

ACADEMIC REPORT 2006/2007

Rector of the University of Barcelona,
Commissioner for Universities and Research,
President of the Social Council,
Academic authorities,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In keeping with tradition, the inauguration of the academic year in this magnificent setting, the *Paranimf* (Assembly Hall) of our university, begins with a presentation of the academic report for the year just ended, 2006-2007.

The purpose of the report is to describe the activity of our institution, but so as not to bore you with too many facts and figures, and given the impossibility of covering everything in a matter of minutes, I will restrict myself to giving an overview, a broad outline of the most notable aspects of the activity carried out by and within the University of Barcelona during the last academic year. Furthermore, and as a complement to my presentation, you all have a copy of the document *The UB in Figures*, which sets out the extent of this activity, as well as the latest edition of the magazine *La Universitat*, which for the last ten years has been keeping track of all that goes on in our institution.

So, although I may offer a partial view of all that has happened, it will nonetheless be a view that is full of enthusiasm and regard for the institution. And I would like to begin with this point, because it seems to me that what we lack in the university, and in the Catalan university system as a whole, is enthusiasm. In political terms the last academic year was marked by a great many uncertainties, by much confusion and a sense of disorientation, all of which left many of us within the university community feeling not only perplexed about how best to proceed, but also somewhat discouraged. The challenge, therefore, is to regain our enthusiasm and belief in the future.

In this regard, the presentation of the Academic Report 2006/2007 is also an opportunity to celebrate the University of Barcelona and, by extension, the whole of the Catalan university system. And the task is to do so by looking inwards, by examining what has been done and achieved by the UB during the last academic year, while avoiding any navel-gazing or any complacency.

For the sake of simplicity I have tried to make my presentation function like a mirror which reflects, as would a hologram, various areas of university activity, and I will describe the main features of each one.

The first area concerns academic and teaching activity. During the 2006-2007 academic year we have taught over 80,000 people: undergraduates on first- and second-cycle courses, doctoral students, those on Master's degrees and others involved in lifelong learning. Once again the UB has been the leading Catalan university in terms of new intake, since, of the more than 30,000 students enrolled throughout Catalonia, 11,825 chose the University of Barcelona. Obviously, this partly reflects our size and the range and breadth of the courses that we offer. However, what is especially noteworthy is the analysis in quantitative terms, that is to say, the UB as first choice with respect to the number of places available, where the figure was 1.33, as well as the mean grades required for entry, which were as high as 8.23 in medicine and 7.49 in dentistry, thus illustrating the heavy demand for places and the limitations that we are obliged to impose in terms of places offered.

In addition to the above, mention should be made of the international and cosmopolitan nature both of our university and of the city of Barcelona, a fact that is reflected in the more than 2,000 foreign students who enrolled during the last academic year. Then there are the more than 800 students from the UB who have spent time studying abroad, as well as the many foreign lecturers who have taught at the UB, or those among our own staff who have been invited to teach at foreign universities.

Another important landmark this year was the launch of our official master's program, which included 41 official master's degrees. The response from the students has been particularly positive. This year we will be offering more courses, but the experience gained from the first round of official master's degrees will serve as a useful guide in developing these courses which, from both an academic and professional point of view, provide specialized and in-depth training. Obviously, room also needs to be made for an aspect which we regard as highly important, namely education in values, educating citizens who are able to show a critical and committed spirit as regards the future of their country.

The slogan used to advertise these official master's degrees is *Choose your destination with the UB*. While there are indeed many destinations, there is probably only one way of getting there: the road of individual effort and long, hard studying, a road that will have been particularly well travelled by those graduates who today will receive a special award for their achievements. And, within the University of Barcelona, students who set out along this road are offered the support and resources they need, whatever destination they choose.

