

Highlights - Visit from MIT to Guatemala

January 23-27, 2023

During the week of January 23 - 27, 2023, part of the team from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), that co-leads the Achieving Sustainable Partnerships for Innovation, Research and Entrepreneurship Project (ASPIRE), with Universidad Del Valle de Guatemala (UVG) and the Guatemalan Exporters Association (AGEXPORT), visited Guatemala to work with its implementing partners.

The MIT mission was comprised by the following team members:

- Dan Frey, Principal Investigator
- Elizabeth Hoeffcker, Co-Principal Investigator
- Kendra Leith, Co-Principal Investigator
- Michael Eschleman, Project Manager
- Sher Vogel, Training Manager
- Romita Mitra, Research and Evaluation Associate

Some of the highlights of their visit included:



Diagnostics Presentation

On January 24th, Elizabeth Hoeffcker and Kendra Leith, Co- Principal Investigators for ASPIRE and researchers at MIT, presented to UVG authorities from the the results of their extensive study , a series of seven assessments carried out for a year by the MIT research team, professors and Anthropology students from UVG. The assessments were designed to identify key strengths and opportunities in a variety of UVG environments including curricular and extracurricular activities, training, research, research translation, culture and systems, and the overall innovation ecosystem within UVG.

One of the main findings was the fact that each of UVG's campuses - main, Highlands, and South - have unique innovation sub-ecosystems, which are in different stages of evolution and have different foci based on their local realities. For example, the Central Campus is characterized by its maker spaces and culture of innovation.

In the Highlands Campus, the entrepreneurial spirit predominates and reflects its agricultural surroundings, and the South Campus focuses on innovation around industry and the private sector, also reflective of its surroundings and reality. The presenters, Ms. Leith and Ms. Hoeffcker, emphasized that this information proved helpful to ASPIRE's project planning for year 2 and to UVG's decision to create an Entrepreneurship Center this year, whose role will be in part to integrate actions and efforts among all three campuses in the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship.

The presenters highlighted that ASPIRE seeks to expand capacities related to research translation and collaboration. In addition, it will provide funds for research projects and make stronger connections between academia, the private sector, and communities in order to create sustainable solutions to local problems.



Forum: Co-creating Impact in Guatemala - a Collaborative Approach

On January 24th, AGEXPORT organized a forum in which participants included representatives of AGEXPORT's member companies, academia (UVG and MIT), entrepreneurs, and the Agency for International Development, USAID. The event was moderated by Juan Mini, founder of Campus Tec, a local organization that supports innovation and entrepreneurship. After presentations by Dan Frey, ASPIRE PI, and Victor Ayerdi, ASPIRE Project Manager at UVG, three guest panelists shared their experience and insights on a range of topics related to impact, innovation and entrepreneurship, and answered questions. The panelists included Gabriel Biguria, Vice President of AGEXPORT; Elizabeth Hoeffcker, ASPIRE Co-Principal Investigator; and Monica Stein, UVG Research and Liaison Vice-Rector. The event was valuable because it created an environment for participants to find common ground and opportunities for collaboration through innovation across sectors that don't have a strong tradition of that yet - academia, private sector, and communities.



Workshop on Developing a Vision for the UVG Innovation Ecosystem

Based in part on the results of the diagnostics, UVG authorities identified the need to gather and jointly reflect on UVG's innovation ecosystem, and generate ideas about how to develop and implement a shared vision to support innovation throughout the university. In response to this felt need, the ASPIRE Co-Principal Investigator, Elizabeth Hoffecker, led a workshop on January 25th in which the university's leadership team, including the Rector, conducted exercises that allowed participants to share their views regarding innovation to converge on a series of shared ideas and visions for the future. In addition to identifying common ground, the participants highlighted the important role the Entrepreneurship Center can play as a convener and facilitator, and the need to replicate the workshop with UVG's department heads to ensure sustainability.



Visit to the Highlands Campus

ASPIRE team members from MIT and UVG visited the UVG Highlands Campus on January 26th to learn about the different efforts in innovation, entrepreneurship, and research.

During the visit, Dan Frey, Principal Investigator of the ASPIRE Project, offered the inaugural lecture to kick off the Highlands Campus 2023 academic year. Mr. Frey invited students to apply MIT's motto, "Mens et Manus" in their daily lives, which means "mind and hand". This combination of thinking and taking action is a powerful combination when applied in a complementary manner to generate growth and prosperity.

The ASPIRE team also toured the facilities to see a variety of greenhouses, laboratories, the makerspace, the food lab, and the Highlands Campus library. They capped off the day-long visit in a forum with students, in which the group exchanged ideas about development, opportunities, and the importance of youth leadership to generate local and regional impact.



Inaugural Lecture at the UVG Central Campus

On January 27th, Dan Frey, Principal Investigator for ASPIRE, gave the Inaugural Lecture 2023 of Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, to mark the official start of the academic year. In his address, which emphasized the applicability of the MIT motto, "Mens et Manus" to Guatemala and UVG, in addition to the role of universities as engines for socioeconomic development, he highlighted three essential practices for the future of UVG:

- An integrated curriculum, making sure that courses, projects, and experiences reinforce technical knowledge and the development of crucial capacities such as teamwork and good judgment.
- Emerging thought, to quickly connect new discoveries to the curriculum, motivating students through the innovation around them.
- Readiness to innovate: Prepare students to take on their roles as entrepreneurs or any other form of innovative leadership.

About ASPIRE

The Achieving Sustainable Partnerships for Innovation, Research and Entrepreneurship (ASPIRE) Project is a five-year, \$15 million project funded by USAID and implemented by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG), and the Guatemalan Exporters Association (AGEXPORT). Its goal is to create a world-class, replicable model for how Latin American universities, in collaboration with the private sector, government and local communities, can respond to local and regional development needs. The project implements a collaborative approach to research, teaching, innovation, entrepreneurship, and tech transfer, based on the combination of local assets and knowledge with MIT's experience in the innovation ecosystem.