

INCAE Celebrates Thirty Years of Achievement

A celebration held last May at the School to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of INCAE (the Central American Institute of Business Management) seemed more like a family reunion than a formal commemoration. Seventy-five invited guests, mostly from Central America, gathered not only to honor the creation of this venerable graduate school of management but also to renew the ties of what the event's host, HBS professor James E. Austin, called "the Harvard-INCAE family, an outstanding example of institutional development and international collaboration."

Established in 1964 as a result of collaboration among HBS, Central American business and government leaders, the Kennedy White House, and the United States Agency for International Development, INCAE — now based in Alajuela, Costa Rica — elicited moving tributes from speakers at the morning session. During that opening segment of the program, devoted to historical reflection, many of the HBS and INCAE faculty members, administrators, and alumni who spoke were frankly emotional about their pride in the institution. Looking back over thirty eventful years, they reminisced about friends and colleagues and reflected on the role of faith, commitment, continuity, and change in INCAE's history.

Recounting his work on the feasibility study for INCAE in 1963, HBS professor George C. Lodge described the initial skepticism of Central American business leaders. "They thought that management was something you could only learn through experience," Lodge observed, "and that academics couldn't be of much help."

Among the naysayers, however, there was one prominent exception — the late Francisco de Sola (48th AMP) of El Salvador, affectionately known to colleagues as "Don Chico" (described by Austin as "the father of INCAE"). Don Chico, the first chairman of INCAE's board of directors, was also



Professor Jim Heskett leads a discussion on opportunities for HBS-INCAE collaboration.

(Below, from left) Clark Wilson, INCAE's first rector, with third rector Harry Strachan (DBA 11/'72), fourth rector Marc Lindenberg, and sixth and incumbent rector Brizio Biondi-Morra (DBA '88).



the father of Francisco R.R. de Sola (MBA '69) who shared his own recollections of INCAE's origins with his fellow participants. "There was a suspicion of 'this Harvard thing,' of Kennedy and of all his socialists," the younger de Sola wryly told the group. "And nobody could believe all these Harvard professors would come down here."

One Harvard man who did come to Central America, and stay, was Robert Mullins (MBA '52, DBA 06/'67), a faculty member at INCAE for seventeen

years. Arriving in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1969, Mullins witnessed the inauguration of INCAE's original campus. He would also be present during several major crises and transitions for the institution: the 1972 Managua earthquake, the Sandinista revolution and contra insurgency, and the opening in 1983 of a new INCAE campus and headquarters in Costa Rica. The institution has derived its staying power, Mullins said, from its ability to survive this turmoil and to change with the

evolving needs of the region. As a result, he stated, "INCAE has an extended network of devoted alumni and friends whose abilities, values, and ideals are being felt in all of Latin America."

Members of INCAE's second generation also contributed reminiscences and reflections from the institution's early days. Carlos G. Sequeira (DBA 11/81), who received his MBA from INCAE and now teaches marketing there, spoke of change and continuity. Sequeira, who was a visiting professor of international marketing at HBS last spring, described INCAE as the creation of "Harvard men who were 'tropicalized,'" and observed that INCAE has survived the separation from its parents and grown and prospered on its own. He added that he had come to Soldiers Field to offer "a tribute not only to the minds of the people behind INCAE but also a tribute to their hearts."

In the afternoon session, the focus shifted from a historical perspective to the future. Professor Austin opened the session by introducing INCAE's sixth and current rector, Brizio N. Biondi-Morra (DBA '88), who spoke on "The State of the Institute and the Future Vision." Biondi-Morra began by noting that INCAE now has over 500 students from 17 countries enrolled in master's and other degree programs and trains some 7,000 participants in the approximately 250 executive education seminars offered by the school every year. In marked contrast to INCAE's first twenty years, when the great majority of its students hailed from Central America, some 50 percent now come from South American countries. In all, about 3,000 Latin American executives have emerged from INCAE's degree programs, and more than 100,000 executives have participated in the school's executive education seminars.

In an interview with the *Bulletin*, Biondi-Morra noted that within the last three years, the school has doubled its enrollment and introduced two new master's degrees: one in natural resources and the environment (dealing with issues of sustainable development) and the other in industrial management

and technology. "We would like to become more involved in global issues and act as a bridge between Latin America and the rest of the world," Biondi-Morra said. "We're developing a Center for Sustainable Development at INCAE that we hope will lead to greater participation and service in the global arena. In fact," he said, "the mission of INCAE today is nothing less than to help guide Latin American countries to international managerial and business prominence. Ten years ago, that goal would have been unthinkable, but our progress toward achieving it shows just how far INCAE has come."

To support Biondi-Morra's vision of INCAE's future, several speakers addressed key elements of the school's current directions. Eduardo L. Montiel (DBA '83), a professor at INCAE and dean of its master's program, described the institution's multinational thrust as a primary strength that grew from necessity, "because we were in a small, poor country and had to attract support from outside." Today INCAE's ability to foster diversity in terms of the nationality, gender, and socioeconomic status of its students represents a major strength that attracts some of the top students in the region.

Alvaro Umaña, former Minister of Energy and Natural Resources for Costa Rica and currently director of INCAE's Natural Resources Management Program, noted the rising interest in sustainable development throughout Latin America. "Trade and the environment are critical issues as the hemisphere becomes increasingly integrated," Umaña commented. Lewis Rambo, a former vice president at Arthur D. Little and an organizational development specialist serving as a consultant to INCAE, closed this portion of the meeting by describing the school as "a home for learning and growing, where you can feel the energy and excitement. It is an excellent environment for grooming leaders."

The group entered into a spirited discussion — led by HBS professor James L. Heskett — on opportunities for future collaboration between HBS and INCAE. "It is a mark of the maturity of

INCAE," Heskett said, "that it is no longer a one-way flow of information from HBS to INCAE, but a partnership in which both contribute valuable ideas that enrich both schools."

Participants expressed the desire to see systems in place that would promote faculty and student development at both institutions by encouraging greater interaction, including joint research. "But the issue goes beyond collaboration," Rector Biondi-Morra said. "We should be looking for things we could do together that neither could do otherwise." Ending on an optimistic note, Professor Austin observed: "With INCAE positioning itself on the cutting edge of crucial problems in Central America and beyond, it will attract to an even greater extent the interest and cooperation of HBS faculty and students. After all, that is where we live our lives, on the frontier of managerial issues."

Austin went on to note in remarks to the *Bulletin* that the HBS-INCAE relationship has been characterized by "institutional development in the best sense of the word. In the early years," he explained, "there were by necessity elements of dependency, but our ties have evolved into a collegial relationship, a two-way street in which each institution learns from and is strengthened by the other, especially as both reach out to become more globally oriented." The day ended with a discussion of some lessons to be learned about institutional development, based on INCAE's thirty years of evolution and growth as an outstanding school of higher education.

The conference sessions concluded with widespread agreement that the meeting was a great success. To complete the celebration, the group adjourned to Austin's home for a fiesta dinner and farewell party that included numerous resolutions to meet again in the not-too-distant future.

by Dan Page and Daniel Penrice