However, this area of academic and teaching activity does not end there. Also noteworthy has been the intense concern shown for teaching, which is reflected not only in the number of academic innovation groups or the numerous teaching initiatives undertaken, and in the adoption by the Social Council of the document setting out the basis for tutorials at the University of Barcelona. Another key event during the year was the decision by the Catalan government to give the Jaume Vicens Vives award for teaching innovation to Dr. Josep Carreras i Barnés from the Faculty of Medicine and the group award to the Department of Painting of the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Department of Physiology of the Faculty of Biology.

No list of notable aspects can fail to mention the setting up of the UB's Virtual Campus, a technology platform designed as a support for teaching and learning, and one which will now be extended to replace the now familiar "electronic dossiers", another innovative initiative that has now been superseded as a result of technological developments.

Finally, it should be said that this academic and teaching area also comprises a set of teaching activities that is reflected in the wide-ranging courses on offer at the UB; this includes not only the master's degrees and lifelong learning or tailored learning courses, but also the courses at the School of Modern Languages or the Institute of Hispanic Studies, not to mention courses for those who wish to learn Catalan, for the elderly, and the many summer school activities that, for ten years now, have been offered as part of the *Els Juliols* program and which, year on year, attract large numbers of students and leave their mark on society.

The second area I would like to reflect concerns research, whether in the laboratory, the library or in field work. This is an area characterized by intellectual concerns, curiosity, the desire to know, and scientific activity, and one which embraces many areas of knowledge within the UB. The university has made a particular impact in the biomedical field and is regarded as one of the top 100 centres worldwide: in the area of clinical medicine and pharmacy it is ranked 87th.

Our frontline research has achieved international recognition and, for instance, has led during the last year to the publication of several studies involving UB researchers in the reputed journal *Science*; this research has concerned issues as wide-ranging as the key role played by the protein caveolin-1, global warming and genetic changes in the fruit fly, the Ebola virus and populations of great apes, the genome sequence of the sea urchin, and the capacity of newborns to distinguish between two languages via the facial gestures of the speakers. So a great variety of research is conducted at the UB, a university that is intensely engaged in scientific investigation across a wide range of disciplines.

At both national and international level the number of research projects awarded to our staff via competitive calls continues to show sustained growth. By way of illustration the following figures should suffice: 619 projects, €75 million in research and technology transfer, and around 85 projects submitted for the first call of the VII European program for research and development, where two of the ten projects already granted funding are coordinated by the UB. In the first call for European Research Council starting grants, three lecturers from the UB and two researchers from the Barcelona Science Parks have been pre-selected, an extraordinary achievement when one bears in mind that of the almost 10,000 submissions, only seventeen from the whole of Catalonia have been pre-selected.

In addition to the above, mention should also be made of the fact that the UB obtained the most important funding award given under the aegis of Spain's EUROCIENCIA research program. Finally, the UB is also taking part in the International Polar Year, an international research program aimed at promoting the study of the Arctic and Antarctic regions in the period up until 2009.

The university's research activity has also been recognized by various institutions and several members of staff have received awards. While aware that my list is incomplete I would like to mention the following: the Gregorio Marañón Research Prize to Joan Rodés from the Faculty of Medicine; the Narcís Monturiol Medal for scientific and technological merit to the researchers Maria Casado, Xavier Llimona and Joan Domènech Ros; the City of Barcelona Prize for scientific research to Albert Pla; the Joan Oró Prize for scientific publication, awarded in its third year to the thesis written by Francesc Murria from the Department of Ecology; the Prize for Clinical Biomedical Research awarded to Antoni Torres; and finally, the Senate of Doctors Prize awarded to Maria Teresa Casals in a ceremony held in this very *Paranimf*.

As regards research structures, the last academic year saw the setting up of institutes linked to specific disciplines, for instance, the Institute of Biomedicine of the University of Barcelona. The UB also played a role in institutes backed by the Catalan government or other institutions, examples being the *BioRegió de Catalunya*, the b-TEC Park (Barcelona Innovation Technology), the Centre for Research in Education and Technology, the Foundation for Research into Language Technologies, and the Institute for Research into Multilingualism Management. Special mention should also be made of the research call posted by the Spanish Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs and aimed at the network of biomedical research centres (known as *Cibers*), in which the UB is the only university in Spain to participate in all the subject areas addressed by these centres.

