



Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (ISPM), University of Bern

Epidemiology Academic of the Year (Europe): Oscar H. Franco

Academic success is a great way to measure the intelligence and importance of a certain individual, but Professor Oscar H. Franco is so much more than that. As the Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, and Director of the Institute of Social and Preventative Medicine (ISPM) at the University of Bern, Professor Franco is one of the most influential figures in the world of epidemiology. We profile the professor's work following his achievement in the International Life Sciences Awards 2020 from Global Health and Pharma Magazine.

Alongside his wealth of responsibility at ISPM in Bern, Professor Franco is also Adjunct Professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Erasmus University Medical Centre in Rotterdam, as well as being scientific advisor for French television channel, France24. With more than seven hundred publications, Professor Franco has dedicated much of his life to scientific advancement, and particularly to the sector of epidemiology. Over twenty years ago, in 1998, after leaving his native Bucaramanga, Professor Franco obtained his MD at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, in Bogotá, Colombia. Just a few years later in 2001, he moved to the Netherlands to complete MSc and DSc degrees in clinical epidemiology, and a PhD in public health and cardiovascular disease prevention at the Erasmus University Medical Center.

Following a postdoc at Erasmus MC, Professor Franco then moved to the United Kingdom, where he was a senior public health epidemiologist at Unilever England, assistant professor of public health at the University of Warwick, and then director of the MPhil program and clinical lecturer in public health at the University of Cambridge. After a prolific career in England, Professor Franco then returned to Erasmus MC, where he worked as professor of preventative medicine, and as the principle investigator of the cardiovascular epidemiology group. He also founded and

directed the Rotterdam Intergenerational Ageing Research Centre, Erasmus-AGE, and he was cofounder and CEO of Erasmus Epidemiology Resources.

Professor Franco has achieved a great many things in his academic tenure across the world, but with life sciences being a particularly fast-moving part of scientific study, he has had to work with a core vision and aim, especially in his work with ISPM. The vision has always been to commit the ISPM to global excellence and innovation through local impact, whilst the core aim of the Institute is recovery and active maintenance of health, and prevention of disease throughout life. In his work, Professor Franco has been able to advance the mission of ISPM, summarized in seven key actions.

Firstly, the Institute aims to improve population health throughout life. It aims primarily to do this by producing scientific and educational outcomes relevant to prevention, epidemiology, public health, social sciences, and methodology, striving towards open access and reach of its scientific output. This helps to create an optimal environment for scientific and academic development in which the ISPM talent cycle is the motor of development. As for Professor Franco's role in all this; he aims to deliver his best on a daily basis, whether this is building strong collaborations with partners at local, regional, national, and

international levels, or applying knowledge to create links and help create life-changing policies.

COVID-19 has represented a major health challenge to the world, but Professor Franco has been working diligently to understand and evaluate the impact that the virus will have had, and may continue to have, especially in low and middle income countries. Despite being based in Switzerland, Professor Franco has collaborated with scientists all over the world to enhance the impact that the University of Bern's work is already having. With partnerships of excellence that stretch as far as Harvard, Northwestern, Javeriana, Warwick, Cambridge, and Erasmus Universities, this is science at its finest.

As if that weren't enough, Professor Franco is also working hard to establish global partnerships that add to existing collaborations with

African countries, including those now established with Colombia, Dominican Republic, and China, as well as other new collaborations in Latin America and Asia. Professor Franco is the epitome of what an exceptionally innovative and ingenious scientist is. His determination and his tenacity is matched only by his intelligence, and the world is a better place for it.



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