
11 Professor Omar García

Professor of Spanish (1926)

→ Within a short time of taking up his appointment as 1926 Chair of Spanish in January 2020, Professor Omar García contributed to putting together a tender, led by the Head of School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, to the government's Human Capital Initiative (HCI) which is centred on providing opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD).

The Trinity proposal – for a Centre for Global Intercultural Communications to deliver programmes, short courses and micro-credentialing modules relating to the Middle East, North Africa, Francophone Africa, Latin America, and Eastern and Central Europe – was successful and has received over €1 million of the €21 million in seed funding allocated to Trinity. The Centre is now hiring staff and developing programmes, to start this coming academic year. The core mission is to provide intercultural training for those seeking to engage with the regions, whether through industry and commerce, education and the arts, or health sciences.

For Professor García, who is a founding director of the new Centre, it has been a fast immersion into Trinity and the national funding process, at a time when, like everyone else, he was grappling with the transition to online teaching and learning. He found it “a great experience. I've got to know colleagues across the School and it's been really exciting participating in these developments. In Trinity, there are so many opportunities if you want to do things.”

He is clearly seizing those opportunities – as well as the HCI-funded Centre, he jumped at the chance of joining the Trinity Centre for Resistance Studies, launched in March, an interdisciplinary and cross-faculty initiative, bringing together history, cultural studies, the social sciences, languages, literature, law, peace studies and health sciences.

Resistance Studies is his own field of research and he will be co-directing a lecture series in the new Centre. “I focus on cultural resistance, working at the intersection of politics, history, law and cultural production, and interrogating how culture negotiates with power. If you have an authoritarian system, either right or left, how does that change the dynamic of cultural production?” His focus is Latin America but he works “comparatively, especially across the Spanish-speaking world” and Resistance Studies is interdisciplinary and cross-regional: “The region determines the research angle – in Kurdistan, for instance, colleagues are asking why it never became a country.” Ireland is an obvious focus for the new Trinity Centre – his students have brought the mother and baby homes to his attention. “The whole idea of witnessing but not speaking about your experience is at the core of Resistance Studies.”

His route to the Humanities was unusual. Born in Cuba, he emigrated to Florida as a child and went to the University of Miami to study science. “Literature and languages were my hobbies. I took modules in them and then one day the Director of Graduate Studies asked when I was getting my BA – turns out that I had taken so many modules, I had two degrees without realising it!” As a BSc, he was working in a clinical hospital when an opportunity came up to do a postgrad in either Education or Language Studies “so I registered for both.”



He was still torn between two directions when he took up a Fellowship in humanities from the University of Miami to go to then Queen Mary and Westfield College, now Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), in 1991. “I loved London and the university and I realised this was what I wanted to do.” A lectureship came up in 1992 and he progressed to a personal chair in Hispanic Studies and Comparative Poetics in QMUL in 2010. He found Brexit very disappointing – “I was one of those people protesting outside parliament for two years” – and he was excited by the opportunity that Trinity offered. “The Spanish department wants to develop expertise in Latin America so, for the first time, they sent the 1926 Chair to Latin America, so to speak. I’m excited to be part of that expansion and as soon as I arrived, I could see that this is a really robust, vibrant School. We have over 370 students studying Spanish, a really healthy number, and I’m impressed at how many pathways they can take, to combine with other studies. I direct the BSL [Business Studies and a Language] programme in the School. The Trinity Education Project has its challenges but it also enables, encourages and *forces* students to move out of their comfort zone to explore new areas.”

His teaching philosophy is “student-centred, pragmatic and symbiotic. We need each other. I hate lectures – the idea that I’m going to give you sacred knowledge and tell you

what the text means? No – I’m going to help you explore the text on your own terms. We’re going to test it together.”

This inclusivity stretches to his own creative practice. “I’m very interested in what I call ‘fractal poetics’ – poetry that interacts with the audience. I’m acutely aware that my poetry is read very differently by different audiences”. He writes “mainly in Spanish. I think it became a way for me to keep hold of the language when I was living in an anglophone world” and he is delighted that in Trinity “your creative practice is recognized; it’s not seen as a hobby or an extra. That’s exactly how it should be.”

He has just been elected Professorial Fellow and Head of School for the next three years. His ambitions include identifying new opportunities for the School, contributing to the two new Centres and getting involved in outreach programmes: “I notice, to put it frankly, that Trinity is so white, but Dublin city isn’t that white... I have experience in building widening participation pathways and developing relations with secondary schools and that’s something I can share.” He is also looking forward to getting to know Ireland more after lockdown: “I love cultural life obviously, and I’m happy when I’m close to sea and mountains – Dublin is perfect for me in that way.”