

**Reform at Mexico's National Autonomous University:  
*Hegemony or Bureaucracy***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) is the most important higher education institution in this country. Although there seems to be broad consensus on the need for a profound transformation of this University, most attempts in the last 25 years have failed to generate the required reforms. The limitations and obstacles for university reform at UNAM are analyzed in this article. The established power relations and the bureaucratization process are identified as the main political and structural limitations for change. The dominating system at UNAM is analyzed in a historical perspective emphasizing the cultural elements in the conformation of the dominant discourse and alliance. Confrontation and conflict within the University and against external power structures are traced in this historical analysis and exhibited as permanent components in the modern history of UNAM. The existence of a legitimacy crisis in the governance structure of this University is argued in terms of the erosion of the prevailing dominating system, expressed in the open manifestation of inherent contradictions through social conflicts directed against the bureaucracy; the permanent challenge to rules, regulations and established procedures; the lack of academic leadership; and the internal dissent and the deficient articulation within the dominant block. Finally, the building of a new hegemony at UNAM (through a redefinition of the concept of university reform, the reconstruction of the social fabric, the establishment of new constituencies, a rebuilding of collegial relations, and the founding of a new pact with the Mexican State), is shown to be a unique path towards university reform.

## INTRODUCTION

There seems to be unusual consensus in modern society around the need for reform in universities and institutions of higher education. In a context in which knowledge and technology change with amazing speed, these institutions appear to be conservative and bound to traditions and ineffective practices. Public and private sectors apply much pressure in the direction of financial and administrative change. University authorities blame faculty and students for the immobility of higher education.

This paper argues that the crisis of higher education in Mexico is essentially a consequence of the lack of academic leadership and legitimacy of governing bureaucracies. These authorities have internalized the external demands for change but have been incapable of outlining a reorganization of academic disciplines, a modernization of goals and tasks, and a democratic reform of governance structures. In their eagerness to maintain control over the institutions of higher education, bureaucracies have prevented faculty and students from conceptualizing and putting into practice these kinds of reforms. Bureaucracies have obscured the critical issues of modern university life. They have exercised power in a such a conservative fashion that the present condition of university bureaucracy appears as a clear obstacle for reform in higher education.

This social phenomenon is very evident in the case of Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM). The weight of this institution within the country and the magnitude of the bureaucratization process makes its study particularly relevant. The National University is the most important institution of higher education in Mexico.<sup>1</sup> The strong impact of the UNAM on Mexican society is based on its long historical tradition, its moral authority, its prestige, and the presence of its alumni on the most important professional, academic, political and governmental institutions throughout the country for many decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Some figures may illustrate the significance of the UNAM. In 1990 the UNAM had 274,409 students (10,351 graduate, 135,409 undergraduate, 3,681 vocational and 121,812 baccalaureate), 29,085 teachers and researchers and more than 25,000 administrative and manual workers (staff). It had 13 faculties, 4 schools, 5 multi-disciplinary units, 24 research institutes and 13 research centers, and 14 baccalaureate level schools (5 colleges of sciences and humanities and 9 preparatory schools).

The UNAM has 11.7% of the national enrollment at undergraduate level and 20% at graduate level. Until 1984, this institution alone produced 32.08% of the research in the nation (considering basic research in all areas) with 39.61% in biology, 62.5% in chemistry, 45.27% in mathematics, 75% in earth sciences, 77.27% in astronomy, 33% in communications, electronics and aeronautics, 42.86% in political science, 23.7% in economy, 28.14% in history, 61.11% in philosophy, 57% in information technology, and 33% in sociology as outstanding features (Martínez and Ordorika 1993).

This University has established the main features of the public higher education system in Mexico. Most of the public universities have attempted to emulate its best attributes and have reproduced its worst characteristics. Although the centrality of the National University has diminished with the expansion of the public system, significant changes at the UNAM deeply affect the rest of the universities and many other institutions in Mexico.

The political nature of university reform and the legitimacy of the transformation process are emphasized throughout this paper. It attempts to expose the myths about the neutrality and the apolitical nature of the University as a mechanism to exclude faculty and students from the process of reform.

This article is part of a broader research on the issues of governance and reform in Mexico's National Autonomous University. The main objective is to identify the causes that explain the lack of structural change at the UNAM, to understand the most important obstacles to transformation, and, by doing so, suggest alternative mechanisms for change.

### **WHY WORRY?**

Since the beginning of the 1980's the debate over educational issues in Mexico has increased. This is particularly true with regard to public higher education. During the same period of time the discourse has shifted from an emphasis on “educational planning”, to the “educational revolution” and presently, to the “modernization of education”.

These terms represent the synthesis of diverse educational policies of the Mexican government in different epochs. During the presidency of Luis Echeverria (1970-1976) there were many resources to distribute. The State invested heavily in public higher education with the fundamental purpose of closing the breach between urban middle sectors and the State opened by the 1968 student movement. From 1976 to 1982, during the José López Portillo presidency, an economic crisis required the revision of public expenditures. Investment in public higher education system was still large but new requirements were established to rationalize this investment and organize educational institutions. The corresponding official discourse was that of “educational planning”. During the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid the financial crisis worsened and structural adjustment policies were adopted. Investment in public education was reduced drastically. This retrenchment was paradoxically called “educational revolution”. Carlos Salinas'

discourse has been centered on the “modernization” of the educational system. As in De la Madrid's period, the main argument is the quest for quality, even at the expense of reducing educational opportunity for many Mexicans. The emphasis has been placed on administrative efficiency (Martínez and Ordorika 1993).

In this context, public higher education institutions have been severely judged and questioned. The evaluation is oblivious of the historical contribution of these institutions to national development. The difficult conditions in which they operate are largely ignored when analyzing their overall performance.

### **Failure to Reform**

From the 1970's on, the Mexican government has imposed diverse policy directives upon the National University. These matters have determined the future of this institution in a decisive way. At the beginning of the decade, enrollment expansion and institutional growth, complemented with political control, were the basic requirements. This policy generated an enormous bureaucratization of the University. In the late 1970's, in the midst of a severe economical crisis, the government demanded institutional change, with administrative efficiency as the main objective.

