



CARLOS EDUARDO MÉNDEZ:

Teaching is much more than his work, it is his life

Everyone has had a teacher who has left a mark on their professional life. This is true of Carlos Eduardo Méndez Álvarez, one of the most outstanding professors at the School of Management and Business of the Universidad del Rosario, who, for more than four decades, has had a positive influence on his students, many of whom are well-known professors, including some presidents of the Rosario.

By: Ximena Serrano Gil
Photo: Leonardo Parra

Upright and composed, he stands in the midst of the students who come and go. How you can fail to recognize him?: A man of medium height, with perfectly combed hair, an impeccable suit and a gentlemanly hello, accompanied by a kind smile which complements our meeting on a cold morning in Bogotá.

On the way to his office, as he walks with a slow gait, we cross the green, spacious campus of the Universidad del Rosario, seat of the School of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and while he proudly points out its new buildings, including its sophisticated laboratories, he says: "Who could have believed it, 42 years ago we only had 250 students."

Professor Méndez is a distinguished business consultant and also recognized for his important contributions to the study of the culture, climate and changes in organizations. In addition to his achievements in the academic, research and professional ambits, he is a charismatic human being, noble

and sensitive, who enjoys the boundless esteem of his old and new students. When he is told that this article will try to focus on his academic work and his human side, his eyes moisten and his voice breaks.

From a seminarian to a sociologist

Comfortably seated in his armchair in his office, which is not very big but comfortable, his face lit by a smile which is half-roguish and half-nostalgic, Professor Méndez speaks of his life in a quiet and measured tone of voice and how, when he was only 10 and someone asked him what he wanted to become when he was grown up, like any child, he said a doctor one day and an engineer the next, but there came a day when he said "I want to be a priest."

At once his mother enrolled him in a school (*preseminario*) which prepared boys for a seminary. Thus, a building which stood alongside what is now the Santa Clara Church, on calle 100 with Carrera 7th in Bogotá, became his

Among his greatest achievements, this academic singles out his role in the training of many people and his academic output. In 2018, he was nominated for the *Portafolio* magazine's Prize for the Best University Teacher.

home, a place where, along with 500 other boys, he began his high school courses. After that, he entered the *Seminario Menor San Benito* (San Benito Minor Seminary), which lay in the town of Sibaté, on the outskirts of Bogotá, and is now the seat of the *Escuela de Suboficiales de la Policía Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada* (Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada School for Non-Commissioned Officers of the Police). "It was a pleasant life where I was trained, taught discipline and learned about spirituality, but where they also allowed us to be boys. It was there that my passion for writing began: I did it for the Seminary's newspaper."

Two years before his courses ended, he decided he no longer wanted to become a priest, so, once he obtained his high school degree, when he was a little confused about his future course, he chose to study sociology at the Universidad Santo Tomás, without having a clear idea of what sociology was.

When he was awarded his degree, with a thesis which won an honorable mention, he looked for a job, but it was a time when sociologists had the reputation of being *guerrilleros*. With a smile, he jokingly explains: "There was the referent of Camilo Torres, a well-known sociologist, a teacher of the Universidad Nacional, who wound up with the guerrilla in the bush. They told us that sociology was useless." In the end, he got a post as a teacher of philosophy and religion in a high school and after that, worked as a sociologist in the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* – ICBF (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare).

The academy is his life

The life of this calm and always smiling academic has been devoted to research, teaching and the private sector. One moment which changed his life was when, at the age of 24, he decided to study for a Masters in Business Administration at the Universidad de los Andes. "That opened the world to me at a time when



↑ Professor Méndez places a special emphasis on respecting and setting an example for one's students, which are the two fundamental factors in the life of an academic.

people did not know what a MBA was. I was interested in marketing, but after that I focused on the study of organizations."

For 22 years, he was linked to the Universidad Santo Tomás as a professor, dean, and director of research, director of the Masters program and director of specialized studies, until the Universidad del Rosario asked him to devote himself exclusively to its programs.

