

# LAW/S NEWSLETTER

Department of Latin American and Women’s Studies

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### Notes from the Chair

Another exciting semester is well underway, and we continue to bring our students and our community an exciting range of classes, events, and opportunities to grow. Both of our programs continue to thrive, bringing internationally renowned scholars, artists, and activists to The University of Scranton.

Among them is Stephanie Ortoleva, whose work as founder and president of Women Enabled International inspires us all to consider issues of inclusion at the most basic level, by advocating for a more inclusive understanding of human rights attentive to the lives of women, especially disabled women. (You can read more about her in this issue of our newsletter.)

I am pleased to have the opportunity to mentor students as they reflect on what they have learned in and outside of the classroom and ask how they, too, can work for a more just and inclusive world. This Fall, I hope our current students will join me in the second iteration of our course “Working for Justice,” which gives students a chance to consider how they might translate their commitments to Latin American and Women’s Studies into their professional lives after graduation.

Best wishes for a productive semester and a refreshing summer,

Jamie H. Trnka

### A Letter from Dr. Yamile Silva, Director of Latin American Studies

Dear students, alumni and friends,

I am fortunate to be part of such an active program. In 2014-2015 the Latin American Studies Program benefited from courses originating in five different departments across campus. A total of 284 students took our courses, cross-listed with World Languages, English, History, Political Science and Biology. Some of our students benefited from our Universidad Iberoamericana (Puebla, Mexico)-Scranton Intersession Program. From this abroad program, students have memorable moments as you can read in Carmine Gerrity-Gemei’s article included in this newsletter. Probably the highlight from the 22 days of this intersession program was getting to know the people of this beautiful country. Their kindness often surpassed anything the students had experienced before.



By the end of this semester, our film series will have shown six movies from different parts of Latin America –Venezuela, Cuba, Argentina, Peru, and Mexico- and we have welcomed two international speakers: Manuel de Alba (Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mex) and Anna Lidia Vega Serova (Havana, Cuba). 84 students attended De Alba’s visit. Attenders watched De Alba’s documentary on immigration and had a stimulating conversation with him on the process to make this award-winning documentary. In December 2014, Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro agreed to prisoner exchanges and a resumption of full diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. Cuba released American aid worker Alan Gross after five years in prison, as well as another “intelligence asset.” President Obama -



announced a new era in the relations between Washington and Havana and stated his intentions to restore full diplomatic ties after more than five decades. Across the region, Latin Americans reacted with joy and relief, as well as with a new sense of hope. We are really excited to have the well-known Cuban writer Anna Lidia Vega visiting our campus on April 21, 2015. The bilingual event “Vengo a ofrecer mi corazón/ I come to offer my heart” will include a short movie which is an adaptation of one of her short stories followed by a conversation about her identity (Russian-Cuban), biculturalism, the situation of Cuban literature written by women, the challenges publishers have to overcome in Cuba and the position of writers on this new era between USA and Cuba.

This newsletter also highlights one alumnus, Mary Joe Mejía ('13) and one current student Alexis Burgess ('15). Thanks to them for sharing their experiences with us and taking the time to contribute to this newsletter. As next year I will be on sabbatical; I would like to thank all of my colleagues for their willingness to contribute time and energy to the Program; specially Dr. Susan Méndez who has accepted to be our program's Acting Director for the next academic year. Susan has always been a great support to LAS; and it reflects her strong commitment to her scholarship and students and her love for the region as you can read in her article included in this newsletter. Finally, a word of thanks to Donna Rupp, our Department Secretary. Donna is efficient, energetic, and accommodating, she makes all of our program projects as well as the day-to-day running of LAS possible!

Enjoy—and best wishes for a productive rest of the semester and relaxing Summer!

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## Research on African Women Writers: An Encounter with French-Ivorian Author Véronique Tadjó



By Marzia Caporale, PhD

For my sabbatical, I chose to spend the 2013-2014 academic year in Florence, Italy for a couple of reasons. Primarily, it is my hometown and the place where all of my family and friends live. Additionally, since Florence is located towards the southern part of the European continent, I thought it

would offer close enough proximity to Africa where I planned to travel for my research.