Until now, there has been a refractory attitude towards structural change that can adapt the National University to the contemporary needs of the Mexican society. By structural university reform, I mean one that produces changes to the structure of work and the organization of academic disciplines, and transforms the structure of governance. I am speaking of structural change: organizational (adjustment of educational levels and modalities), government styles, democratization of power, and academic policies. That is, change that deeply alters the traditional relations between members of the university and those of the institution with society.

In the last twenty years, four different University administrations have failed in their intent to transform the UNAM. These attempts have been: the proposal to change the University's General Statute by rector Guillermo Soberón in 1979; rector Octavio Rivero Serrano's “University Reform” in 1983; the modification of the regulations for registration, exams and tuition by rector Jorge Carpizo in 1986-1987; and the unsuccessful venture to raise tuition by rector José Sarukhán in 1992.

In 1979 Guillermo Soberón tried to institutionalize the changes he had generated in the university. These changes can be summarized as the geographic scattering of some university components, increased

centralization of decision making, the reduction in the autonomy of faculties and schools within the university, and the subordination of collegial authorities to bureaucratic power.

Soberón stratified the massive institution into two different universities within the UNAM. One would be a small high quality university, with an increasing amount of resources, based on graduate education and research institutes and centers. The other one was to be an enormous, lower quality, resource limited institution concentrated in the baccalaureate and undergraduate levels in schools and faculties.

The University Council was set to approve a new General Statute in which these relations would be legalized and a new vision of the University would be sanctioned. Important sectors of the university openly expressed their rejection of this project. APAC, the association of tenured, full-time faculty members strongly opposed most of the articles of the project for a new General Statute. The rector's initiative was stopped by a student movement during the legislation process.

Nevertheless, some of the changes had already been put in place and although they were never legalized they became common practice in the following years. As we will see later, many of the changes put forward by Soberón embodied a partial structural transformation and redefined the internal relations within the university. However, the reform did not address most of the academic concerns and thus failed to reorient the educational performance of UNAM.

In 1982 the Mexican government started to implement structural adjustment policies designed by the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>2</sup> One of the consequences of these policies was the reduction of investment in

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<sup>2</sup>After the 1976 devaluation of the Mexican peso and in the midst of a deep economic crisis the concluding Echeverria and emerging Lopez Portillo administrations bargained with the IMF for new credits. These were granted in exchange for a Stabilization Plan designed by the IMF and a compromise by the Mexican government of putting together a Financial Reorganization Plan (Girón, 1984 and 1985). The Stabilization Plan and the Financial Reorganization Plan established that the IMF would scrutinize the Mexican government economic policy very closely during the first three months of the Lopez Portillo administration (January 1st 1977 to December 31st 1979). It also established severe cuts in public expenditures and limits to salary increases (10%) and public job growth (2%) (Girón). The adjustment consequences of these plans were soon put aside with the discovery of new oil fields and the presence of the oil "boom." The Lopez Portillo government increased public expenditure in an attempt to obtain legitimacy for the Mexican State. The heavy reliance on oil trade of the Mexican economy and the new process of indebtedment generated a new economic crisis in 1982. On August 13th 1982 the Mexican government declared that it was unable to continue paying its foreign debt which rose to 80,000 million dollars (more than 60,000 million dollars were contracted with 1100 western banks). This situation was extremely risky for these banks and many occidental governments. Mexico was "rescued" by the Reagan administration and the IMF (Girón). The rescue package put together by the IMF and the Swiss International Payment Bank, consisted of a new 1,800 million dollar credit by the latter and 5,000 million dollars delivered by the IMF through a Stabilization Plan. All the private banks which held the Mexican debt granted a ninety day payment postponement. Meanwhile, the Mexican government put together a Plan for Financial Reorganization which was part of the bargain with the IMF (Girón). This Stabilization

public education. The pressures on the UNAM were still not very strong. Octavio Rivero Serrano's period as a rector was characterized by its immobility. At the end of his first term as rector, Rivero attempted a process of reform that would guarantee his designation as rector for a second term. The reform was centrally designed and included a long process of legitimation by local and central collegial authorities. Rivero was not reappointed because his administration was characterized as conformist and unwilling to go far enough with the restoration projects of the most conservative sectors of the academic bureaucracy. As a result this reform process was truncated.

In the past decade the Mexican State has gradually abandoned its accumulative and distributive role in the economy. By 1984 the Mexican State was in the midst of a redefinition of its role in the distribution of resources and intervention in society. Social expenditures have been severely cut following the structural adjustment dictates of the IMF and the World Bank (World Bank Report 1990). The Mexican government has increasingly embraced a neo-liberal discourse and practice.

The adoption of neo-liberal policies has generated an enormous scarcity of resources for public higher education. In the UNAM, rector Jorge Carpizo put forward a set of reforms which essentially embodied a retrenchment project argued as a “quest-for-excellence”. Beyond the discourse, the project represented a conservative, efficiency-oriented, managerial response to financial scarcity (Cameron 1983). University authorities tried to comply with the new privatizing policies of the Mexican government.

Until this point most reform attempts had been essentially designed and decided in a centralized process controlled by the university administration. Participation by the faculty and students was restricted to a legitimating role with little opportunity to propose initiatives or reverse previously established decisions. I will characterize these as **bureaucratic** attempts at reform.

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Plan would guide the Mexican government's economic policy during the first three years of the Miguel de la Madrid administration. The conditions imposed by the IMF upon the Mexican policies were: reorganization of public finances, controlling inflation, reduction of public expenditure, and guaranteeing foreign debt payment (Girón). These changes in economic policies and the requirements of the IMF had an important impact on public expenditure. From 1982 to 1988 there is a very important reduction in federal investment on education as a whole. During this period the federal budget for education decreased in -43.65%. The federal budget for higher education was also reduced strongly from 1982 to 1989. The reduction in this period was greater than that of the total of the education budget: -50.78% (Martínez and Ordorika).

