

Background.

The sustainability of a democratic political system rests on the strength of its democratic political culture and institutions. Despite the resurgence of democracy in the early 1980's in Latin America, democratic institutions, values and practices remain relatively weak. For this reason, it is imperative to stimulate and promote the development of these values and practices in order to arouse interest and nurture a greater participation and commitment to democratic political processes by the newer generations of the hemisphere. These younger generations are the future's key political players in their respective societies.

Action.

In order to respond to the specific mandates of the OAS General Assembly and of the Member States, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD), in cooperation with renowned national and regional counterparts, has developed a program of regional training courses for Young Leaders on Democratic Institutions, Values and Practices. Since 1998, the UPD has organized annual courses in the following regions- Central America, the Andean countries, the Mercosur, and the Caribbean.

Objectives.

- To promote knowledge and understanding of, and commitment to democratic institutions, values and practices.
- To help develop analytical skills for adequate political analysis and action.
- To help acquire techniques related to the development of a democratic political culture and to modern technologies employed in democratic politics.
- To promote exchange of experiences and mutual understanding among young leaders of different sectors of the participating countries.

Target Group.

The course is targeted to approximately 30 to 40 leaders up to the age of 35 years from political parties, universities, nongovernmental organizations and the media. The group will be balanced among men and women and will be drawn from across the political spectrum of those sectors. The program itself will be non-partisan.



Basis Structure.

The course will be **10 days** in length. It will consist of lectures by experts, practical participatory training exercises and working group sessions on specific issues. Emphasis will be on active participation and involvement, including simulation exercises on relevant topics. Experts from leading universities and institutions, as well as prominent public figures, will provide instructions and facilitate analysis, discussion and role-playing exercises among participants. The general topics to be discussed in the course will include:

- Theories of democracy.
- Functions and workings of democratic institutions.
- Role of Political Actors.
- Democratic values and practices.
- Modern technologies and skills of political management.

The reasons for regional courses.

1. The courses promote democracy among young political opinion makers.

A principal objective of each course is to **promote a greater understanding of democratic institutions, values and practices among 40 young leaders from sectors that form public opinion**, such as political parties, the communications media, the academia, and NGOs. These are sectors with the capacity to transmit and multiply their knowledge.

2. The courses promote a critical mass of Latin American and Caribbean experts regarding democracy.

Each course has between **15 and 20 professors** from within each region where the course is held. These professors prepare written materials and workshops regarding their topic of discussion – a process that allows them **to specialize and deepen their knowledge** increasingly becoming true Latin American and Caribbean experts regarding democracy.

3. The courses promote the generation and distribution of new knowledge on the functioning of democratic institutions, values and practices.

The course professors and young participants **contribute** with their own experience, knowledge, exchanges of information and research in the **generation and distribution of new knowledge on the functioning of democratic institutions, values and practices**, as well as in identifying interesting and imaginative proposals for the strengthening of democracy.

4. The courses strengthen institutions.

The courses are organized jointly with national and regional political and academic institutions. Therefore, all of the experience and substantive, methodological and logistical know-how derived from the event stays with these institutions, **contributing to their institutional capacity**. In fact, these institutions are replicating the regional courses on a national level.

5. The courses contribute to the creation of youth and professor networks regarding topics of democracy.

Course **participants have created regional electronic networks and NGOs**, which have become active forums for exchange of imaginative ideas and penetrating discussion regarding the current most relevant political issues. One of these networks, JPD (Youth for Democracy) maintains a web page that allows its members to communicate, exchange and develop ideas and projects.

6. The courses are held with prominent institutions.

The UPD develops the courses in coordination with institutions and experts within each region. The course contents and educational methodologies (interactive and for adults) have been widely recognized in academic and political circles. This is evidenced by the collaboration of numerous and prestigious entities, such as the George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management, The Javeriana University (Colombia), The Luis Carlos Galán Institute for Democracy (Colombia), the Andean Parliament, the Inter-American Human Rights Institute, the Central American Institute for Political Studies, the College of the Americas of the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education, (whose membership includes the principal universities of the Americas), the University of the Republic and CLAEH of Uruguay, the Institute of Political Training of the Ministry of the Interior of Argentina, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Germany), and the Central American Parliament, among many others. Also, **the growing demand for these courses is recognition for the merit of this cutting-edge training initiative.**

7. *The courses attract external resources to the OAS.*

The courses are partially financed by the resources of the local institutions. It is also important to note that the OAS has received a **contribution of US\$1,000,000 from the Inter-American Bank** specifically to organize courses at the national level. This donation is based on the UPD's successful experience in these regional courses.

8. *The quality of the courses.*

The benefit of this type of program is not measured merely quantitatively, but rather by the quality of the program and its participants. Indeed, the most successful and prestigious academic programs are not massive. On the contrary, these programs are offered to a small number of carefully selected participants. The impact, influence and leadership of the graduates of these institutions are considerable.

9. *High level figures participant in the courses.*

The **courses have been inaugurated and closed by presidents, cabinet members, secretaries of state and legislators.** The professors of the courses have been high-level political figures, journalists, legislators, former presidents, and renowned Latin American and US experts. Similarly, among the students have included young government officials, legislators, advisors, journalists, and prominent community leaders, which indicates the importance that they have placed on this initiative.

10. *The courses promote a greater understanding for the role of the OAS in the promotion of democracy.*

Lastly, the courses, **promote a greater understanding and knowledge, particularly among the previously mentioned opinion makers, for the role of the OAS in the promotion and defense of democracy within the Inter-American system.**

The UPD offers courses in:

- Democratic Institutions, Values and Practices
- Decentralization and Local Government.
- The Legislative Branch in Democracy
- Analysis and Negotiation of Political Conflicts
- Political Management

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REGIONAL COURSES ON DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, VALUES AND PRACTICES

*Rotating Annual Courses
for Young Leaders –
Opinion Makers*