

**2020 Fall Faculty Convocation**  
**Remarks from Purificación Martínez, Chair of the Faculty.**  
**View the full ceremony [here](#).**

Here we are. In a blur spent redesigning courses, rethinking everything we do in our clinics, labs and classrooms, attending town halls and special faculty senate meetings, the summer is gone and academic year 2020-2021 is ready to start. I don't see your faces, but it is very likely that you are all looking a little worse for wear. I don't think anybody has been able to recharge batteries or disconnect from professional e-mail. We start this academic year in our living rooms watching this convocation exhausted, anxious, spent, and **ready**.

On July 9<sup>th</sup>, I said as much to the Board of Trustees. I put particular emphasis on the idea that we will be ready to teach on August 10<sup>th</sup>. I am so certain of this fact, that I would put my hands in the fire, or bet my mortgage on it. Of course, I will win the bet, and then I will be able to retire and go to a paradisiacal beach and drink drinks with umbrellas, and .... I must stop daydreaming. This is 2020, Covid-19 is running rampant in the US, we have an unprecedented economic crisis, and it is **imperative** that we work hard to dismantle the systemic racism that gave this country its wealth by exploiting and oppressing other human beings. And we still have other pesky little problems like gender discrimination, unequal pay for equal work, etc. There is no time to lose. As Henry Ferrell aptly titled ECU's history, there is no time for ivy.

Oh, how I hate the figure of speech of universities as ivory towers with ivy growing on them. As Steve Shapin states when describing the history and cultural uses of the term: "The modern monologue finds no worth in the Ivory Tower." (27)<sup>1</sup>. Some politicians and business leaders think that universities are defective institutions, places that need correction and reform because we are removed from real life, disengaged, lost in useless contemplations, unresponsive to the market (Shapin 24-26). However, it is widely known that a college degree is necessary to overcome poverty and achieve economic and social equity. ECU, in the top **15%** of performers with respect to social mobility, has proven that a university can transform an entire region one graduate at a time. The entire UNC **system** is a testimony to that fact. Where would North Carolina be without its 17 public institutions? Would the Research Triangle exist? The financial hub that is Charlotte?

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<sup>1</sup> The Ivory Tower: the history of a figure of speech and its cultural uses BJHS 45(1): 1–27, March 2012.  
[https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapin/files/shapin\\_ivory\\_tower\\_bjhs.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shapin/files/shapin_ivory_tower_bjhs.pdf)

Despite the facts, it seems that we have lost the battle, and instead of finding ourselves cherished and supported, we witness the **defunding** of higher education and **hostility** from those who were **supposed** to protect us because we serve the public good. But as with Ivy Tower, “**public**” is also a maligned word. If Covid-19 has taught us anything, though, it is the fact that a person cannot survive or succeed alone and that investing in health, education and research are not luxuries, but every day necessities. The public good is **real**, not abstract. Universities are not withdrawn from it, we are the engines that produce it. Why don't they understand?

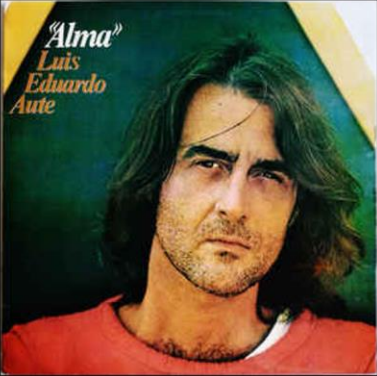
This April, while compulsively reading the news about my birth country, a sad story came into my feed: Luis Eduardo Aute, a singer and song writer who marked my understanding of the world had died because of Covid-19. Rushing to my mind came other hot summer days, me as a teenager singing his songs with my friends in the little park near my house, Imma on the guitar. **He** teaching us to abhor a dictator who was more oppressive than the august heat. **He** articulating the fear of an entire generation about a very uncertain future: “miles de buitres callados van extendiendo sus alas”.

<i>Al alba - At Dawn (1975)*</i>	
Miles de buitres callados van extendiendo sus alas	<i>Thousands of quiet vultures are spreading their wings</i>
<i>La belleza – Beauty (1990)</i>	
Y el que trepe a lo más alto, pondrá a salvo su cabeza aunque se hunda en el asfalto la belleza	<i>Whoever climbs to the top will save his <b>own</b> head, but will sink beauty into the asphalt</i>
Tanto vendes tanto vales	<i>How much you sell is what you're worth</i>
<i>*All translations courtesy of Dale Knickerbocker</i>	

I didn't remember the last time I had listened to Aute. I know from experience that you can passionately love a book when you are 20 and find it absurd in your 50s or vice versa. I searched on **Spotify** afraid of what would happen, ... and I found profound truth in a song that I had truly forgotten, “La belleza.”

