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Pontificia Universidad  
**JAVERIANA**  
Colombia

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# UNIVERSIDAD JAVERIANA: INNOVATIVE RESEARCH FOR PROGRESS AND PEACE

A conversation with **JORGE HUMBERTO PELÁEZ PIEDRAHITA S.J.**, Rector of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana



Universidad Javeriana is one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Colombia. Founded in 1623, it is also one of the oldest educational institutions in South America. Rector Jorge Humberto Peláez S.J. discusses how the research agenda at Universidad Javeriana is contributing to a new Colombian society, with innovative and interdisciplinary approaches that foster collaboration with other institutions.

**What makes Colombia an interesting destination for researchers from around the world?**

The economic stability in Colombia has favoured the sustained development of high-quality research universities. Additionally, Colombia is exceptionally well-located geographically and is the second most biodiverse country in the world. A recent peace agreement, after 50 years of conflict, has made Colombia a unique peace-building laboratory and has removed barriers for conducting research in a broad range of subjects. We can see from the rising number of researchers coming to Colombia that the country is an interesting hotspot for research during this historic time.

**How does Universidad Javeriana contribute to Colombia's development?**

The search for innovative answers to local challenges is one of our main contributions to Colombian society. Both research and teaching at Universidad Javeriana play a transformative role. For example, in the field of Health, our Faculty of Medicine studies the mental health impact of the internal conflict on our population. Likewise, in the Social Sciences, the Institute for Intercultural Studies, in our campus in the city of Cali, brings together social, military, business, and former combatant leaders of the FARC — in three strategic conflict zones in southwestern Colombia — to

design effective mechanisms to reintroduce participants of the conflict into civilian life. We lead the way in implementing the transformation of the civil war into a constructive dialogue with all members of society. These examples demonstrate that the peace-building process must encompass political, economic, social, and environmental aspects. To this end, Universidad Javeriana has developed strategic alliances with local, national, and international organizations in order to provide local solutions with a global scope.

Furthermore, we highly value inter-institutional collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches to tackle the complex socioeconomic challenges faced by Colombia. For this purpose, our research capacity includes 118 research groups and 12 research institutes encompassing areas such as political science; economics and business; intercultural studies; ecology and territory; public health; clinical and biostatistical epidemiology; infectious diseases; human genetics; immunobiology and cell biology; water and environmental science and engineering; and control systems, power electronics and management of technological innovation.

**Since Universidad Javeriana is a Jesuit university, how are ethical values important for promoting research and progress?**

Colombia's social and economic progress has been hindered by

institutional weaknesses that are reflected, for example, in the country's corruption and deep economic inequality. In many cases, these are a consequence of the absence of sound ethical values. The profound institutional transformation that the country needs to go through calls for creative approaches that will not occur spontaneously. This new environment requires people to be prepared not only with the highest levels of education but also with solid ethics that prioritize human dignity, respect for others, and respect for the common good. As a Catholic and Jesuit university we are committed to educating the whole person, developing individuals who stand out for their values, ethics, academics, and professional quality, as well as a strong sense of social responsibility. It is our mission to promote world-class higher education in order to build a just, sustainable, inclusive, and democratic society.

**Could you mention some research highlights that have taken place at Universidad Javeriana in the last few years?**

Universidad Javeriana plays a significant role in leading two major research programs of Colombia Científica, the most important initiative funded by the national government to strengthen the quality of Colombian higher education



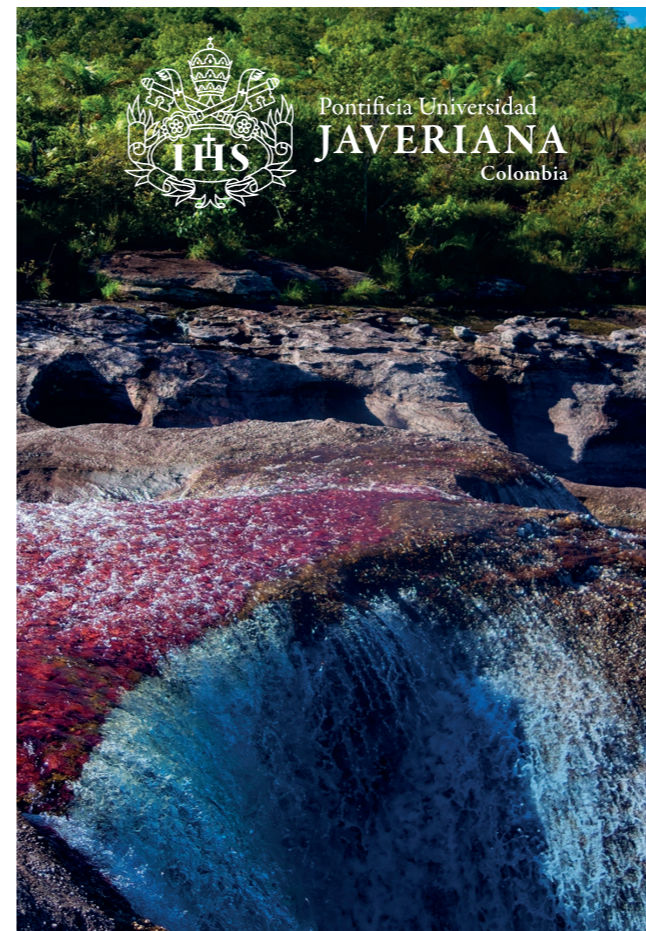
institutions through research. This public funding from Colombia Científica is a recognition of our research achievements. The first program promotes the use of Colombia's biodiversity to produce phytomedicines — medicinal plant-based compounds — to treat cancer. The second program strives to reduce the time for producing and optimizing new sustainable crop varieties by using Omic Sciences (e.g.: genomics, metabolomics, etc.). The development of these programs has fostered international collaboration with leading global institutions, other Colombian universities, and institutions in the private sector. Some of our Colombia Científica program partners include: University of São Paulo, Sorbonne University, Imperial College London, California Institute of Technology, University of Illinois, and University of Tokyo. We are keen on replicating these examples of success in further research collaborations with scholars and institutions from around the world.



## Pontificia Universidad Javeriana INNOVATIVE RESEARCH FOR PROGRESS AND PEACE

**Nº1**  
University in Colombia  
(Times Higher Education World University Rankings –THE)

**62%**  
of our research groups in the top categories of the National Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (Colciencias)



**32,485**  
Students  
**24,203**  
in Bogotá  
**8,282**  
in Cali

**118**  
Research Groups  
**68**  
Departments  
**12**  
Research Institutes

**257**  
Academic Programs  
**59**  
Undergraduate Programs  
**198**  
Graduate Programs

We have academic agreements with higher education institutions in  
**48**  
Countries



