



LOCAL HEALTH CARE HISTORY

Historical notes of the University Student Federation in the medical university of Pinar del Río: first part

Apuntes históricos de la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria en la universidad médica pinareña, primera parte

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: little research has been done on the origin and development of the University Student Federation, in the province and medical university of Pinar del Río. Going to those who initiated, founded and continued the work of this student organization is a necessary premise to know its history.

Objective: to bear witness to the history of FEU in the medical university of Pinar del Río.

Methods: theoretical methods such as historical-logical, inductive-deductive and analysis and synthesis, along with empirical methods such as documentary review and testimonial collection.

Development: eight professionals from the health sector were interviewed, who ruled the organization during their time as students, compiling mandatory reference material for



students, leaders of student organizations and university campus in general, moving from the first representatives of the FEU in the province from 1968 to the present.

Conclusions: the achievements of the FEU are undeniable, and are based on the actions of young people who did not drop the conquered flags, not in vain it has been said that history is made by the masses, but also by the men who lead them.

MeSH: HISTORY; TEACHING; EDUCATION, MEDICAL; STUDENTS; ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.

RESUMEN

Introducción: poco se ha indagado sobre el origen y desarrollo de la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria en la provincia y universidad médica pinareña. Acudir a aquellos que iniciaron, fundaron y continuaron el trabajo de la organización estudiantil constituye premisa impostergable para conocer su historia.

Objetivo: testimoniar la historia de la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria en la universidad médica pinareña.

Métodos: se utilizaron los métodos teóricos: histórico-lógico, inductivo-deductivo y análisis y síntesis, y métodos empíricos como la revisión documental y recolección testimonial.

Desarrollo: se entrevistaron a ocho profesionales del sector salud que dirigieron la organización durante su etapa de estudiantes, se recopiló material de consulta obligada para estudiantes, dirigentes de las organizaciones estudiantiles y campus universitario en general, desde primeros representantes de la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria en la provincia en 1968 hasta la actualidad.

Conclusiones: los logros de la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria son innegables, y se sustentan en el accionar de jóvenes que no dejaron caer las banderas conquistadas, no en vano se ha dicho que la historia la hacen las masas, pero también los hombres que las dirigen.

DeCS: HISTORIA; DOCENCIA; EDUCACIÓN MÉDICA; ESTUDIANTES; CULTURA ORGANIZACIONAL.

INTRODUCTION

In Cuba, with the foundation of La Habana University on January 5, 1728, the history of Higher Education commenced, sealed at the beginning by the colonial vices of power, racism and slavery prevailing in the emerging society. The neocolonial period stained the Cuban university with horror, blood, despotism and lust. This motivated the progressive student organization to take the streets in search of legitimizing their rights and the leading role never achieved before. Then the University Student Federation-USF (FEU in Spanish) was born, founded on December 20, 1922 by the young revolutionary Julio Antonio Mella. ⁽¹⁾

At the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959, after the closure of the university for three years due to the tyrant Fulgencio Batista and Zaldívar, young people who wished to continue their university studies were summoned, and immediately the first Pinar del Río doctors who would form the Revolution left for the capital, who graduated in 1965 at Pico Turquino with the presence of Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz. ⁽²⁾

In 1968 the teaching of Medicine Studies in Pinar del Río was opened, with four students of the sixth-academic year from Havana. In the beginning, the Teaching Unit of Medicine in the province had a subordinated status to the Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca University of Pinar

del Río (UPR), until 1979 when it was granted the status of Medical School, and that in 1998, at the request of students and workers, was named Dr. Ernesto Che Guevara de la Serna School of Medical Sciences. Today, Pinar del Río University of Medical Sciences (UCM-PR), which obtained this rank by the agreement 6591 from the Ruling Body of the Ministers on February 2, 2009.⁽²⁾

The beginning of medical teaching in the province, without a doubt, made it possible for facts and personalities that deserve to be studied to enter local history. History is the basis for understanding the present, the future and the precepts to be defended. If this root is lost, the sacrifice and blood spilled in the conquest that the nation enjoyed today, would be forgotten.