With a serene gaze, he becomes absorbed in the view from his window, where he takes in the mountainous landscape and says in a tone of nostalgia and gratitude: "Here, I have been able to lead my life as a teacher, researcher, person and also as a professional." He pauses to catch his breath and continues: "The academy is my life and the Rosario has been the driving force of my career."

He worked in the private sector for ten years: In the *Carulla* supermarket chain and the *Kokoriko* restaurant chain as their manager of operations; and in *Texaco*, where he managed the founding of the "Star Mart" mini-supermarkets attached to their gas stations. After that, he worked for the consultants firm of Enrique Luque Carulla, who had been the general manager of *Carulla* and his professor at the Universidad de los Andes. Finally, the owner of *Hamburguesas El Corral*, a chain of hamburger restaurants, who had been his student, employed him as the human resources manager of the company. That was a very enriching experience, but as he himself says. "I rethought my life and decided to return to the university, full time, 22 years ago."

A witness of great changes

His eyes, which show signs of tiredness, have witnessed the evolution of the University's School of Management and Business:



“The creation of the undergraduate programs in International Business, Logistics and Production provided us with a great forward thrust, along with the specializations, the Masters and the Doctorate. We transformed the Faculty of Administration into the School of Management and Business. In a parallel manner, the University in general began to grow, strengthening its positioning and accreditation in higher education with research, the high quality of its programs and new challenges.”

“In 1977, the university did not have more than 800 students. We all knew one another and we would meet up in the *plazoleta* (little plaza) of the University. Many important people in the country had studied at the Rosario. We only taught Law, Administration, Economics, Philosophy and Medicine,” he finishes, with a sigh.

A harsh blow

Four years ago, he suffered the harshest blow in his life. He had cancer of the liver and had to undergo a liver transplant. When he speaks of that experience, he cannot avoid a look of distress. There is a silence during which he struggles to regain his composure and all he can say is: “I got over it. We battled on and I am grateful to the Universidad del Rosario for its support and unconditional accompaniment”.

As he explains, the following two years were very difficult, but, harsh as the experience was, he found that the best therapy was to keep active and write a book. He counts off the time: 29 months since he has not returned to the clinic and the results of his examinations are now normal.

He was terminally ill a couple of times: “That occurrence brought me close to God again. That is why I wrote the follow-

Professor Méndez is an outstanding business consultant, he is also known for his important contributions to the fields of organizational culture, climate and change.

ing in my last book: ‘I testify to the importance of prayer, faith and a positive attitude in the moments of one’s life.’” Despite how painful it is to speak of and remember that setback, he always finishes with a smile he draws strength from.

His legacy

As he reminisces, Professor Carlos enters into a sort of monologue in which he says, in his own words, “one day, as I was reflecting, I said to myself: Hey, people have a lot of problems in writing their degree thesis. Let’s create a 20 page pamphlet to give them some instructions – it became the *Guide for drafting designs for research in the economic, administrative and accounting sciences*. It gradually grew and evolved to become a book of more than 300 pages, entitled the *Design of processes of research, with an emphasis on the managerial sciences*. It has now gone through four editions.”

Méndez has made major contributions to the fields of the methodologies of research and organizational culture. At the current time, thanks to his dedication, there is a project on organizational culture in the line of organizational studies of the *Business and Management Research Group* of the university. In addition, he is revising his latest book, which is entitled *Culture, the condition for the success of the strategy*.

Professor Méndez places a special emphasis on respecting and setting an example for one’s students, which are the two fundamental factors in the life of an academic. Last year he was nominated for the *Portafolio* magazine’s Prize for the Best University Teacher and he explains that his greatest achievements have been to participate in the training of many people and his academic output. “I have always counted on the support of the deans of the School. Some of them have been my students,” he says in a quiet voice, adding that he feels very proud of that, because leaving a mark is a great satisfaction.

In a voice choked with emotion, this tireless and active professor remarks: “After my illness, what has motivated me is to come here, be with people, sit down at my desk and write, go the classrooms and transmit knowledge: In other words, feel that I am alive.” ■