

POWER

Combination

EPIPHANIES

The oldest of six children, Jorge G. Gonzalez, Kalamazoo College's 18th president, was born in Monterrey, Mexico, where he lived for most of his youth, not counting his short residencies in Palo Alto and East Lansing while his father was attending graduate school at Stanford and Michigan State University, respectively.

As a boy growing up in Mexico, Gonzalez saw the poverty that characterized portions of his homeland, and his youthful vocational dream was to learn the causes of that poverty and to help make changes to ameliorate it.

"I felt I needed to understand economics," he says. "So my plan was to earn a Ph.D. in that field and then begin a career in public service. Becoming a politician I thought would be the most effective way to make the changes that would reduce and eliminate poverty."

Toward that end Gonzalez earned his bachelor's degree from the Monterrey Institute of Technology (ITESM), graduating first among the school's economics class in 1984. His undergraduate junior year was seminal because of study abroad, an experience he describes as "life changing." So epiphany number one came right out of a *K-Plan* counterpart, with a U.S. foreign study at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, a kind of transnational mirror to the foreign study program at the Midwestern liberal arts



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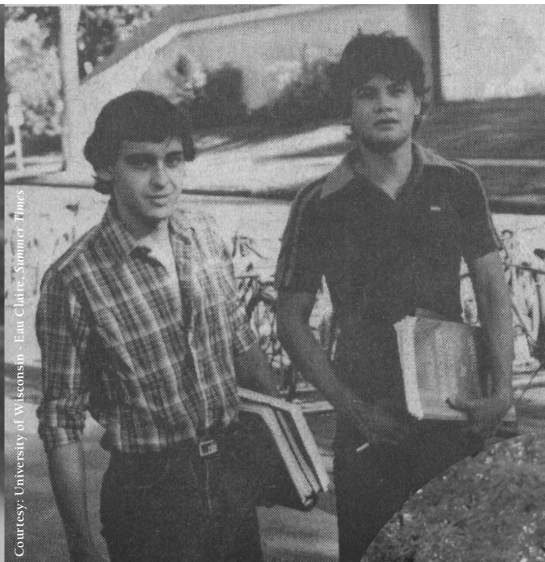
Power

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Luxembourg 2016

innovation



*Jorge on study
abroad in Eau Claire,
Wisconsin.*

*Jorge and Suzie,
fall 1988, in East
Lansing.*



college he'd be called to lead some 30 years later.

"International study matters because it awakens and strengthens inquiry and empathy," Gonzalez says. "On study abroad everything you've assumed becomes open to question. I learned more about the world, and I learned more about Mexico from studying outside of Mexico. I also came to admire and respect Midwestern values, particularly the kindness I experienced."

According to Gonzalez, by living in a new culture one discovers that different ways of behaving represent the broad diversity of human potentialities, and that realization is fertile ground for the growth of empathy. "Strange" morphs to "different," and the concept of our human family expands. "You learn, for example," explains Gonzalez, "that a fine and robust intelligence will occasionally struggle with fluency and accent. You learn that everyone in fact has an accent. And you come to realize and appreciate the extraordinary courage of immigrants."

Gonzalez' second epiphany would occur a few years later when he was in graduate school.

"I considered a doctorate in economics essential to my prospective career in Mexican politics," he says. He earned his master's degree and Ph.D. from Michigan State University in the fields of international economics, political economy and development. (At MSU he also met his future wife, K alumna Suzie (Martin) Gonzalez '83, a fellow MSU graduate student at work on her doctorate in educational psychology. More on that story to follow.)

In the fourth year of his Ph.D. program Gonzalez was asked to teach an undergraduate class. He initially resisted, preferring to concentrate entirely on his own studies and research. But the additional income would come in handy, "so I eventually agreed," he says. "From the first day I fell in love with working with students, and I discovered I cared as deeply about teaching as I did about research. It was a 'Eureka! This-is-who-I-am!' moment, and I knew I needed to give the idea of becoming a professor a chance."



MULTIPLE MULTIPLIERS

For the 21 years after he completed his Ph.D. (1989) Gonzalez “had the time of my life” teaching at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

“Economists talk about a multiplier effect,” he says. “A professor can affect change in society through each student he teaches.” Fundamental to that effect, though, is the liberal arts. The startling accomplishments (and capacity) of humankind is better reflected in diverse disciplines as well as multiple cultures. “For that reason a liberal arts learning experience with international and multicultural components constitutes an educational power combination unlike any other,” adds Gonzalez. “And that power is further multiplied with every experiential opportunity that allows students to engage with the world and draw upon and apply their liberal arts learning.”

