

**CLADEA**  
**Guide** to  
Responsible  
*Business*  
**Education** in  
Latin America

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## Case: strategic management of the research at the Business Administration Program of Universidad de Cartagena

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Since its origin, in the year 1827, La Universidad de Cartagena has been involved in local, regional and countrywide development with a view of social responsibility due both to its *raison d'être* and its context.

The Business Management program, since its creation in 1975, has produced top-class leaders, entrepreneurs and businessmen whose performance stands out in the different organizations that employ them or in the generation of workplaces within their own business. Nowadays, its strategic management is focused on the PYMES (small and medium-size businesses), with a view of social responsibility, as stated in its mission and vision, that is specifically related to social entrepreneurship from the methodological proposal of service learning. Consequently, the research comes up as a key element in the formulation of proficiencies for business managers, in order to answer to the needs of the current society.

In order to achieve the program's mission, research is done in two ways: formative research and scientific research linked to the pedagogic function of formulating teaching research. During the first

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semesters of the program, students begin to work on strengthening skills related to finding information from primary and secondary sources in order to propose projects and resolve problems.

On more advanced courses, the students formulate micro-projects that later on are improved until they become degree projects, which are in turn grouped by affinity and can become macro-projects that receive funds from the university.

**Keywords:** higher education, research culture, social responsibility, strategic management

## Challenges

The academic-administrative development of the program has always been in line with institution educative policies, and based on quality process. This has resulted in the “high quality” certification given by the National Education Ministry by resolution 2503 of March 30, 2011, which was renewed by the Ministry’s resolution 4254 of March 7, 2016.

While the research of the Program was carried out by professors, research groups and students, it was done in an independent way, with scarce resources that were not optimized, and generally resulted in variable products with limited use or visibility. The Teacher-Researchers executed their research projects and published their results by means of grants and funds. Meanwhile, some students undertook practical projects on their courses, some of them using the Learning-Service strategies; others did degree projects or carried out research as part of the work of the research courses. In all of these cases, the functionality of this research depended on the personal perspective of the professor leading the course and did not obey a general policy from the Program.

As part of the continuous improvement program, this situation created the challenge of integrating, and making coherent and complementary, the processes and activities related to research in the classrooms, seedbeds for research, degree work, research groups and individual research.

## What was done

The curricular committee of the Program, which includes professors, administrative personnel, students, directors and graduates, designed and structured a document on the policies for the strategic management of the research on the Program. In said document, the program’s mission, visions and principles make explicit the

way that research is conceived. The starting point for its generation was a research project about the degree projects of the Business Management Program in La Universidad de Cartagena; the digitalization of the professors's scientific production, and the classification of the degree projects by thematic nuclei.

The purpose of the document is the encouragement and the acquisition of a research consciousness and culture, through the promotion of active researchers who are part of research groups and who actively incorporate students on the research branches defined on the Program. The professors have the duty of applying the Learning-Service strategy due to it being considered effective to encourage the students' learning by putting into practice their theoretical knowledge. This active participation consists of a community service for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that encourages students in developing values such as responsibility and solidarity.

This idea is completely coherent with what is stated by Martínez (2006), "it is not possible to conceive a quality university formation that does not embody in a systematic and rigorous way situations of ethical learning and citizenship formation" (pages 86–87).

In this way, and as a program policy, research is promoted from the first semester until the completion of studies. It is managed within a pyramidal structure, and is transversal in its working; it integrates different formation strategies on three levels: research hotbeds (with students from different semesters), thesis students (with degree work), and researchers (in research groups). The research hotbeds assist the thesis students and the researchers; the thesis students work together as co-researchers for their degree work, the results of which are used as products for presentations and papers on national and international events, and as products for the research groups; and finally the research groups create macro-projects that can be externally financed and that can receive students from the research hotbeds, thesis students and professors that are part of the research group, or members of other research groups from within or outside of the university.

## What happened

- Excellent provision for coordinated team work by the members of the program.
- A curricular review of the teaching projects, placing emphasis on participative and cooperative work, taking into account the different areas, levels and complexity upon which the subjects and the research activities in the classrooms are designed.
- Launching of the research structure: the research hotbeds specialized in the gathering of primary and secondary information, and later on the students

can do their degree work with the same project they have been working on. The thesis students develop their degree work on one of the research branches within the research groups of the program, in this way generating products for presentations and papers. The researchers develop their research projects with their own information or the information supplied to them by the students working within the hotbeds and the thesis students; alternatively, the researchers generate macro-projects that provide origins for and make easier the work of the research hotbeds, or the degree projects. As an example, the macro-project “Commercial transformations on the walled city Cartagena de Indias: Foundations for its transformation to an open sky shopping mall, financing approved by decree no. 02617/2012” provided the opportunity for seven degree projects, one for every subsector of the city, which were developed by pairs of students.

- Increase in the research production of the program's professors, from 2010 to 2015. See Figure 1.

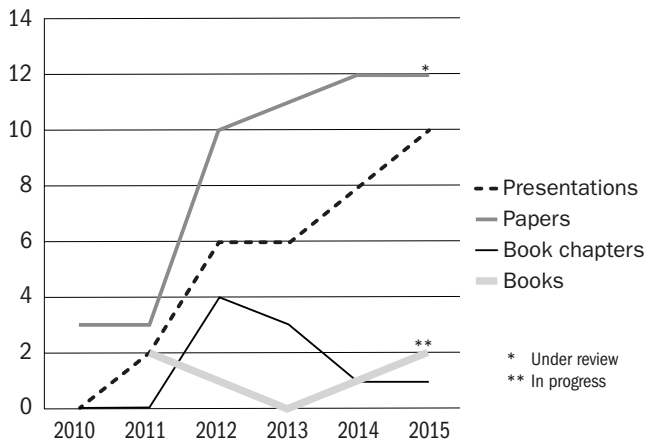


Figure 1: Increase in the research production of the Business Management program

Source: Research Factor Department Report

- Increase in the number of research groups within the Business Management program. From three groups in 2011 (Capital Intelectual; Comercio y Comportamiento del Consumidor; Personas Pagos y Desempeños), it was increased to five groups acknowledged by the university (Capital Intelectual; Comercio y Comportamiento del Consumidor; Personas Pagos y Desempeños, Gestión del Conocimiento y Calidad Educativa; Kapital). Three of these groups are categorized and two of them are recognized by Colciencias.



## What is to come

- Incremental growth of the scientific production of the professors, research hotbeds and student researchers.
- Participation in the “Young Researchers” program from Colciencias and in the university’s internal calls for mobility funds aimed at researchers and students from Universidad de Cartagena, who are members of the research groups categorized by Colciencias.
- Design and proposal of research projects to be financed internally or through sources external to the Universidad de Cartagena.
- Strengthening of the research branches of the Business Management program and the upgrade of the classification obtained in 2014 by the research groups in Colciencias.
- Strengthening of the research proficiency of the professionals formed by the Business Management program, accompanied by significant learning.
- The positioning of the Business Management program by means of the use of the Learning-Service strategy through the immediate contributions to the SMEs and the wider community obtained through classroom projects, the degree works and the research projects.
- Development of the University’s social responsibility through the Business Management program by providing SMEs and the wider community with training and consultation services that aim for local, regional and country-wide development.
- Improve the community’s Social Balance through the improvements to the SMEs by the Business Management program.
- Involve every level of the Business Management program with the research.

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