For its part, the local history is the historical-scientific area of research most important for the university students, considering the need of increasing the work regarding the History of Cuba and the FEU at national, provincial and local levels, demanded by the delegates of the Political-Ideological Commission from the 9th Congress of la FEU.⁽³⁾

There is little documentation on what has been investigated in the province and the University of Pinar del Río on such an important subject, so that going to those who initiated, founded and continued the work of the student organization (FEU), is an unavoidable premise to learn about its origin and history.

The open and sincere dialogue was the ideal link to share ideas about the scope or not of achievements in current times and whether the path that follows the university student organization is the right one to be followed.

This research was proposed with the objective of witnessing the history of the FEU at Pinar del Río University of Medical Sciences. In order to carry it out, theoretical and empirical methods were applied, among the formers the historical-logical, inductive-deductive and analysis-synthesis, and of the latter the documentary review and the compilation of testimonies of professors and directors of the health sector in the province who were student leaders during their university life.

DEVELOPMENT

The university students, grouped in the FEU, have embraced the socialist ideas of the Revolution since its commencement. The organization has reached all corners of the country, has transformed its functioning through a critical radiography to be better. It is like a mass of light, a front line troop fighting to maintain its Revolution, with the utmost pride and commitment to be the oldest organization in Cuba grouping young people.⁽¹⁾

According to Bello Martínez J⁽⁴⁾, who was the president of the FEU in Cuba from 2015 to 2017, in the epilogue of the book *Tiempo de definiciones. Voces de las luchas universitarias en Cuba* (Time of definitions: voices of the university fights in Cuba): "(...) projects of economic-social impact, promotion of the genuine culture, cooperation with Cuban schools, welfare work in health centers of the country, all them enrich the record that enumerates the not few tasks in which we have participated during the recent years, multiplied in the thirty-nine universities of the country".

Interviews with FEU leaders at UCM PR

Testimony of Antonio Machín Arias, MD- First president of FEU in Pinar del Río, interviewed during 2014-2015 academic year, Consultant Professor of UCM-PR, deceased in 2017.



In October 1972, with the creation of Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca University, the history of university life in the province was opened and with this the FEU began as a political force in the province. This achievement was thanks to the work of different members of the Committee of the Young Communist League of Havana, the support of Fidel and the tireless impulse given by Julio Camacho Aguilera the Commander of the Revolution in charge of all the works.

In the beginning the UPR was integrated by a brigade of Agronomy, Economy, Forest Engineering, Mining and one of Medicine. On December 20, 1972, when the FEU was 50 years old and at the suggestion of Commander Camacho, the FEU of the University was created, where Machín was voted as president and as members: Ramón Paz Acosta, Medardo Naranjo Valdés of the Agriculture students, Ernesto Vass Vigoa of Agronomy and Mariano Mendoza Carrodegua of Forest Engineering. The first president of this medical brigade was Andrés Marín Ortega, who became a Consultant Professor at the medical university of Pinar del Río until his death. On April 4, 1973, as a result of its growth, the organizational structure that was integrated by the UJC (Young Communist League) was modified and made independent.

With joy he remembered the moment when Julio Camacho Aguilera told them that they had to make themselves known, that the students could not continue without knowing what the organization to which they belonged meant. Thus, under Machín's organization, they paint a very large sheet with the letters of the FEU and one day, in the middle of a baseball game, several members of the FEU thrown onto the grounds of the Capitán San Luis Stadium while another "assaulted" the announcers' booth in order to let the attendees know who they were and the role they played in the organization of university students. First and foremost, the Revolutionary National Police throw themselves to the grass of the stadium and captured them. Machín and the other five members of the FEU in the province accused themselves to let the others go free and already under arrest, he asked to speak with Commander Camacho on the phone, who is surprised to hear the story and asked him: --young man, what have you done? --to which Machín responds: --you told us that we should make ourselves known and we took the opportunity to do so--.

At the beginning of 1973, the Guamá Sports Games were created, almost without resources, with a lot of personal effort, and without having any professional sportsman or having all the modalities completed. Machín says that on one occasion a student from another province came to fight in judo against the representative of the university. In the University of Pinar del Río this judoka did not exist and before the dilemma, because they could not be in the wrong if they themselves were the promoters of these games, they selected the strongest of those moments, Emerald, to compete. The boy claimed: --but Machin, if I don't know anything about Judo? --to which Machin replied: "It doesn't matter, come out and fight that we have to stand up". With smiles, Dr. Machín remembers that Emerald did not win, and this fight left him with a hurt arm.