A few months before my sabbatical officially started, I had come across a publication by French-Ivorian author Véronique Tadjó which had caught my attention. The 2010 book was titled *Loin de mon père* (“Away from my father”). In the novel, Tadjó addresses the question of post-colonial and female identity through the story of an alter-ego of herself. Nina, the novel's protagonist, is a *metisse* woman born to an African father and a French mother, who travels from France, where she resides, to the Côte d'Ivoire, where she grew up, to organize and supervise her father's funeral. Once she finds herself back in Africa, Nina



must come to terms with a family and a country she no longer understands or recognizes as her own. As the one in charge of the many rituals and ceremonies that precede her father's burial, Nina must re-learn in a short period of time how to become reacquainted to a culture and a family that have become foreign. The novel traces her journey towards acceptance of a hybrid self by identifying her challenges, her setbacks and her victories.

When I began reading the novel, I was immediately captivated by the poetic style and the intensity of Tadjo's writing as well as by her fresh look at race and gender roles within the African public and private sphere. My research had previously ad-

ressed mother and daughter relationships in French and Francophone literature and film but I had not yet worked on fathers and daughters. As I discovered, not much research had been done in this area and this particular novel by Tadjo had hardly been studied. Working on Tadjo's biography, I learned that she is currently living and working in South Africa and that a conference was being organized in her honor in Johannesburg. So in November 2014, I flew to South Africa and presented a paper titled "Whose voice is it? Writing the post-colonial self in Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père*," which will appear shortly in a special volume of *Présence Africaine* entirely dedicated to Tadjo. Unknown to most of the participants, Véronique Tadjo was present at the conference. For three days, she graciously listened to every presentation, discussed her past, present, and future works and participated in literary and non-literary discussions about feminism, post-colonial history, and the future of Africa.

Meeting Tadjo and fellow scholars of African women's literature was so inspiring that I decided to continue exploring Tadjo's writings which are extensive and range from novels to essays to poetry to children's books, illustrated by the author herself. During the second half of my sabbatical, I worked on her literary rendition of the founding myth of the Ivorian people, that of Queen Pokou, and presented a paper titled "Narrating the Past to Write the Present: Véronique Tadjo's Reine Pokou: concerto pour un sacrifice," at an Interdisciplinary conference in Paris in June 2014. I have since integrated Tadjo into both my literature and my translation courses and I am pleased to say that students are as fascinated with her writing as I was when I was first introduced to this multidimensional and extremely talented author.





## Old Stories, New Courses

LA/W/S Faculty Member Susan Mendez

My family came to reside in the United States because my maternal grandmother was employed as a domestic to a government official in Peru. My grandmother, a young single mother at the time, left her only child, my mother, in the care of her female relatives, my great-grandmother and great aunts, while she worked as a cook and a nanny in Lima, Peru and then moved with her employer to Washington, DC. This job allowed her to financially support my mother, so she went where it took her. Being in the employ of a government official also allowed her greater ease in applying for US residency when she decided that is what she wanted to do. After she acquired her green card, my grandmother brought my mother over, and my mother then brought my father to the United States. Three children and two grandsons later, the rest is history. This is how my particular branch of the Méndez family came to live in the USA.

Being a first-generation American, I am always hyper-aware of how my family came to live in the States. I know how our story differed and was the same to other people's immigration stories. Yes, there was that consistent and strong dream for a better life, but my family's story is one marked by a facility of movement and gender. My grandmother's job, who employed her and where it took her, allowed my family greater ease in completing the complex and costly process of immigration. Not all people who immigrate have such access, and the general public does not realize how intricate and expensive the immigration process was back then and is even more so today. Currently, although as many as 800,000 to 1.3 million people are expected to apply for amnesty under the immigration programs initiated and expanded by Obama's executive actions in November 2014, the average price per application is \$465 and the administrative

bureaucracy of the paperwork is still an issue.\*

Moreover, my family's history is one marked by gender. It was my grandmother's gendered labor which facilitated the eventual immigration of my family to the USA. It was also the gendered labor of my extended female family members, in caring for my mother while my grandmother was away, that eased my family's journey. All of these stories are why I do what I do, why I teach in the Departments that I do, and why I develop the courses that I do.

Recently, the courses that I have been developing for the English, Women Studies, and Latin American Studies programs, have been based on the topics of gender, race, and social justice issues. I have taught two First-Year Seminars, "ENLT 135X: Feminism & Jesuit Education," where we go over basic understandings of concepts like "patriarchy," "oppression," and "privilege" while also addressing college transition issues and the University's mission of social justice. One of the course's readings, Josefina López's *Real Women Have Curves*, allows the class to not only discuss body image and politics issues but also facilitates a larger discussion about immigration, Latinas, and social justice in our contemporary world. This course is cross-listed with Women Studies and serves as a great way to introduce the First-Year Student to feminism as well as life at The University of Scranton. I hope to offer one section of this class every Fall semester.

