

Microbiology education in Mexico

Martin Collins



ABOVE:
The Stock Exchange in Mexico City in the Zona Rosa (the 'west end', not the 'red light' district!).

RIGHT:
An expedition from the lab in the UAM Department of Biotechnology in 1997. We visited a colonial style town about 50 km outside Mexico City, well away from the pollution.

PHOTOS COURTESY MARTIN COLLINS

Metropolitana (UAM) with which I have been associated for the last 10 years through a variety of British Council

and EU-funded initiatives. UAM comprises three separate campuses in different parts of the city. UAM-Iztapalapa (about 13,000 students) is situated in an industrial area and amongst its specialities are biology, hydrobiology, biochemistry and food technology, and engineering. Its organization of microbiology teaching typifies that in many Mexican universities and polytechnics. A major course in microbiology is taught in the second year of study

A web search for Universities in Mexico will reveal a listing of some 102 publically and privately funded universities and polytechnics spread throughout the country (<http://geowww.uibk.ac.at/univ/>). These vary markedly in size and the range of courses offered with virtually a complete absence of named degrees or departments of microbiology. However, microbiology is an integral component of many degree or Licenciateship courses spanning medicine, biology, molecular genetics, food technology and more, whilst microbiological research is active in many departments throughout the country. By far the largest and oldest university is the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, located in Mexico City, with about 300,000 registered students. Another publicly funded university in the capital is the Universidad Autónoma

and is common to several degree programmes, thus classes are large and practicals a major feat of organization. More specialist courses such as food microbiology are taught in the third year to smaller sized groups. Further specialization and a major project are undertaken in the final year. Thus it is possible for students to graduate in several named degrees having gained quite a range of experience in microbiology. Such experiences may be extended through post-graduate MSc courses, again under inclusive titles, e.g. biotechnology.

Visiting staff from UK and elsewhere may be involved in various aspects of these courses. Certainly those of us from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) have taught courses ranging from food poisoning to microbial molecular genetics, language rarely being a problem due mainly to the linguistic skills of the students! On one memorable occasion a course for industry on microbiology and the development of organoleptic characteristics of yoghurt was jointly organized and run by colleagues from UAM, Huddersfield, Nottingham and QUB.

Postgraduate students and staff at UAM are encouraged to make use of International University links and interactions typified by QUB-UAM links in which a succession of students and staff from UAM spend some time working in the Department in Belfast and those from QUB spend time working on joint research and teaching in UAM.

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