that it serves the educational needs of the growing adult population. Special attention must be given to the continuing education programs.

7. Give special emphasis to the enrichment of bibliographic, cinematographic and audiovisual collections and to the diversification of the provision of services of the Learning Resource Centers. These academic resources represent one of the pillars for the strengthening of the academic programs and of the teaching-learning process, they propitiate research and support publications generated by graduate students and their professors. That is why they must be strengthened, considering the characteristic of each institution in regard to its mission, goals, educational program, size, complexity, degrees it grants, teaching-learning process and research demands.

8. Incorporate the use of technology and telecommunications into the teaching activity systematically and effectively. This implies the strengthening of laboratory resources so that they are competitive and up-to-date with the recent technological changes. Efficiency in the use of technology resides in the way it is incorporated into the education and learning systems. This incorporation should facilitate active participation of the students in the teaching-learning process as a strategy leading to the autonomous participation of the students.

9. Promote the intensive use of writing as a means of expression, communication and learning in the disciplines taught in the various academic programs. Attend to oral expression, with the same intensity.
10. Link written expression to the development of critical thinking skills in the various disciplines, starting from the premise that language is seen as an instrument which has an organizational function. Concurrently promote reading and its interpretation.

11. Evaluate and adopt teaching systems that foster active participation of the student in his learning process. The systems must combine different teaching methods with emphasis in cooperative learning, among others, with the acknowledgment that group activity, as an educational strategy, also provides for the development of socialization skills and emphasizes the importance of the sense of community and solidarity amongst the students. This also implies expanding the use of the laboratory as a teaching method.

12. Calibrate both the process and the result of the educational experience of the students for the purpose of determining the “added value” to the development of the students’ talents. The Model of Institutional Assessment shall be implemented and the assessment processes of “institutional effectiveness”, as established by the accrediting agencies. Assessment shall be focused on the student and shall calibrate the educational process, the result and the impact of the academic programs on the students. It shall include, among others, the conditions that gave life to the program and the planned and assigned resources. This assessment function of the educational task shall be recognized as a continuous, systemic, dynamically integrated and oriented towards the achievement of academic excellence.

13. Strengthen the practice of establishing dynamic collaborative relationships with the industrial community, the corporate world, schools and other social and government institutions. Among the measures to be taken in that direction, is the attention to the educational needs of the persons according to their respective work centers or in the university campuses, as suitable for the interested parties.

The Faculty

We assigned to the faculty a role of extraordinary responsibility in the design and development of the courses of action that promote the integral transformation of the student and the development of his talent. This means that the faculty is called upon to establish the proper balance in the strategies that are followed to satisfy the professional and occupational needs of the students with others of a humanistic, general culture and civic nature. All of this must be carried out in an atmosphere of academic freedom that guarantees independence of thinking and expression among the members of the academic community.

The predominant way in which the University System fulfills its mission and goals is through the education of its students. This teaching task requires both the transmission of knowledge and its
construction, beginning with the skills and talents that the student provides to the process. The effective interaction between student and facilitator (teacher) is what crystallizes the education.

To comply with the foregoing, the following guidelines are incorporated, aimed at strengthening teaching and research.

1. A Faculty Development Program must be strengthened and expanded in every institution which includes the regular faculty as well as the lecturers. This program must be in keeping with the rules defined in the Academic Development Program of each institution and must attend to the refinement of the teaching strategies and the improvement of knowledge of the discipline being taught. The development of the faculty must be guided to the professor’s practicing, experimenting and evaluating the most effective methods to teach his discipline and reflecting upon these practices. Given the constant evolution of knowledge and information, the teacher must keep abreast of the development of his discipline by attending, among other activities, professional development courses.

2. The evaluation of the faculty must be periodic and of a formative nature. It must permit the latter a greater development in keeping with the policies provided in the Faculty Handbook.

3. The lecturers represent a broad sector of the human resource on which the institutions rely to impart knowledge to their student body. That is why it is necessary to establish criteria and procedures for their recruitment, evaluation and development as an important component of the teaching staff of the institutions.

4. Research and creative activities will be promoted among the faculty of the institutions. The search for knowledge by means of research is part of the mission of the universities. To achieve it, qualified staff members will be given technical advice and time to do research. Institutional policies that stimulate the participation of the staff in research projects and creative production will be fostered.

5. Scientific and educational research will be strengthened and fostered among the faculty of the Ana G. Méndez University System.

In short, research will be promoted and supported in the institutions of the University System and a research incentive program will be established for those faculty members who wish to develop research projects and educational innovations. Rules and procedures will be drawn up to regulate the incentive program. Eligible projects for the awarding of funds through this program include all the academic disciplines. They will include research designs for applied research projects, as well as artistic and literary creation projects.
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE POLICY

According to the statutes of the institutions that make up the University System, the Academic Board is the originating body of the academic policy of each institution. In compliance with this statutory responsibility, the Academic Board shall recommend to the Administrative Council, the legislative body of the Institution, the approval of regulations, implementation of programs and decision-making in cases related to academic and curricular aspects, among which are the following:

1. Any new academic program or courses.

2. Amendments to programs of courses.

3. Evaluation of current programs or courses.

4. Admission, retention and graduation requirements.

5. Innovations in the teaching methods.


7. The creation and implementation of specialties and new academic offerings.

8. The creation or elimination of new academic divisions, departments, programs or services.

9. Rules and regulations for the aforementioned matters.

In the performance of the foregoing functions, it is the responsibility of the Academic Board of each institution to act as depository of this document to initiate its implementation, recommending to the Administrative Council the courses of action of an academic and administrative nature that will enable the Institution to reach the desired levels of academic excellence.

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT THE MEETING OF MAY 27, 1993

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