



**Connecting university
resources to the needs of
local governments and
communities to improve
well being.**

Leverage the knowledge, innovation, and energy of universities to tackle your community's most pressing problems.

Communities

- Increase community capacity
- Increase outreach efforts to the community with the participation of students, whose ideas are often received more positively by constituents
- Reinvigorate projects that are “stuck” due to lack of resources, will, or skill
- Generate material for future grant submissions
- Bring a new energy to your community and improve staff morale
- Provide a coordinated entry point to the university for all future projects
- Increase access to the next generation of workforce and help train them for your future needs

Students gain real-world experience by delivering radically useful ideas to surrounding communities.

Universities

- Engage with the community efficiently and economically
- Meet the community where they want to be met
- Provide students real-world experience- while decreasing administration time for faculty
- Support faculty without altering their core syllabus
- Leverage projects for future research and collaboration between the public sector and faculty researchers
- Build partnerships with diverse stakeholders in the community
- Build internal relationships across departments through projects that overlap disciplines
- Improve university visibility

About EPIC-N

The EPIC-Network (Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities) connects the human capital of universities with the needs of local governments and communities to improve quality of life. EPIC-N is the nonprofit association of institutions that adopt the award-winning EPIC Model for university-community partnerships.

The EPIC Model is radically simple. It works within administrative structures of universities and communities to achieve tremendous outcomes for all involved. It brings together the greatest resources in academia — professors, students, laboratories, research libraries, existing curricula — and creatively draws them together to tackle the biggest challenges in local communities. The results are immediate, lasting, and transformative:

Solutions that might never have been imagined through traditional structures; public goodwill toward the university; real-world learning for students; and a community that feels meaningful change.

By adopting the EPIC Model, colleges and universities around the world can become an active part in catalyzing real change in local communities, leading to high-road practices that will make life richer and more sustainable for generations to come.

“ Perhaps the most comprehensive effort by a university to infuse into its curricula sustainability and community outreach.”

EPIC-Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2022 EPIC-N began a regional assessment of universities and communities in LAC led by various institutions- ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability, the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research IAI, and United Nations Global Adaptation Network UNEP-GAN . These institutions are part of EPIC-LAC's Steering Committee that support and advise EPIC-LAC implementation.

This scoping exercise let us plan and connect with future program partners. At the end of 2022 EPIC-N opened a call for seed funds and granted 10 university-community partnerships that implemented the model with 14 respective total city partnerships.

The introduction of the EPIC Model to LAC occurred at the right time, as many universities were launching a set of innovative academic and experiential approaches in which university extension serves as a fundamental support unit for problem-solving and addressing community demands and needs, thereby strengthening community engagement. Our scoping exercise showed that universities were restructuring their mission and vision for community engagement beyond the typical outreach approach, moving toward a more reciprocal, respectful, and synergistic relationship with impactful takeaways for students and communities. EPIC saw a major opportunity to integrate into this process and facilitate implementation and meaningful collaboration that follows co-design and co-production of knowledge approaches. The new learning modalities and community focus presented by the EPIC Model have the capacity to bring academic forces together, reflect on improved solutions and strategies, methodologies, experiences, and strengthen critical and practical thinking among communities and local governments, potentially advancing SDGs.

EPIC-LAC now has 20 active member programs, and is continuing to grow across the region.

Contact Us

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EPIC-LAC Leadership

Dr. Andrea Chavez

EPIC-Latin America and Caribbean Coordinator
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Andrea Chavez has co-directed the activities of the Governance Infrastructure of the Amazon project from the Tropical Conservation and Development Program of the University of Florida. She is a Research Affiliate of the Space Ecology and Conservation Laboratory. Since 2009, Andrea has been working on capacity-building initiatives through applied research, training, and extension activities in natural resource management conservation in Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil. Andrea earned her PhD in Geography from the University of Florida, an MA in Political Science from Karl-Ruprechts-Universität in Heidelberg, Germany, and an MA in Geography from the University of Miami. Andrea has a deep interest in integrating science with society and fostering a better understanding between practice and theory in order to serve society.