Although written in the 90s to denounce how the end of communism did not bring a new world order of democracy and prosperity, but war and exploitation, the lyrics still speak to our circumstances: For example: Y el que trepe a lo más alto // Pondrá a salvo su cabeza // Aunque se hunda en el asfalto // La belleza Or “tanto vendes tanto vales.” And finally, the devastating diagnosis: “no rozaron ni un instante, la belleza.”

No rozaron ni un instante, la belleza



*They touched not beauty, not even for an instant*

2

Let me show you a few examples of what I mean when I talk about “beauty”, all taken from what we now know as Spain, for easy reference.

A **geologist or an engineer** might want to research and teach about **El Soplao**,

“El Soplao” Cave  
from 145 Ma  
to 100.5 Ma



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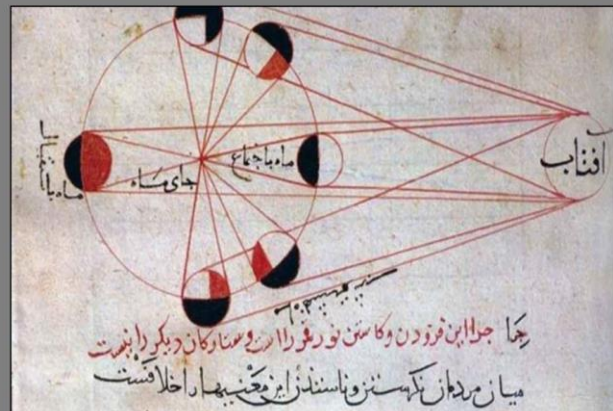
An **anthropologist** or **paleontologist** could spend endless hours in the excavations of **El Castillo**.



“El Castillo” Cave  
45,000 years BC


**Nobody** who works with mathematics would be able to do so without the advances made by **Al Qalasaki** in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

*Commentary on  
The Science of Arithmetic*  
by  
Al-Qalasaki  
15<sup>th</sup> century



چرا جلالین فزودن و کاستن نور غورا ازین و منارکان دیگر را بنهرت  
میان مردمان نکهستین و ناستند ازین معنیها را اخلافت

This particular shade of **black** could not exist if Spain would not have colonized the Americas and found the dye there. Spain would have been poorer if this and other portraits like it did not make the color fashionable, a must to have in all European courts: **Fashion and Merchandising** is not such a modern field of study after all.

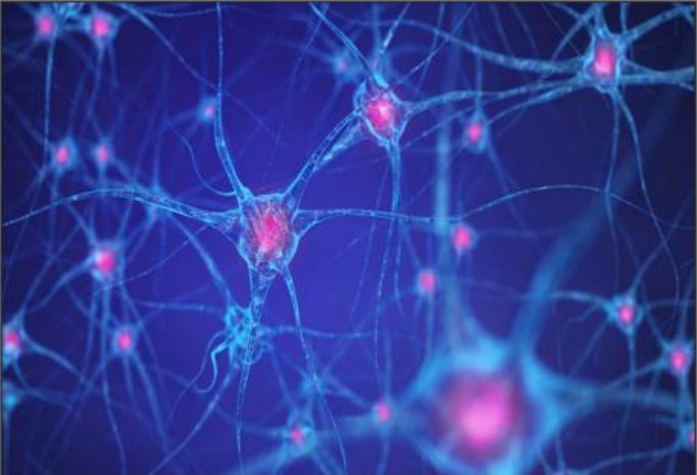


"Felipe II"  
by  
Sofonisba Anguissola  
17<sup>th</sup> century  
*Only female painter in El Prado Museum*

The image shows a portrait of Felipe II, King of Spain, wearing a black cap and a black robe with a white ruff. The portrait is set against a dark background. To the right of the portrait is an orange text box with white text. Below the text box is a small orange number '6'.

We could not have advances in medicine without the discovery of the **neuron** by Nobel laureate **Ramón y Cajal**.

