Over a few moments after lunch at the University Club, Rigoberta Menchú reflected upon the work of her foundation, highlighting not only its efforts to seek justice in the struggle for human rights for all citizens of her country but also its campaign to have members of the Guatemalan political and military leaders of the Guatemalan Civil War tried for genocide and prosecuted in Spain. Emphasizing the Foundation’s main focuses including the recognition and defense of rights for the indigenous people on the local, regional, and global levels through education, dialogue, negotiations, peace accords, and sustainable development through conservation of natural resources, harmonious, holistic and spiritual respect for the environment, Ms. Menchú also underscored the importance of its judicial fight for impunity.

Ms. Menchú is very proud of the international support the Foundation had gained, citing the example of Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti’s solidarity with the organization and his efforts to raise funds for the indigenous children affected by the armed internal conflict and also generous donations from local and provincial governments in Cataluña, País Vasco and The Netherlands. Underlining education for not only students but all citizens as the key to reaching the values of democracy, multiculturalism, conflict resolution, and community development as an instrument of peace and struggle against discrimination, Ms. Menchú presides over the committee for the creation of the Mayan University.

Promoting concern for the environment is an essential activity of the organization as well. Seeking to create a fair market, the organization supports the production of organic products including coffee through its credit and co-op program “Café Para la Paz”, forest preservation, and institutional support of equal participation for both men and women in small business projects.

Rigoberta Menchú also spoke of the importance of cooperation and mutual respect under the conditions of dignity and freedom regarding all national and international institutions such as church mission groups and others offering support to developing nations.
Rigoberta Menchú and Ecuadorian Ambassador Inaugurate Exhibition

Rigoberta Menchú, internationally recognized for her work for social justice and cultural reconciliation for indigenous people, spoke at Vanderbilt University on February 7 at Benton Chapel in an event sponsored by CLAIS and the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities.

Menchú, the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, is a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador and ran for president of Guatemala in September 2007, the first indigenous candidate in the country’s history. Her 1983 autobiography, I, Rigoberta Menchú, chronicles the oppression suffered by the indigenous people in Guatemala by the right-wing military regime. Her book drew international attention to the atrocities of the Guatemalan military and led to Menchú winning the Nobel.

However, in 1998, the veracity of I, Rigoberta Menchú, came under attack by anthropologist David Stoll. CLAIS and the Warren Center brought Stoll to campus to discuss the debate in the spring of 1999. Menchú has since acknowledged that some of the accusations are true, but stated that she intended her book to represent not just her life, but the collective experience of her people. In the late 1970s and early ‘80s, several of Menchú’s family members were tortured and killed, and she herself was forced into hiding, after they stood up for the rights of their fellow Mayan peasants in Guatemala’s highlands.

Today, she is a widely read author and a celebrated activist who travels the world on behalf of her foundation. “Menchú was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1992, on the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of America,” said Ted Fischer. “Since then, there has been a sea shift in indigenous rights across Latin America. People are rising up and exerting their rights across the continent.”

Now living in Guatemala City, Menchú was invited to speak at Vanderbilt in conjunction with an exhibit opening devoted to the late Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín. Like Menchú, Guayasamín was an outspoken champion of social justice, and the two became friends before he died in 1999. She remains committed to keeping his legacy alive.

“This is the first time Guayasamín has had a major exhibit in the United States in more than 50 years,” Fischer said. “The fact that Menchú was willing to travel to Nashville specially for this occasion speaks to the importance of his work.”

For Nashville’s Latino community, Menchú’s appearance is of special significance, said Renata Soto, executive director of the local nonprofit agency Conexión Américas. “It’s very timely that she comes to Nashville as someone who has been speaking on behalf of the voiceless. We could benefit from that message here, because it’s a difficult time for the Latino community in Nashville and in our country. …”

“Menchú’s message is clear about the consequences of racism and injustice, and it brings attention to the fact that right here in our own community, we have a ways to go to achieve some of those ideals.”
A Conversation with
Norma Antillón

Where were you born?
I was born in Guatemala City—1/2/1935. I’m old but young at heart!!!

What are your earliest memories?
I can remember when I was as young as five that I was flower girl at my aunt’s wedding. People were commenting how well I had behaved. I was a somewhat quiet child, the middle one of three girls in the family. We lived in a very friendly neighborhood. All were couples with children more or less the same age so it was like having a huge happy family. The parents had parties, they enjoyed whatever they did. I was ten when my brother was born and he brought a lot of joy to my life. I took care of him as if he were one of my dolls except this was for real.