It is now twenty years since the university set up its scientific and technical services, which throughout this period have provided both services and technology to most of our specialist areas of experimental research.

This research activity takes into account the fact that innovation and knowledge transfer are undoubtedly one of the university's key missions. This "third mission" has been further developed during the 2006-2007 academic year via the setting up of the "Transfer Portal" and the now fully-operational Agency for Assessing and Marketing Research Results (AVCRI). The latter has already posted its first call as part of the "Assessment Projects" program and, in the near future, aims to develop a solid structure for transferring and patenting the results of university research.

A **third area** is also visible in this mirror I am pointing at our university, and it is one which follows on from the previous two areas. It refers to what I would call the social dimension of our institution, not only because teaching, research and the university's activity as a whole are there to serve society, but also because we neither can nor wish to remain within an ivory tower. Indeed, our lecturers, our administrative and service staff, and our students all form part of and contribute to the development of society.

An example of this is that our lecturers and the institutional activities of the UB merit an average of 320 mentions per month in the press. Or from a different angle, one involving a strong social commitment, is the work carried out during the last academic year by the charitable organization *Fundació Solidaritat UB*.

A key element in our efforts to enhance our social dimension is the Social Council, the body through which society takes part in the life of the university, and vice-versa. Since last May the Council has had a new president, Joaquim Coello Brufau, who took over from Juan José López-Burniol. Among the many activities of the Social Council, which of course is responsible for overseeing the financial side of university affairs and monitoring the performance of services, I would like to highlight just two aspects: the first is the third annual Social Council Awards for the best scientific projects derived from a doctoral thesis read at the UB, and the second is the backing given by the Council to the drawing up of the university's long-term strategic plan *Horitzó 2020*.

This plan, promoted by the rector himself and which is about to enter the diffusion and participation stage, was first sketched out during the highly productive strategy planning days held last May and June. The initiative aims to stimulate debate on two issues: firstly, the reforms necessary to consolidate the UB as a centre of reference on the European scale, and secondly, based on a detailed study of the challenges facing the university and its needs as an institution, how to influence government policy as regards the future of a university system which, to some extent, is having to compensate for a serious lack of vision in university policy.

The vision of a university system at the service of the country has also led us to help in setting up the inter-university network *UniBa*, a platform for establishing contact not only with emerging technology-based and innovative companies who are on the lookout for capital, but also with potential private investors willing to provide entrepreneurial know-how, experience and financial backing. Similarly, a joint agreement between the UB and the Chinese government, the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the cultural centre Casa Asia has led to the setting up of the Confucius Institute. As for this historic building in which we are gathered, last June saw it host the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Inter-university Council of Catalonia, the body responsible for coordinating the Catalan university system and advising the Catalan government on all university matters.

All the world's top universities have a prestigious publishing house that lends its backing to teaching and research activities. In the case of the UB, the last year once again saw greater support being given to our publications, which included 207 books, 32 scientific journals and, in various formats, 256 doctoral theses. Indeed, in the 2006-2007 academic year around 500 lecturers submitted projects for publication.

Mention should also be made here of the international scope of our institution, not only through the agreements and close links established with various universities and institutions around the world, but also in terms of our involvement in university associations such as the Coimbra Group, whose Executive Committee we joined this year, the International Forum of Public Universities set up in Montreal, and the European University Association, which is currently conducting an institutional evaluation of the UB and whose spring convention for 2008 will be hosted by our institution.

This third area also includes the social recognition received by the UB, one which has many different facets. On a formal level this recognition is illustrated through a number of awards, for example, the 20th Esteve Bassols "Senyor de Barcelona" Prize given to our emeritus professor, Jordi Sabater Pi, and the Sant Jordi Cross awarded to the UB lecturers Eduard Baget, Teresa Duran, Jorge Wagensberg and Victoria Sau, as well as to the professor of constitutional law, Jordi Solé Tura, who is not only emeritus professor at the UB but also one of the founding fathers of the Spanish constitution.