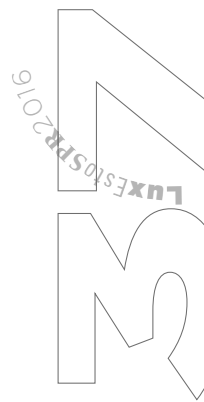
At Trinity, Gonzalez organized and helped develop many such opportunities, including: summer travel-study programs related to economics coursework in Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg; summer student internships in Madrid, Spain; a travel-study program in Vietnam; and a partnership between the Tec de Monterrey (Mexico) and Trinity University. “If my class is focused on the economics of the European Union, how better to augment the classroom than with experiences in the countries themselves,” says Gonzalez.

He also helped create a “Languages Across the Curriculum” program in which courses are taught in the language most germane to the content. A course about the French Revolution, for example, is taught in French; one on Latin American economics in Spanish.

Given his success in the classroom and with experiential “multipliers,” it’s not surprising Trinity University encouraged Gonzalez to explore his potential for higher educational administration. He was awarded a prestigious American Council on Education (ACE) fellowship and spent the 2007-08 academic year observing and participating in various administrative roles at Pomona College (Claremont, Calif.). During that year he observed and learned from administrators at some 30 other colleges and universities throughout the country.

He returned to Trinity as an educational hybrid, one foot in the classroom, the other in administration.

*Jorge Gonzalez meets
dining services staff
and greets students
in the cafeteria.*





Courtesy: The Occidental Weekly



Courtesy: Ricardo Parada



Courtesy: Ricardo Parada

A gifted teacher in front of a class at Occidental College and in Japan this past December, combining study abroad with liberal arts learning.

"I continued teaching a reduced load of economics classes and also served as special assistant to the president," says Gonzalez. "Frankly, I was torn. I loved the classroom, but I also saw the multiplier effect of administration. A professor can help make change through the students in his classes; an administrator undertakes that potential through every student in the institution."

In 2010 he left Trinity for Occidental College (Los Angeles, Calif.). There he planted both feet solidly in the administrative sphere as Occidental's vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college. Well, sort of solidly. Gonzalez spent a portion of last winter break—just prior to the January 2016 announcement of his presidency at K—traveling in Japan on an educational seminar with Occidental students. There's still a lot of teacher in the administrator.

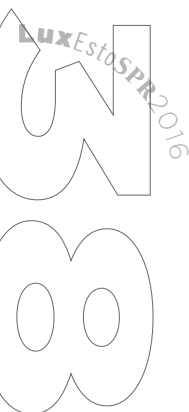
"I love Occidental for the same reasons I love K," he says. "Both institutions take strong stands for the liberal arts combined with experiential applications, and both are committed to social justice learning and leadership, in the classroom and in the community."

SUPERIOR VALUE; CRITICAL CHALLENGE

According to Gonzalez, the power combination of liberal arts and experiential education is the most effective way to "enrich a life." Part of that enrichment has to do with career preparation (or, more accurately, careers preparation). And, arguably, the more important part has to do with the cultivation of the soul—what Ralph Waldo Emerson (a visiting lecturer at K) defined as the "vast background of our being." Not a function or a faculty, he wrote, "but a light" (*lux esto*). Emerson believed the "vast background" was the essential "germ of intellectual growth. Those who are capable of humility, of justice, of love, of aspiration, are already on a platform that commands the sciences and arts, speech and poetry, action and grace." Similarly, contemporary writer and thinker Marilynne Robinson associates the soul with "the dignity of a human life and of the unutterable gravity of human action and experience."

What do the liberal arts have to do with that? The answer may be ineffable, but it certainly has to do with balance, with broad continual study, and with living well in each moment. "The way you look at a painting is a critical skill applicable to many different situations in a career and a life," says Gonzalez. "So the art history class is indispensable to the engineer or accountant."

"An engineer with the time to visit the Prado's Goya exhibition will achieve a joy that would otherwise be absent from her life," he adds. "The same goes for the accountant who sees 'Horus in Roman Military Costume' in the British Museum. He can also ponder the ethics and justice of artifacts that appear in permanent



collections other than those of the artifact's country of origin."

And who's to say the engineer and accountant will be in those jobs five or 10 years after their life-enriching museum visits? "Most students today will retire from a profession other than their first," says Gonzalez. "Because the liberal arts develop analytical skills, critical thinking and communication so effectively, a liberal arts education is the best preparation for one's first and last professions, and everything in between. That is an extraordinary value over time."

Making evident that superior value to prospective students and families—especially students who will be the first in their families to attend college, and low- to middle-income families for whom college represents a challenging financial investment—is critical to a healthy future for liberal arts colleges like K. "We have to be very explicit about how the education we provide prepares for an enriched life, only one element of which (but a very important element) is employment and employment transitions," says Gonzalez.