Neuron doctrine  
by  
Ramón y Cajal  
19<sup>th</sup> century



<https://www.dana.org/article/how-does-the-brain-work/>

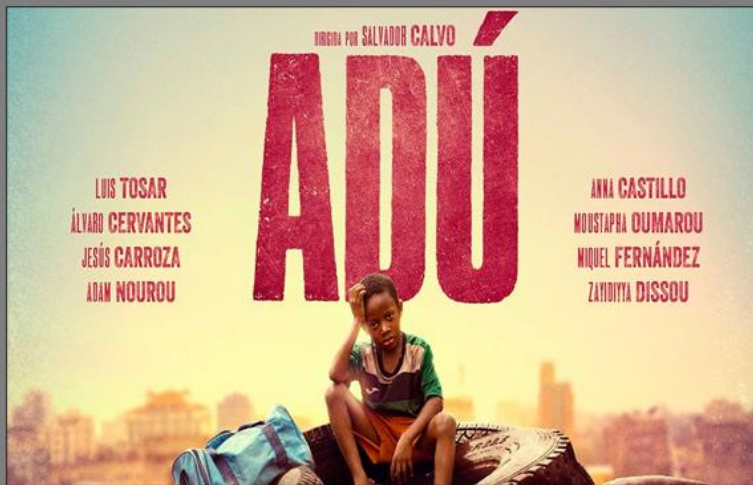
The image shows a network of neurons with blue cell bodies and pink axons. The neurons are interconnected, forming a complex network. The background is dark blue. Below the image is a small white URL.

**Margarita Salas** allowed us in the 60s to start deciphering **DNA**.



**Bacteriophage  $\phi$ 29**  
**Margarita Salas**  
**20<sup>th</sup> century**

Others, like **Salvador Calvo** or, our own **Ken Wyatt**, use art to denounce social issues and raise awareness.



**21<sup>st</sup> century**

I would give **anything** to have been privy to the conversations that Al Qalasaki had with his students about algebra, or to have been a fly in the wall when a young **Rembrandt** visited an 80-year-old **Sofonisba** to learn about her painting techniques and pay her homage as one of his idols. How does a **woman** in Franco's Spain become a scientist known worldwide? All driven by a thirst for **knowledge** and determined to share that knowledge with others, us, their students.

We chose this profession not for money, but because of what Aute and I call **beauty** and you might prefer to call **knowledge**, we professors get to be surrounded by it every day and have the privilege to being able to share it with others. Many of us are poorly paid, but we continue teaching because we understand how important is what happens inside the 4 walls of a classroom. In January of this year, the AAUP adopted a Statement titled “In Defense of Knowledge and Higher Education.” Hear what they have to say: “The mission of colleges and universities is to produce and to disseminate [this] knowledge, which is not a mere **commodity** to be defined and purchased at the whim of consumers. Higher education serves the **common good**, not the interests of a **few**.” Who have never touched beauty, I may add.

They might be few and perhaps ignorant, but they are **powerful**. The harm they are doing is **palpable**. This year we see it not only in our diminished resources, we can also count it in lost lives. We must continue disseminating and creating knowledge, it is our job. But we also must stand **together** ready to use our intellects to defend this misunderstood ivory tower that is under siege. I urge you to join me and the other Faculty Senate officers. We must continue pushing for safer working conditions for all ECU employees. We must continue working on offering **better working conditions** for our fixed term faculty, we must engage in difficult conversations about how to bring **diversity and equity** to our campus. We must work hard to preserve academics when budget cuts get here. 4 officers and 57 senators cannot do it all. ECU has 2073 faculty members. Each one of you is needed. We must stand together in solidarity. Remain **engaged** during the semester, send us your **questions**, share your **expertise**, volunteer your **time**. You know why you should do this? Luis Eduardo Aute told me a few months ago: “reivindico el espejismo de poder ser uno mismo // ese viaje hacia la nada// que consiste en la certeza de encontrar en tu mirada, la belleza.”



ECU Student

Reivindico el espejismo  
de poder ser uno mismo  
ese viaje hacia la nada  
que consiste en la certeza  
de encontrar en tu mirada,  
la belleza

*I vindicate the mirage  
of being one's self  
that journey to  
nowhere  
the certainty  
of finding beauty  
in your gaze*

In case you have any doubt that all I told you is true, here it is how faculty at ECU do it.



*"I hope they take away empathy"*

**LIZA WIELAND, English**  
2020 Lifetime Achievement  
for  
Research & Creative Activity  
Award



*"Approachable and patient"*

**TOBY ALLEN, Chemistry**  
2020 Excellence in Teaching  
Award by the UNC Board of  
Governors