

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 26, 2012

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. – University of Florida faculty, led by the Levin College of Law, the Center for Latin American Studies and the College of Education, will spend the next three years working with two universities in Colombia to enhance the human rights programs at their law schools.

UF will receive nearly \$757,200 from the U.S. Agency for International Development through Higher Education for Development to create the Colombian Caribbean Human Rights Center, which will build capacity in human rights among two Colombian Caribbean law schools through rigorous interdisciplinary research, education and community service with emphasis on serving vulnerable populations.

The center will assist regional law schools in training future legal practitioners with knowledge on national and international human rights standards, the skills to support human rights reform in Colombia, and in enhancing outreach initiatives to better serve minorities, displaced persons and other vulnerable populations.

“The faculty at the colleges of law and education, and at the Center for Latin American Studies, possess great depth in international law, human rights and experiential learning,” UF Law Dean Robert Jerry said, “and are very well suited to achieve the goals of this ambitious program.”

Directors of the project are Jon Mills, dean emeritus and director of the Center for Governmental Responsibility at the Levin College of Law; Pilar Mendoza, a native Colombian and assistant professor in higher education administration in the College of Education; Philip Williams, director of the Center for Latin American Studies; and Timothy McLendon, Center for Governmental Responsibility staff attorney.

The UF team will work with the Universidad del Magdalena in Santa Marta, Colombia, and the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, Colombia. Both universities offer courses and activities to enhance human rights awareness and education in the region.

“Respect for the rights of individuals, especially vulnerable populations, is vital to the development of the democracy and economy of a nation,” Mills said. “We are honored to have this opportunity to work with two distinguished Colombian universities on such an important priority for the U.S. government. The Levin College of Law is acknowledged for its faculty expertise in human rights.”

The three universities will work toward establishment of the human rights center through enhanced human rights curricula; workshops and training programs in Colombia; educational

opportunities at UF for Colombian faculty members and LL.M. students; and collaborative research and scholarship between Florida and Colombian faculty.

The project will include law faculty with expertise in human rights, clinical legal education and comparative law; and education faculty from the Collaborative Assessment and Program Evaluation Services . The award will be managed by the Center for Latin American Studies.

“Given the fundamental importance of enhancing the protection of the human rights for Colombian citizens after years of internal conflict, the Center for Latin American Studies is thrilled to be working alongside the Center for Governmental Responsibility and the College of Education in a project of such national and international significance,” Williams said.

During the first two years of the project, the Center for Governmental Responsibility’s annual Conference on Legal and Policy Issues in the Americas will focus on human rights in Colombia, beginning with a workshop in Gainesville in spring 2013, and a major conference to be held in Colombia in spring, 2014.

Two recent factors have increased U.S. interest in human rights in Colombia – the end of overt civil war and weakening of guerilla movements and the development of free trade agreements.

Colombia also is an important trading partner with the State of Florida, as evidenced by an upcoming trade mission to Colombia, led by Gov. Rick Scott and Enterprise Florida. In announcing the trade mission, the Governor’s Office said Florida trade with Colombia totaled \$9 billion last year, noting that Colombia is one of the top five destinations for Florida products, representing nearly \$3 billion a year in exports.

“The higher education sector is rapidly developing in Latin America and the Caribbean,” Mendoza said. “The University of Florida is uniquely positioned to take advantage of these developments and engage in these types of collaborations.”

The U.S. Agency for International Development administers the U.S. foreign assistance program providing economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 80 countries worldwide. For more information, visit www.usaid.gov.

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