EPIC-LAC Steering Committee

- Joel Rogers, EPIC-N, Chair & CEO
- Kim Portmess, IAI, STeP Program Lead
- Pourya Salehi, ICLEI, Head of Urban Research, Innovation, and Development
- Marcella Ohira, IAI, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Capacity Building

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Community Partnership Case Stories

Universidad de Colima & City of Colima

Helping Colima's Beekeepers

Program Details

Universidad de Colima
Avenida Universidad 333
Las Víboras, 28040 Colima
Col., Mexico

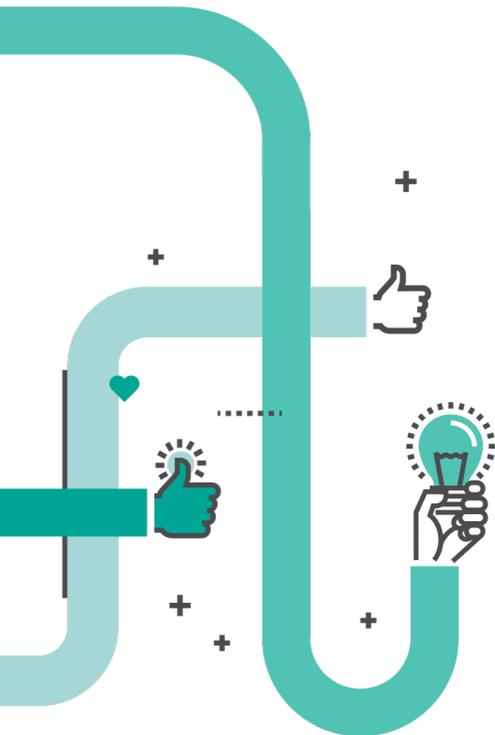
<https://portal.ucol.mx/>
Written by: Angela Delgado



Helping Colima's Beekeepers

In the beginning of 2023, professors at the University of Colima began working on a project to categorize different types of honey in Colima. The foundations of this project were conceived in 2015 when a team at the University of Colima began looking for funding for a study on pollen and nectar-producing plants in the state of Colima. This team was created by Dr. Andrés García Aguayo, Carlos Leopardí, Christian Carolina Gallegos, Elvira Silva Jiménez, and two classes of 24 Biology and Geographic Information Systems students. Over the course of the project, the students learned how to measure the basic physicochemical characteristics of honey, such as its color, freshness, and sweetness. They also learned how to identify different types of plants and honey in their state. Their measurements helped farmers differentiate the botanical origin of their product from other types of honey, thereby increasing its value. Thanks to EPIC-N, the University of Colima's team was able to focus on the construction of a pollen library, identifying the grains of pollen in honey, and the creation of a risk map.

Over the course of the project, students encountered many challenges. Some of these challenges included difficulties in analyzing honey samples due to the variety of characteristics that honey can possess. Additionally, students needed to collaborate with local beekeepers, who had hesitations about sharing the location of their apiaries with the university. They worried that others would find out and encroach on their apiaries, affecting the productivity of their hives. Fortunately, the beekeepers agreed to share samples and data with the University of Colima, hoping to learn more about the product they were selling. They found substantial value in the results and have continued to work with students at the University of Colima. Since the beginning of the project, the team has analyzed 24 different types of honey and a variety of pollen samples, thanks to the support of beekeepers who found value in understanding the resources that their bees used.



Although the studies were finalized in June of 2024, the team wants to continue their work with beekeepers throughout Colima. They hope that beekeepers will continue to reach out to the University of Colima with questions and concerns about their product. The team is also working on the creation of a pollen library using the pollen samples they collected, which will serve as a resource for beekeepers. Finally, the team plans to collaborate with another team to create a risk map containing annual flowering patterns, safe spaces for bees, and areas contaminated with pesticides, as another resource for farmers. The University of Colima hopes that this project will serve as an example and initiate a larger movement within the field. With the help of other universities, the University of Colima aims to create an organization of honey producers to benefit beekeepers across Mexico.



“They (the beekeepers) found substantial value in the results and have continued to work with students at the University of Colima.”

