



Colombia Adventist University Corporation.

Photo courtesy of North Colombia Union Conference.

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Colombia Adventist University Corporation (*Corporación Universitaria Adventista*, also UNAC) is a nonprofit university institution whose primary objective was to offer post-secondary education at the university level. The

Inter-American Division endorsed the institution's establishment, and the Adventist Accrediting Association recognized the programs it offered.

History of Adventist Work in University Territory

Pastor E. Max Trummer, president of West Caribbean Conference, arrived in Colombia in 1921. He moved to Medellín in 1926 and founded the Seventh-day Adventist Central Church. Colombia-Venezuela Union Mission was established in 1927.¹ El Bosque Church was founded two years later. Due to preaching of the gospel, hundreds of children and young people accepted Jesus Christ, but they had a major need for an education to empower them for life and service to God. The Seventh-day Adventist Church faced the challenge of providing schools and colleges to properly educate these children and young people.

In 1989, Colombian Union Mission was established. In 1993, it was reorganized as Colombian Union Conference. In 1996, for legal and statutory reasons, the church's official name was changed to "the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Colombia." The new name became the official name for all conferences, missions, and institutions in Colombia. In 2003, Colombian Union Conference divided its territory into two sections, the north and south sections with offices in Medellín and Bogotá, respectively. The new missions were legally named missions at this time because, in previous years, some missions had been named conferences according to their jurisdictions, although they were not ready to be considered conferences according to the regulations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In 2010, the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church approved the establishment of South Colombian Union Mission, and Colombian Union Conference became North Colombian Union Conference, where UNAC is located.

Initial Plans to Establish UNAC

In 1937, at the recently purchased *El Noral* farm in the outskirts of the city of Medellín, *Colegio Industrial Coloveno* started operations to meet the educational needs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in that region.² Its curriculum included all educational levels to professionally prepare pastors, administrators, teachers, and musicians. At the start of 1950, the name "*Instituto Colombo-Venezolano*" (ICOLVEN) was adopted, and it offered primary, secondary, and college educational levels. However, in January 1980, the president of the Republic of Colombia endorsed Decree 80, Article 21, which defined the country's system of higher education. This forced ICOLVEN to revise its statutes.³

In 1980, Adventist leaders wanted to offer Christian education. Over 200 Adventist students had graduated from non-Adventist institutions and wanted to continue university studies to obtain a professional degree, but they faced conditions that, in many cases, conflicted with religious principles. Therefore, the ICOLVEN school board

raised awareness about the problem and took the necessary steps to create Colombia Adventist University Corporation (UNAC). Several professional programs were started, such as the bachelors' degree in education with emphases in theology and music and the bachelor of business administration. The institution also continued to offer biblical instructor and secretarial programs. Because of many government-imposed requirements, these initiatives did not have an easy start. However, among many people who were interested in realizing this dream, two people stood out: Professors Leonardo Suescun and Raimundo Pardo Suarez. UNAC would use a Christian basis to prepare men and women in different areas, which would contribute to the expansion of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Colombia.

Establishment of UNAC

Professor Leonardo Suescun Franco became convinced of the need for a Seventh-day Adventist university and promoted the idea to create such an institution. On June 18, 1981, legal representatives of the different Adventist organizations in the Colombian territory met at ICOLVEN in Medellín. They created *Corporación Universitaria Adventista* (UNAC) with the objective to provide post-secondary education at the university level.⁴ UNAC received Legal Status No. 8529 on June 6, 1983, from the National Ministry of Education, acquiring recognition from the state of Colombia.

UNAC's Initial Status, Accreditation, Courses, and Degrees

UNAC's initial status in the National Ministry of Education of Colombia was that of a nonprofit university institution whose primary objective was to offer post-secondary education at the university level. The Inter-American Division endorsed the institution's establishment, and the Adventist Accrediting Association recognized the programs it offered.

