

# Latin American Studies Concentration

## Spotlight on the Faculty

Dr. Linda Ledford-Miller and Dr. Susan Méndez are both accomplished members of the Latin American Studies Concentration. They agreed to be interviewed in order to illuminate different aspects of the Concentration.

Dr. Ledford-Miller joined the University in 1985 and is currently the Chair of the newly renamed Department of World Languages and Cultures. She has lived in Brazil, Guatemala, and Mozambique. She was also instrumental in helping to establish the University's Latin American Studies program.

She teaches a range of language and culture courses for LASC in both Spanish and

Brazilian Portuguese. When asked about the benefits of the Concentration, Ledford-Miller responded, "It allows students to organize their studies and interests cohesively. The Concentration allows and encourages students to broaden their education."

During the interview Ledford-Miller noted the importance that Latin American culture plays in US society, in which Hispanics comprise the largest minority, and are expected to be about 30% of the population in the near future. She further stressed the need for citizens of our country to learn more about our neighbors.



Graduating LASC Seniors: (from left) Tara K. McMahon, Stephanie Ramírez, Gaham W.J. Fisher, Meghan E. Tello, John C. Chilet, Richard Santosdiaz (not pictured: Jeannine M. Delgado, Andrea Leigh Frankenburger, Laura Ward)

Ledford-Miller shared many of her own ideas on how LASC can continue to grow. She would like to see a major in Latin American Studies, as well as an increased emphasis on study abroad, including to countries our students don't normally go. In addition she

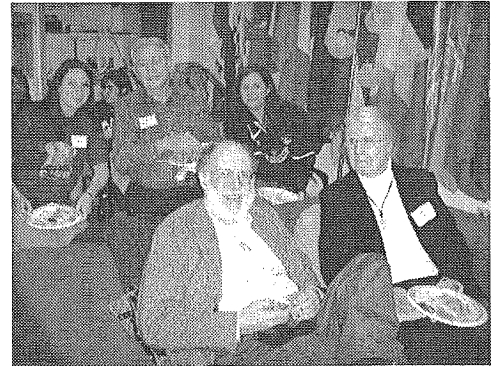
emphasized the need for the University to hire specialists in the areas of anthropology, geography, and perhaps archaeology. She also advocated the need for additional faculty-led travel courses and noted, (continued on page 3)

## A Reading by Horacio Castellanos Moya

Latin American Studies co-sponsored Mr. Horacio Castellanos Moya to read excerpts from his novel *Insensatez* to a group of students and professors on Tuesday evening, March 4th. His book will be released in English this May under the English title *Senselessness*. The book is about a man who becomes the proofreader for an in-depth report of a massa-

cre on indigenous peoples in Guatemala. Castellanos Moya spins fiction out of this historical situation. The book has a fast pace and quickly brings a reader into the mind of a man who slowly loses and finds his way as he grapples with his country's past. The quick pace allows the reader (and the listener of his presentation) to get inside the mind of

the protagonist. His protagonist repeats the phrase, "I am not right in the head" numerous times in the opening chapter. This direct and unnerving phrase grabs the reader's attention immediately and sets the tone for this work.



(back row) Emma Topalanchik, Kevin Nordberg, Tara McMahon, (front row) Stephen Casey, Ellen Casey

## Latin American Studies Concentration

### Student Study Abroad Experiences: Argentina & Uruguay

Studying abroad in Latin America, while being a member of the Latin American Studies Concentration, is the perfect way to experience first hand the richness and uniqueness of Latin American culture. Two students, Richie Santosdiaz and Stephanie Ramirez, shared their experiences with Michelle Dease, work study student for the Concentration.

Richie Santosdiaz is a senior International Language/Business major and has plans to work in international business. During Fall 2006, he traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and, among other things, was amazed by the dissimilarities between the hectic everyday life in the United States and the more relaxed way of social interaction in Buenos Aires. "The way that people conduct their lives is incredibly different. Here in the States, people rush everywhere during the stress of a busy day. While I was in Buenos Aires everything was at a much more relaxed pace. Even eating was slower. One cup of coffee is a two hour affair."

Adjusting to the new culture in Argentina was easy for Santosdiaz. He said, "I wasn't with very many Americans, so I was able to integrate into society easier. The lack of a large number of Americans forced me to adjust. I was able to partake in the culture and find out first hand what Latin America was like. In addition, Argentina's strong European cultural influences enabled me to enjoy a rather unique experience and, in some ways, one that might have been similar if I had chosen to study in Spain, minus the different accent, of course."

Santosdiaz shared some of the fascinating cultural events he experienced while abroad. He said, "I would walk to school and notice something new and exciting at every step. I developed a great sense of history being able to walk past hundred year-old buildings."

When asked why studying abroad proved to be such a wonderful opportunity, Santosdiaz said, "You get to learn about yourself in a new environment. It's

not every day that someone gets the chance to visit another country; in fact, for many people, it's an opportunity that they might never have again. Buenos Aires was so different that I even experienced a bit of culture shock when I returned to the States. It was an unforgettable experience to witness the beautiful city of Buenos Aires."

