

Final Project Report

Professional Development Grant

Understanding Contemporary Latin America

Dr. H. Micheal Tarver
Project Director

May 2006

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Understanding Contemporary Latin America

I. Activity Summary:

This Professional Enhancement Project provided a week-long, in-depth institute that offered Arkansas Tech University faculty and staff an interdisciplinary program that examined the history, language, literature, art, political and economic philosophies, and religious and ethical precepts of the various Latin American nations. The personnel for the seminar had been arranged through the Project Director's contact at the Universidad de Los Andes, in Mérida, Venezuela.

The primary purpose of "Understanding Contemporary Latin America" was to provide interested Tech faculty and staff with a solid academic background in contemporary Latin American events, especially cultural, economic, and political. The content of the seminar was designed in an effort to provide the maximum benefit possible in the time allotted. In this regard, the program was especially suited to the humanities subjects, in an effort to enhance the participants' ability to broaden their respective humanities courses.

Overall, the program was designed to benefit Tech instructors and staff in a number of disciplines and areas, including anthropology, archaeology, art history, economics, geography, history, foreign languages, literature, philosophy, sociology, and those offices dealing with international students. *In the short-term*, the planned discussions and seminars immediately introduced the participants to the substance of Latin American culture. The seminar also demonstrated the reflection of Latin American values in the art and literature of the society. The program was also designed to induce an appreciation of the rich diversity in the Americas so that the participants could incorporate this understanding of Hemispheric events into their own teaching.

At the same time, *in the long-term*, an awareness and profound analysis would result in a life-long interest in contemporary Hemispheric events. The belief is that once the initial interest and curiosity are aroused and excited, the knowledge and understanding will expand, stimulating self-renewal of interest in trends and events in Latin America.

II. Process for Attainment of Goals:

The following major topics were covered during the project. See attached program with specific dates and presenters.

- a) Pre-Columbian America (included geography, archaeology, and history)
- b) Colonial Latin-American Society and Culture
- c) The Church in Colonial Latin America
- d) Colonial Latin-American Art and Architecture
- e) Colonial Latin-American Literature
- f) The Latin-American Independence Movements
- g) The Newborn Latin American Nations
- h) Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Latin-American Economies
- i) Twentieth-Century Latin-American Political Movements
- j) Twentieth-Century Latin-American Society and Culture
- k) Contemporary Latin-American Public Health Issues
- l) Latin-American Music and Dance
- m) U.S. - Latin American Relations since 1975
- n) Roundtable: The Future for Latin America

III. Personnel:

The following personnel participated in this seminar as scholars:

H. Micheal Tarver, PhD – Arkansas Tech University – Project Director
Ladimiro Urdaneta, PhD – Universidad de Los Andes – Culture and Religion
Henry B. Sirgo, PhD – McNeese State University – Political Economics
Francisco Gavidia, PhD – Universidad de Los Andes – Sociology
Sonia Araujo, MD – Private Medical Practice – Public Health and Medicine
Luis Loaza, MS – Universidad de Los Andes – Political Science
Arturo Yañez, PhD – Universidad de Los Andes – Art and Literature

Brief Biographies of Venezuelan Scholars

Dr. Sonia Araujo [MD – Universidad de Los Andes]: Medical Doctor and Researcher. Former guest scholar in seminars at Arkansas Tech University and McNeese State University, funded by the Department of State and the Fulbright Legacy Fund (Project Director was Micheal Tarver).

Dr. Francisco Gavidia [Ph.D. – University of Manchester]: Dean of the School of Humanities and Education at the Universidad de Los Andes and the Director of Culture and Extension. Former Chairman of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and former Chairman of the School of History.

Prof. Luis Loaiza Rinón [M.S. – Universidad de Los Andes]: Director of the School of Social Sciences and Secretary of the Association of University Professor at the Universidad de Los Andes (APULA). Former Organization of American States (OAS) Observer for national elections in Nicaragua. Professor of Political Science. Authored and/or co-authored five books in the field of politics and political history. Former guest scholar in seminars at Arkansas Tech University and McNeese State University, funded by the Department of State and the Fulbright Legacy Fund (Project Director was Micheal Tarver).

Dr. Ladimiro Urdaneta [Ph.D. – University of Iowa]: Director of the School of Modern Languages, Universidad de Los Andes. Mérida, Venezuela. Has also served as Academic Coordinator of the Internship Office of the School of Modern Languages, Member of the Organizing Committee for the Curriculum Revision in the Department of Modern Languages, Academic Coordinator of the English Area in the Department of Modern Languages, and Coordinator of the Department of Modern Languages Library. Former guest scholar in seminars at Arkansas Tech University and McNeese State University, funded by the Department of State and the Fulbright Legacy Fund (Project Director was Micheal Tarver). Dr. Urdaneta was a Visiting Professor of Spanish at Arkansas Tech University 2003-2004.