What was your childhood like?
My childhood was simply wonderful. My parents had parties, they enjoyed whatever with all the aunts, uncles, cousins. None of my aunts made us act sometimes to entertain with him when they showed it in Guatemala). When he went back to Guatemala he worked and studied. My dad taught us to be honest, to respect other people, to be happy. He read a lot and had very interesting friends who used to come to our home. I could say many more things, but this can’t be too long, I’ve said enough.

What was your favorite subject in school?
My dad wanted us to learn English, so I started school at the Edelmann School (run by a German family who had fled Germany and landed in Guatemala and open this school. It offered English, French, and Hebrew for many Jewish children in that school. One of my aunts was secretary at that school and another one taught math.

English was introduced to us right from the beginning, and the only one who could help me and my sisters do homework was my dad. We had to wait for him to come home and help us with homework in English. My mom never learned English. In spite of all the struggles, I liked English very much (teachers were very good and loving), it took me years of struggling in order to speak it. I also enjoyed Geography, math at the beginning, and Spanish language with its verbs and grammar. In later years the Lehman School joined the American School of Guatemala run by Americans and Guatemalans, and I graduated from high school from that school.

At 17 I was awarded a fellowship to go to Briarcliff Jr. College (only girls) at one hour away from New York City, and that was a life-changing event. In order to survive, my abyss was a thing of the past. Great experience and met international students from many areas of the world (except blacks) and very rich American girls. I had a great experience.

Who was your hero when you were a child?
I remember when I was little and I read a lot. I was attracted with the history books. I visited Central America and the Caribbean countries on the maps in the history books. It was a wonderful experience and met international students from many areas of the world (except blacks) and very rich American girls.

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A Conversation with Norma Antillón continued from page 4

Vanderbilt-Siloam Health Fair

Studens in Lori Catanzaro's Medical Spanish course got a chance for some hands-on experience on Saturday, Nov. 3, at the Vanderbilt-Siloam semi-annual health fair at the Claremont - Siloam Center. Funding comes from local churches, the Venture Fund of the Vanderbilt University College of Arts and Sciences, private donations and Siloam. A

The Push for a New Life: Emigration from Latin America • April 21, 2008

In his book, "New Life: Emigration from Latin America," Latin American countries, and though we all speak Spanish sometimes, we try to understand each other's language because we were trained to do that since we were children, and we try to understand each other

I typed his books because he only wrote by hand, and I learned a lot about Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and others of that time. (No computers then.)

During Mr. Pupo-Walker's directorship, the Center published "The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature" in conjunction with Cambridge University Press.

I'm grateful to God for good health and direction; at 73 years of age I've been doing volunteer work wherever I go. I do enjoy giving to the Hispanic community.

A Conversation with Norma Antillón continued from page 4

Continued from page 4

Based on the information provided, it seems the conversation was conducted with Norma Antillón, who might be a professor or researcher associated with the Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies (CLAIS) at Vanderbilt University. The conversation covers topics such as her role at the Center, her family, and her personal life. Antillón discusses her children, her work, and her experiences as a volunteer in the Hispanic community. She also reflects on her career and the center's history. The conversation is likely part of a larger project or series focused on Latin American and Iberian Studies. The source text suggests that the conversation was part of a larger publication or event, possibly a colloquium or a workshop, given the mention of "Vanderbilt University College of Arts and Sciences." The conversation likely took place at Vanderbilt University in the early 2000s, given the date "January 16."
Susan Berk-Seligson Interviewed by Univision

Susan Berk-Seligson (Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies and Department of Spanish and Portuguese) was interviewed on the UNIVISION cable program “Aquí y Ahora” on February 19, 2008, in a feature focusing on false confessions. Berk-Seligson, a sociolinguist who has been doing research in the area of forensic linguistics for many years, is often called on to serve as an expert witness in cases involving language issues, specifically related to problems that Hispanics face in their contact with the U.S. justice system. Much of her work has dealt with capital punishment cases.