Stephanie Ramirez is a senior at the university. In addition to receiving a concentration in Latin American Studies, she is a major in Spanish and a concentrator in Women's Studies. She chose to study in Uruguay for a semester during her junior year. She lived with a family that had been greatly affected by the Tupamaro "Dirty War" and greatly benefited from learning about the trials and tribulations of people who experience devastating effects of military dictatorship and then struggled to initiate the democratic process.

She saw many similarities between her host family in Uruguay and her family here in the States. "We all ate dinner

(continued page 4)



(from left) Daisy Velez, Stephanie Ramirez, Graham Fisher, Emma Topalanchik

## Spring 2008

### Spotlight on Faculty (continued)

“The best way to learn about the rest of the world is by experiencing it. When you experience things for yourself you leave stereotypes and unfounded notions behind and can, instead, form opinions based on experience and knowledge.”

Dr. Susan Méndez has been a member of the University since 2006 and a member of the board of directors of LASC since 2007. During Fall 2007, she taught a course for the Concentration entitled “Borderlands Writings.” Asked to comment on the overall strength of the Concentration

she noted, “the diversity and continual development of the coursework is impressive.”

She hopes that additional courses can be added that address literature and film since these mediums are usually “attractive and lively to students and help them to acquire new perspectives and a deeper appreciation of Latin Americans and Latinos.” Overall, however, she noted her contentment with the program, lauded some of its cultural events, and hoped to see a continual rise in student and faculty involvement. “The Latin American Studies Concentra-

tion is comprised of a dedicated group of students and faculty who work well together,” she stated. “The University and the Concentration would benefit by forging even stronger ties to the greater Latino community and with multicultural school organizations.”

### A Unique Cultural Event

“Jesse Bermúdez and His AMLA Friends (Asociación de Músicos Latino Americanos)” performed a concert at the University on April 1. This musical and educational program, sponsored by Latin American Studies, started at 7PM and was held in DeNaples 401. Approximately one hundred students, faculty, and members of the local community attended. The educational component of the performance (descriptions and demonstrations of indigenous, Afri-

can, and European elements of Puerto Rico’s musical tradition) contributed to the audience’s enthusiastic reception during the event. As the performance progressed, many people began to interact with the musicians. Some danced in front of the stage and others even accompanied the band by playing maracas and claves. The melody of the music radiated throughout the new DeNaples auditorium. This hour-long performance proved to be a smashing success.



Robert Parsons and students

## Student Study Abroad Experiences: Argentina & Uruguay (Cont'd)

together and my host family really did everything they could to make me feel at home."

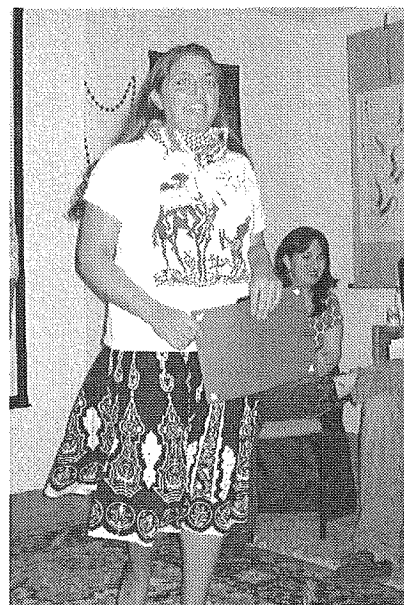
Uruguay's unique history was an appealing reason for Ramírez to study in the country. "In the late nineteenth century," she explained, "Uruguay pressed hard for separation between Church and State." "I was impressed with the fact that they had no recognized national religion and that this Latin American country had created such a secular society, juxtaposed to so many others in Latin America."

Ramírez was also impressed with the country's strong educational opportunities. "They have a phenomenal public school system and spectacular resources."

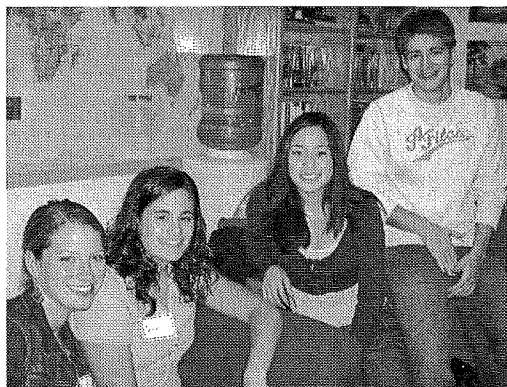
When asked why she chose Uruguay, she said, "As far as I know, no students from the

University had studied in that country yet. I had also had the opportunity to do a considerable amount of traveling with my family in more touristy places, and I really wanted to get off the beaten path and visit other areas."

Ramírez feels that studying abroad was a wonderful opportunity. She said, "It's a great way to learn new things and expand one's language skills. South America is a beautiful region and its history and culture are so different from that of the United States. It was also a great way to hone my language skills and the entire trip was really an amazing learning experience. Uruguay is so beautiful. It's a wonderful feeling to know that you've had such an enriching experience."



Graduating Senior Meghan Tello



(from left) Trish Oakley, Gina Fullam, Kathryn Brokus, Jon Buryk

### Concentration Faculty Members:

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Prof. Stephen J. Casey  
Dr. Robert A. Kocis  
Dr. Linda Ledford-Miller  
Dr. Susan Méndez  
Dr. Kevin M. Nordberg  
Dr. Robert A. Parsons  
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