The 1986-87 student movement generated a strong demand for participation in the process of reform. This was crystallized when the student and faculty demand for a University Congress was reluctantly accepted by the university bureaucracy and the Mexican government.

The only recent participatory experience for University reform, the 1990 University Congress, was frustrated by the Mexican government and the university authorities during the first Sarukhán administration. The Congress was characterized by an intense confrontation between important sectors of faculty and students against the Mexican government and the University authorities.<sup>3</sup> The result was a stalemate on the most important issues, such as finance and governance of higher education. Implementation of the most important agreements that the Congress produced has been blocked by the bureaucracy and after more than two years these have not been put in practice.

I characterize this, and other experiences in which the driving force for transformation has been faculty and/or student social movements and their external alliances as **democratic** reforms.

The latest attempt to produce changes in the institution also took place during the first period of rector Sarukhán in 1992. It is also inscribed in the bureaucratic practice of retrenchment and essentially tried to raise tuition costs transferring the main responsibility of financing public higher education institutions from the State to the students. The attempt was stopped once again by a strong student response.

### **The Obstacles to Structural Transformation**

Identifying the factors that have prevented the transformation of Mexico's National Autonomous University (the UNAM) is the paramount motivation of this paper. The main concern is to understand what are the most important limitations for structural transformation.

Some literature tries to answer this question by establishing that universities are conservative institutions; that faculty possess strong resistance to change; that higher education can only develop gradually; or that the objectives of university reform are excessively ambitious (Cerych 1987). Other authors propose that universities in Latin America have assumed this conservative stereotype when

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<sup>3</sup> The University Congress was composed of 840 delegates. The democratic sectors gathered nearly 80% of the student representatives and 60% of the faculty delegates. This faculty group was very important because it included a vast majority of full time professors and researchers as opposed to the conservative faculty group which was comprised essentially of part-time professors.

attempting internal changes (Garcia 1982; Levy 1988). Such an attitude contradicts a traditional anti *status quo* external position that frequently permeates this type of institution (Lipset 1975).

For a full understanding of the current problems of the Mexican university it is necessary to realize that the dynamic of the university is determined by internal and external, political and economic factors. The university is part of a social system and there is a permanent tension between the external and the internal. There are very complex interaction mechanisms. These are expressed in diverse spheres and frequently produce flagrant contradictions (Brunner 1985).

The University is part of the power structure of society. Because of this condition, the relations with the government, with diverse groups, and with social actors can be conflictual or complementary. At the internal level, the university is the site of active struggle for institutional control (Muñoz 1989). Problems associated with University governance are necessarily the origin of almost every *campus* conflict, many of which pursue a different distribution of power (Wolff 1970; Becker 1970).<sup>4</sup>

This perspective on universities and the social power structure suggests that “the main obstacles to change are the product of the lack of legitimacy of most of the mechanisms used to orchestrate the reform and/or the incapacity to establish agreements among the diverse political actors in the university scenario” (Muñoz 1990, 58). That is, in a terrain in which most of the initiatives for change are contested, the vertical and centralized procedures used by university authorities to transform the institution are unable to generate the necessary consensus within the university community. At the same time, the authorities have been unwilling to undertake a process of discussion and negotiation with contesting groups to produce a general agreement about university reform.

The main impediments to a structural transformation are therefore political. To understand this situation we have to focus on power relations within the university and the intense and complicated

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<sup>4</sup> In Latin America there is a long history of student conflict and activism related to struggles for power within and external to campus. This history was probably inaugurated by the student struggles in Córdoba, Argentina, in 1918. The Córdoba Reform generated a tradition of student movements for shared governance. In Mexico many student uprisings have struggled for access to decision making at the university level. Diverse authors have analyzed the characteristics of student movements in Latin American countries and the USA. For a good study on student movements in Latin America it is important to look at the work of Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudiantes y Política en America Latina* (1978). A comparative approach can be found in the work of Philip Altbach, *Student Political Activism* (1989).

interdependence with the Mexican government. These two matters are interwoven in a complex system of domination . The system itself represents the articulation of relatively heterogeneous political groups within the university and their counterparts and relations in the Federal government. These groups share similar interests and are bounded together by a powerful discourse<sup>5</sup> and a dominating view of the university.

The domination is institutionalized in a powerful bureaucracy. This bureaucracy represents its social base and at the same time is relatively independent from it and, in some occasions, even from the Mexican government.

In summary, the main concern is the issue of change. It is important to look at this problem from a political perspective by analyzing how internal and external power relations have created obstacles to structural transformation at the UNAM. Power relations and struggles within a campus can only be understood when viewed as interwoven with those in the broader society. The internal-external distinction is extremely problematic (Gumport 1993). In this case it is strictly methodological and the focus will be placed on the interactions between these dimensions. These relations are mediated by a dominant alliance. The objective is to understand this social alliance and the way in which it mediates these power relations.

### **UNAM: POWER AND AUTONOMY**

Through out the history of Mexico's National University after the Mexican Revolution the relations between the University and the Mexican State have played a very important role. Taking these relations into account we can roughly and schematically define three periods. From 1917 to 1944 the University assumed a conservative attitude and clashed against the populist policies of the post revolutionary governments. In 1929 the National University was granted autonomy from the government. The independence of the university varied according to the magnitude of the confrontation between this conservative institution and the State. During this epoch the university government shifted frequently from collegial structures to an extreme and almost dictatorial bureaucratic-political system.

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<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this work I will take hegemony to signify the process of consensual rule through the articulation of a diversity of social groups and interests in the traditional Gramscian sense. Ideology will be the ideas and beliefs which constitute the foundation of a hegemonic process. Discourse is the expression of ideology.

The period from 1944 to 1968 is often called the "golden years" of the university. The Mexican government abandoned most of its populist projects and the conservative groups within UNAM closed the gap with the Mexican State. The new pact between government and University was symbolized by the 1944 Organic Law and the construction of the University City in the 1950's. Collegial structures were established but these were severely limited by bureaucratic and political bodies.