On another occasion they created a carnival float and the student who had to dance suffered a fracture on one of her legs, but it didn't matter, she was tied to the back of the carnival float and with plaster and everything she danced in the carnival. For them it was always necessary to overcome adversities and setbacks, because their motivation was greater, they could always do the tasks assigned and the word NO was something they never had in their vocabulary.

Testimony of Aida Linares González, MD- Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Pepe Portilla Provincial Pediatric Hospital -She was interviewed in the academic year 2014-2015



When the university venue opened in Pinar del Río, the students from Pinar del Río were asked to come and study in the province and today's Professor Aida, in spite of having the conditions to continue in La Habana University, was one of the first to step forward and join the task entrusted to her. At the beginning of her studies here she is nominated as representative of Teaching and Research of Medical Sciences.

In her testimony, she refers to the fact that, at that time, publishing a scientific article was a difficult task, since there was only the student scientific journal 16 de Abril in Havana, and the publication process was slower. In spite of this, the Medicine venue in Pinar del Río demonstrated such quality in the researches that they achieved very good results in the Scientific Meetings.

She highlighted on more than one occasion, the work of Carmen Serrano Verdura, MD, first dean of the School of Medical Sciences, who was an example of commitment to work, disinterest, dedication and vocation for medicine, and for Professor Aida, Carmen was one of the persons who is responsible for the creation of the medical university in Pinar del Río province.

She tells with passion that on one occasion she had to participate in an activity that would be visited by the national FEU and other political organizations. She asked permission, in advance, to the professor with whom she would have lectures that morning in the Pediatric Hospital, they refused outright, so she had to go to the office of the dean Serrano. Thanks to the intervention of the dean she was able to participate without problems in the activity. It was one of the few times that a professor disagreed with any extracurricular task, although at that time they were distanced from the students.

As a student leader, she yearns for the self-determination and autonomy with which they acted, and remembers that each time a scientific day was organized, a shift of Reflection and Debate regarding political activities, or other activities, they were the ones who organized, directed and were there to carry out each task.

Testimony of Sabina Caridad Mena, Associate Professor of Philosophy and History- Interviewed in the academic course 2014-2015.

The professor directed the basic committees of the UJC (Young Communist League) from 1981 to 1982, and the most she misses concerning those times is the autonomy with which young people acted when it came the hour to develop tasks and fulfilling assignments. In her opinion, it is necessary that professors see the student as a bio-psychosocial being, educators should be much more interested in what is happening to students in their social environment outside the institution, should always bring to the classroom a theme for reflection and current political debate, in order to promote the development of values and grounding of future professionals and leaders of the country, who have in today's youth the continuity of tomorrow.

She also stressed that the Young Communist League in the center, had the power to refute the decision of a professor to teach lectures if he/she was not well-prepared or that he/she was not a professor with the capacity for that function, changes were made in conjunction with the direction of the study specialty, always with maturity, seriousness, determination and commitment to learning and comprehensive training of future health professionals.

She stressed the need to work more with the brigade, on the subject of the formation of policies of the team of specialists that are at the level required in these times that positive



leaders should be chosen for their outcomes in teaching, research, for their thoughts and political position, for their revolutionary attitudes and behavior.

Testimony of Lázara Mayra Díaz Álvarez, BSc- Consultant Professor and Head of the Department of Preclinical Sciences, interviewed in 2014-2015 academic year.

The professor stressed the need to develop the future in an upward spiral based on a critical analysis of what should be imitated and what should be amended.

In her years as a student, she remembers the seriousness and commitment she had with these organizations. She remembers that they went home once a month and when there was an activity that coincided with the weekend of rest, they cancelled their tickets and left the trip for the following week. In spite of understanding that these are very different times, she takes up again the need for youth organizations to invigorate the student protagonist, considering this to be more mature since it has already passed through other organizations, and concludes that one must start from the premise of having student leaders who cannot be pointed out by anyone due to incorrect attitudes; brilliant leaders in their teaching results, in their interpersonal relations with others, with morals to demand and to be an example before the rest.

Regarding the meetings in the brigade, she remembers that commitments were made to obtain a grade according to the abilities, but very realistic, because a student justified a low grade for being a student leader, this excuse was not accepted, an excellent student should always be excellent, thus demonstrating the moral commitment.

