Marcela Vásquez-León became the new director of the Center for Latin American Studies this semester with the goal of enhancing the interdisciplinary program and communicating to campus the importance of the Latin American region.

She assumed the position in January, replacing Linda Green, who served as director of the center for five years.

Vásquez-León is an associate professor in the School of Anthropology and Center for Latin American Studies, both in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Her research interests include political ecology; social vulnerability to climate and environmental change; and grassroots development and collective organization.

Vásquez-León has conducted research with fishing and agricultural communities in Mexico, Paraguay, Brazil and Colombia and has worked with refugee and displaced populations on the Ecuador-Colombia border. She has also worked in the U.S. Southwest with Hispanic farmers and farmworkers.

"As a unit with a 40-year history on campus, LAS (Latin American studies) has developed important strengths that derive from its interdisciplinary nature, its emphasis on language immersion and fieldwork training, as well as its rigorous academic and intellectual approaches," Vásquez-León said.

With about 150 affiliated faculty from across campus, the center initiates and collaborates on a variety of research projects on the social, environmental and political issues affecting Latin America. Investigations of border patrol abuses, climate change issues, and indigenous peoples' social movements are just a few examples of Latin American studies projects.

The Center for Latin American Studies offers an undergraduate major and minor; a master's degree, with dual degree programs in journalism, law, public health and public administration; as well as a Ph.D. minor.

Latin American studies students also benefit from many engagement opportunities, including study abroad programs across Latin America, as well as internship and research projects in Tucson, along the U.S.-Mexico border, and in Mexico and other Latin American countries. The center also administers Tinker grant funding for graduate summer research in Latin America.

In addition, the center has a K-12 curriculum development program and serves as an outreach resource on Latin America for community colleges and the Tucson community.

"I plan to enhance the significance and visibility of our interdisciplinary program and convey
the importance of the Latin American region across campus," Vásquez-León said. "I will also leverage resources from federal and private funding agencies to develop new programs and enhance existing ones."

Currently, the center is collaborating with its visiting scholar, Edgar Monreal, to promote a relationship with the Centro Coordinador y Difusor de Estudios Latinoamericanos, an international center housed at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico.

The center also plans to begin a speaker series and coordinate a number of events in 2016, including a ?Violence in Latin America [4]? panel discussion on March 4, a Latin America Student Leader Showcase and the Tucson Cine Mexico 2016 film festival.

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