IDEA GROUP PUBLISHING
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IT5722

Library Networking of the Universidad de Oriente: A Case Study of Introduction of Information Technology

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Universidad de Oriente was founded in 1958 and structured in five campuses, located in five different states in the south northeastern region of Venezuela, with a current total enrollment of 43,000 students and 200 teachers. A total of 20 libraries of different kinds manually served these students and professors until 1999. To introduce new information technologies to the libraries and all laboratories of the university, the intranet of the university—with 32 networking systems—was introduced for all campuses with the technology of Main Frame Relay. Automation services of libraries were introduced with Alejandria, a locally produced software in effect since 2001. The challenging job is to create consciousness about information literacy. Creation of university digital databases and digitalization of valuable documents are in progress.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The south northeastern region of the country, belonging to five states, which comprise over 40% of the national territory (*Figure 1*), did not have any higher educational institutions to offer professional courses. The people were mostly fishermen

Figure 1. Map of Venezuela

in the coastal areas, small farmers in the central region, or miners in the south. Most younger generations with or without primary or secondary education used to follow the parental profession to earn their livings. Few exceptional younger people from well-to-do families pursued higher education in Caracas, the capital of the country.

Immediately after installing a provisional democratic government on November 21, 1958, the government decreed to create the Universidad de Oriente (UDO), one university for five states, to promote and develop economic, educational, and cultural progress in each of these states. The newly appointed rector introduced the centralized campus system (or Nucleo), a new experimental educational system in the country. Each campus initiated the academic activities with a specialized faculty, in accordance with the characteristics of the land and culture of the region. The first inaugural class started on October 12, 1959, in Cumana, the headquarters of the new university, with 120 students and nine teaching staff. As of 2002, the university had an enrollment of more than 43,000 students, over 2,500 teaching staff, and over 5,000 administrative and supporting personnel. The five initial campuses had grown by another five sub-campuses by mid-2002 to meet the demand of the local students. The university offers graduate, undergraduate, and some diploma courses in all branches of science, technology, and humanities, except Law. An evaluation committee reported in 2001 that the UDO achieved the original objectives in bringing cultural changes in the region.

The university is completely financed by the Central Government. Students pay less than US$1 per semester for inscription, and receive a well-balanced lunch and dinner on