In a similar vein, mention should be made of the City of Barcelona Gold Medal for Scientific Merit, awarded by the Municipal Council of Barcelona to the Hospital Clínic in recognition of its work in the fields of healthcare provision, research and teaching, as well as for the institutional framework it represents.

Also during the 2006-2007 academic year the UB awarded honorary doctorates to the oncologist Carlos Cordón, the psychologist Risto Näätänen, and the musician Jordi Savall.

Tribute was also paid to key figures from the worlds of science and culture, for example, to Antoni Comas, to mark the 45th anniversary of Catalan studies at the UB, and to the professor of sculpture, Josep Salvador Jassans, on the first anniversary of his death. Another tribute, which last June brought together many people from the world of politics and the university, was paid to the former rector of the university, Josep Maria Bricall, to mark his retirement.

The University's Music Cycle continues to prosper. Its first concert of the year was held last October to mark the inauguration of the new Faculties of Philosophy and Geography and History. The ceremony was held in the courtyard gardens of the two faculties, which have been named after the world-famous soprano, Victoria de los Ángeles, the world famous soprano who was the daughter of a porter at the UB and who grew up in this building. In 1987 she was awarded an honorary doctorate, the first woman to receive this honour at the UB

Finally, on a rather different matter, throughout this academic year the economic difficulties facing the Catalan university system have been sorely felt and the universities have made clear their desire for improvements in funding and for the implementation of the plan passed by the previous government last October. Sadly, all this was done in a rather disjointed way, and the core of the problem was somewhat distorted and misinterpreted. In this context, mention should be made of the efforts undertaken by the UB to sign agreements with banking institutions such as the Banco de Santander, la Caixa and Caixa de Catalunya, for the promotion of plans for business or knowledge transfer, or related to specific projects in the different campuses in order to obtain additional funding to supplement the income from the long-term investment plan.

Moving beyond the three areas described above there is also **a fourth area**, one that is more structural in nature and which concerns those features that enable teaching and research activity to take place. Here I would merely like to make brief mention of three such structures: the UB Group, the Agencies, and the organization and new names given to the campuses of the University of Barcelona.

As regards the UB Group the last academic year saw significant redesigns being made in some of the group's institutions and led to greater clarity in terms of their functions. Their boards also became more open to involvement on the part of Catalan society. This has led to the setting up of the new IL3-UB Institute for Lifelong Learning and the modification — practically the re-founding — of both the Bosch i Gimpera Foundation, dedicated mainly to transfer and innovation, and the Josep Finestres Foundation, geared towards non-hospital-based healthcare and the practical training of our students in the fields of dentistry, podiatry and, in the future, psychology and food science.

Speaking of the UB Group, it is now ten years since the University of Barcelona strengthened its role as a public service by set up the Barcelona Science Park, an ideal vehicle for passing on the benefits of its scientific and technological expertise to society.

As regards the Agencies, and in addition to the now fully operational Agency for Assessing and Marketing Research Results, as well as the ongoing success of the Postgraduate Agency, the Quality Agency deserves special mention. This agency was set up last March with the aim of improving the processes and activities carried out in all areas of university life, in line always with the guidelines laid down by the managers and governing bodies.

In terms of campuses and investment in renovations and building work, the last academic year saw continued progress being made in the organization of the UB's territorial framework. Competitive tenders have been put out regarding ideas for future renovation work, and greater definition has been achieved as regards current structures and future needs. Though yet to be signed, the Catalan government's long-term investment plan for 2007-2013 was finally approved in July. This plan will allow work to begin on renovation and building work projects which have been ready to start for some months.