The degrees ICOLVEN offered were transferred to UNAC on November 18, 1981. However, the Colombian Institute for Promotion of Higher Education needed to visit the campus and study the bachelor of theology degree in order to approve it and grant it its operating license, although the agency had already granted the institution an operating license in 1979. The bachelor of music education and of business administration were also required to undergo a visit for their approval and to obtain an operating license. UNAC was also enabled by law to continue offering biblical instructor and secretarial programs.

The next step was to request an operating license and official approval so that UNAC could receive authorization from the state of Colombia to grant higher education degrees. UNAC had never received financial, academic, or any other type of penalties. All of its licenses have been kept up to date.

Mission

The institution's mission was approved in 1988. In 2013, UNAC's mission and vision were restructured due to internal and external realities. An institutional system for quality control was created, and the institution deemed it necessary to consolidate a system consisting of three subsystems: planning, self-assessment and information, and communication.

The mission has five strategic axes and divides itself into four main areas of higher education: Faculty, Research, Community Outreach, and Internationalization.

UNAC's mission is: "Promote and foster a transformative relationship with God in students through comprehensive training in the different disciplines of knowledge, preparing competent professionals, ethically responsible, with a spirit of altruistic service to God and his fellow men, within the framework of the Christian biblical worldview that underpins the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

Target Group of Students

To fulfill its objectives while following the spirit of the founders in the SDA Church agreements of 1934, 1935, and 1936, UNAC basically teaches SDA and low income non-SDA students from Colombia, the Netherlands Antilles, and Venezuela. UNAC also welcomes students from Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Brazil, Costa Rica, Bolivia, and other places.

Degrees and Specialties

Over the course of UNAC's history, 49 academic programs have been created, but some are not offered. In 2016, 13 programs were offered, ten at the undergraduate level and three at the graduate level. All of the programs qualified and were registered by the National Ministry of Education as bachelors' degrees in music, preschool, and basic education with an emphasis on humanities; Spanish and English; public accounting, business administration, and marketing; system engineering; theology; and nursing and pre-hospital care technology; as well as graduates' degrees in organizational management with emphases on leadership and service, tributary management, and teaching that depends on the faculties according to the nature of its field and object of its study.

The first online degrees were created in 2008. The work in the academic area began to form a historic footprint through the creation of two basic bachelors' degrees with emphases in humanities, Spanish and Foreign Language: English.

Transforming the Curriculum

UNAC adopts the regulations of the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the norms of Colombia if they do not contradict divine principles. All undergraduate academic

programs have a basic emphasis in an Adventist worldview. Internal organizations define changes in curricular plans, some of which must be submitted to the National Ministry of Education for approval. In 2014, a comprehensive training model with hands-on preparation was adopted. The director is in charge of weekly quality assurance processes to study issues and follow up on possible accreditation for academic programs as a step towards institutional accreditation.

The pedagogical proposal articulates the various components of the institution and is, therefore, a significant advancement to UNAC. Its essence can be described as a comprehensive and restorative pedagogy with a comprehensive, edifying approach.⁵

Another aspect is competency training. The integration of faith with teaching, learning, and Christian values represents another step in achieving total quality. Another change that was generated was in UNAC's structure in applying the 2016 General Statutes. UNAC's administration approved the 2016 student manual in accordance with the university's rules and regulations.

Accreditations

UNAC is accredited by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities. UNAC is actively pursuing the state of Colombia's accreditation for its programs in the departments of education, pre-hospital care, and health sciences.

Honors and Awards

UNAC has received recognition for its extensive experience from both national and international organizations. In 2015, UNAC ranked 68th out of 187 higher education institutions in Colombia. Furthermore, UNAC has received the following awards and distinctions:

The government of Antioquia awarded the Pedro Justo Berrío Award for UNAC's 70 years as an institution.

The House of Representatives imposed the Simón Bolívar Democracy Order through Honorable Representative María Isabel Urrutia Ocoró.

