

2022 Alumni Symposium

La Pedrera, Barcelona

Dr Turiel, Alumni,

The fascinating conversation between Dr Antonio Turiel (who I'd like to thank for being here today) and our vice president Àngels Fitó has inspired in me three ideas that I would like to share with all of you.

Firstly, the importance of language. We humans are, above all, words. With words, we introduce ourselves, explain ourselves and get to know the world around us. But it is also with words – other words – that we conceal ourselves, deceive both others and ourselves, and distance ourselves from the world. **Our choice of words is never an innocent one.**

So, whilst on the one hand we have become more aware of the catastrophic impact of human activities and have taken on board the concept of 'climate crisis', we have, on the other, posited as its antidote the term 'energy transition', a magic combination of words that, we are told, will allow us to move on from fossil fuels to renewables, as easily as if we were simply flipping a switch.

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However, behind this transformation, as our guest has stressed, there still remain great changes to be made – technological, cultural and economic – and, above all, we need to understand that not everything can remain the same. There are things we will have to do differently, others that we will no longer be able to do, and others still will have to be completely rethought.

As British historian Eric Hobsbawm put it: "If humanity is to have a recognizable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present. If we try to build the third millennium on that basis, we shall fail. And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness."

So, to counter this darkness, what is to be done? If you seek out the mottoes of the first universities in Madrid and Barcelona, you'll see that they both feature the same sentence

in Latin: "*Libertas perfundet omnia luce*". In other words, "Freedom will flood all things with light". Today, to update this old expression, we should perhaps replace 'freedom' with 'knowledge': "**Knowledge will flood all things with light**".

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This has been the second contribution made by the conversation that I'd like to highlight: the importance of having education policies that – whilst avoiding euphemisms and being alarmist – foster talent, education, culture, research, training, exchanges, intellectual curiosity... Or, short and sweet: that foster knowledge.

Only with the guidance of knowledge will it be possible to undertake these essential transformations, in line with future perspectives such as those of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, the UOC Alumni community is a powerful force for knowledge. And it is this that neatly brings me to the third idea: **personal and collective commitment**.

Because your impact is not measured so much in terms of numbers – even though 100,000 alumni is no small achievement – but in terms of the sum of personal stories like those we have heard here today. As Anna Armengol noted, perhaps you have not "always chosen the easiest path", but you have never allowed yourselves to lower your sights.

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So, the sum of your knowledge and your experiences has a potential multiplier effect when it comes to working towards a sustainable, democratic, humane and just future. It is obvious that these are uncertain times, both economically and geopolitically, but, as the novelist Marta Rojals reminds us, we must prevent fear from paralysing thought¹.

You, the UOC Alumni, each of you in your respective field, can boast, in addition to your innate talent and the specific knowledge you have acquired during your studies, a very particular set of skills, ranging from digital competencies to time management and organizational skills and the ability to overcome challenges. **And, because you are unique and outstanding, we as a university must also be so.**

¹ Marta Rojals, "Ets pobre? No siguis pobre!" [Are you poor? Don't be poor!], blog on *Vilaweb* (<https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/ets-pobre-no-siguis-pobre/>), 25 October 2022.

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When I took on this position in 2013, I did so keenly aware of the fact that we needed to grow to be sustainable. Grow in terms of research projects, programmes offered, student numbers, ambition and renown. But also in terms of quality. Today, as we celebrate our 25th+2 anniversary, I truly believe that, thanks to the UOC's staff and thanks to you, we are well on the way to achieving this.

To back up these claims, I could resort to outside recognition, objective data or even university rankings such as that from Times Higher Education, which puts us in the top ten centres in Spain and the top 600 worldwide. However, **no ranking says as much** – or makes me feel, personally and on behalf of the institution, more proud – **than when I meet one of you** – be it in the Canary Islands, Colombia, Tarragona or Boston – **to hear you, after introducing yourselves, always adding "at the UOC" to your bachelor's, master's or postgraduate qualification.**

I can't think of a better way of expressing a sense of team pride. As "President... of the UOC!", my sincerest thanks.

Thank you very much.