

# EPPUR SI MUOVE: YOUNG CUBAN PHYSICISTS TRANSCENDED FRONTIERS AT CAM 2017

EPPUR SI MUOVE: JÓVENES FÍSICOS CUBANOS TRASCENDIERON FRONTERAS EN EL CAM 2017

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I had the pleasure to participate, with 14 Cuban PhD students, in the Canadian-American-Mexican Graduate Student Physics Conference (CAM 2017), celebrated in Washington, D.C. from August 17 to 19 –a historical event in the regional physics scenario.

CAM is a scientific conference organized every two years by the Physical societies of Canada, the US, and Mexico. It is celebrated in venues alternating among the three countries.



Figure 1. A four-country panel. From left to right: Gretel Quintero (Cuba), Christopher Pugh (Canada), Midhat Farooq (USA), and Krista Freeman, president of the organizing committee. The speaker is Ana Aviléz-López, (México).

There were actually a few CAM meetings in the early-mid 90's but the first CAM in its present format took place in Mexico in 2003, and ever since it has established itself as a Congress to promote the collaboration among graduate students and update them about recent progress in Physics. The event is quite unique: it is organized by the students themselves, who run the organizing committee, select invitees, and chair scientific sessions.

The agenda of CAM 2017 included 5 plenary talks, as well as oral and poster presentations by the participating students. In addition, two discussion panels were organized, dealing with the experience of the participants as grad students both from the academic and social points of view. The need of scientific collaboration acted as a natural attractor during the discussions.

An interesting feature of CAM 2017 is that the students who gave oral presentations actually received evaluations from

their peers, which will help them to polish their skills as speakers.

Honoring its slogan “Transcending frontiers”, the event not only crossed professional and geographical frontiers; the presence of Cuba also smashed the political ones.

In fact, the invitation to Cuban students was a proposal of the American Physical Society (APS) made during a meeting between APS leaders and members of the direction board of the Cuban Physical Society (SCF) in March 2016 in Havana. The APS generously took charge of the travel and living expenses of the Cuban participants.



Figure 2. Precision raincoats. Some of the participants in CAM 2017 getting ready to walk to the dinner place with the raincoats provided by the organizing team with amazingly good timing (Photo courtesy of Hari Sharma).

The Cuban delegation was composed of graduate students from the universities of Havana, Camagüey and Las Villas, as well as PhD candidates belonging to the Centro de Inmunología Molecular (CIM), the Instituto de Cibernética Matemática y Física (ICIMAF) and the Instituto Superior de Tecnologías y Ciencias Aplicadas (INTEC).

The Cuban visitors enjoyed the courtesy both from the organizers and from the rest of the participants. I would like to underline the heartfelt words of William Dorland (professor at the University of Maryland and former Chair of the APS Committee on International Freedom of Scientists) who said during his closing speech that he was very satisfied with the presence of Cuban physicists in the conference; something he had thought that he would never be able to see.

Besides the academic rigor, CAM 2017 boasted an impeccable organization, especially thanks to the presence of three key persons: Michele Irwin, Manager of International Programs of the APS, Amy Flatten, Director of International Affairs for APS and the Chair of the APS Forum on Graduate Student Affairs, Krista Freeman, who took care of the organization in minute detail. A curious example of their success was the expedite response to a rain announcement for Friday 17, at 6:30 PM –exactly the time to walk to the banquet location, in a different building. Right at the departure time, all participants were provided raincoats and umbrellas (see Fig. 2): their usefulness was absolutely clear when rain started at 6:30 PM sharp.

The banquet took place at the impressive lobby of the Rayburn building, headquarters of the US House of Representatives. During dinner I had the possibility to publicly acknowledge the organizing committee and the APS on behalf of the SCF; I also made good use of the opportunity to suggest the celebration of the next CAM in Havana, Cuba. The proposal was well received, and, in fact, will be discussed in detail later on. With a spark of Physics humor, someone

suggested that the meeting could be called C<sup>2</sup>AM (were the two C's would naturally correspond to Canada and Cuba).



Figure 3. Dinner at Capitol Hill. Participants during the banquet that took place at the Rayburn building, Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.

Besides the rich academic experience, the participation in CAM 2017 offered us the opportunity to visit many attractions of the impressive city of Washington, D.C. like the Capitol, the monument of George Washington, the National Air and Space Museum, and, of course, having a taste of the city's night life.

But above all, the Cuban participation in CAM 2017 showed that Science is a powerful force allowing women and men to transcend frontiers, walls and prejudices of any kind.