And effective communication is not enough. "We must be sure that we are accessible to a wide range of students from a variety of educational and financial backgrounds."

TRANSNATIONAL MIRROR AND KALAMAZOO CONNECTIONS

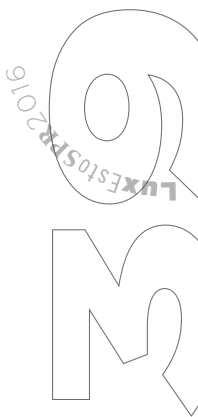
"I feel that my life up to now has been preparation to be president of Kalamazoo College," says Gonzalez. And he views the office not so much an end but rather an opportunity to do what the role allows: continue the K community's stand for the liberal arts and the multiplier effect of experiential programs like study abroad, career internships, the Senior Individualized Project, and social justice and civic engagement leadership development. Such advancement, missionary work on behalf of the *K-Plan*, is what Gonzalez relishes.

One of the most important milestones in his life preparation for the presidency of K turns out to be the

choice of his life partner. "Marrying Suzie has given me a three-decade familiarity with the College," he says. "She embodies the values of K and the *K-Plan*."

"Suzie" is Suzanne (Martin) Gonzalez '83. Their lives before they met mirror one another. On some occasions when Jorge's family was living in the United States while his father attended American universities, Suzie's family was living in Mexico City or Puerto Rico (her father is a retired pharmaceutical company executive who worked at the company's

*Announcement day,
January 12, 2016,
Jorge and Suzie in
Stetson Chapel.*





Suzie in Madrid, fall 1981;

On a trip to Portugal during study abroad;

Receiving her degree at commencement 1983.



subsidiaries in both places). Suzie matriculated to K from Puerto Rico. She majored in psychology and studied abroad in Madrid, roughly the same time Jorge was majoring in economics at ITESM and studying abroad in Wisconsin. Suzie currently works for the El Monte City School District as a school psychologist.

“Ours is a story of a Mexican national and an American national who, unbeknownst to one another, shared a very transnational life,” says Jorge.

Friends at MSU introduced the two graduate students, in part because of their shared fluency in Spanish and in English. They were married in 1989, smack dab between the defense of their dissertations (his in economics, hers in counseling psychology). “The timing meant we were far too busy to really worry too much about wedding ceremony details,” smiles Jorge.

The couple has two children. Their daughter Kristina is a recent graduate of the University of Southern California. She majored in international relations and currently works in commercial real estate in Los Angeles. Their son Carlos is a computer science major at Rice University (Houston, Texas).

Do Jorge and Suzie have any trepidation about Michigan’s colder climate, relative to San Antonio and Los Angeles?

“I’ve been to Kalamazoo,” he says. “Suzie’s family helped us with wedding planning in 1989. I visited The Upjohn Company and even attended a Kalamazoo Wings hockey game with my father-in-law and some of his work colleagues.

“As far as winter is concerned, one can focus on the cold and difficulty, but I love the change of seasons and the beauty of that first snowfall.”

His wife’s family owns a cabin on Torch Lake in northern Michigan, and Suzie and Jorge enjoy spending time there in all seasons.

“Of course,” he laughs, “if winter came once every three years instead of annually. Well, that might be nice.”

The family

*Gonzalez (l-r):
Kristina, Carlos,
Suzie and Jorge.*





MARGARET MEAD AND JORGE GONZALEZ

For anthropologist Margaret Mead the true test for subject mastery was one's capability to explain the subject to a child. Her exact quote: "If one cannot state a matter clearly enough so that even an intelligent 12-year-old can understand it, one should remain in the cloistered walls of the university and laboratory until one gets a better grasp of one's subject matter."

Mead's assertion is one reason Kalamazoo College's 18th president believes so strongly in combining liberal arts classroom learning with experiential opportunities to apply that learning—the better able to explain a matter so a child understands. Or, better yet, to prompt great questions from the child.

For fun, *LuxEsto* asked Professor Gonzalez how he would explain international economics to a 12-year-old.

"I would ask her or him to look at the tags on their clothing and devices," he says, "the play station, pens, television. Make a list of where they are made, where they come from. What we do every day is tied to the actions of people around the world. Is this good?

"If this situation changed, would the changes favor your daily life or someone else's? Whose? And if it favors the lives of others, does that benefit you as well? If so, how so?

"Perhaps, together, the 12-year-old and I would conclude that it is important to study these questions so that people can change or control (for the benefit of people) forces that would otherwise happen in uncontrolled and potentially more harmful ways."

Welcome home, Professor Gonzalez! Home being a place dedicated to the liberal arts and experiential applications, a.k.a. the *K-Plan*. ●