Metropolitan Autonomous University & Cautitlán Izcalli

Rescuing La Piedad Lagoon

Program Details

Metropolitan Autonomous University
Prolongación Canal de Miramontes 3855
Ciudad de México 14387

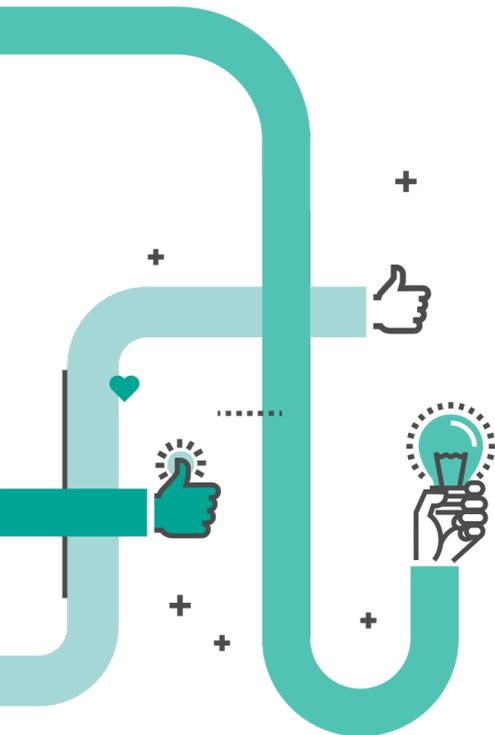
<https://www.uam.mx/>
Written by: Angela Delgado



Rescuing La Piedad Lagoon

Since 2023, EPIC-N has helped the Metropolitan Autonomous University Azcapotzalco increase efforts to save the La Piedad Lagoon in the city of Cuautitlán Izcalli, Mexico through a series of alumni projects involving over 300 undergraduate students. The salvation of La Piedad from contaminants is critical to the city as it is an essential body of water that can contribute one cubic meter of water per second to municipalities that struggle to meet their daily demands of the vital resource. The projects not only help meet environmental goals of facilitated access to unpolluted natural areas, they also increase activities that will lead to economic development and environmental consciousness. Dr. Fabiola Sosa, the coordinator of the project and advisor of the university's student projects, hopes that the new access to a clean body of water will revitalize communities by encouraging organic farming and recreational activities such as bird watching and fishing.

Throughout the years, different academic departments and courses at the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM) have engaged in efforts to rescue the Lagoon. Notable course projects include UAM's sociology department's Qualitative Data Collection course, where students interviewed community members on how the lagoon's contamination and decrease in water quality has affected their well-being, livelihood, cultural traditions, and nourishment. Additionally, Chemical Analysis courses spend time on field reports that monitor the lagoon's water quality and affluents and assess the distinct contaminants present in the water. The findings of both of these courses were captured in a documentary made by students in the Graphic Design Communications course, who also created infographics and other forms of digital media to spread awareness about the lagoon's current state. Lastly, architectural students at UAM have dedicated a significant amount of time on the creation of architectural proposals focusing on adequate landscaping for the wetlands of the region. Over the next few years, student involvement in the Lagoon's rescue is expected to increase with about 180 students per trimester from UAM, along with additional participation from other universities across the country.



Completed course projects have received nothing but positive feedback from community members and councils. Every year, UAM makes an effort to report accomplishments to the public by hosting student presentations where local governments, conservation groups, and community members can learn about their work. Their last presentation session took place on February 19th, 2024, when the audience filled an auditorium of over 150 people (more information can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xw9oezu9KBO>). The purpose of these presentations is to update authorities on the progress of student work so that local governments that have frequent shifts in councils can continue to support students and their efforts by promoting environmental policies. Although previous student projects have been successful in making progress towards environmental, economic, and social development, Dr. Sosa hopes that students will soon be able to work on governmental action projects, with the recently established Basin Committee focusing on making the restoration of La Piedad a political priority. Before students can get involved in governmental work that will establish wetland systems to manage cleanliness, however, hydraulic engineers must determine the technical feasibility of a system's capacity to withstand the amount of water that enters the Lagoon to ensure long-term durability and efficiency. These assessments are expected to begin as soon as July of this year. After these characteristics are ensured, Dr. Sosa expects to begin the process of establishing legal institutions that will create a protection status for the Lagoon, avoiding its urbanization and creating a protected natural area on a federal level so that any threat to its conservation can lead to legal action. The start of a legal project will be a more prolonged process than what students are accustomed to. Still, Dr. Sosa is optimistic that this will teach students about the importance of continuous activism.