The third period goes from 1968 to our days. It is characterized by its conflictual nature. The problematic relations between University and State and the struggles within this higher education institution heavily determine the present situation at UNAM. This paper is focused essentially on the third period.

### **History of Confrontation**

In 1968, during the student movement, the UNAM maintained the highest degree of autonomy in all its history. It was precisely in this confrontation against the government and in the middle of a great social movement that the bureaucratic and collegiate authorities assumed a truly independent attitude towards the State.

The Mexican student movement was militarily destroyed by the government after the killing of hundreds of students in 1968.<sup>6</sup> These events shocked the Mexican society. People within the universities were particularly bewildered by the experience. In the midst of this overwhelming defeat, the students turned their attention, and their action, to the University itself. In the early 1970's students and teachers from several faculties produced some important reforms of local governance structures and procedures, and, to a lesser extent, changes in the curricula. Also as a consequence of the 1968 student movement, teachers and workers in universities began the formation of unions.

These transformations generated strong and permanent conflicts between the government and university community. The State had great interest in controlling these conflicts and overcoming the breach, opened by the student movement, between the government and intellectuals, most of whom resided inside the universities. This interest generated a two-tiered governmental policy towards the UNAM: (a) a very

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<sup>6</sup> There are many books about the 1968 student movement and its tragic end. For an accurate chronological and documentary approach, look at *El movimiento estudiantil de México* by Ramón Ramírez (1969). Two excellent testimonial books are *Massacre in Mexico* by Elena Poniatowska (1975), and *Los Días y los Años* by Luis González de Alba (1971).

important increase in financing, and (b) the construction of a huge bureaucratic apparatus to control every aspect of university life.

### **The Conservative Reaction**

Another consequence of the 1968 student movement was an extensive debate about the renewal of public higher education. At the end of Javier Barros Sierra's term and during the rectorship of Pablo González Casanova there was an attempt to reexamine traditional values and generate new definitions about the university. During these years (1969-1972) the democratic discourse about the university was emphasized. The importance of the education function and the political autonomy of the university were stressed. The need for an integral university reform that went beyond the inertia of tradition to transform higher education into a motor for political democratization, a socially just economic development, and cultural modernization was promoted strongly by the Barros Sierra, and González Casanova university administrations (Kent 1990). In practical terms these definitions meant an expansion of the higher education system, an increase in academic quality and the democratization of university life.

The first administrative worker's strike (STEUNAM) and the violent occupation of the rectory building by Castro Bustos and Falcón in 1972<sup>7</sup> hastened González Casanova's resignation, a consequence of the Luis Echeverría's government lack of support for the rector of the UNAM.

The unionization process and the progressive trends for reform generated a strong conservative reaction among die-hard power groups within the UNAM. The professional organizations linked to the faculties of medicine, law and engineering, which traditionally controlled the institution, realigned themselves under the leadership of Guillermo Soberón. Rector Soberón represented the conservative and defensive attitude of important sectors of faculty against the unionization process and the politicization of

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<sup>7</sup> During three months a small armed group headed by Miguel Castro Bustos and Mario Falcon occupied the rectory building by force. They put forward an ambiguous set of demands including the admission of students from the teaching colleges (escuelas normales) to UNAM. The group used a radical discourse and presented itself as a left-winged revolutionary association. However, it was completely isolated from the student movement and its known political groups. Gonzalez Casanova assumed a hesitant attitude and finally decided to resign when the government failed to support him. Castro Bustos and Falcon were later imprisoned. Years later, Castro Bustos reappeared working for Guillermo Soberon's political group in the state of Guerrero. This is probably a confirmation of the suspected links between Soberon and Miguel Castro Bustos during the rectorship occupation.

the University. These conservative groups, essentially based on the natural and exact science disciplines, were the internal base for the government's control policy.

The authoritarian process that developed since 1972 consolidated a new social formation that has dominated the UNAM until this moment. This does not mean that the actors are new. Most of the original components of this formation had been part of the university for a long time. Some had direct linkages with the constitutive moments of the modern university (1929 and 1945) through family or political group bonds. As we said before, the schools of medicine, law and engineering provided the broader base of faculty members for the new administration. The relatively new groups in the Coordination of Scientific Research provided the new cohesive element between those traditional parties.

Soberón was the representative of this conservative tendency. He was able to structure a dominant discourse and articulate a broad alliance in the course of the confrontation against SPAUNAM (UNAM's Faculty Union) and STEUNAM (UNAM's Employee and Worker's Union), and the local transformation movements in the faculties of Sciences, Economy, Philosophy, Psychology and Architecture. This discourse stressed the neutral and apolitical nature of the UNAM, the presence of external threats, and the technical nature of university governance.

The most important transformation that concluded on the consolidation of the bureaucracy occurred during the two consecutive administrations of Dr. Guillermo Soberón (from 1973 to 1980) as rector of the UNAM.

Two central elements synthesized Soberón's project for the University. The first one was to guarantee the stability of the institution. The second was to stop the expansion of enrollment and the consequent growth of the UNAM (Kent). The most important problems for the re-establishment of institutional rules were anarchy, unionization, violence, and enrollment expansion (Soberón 1980).

He associated the idea of anarchy to the existence of social and political movements. The unionization process was part of this anarchy. The conflict about labor relations within the university created a "state of crisis in public universities generating lack of stability, and opening the space for issues that have nothing to do with universities or the labor relations within them" (Soberón, 12). A consequence

of this anarchy was the eruption of violence on campus as a manifestation of purely criminal actions or the expression of student activism (Soberón).

The other important problem for the new administration was the increasing growth in student enrollment. It was an undesired trend. The Soberonian administration looked forward to stop this expansion and even to reduce enrollment.

