



Navojoa University.

Photo courtesy of Navojoa University.

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ALEJO AGUILAR

Alejo Aguilar Gómez, M.Th. (Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo León, Mexico) and Ph.D. (International Christian University, Mitaka, Tokyo, Japan), was a professor of Old Testament studies at Navojoa University at the time of writing this article. He has written four books and several articles that have been published in magazines such as *Adventist Ministry*, *TheoBiblica*, and *DavarLogos*.

Navojoa University is an educational institution of North Mexican Union Conference that operates in the northwest region of Mexico. This institution emerged from the following secondary-level educational institutions: Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School (1948-1967), Mexican Pacific Academy (1968-1983), and Pacific Academy (1984-2001).

Its students come from different parts of Mexico and from abroad. In 2015, it had 330 students and 39 full-time staff. In 2017, the institution had 732 students and nearly 100 employees.¹

The university is located 13 kilometers from the city center of Navojoa in Sonora, Mexico, and has a 263-hectare area of land that is used for cultivation. Its address is Navojoa-Huatabampo Kilometro 13, Colonia Colegio del Pacífico, Navojoa, Sonora 85800, Mexico.

Events Preceding Establishment of Navojoa University

In the 1940s, the Adventist church in Mexico made advances in its organization and educational system, among which was the establishment of the Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School in 1948.² One of the notorious problems that the Mexican government faced in that time was the country's high illiteracy rate, especially in rural areas. To combat this problem, the government began to promote a special literacy program in 1944. The results of this program were first noted in 1950.³ The Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School contributed to the government program by offering education to children and youth who may not have had access to education otherwise.

Since its establishment in the 1920s, the Mexican Union Mission had known that establishing schools in the country would help retain and prepare children and youth to serve the church. Therefore, the church leaders decided to establish a school in the south and another in the northwest of the country, trusting that these locations would facilitate youth enrollment. These projects were made possible through the efforts of a church member who lived in a city near Navojoa.⁴ This committed lady was very active in the ingathering program, collecting funds for the church's educational system. While ingathering, she arrived at the office of Frank (Francisco) A. Byerly, an American who owned several businesses in the northwest of Mexico. He listened with great interest as she spoke of the work of Adventist education in Mexico and the need to establish better educational institutions. Byerly was impressed and asked to speak with the church leaders.

Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School

Soon after that, Mexican Union Mission President Henry J. Westphal and Pacific Mexican Mission President Max Fuss had an interview with Byerly. Byerly informed them about a property that he owned that contained a windmill and several buildings. Byerly had previously donated the property to the Catholic Church with the purpose of establishing a boarding school for youth. However, he had decided to reclaim the property since that school had not fulfilled his expectations.

After that interview and some thought, Frank A. Byerly contacted the church administrators again to inform them that he would donate the property to the Adventist Church without conditions. Soon, after the proper legal arrangements had been made, the 50-hectare property was donated to the Adventist Church. The buildings were adequate to establish an agricultural school. Thus, the Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School was established in September 1948 with Professor Juan Gil, a missionary with construction skills who was originally from Cuba, as its principal.

The Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School had an initial enrollment of about 30 students at the elementary and secondary levels. The education of the students was conducted by Principal Juan Gil; Gilberto Corona; Ignacia Gil; J. L. Hampl Kurt; Josafat Romero, dean of men; and María Ochoa, dean of women. Among the students registered were two of the Pacific Mexican Mission president's children.

By 1949, the Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School began operations with official recognition from the government. In 1952, the school celebrated its first graduating class of four secondary-level students.

Among the property's preexisting buildings, one had a basement that was used to store grain. The main floor of this building was used as the first classroom of the school except on Saturdays when it was used as a Sabbath School church.

From those humble beginnings came many improvements. In 1949, a campus cafeteria was finished with a basement that was used as a dormitory. It continued to serve as such until, after a diligent construction period between 1954 and 1958, the boys' and girls' dormitories were constructed and inaugurated. In 1961, with help from T. Gordon Reynolds, an American medical missionary, an auditorium with a capacity of 600 people was built. Laundry facilities, built mainly with donations from Dr. Chanceford Mounce and his wife, Vivian, began operations in December 1962. The administrative offices of Harry C. Nelson Hall were built in 1963.

In the late 1950s, the *Liga México Panamericana Médico Educacional* and the *Asociación Civil Filantrópica y Educativa* had joined the school to assist in the construction of houses for teachers and in the acquisition of machinery for its agricultural program. This had led to many major improvements in the school's infrastructure. However, the school faced financial difficulties and temporarily closed in 1965.