Dr. Fabiola Sosa is tremendously proud of the incredible work accomplished by the UAM students. Many of their endeavors have received recognition in local and national newspapers, radio stations, and television channels. Students have had the opportunity to share their experiences and how their work has influenced them, and many of them have expressed interest in pursuing careers in environmental conservation. As part of the recognition for these efforts, Dr. Sosa was also awarded the Woman Defender of Water Award in 2023, and an award from the Judiciary of the Federation on the 2024 International Women's Day for her dedication to equality and search for safe spaces for women. Dr. Sosa reflects on what these awards mean to her and how they represent the role of responsibility placed on women to ensure the accessibility of clean water in their households for their families. She states that she is excited for more students to get involved in the salvation of La Piedad so that they can work towards finding solutions for the societal injustices that come with environmental pollution. Dr. Sosa is grateful for the passion and dedication to the issue that students have conveyed through their hard work and is looking forward to seeing them become our future agents of change.

“The projects not only help meet environmental goals of facilitated access to unpolluted natural areas, they also increase activities that will lead to economic development and environmental consciousness.”

Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral & Santa Elena

ESPOL Tackles Water Security in Santa Elena

Program Details

Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral
Avenida Principal de la ESPOL
Guayaquil, Ecuador

<https://www.espol.edu.ec/>
Written by: Sam Patton & Andrea Chavez



From Classroom to Community: ESPOL Tackles Water Security in Santa Elena

La Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL) in [Guayaquil](#), Ecuador, is a university deeply committed to its students and the broader community. Since 2023, ESPOL has been an active member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N). Although ESPOL has been implementing several community partnership initiatives related to tourism, resilience, and digitalization, this project story emphasizes its specific efforts in water management.

ESPOL has made significant impacts, particularly in the Santa Elena region, by launching 30 initiatives aimed at developing sustainable infrastructure and water management education across Ecuador. This southern coastal province, home to approximately 300,000 residents, faces challenges in providing water to its growing population and agricultural sector.

The Santa Elena peninsula is in a precarious situation as its primary water source, the Daule River, is located over 200 kilometers away. The river also supplies Guayaquil, Ecuador's most populous city, making Santa Elena vulnerable to disruptions in the canal system or reductions in river flow, which could lead to potential water shortages. Additionally, local water sources are increasingly threatened by salinization due to rising sea levels.

Santa Elena is characterized by a mix of urban and rural communities, with agriculture and tourism as key economic drivers. In rural areas, such as Manglaralto Parish, which has a population of around 37,167, water is primarily sourced from underground aquifers, which are managed by local water councils. However, declining water levels and erratic rainfall patterns are straining their ability to distribute water effectively. Recognizing these challenges, ESPOL engaged with the community to develop a sustainable water management plan in partnership with EPIC-N.

After assessing the issues in Santa Elena, ESPOL identified several areas for intervention. One primary concern was the lack of adequate water monitoring in the Manglaralto Parish. Without proper sensing devices, it was difficult to make informed decisions about water usage. In collaboration with Ecuador's Autoridad Nacional de Meteorología e Hidrología (INAMHI), ESPOL installed monitoring devices to measure water levels and test chemical properties to ensure safety.

ESPOL also addressed the transportation of water from wells to residents. They undertook efforts to clean and restore dikes and canals, which are essential for water distribution in Manglaralto. To ensure long-term sustainability, ESPOL established regular maintenance protocols for these infrastructures.

Education played a crucial role in ESPOL's strategy. They organized events and educational campaigns to connect local communities with experts on sustainable water usage practices. They set up community challenges to promote sustainable water usage in homes. Through these efforts, ESPOL not only provided immediate solutions to the community's challenges, but also empowered the community with knowledge for sustainable water management in the future.

ESPOL's students played a significant role in the execution of this project. They frequently participated in fieldwork that was vital to the project's success, including the installation of monitoring stations and cleanup efforts. Their work was not only essential to the project's success but also vital to their learning. The skills that these students acquired throughout the project will serve them well in their future careers, creating a workforce of competent and knowledgeable individuals with advanced knowledge of local issues.

