

Monday, December 29, 2008

## EDUCATION



Technical higher education should prepare its students for work as well as for continuing university studies, says Mellow.

Photo: MANUEL HERRERA

Gail Mellow:

## Technical education should go to the next level

The President of LaGuardia Community College (New York) came to sign an agreement with Universidad Central *[Central University]*.

In 2010, Central U. will open its own "community college," the American technical education model characterized by partnering with universities. The idea is that those who graduate with two-year degrees from this program can go onto that institution's professional degree programs and the courses that are similar will be recognized, explains Dean of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Sergio Quezada.

For this reason, the house of learning teamed up with New York's LaGuardia Community College, so that it can advise them on designing the courses of studies. That was the purpose of the trip to Chile for the institution's President, Gail Mellow, who assures us that the degrees that this new institution confers will be recognized by LaGuardia.

"In Chile technical education has to move to the next level. And that happens when they stop teaching only to do things or so that the students only know how to operate a machine. They must train people who can think, who can solve problems, who can adapt," she says.

-It's the university discourse.

"It's the fact that this is higher education. In the U.S., universities and community colleges are part of the same system and it is very easy to move between the two levels. There Chile has a problem: the fact that universities do not recognize technical center graduates' years of study shows that technical education is not really higher education."

-How is this partnership achieved?

"With lots of conversations until we get to a point where the two years that the students study in a community college are equal to those in the university in terms of the development of skills and the level of requirements. It's a need that comes from the working world: we don't want a technician who only knows how to fix a connection, but rather someone with the same skills as a professional."

-Here, technical education is not valued socially. "Therefore, there is a need for institutions that allow their graduates to be well prepared for the labor market as well as to continue their studies in the university without starting from scratch. That's what happened to me. I entered a community college and had a psychology course that I loved, and that's where I discovered what I wanted to be. The nice thing was that I had the tools to go all the way to obtaining my doctorate."