I am offering "ENLT 184: Literature & Social Justice" during this Spring 2015 semester. In this course, the students get to see how various markers of identity (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ableism) have been used in creating systems of structural injustice. This class is cross-



listed with Latin American Studies as we are reading texts by Latina authors such as Cherrie Moraga, Carla Trujillo, and Ana Castillo. As this class covers race, I can continue the conversation on racial injustice that I started in my “ENLT 255: African-American Literature” class this past Fall 2014 semester, where the students and I were able to link literary readings addressing the hyper-visibility of the invisible black man to community policing practices in our contemporary world. This is such a crucial topic for any college student but even more so for a Jesuit university’s students, who are called to be “men and women for others.” Since the course is focused on social justice overall, it is also cross-listed with Peace & Justice Studies. I hope to offer one section of it every Spring semester as well.

It is interesting to note the continuity in my life and work. What marked me from the beginning, interests in immigration, gender, race, and class, keeps guiding my life and my life’s work. There is comfort in that for me, and there is also the hope that I can present these issues in as clear and relevant a manner as possible to my students.

\*Just as this essay was sent to press, a federal judge in Texas stalled these recent executive actions on immigration, thereby giving time to a coalition of 26 states to file a lawsuit which could permanently block these actions.

*Be on the lookout for Susan Méndez’s  
ENLT 260: Women of Color: Literature  
& Theory and ENLT 251: Borderlands  
Writing or ENLT 255: African-American  
Literature to be offered in the academic  
year 2015-2016*

STUDENT VOICES

Alexis Blurb (’15)

As an undergraduate, I decided to take Spanish classes just for fun. I had no expectations of where it would take me, but I learned that I enjoyed the classes and uncovering Spanish and Latin American culture.

As a sophomore, I volunteered as a medical interpreter for Spanish speaking patients at Leahy Clinic and gained an interest in the many immigrants that came from all over Latin America. As a Community Health Education Major, it was there I realized I wanted to take advantage of my Spanish language skills to promote health and wellness and prevent illness and injury.

Many of the guest lectures and Spanish classes molded me and gave me the sense of call to action. Classes like Service and the Hispanic Community gave so much perspective on the plight of many Latin Americans. I still remember the poem that I presented in Intro/Hispanic Literature by Pablo Neruda *Explico Algunas Cosas (I'm Explaining a Few Things)*. The ending of this poem is my favorite part.

Preguntaréis por qué su poesía no nos habla del sueño, de las hojas, de los grandes volcanes de su país natal?	And you'll ask: why doesn't his poetry speak of dreams and leaves and the great volcanoes of his native land?
Venid a ver la sangre por las calles, venid a ver la sangre por las calles, venid a ver la sangre por las calles!	Come and see the blood in the streets, come and see the blood in the streets, come and see the blood in the streets!

I feel that all too often media portrays Latin American countries as vacation destinations or just places where immigrants are from. There is so much more to these countries, cultures, and people. It was not enough to just to learn about different Latin American cultures I had to experience it, as Pablo Neruda said I needed to “Come and see the blood in the streets.” My classes are what nudged me to seek opportunities in Latin America. During the intersession of 2013, I participated in the trip to Puebla, Mexico, although learning about Mexican language was fun, savoring the food and visiting places like Teotihuacán was mesmerizing. In June 2014, I went to *Working Boys Center in Quito, Ecuador* with the International Service Program (ISP). Upon arriving, I was excited to serve the people of Ecuador, but there was much more than just serving, I learned more about Ecuadorians, expecting the unexpected, and learning from the people that I seek to help.

It is so easy to focus on my world and my wants, but the Latin American Studies concentration has exposed me to the world outside of my own. If there is one piece of advice I could give to students who are in the LAS concentration, I would say go out and experience the world, dive into the documentaries and literary works and share your knowledge with those who don’t know or understand. Opening up the dialogue about Latin America and other cultures is the first step toward celebrating diversity. Incorporating Spanish as a minor and Latin American Studies was one of the best decisions I made because it has motivated me to be a better health resource person.