Mexican Pacific Academy

After a period of reorganization of the administrative system, the institution opened its doors again in 1967. It had an enrollment of 90 students and a new name: Mexican Pacific Academy (also known as the *Colegio del Pacífico* – COLPAC).

In 1968, thanks to the visionary Paul Allred and his wife, Lorna Ann, a food factory was established. This new factory was named *Alimentos COLPAC* ("COLPAC Foods"), and it made soybean products.⁵ This factory provided students a healthy experience in manual labor and a means to finance their own education over several years.

The secondary level (high school) education began to be offered during the 1969-1970 school year, giving evidence that the school was experiencing growth. A new cafeteria with a capacity of 400 people was opened in August 1972. In December 1973, Mexican President Luis Echeverría Álvarez visited the school and donated a bus that would provide a prolonged, useful service. Between 1974 and 1975, new classrooms and a library were constructed and inaugurated. In the 1982-1983 school year, a new administration building was built and inaugurated.

Pacific Academy

In the 1985-1986 school year, the school began to offer computer science and secretarial courses. Because of the new courses, the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities visited the campus in 1990 and granted the Pacific Academy denominational accreditation for five years. In 1995, the government of the state of Sonora granted the institution valid official recognition to offer baccalaureate degrees in business administration, accounting, nutrition, and computer engineering. By offering these degrees, the school took its first steps to become a university-level institution.

In the 1995-1996 school year, as an extension of Montemorelos University, the Pacific Academy began to offer courses at the university level. During this time of academic growth, the campus infrastructure also grew. In 1997, a new university academic library was inaugurated. In 1999, a new building for the elementary school was constructed.

Navojoa University

In 2000, the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities once again visited the campus and granted university status. In 2001, the Pacific Academy became Navojoa University. To accommodate the influx of university students, a new women's dormitory was built in 2002 and inaugurated in 2004, and the men's dormitory was remodeled in 2005.

In 2003, college courses were taught in the following areas: institutional evaluation, research, curriculum development, and mentoring. Also, the *Dirección General de Profesiones* of the Mexican government granted a name change to the institution from "*Universidad de Montemorelos Campus Colegio del Pacífico*" to "*Universidad de Navojoa*," granting the university the authority to offer baccalaureate degrees and a master's degree in education. At the same time, the university began offering a baccalaureate degree in theology through an agreement with Montemorelos University. In 2010, the first eight students with a degree in theology graduated.

In 2006, the university began offering new programs in accounting and taxes, accounting and finances, graphic design, and education with emphasis in English. Three years later, the Board of Higher Education of the Inter-American Division granted authorization to offer programs in nursing and gastronomy. These programs began their courses in 2010 and 2011, respectively.

After several years of renting portions of its land to local farmers, the university stopped this practice and began its own agricultural farming in 2012. In 2015, the university obtained authorization and official recognition to offer the following five new baccalaureate degree programs: sports and physical education, education, psychology and addiction studies, elementary psychology, and theology.

Role of University in Church, Community, and Nation

Navojoa University has hosted many diverse congresses, church meetings, and youth camps. The usefulness of the university's facilities for the church and the community is evident. The university remodeled the church/auditorium in May 2014 and the dining room in August of the same year. The first wing for the new university students' dormitory was built in February 2016. The Ellen G. White Research Center in the library opened in May 2016. New offices were built in May 2017.

The university's influence is not limited to the services it offers to its student body. Navojoa University hosts and promotes integral health events. It is affiliated with important organizations such as the *Red Mexicana de Universidades Promotoras de la Salud* and the Adventist project *¡Quiero Vivir Sano!* The university is also part of the national research project, *NutriNet-Salud México*, whose objective is to gather nutritional information from the population of Mexico and create solutions to problems such as obesity and chronic illnesses.

The university has several agreements through its nutrition and nursing programs with official organizations in the country. The agreements are made with the idea of giving service to various community sectors, such as several indigenous communities near the university. Through these programs, the university carries its vision to be recognized through its academic excellence, Christian values, and high sense of service.⁶

The university's missionary spirit has resulted in the establishment of several Adventist congregations. These congregations are led and supported by faculty members and theology students. Efforts to evangelize non-Adventist students have been ongoing since 1952, when the first baptisms were held on campus.⁷

Theology professors contribute to the church community through a program of continuing education for the North Mexican Union Conference pastors. The professors offer classes, and the university provides certificates in practical theology. Other training areas for lay members are also offered, especially to those in the Sonora Conference. When necessary, one of the theology professors is in charge of the Sonora Conference office of the Spirit of Prophecy, which is responsible for the study and promotion of the writings of Ellen G. White. Another theology professor authored the complement book for the Sabbath School Quarterly of 2014 on the Book of James to be used by the Inter-American Division and the South American Division.

