



Mayra Luz Pérez Díaz

Nicaragua

“ Women have had the privilege of gaining access to the world of knowledge. They have had to test their sensitivity in search of a new social ethics based on truth, equity and harmony between human beings ”

Introduction by Jorge A. Huete-Pérez and interview by Vera Amanda*



Honorary Doctorate, University of Fairfield, United States May 2010

Dr. Mayra Luz Pérez Díaz's academic career illustrates the weight of Nicaraguan intellectuals in the brief history of science in Central America. During the time I spent as director of research, I witnessed firsthand the tremendous impetus given to scientific research under her leadership. This drive principally took two forms.

Dr. Pérez Díaz - more than any of her predecessors - has made scientific research the center and driving force of university activity, which has contributed to the development of modern science in Nicaragua. Dr. Pérez Díaz, the successor of Rector Eduardo Valdes, stands out as the first female rector, along with great Jesuit heads such as Dr. Xavier Go-

rostita, who fought for the modernization of higher education in Nicaragua. During Dr. Pérez Díaz's tenure as Rector of the Central American University (UCA), the illustrious Jesuit university, has also established social commitment as the main purpose of scientific and intellectual work. In a country suffering from significant socio-economic difficulties, this required the creation of a research agenda that gave priority to human and social development and to the vast obstacles to fundamental human rights in poor nations. Another of Dr. Pérez's achievements has been her support for the creation of the Nicaraguan Science Academy as an institution promoting national scientific development. Together with Jaime Morales Carazo, the then Vice President of Nicaragua, Dr. Pérez Díaz assisted with the organization of the Academy, which aims to

become the voice of Nicaraguan scientists. Dr. Pérez Díaz played a decisive role in women's achievements in a period in which national scientific institutions were consolidated. This was crucial for the development of a national scientific culture.

As a Nicaraguan intellectual, Dr. Pérez Díaz's professional and personal experience is a source of inspiration for the young female professionals wishing to overcome many obstacles, be they work, social, cultural, educational, psychological or research-related.

Dr. Mayra Luz Pérez Díaz was born in Managua, Nicaragua. She is the first woman to be appointed as Rector of the Central American University (UCA) of Nicaragua, founded in 1960 and the first private university in Central America.

Awards prize to the Ambassador of the European Union, Mr. Mendel Goldstein. November 2011



Inauguration of "Carmelo Palma" Arbor, together with the Ambassador of the European Union



Under her leadership, UCA was ranked as the top Nicaraguan university and one of the ten best in the Central American region by the world university ranking by the Superior Higher Scientific Research Council (CSIC) of Spain, attached to the Ministry of Science and Technology. This recognition can be attributed to the Rector's commitment to extensive university reform designed to make UCA a successful university of the modern era.

During her academic training, Dr. Pérez Díaz obtained a doctorate in Philosophy and Literature from the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, Spain, and a Diploma in Cinematography from the University of Valladolid.

The achievements that represent her greatest source of pride

Dr. Pérez Díaz has worked at UCA for 35 years and played an important part in its management. Indeed, the various high positions she has occupied have significantly strengthened the academic processes, in particular the development of research. The Rector considers research a fundamental contribution to society, since it produces new scientific, technological and humanistic knowledge and progress.

Dr. Pérez Díaz has promoted the institutionalization of scientific activity at UCA and in Nicaraguan society. She is convinced that it renders human development more dynamic,

by creating a new culture favorable to equality in all forms. In this regard, she considers gender equality a fundamental challenge for human beings and an institutional responsibility to recreate a world based on new ideals and values.

Consequently, under her leadership, the UCA has created a research agenda that supports the economic, social and democratic processes in Nicaragua, to overcome the prevailing poverty and inequality. This has been a two-fold effort for the university: its responsibility to the nation requires it to conduct activities that respond to their difficulties, many of which are of an urgent nature. On an internal level, the university seeks a systemic vision, to consolidate a culture of research and innovation that provides coherent responses to national and regional demands.

To date, though Dr. Pérez Díaz feels satisfied with the progress of research activity, which has brought the university prestige and recognition in recent years, she still has many challenges before her. This is the reason for her support for the Nicaraguan Science Academy, as a means to project the shared scientific spirit that lives and breathes thanks to research.

Honors and prizes

Throughout her professional life Dr. Pérez Díaz has received national and international recognitions, including the following:



Unveiling of the Father León Pallais S.J. plaque, together with Vice-president Jaime Morales Carazo, 31 August 2010

- Honorary doctorate from the University of Fairfield, United States;
- Diploma of Recognition for her contributions to research from the Encuentro Journal published by the Central American University;
- A recognition for her contribution as a benefactor of the Nicaraguan Science Academy;
- Merit Diploma for her professional experience, awarded by the Rotary Club of Managua, Nicaragua.

Why is it important for a woman to work in the scientific world?

As a woman, Dr. Pérez Díaz is proud of the greater female presence in the university and scientific sphere, and mentions that women have contributed to science for centuries, permitting numerous advances. Indeed, primitive women's discoveries and experiments provided their families with better living conditions, which were subsequently handed down to later generations.

What are the main obstacles you have encountered and how have you overcome them?

Despite the cultural barriers that require a greater effort from women to participate in a competitive, predominantly male environment, there is more recognition of their contribution to social development. Women nowadays must be aware of how important their participation is from a progressive point

of view, as it promotes their autonomy and independence. This is a counterpoint to the traditional dynamics that still prevail in Nicaraguan society and legitimize inequality between men and women to the detriment of the latter's human and professional growth.

Mayra considers research a fundamental contribution to society, since it produces new scientific, technological and humanistic knowledge and progress.



Do you have any family?

I have been married for 28 years to Dr. Rafael Lucio Gil, an academic who has worked extensively on educational theory and scientific philosophy. We have two sons, Rafael and René Alejandro, both of whom are engineers.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I like to spend time with my family and a small circle of friends. I also enjoy reading and going to the cinema.

What advice would you give to female scientists?

In the years to come, women must work with great commitment and solidarity to gradually build a new history in which women play a strong role in all spheres of society. They must claim their right to education, and be aware that unlike in earlier, more restrictive eras, women's situation has benefited from new spaces for training and action.

Women who have gained access to the world of knowledge must employ their sensitivity to create a new social code of ethics based on truth, equality and harmony between human beings in both economic and social processes. ■

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