## Mary Joe Mejía

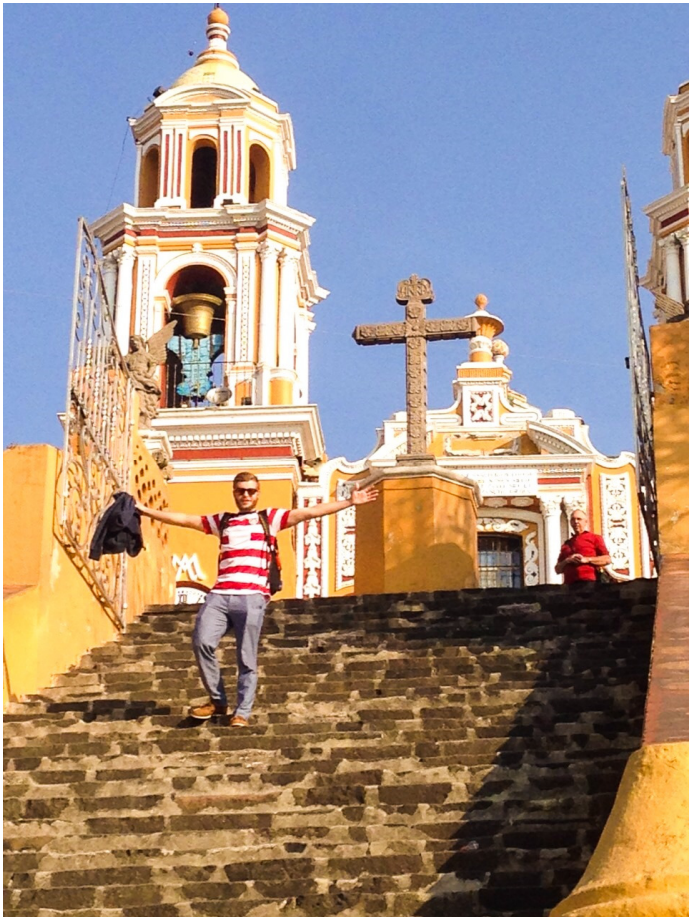
When I first entered The University of Scranton, I was convinced that my calling was to become an Industrial Organizational Psychologist for a Fortune 500 company. A turn of fate during my freshman year caused me to postpone taking my required Psychology courses and instead focus on filling my schedule with electives. While I was looking at the possibilities, I really thought to myself “What do you want to do? What will make you excited?” It immediately came to me; I have a passion for History and Latin America. As a person of Honduran descent I’ve always possessed a desire to learn more about my heritage and the overall region. After taking my first course with Dr. Penyak, as clichéd as this sounds, I felt a spark and knew this was my passion! Without hesitation, I decided to make the change from Psychology to a double major in International Studies & Latin American Studies with minors in Spanish & Portuguese.

While at The University, I took a variety of courses that the Latin American Studies Program offered, volunteered for a semester at the Leahy Clinic for the Uninsured, and was a work-study student at the Language Learning Center. During my junior year, I felt that I needed to travel and expand my cultural understandings. What better place than São Paulo, Brazil?! During my intensive immersion program, I studied Brazilian culture and language. Upon my return, I felt that I needed to do more. I took advantage of an opportunity that the Political Science department had with The Washington Center in Washington, D. C and completed an internship at the National Defense University: The William Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. Through my internship, I had the opportunity to live in D.C. for a semester and work with military experts in Latin America.

Upon graduating, I moved to Washington D.C. to begin my M.A. in International Affairs with a concentration in Latin American Development at The George Washington University: Elliott School for International Affairs. During the end of first year, I took my Foreign Service Officer exam and although I failed, I plan on taking it again in the future.



As I complete my final semester of my M.A. I am currently finishing my Capstone Project on Gang & Violence Prevention in Baltimore and San Salvador, El Salvador. Through a travel award from the Elliott School of International Affairs, I will be traveling to San Salvador, El Salvador in March 2015 to conduct my investigation. I strongly believe that the Latin American Studies Program at The University really did assist me with creating a strong academic foundation and opened many new opportunities for me. All I can recommend for those reading this is to take a leap of faith, trust your gut, fail often and pick yourself back up.



**Carmine Gerrity-Gemei**

**World Languages**

**Intercession Trip to Puebla**

It is impossible to fully describe the Spanish learned, the sites seen, the cultural aspects experienced and, most importantly, the relationships fostered on our trip to Puebla, Mexico, but I will try. This was my first trip out of the country and I did not know what to expect. Before I met my host mother at La Universidad Iberoamericana, I was as nervous as I have ever been. Is my Spanish good enough? What if they don't like "gringos"? Will my neighborhood be safe? All of my questions were quickly answered as soon as I met my host mother and we left in her car. Immediately, I felt an unexpected comfort with a woman whom I had just met. When I asked her if her English was better than my Spanish, she quickly said no because she did not know any English. "Oh

boy," I thought, 'this is going to be a rough three weeks.'