In this context, last year I emphasized the efforts made by the whole of the UB, although especially by the lecturers, administrative staff and students of the Faculties of Philosophy and Geography and History, in making possible the move from the Diagonal Campus to the new faculties in the Raval neighbourhood, known as the Humanities Campus. Now, after a year in their new location, it is clear what an enormous social impact and positive effect this move has had. Although this impact was to some extent a natural and spontaneous consequence of the circumstances it was also something which had been actively sought. Indeed, the UB wished to develop links and work with the institutions of the Raval, sharing what it has to offer with local residents and coming to form an integral part of the neighbourhood's social fabric. This philosophy led to the setting up of the Tot Raval Foundation, to the organization of talks about the university aimed at local cultural organizations, and to the creation of the Cultural Portal of the Raval, which was officially inaugurated last June in the gardens of this very building, in a ceremony that was attended by numerous social organizations from the Raval neighbourhood.

On the Bellvitge Health Sciences Campus, a great deal of effort has been devoted to creating the BioPol Consortium of L'Hospitalet, a new complex designed to attract a wide range of key players in the health sciences field. This project is carried out in conjunction with the Catalan government, L'Hospitalet City Council, and the *BioRegió de Catalunya*.

An agreement of enormous importance has also been signed with the provincial government of Barcelona, the *Diputació*, concerning centres such as the Food Studies Campus in Torribera and the future of the Ramon Llull Hall of Residence. Another agreement, signed with the Badalona City Council, will start redevelopment work on the former CACI factory, the aim being to turn it into a university centre offering corporate training and intensive master's degrees, with part of the new site being set aside for student accommodation.

Finally, the Sant Jordi Hall of Residence has inaugurated its new facilities in Can Ràbia, and this year also sees the 50th anniversary of the university's sports services. The exhibition of photographs taken fifty years ago in that part of Diagonal provides a striking reminder of the changes undergone by our city, the country as a whole and, of course, by its main university.

Having reviewed these different areas it is clear that an enormous amount goes on within the University of Barcelona, making it an undisputed force among Catalan universities. The same conclusion can be drawn from international rankings such as that of the University of Shanghai, which places the UB among the world's top 200 universities; indeed, it is the only Catalan and Spanish university to feature among the top two-hundred of this internationally-recognized ranking. It should be said, I think, that this hard-won status is too often overlooked by the media, who fail to give it its proper due. Similarly, the country and its politicians seem not to transmit the pride and satisfaction that one would expect them to feel as regards this achievement.

To conclude, allow me to say that everything I have described today, and which has been reflected in this mirror I have pointed at the University of Barcelona, as well as all the information listed in the document *The UB in Figures*, is not a work of fiction, it is not a mirage or a false image of our university. On the contrary, it is, as I pointed out at the start, a faithful reflection of our current situation and our potential.

However, I would like to finish with something I consider to be essential. If we turn this mirror around we see the university community: all those people who work, conduct research, teach, study and live part of their lives in the University of Barcelona. Some of them devote their time to teaching, others to research and transfer, and others to management and providing support to university teaching and research, not forgetting, of course, the large numbers who are studying and undergoing their professional, intellectual and personal training. And all of them do so with a keenness of spirit, in the conviction that they are part of a great institution.

Today we also pay tribute to those who, after a lifetime's dedication to the university, have reached retirement age, as well as to those who have opted for early retirement under the innovative plan that was implemented last year. The corresponding commemorative medals will be awarded a little later.

Allow me as well to remember, with heartfelt feeling and solidarity, all those lecturers, administrative and service staff, and students who have left us this year. The most recent of these is a young medical student, who was killed in an accident only last week. And of all those who have left us I think it right to mention someone who was not originally a member of the university community: the notary Josep Maria Puig Salellas, who was the first president of the Social Council and who passed away last June.

The prolific activity which I have described during my talk has been possible thanks to the hard work, commitment and intense dedication of everybody within this vast and generous university community. I can only say that each and every one of you deserves our gratitude.

I shall finish by paraphrasing President Montilla, and say that all this is because the community of the University of Barcelona, both teaching and administrative staff as well as students, are fully committed to ensuring the progress of knowledge, research and teaching in our universities, and in doing so are strongly committed to the future of our country.

Many thanks.