As part of its international outreach efforts, especially from 2007 to 2012, Navojoa University granted a number of scholarships to Adventist students from Equatorial Guinea. After completing their studies at Navojoa University, most of these graduates returned to their country and are presently serving there in various professional fields.

The local community still refers to the university as "COLPAC" because they remember its beginnings and deeply appreciate the educational work that it still offers. This is evident through numerous positive comments from those who have come in contact with or have studied there over the years. Above all, this appreciation is shown by parents who send their children and youth to study at this institution from nearby towns despite the distance they have to travel.

What Needs to be Done to Fulfill the Mission

The goal for Navojoa University is to become financially independent and less reliant on North Mexican Union Conference. The school seeks to accomplish this goal through a better student recruitment plan and fundraising efforts to pay off certain debts acquired over the years.

Navojoa University's mission statement reads: "Navojoa University, as an Adventist Church educational institution, exists to transform the lives of students, forming disciples for the Kingdom of God through truth, service, and leadership."⁸ As a priority, the university continues to promote the Adventist lifestyle in all aspects of university life.

Navojoa University has followed a course of excellence through the valuable participation of its staff, faculty, and alumni. Certain university buildings and places have been named after some of them: the health sciences building after Mario A. Collins in November 2008; a campus street after Félix Cortés Antonio in May 2013; and the library after Norma de Sánchez in May 2016.

Thriving like an oasis in the extremely hot and dry Sonora desert, Navojoa University is a powerful testimony to what God can accomplish through His "school of miracles."⁹

List of Principals and Presidents

Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School: Juan Gil Rodríguez (1948-1953); Hipólito Preciado Atongo (1953-1954); Antonio Alarcón (1954-1955); Francisco Reyes (1955-1956); Lorenz A. Wheeler (1956-1958); Dan W. Palmer (1958-1964); Luis Carlos (1964-1965).

Period of temporary closure (1965-1967).

Mexican Pacific Academy: Henry E. Fuss (1967-1969); Horace A. Kelley (1969-1972); Mario A. Collins Sepúlveda (1972-1977); Neftalí Rodríguez Reyes (1977-1979); Félix Cortés Antonio (1979-1981); Saú Barceló Guerrero (1981-1983).

Pacific Academy: Isaías Tineo Valenzuela (1983-1986); Therlow A. Harper González (1986-1989); Carlos Ramón Avila (1989-1992); Saúl Pérez Baro (1992-1996); Abimael Escalante Valdez (1996-2001).

Navojoa University: Abimael Escalante Valdez (2001-2002); Gabriel D. Camacho Bojórquez (2002-2010); Mario Rábago Campos-*interim* (2011); Orley Sánchez Jiménez (2011-2016); Saúl Hernández Saavedra (2017-).

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NOTES

1. Navojoa University, "Registration and Certification," registrar's office, accessed July 2017, vice president of academic affairs' office archives.
2. Velino Salazar Escarpulli, *Cien años de Adventismo en México* (Montemorelos, Nuevo León, México: Centro de Producción Unión Mexicana del Norte, 1997), 269.
3. Ramón Eduardo Ruíz, *Mexico: The Challenge of Poverty and Illiteracy*, translated into Spanish by María Elena Hope, *México: 1920-1958 el reto de la pobreza y del analfabetismo* (Mexico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1977), 104.
4. Dora Breyther de Fuss, *Desde el Rhin hasta el Grijalva: fieles al llamado!* (Mexico, DF: CEPESA, 1980), 156-159.
5. "Nuestra historia," *Alimentos COLPAC*, 2015, accessed July 25, 2017, <https://colpac.com.mx/nuestra-historia/>.
6. "Marco Filosófico: Visión," *Universidad de Navojoa*, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://unav.edu.mx/web/marco-filosofico>.
7. Elías Cortez, engineer and former student of Pacific Agricultural and Industrial School and one of those baptized at that time, phone interview, July 21, 2017.
8. "Marco Filosófico: Misión," *Universidad de Navojoa*, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://unav.edu.mx/web/marco-filosofico>.
9. Breyther de Fuss, 156.

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