



A LIFE AS A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

By Ninfa Esperanza Sandoval
Photos Alberto Sierra
Milagro Castro

Fernando Jaramillo Mejía, professor of the Faculty of Economics at the Universidad del Rosario, won the 2017 award for Best University Teacher, a prize given by the Colombian daily newspaper *Portafolio*. The accolade recognizes an entire life as a teacher in Economics faculties in Colombia and France, as well as his almost 30 years of work as a researcher.

At the end of last year, Professor Fernando Jaramillo Mejía, director of research at the Faculty of Economics of the Universidad del Rosario, received an important accolade for him and his alma mater. He was given the *Portafolio* Prizes Award for Best Teacher in Colombia.

"I never thought I would win this. The University put me up for it in 2016 and 2017. The first year it was won by Professor Miguel Urrutia, and I was thinking then that if they gave it to me, I would have to hand it to Professor Urrutia because he really deserved it. In 2017 I took part alongside really very good professors who I respect greatly, people with very important positions in the state. The competition was very tough, and when I was shortlisted for the final, that already felt like an award," recalls this mentor of some of the country's leading managers of economic policy, and also of renowned researchers.

Among his students are state functionaries of the highest level, such as Andrés Escobar (Deputy Finance Minister), Juan Pablo Zárate (co-director of the Colombian Central Bank), and Luis Fernando Mejía (Director General of Planning, Colombia). They also include researchers of international renown such as Camilo García (professor at the University of Pennsylvania), Juanita González (professor at the London School of Economics), Alejandro Badel and Paulina Restrepo (who have worked as researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis), Andrés Fernández (BID researcher), Valentina Calderón (United Nations), and Ana María Loboguerrero (CIAT), to name just a few.

In all, this recognition by the *Portafolio* daily newspaper takes in 30 years of teaching, scientific production, and input



to designing undergraduate, Master's Degree, and PhD programs. Other finalists for the award included outstanding professors from other universities, among them Andes, Eafit, Santo Tomás, and Norte.

"I have been at the two best Economics faculties in the country, in the process of transforming these to modernize the research program, and in both I have helped with the process of creating the PhD course and training the best researchers in Colombia," said Jaramillo on receiving the award from *Portafolio*.

He is an economist trained at the Universidad de los Andes, and holds Master's Degrees in Economics (from the same institution), and in Economic Theory and Policy from the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), France, and a PhD in Economic Sciences from the Pantheon-Sorbonne University (France).

FERNANDO JARAMILLO: "I WILL CONTINUE TO BE AN ENABLER OF RESEARCHERS' PROJECTS, AND I WILL GO ON DESIGNING STRATEGIES FOR VISIBILIZING WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN RESEARCH, SINCE WHAT WE DO IS OF VERY HIGH QUALITY BUT WE NEED TO GET IT ACROSS."

He was one of nine children born to a family in Pereira, one that made great efforts to give its young a proper education. His father was an expert salesman who worked from a very young age to provide the family income. He was hard-working and enterprising, optimistic, jovial, and generous. Although he lacked a university degree, his autodidacticism marked him out as a restless intellectual. Jaramillo's mother, meanwhile, did not lag behind. Married very young, she brought up her children, and once they had moved on she finished her baccalaureate, studied accountancy, and worked through to her retirement at the National Directorate of Taxes and Customs (DIAN).

Jaramillo became a lecturer at the Universidad de los Andes and, since 2007, has been a research professor at the Universidad del Rosario. Yet in this period he has never cut his ties with France, where he carried out a huge part of his studies and some of his favourite projects. "I have been invited several times as researcher and professor to universities in the Sorbonne, Rennes, Marne la Vallée, and d'Évery Val d'Essone, among others. My links with France remain firm. We are about to receive two French researchers from the Universities of Rennes and Paris-Saclay, who co-wrote an article on social segregation in Colombia. We will sign a formal cooperation deal with Saclay," he underlined.

What challenges face the best Economics teacher in Colombia?

I have always been interested in the segmentation problem and distribution of income and how these affect social economic growth. I research strategies for creating greater formalization of workers and companies.

I will continue to be an enabler of researchers' projects, and I will go on designing strategies for visibilizing what is taking place in research, since what we do is of very high quality but we need to get it across and make it understandable and applicable in order to impact on debate and current discourse.

What has your relation with students been like?

I believe in debating with professors and research assistants, with monitors, and with students too. I cannot say I have ever designed an undergrad or Master's program by myself, because they have all been done jointly. We talk about the design of the courses, the exercises set for students and, in general terms,



also the methodologies. Teamwork has been a constant feature of my work in the universities where I have taught, and that has allowed us to do things better, to find different solutions.

I personally assess students in their Master's and PhD theses. We put down the synthesis of the arguments on the board, together with the work plan on the texts they are going to write. I help them identify the strengths and weaknesses of each of their hypotheses, to challenge them, and later come up with a synthesis that moves forward in the understanding of the problem analyzed. It is a source of great satisfaction to see my students obtaining commended theses. I am filled with pride when any member of my teams takes the steps towards taking a PhD.

And what is the legacy for the Universidad del Rosario?

From 2001, I began to receive invitations to join the Universidad del Rosario. I started to follow the University, saw that it was training a very interesting Economics faculty, and I also saw its links with French universities. In 2007, when I joined, thanks to the invitation from Professor Manuel Ramírez (R.I.P.), I took part in the restructuring of the program and the PhD in macroeconomics.

I have experienced the birth of the doctoral courses of the two Colombian universities to which I have belonged, but at

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Fernando Jaramillo, professor at the Faculty of Economics.

the Universidad del Rosario, furthermore, I directed the theses of four of the first five of the University's Doctors in Economics. It was a risk, being the first, but it came out well in their national and international evaluations.

In respect of the Economics program, we always work to strike a balance so that students are prepared with the necessary rigor in respect of the formal part of the economy, but so that they also progressively learn from recent evolutions. It is vital for their formalization not to depend only on intuition; this is the constant challenge.

And as in all universities, we work constantly to lower student desertion rates. Starting Economics is not easy for those unfamiliar with it, so the first terms must be attractive; we have to make them fall in love with this discipline.

The ongoing discussion on how to train economists, not just researchers but also those who formulate economic policy - that's my current mission. ■