Although many aspects of this project are still a work in progress, it has already had a lasting impact on hundreds of thousands of people. While the effects of climate change will continue to cause water security problems, ESPOL has created a community that is more resilient to these challenges and more informed about sustainable water management practices. With the help of EPIC-N, ESPOL will continue to create a more sustainable future for communities all over Ecuador.



“The skills that these students acquired throughout the project will serve them well in their future careers, creating a workforce of competent and knowledgeable individuals with advanced knowledge of local issues.”

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú & Lima

PUCP's Environmental Law Clinic

Program Details

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú
Av. Universitaria 1801, San Miguel, Lima
15088, Perú

<https://www.pucp.edu.pe/>
Written by: Sam Patton



PUCP's Environmental Law Clinic: Protecting Environmental Rights in Peru and Beyond

Over the past 15 years, the Environmental Law Clinic at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) has become a model of experiential legal education that defends environmental rights in Peru and abroad. Founded in 2009, the Clinic has addressed complex environmental challenges at the local, national, and international levels. Its location, in a country home to the second largest expanse of the Amazon rainforest, gives it a unique perspective and responsibility. Despite its global ecological importance, the Peruvian Amazon faces intense pressures from illegal logging, mining, and road construction, resulting in the annual loss of approximately 150,000 hectares of forest.

In response to these threats, the Clinic launched a project in 2023 focused on the Madre de Dios region, one of the most biologically rich and environmentally vulnerable areas in the country. Led by Professor Andrea Domínguez, four PUCP law students traveled to Puerto Maldonado, thanks to support from the EPIC-Network, the FCDS, and SPDA, to conduct field research and engage with environmental defenders, public officials, and local organizations. Their findings revealed that illegal gold mining not only drives deforestation but also contaminates water sources and is linked to other criminal networks. They also identified systemic problems in law enforcement, such as corruption and lack of funding.

Based on this evidence, the Clinic developed a legal strategy with four pillars: (1) strengthen the implementation of existing laws, (2) propose new preventive legal measures, (3) standardize protection protocols for environmental defenders, and (4) promote specific resources to ensure their safety. These recommendations were designed to complement and strengthen the implementation of Bill 4686, which seeks to protect environmental human rights defenders in Peru.

The project had a dual impact: it offered concrete contributions to policy reform and provided PUCP students with a transformative and practical learning experience. As one student commented, "This experience allowed us to connect legal knowledge with real-life justice challenges; it reaffirmed our commitment to using law as a tool for environmental protection."

The PUCP Environmental Law Clinic remains committed to training future lawyers and supporting communities on the front lines of environmental defense. With the support of EPIC-N and growing international collaboration, its work will continue to inspire legal innovation for sustainability throughout Latin America.

What does the EPIC-Network offer to universities?

The network provides value to universities by advancing their mission, improving their students' learning experience, and enhancing their reputation with public and private donors. EPIC-N offers the following array of resources free of charge to its members with the goal of increasing the number, quality, performance, and influence of EPIC programs globally, and no dues or fees are required to join.

Benefits of the Network

Start-up toolkit

Listserv

Annual conference

Networking opportunities

Trainings and site visits

Project library

Technical assistance

Resources toolbox

Webinars

Courses

Evaluation optimization

Global prestige and marketing

Funding opportunities

Strategic partnerships

Cross-campus grant-writing opportunities

Support on all the resources above

EPIC-LAC By the Numbers



50+ Courses



900+
Students



10 Countries

The EPIC Model

1. Existing courses and faculty/staff/students and existing local government-identified staff and projects
2. Partnerships documented through contracts and MOUs
3. Intentionally improving quality of life through the UN Sustainable Development Goals
4. Community-identified, -driven, and -evaluated projects
5. Numbers: Bringing the full power of the university to local governments

EPIC-LAC Members

Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral
Pontifical Catholic University do Paraná
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California
Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga
Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana
Universidad Científica del Sur, Peru
Universidad de Chile
Universidad de Colima
Universidad de Granma

Universidad de Guadalajara
Universidad Mayor de San Andres
Universidad Mayor de San Simón
Universidad Veracruzana
Universidade do Estado do Mato Grosso
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
University of Buenos Aires
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana
Universidad Iberoamericana Tijuana
CATHALAC

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