### *The stratification of UNAM*

The stratification of the UNAM played a very important role in dealing with massive enrollment and in the redefinition of the university elite. The segmentation of the University, into an elite research and graduate studies institution, and a massive preparatory and undergraduate institution within the same University, was done essentially through differentiated investment. The financial resources for research institutes and centers, mainly in the natural sciences area, increased substantially while those of the schools and faculties decreased. The research mission of the UNAM was emphasized in public statements while the teaching goals were placed at a secondary level. The differentiation between teaching and research activities was emphasized. Schools and faculties were discouraged to implement research activities through lack of investment. Most faculty members in these locations fled towards the institutes or simply abandoned research. At the same time, research institutes and centers established their own graduate programs. In many cases these were parallel to similar graduate programs that existed in the faculties. The first were considered programs of “excellence” and received abundant financial resources. The latter were lower level programs, detached from research activities and with very limited resources.

Beyond the academic implications of this model, we will look at some of the political consequences of this segmentation. The strengthening of the research sector redefined the force correlation within the University elite with the expansion of one of the most conservative sectors at the UNAM. It consolidated Soberón's closest constituency and broadened its political base. This project also had ideological implications. The new social formation was viewed as supported on scientific knowledge and activities. The academic excellence was the foundation of the new governing coalition.

Rollin Kent summarizes the conservative groups worst fears and their project for UNAM. From a Soberonian standpoint, this particular view had

“good motives to think that the university of the 50's and 60's was disappearing as a consequence of the explosive growth of the student population, the strengthening of the left-wing parties and the emergence of the unionization process. These factors seemed to generate a situation in which political agitation would become a permanent feature of university life and therefore a threat to the interests and *modus vivendi* of those university sectors that had flourished in a quickly disappearing context. There were several possible responses towards this situation. The response of Soberonism defined itself by highlighting the deactivation of the political and educational potentiality of the massive zones and by developing the research sector. It was an option that did not perceive the massive university as a cultural challenge, as the requirement to promote educational innovation, it perceived it fundamentally as a challenge in the political sphere” (Kent, 66).

### **The Creation of a Saga or the Selection of Traditions**

With this project in mind, and for the purpose of articulating a powerful alliance Soberón recreated the university saga (Clark 1983): He was able to select episodes within the history of the university to establish a dominant tradition (Williams 1977). By reconstructing and reinterpreting the history of the university he established a new legitimacy. These selected traditions articulated in a unique discourse contradictory episodes of the historical development of the UNAM. Most of the views held by Soberón are summarized in his book *La Universidad, ahora* (1983).

The new social alliance was able to present itself as a product of the autonomy movement of 1929 depriving it of original content provided by the anti-government student struggles that conquered autonomy. Other consequences of this struggle, such as shared governance of students and faculty, were criticized by Soberón. The un-resolved demands for democratic election of university officials and against the external intervention of the government in appointing authorities were not compatible with Soberón's ideal University and were therefore forgotten.

The new alliance was viewed also as the incarnation of the Organic Law of 1945 from which it took its legal legitimation. For Soberón, the 1929 autonomy was a “precarious” law because “it gave the President of the Republic the faculty to propose three candidates to the University Council among which it had to appoint the Rector” (Soberón 1983; 107). On the other hand,

“the 1933 Organic Law went beyond by granting total autonomy, nevertheless, it subjected the University and condemned it to indigence, because it determined that it should obtain its own financial resources after an initial ten million pesos handed by the government” (p. 107).

For the new Soberonian alliance, the 1945 Organic Law provided the basic ideological foundation of a conservative modernization as opposed to a democratizing transformation of the university as proposed by González Casanova (Kent). From Soberón's standpoint, the essence of the 1945 Organic Law was the

differentiation between political and academic issues within the university. In 1945 rector Alfonso Caso insisted that the University had been severely damaged by politics. When proposing the 1945 Organic Law he argued that it withered politics away from the institution by organizing university governance through a combination of legislative and executive authorities whose actions were constrained to the academic realm (Caso 1944).

This discourse served the conservative groups perfectly. The new formation argued that politics had no place in an academic institution. Politics were condemned as a negative and anti-university practice. In reference to university conflicts Soberón wrote:

“It must be understood that even when the cause of a university conflict can be evident, it can never be fully established if there are perverse intentions of political nature or of clear anti-university character behind statements that originally can be judged of a purely academic or administrative nature. On other hand, these polluting factors are attached at the first chance, because everybody wants to ‘bring water to his mill.’ Do not forget that the UNAM has played and will continue playing a relevant role in the development of Mexico and it constitutes an agent of social mobility; therefore, in every conflict it is said that, in the beginning and later, national or extra national interests that are opposed to the development of the institution can come into the game” (p. 106).

Political intentions are therefore perverse and against the nature of the university. This vision provided the new dominant alliance with the perfect excuse to toughen the practice of the bureaucracy in the bargaining processes with diverse internal social actors and justify the repressive attitude during conflicts within the university. At the same time, this discourse excluded most of the members of the university from politics while reserving this arena, at the internal and external levels, for the bureaucracy and the upper echelons of the governing elite.

With this idea of the UNAM as an apolitical institution, the events of 1968 were brushed aside. The democratization processes generated by previous rectors (Barros Sierra and González Casanova) were reversed in the name of academia.

The “menaces” of the “anarchic and anti-academic” consequences of the 1968 were symbolized by the emerging unions. In the presence of this “enemy” the traditional conservative tendencies of the university were able to regroup and acquire a solid identity around these selected, and now dominant, traditions.

The selected traditions, the discourse of apoliticism and neutrality, the response to the external threat, and the technical nature of university governance configured a new ideology within the UNAM. The selection of traditions provided the historical rooting of the new ideological discourse. This ideology provided the new governing alliance with a solid common identity that enhanced its internal articulation. The ideological discourse of the Soberonian coalition played the most important role in the confrontation with the democratic opposition which was unable to put forward a coherent opposing view of the University. The dispute for faculty and public opinion support was essentially a confrontation between these views. The Soberonian ideology was of major importance in the downfall of the democratic opposition. In this process it became a dominating ideology that was consolidated with the ultimate defeat of independent faculty unionization and it was used to solidify the hold of the conservative bureaucracy over the UNAM's political structures.