In the inspections to the student hostel, in which no professor participated, the men checked the rooms of the girls and vice versa, she smiles when remembering that "they were inspections of passing the finger through the glass windows, throwing oneself to see under the bunk beds", there was a serious fulfillment of the emulation in all its aspects.

Her piece of advice to the new generations: "not to lose the spark, to keep it lit to be able to be protagonists of our own history, following the legacy of those who preceded us".

Testimony of María de los Ángeles Díaz Domínguez, MD- Consultant Professor and Second degree Specialist in Internal Medicine, interviewed in the 2014-2015 academic year.

The renowned professor commented that she was the first to attend the Teaching and Research specialty in the academic year 1974-1975, when the Medicine studies was inserted at Hermanos Saíz University of Pinar del Río. She was part of the team in charge of carrying out the first scientific event or conference that took place in the province, when in spite of not having the current development of technology, everything went according to what was planned, and that only the senior professors were consulted if there was any doubt, but that the organization in those times enjoyed great decision-making power.

She proudly referred to the massive participation in all the activities, such as knowledge meetings, sports games, scientific days, among others; what they could not do was to fail to carry out the tasks entrusted to them, since the moral commitment was very high. Each task was carried out with enthusiasm and responsibility, regardless of personal sacrifices. She remembers the first Sports Games they organized and once again the story of the young man who, without being a judoka, participates as such (a story told by Dr. Machín in his testimony). She tells about the silver medal he won and that, in an interview, the inexperienced athlete responds to the journalist's congratulations: -- Well fellow, the truth is that we were only three representatives. -- In this way he defended the truth and the humbling opinion of the way he had arrived there.



Among the anecdotes of those games, she tells about a university baseball player who, by capturing the definitive out, broke his shoulder against the fence of the stadium. On another occasion, when they didn't have a boxing competitor either, the students in charge put a deaf-mute student in the ring. They explain to him that in case of losing he would throw himself to the ground and if the opposite happened, he would continue the fight until he won. Ignorant in this sport, the young man, before so many blows, throws himself to the ground and begins to emit noises in distress signal. The fight was stopped and before the questioning of the referees, the student leaders explain to him that he was only nervous and that in minutes he would be fine.

She advises to take up again the student protagonist role since in the present times there are many more resources and development. She also recommends bringing together all those interviewed in this work in order to be able to outline a better link of the historical events that took place, alleging the advantages that would be offered by exchanging with the student, leaders of these times and exchanging criteria and opinions on the matter, and thus favoring a better development and continuity of the organizational process of both the FEU and other organizations.

With great pride she expresses that it was worth being the first generation of doctors who graduated in the province in 1975, since they are considered the initiators of a beautiful process that even today, sets high the values of the Cuban Revolution.

Testimony of William Quintero Pérez, MD.-Associate Professor and First degree Specialist in Immunology and second degree in Intensive Care, interviewed in the 2014-2015 academic year.

William was president of the FEU in the School of Medical Sciences (category of the center in those years) from 1993-1995; he was also the first student of the sixth-academic year of Medicine that held this responsibility. He remembers that it was a stage in his life that allowed him to grow as a student and as a person.

One of the anecdotes she will never forget was when her final Psychiatry exam coincided with a national meeting of the FEU in Havana that she could not miss. In spite of studying in Havana and leaving in time for the exam, the car in which he was moving breaks down in San Cristóbal, so that day he could not attend the test. As president he had to set an example in all the activities that were planned and as a student too, so he made the exam afterwards and obtained outstanding grades. It was difficult to carry out both responsibilities, but he always knew how to do it with dignity.

He said that although it was a difficult time during the Special Period, he never stopped doing the activities with enthusiasm and quality. His advice is "to regain autonomy, which must be gained from the maturity and depth of thought when carrying out processes and activities".

Testimony of Yusleivy Martínez Carmona, MD- First degree specialist in Comprehensive Medicine and second-grade specialist in Intensive Care, current director of the Dr. León Cuervo Rubio Teaching Clinical Surgical Hospital, interviewed in the 2017-2018 academic year.