Dr. Arturo Yañez [Ph.D. – University of Iowa]: Current Editor of the journal *Entre Lenguas* and Director of Fundaidiomas (<http://www.fundaidiomas.ula.ve/>). Professor of Modern Languages.

IV. Program Feedback

Dear Dr. Tarver, Thank you once again for the opportunity you presented to participate in the "Understanding Latin America" Seminar last year. It was exiting to see the participation of the attendees and the level of interest in Latin American Issues that they showed. Initiatives like that one can only contribute to the better understanding of both Latin American people and culture. Such an understanding is essential to the successful relations of countries. I was nicely surprised with the level of knowledge of religion and culture shared during the seminar. Cordially. – Ladimiro Urdaneta H.

The session on Latin American music and dance was very, very outstanding! – Anonymous

The Understanding Latin America Workshop at ATU (summer 2006) provided an excellent introduction to numerous aspects of Latin American society. It struck the right balance between a survey of popular Latin culture and an in-depth analysis of politics and religion. The participants were knowledgeable, insightful, and best of all, approachable. The best sessions were those that focused on changing attitudes and beliefs in South America, particularly related to the diminishing role of Roman Catholicism and the growing relevance of Protestantism. – Carey Roberts

To whom it may concern: I had high expectations for the Understanding Latin America program since Dr. H. Micheal Tarver is the recipient of a Fulbright Legacy Grant, and many of the participants were members of the faculty of Universidad de Los Andes in Merida, Venezuela. It is the second largest institution of higher learning in Venezuela. My expectations were exceeded. All the presenters were thorough, and rapport among presenters and the audience of students and faculty was excellent. I was responsible for dealing with the topic of political economy. Having a background in teaching and publishing in the area of public policy, and having prepared numerous encyclopedia entries dealing with tariffs and trade, I gained an in-depth appreciation of how culture has interacted with recent economic developments. A prime example would be the interaction of thousands of years of maize cultivation and culture in Meso-America with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. I was also heartened by the response of students and faculty members from across the breadth of Arkansas Tech University to the presentations. They asked pertinent questions, and at least two strong students plan to travel to South America for educational purposes. Very truly yours. – Henry B. Sirgo, William L. McLeod Endowed Academic Professor, McNeese State University

Dr. Tarver: Thank you for the invitation to the Understanding Latin America workshop that was held on the Arkansas Tech University campus. I learned a great deal about the Latin American region and the cultures within it. The speakers themselves were very understandable, approachable, and helpful, and they graciously consented to answer my questions, even after the discussion periods ended. The variety of speakers and the myriad of topics covered provided an intellectual, engaging, and enjoyable week of study. Although I had previously studied Colonial Latin America, I learned much more about that time period and what the legacy of Spanish imperialism and Catholicism means to the people living in the region today. In addition, the chance to view the area's history, multifaceted problems, and uncertain future from the viewpoint of scholars from Latin America provided me with a better understanding of the issues and brought forth new avenues of inquiry. Opportunities of this kind are rare, and I hope more will be offered at Arkansas Tech in the future. Sincerely. – Brenda J. Murray, Graduate Student, Arkansas Tech University

I do not hesitate to affirm that the seminar, Understanding Latin America, offered last summer (2006) by Arkansas Tech University was beneficial to the Tech faculty, the graduate students who attended, and for us, as presenters. Based on the dynamic and valuable participation and interaction with this highly qualified audience, I can say that the information presented was relevant to their needs and interests. The interactions at the end of each day with participants made the seminar more valuable. I am sure that several of the participants will use some of the ideas from the seminar in their teaching, papers, and other related academic activities and assignments. In this respect, the

seminar accomplished its main goal (understanding Latin America) articulated by the seminar organizer, Dr. Micheal Tarver. It is difficult to accomplish any goal without logistical support. Without any doubt, we received the most convenient logistical support. As a whole, I can say that we had excellent seminar facilities and advanced technology. As presenters, we were also given enough time for each of the sessions. That allowed us to cover each of complex topics and had appropriate time for the questions and answer occasion. I left Tech with the strong feeling that these professional enrichment activities are what undergraduate and graduate students and faculty would like to see more often in the Campus. I missed the presence of the undergraduate students (because of the summer break, I know). Maybe, in a different opportunity undergraduate (Spanish) students can be invited, if they are in the Campus. – Arturo Yañez