Berk-Seligson’s research has been uncovering the role of language in coerced confessions. She has found that often police officers who have only a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish conduct custodial interrogations of Hispanics who have similarly limited levels of competence in English. The result of these interrogations is serious miscommunication and sometimes statements made by suspects that are taken to be confessions. In addition, police officers assign the role of interpreter at such interrogations often shift into detective-integrator mode, thereby introducing a measure of coercion into the questioning process. Berk-Seligson’s research finds that cultural factors associated with certain Latin American social groups, namely acquaintanceship and gratuitously answering “yes” when questioned by persons of higher social power and authority, adversely affect Hispanics in judicial contexts.

Evidence of Peanut, Cotton, and Squash Farming Found in Peru

A peanut hull discovered in Northern Peru has been dated to 7600 B.P. According to Vanderbilt University, “Anthropologists working on the slopes of the Andes in northern Peru have discovered the earliest-known evidence of peanut, cotton and squash farming dating back 5,000 to 9,000 years ago. Their findings provide long-sought-after evidence that some of the early development of agriculture in the New World took place at farming settlements in the Andes. The discovery was published in Science. The research team made their discovery in the early 1970s in a research project led by the late David Douglas Dillehay. The team determined that the plant remains did not naturally grow in the immediate area. ‘The plants we found in northern Peru did not typically grow in the wild in that area,’ Dillehay said. ‘We believe they must have therefore been domesticated elsewhere first and then brought to this valley by traders or mobile horticulturists.’ The use of these domesticated plants goes along with broader cultural changes we believe existed at that time in this area, such as people staying in one place, developing irrigation and other water management techniques, creating public ceremonials, building mounds and obtaining and saving exotic artifacts. The researchers dated the squash from approximately 9,200 years ago, the peanut from 7,600 years ago, and the cotton from 5,500 years ago.”

Source: EurekAlert!

Vanderbilt’s Latin American Public Opinion Project Receives Major Financial Boost

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has expanded and extended its support for the Vanderbilt University-based Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) with additional funding of up to $9 million.

“This generous support will enable LAPOP, a consortium of universities and research institutes throughout the Americas, to continue its work to help the Americas better understand the data and present them to policymakers, citizen groups, scholars and students in the host countries. LAPOP provides the nation’s objective look at many important aspects of democracy and governance,” Seligson said. “For example, they measure the extent to which citizens are committed to democratic values, participate actively in their democracies and engage in civil society. The surveys also measure the darker side of governance through the corruption victimization index and crime victimization scale that they include.”

An important aspect of LAPOP is training the next generation of graduate students to handle the complex tasks of sample and questionnaire design and data analysis. Currently, there are 11 doctoral students in the program, and the USAID has provided fellowship support for several of the students.

Last December senior scholars in the program along with USAID Democracy and Governance officers in the program met in San Salvador, El Salvador, to decide upon the questions to be included in the 2008 round of surveys. Interviews are underway, with more than 30,000 expected to be conducted.

Elizabeth Zechmeister, an assistant professor of political science at the University of California, Davis, will join LAPOP in the fall as an assistant director. LAPOP also has received funding from the InterAmerican Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. At Vanderbilt, the project is supported by the University’s College of Arts and Science and Department of Political Science.

Source: Ann Marie Dee Owens, (615) 229-NEWS; annmarie.owens@vanderbilt.edu

David Dickinson Advises Brazilian Government on Early Education

Vanderbilt Peabody researcher David Dickinson traveled to Brazil participate in a seminar organized to inform the Education Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Brazilian Parliament on language development and the importance of early language.

“Education for the children aged 0 to 3 has been a marginal concern of Brazilian public policies until very recently. Most existing services are private or provided under voucher-type systems allocated to poorer families,” Dickinson said. Dickinson traveled to Brazil as part of the Vanderbilt University-based Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and the USAID has expanded and extended its support for the project.

LAIS is pleased to announce that Vanderbilt’s Enhancing Graduate Education program run by Associate Provost Dennis Hall has geared to fund a new program of LAIS. This program will fund two distinguished Latin American scholars, politicians, or writers per year to come to Vanderbilt for approximately four weeks to participate in a graduate seminar, offer a non-credit special topic seminar, and to interact more widely with graduate students.

Candidates for the Visiting Resource Professorship (VRP) will be nominated each year by Vanderbilt faculty members from any department or school; faculty members will have to demonstrate how the proposed 2-3 meetings that the faculty member is teaching during the proposed semester. The VRP would be in charge of a designated number of seminar sessions, assigning readings for those sessions, and leading class discussion.

