

# What a Fair Trade University Should Look Like

## Introduction

Students can be powerful catalysts for change, both internally on their own campuses as well as externally by shifting policies and practices of the larger culture. In this article, Marco Coscione describes the Latin American Universities for Fair Trade movement as being built on the models of similar programs around the world, but led by small-scale producer organizations in partnership with student-led organizers. This is an important distinction in contrast to the model in the United States, which is led and housed by a certification organization. The U.S. fair trade university program, Fair Trade Universities, operated by the certification scheme Fair Trade USA, concentrates on institutional purchases of just two fair trade products, coffee and cocoa, with a narrow focus on fair trade certification education. The Latin American Universities for Fair Trade not only focuses on ethical consumption and institutional purchases, but also on growing the movement, building links between producers and consumers, and research. Fair World Project presents the Latin American Universities program with the hope that going forward this solidarity-based, holistic program will be the model for fair trade university programs around the world.

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## Small-scale Producers Building Powerful Fair Trade Programs in Latin American Universities.

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For the first time in the fair trade movement, a small producers network, The Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers (CLAC), is leading an advocacy campaign “Latin American Universities for Fair Trade” to disseminate the principles and values of fair trade. We are promoting direct relations between universities and small producers organizations, introducing new teaching and education courses, and encouraging responsible consumption. At the same time, we are also creating a solidarity market through institutional procurements in universities.



Discussion panel with small producers' organizations representative, during the “Fair Trade and Universities” event, at Universidad del Valle, Santander de Quilichao, Colombia, October 2015 (Photo Credits: Marco Coscione)

We knew it was going to be difficult and slow, and could generate many concerns, but gradually the campaign is progressing and becoming known in social networks inside the global and Latin American fair trade movement and academic circles. The Latin American proposal follows the example of similar campaigns in other countries; however, it has a strong focus on advocacy, awareness and education. This responds to the need to develop

the fair trade movement in a continent where the concept and practices of fair trade and responsible consumption are not yet well-known or developed.

In universities reside future political and business leaders. Universities are fundamental for learning, research and development. For these reasons, among others, they have enormous potential to build more just, solidarity-based trade relations. We want students to understand the impacts and challenges of fair trade, as well as the need to build direct links with small agricultural and artisan producers, and the differences between small-scale family farming and agribusiness - differences in social, environmental, economic and alimentary terms.

Raising the awareness of citizen-consumers about more sustainable patterns of production and consumption inevitably involves education, and thus academic institutions play an important role in this process. Through better course content and procurement policies, they can provide a concrete example of how to build a more just economy.

From the beginning, we received great support from the Uniminuto University of Bogotá, the first to be declared a “Latin American University for Fair Trade.” In Colombia, the campaign has moved faster than in other countries, also involving the Cooperative University of Colombia, the Universidad del Norte and the Universidad del Valle. In Brazil, the Universidade Federal de Lavras of the Minas Gerais, the most important state for the country’s coffee production, joined the effort. In Costa Rica, both the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE, or Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center) and the Universidad Técnica Nacional (UTN, or National Technical University) integrated into the network as well.



International Coffee Day celebration at Universidad Técnica Nacional (UTN), Atenas, Costa Rica, October 2015. (Photo Credits: UTN)

In August of 2014, CLAC launched this campaign, knowing that many universities already have some relationships with fair trade small producers organizations. In just fourteen months, by the end of October of 2015, we had seven universities actively involved in the campaign, which generated international interest. For example, we received an invitation from the University of Ghent in Belgium to be part of an international research network on fair trade. If that research proposal is approved, FLACSO-Ecuador, UTN and CATIE will participate in it. CLAC will also help with its producers and networks in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Through this campaign, we are strengthening existing fair trade links and building new relationships, because we are convinced that universities, professors, researchers and students are all important allies in the fair trade movement. We will continue to expand this network and build relationships among all Latin American universities working on fair trade, responsible consumption and the solidarity economy, so that they can share their activities and establish links with other universities and similar campaigns around the world.

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## RELATED LINKS

- Uniminuto University of Bogotá ([www.uniminuto.edu](http://www.uniminuto.edu))
- Cooperative University of Colombia ([www.ucc.edu.co/Paginas/inicio.aspx](http://www.ucc.edu.co/Paginas/inicio.aspx))
- Universidad del Norte ([www.uninorte.edu.co](http://www.uninorte.edu.co))
- Universidad del Valle ([nortedelcauca.univalle.edu.co](http://nortedelcauca.univalle.edu.co))
- Universidade Federal de Lavras (UFLA)  
([ufla.br/portal/administracao/reitoria/curriculo-do-reitor](http://ufla.br/portal/administracao/reitoria/curriculo-do-reitor))
- Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE)  
([www.catie.ac.cr/es](http://www.catie.ac.cr/es))
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