



“I just want to be Samuel... to inspire and have an impact”

This is stated by this young student, president of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Student Council of the Universidad del Rosario, for whom his greatest learning is to recognize the importance of being vulnerable, without being weak.

By Ximena Serrano Gil
Pictures Víctor Samuel Pérez

He identifies with the *Sanjuaneros* and the mischievous *Rajaleñas* popular songs from the Opita territory, but at the same time, he is a fan of The Strokes. Víctor Samuel Pérez Díaz is an enthusiastic student, leader of the Universidad del Rosario, a person with a smile that enchants audiences.

He presents himself as passionate about mathematics, philosophy, physics, and music. In addition, with the energy of his youth, his goal is to inspire and empower others.

With his almost 20 years, the resumé of Víctor Samuel already has achievements such as being a fellow of the Young Ambassadors program of the United States Department of State, president of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Student Council (CECNM, in Spanish), beneficiary of the *Ser Pilo Paga* program of the National Government, and a fellow of the Latin American Leadership Academy. Some of the achievements that he continues to add are his commitment and ability to integrate and improve the academic and scientific skills of students in the construction of knowledge.

Music that makes him vibrate

The student of Applied Mathematics and Computer Science (MACC, in Spanish) was born in La Plata, a small, typical, and picturesque town in the southwest of Huila, where he learned to know and love the folklore of the region. Remembering how he started playing the guitar, playing *bambucos* and *pasillos*, particularly when he was selected to participate in the National Bambuco Festival in Neiva, marks him with a mischievous and wide smile, after which he expresses, “That was the best, it was a wonderful time.”

Due to work reasons for his mother, Pérez moved to Ibagué, the musical capital of Colombia. This was one more opportunity for growth and training. According to Samuel, while he was in the last two years of high school, he also studied at the Tolima Conservatory, where he expanded his training by moving from folk music to that commonly used in the academy.

Challenges that build a future

Samuel, as most call him, is characterized by his ability to take on challenges that lead to continuous learning. Finishing the 11th grade, he won the call for the Young Ambassadors program of the United States Department of State, an experience that marked a turning point. “It was the first time that I left the country, a month of apprenticeship in the United States. We got to enter the congress in order to have a better understanding of that country and, in that manner, I got to know part of its culture. That was an experience that encouraged me to see what else is there when we think outside the box,” he says.



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The achievements continued. As a result of his effort, dedication, and excellent academic results, he obtained the benefit of the *Ser Pilo Paga* program. So, the challenge was to define his academic life. As if he were living that moment, in his eyes there is an expression of concern: "The first step was to choose between philosophy, music or science; It was a super strong decision. Although I decided not to give up on music, I decided to go for science." The reasoning was: "I would have felt a bit sad if I did not continue learning mathematics in a scientific context," a conclusion that he closes with a wide smile.

After a lot of thinking and searching, as well as applying to various universities, he settled on Applied Mathematics and Computer Science. The reason, as explained by the Rosario student, combines several of the things that attract him to science: Understanding how things work, the pure part of science, the use of applied mathematics and computer science in the real world, as well as catalyzing innovation in digital environments. "I did not feel satisfied studying only pure mathematics, physics, or systems engineering. MACC gave me a new vision of mathematics and computing; I was passionate about that."

Trapped in the academic nebula

At the age of 16, wanting to discover new horizons, he came to Bogotá to start his studies. With the excitement of feeling like a university student, exploring the city, and learning to live alone, that first semester did not turn out to be what he expected: "It was a hard experience because I always lived with my mother. It was a difficult semester, I felt the marked academic gap, I did not know how to solve



inequalities and my colleagues were already calculating integrals, I did not do well in the first partials," Samuel says.

But this was not a luxury he could afford; Furthermore, taking into account that he was always an outstanding student, as an example of commitment and perseverance, Samuel's response was, "I took a deep breath, reacted and said, 'I have to face this challenge and the only way to overcome it is by studying hard'."

With the spontaneity and simplicity that characterizes him, he continued the story saying: "The second semester was one of personal acceptance, of understanding that one is growing, that one has responsibilities. I missed my mom; the loneliness was hard. However, the university has always played a role of special accompaniment in Bogotá since it provides me with a food subsidy at lunch, which is the most important meal. When I have needed support, it has been very generous."

Leadership, a tool for the present and the future

From an early age, this young student has shown great leadership skills. Thus, very naturally, he says, "I have always been interested in the dynamics of leadership. In the first semester they asked who wanted to be the representative of the semester and I raised my hand. In the second year, I was proposed to be Chancellor of the Student Council and I accepted the challenge, which is already a position on the board of directors.

From that moment, I set myself the goal of being president of the CECNM, not because of the status of the position, but because I am excited by the idea that, through leadership, you can inspire and empower other people."

With his backpack full of outstanding achievements and activities, he applied to the Latin American Leadership Academy scholarship, which consists of intensive training to strengthen, encourage and empower people who demonstrate leadership skills and qualities. "This program carries out a series of boot camps in different countries; I applied to the one in Mexico, and I was the only Colombian chosen from approximately a thousand young people from Latin America. The scholarship did not cover flights, and the university helped me," he added.

With simplicity, clarity, and total spontaneity in his appreciation, Samuel affirms, "My greatest learning was to recognize the importance of being vulnerable, without being weak. Also, in that vulnerability, to learn to recognize oneself, your strengths and weaknesses, in order to impact others."

One of the questions with which he traveled was how to use his career to find and propose solutions to contemporary problems. In this regard, amid laughter, and very mathematical style, he explained, "I still don't have the answer. They didn't give me the formula; they didn't tell me 'you do this multiplication or calculate the integral and you have the an-

Samuel studies Applied Mathematics and Computer Science at the Universidad del Rosario because, as he explains, it combines several of the things that attract him to science: Understanding how things work, the pure part of science, and the use of applied mathematics and computer science in the real world.

swer'. I only managed to clear one variable. So here I go, solving the equation that surely does not have a mathematical answer, but, perhaps, an approximation."

While that happens, Samuel and his mates want to promote and inspire, from the Council, science among the entire Rosario community. With his voice in a very enthusiastic and motivating tone, he says, "We are promoters of science at the university, we want to use science for the benefit of society."

He doesn't play guitar every day anymore, but the music is still there. Still, with the same desire to find answers and explore new horizons, finishing his fifth semester, Samuel represents the energy, leadership, and paradigm shift of the new generations of students at Universidad del Rosario. "I really want to contribute to the theoretical part of mathematics or computer science, but I also want to apply these disciplines in proposing solutions. I don't want to be Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, or Elon Musk, I don't want to be like someone else; I want to be Samuel and, with the authenticity that this entails, to be able to inspire and impact those around me." ■