

Microsymposium

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Teaching Crystallography in Latin America

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Crystallography in Latin American seems to have started in the mid 1930s after the pioneering work of Ernesto Galloni, in Argentina. Since then, Crystallography was associated with undergraduate research and conducted in Departments or Institutes of Physics and Chemistry and later in Molecular Biology and Materials Science Departments. Most undergraduate degree programs required carrying out a research project for one or two semesters, writing a thesis, and making a public presentation of the work before a committee. Even after graduate degree programs started and began to consolidate, undergraduate degree research in Crystallography maintains its importance. The expertise and dedication of many Latin American crystallographers, most of whom graduated or visited important academic institutions in Europe and the US, created the foundations of our discipline in the region. For instance, after a work visit paid to Prof. B.E. Warren (MIT), Dr. Carlos Graef Fernández organized and taught the landmark course “Rayos X y Física Cristalográfica”, at UNAM (Mexico) in 1947. Since then, the efforts of distinguished crystallographers, such as Galloni, Cano Corona, Fabregat Guinchard, Witke, Caticha-Ellis, Becka, Mascarehnas, among others, with support from UNESCO, IUCr, TWAS, and other institutions, helped to establish the tradition of teaching crystallography. In numerous courses, Ewald, Buerger, Hauptman, Karle, Woolfson and other prominent crystallographers participated as instructors. Many crystallographers helped to establish laboratories outside their countries of origin. In 1967, Amzel, Becka, and Baggio, worked at UCV, in Caracas, Venezuela, supervising undergraduate degree thesis based on crystallographic work. Later, Eldrys de Gil, after graduation from UCV, founded the Crystallography Laboratory of ULA (Mérida, Venezuela) which this year celebrates its 45 anniversary. An overview of key recent educational events and modern practices in Latin America will be presented.

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