On the contrary, it was the most independent and culturally enriching three weeks I have ever spent. When someone takes a leap of faith and puts himself or herself in a new environment, like we did by taking the trip to Mexico, true growth occurs. We took two classes, totally in Spanish, for two hours each four days a week. Our first class was a Mexican history and political science class and our second class was a Spanish and language class. I say language class because we learned just as much about nonverbal communication, cultural expressions, gestures and meaningful ways to communicate as we did about Spanish. Both of our teachers were completely engaged and taught us an incomprehensible amount in only 12 days of class.

We took weekend trips to Oaxaca and Mexico City as well as weekday trips to Cholula and the Lucha Libre, also known as the masked wrestlers fight. On these trips we saw Monte Alban, El Centro de Oaxaca, night clubs, Pre-Columbian museums, the ancient civilization of Teotihuacán, Coyoacán, Cathedrals, the Great Pyramid of Cholula, Los Fuertes, mezcal shops, wood-carving masterpieces, markets and many more places. It was such a complete Mexican cultural experience to actually visit many of the historical sites we learned about in class.

It is necessary to learn a basic level of Spanish in the classroom, but to really exercise and enhance one's ability to communicate in Spanish, I believe a trip to a Spanish-speaking country is essential. My confidence speaking Spanish and surviving independently sky-rocketed because of this trip. I had to adapt to speaking solely Spanish with my host family, professors, students, store workers, taxi drivers and other Mexican citizens. There were no tourists in our neighborhood, so it truly was an immersion experience into a middle-class Mexican way of life. Yes, we had to drink bottled or purified water, and no, we did not interact with the drug cartels. On the last day of class, our Mexican history professor Mr. García asked us if our interpretation of Mexico had changed after our three week stay. I responded that I tried to go into Mexico with an open mind because I had never been in Mexico before so I could not have an accurate or credible interpretation of this beautiful country. Now, I finally have some basis for my opinion on Mexican life, language and culture and I wish I could have stayed for a full semester.

For anyone interested in Latin American studies or different cultures in general, a trip like this is essential to learn the way of life of another people. The trip was so cheap for the life-altering experience I was afforded. In retrospect, I feel so silly for even thinking twice about going on the trip. I learned an unexplainable amount about my own abilities, Mexican history, the current Mexican culture and the Spanish language that can never be measured in dollar signs. All of the amazing events we experienced still have not sunk in as real yet, because I could never imagine the totality of so many of the experiences I had the privilege of being a part of in Mexico. I hope to, one day, fly my host parents Alejandro and María Luisa to New York City to share my history and culture with them as they so graciously shared their history and culture with me.

**Karl Kretsch,'15, is “Working for Justice”**



Nothing would please me more than to be writing an article because I am a dedicated and knowledgeable authority on Latin America. But that would not be the truth. I barely speak the language and I understand it even less. What I know of the history is enough to make me look silly and I have only traveled south to El Salvador once. The realizations I made during that short trip concerning the terrible history and my role as a citizen of the United States were very powerful. Three years removed from my experience, I am just beginning to understand the seeds planted by the people of El Salvador. They bore fruit last semester as I satisfied the requirements of Dr. Meagher’s “Working for Justice” class.

Thanks to Dr. Meagher’s freirian sensibilities and a sizable grant from the Office of Equity and Diversity, in the fall of last year the Scranton Community had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the work of an amazingly energetic and passionate social activist by the name of Linda Panetta. Linda, a well-traveled photo-journalist, has spent much of her life documenting the reality of life in war torn and impoverished countries. Her work has taken her to Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mexico (Chiapas & Oaxaca), Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Panama, Venezuela, Haiti, Cuba and Colombia. She uses her

experiences to advocate for justice in the places she visits.

I originally asked Linda to come to the University to help tell the story of the people of Latin America and to raise my community’s awareness of the complex, and sometimes sordid, relationship we as citizens of the United States have with those who share our hemisphere. Linda’s energy and passion could not be contained in a simple, lecture-style engagement. What did develop was a series of events held in different locations throughout campus and downtown Scranton. These events were supported by the Latin American and Women’s Studies Department, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and the Weinberg Memorial Library, the University of Scranton Planning Board, Campus Ministries, the Office of Community relations and the Jesuit Center.

