

# USP at 80

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The commemoration of USP's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday is a good time to move beyond disheartened discussions about its problems and take a heartening look at its achievements and what they represent for São Paulo and for Brazil. "The beginning is not merely half of the whole, but reaches as far as the end," Polybius said. So it would be worth our while to begin with some thoughts about the project devised by the founders of USP and to frame it within its original historical circumstances. Contextually, the 1930s saw a relative decline in São Paulo's power within the nation and its defeat in the Revolution of 1932, subsequently prompting the state to assume a posture of political accommodation vis-à-vis Pres. Getúlio Vargas, which in turn put Armando de Salles Oliveira at the helm of the state government.

It was Salles Oliveira who established USP by Decree No. 6.283, published on January 25, 1934. He drew inspiration from the ideas of Julio de Mesquita Filho, who had the support of a great educator, Fernando de Azevedo.

The goal of USP's founders was to respond to the challenge that changes to the Brazilian status quo represented for São Paulo. Approaching the issue innovatively, they started from the determination that only through a university could São Paulo become a laboratory for scientific investigation and a beacon of high intellectual pursuit, which would set our state apart within Brazil. These were the terms underscored by the newspaper *O Estado de S.Paulo* on January 27, 1934. In effect, what São Paulo had already accomplished through its colleges and its institutions for professional training and scientific investigation should be raised to the level of a university, as stated in the preamble to Decree No. 6.283.

Our state has always deemed knowledge critical to its development. The Campinas Institute of Agronomy was founded in 1887, the Law School in 1827, the Polytechnic School in 1894, the Luiz de Queiroz College of Agriculture in 1901, the School of Medicine in 1913, and the first phase of the School of Pharmacy and Dentistry in 1899. All of these institutions were dedicated to the training of professionals, while research activities essentially fell into the applied category. The latter was the case with the Polytechnic School's Center for Materials Resistance, which was established in 1899 and later became the Institute for Technological Research (IPT).

What was innovative about USP was that it did not merely combine pre-existing educational institutes but instead founded the School of Philosophy, Sciences, and Literature. Setting an example to be followed, this school introduced so-called "disinterested studies," focused on pure science and the liberal arts. By carrying research ever farther, these studies were meant to increase knowledge and open the way for its potential application. From the very moment of USP's inception, its motto, *Scientia vincet*—through science, you shall conquer—has translated what lies within the university's DNA: a distinct awareness that it is crucial to generate knowledge through research, both to steadily renew the teaching of knowledge as well as to properly train experts and professionals in all branches of human learning.

At the heart of the institution's original conception, this "idea to be realized" underpins the work that has shaped USP into the great research university it is today, whose role is to advance merit and quality as the lodestars of university life in Brazil.

The University Funds that were set up at USP in 1942, as part of the Brazilian society's contribution to World War II efforts, helped the institution deepen its genetic roots in research. These funds anticipated a feature of our contemporary world: knowledge—whether in the form of basic or applied research—engages in the "dialectics of complementarity" and transforms living conditions at a remarkable speed, making scientific and technological training a critical variable if a society is to be enabled to deal with its issues.

The University Funds experience prompted São Paulo researchers and university faculty to propose to the state Constituent Assembly that a research foundation be established; the outcome was Article 123 of the São Paulo State Constitution of 1947. This recognition of the value of research predates the creation of the federal funding agencies CNPq and Capes, launched in the 1950s, and thus affirms São Paulo's pioneering spirit. FAPESP—the São Paulo Research Foundation—opened its doors in 1962, thanks to the vision of then-Governor Carvalho Pinto. In implementing the agency, he relied on the leadership of USP personnel, who designed it to reflect the motto *Scientia vinces* in all fields of knowledge. Down through the years, FAPESP has played a vital role in funding research at USP. In 2013, for instance, the university received investments of R\$517 million from the Foundation.

There were other significant steps in the process of solidifying USP as a great research university: in the 1960s, an emphasis on the policy of requiring faculty to work exclusively and full-time at USP; the firm establishment of graduate programs in the 1970s; the achievement of financial autonomy in the 1980s; and the inauguration of the office of Dean of Research, under the 1988 bylaws.

As a result, USP now accounts for 22.4% of all of Brazil's scientific production. Combined with the scholarship produced at São Paulo's two other public state universities, Unicamp and Unesp—both by-products of USP—the state is responsible for 38% of Brazil's scientific production.

In every reputable international ranking, USP consistently places first in Latin America and is listed among the best in the world. It stands 132<sup>nd</sup> in the QS World University Rankings® and 77<sup>th</sup> in the Best Global Universities ranking by U.S. News, to cite two examples.

Ever mindful of the fact that the majority of the universities ranked above USP have much longer histories—some have accumulated centuries of experience—it is clear that USP has achieved much in its 80 years. São Paulo has earned renown in Brazil, Latin America, and the world for its production of value-added knowledge, and the bulk of this added value derives from what has been accomplished at USP