The Assembly of Antioquia granted the Order of Civic and Business Merit, Marshal Jorge Robledo, Gold Category, for 70 years of social work.

The Senate of the Republic granted the Order of the Colombian Congress through Resolution 096 on November 5, 2009.

The mayor's office of Medellín awarded the Porfirio Barba Jacob Medal, Gold Category, on July 26, 2012.

The Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad publicly recognized UNAC's trajectory through a resolution in 2012.

Challenges and Other Issues

Campus conditions and high taxes are burdens for UNAC. The municipality of Medellín has planned the expansion of 33rd Avenue, which would divide the university's property in two parts. The protected infrastructure area, which could be used for education, health, recreation, and sports, must be left as is in the old land management plan of Medellín, but the new plan establishes that the space can be allocated for housing and commerce. UNAC could keep 40%, or eight hectares, of the total property, and the remaining 60% would be divided as follows: 30% for development in other uses and 30% for other mandatory loads (roads, parks, green areas, etc.).

Relations with the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The president's office has promoted evangelization tasks since 2014. One of the slogans is "United in the fulfillment of the Mission!"

UNAC has had presence in the 10-40 window and also sponsors missionaries and students in Africa, Alexandria, Egypt, and Sierra Leone to spread the gospel.

The International Congress of Adventist Missionary Professionals and University Students titled "I Will Go Too!" has been held twice.

The UNAC Missionary Institute is responsible for 17 ministries.

Dignitaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church frequently visit UNAC.

The contributions of UNAC graduates in management positions throughout Colombia and other countries are commendable.

Relations with City of Medellín

The Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education frequently refers those interested in receiving instructions and registration forms for state testing to the UNAC campus. The Ministry of Education of Medellín holds meetings on UNAC's campus. Many of the city's organizations, institutions, companies, and industries appeal to UNAC to hold meetings, seminars, workshops, symposiums, conferences, demonstrations,

practices, and other activities given the good relations and the breadth and facilities of the campus. The UNAC acronym appears as an outstanding reference on urban transport buses and in general.

The signed agreement with Alexis García Soccer School is a mechanism for integration with the city. This requires a presence in several neighborhoods in Medellín, where humanitarian aid can be brought while sharing the Bible. The health brigades in the city also contribute to the institution's greater visibility, and *Empresas Públicas Medellín* sponsors several students with full scholarships.

Relations with Antioquia Region

The Ministry of Education for the Culture of Antioquia conducts activities on the campus. UNAC has connections with educational institutions in northeast Uraba and Valle de Aburra in Antioquia. The Health Service department of Antioquia is aware of UNAC's health sciences programs, and teaching assistance agreements contribute to healthy relationships with the city. UNAC is member of the Committee of Higher Education of Antioquia-Chocó.

Relations with Country

UNAC maintains connections with the Presidency of the Republic, National Ministry of Education, National Council of Higher Education, National Accreditation Council, Ministry of Social Protection (now Ministry of Health), National Directorate of Taxes and Customs, Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education, Ministry of Culture, and other official organizations of the state of Colombia. UNAC has academic peers in the National Ministry of Education and the National Accreditation Council. UNAC holds other important connections with the associations of business administration professionals, systems engineering, and public accounting through the graduates who must manage their corresponding licenses with these entities.

On February 28, 2006, the President of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, visited UNAC with his official administrative delegation. This event was valuable in solving a difficulty related to Adventist youth regarding the State High School Exams and Higher Education Quality Exams.

A special Sabbath reception took place in UNAC, which elected congressmen attended. Chamber Representative Charles Cuervo, Senator Rafael Pardo, and the administrators and other members of UNAC attended this service. The president of UNAC thanked them for attending and handed them copies of the Bible and other Christian books. The attendees offered thanks for the support and prayers.

