



David Garza, [Tec de Monterrey](#) Rector and President, shared his experiences of coping with the [COVID-19](#) pandemic at the annual meeting of the [Association of Pacific Rim Universities \(APRU\)](#).

According to the [University World News](#) site, university leaders from the association met online on June 23 to reflect on the **challenges** of **distance learning** and **returning to the classroom** in a **post-COVID** era.

Garza shared that the **Tec** was the **first organization in Mexico** to [suspend its face-to-face classes](#) to protect its community of **150,000 students** and **30,000 collaborators**, and start [online learning](#).



*“Then a **domino effect** started from government agencies, public organizations and private industries and other universities, following our decision.”*

Garza said the institution relied on **seven principles** to guide it through this pandemic:

- **Protecting the health** of students and collaborators
- **Ensuring academic continuity**
- **Solidarity** with the families of students in **need**
- **Sharing academic, medical, and scientific resources**
- Generating **empathy** and **transparent communication**
- **Financial responsibility**
- Defining **future scenarios**

In addition to the **50,000 weekly sessions** of courses, the Tec also transferred the student experience activities to [remote learning](#).

*“We needed to take the university **experience to the homes of the students**, so we identified cultural activities, sports activities and group activities (to move online) and we also managed to do that.”*



Garza emphasized that the Tec has played a **key role** in Mexico by **coordinating private, government and academic** efforts to bring **supplies** to hospitals, to **train health** personnel, and to **plan hospital** capacity, among other actions.

Like some other **APRU** universities, the Tec created an **emergency fund** to help students and their families.

*“We managed to transfer employee **benefits** to some **students** and we also implemented **special loans** to our staff who had financial problems,”* said Garza.

In addition to generating trust in society, **leadership, quick response, and internal organization** were also important factors highlighted at the Tec.

*“I am proud of our teachers and medical staff; their agility was also key. **They are the true heroes**,”* he added.

DISCUSSING THE NEW REALITY

During the meeting, the **university directors** agreed that the even more complex challenge will be to **come out of lockdown** and **reopen the campuses** safely since it is

difficult to plan the [“new normal”](#) in the face of so much uncertainty.

*“Different sectors of society looked at us in terms of going into the lockdown and they are looking at us in terms of how to come back. **The complexity of coming back is even higher than the complexity of going into lockdown,**”* said Garza.

APRU Chair [Gene Block](#), chancellor at the **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)**, said universities have been facing common problems even though they are at different stages of the pandemic.

*“Many people view the university as a bit ossified and like dinosaurs, bureaucratic and slow to move, yet many of us moved thousands of classes online in a very short amount of time, demonstrating that universities have more **flexibility** than most people believed,”* he said.



Block added that they are trying to figure out how to get students back to their campuses in a new and safe way.

*“All of us have mastered the skills of **online learning** and it seems like **what we have learned will change our universities forever**,” Block concluded.*

The [Association of Pacific Rim Universities](#) was established in 1997 and is made up of 55 leading universities from **18 countries** of the Pacific Rim, known worldwide for their academic and research excellence.

[Tec de Monterrey](#) is one of the four Latin American universities ([and the only Mexican university](#)) that is part of this association.

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