

UA South Professor Completes USDA Fellowship

University Communications
August 2008

An associate professor at The University of Arizona South is one of only a few people across the country who were selected to receive a federal fellowship that focuses on Hispanic students.

Ruth Claros-Kartchner, an associate professor who teaches Spanish and bilingual education, was one of only two academics in Arizona to be chosen for the E. (Kika) De La Garza Fellowship and is the first person from the UA to be named a De La Garza fellow.

The program, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture, works to improve the skills and preparation of Hispanic students.

A USDA release announcing the new fellows noted that "fellows were selected on the compatibility of their interests with USDA mission areas and the value their experience with USDA will add to their institutions curriculum."

The fellows, according to the USDA, "collaborate with USDA on food security, leadership, biotechnology and agribusiness" while also learning about other federal agencies.

Only those who work at Hispanic-serving institutions are allowed to apply for the fellowship, which is run by the USDA's Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program. Hispanic-serving institutions are defined as colleges and universities where full-time Hispanic students comprise at least 25 percent of the enrollment.

The program is meant to help fellows become "better prepared to address educational challenges faced by the Hispanic community," the USDA noted.

The De La Garza fellows spent a few weeks in Washington, D.C., earlier this summer learning about the various divisions within the USDA as well as internship, research and career options.

Claros-Kartchner said that what she learned will allow her to work more effectively supporting career-motivated UA South students.

"I wanted to see how I could more effectively help our Hispanic student population and orient them to career paths that make sense right now according to the needs our country has," she said. In the USDA's opinion, she said, that includes science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about what the government is looking for in graduates and what they need to do right now in the United States to remain competitive," said Claros-Kartchner, who is currently on sabbatical in Chile.

Claros-Kartchner and the other fellows met with scientists, administrators and others to talk about and learn about the issues facing the nation's education, economic and work force systems. She also said it is becoming increasingly important for graduates or interns to be bilingual and to have studied abroad.

"If our graduates have that kind of experience, they're going to better serve our country. That's the bottom line," said Claros-Kartchner, adding that she intends to hold workshops about the information she gathered once she returns to UA South at the year's end.

"It was a learning experience. My interest is to pass the information along to my colleagues and students I work with," she added. "It is very important that we take advantage of having that information."

The fellowship was created in 1998 and is named after a Texas lawyer and policymaker. De La Garza also served as a congressman and was highly involved in improving lending and insurance issues in agriculture.

Source URL: <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/ua-south-professor-completes-usda-fellowship#comment-0>