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e-Newsletter

Interview with Dr. Mario Gonzalez-Fuentes, Social Science Division Representative

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“Creating an undergraduate research program on an institutional campus is a multifaceted endeavor that requires careful planning and execution. Whether your institution is in the process of initiating a program from scratch, undergoing a restructuring phase, or

This March it is our pleasure to spotlight Mario Gonzalez-Fuentes, CUR Social



Sciences Division Representative. Dr. Gonzalez-Fuentes is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the Michael School of Business at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX. He has been a faculty member at Trinity since 2011 but has been serving in higher education since 2005. He holds a Bachelor’s Degree from the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon in Monterrey, Mexico, a Master’s Degree from Arizona State University, and a Ph.D. from the Universidad de Alcala in Madrid, Spain-- all in economics.

What CUR committees or task forces are you currently serving on?

In addition to serving as a representative in the Social Science Division, I have served on the Nominations Vetting Committee since 2020.

How long have you been mentoring undergraduate research?

I have been mentoring undergraduate research since joining Trinity in 2011. First, I had the opportunity to offer a couple of directed studies courses in which I would meet weekly with students who were interested in deepening their knowledge in a topic not sufficiently covered in other classes. These one-on-one meetings taught me the importance of mentorship, which is different than teaching. Later, I began participating in an initiative we have at Trinity called SURF (Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship), in which students submit their applications early in the Spring semester to conduct research in the summer along with a faculty member. They're funded for 10 weeks in the summer and are offered housing on campus. My first project was in 2017 and it involved collecting data in Tokyo and Osaka, Japan. The student who I mentored throughout this project was exposed to every stage of research, from the identification of a gap in the literature, to finding the appropriate research instrument, administering it, and analyzing the data. This experience was instrumental after she graduated, when her experience helped her to get accepted and secure funding to do a master's degree in Japan. Since then, almost every summer, I've taken students under my mentorship. Since I started

even considering how to start one, CUR has compiled resources to help create a thriving undergraduate research ecosystem that benefits both students and the broader academic community.”

my own research lab to further my understanding of how using storytelling lenses can help companies and organizations engage more effectively with their audiences, students have joined this lab in the summer to design experiments to test various hypotheses. Last year, one of the students who I mentored had one of her studies accepted for presentation at the Society for Marketing Advances Annual Conference in Fort Worth, TX. I think that was the highlight of 2023 for me: seeing an undergraduate student who I mentored defend her ideas in a session among seasoned faculty members and Ph.D. students!

Have you had any other involvement in leading experiential learning activities for undergraduates that you would like to share?

Yes! During my first 8 years at Trinity I had the opportunity to lead a good number of Trinity's faculty-led study-abroad programs. These are short-term (from 2-3 weeks to 6-8 weeks) study-abroad programs in the summer or the winter break. I have been to China (Shanghai), Cuba, Japan, Spain (Madrid), and Vietnam. Students get to immerse themselves in another culture and learn soft skills like flexibility, resilience, etc.

“CUR provides support and professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Our publications and outreach activities are designed to share successful models and strategies for establishing, nurturing, and institutionalizing undergraduate research programs.”

Most of the programs in the summer have an internship component. So, students who go to Shanghai and Madrid have the opportunity to do a month worth of full-time internships with local companies. That galvanizes their cultural learning and exposure. These experiences have been memorable not only for them but also for the faculty mentors like me. As I like to say, we take 15-20 students on these trips and return with 15-20 VERY different students back to Trinity!

What influenced you to join CUR?

In the very early years of my time at Trinity I saw the power of mentorship and realized there was a community of like-minded academics who are interested in promoting these opportunities and innovating in this field. That's what motivated me to join CUR. I've been a councilor (now representative) since 2019 and it's been an honor and a privilege to serve Trinity in that capacity. But moreover, it's been a pleasure getting to know colleagues across institutions who care and believe in the power of hands-on experiences in which we strike a balance between facilitating and letting students find their way.

Do you have any other news that you would like to share with the division?

Yes. I'm very proud of a recent achievement. Each year, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International recognizes institutions around the world that are innovating to create relevant, equitable, and impactful business education. This year, my Dean (Dr. Robert Scherer) submitted my “Brand Storytelling and Identity” course for consideration, and it was one of 25 projects selected internationally for recognition in the esteemed category of “Innovations That Inspire.” I created this course in 2019 and have taught it every Spring since 2020. This course stands out for its innovative

approach and interactive nature. Rooted on the premise that everyone possesses the capacity for storytelling, it provides a hands-on experience where participants craft digital narratives collaboratively, refining and amplifying their storytelling skills together. Embracing inductive reasoning (i.e., to do, you first need to see), the instructors pivot from traditional teaching roles to become facilitators, adapting content and delivery to meet the unique needs of each learner.

Faculty Excellence in Mentoring Award

Each year, the CUR Social Sciences Division awards a competitive Excellence in Mentoring Undergraduate Research in the Social Sciences (EMURSS) award. The award recognizes an outstanding mentor in the social sciences who supports and encourages a positive and inclusive scholarly and teaching environment for undergraduate students and contributes to their personal and professional development. Nominations closed on March 1, 2024, and the awards committee is currently evaluating the applications with the assessment rubric. The committee is thrilled to see the impressive work in mentored undergraduate research that social scientists are engaging in at higher education institutions across the U.S.

Upcoming Opportunities & Deadlines

- CUR Proposal Writing Institute, July 11-July 15. Registration ends May 22, 2024. [Link](#)

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