

# **International on line M.A. in Addictions Studies**

**External Evaluation, April 2005**

## **Executive Summary**

### **I. Project profile**

Name: International on line M.A. in Addictions Studies

Core purpose: Formation of human resources

Executing agency: UNIREDDROGAS

Seed Fund: \$400,000.00

Donors: Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD/OAS)  
(50%)  
National Plan on Drugs of Spain (50%)

Period: 2000-2005

Beneficiaries: National Anti-Drug Commissions, Nongovernmental organizations, State and private institutions involved in activities in the area of drug addiction: prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, social reintegration and research.

Coverage: Global

### **II. Project implementation**

This project has taken on the challenge of providing an innovative alternative in human resources formation, with the core aim of offering the highest academic standards and state-of-the-art instruction for students, through the use of modern information and communication technologies. To accomplish this, required the creation of a network of Ibero-American universities with broad experience in the

areas of drug addiction and distance education. The result has been the creation of UNIREDDROGAS, a network composed of the following universities:

- ◆ Fundación Universitaria Luis Amigó, Colombia (FUMLAN)
- ◆ Universidad Estatal a Distancia, Costa Rica (UNED)
- ◆ Universidad Miguel Hernández, España (UMH)
- ◆ Universidad de Deusto, España (UD)
- ◆ Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia de España (UNED)
- ◆ Universidad Nacional Federico Villareal, Perú (UNFV)
- ◆ Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Perú (UPCH)
- ◆ Universidad Nacional Experimental Simón Rodríguez, Caracas, Venezuela (UNESR)

These eight universities, with technical assistance provided by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD have the task of designing a joint curriculum that meets current and future professional needs in the areas of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, social reintegration, and research. Virtual instruction is combined with a supervised compulsory practical component, as well as on-site examinations at the end of each course semester. Students will also be required to prepare a thesis on of applied research that is in keeping with M.A. course requirements and can provides further knowledge in the countries where the course is offered. The M.A. course is designed to be completed in two years, with approximately 20 hours of study per week.

To date, two student intakes have completed or are close to completing the course; a third is due to start in the near future:

- ◆ 2002-2004: 127 students, 19 countries and 52 cities
- ◆ 2004-2006: 82 students, 21 countries and 75 cities
- ◆ 2006-2008: Enrolment opened in March 2005

### **III. Evaluation Process and Results**

The evaluation spanned January to April 2005. It was divided into two phases: internal and external, which provided evaluators with access to students, teachers, lecturers, coordinators, and rectors at the different universities involved. The evaluation used 13 indicators to assess management performance: Performance of lecturers and tutors; Competence of lecturers; Administrative organization; Syllabus; Educational resources; Focus on quality; Learning environment; Communication process; Leadership style; Commitment to shared goals and standards; Sustainability; User satisfaction; and Integration in the labor market. The management evaluation was carried out successfully.

#### **Student Profile**

Students who enroll in the M.A. course tend to be professionals who are connected in their own countries with state institutions, inter alia, National Anti-Drug Commissions or Councils, or with civil society organizations that work in the area of drug abuse, and who share the same interest in enhancing their expertise and academic qualifications to help further their professional careers. They have pursued other postgraduate studies and have decided to take a master's degree to increase their specialization. Some of them work in remote areas, as in the case of a student in Brazil's Amazon region, and others in urban environments. They come from 21 different countries, including Spain. Another benefit is the possibility of obtaining high-level international professional qualifications without the need to move to another country, which enables them to go on with their professional and family lives in familiar surroundings.

## Strengths

**Comprehensive instruction:** The project has successfully offered a new professional training alternative that meets students' academic expectations. Furthermore, an agreement has been established with the Ibero-American Network of NGOs working in Drug Addiction (RIOD), which affords access to institutions where students can carry out internships as part of their broader training.

**Coverage:** The M.A. is open to any student who meets the enrollment requirements and has access to virtual communication, to enable international exchange and strengthen and broaden their national frames of reference.

**Virtual:** The virtual platform and course materials are designs strictly with knowledge transmission in mind. They are regarded as highly satisfactory by students and faculty alike and have enabled each institution to make the best possible contributions to the education process.

**Administration:** The project has a participatory management style, through associated structures that deal with the various administrative and academic aspects.

**Communication:** The use of virtual communication processes and interaction between students, faculty, and coordinators have ensured satisfactory levels of communication while permitting the project to evolve.

**Sustainability:** From the outset, the project has sought to guarantee its continuity by taking concrete steps to secure an inflow of funds from enrollment fees and other sources. The Compensation Fund was created as an administrative mechanism to ensure that revenues are equitably distributed among the participating universities. Furthermore, students can access loans at preferential rates under an agreement with Educrédito. There are partial and full scholarships available from the OAS and the National Commissions of Chile and Venezuela.

**Labor Market:** Some students have said that the M.A. soon brought internal mobility, enabling them to rise to positions of greater responsibility. For other

students the M.A. has provided the necessary qualifications to secure placement in new institutions of professional and economic interest to them.

## **Challenges**

**Institutional:** The universities brought together by CICAD and the National Plan on Drugs of Spain have set up a working network under an inter-university cooperation agreement. This needs to be replaced by a structure with legal personality, so that the group of universities can take on the new challenges and commitments that the management of an M.A. course requires.

**Contingencies:** There should be regulatory mechanisms in place to ensure availability solution alternative in the event of unforeseen circumstances caused by internal changes in participating institutions and that have a direct impact on the performance of agreed obligations, as in the case of the situations generated by the Universidad Nacional Experimental Simón Rodríguez.

**Marketing plan:** More concrete efforts should be made by each university to carries out its responsibilities as regards promoting, publicizing and marketing the M.A. course from within its own circles as well as on the Internet. The marketing plan should target a blend of alternative and traditional communication media.

## **IV. Recommendations**

1. UNIREDDROGAS, CICAD and the National Plan on Drugs of Spain could pool efforts to invite the National Anti-Drug Commissions to design a system to publicize and encourage adoption of the International on line M.A. in Addictions Studies as a strategy to further training of human resources, which not only offers the benefit of guaranteed academic quality, but would also synchronize measures at the hemispheric, regional, and national level to reduce levels of abuse, trafficking, and production of illicit drugs.

2. UNIREDDROGAS should follow up on the professional advancement of graduates, in order to help design future indicators to evaluate project impact.

3. UNIREDDROGAS, should review its operating structure with a view to including a project manager, whose responsibilities could be to implementing the necessary measures to ensure the sound running of the M.A. course, as well as negotiate and secure funds.

4. UNIREDDROGAS should design a strategic development plan both for itself and for the M.A. course, so as to be able to tackle new challenges and current contingencies. Essential elements to include are the marketing plan and quality certification process.

5. The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs and the National Observatories could include the results of research and graduate theses in a database for use in the design of national and hemispheric policies on demand reduction. It is also important to select lines of research that conform to priorities and can be pursued by the students.

6-. CICAD could harness the positive results yielded by the International on line M.A. in Addictions Studies, in order to extend coverage to the Caribbean and other countries, where the course could be made available in English.