### **The Bureaucratization Process**

From 1970 to 1980 the bureaucracy expanded rapidly. The growth rate in this sector (239%) was higher than that of students (188%) and faculty (227%) (Kent).<sup>8</sup>

At the same time this bureaucracy diversified in two dimensions: at the level of the academic bureaucracies and at the level of the administrative and political-bureaucratic structures. The first are the structures that directly manage the academic units (programs, departments, schools, faculties and research institutes). They are also the link between these units and the central administration. Rollin Kent argues that “these academic bureaucracies constitute the visible heads of the academic power groups within the university” (p. 98). They emerge from the immediate academic sphere, their formal attributions and their legitimacy are determined by the management of the units themselves.

The creation of new schools, faculties or programs was the source of the expansion of this sector. From 1974 to 1977, the creation of the National Schools of Professional Studies (ENEP's) within the UNAM provided employment for more than 500 officials (deans, academic secretaries, chiefs of division and department, coordinators technical secretaries and administrative officials) (Kent).

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<sup>8</sup> The book *Modernización conservadora y crisis académica en la UNAM* by Rollin Kent Serna provides a good description and analysis of the bureaucratization process at UNAM from an organizational perspective.

In 1980, 5 170 appointed employees worked at the UNAM. We consider that at least 50% were officials (if for each official there is a secretary or a technical aide). Therefore a labor market for more than 2000 people, organized in dozens of bureaucratic groups, was formed (p. 101).

These academic bureaucracies are very important political actors in the University as a whole. The academic, administrative and political performance of these groups is heterogeneous within the limits established by the central bureaucracy. The academic bureaucracies are recruiting sources for the central administration. “This link, of political nature, is a strong cohesive element of the whole apparatus” (p. 99)

During this period the political bureaucracy also expands and diversifies at the central level. The University is configured as a system with the stated purpose of acquiring administrative rationality and efficiency. The institution is reorganized into six subsystems (Jimenez Mier y Terán 1983):

- Schools and faculties controlled by the Academic Secretary General.
- Scientific research (natural and exact sciences research institutes and centers) under the Scientific Research Coordinator.
- Humanities research (social sciences and humanities institutes and centers) under the Humanities Coordinator.
- Administrative work under the Administrative Secretary General.
- Legal issues under the General Attorney (of the University).
- Internal and external issues, communication, media, etc. under the Secretary of the Rectorship.

Schools and faculties lost their identities and independence and were gathered in a unique block at the same level of hierarchy as administrative and legal affairs. The legal and political systems (General Attorney and Secretary of the Rectorship) were consolidated. All of these officials and the chairs of several committees are appointed by the rector and depended directly on him (Kent).

At the same time, and in spite of the expansion of the university, the collegial authorities (University and Technical Councils) were not reformed to enhance their representation and functions. These structures were almost reduced to the level of formal legitimators of bureaucratic decisions (Jimenez Mier y Terán).

Bureaucratic growth was the material base for the formation of political clienteles. These constituted a very important element in the solid consensus that rector Guillermo Soberón was able to articulate. At the same time, this process created new channels of political mobility within the University and therefore enhanced and strengthened the career of professional university officials. Rollin Kent argues that the bureaucratic expansion served a cast of officials whose increasingly autonomous interests and performance

positioned them above the academic rationale of the University as a whole and the different entities within it (Kent).

### **Bureaucratization and Political Control**

The reaction against the process of unionization and collective bargaining was one of the most important features in consolidating the bureaucratic aspect of governance at the UNAM and the progressive decline of collegiate authority with the reduction of faculty participation in the decision-making processes (Birnbaum in Bensimon 1984).

The task of controlling the University after 1968 enhanced the bureaucratic and political features of governance and administration within the UNAM. The latter was emphasized by the authorities' need to establish powerful coalitions to be able to counteract the action of students, faculty, and manual and administrative workers within the University. After almost a decade of union struggles the defeat of the academic union SPAUNAM after its merge with the staff union STEUNAM into STUNAM in the 1977 strike opened the way for the new governing alliance.

At the structural level the formation was able to consolidate its power. Soberón deprived the collegial authorities of their independence from the bureaucracy. On the basis of the particularities of the process for selecting governing board members (similar to the appointment of supreme court judges in the US), he was able to ensure an overwhelming majority on this board for the next fifteen years. This board selects the directors (deans) for the schools, faculties and research institutes among three candidates proposed by the rector. They in turn represent more than one third of the University Council, who, in turn, appoints the substitutive members of the governing board.

Bureaucratic authorities assumed political power. Collegiate (University council and technical councils) and political authorities (governing board) were thus reduced to a subordinate and legitimizing role. This situation can be illustrated at different levels. On one hand, Soberón strengthened a parallel structure called the Council of Directors composed by the deans of schools, faculties and institutes and the directors of the central administration. This structure is not sanctioned by the Organic Law. It combines authorities selected by the governing board and other directly appointed by the rector. Since deans and directors depend directly from the rector for their selection or reelection he has strong control over this

governing structure. The Council of Directors deals with most of the crucial issues for the performance of the UNAM. Some of the decisions made by this body are then turned to the University Council for formal approval.

The University Council has been excluded from decisions like the establishment of enrollment limits. Other issues like university budget and expenditures are decided by the executive authorities and presented to the Council for official sanction. In the last twenty years no University Council has made any change to the budget proposal presented by the rector.

This situation is reproduced at the local level between deans and technical councils. At this site, the decisions about budget and expenditures are of the exclusive competence of the dean in each school or faculty: In the research institutes the collegial authorities, Internal Councils, have no power of decision and are consultation structures for the dean.

Other members of the University and Technical Councils, representatives of students and faculty, are elected by their communities. It has become a tradition that deans and local bureaucracies intervene in this election processes to guarantee that the elected representatives are politically compatible with the local authorities and therefore with the central administration. This complex circle of control is so completed.<sup>9</sup>

### **University Bureaucracy and the State**

As we have seen previously, the new dominant formation at UNAM condemned politics as a anti-university practice. However, the leading bureaucracy was very far from the Weberian ideal of an apolitical specialized administrative corpus. Both the central and the local bureaucracies have been intensely involved in internal and external political processes. At the internal level, in the dispute of power positions, the local groups within the dominant alliance confront each other and generate pressure upon the rector and the governing board for the selection of deans and rector. Confrontation and bargaining processes also take place in the appointment of secretaries and general directors at the central level, or local officials in schools, faculties and institutes.