The Bell Choir is another helpful ambassador within and outside of the country that enables relationships with other organizations. In 1988, the 20th anniversary of the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education, the UNAC's Bell Choir's outstanding performance served to renew UNAC's Bachelor of Education: Music license without the typically necessary visit from supervisors or academic peers. UNAC is also promoted

during performances of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Medellín under signed agreements between UNAC and the orchestra.

UNAC maintains open relations with the two unions, conferences, missions, and institutions that the SDA Church operates in the nation. Pastors, ministers, leaders, brothers, and sisters are links in UNAC's promotional chain. UNAC graduates in Colombia and abroad are the best promoters for the institution's plans, projects, and programs.

Relations with the World

UNAC seeks to bring its services to several countries around the world through academic, artistic, humanitarian, and other missions like those conducted in Brazil, the United States, Venezuela, Ecuador, Spain, Peru, Panama, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Egypt, and Sierra Leone. The Inter-American Division's network of Adventist universities allows for exchanges and greater visibility for UNAC. For example, in firefighting, experiences in Brazil and the United States brought a significantly positive impact. The pre-hospital care technology and nursing programs and the administration and accounting sciences department's services are also known in Mexico, Brazil, and the United States.

Spiritual, Economic, and Social Impact

The university impacts its surroundings in many positive ways.

Biblical contests have a positive influence on the church in Colombia.

Weeks of prayer and spiritual emphasis events impact the spiritual life of the community.

The 29 centers of influence in Medellín offer necessary outreach programs.

The project, "Get Up and Conquer," has helped baptize many people in Antioquia.

UNAC actively participates in seminars and events held by conferences, missions, etc.

Students benefit from the university's educational work plans.

Vitarrico Food Industries and ICOLPAN Industries offer healthy food to the community.

The Adventist Seminar for Laymen Training is another strategy to impact Medellín.

The Maranatha ophthalmological unit offers surgical interventions in the country.

In the “Religion and Photography Exhibition in Antioquia: 1890-1960” held at the Pilot Public Library for Latin America, important historic photographs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Colombia, UNAC, and ICOLVEN were displayed.⁶

UNAC Bible study weeks have a positive impact throughout the country.

University fairs and the Language Center reach the community.

Challenges for the Future

UNAC needs to relocate to a rural area where the Adventist worldview or philosophical principles of education can be applied. The institution also needs to obtain accreditation for all programs, achieve accreditation as a higher education institution, become a well-known university, and achieve financial sustainability. Moving to a rural area and building a new campus to meet the needs of the present student population is one of the core objectives of Vision 2020 as outlined in UNAC’s Strategic Plan for 2013-2020.

Higher education institutions that enjoy high quality accreditation or have academic programs with such accreditation have access to state resources for teacher development, research, internationalization, social projection, innovations, patents, and other fields. However, virtualization is also necessary.

List of Presidents

Miguel Ángel López Cortés (1979-1981); Edmundo Alva Portilla (1982-1983); Esteban Julio Beleño Villarreal (1984-1985); Édgar Jaime Escobar Suárez (1986-1989); Leonardo Suescún Franco (1990-1992); Luis Edgardo Muñoz Córdoba (1993); Gamaliel Flórez Gómez (1994-2009); Juan Alberto Díaz Rueda (2010-2012); Abraham Arturo Acosta Bustillo (2013-).

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NOTES

1. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *Presencia Adventista en Colombia* (Medellín: s.e., 1996).
2. R. S. Arismendi, *Resumen histórico de la Academia Colombo-Venezolana* (1941).
3. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *Instituto Colombo-Venezolano – Corporación Universitaria Adventista: Valores y Servicio 1937-2000* (Medellín: Litografía ICOLVEN, 2004).
4. Corporación Universitaria Adventista, *Constitution of the Colombia Adventist University Corporation* (1981).
5. Corporación Universitaria Adventista, *Pedagogical Proposal of the Colombia Adventist University Corporation* (2014).
6. Yudian Acevedo González, *et al, Modernizadores, instituciones y prácticas modernas: Antioquia siglos xviii al xx* (Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia, 2008).

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