In departments where students have sufficient proficiency in Spanish or Portuguese, the class should be conducted in that language to promote a much-needed “languages across the curriculum” approach. We especially encourage the nomination of scholars who work transends several disciplines, making the proposed seminars compelling for students in related fields and thus promoting the sort of interdisciplinary cross-fertilization so crucial to making our graduate students’ work more competitive in the marketplace.

The VRP would also offer a special-topics, non-credit graduate seminar on a subject of his or her choice. This special seminar would meet 2-3 times during the VRP’s stay at Vanderbilt. This would give graduate students who are not enrolled in the relevant class an opportunity to meet with the scholar as well. We encourage these special seminars to be as interdisciplinary as possible so that the greatest range of graduate students could reap the benefits.

Competition guidelines are posted on the CLAIS website.
Jim is from a family of nine children and grew up in Buffalo, New York. His first experience in Latin America was in Ecuador in 1961 as part of a high school exchange program. He spent two months in Ecuador during the summer and recalls "It's hard to imagine a more different place from Buffalo than Quito!" During his college years, he spent a summer in Lima, Peru, which included trips to Cuzco and Machu Picchu. "In those days, Study Abroad programs were few and far between. Other than a course in Spanish, there were few windows opening into the world of Latin America," said Jim.

He did graduate work in Sociology at the University of Michigan and had the good fortune to study Latin American colonial history with Charles Gibson, an expert on Colonial Mexico and also anthropologist Eric Wolf, another noted Latin Americanist. Jim published a comparative study of Spanish and English colonialization in the New World, from initial settlement to independence; the book was titled Conquest and Commerce: Spain and England in the Americas. Jim jokes that his first "and it looks like last" job was at Vanderbilt. He was hired specifically because of his interest in Latin America, and he came to Vanderbilt because of the strength of its Latin American Center. He received a grant from the Center to spend a summer in Brazil, to prepare his research for a book on the colonial period and to teach himself Portuguese. On the strength of his first book, he got a fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. and while there, wrote Portuguese Brazil: The King’s Plantation, still considered a classic covering Brazil’s entire colonial period. But Jim grew tired of colonial history and wanted to learn more about the contemporary world in which he lived. He received a three-year Kellogg Fellowship and visited various community and rural development projects all over Latin America–in Costa Rica, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Argentina. This work generated hundreds of pages of typed field notes and boxes of project pamphlets and micrograph reports which he used to compile "Inside Development: A Report from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Brazil." The field notes for this project are now on deposit at the Vanderbilt Library. Peru is home to the potato and the International Potato Center (CIP). During Jim’s various field trips, he had visited CIP and other international agricultural centers. Much of their work was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, which ultimately supported him to write a book about agriculture. With this support, and leave from Vanderbilt, Jim began a long project that took him to indigenous communities and agricultural sites all over Latin America, with a focus on new World crops such as sweet potatoes, corn, manioc, cassava, Andean roots and tubers, as well as rice. To complete the life story, he went to the Philippines, headquarters of the International Rice Research Institute. The first book that came from this project was Rice, Research, and Revolution in Asia and Latin America. Jim then partnered with the Potato Center and visited CIP sites in various countries to better understand their efforts for CIP’s annual report and learning how small farmers worked with CIP to solve local potato production problems. With CIP’s support, he worked in Latin America (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Asia (Taiwan, India, Indonesia), North Africa (Egypt, Tunisia), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya, Uganda). His observations eventually became Notes of a Potato Watcher. Jim is married to a Brazilian, Cecilia Grespan, and the couple travels to Brazil every year. His favorite cities are Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and Curitiba. “Rio de Janeiro is the most culturally vibrant city in the world,” says Jim. In spring 2005, Jim spent the semester teaching with Semester at Sea. Cecilia and he made the voyage together. Jim’s current project is entitled “Crops That Changed the World.” It brings together much of the historical work he did on the Age of Discovery and the colonial period–after all, Portugal’s spice trade did change the world. - When I came, the Center for Latin American Studies was able to be my teachers. I have never stopped going to school–never intend to.”

Jim adds “I came to Vanderbilt in 1974–of course I was only 12 years old, a child prodigy. My parents felt that the center was not doing enough for their students, Lana is grateful for having been given the opportunity to research and develop her interest in immigration issues.