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<sup>9</sup> For an exhaustive study on the structural and legal characteristics of this governing system look at the book *El Autoritarismo en la UNAM* by Fernando Jimenez Mier y Terán.

It has been common practice that external interest groups within the government intervene in these power disputes within the University. If anything, this intervention increased since the Soberón era. After the 1968 events, the University has been seen by the government as a major political problem. The political conditions at the UNAM have been part of most political considerations during the last presidential periods (Luis Echeverría, José López Portillo, Miguel de la Madrid, and Carlos Salinas de Gortari). This situation has strengthened the linkages between internal and external political actors.

Broad sectors of faculty and students still maintained a confrontation attitude against the government. The Soberonian formation was able to generate the idea that the State and the conservative groups in the UNAM had common enemies within the University. The dominant groups abandoned any vestige of their old anti-State tradition and joined the government in a common project for UNAM. The alliance that now dominated the University was able to outline their own conservative view as the only path for the development of this higher education institution. The government adopted that view as its own project for UNAM.

The Soberonian alliance pursued their own academic and political interests. Since the UNAM had reached the political importance of a ministry, the bureaucracy within this institution inserted itself in the political process at the national level. The performance of selected and appointed officials at every level was constrained by their particular political needs within the national political context. Perhaps this situation can be best illustrated by following the political careers of some of the most important officials during the Soberón, Rivero Serrano, and Carpizo administrations.

Our study shows nine important members of the Soberón administration, two from Rivero's period, and three from Jorge Carpizo's rectorship, who occupied high level positions in the Federal Government. This is only a small sample. There are many mid-level officials, general directors, and deans that have also occupied positions in the government after leaving the UNAM. Most of them never go back to their academic positions in the University, if they ever had one before being part of the bureaucracy. The study also shows that most appointed officials are members of the PRI. This suggests that the selection of the UNAM's directors is guided by strong political constraints.

## **Bureaucracy and Autonomy**

The autonomy of the UNAM is granted by the Organic Law. However, it is very evident that the full exercise of autonomy rests fundamentally on two processes which vary according to historical conditions. The first requirement for a real autonomous performance is that university governance relies on the academic community (faculty and students) through collegial structures. On one hand, this guarantees that decision-making is based fundamentally on the internal logic of academic development and the way in which external conditions relate to this logic from the perspective of those involved in academe. On the other hand, in the event of the existence of differences or contradictions between the University and the State, a broad based collegial governance provides internal cohesion that strengthens the bargaining power of the institution.

We have seen that the bureaucratization of UNAM has subordinated the collegial structure and therefore weakened faculty and students participation in decision making. This situation has generated permanent internal conflicts of varying magnitude and importance. The lack of consensus about the University project opens the door for external intervention and pressures that shift institutional policies to adapt them to each six-year governmental requirement.

The second base for autonomy is the existence of strongly independent executive authorities. Once again this is not the case at UNAM. University bureaucrats are strongly linked to external political groups. Their political strength comes from these external constituencies. Their future careers depend on the bureaucrats' compliance with external designs. All these conditions amount to very little independence of the university bureaucracy from the government.

It is possible to say then that the bureaucratization process of UNAM has weakened the autonomy of the institution towards the Mexican State. During the last twenty years the National University has probably suffered the highest degree of external intervention in its modern history. This intervention takes place in definition of internal policies, the determination of spending patterns for public funding, and the designation of authorities and appointed officials.

## **Domination *versus* Hegemony**

Without question, the Soberonian alliance was able to control UNAM and generate some political stability. In the course of the confrontation, Soberón was able to put together transcendental

transformations. Since then, the University has remained without considerable change. The social formation that emerged during the Soberón administration has dominated the National University for twenty years. However, the governing elite has been incapable of developing a hegemonic process that can concert the diverse views about the university in a unified effort for reform. Since 1986, even their capacity to control has diminished.

It is possible to analyze this situation in Gramscian terms. Gramsci distinguishes between *intellectual and moral leadership*, and *domination* (Gramsci 1980, 99). On many occasions he also uses the concepts *direct, lead* or *rule* in opposition to that of *domination* (Gramsci 1971, 55f). It is said that a group *leads* or *directs* when it is capable of exercising power in a *hegemonic* manner. To do this, the group has to previously establish an “intellectual and moral leadership.” Even if the group is firmly in control of power, it must continue to lead (Gramsci 1980).

Since 1973, the Soberonian alliance has been able to dominate but has lacked the capability of leading the institution. In most situations in which domination is exercised without moral and intellectual leadership the domination itself is eventually eroded. The deterioration of the system gives place to a legitimacy crisis.

In the case of UNAM, the legitimacy crisis is expressed in several ways. Some of the most important are: the open manifestation of inherent contradictions through social conflicts directed against the bureaucracy; the permanent challenge to rules, regulations and established procedures; the lack of academic leadership; and the internal dissent and the deficient articulation within the dominant block.

## CONCLUSIONS

Let us focus on the future of university reform at UNAM. Future transformation attempts make it necessary to look at the relation between confrontation and reform. At the same time it is essential to analyze reform at UNAM as the process of building a new hegemony. With this objective in mind, in this section I shall bring together many elements of the previous analysis and focus on these issues.

As we have seen, the bureaucracy at the UNAM grew in number and strength during the last twenty years. In its drive for political control it displaced faculty members from traditionally academic decisions and activities. The social fabric of the university was dismantled. These actions were undertaken in the midst of an unprecedented period of growth. The required incorporation of new faculty members into the

university took place in a completely disorganized academic environment. The academic consequences of this process have been extremely costly to this day.

