



Academic freedom and university autonomy under threat

Ideological imposition in nicaraguan higher education

In Nicaragua, there is a State policy aimed at violating academic freedom and university autonomy. The public authorities, in complicity with university authorities pro Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and individuals associated with the government, have promoted and executed practices of indoctrination in the stages of admission to the universities, lectures and assesing processes, graduation and, in general, each of the dimensions that comprise higher education, as well as implementing reprisals against university students who are critical of the national government. This bulletin offers a look at these practices:



Ideological imposition and politically motivated discrimination in the university admissions process in Nicaragua

One of the restrictions that most affects the right of access to higher education in Nicaragua is the politicization and obstruction of access to Nicaraguan universities. Aula Abierta has documented complaints from Nicaraguans that the university admissions process is in many cases politicized and ideologized, especially in state universities in Nicaragua.



TESTIMONY 1

A student of the UNAN-Managua, in an anonymous interview given to Aula Abierta, about the admission process to the UNAN-Managua, indicated that “Following the introduction of the psychometric test, there have been many more cases of students who are supposed to have equal conditions to enter, but instead they are selected based on the affinity of their family or themselves, in favor of the government or by people who following the same line of affinity with the government have positions where they can select or alter the result of entry at their convenience. As an example of this : in 2019, a classmate who did not meet the established average grades to enter her desired career, talked to the network of the Sandinistas and entered without reaching the required average, as she was the Coordinator of Citizen Power (CPC) in her zone, in the isla of Ometepe.”



TESTIMONY 2

A student in exile, who prefers to keep her identity confidential for security reasons, indicated that when she entered to UNAN-León, in 2017, coming from the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, she was already warned by classmates from her region that “in the university she could not speak against the government and that the university was Sandinista; in addition, when I entered the UNAN boarding school, the coordinator of the same, was Sandinista and also racist towards students from the coast, to whom we were given the worst rooms and we were blamed for theft or labeled as brutes.”



Ideological impositions in inductive courses at Nicaraguan universities

In 2021, Ramona Rodríguez, rector of the UNAN MANagua and openly sympathetic to the Sandinista government, announced the implementation of a course on “Introduction to Citizenship and Professional Skills”. Max Jerez, student leader who was a political prisoner and is currently expatriated in exile, denounced that there was a strategy of political indoctrination by the Government through this course “They have announced the decision to shamelessly deepen the political indoctrination of university students. In this sense, the rector’s office intends to establish a political narrative favorable to the Sandinista Front in universities throughout the national territory, such actions constitute a serious violation of the political and citizens’ rights of students and a clear violation of university autonomy”.

Political indoctrination and ideological imposition in the development of academic activities and in university spaces in Nicaragua

A student of the UNAN-Managua, told anonymously for security reasons that “there are murals, painted walls, signs, buildings with red and black colors, etc (Colors that identify the FSLN). In the year 2022, July, they were forced to go to an activity where the piñatas were opposition characters such as Monsignor Silvio Baez and Medardo Mairena, on that occasion I could see it from my faculty, since it overlooks the field and could be seen, I do not know if they were only internal scholarship students, but there were teachers as well.”



Maritza Vallecillo Flores, director of the UNAN-Managua Library System and coordinator of SIBIUN.

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Political propaganda in the Nicaraguan University Libraries System (SIBIUN)

On July 7, 2023, in the framework of the fortieth meeting of university libraries in Nicaragua, it was registered the presence of political propaganda in favor of the FSLN promoted by the National Council of Universities, in conjunction with SIBIUN. This meeting is intended to articulate the performance and operation of public university libraries in the country, so the presence of this political propaganda and its impact on decision-making, which should be strictly academic, is of concern.

This political and ideological propaganda has also been presented in scientific journals sponsored by SIBIUN. For example, within the “Revista Índice” of the National Council of Universities, in 2 of its four issues, columns have been published in its segment “documentary memory” aimed at evoking the importance and benefits of the Sandinista revolution, promoting an ideological bias within a space that should be strictly academic.

Polytechnic University of Nicaragua



Increasing ideological imposition in universities illegally cancelled and confiscated by the Nicaraguan government

In February 2022, as part of the wave of illegalization of universities by the Nicaraguan government, the legal status of the Polytechnic University of Nicaragua (UPOLI) was cancelled and it became the National Polytechnic University (UPN); In this context, on February 4, 2022, members of the CUDJ denounced to Aula Abierta alleged acts of political proselytism by UNEN on the university campus, whose representatives, in the context of such illegalization, toured the university facilities carrying red and black flags, considered as pro-government propaganda, carrying objects to make noise and chanting slogans that read ***“Daniel, Daniel, the people are with him”***.

Final blow to free universities

UCA illegalized and arbitrarily confiscated

The Central American University (UCA) in Nicaragua has been subjected to a series of attacks by the government, which constitutes a serious violation of academic freedom and other human rights of university students in the country.

Since 2018, UCA has been subject to reprisals and restrictions, culminating in the seizure of its assets and the indefinite cessation of its academic activities. These attacks include budgetary suffocation, retaliation against staff and persecution of the student body. The impact of these actions is significant, as the UCA is recognized as a free and democratic space in Nicaragua, and has been a key supporter of the protesters during the 2018 protests.



Attacks against UCA are aggressions against civil society, denounces former rector Adrián Meza Soza

In view of the intervention of the UCA in Nicaragua, the former Nicaraguan rector, Adrián Meza Soza, assured that it is an aggression against civil society that violates the Inter-American Principles on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

“Nicaraguan academics inside and outside the country must prepare ourselves for the battle that is coming in these scenarios and in which we will unmask these claws of the regime against Nicaraguan education”

Meza Soza

In relation to the budgetary asphyxiation that has affected scholarship programs and limited student access to the Universidad Centroamericana, in 2022 the reform of the Law of Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions excluded the UCA from receiving constitutional resources destined for universities. In addition, UCA staff has been subjected to reprisals, such as the prohibition to form student groups and death threats. Several academics, including the former rector of UCA, have been forced into exile due to government restrictions.

The UCA student body has not been left out of these attacks either. They have been harassed and persecuted because of their status as university students. In this regard, Aula Abierta documented cases of students interrogated and searched during the commemoration of the third anniversary of the 2018 protests.

Former rector Medina

UCA student protests made Daniel Ortega's government uncomfortable

In view of the intervention of the UCA in Nicaragua, the former rector of Nicaragua, Ernesto Medina, recalled the repeated attacks on university autonomy and academic freedom in recent years against Nicaraguan universities.

For the former Nicaraguan rector, the social protests led by the students of the UCA made the Nicaraguan government uncomfortable.

Attacks on the UCA and violations of academic freedom are of grave concern to the international community. The UCA is recognized for its contribution to Nicaraguan society and its commitment to the defense of human rights and democracy. It is essential that university autonomy be respected and that all reprisals and persecution against the UCA and its academic community be stopped, in accordance with the Inter-American Principles on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy.

The international community and human rights organizations must raise their voices in solidarity with the UCA and demand that the Nicaraguan government immediately cease the attacks and respect the academic freedom and human rights of university students. The UCA is a vital institution for the development of education and critical thinking in Nicaragua, and its preservation is fundamental for the future of the country.