During the months of October and November, Linda’s photography was on display in the Heritage Room of the Weinberg Memorial library. The exhibit was titled *“Through the Lens: A Compassionate look back at our future”* and many took the time to check it out. Happily many were from outside the four walls of our campus. Linda even gave an impromptu lecture to a class who happened to run into her while she fine-tuned the display. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, we took Linda’s body of work to the streets of Scranton and hosted an exhibit and reception as part of Scranton’s First Friday Art Walk. Hundreds of attendees were captivated by the images as well as by the opportunity to meet Linda and hear first-hand the story behind any number of the sixty images on display. Finally, on October 6<sup>th</sup>, Linda spoke to more than three hundred listeners in a lecture about her life, her work and her passion to see sustainable justice for the people in her photographs. Linda brought her friend Genaro Jacinto Calel and his involvement was a special treat. Genaro is originally from Guatemala and he is a Mayan ‘priest’. He opened the lecture with a traditional Mayan prayer and candle ceremony. All three events allowed their audiences an opportunity to witness the amazing dedication Linda has to her mission.





In retrospect, I am very proud of the work the collaborators did putting these events together. There is much to learn about our neighbors to the south and equally as much to learn about our connections to them. Much is said on campus about the mission of a Jesuit education. Perhaps the most important by-product of Linda Panetta's presence on campus

was an opportunity for the students to see firsthand an amazing example of what being men and women for others really means. In that sense, this could not have been a better project for my "Working for Justice" class.

### Social Change and Journalism

By Alannah Caisey, '15

On September 17, 2014, the Women's Studies Program, in collaboration with the Jane Kopas Women's Center, the Department of Communication, and the Pennsylvania Women's Press Association had an event on the social changes that women can make through journalism in honor of Constitution Day. There were 66 attendees from Marywood, the University of Scranton, Lackawanna College, and the community. This event served as a "how-to" workshop to give both students and community members tools to get involved and stay informed in their communities at home and at large.

Jane Kopas Women's Center Director Justine Johnson opened the event with a discussion on how it is a feminist issue to write about your lived experiences and be a voice for yourself and others. Feminism is a call for equality, but this cannot happen until women feel comfortable enough to call attention to issues that matter to women and in turn effect everyone. Dr. Jean Harris, professor and chair of the political science department at the University of Scranton, spoke to the importance of women writers in-

cluding letters to the editor and being involved as media sources and political activists. Getting involved at even the most basic levels, such as petitioning and simply having confidence and the knowledge to voice opinions, can create social change on a large scale.

Stephanie Longo, the Vice President of the Pennsylvania Women's Press Association, walked participants through the process of writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper. She gave helpful tips, such as checking the newspaper for its editorial policy. Newspapers may or may not have guidelines for writers, but a letter is more likely to be printed if guidelines are followed. This first step is important because the writer wants to make the concern visible and this cannot happen if it does not make it into the newspaper. Stephanie Longo is the editor of *The Abington Suburban*, a weekly newspaper focusing on the Abingtons region of Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania.

The event ended with students working for about 15 minutes on their own pieces for the newspaper. The topics ranged from gentrification to the sexual assault and sexual misconduct policy.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

### Stephanie Ortoleva, President and Founder of Women Enabled International

Thursday, April 30, BRN 228, 5:00-6:00pm

Stephanie Ortoleva is a highly recognized international human rights lawyer, policy and development consultant, author and researcher on issues of women's rights, disability rights and the rights of women and girls with disabilities. She works actively in collaboration with organizations of women and girls with disabilities worldwide to educate and advocates for the human rights of all women and girls, with a special focus on women and girls with disabilities.

As a woman with a disability herself she brings the development, academic and legal perspectives to her work as well as her personal experience as a woman with a disability. Stephanie has numerous scholarly publications and policy papers regarding women's rights, disability rights, sexual and reproductive rights, access to justice, violence against women, conflict and post-conflict situations, electoral and political reform, and rule of law.





“Vengo a ofrecer mi corazón”  
“I come to offer my heart”

### Bilingual Conversation with Cuban Writer

#### Anna Lidia Vega Serova

Born in Leningrad, Russia, in 1968 to a Cuban father and a Russian/Ukrainian mother. Soon after her birth, she returned to Cuba with her parents and lived there intermittently before finally settling on the island. Among her publications are short-story collections *Bad Painting* (1997) and *Limpiando ventanas y espejos* (2000); the novels *Noche de ronda* (2001) and *Ánima fatua* (2007), and the poetry collection, *Retazos (de las hormigas) para los malos tiempos* (2004).

**April 21**

**TDC 406**

**5:30 pm**