The bureaucracy at the UNAM has presented itself as an element of continuity. As a receptacle of the essence of the University and a representative of its “best” traditions. As the single path to modernity, that is, the only way to adapt to the new requirements of the environment. Nevertheless, the conflicts and confrontations within the university community and with the bureaucracy have grown in the last ten years. The initiatives for reform have generated intense clashes.

### **Confrontation and Reform**

As Baldrige suggests, from the 1970's up to the present there has been increasing political and economic pressure upon the universities. This is true in the case of the UNAM. Financial constraints have determined the new political demands the government places upon the University. These demands have included the reduction of costs through limitations on student enrollment and by decreasing faculty salaries, the standardization of evaluation processes, and the political control over social actors in the institution.

We must understand that the recent attempts to transform the UNAM have produced the confrontation between two broad directions for reform. On one side, the vague and heterogeneous ideas of broad groups of faculty and students: a set of proposals for democratizing governance, expanding access and guaranteeing the permanence of students in the university. On another, the direction the government has been trying to impose on the university through bureaucratic authorities, which suggests a privatizing, financially efficient set of measures. In Carnoy and Levin's terms “these constituencies can often be viewed as those interested in greater ‘equality’ versus those interested in greater ‘efficiency’” (Carnoy and Levin 1985, 231).

In addition there is also the confrontation between bureaucratic control and democratic participation at the UNAM, and perhaps even more meaningful, the struggle of faculty and students to modify the organization of work and the structure of academic disciplines. These initiatives have encountered a thorough resistance from the bureaucracy.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that university authorities promote constant bureaucratic adjustments and changes in an attempt to strengthen their overall control over the university. In this situation, the contradiction between the discourse of decentralization and its implementation is very

meaningful (Weiler 1990). The main resistance to structural change (in the context of the confrontation of two general views of the university's future) comes from the academic elite and its governing bureaucracy within the UNAM. This group can not evade its commitment to the federal government to apply externally designed reforms, but fear of losing established privileges and control over the university makes the bureaucracy a weak instrument for this purpose.

Paradoxically, the existence of this group has become a liability even for the Mexican government. The government is now interested in certain kinds of reforms through which the elitist interests of bureaucracy can be sacrificed in order to produce the changes demanded by the State from the UNAM.

### **Reform at UNAM: Building a New Hegemony**

We have said that the domination process at UNAM has been unable to generate an academic reform of the University. The difficulty to articulate diverse social actors stems from the lack of hegemony of the governing elite and its representative bureaucracy. We also suggested that after twenty years, even the domination capability of this social alliance has deteriorated. The emergence of new conflicts of students and faculty against the bureaucracy, the challenge to rules and regulations, the confrontation between projects, and the disarticulation of the dominant block are evidence of the existence of a legitimacy crisis. This legitimization crisis can only be solved by the emergence of a new historical block, the product of a new hegemonic process.

The opportunity to overcome this critical situation and advance towards a profound structural reform at the National University requires a redefinition of university governance and consequently the role of bureaucracy as well. The decision making process must be based on representative collegial authorities. Bureaucracy must be reduced in number, importance, and expenditure. It has to be subordinated to the collegial governance structure.

The independence of high university officials relative to the government must be guaranteed by active participation of faculty and students in an academic election process. Executive authorities must be subordinated to collegial structures.

Due to the State's financial crisis and the pressure of particular economic groups for reductions in public investment it is difficult for public universities to expect increases in federal funding. While

maintaining the myth of the neutrality of the university, the bureaucratic response to this problem has been to focus on business as the basic constituency for the university in order to acquire private funding and support for public institutions. Business and the wealthy classes of society have put enormous pressures on this institution for the establishment of new efficiency measures and other forms of privatization. This path can only lead to the disappearance of the University as we know it today.

To be able to maintain and enhance its national and public character, the UNAM must establish new alliances with a different constituencies “whose interests are in equitably expanding public services” (Slaughter 1985, 316).

The reconstruction of the social fabric at the UNAM and the alliance with these new constituencies must be based on a redefinition of the concept of university reform. Up to this point, administrators have understood reform as “structural adaptations to austerity” (Gumport 1993, 8). Their own political welfare and the project for efficiency have been their primary concerns.

The reform of a higher education institution like the UNAM requires a broader perspective. Many issues have to be brought into consideration. The role of higher education in a developing country like México, and the rapidly changing conditions of knowledge, technology and knowledge production have to be analyzed. In today's context, it is important to look at the

“functions and purposes of higher education, including what will constitute legitimate academic knowledge, academic vocations, and knowledge products and whether the commercialization of knowledge for revenue enhancement will be a legitimate direction for higher education in the 21st century” (Gumport 1993, 6).

In these terms the relation between the UNAM and the Mexican State must be redefined in a new pact which fully recognizes the autonomy of this University. The responsibilities of the institutions towards society in general have to be established.

### **The Political Nature of Higher Education Reform**

Universities have been characterized as complex organizations. Participants are articulated by disciplines and are deeply reflective about the organization of academic work. Therefore, profound structural reform requires ample coincidence among participants. The process of structural change at the university level needs to articulate the visions, projects and expectations of different social actors within the institution and those of diverse external constituencies. This is essentially a process of hegemony building.

The seek for internal and external legitimacy, the articulation of adequate constituencies, and the building of hegemony are fundamental elements of university reform which reveal its profound political nature.

We have examined some of the elements of the new hegemonic process at UNAM. Most public higher education institutions in Mexico share the problems of university reform with the National University. Bureaucratic and heavily politicized administrations have attempted transformations which have lacked the required consensus among students and faculty.

Hegemony will be built through the establishment of collegial internal relations within the different sectors of each university, the articulation with new constituencies, and the redefinition of the interrelation with the State. An assesment of the functions and future tasks of public universities will articulate all these relations in the construction of new social formations.

The new hegemonic processes are essentially political. The myth of neutrality and apoliticism must be discarded in order to determine the structure, agenda, size and clientele of public universities (Slaughter). The future of Mexico's National Autonomous University and the Mexican higher education system lies in the deeply interwoven tasks of hegemony building and university reform.

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