Dear Dr. Tarver, Participating in the Understanding Latin America Seminar was certainly an enriching experience. To be able to share different views about Latin America with other professionals gave me the opportunity to clarify some key concepts relevant for a better comprehension of the Latin American phenomenon. Knowing that the Latin American health situation presents some controversy, it was a privilege to be able to present recent and reliable information about Latin American health issues in the States. I celebrate events like that seminar and encourage you to continue working for a better understanding of both nations. With kind regards. – Dra. Sonia Araujo

I attended only the closing session of Arkansas Tech's summer workshop, entitled "Understanding Latin America," but found it to be a well-organized and fruitful experience. The closing session was a round-table discussion, during which each of the participants summarized their perspective on the week's events and then all of them answered questions from the audience, a group of perhaps 40 attendees. Some of the questions were general: what did the panel see as the future obstacles and opportunities for Latin America? What single word or phrase encapsulated their vision for Latin America? Other questions were more focused, several of them dealing with Venezuela's colorful president/dictator, Hugo Chavez. Since several of the panelists were native Venezuelans, this offered an interesting chance to learn more, but to also watch as citizens of an increasingly dictatorial regime walked a fine line between very-carefully-chosen words and outright critique. Clearly none of the Venezuelan panelists were fans of Chavez, but then again, they were also only a plane-ride away from returning home. Their frank yet also cautious words made me wonder what it would be like to talk to a German in 1933. All in all, it was a fine experience. Some of the guests spoke very fine English, others did not but one of the panelists served as an able and relaxed translator. Communication was easy. Finally, it seemed to me that all of the Latin American guests very much enjoyed their time in the United States and Arkansas, and gained a great deal from sharing their experiences with us. I certainly learned a lot. – Dr. Peter Dykema

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. *Average Attendance:* The average attendance at the individual sessions was about 10 faculty and or staff. Although the original grant proposal addressed the cost effectiveness of even such a low number as the total number fo participants, the Project Director had hoped for a larger average crowd. The primary reason for this low attendance was probably the timing of the seminar, which was unavoidable.

2. *Overall Attendance:* Forty-five different faculty and/or staff participated in the program in one or more session. This was a satisfactory number for the Project Director, which made the cost per participant less than \$200 for the project. Obviously, this was worth the expense.

3. *Recent Venezuelan Events:* The recent events in Venezuela during the Spring 2006 semester changed the dynamics of the Roundtable, although the event was still educational and of considerable benefit to the participating faculty and staff. Again, this was an event which was unavoidable.

4. *Difference in Style:* The methods of presentation and the information deemed important by the Venezuelan scholars was perhaps not what many Tech participants would have liked to undertake. This is undoubtedly due to the very different educational styles between the two cultures. With this said, the Project Director received no negative feedback about the content covered, just comments along the lines of "I wish they had addressed ...". Even so, most of these matters where then later addressed via questions at the Roundtable session, which concluded the week-long event.

5. *Time Constraints:* Perhaps too many topics were attempted in this program, as time seemed to be short for some of the more-popular sessions, such as the Roundtable.

6. *Language Barrier:* Although all of the participants speak English, a few of the Venezuelans chose to answer questions in Spanish, which then necessitated the use of a translator, which always changes the dynamics of a response. This is an issue which the Project Director will keep in mind for future events.

7. *Participant and Attendee Comments:* I am very pleased with the comments from both the scholarly participants and the attending Tech faculty, staff, and graduate students.

Understanding Latin America



May 22 – 26, 2006

Ross Pendergraft Library and Technology Center –Room 300S

Monday, 22 May

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Pre-Columbian America – Dr. Micheal Tarver

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Colonial Latin-American Society & Culture – Dr. Arturo Yañez

Tuesday, 23 May

9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

The Church in Colonial Latin America – Dr. Ladimiro Urdaneta

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Colonial Latin-American Art and Architecture – Dr. Arturo Yañez

2:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Colonial Latin-American Literature – Dr. Arturo Yañez

3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

The Latin-American Independence Movements – Dr. Micheal Tarver

Wednesday, 24 May

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

The Newborn Latin American Nations – Mr. Luis Loaiza

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

19th - and 20th -Century Latin-American Economies – Dr. Henry Sirgo

Thursday, 25 May

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

20th -Century Latin-American Political Movements – Mr. Luis Loaiza

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

20th -Century Latin-American Society & Culture – Mr. Francisco Gavidia

Friday, 26 May

9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Contemporary Latin-American Public Health Issues – Dr. Sonia Araujo

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Latin-American Music and Dance – Dr. Ladimiro Urdaneta

2:00 – 3:00 p.m.

U. S. – Latin American Relations since 1975 – Dr. Micheal Tarver

3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Roundtable: The Future for Latin America

This program has been made possible by Professional Development funds from the Office of Academic Affairs.