The doctor, who directed the organization at the beginning of the second millennium, states that the greatest thing that happened to him at FEU was that a group of professors gave him

the privilege of entering the lines of the Communist Party of Cuba at the age of 22. Thus he became president for the hospital he now rules, in a process of exceptional growth that took place at that time and that he will never forget.

In addition, he warned: "every moment, every year is a different scenario. We young people are the ones who make revolutions, Fidel did it in his time, now it's our turn, we don't have to use a weapon, we have another scenario, that of arriving at the classroom on time, to be concentrated on the ward rounds".

From his time as a student leader he remembers "we were young and we were active in the FEU in Boca de Galafre, in Santa Lucía, we were going to discuss problems there, and there we bathed on the beach, we invited some professors, and we had fun. The FEU has to have initiatives, it has to take scenarios, it plays a leading role in each space where it is. A young FEU member cannot go home with peace of mind when there is no creativity and incursion into institutional processes, the FEU has to propose something new every day, something revolutionary, something that promotes the good of society and of the Revolution. I am allergic to lack of interest".

Testimony of Aníbal Alejandro Barredo Acosta, MD graduate of Medicine and resident of Internal Medicine, president of the FEU of the university in the academic year 2014-2015 and member of the National Secretariat of the FEU between 2015-2017.

--Six years ago I came to this institution from active military service. When they take you out of the vocational up to the active military service and then take you out again and bring you to the University of Medical Sciences you have the impression of having arrived to paradise. Imagine, I was anxious to start my degree in Medicine, I had no idea what the FEU was, you arrive at the university, the dynamic is new, nobody worries anymore because you have to study, you begin to dream, to think about a future, to know a world in which the experience surpasses any story you have been told. In that first year the FEU begins to receive us, it arrives at the brigades, as I was at that time as fallen from a parachute I was not very interested, but it turns out that by chance I am proposed to be brigade president, and well I came from the FEEM. When I begin to be brigade president of the FEU I realize that the university is very different from the rest of the institutions through which we passed.

In the university you have to represent your people, you should not be lacking in credibility, and representing a group of young people means thinking in the most possibly revolutionary way, Salvador Allende, president of Chile said that being young and not being revolutionary is a contradiction even biological, and I discovered that in the university. I was president of the brigade, I joined the movements of student assistants named Frank País and Mario Muñoz Monroy, I always saw far away the idea that one day I would be sitting in the university secretariat, representing a larger group of students, and that day came at a moment that was defining for the FEU, although all moments are in view of that, because it is the oldest social and mass organization in the country (getting its 95 years old).

So we took advantage of that moment, I was in my fourth year, when a group of students, some of whom are still here, met at the University, and we began to promote a group of changes in the institution. Why? I don't know if you have spoken to them, but the FEU, the last congress it had was the 8th Congress, as a result of which a group of transformations emerged that today are seen as something normal, but it was difficult to transform the way of thinking within the universities and to promote a group of tasks, such is the case of



access to Internet and social networks, which if now it seems like something ordinary, but four or five years ago was quite complex, we are talking about reviving some Guanahacabibes Games with the objective of taking the sports movement forward within the university.

Being in the FEU, what it means, I didn't understand it until I had the opportunity to see what it implies for the Cuban revolutionary process and what it means for many student and youth organizations around the world.

I owe a lot of what I am and what I could be to the FEU, because it has formed me from many points of view, it has given me the opportunity to cross limits that I had conceived.

We are not in a time of having an uninterested youth because an indifferent youth is very dangerous. In the university you have to insert yourself in everything you can. It's not just thinking about parties and what we think is good for us, it's also necessary to do something for the institution and the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

Local history is an important area of scientific-historical research for young university students, as a starting point to rescue the values and contributions of local personalities. The achievements of FEU throughout its more than 96 years of existence are undeniable, and are based on the action, sometimes hidden, of young people who with ability, willingness and exemplary behavior did not drop the flags conquered. Pinar del Río University of Medical Sciences of has many examples.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the preparation and proposal of the article and that they had the consent of the interviewees.

Contribution of the authors

Alexander Ariel Padrón González conceived the research. Angel Ernesto Ramos-Cordero designed the study, conducted the bibliographic search and approved the final report. Damalys Martínez López, Anisleidys Martínez Infante and Roberlandy Rivero González, along with the rest of the authors obtained the testimonies and participated in the writing of the final report.

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