

Community health: Tec professor leads Universitas 21 research



She is collaborating with Global Learning Partnership on a project that equips students with skills for tackling global health requirements.

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Courtesy of Rebeca Leyva

Carmen Huerta

Rebeca Leyva Rico, Director of the [**B.A. in Nutrition and Wellness \(LNB\)**](#) at [**Tec Guadalajara**](#), is leading a team of researchers from the **Global Learning Partnership (GLP)** program, who are conducting a **community health study** in Nepal with a global and interdisciplinary vision for international organization [**Universitas 21 \(U21\)**](#).

Titled: “***Impact of an international interprofessional global health experience on students’ competencies***,” the research establishes a methodology to **explore community-based health interventions** in the Asian country, in coordination with Kathmandu University, the University of Melbourne, and Mexican institutions.

The project aims to measure the effectiveness of developing **community-based health intervention skills** in U21 students from various countries, with the idea of proposing its subsequent implementation in other regions.

“We designed a protocol that was submitted to the ethics committee at Kathmandu University and at the Tec. The idea is to see if this program actually generates these skills and literacy in these areas,” Leyva said.

She said that this was for later **implementation** in **local** academic plans. This is the first time this study has been conducted, and it is completely **voluntary**.



Rebeca Leyva (in the foreground, wearing a black blouse) during the program's community health work in Nepal. Photo: Courtesy of Rebeca Leyva

Health literacy

Here are the specific skills that **Global Learning Partnership** seeks to develop in its participants:

- *Global communication*
- *Teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration*
- *Community-focused health program design*

- *Scientific evidence-based applied research*
- *Global and local health literacy*

This edition included **eleven international students** (Hong Kong, South Africa, Sweden, Scotland, England, Mexico) and twelve from Nepal. The entire experience lasted **three weeks** (one academic week at **Dhulikhel Hospital** and two weeks in the **Bahunepati** community).

U21 is a **global network that brings together research-intensive** or collaborative initiatives from leading universities around the world. *“Over several weeks on this course, participants can develop the competencies that all healthcare professionals are expected to promote,”* said the director.

Leyva explained that U21 has a fund for this type of project and the program bases its functions on the United Nations (UN) [**Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)**](#).

The professor is leading the Global Learning Partnership research project in Nepal. Photo: Carmen Huerta



Developing global health competencies

Two Mexican professors and one from the University of Melbourne, Australia, are participating, plus two professors from Nepal, from Kathmandu University.

Leyva is also in charge of recruiting students, conducting interviews, and managing the selection process, among other things.

What's more, she said that the initiative investigates **what would have to happen in the community** in order for these global health competencies to be developed.

This academic explained that they conducted student evaluation questionnaires at the beginning, during, and at the end of the process. The next step is to find out the answers to those questions.

GLP group in Bahuneapati community, Nepal. Photo: Courtesy of Rebeca Leyva



Replicating the model

This will allow them to refine the annual implementation plan and make adjustments for the next edition of the **Global Learning Partnership**, while beginning to replicate the model at the students' home universities.

Leyva also said that she was invited to lead the project because she was already known to them, having been [awarded the Health Sciences Teaching Excellence Award](#) by U21 in 2024.

The professor said that U21 involves the best universities with dedicated health schools around the world, with multiple degree programs participating: nutrition, medicine, psychology, physiotherapy, and nursing, among others.

Leyva said that participants from the Tec can validate this experience through a training unit called **Global Health for Leaders**.

"It's very enriching, because you don't just encounter different cultures, but also different health professions. That's what the program is about," she added.



The group at Dhulikhel Hospital at Kathmandu University. Photo: Courtesy of Rebeca Leyva

International challenge

"I was invited to structure the academic week, from the design and implementation to talking to the hospitals to find out which community we will go to, and so on," the professor explained.

*"I've been teaching for over eleven years and it's incredible how students from **different cultures** challenge me. This background really does have implications even in the way I have to adjust my teaching," she said.*

She highlighted that one of the program's strengths is **exposing students to international challenges**, in this case, of a community nature. *"It's very different, and if we want students to become global citizens, we have to expose them to this aspect," she said.*

"Belonging to organizations like these gives you the global perspective needed for teaching or education."

The award she received from U21 in 2024. Photo: Carmen Huerta



Leyva emphasized that *"The idea is to identify core competencies so that when we expose students to international health experiences, we prepare them for real-world public or global health challenges."*

For all the above reasons, Leyva says it's extremely important to be involved with U21, a connection which has now become a specific project.

"It's about exposing yourself to these internationally generated projects. Sometimes, we get caught up in the technical and the local aspects. And I believe that belonging to organizations like these gives you the global perspective needed for teaching or education," the director concluded.

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