



LaGuardia Community College

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LaGuardia Community College International Panel Discusses How to Create a Community College System in Chile

Social Justice, Support for Local Economies, and Providing Hope for the Future are Among the Benefits of Two-Year Colleges

Long Island City, NY – November 18, 2008--Dr. Gail O. Mellow, president of LaGuardia Community College, and a nationally renowned expert on community colleges, hosted a roundtable discussion at the College last evening entitled “A Dialogue on A Community College System in Chile.” Educators from the Universidad Central in Santiago, Chile joined members of the Chilean-American business community and LaGuardia faculty and students via live teleconference.

The event provided valuable perspectives for Dr. Mellow to consider before her appearance as the keynote speaker at a forum examining the creation and societal impact of a community college system in Chile. Dr. Mellow was invited by the Rector of the Universidad Central Dr. Luis Lucero Alday, to present her speech “Connecting the Heart to the Hand: Chile and Community Colleges, La Universidad de Comunidad,” before an audience of academics, government officials and leaders of the Chilean business community, in Santiago the week of December 15.

Visit the LaGuardia website www.laguardia.edu/expert to watch videos of LaGuardia Communication Studies students interviewing Chilean exchange students and Dr. Mellow about the potential role of community colleges in other countries. Multimedia resources on Dr. Mellow’s expertise are also available, including links to information about her book, *Minding the Dream: The Process and Practice of the American Community College* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

In Chile, as through most of Latin America, community colleges do not exist. The introduction of a community college program with an emphasis on a two-year transferable associate’s degree in Chile would be a radical change; Chile’s higher education system consists of four- and five-year degree programs for the most wealthy sector of the population, and a system of technical colleges that train workers for specific industries. Community colleges would bridge this gap, opening higher education to an underserved sector of the population.

“Community college is a very democratic system, everyone has an opportunity to learn here,” said LaGuardia English Professor Ximena Gallardo. “Higher education in Chile is a very aristocratic system. Many people are left behind.”

All the participants at last night’s roundtable expressed rousing approval for the creation of such a system in Chile. “I think it is very prescient of Chile to move forward with this idea,” said



Dr. Mellow, after welcoming the panelists and audience. “Recent financial crises have shown how intertwined global economies have become, making the growing role community colleges play in educating the 21st century global workforce one of timely significance.”

“The versatility of community colleges –allowing students to work during the day and take classes at night- would provide greater educational alternatives for a huge number of Chileans,” said Rodrigo Sotomayor, President of Rosot Enterprise, Inc., a neurosurgical equipment supply company.

Ms. Cecilia Briones, Director of Wealth Management at UBS, noted the need for “more indians, and less chiefs,” in Chile. “A whole level of people are missing,” she said. “There is a real need for pragmatic people with mid-level technical analysis skills, not a majority of workers with MAs and Ph.D.s.”

“Not only are we interested in the philosophy of this concept, but also the opportunities it can provide for students and faculty,” said Rector Aday. “Articulation and exchange programs and the possibility of a double degree option can offer a global educational experience for Chileans.”

Dr. Mellow agreed, noting, “There are many ways technology can help you achieve these goals, without incurring the expenses of travel.”

Chileans must decide on a career once they finish high school at around age 18, based on vocational testing. College credits are not transferable in Chile; if a student decides to change their course of study, they must start anew at great personal and financial expense.

“I hope transfer credits are part of the plan,” said Franco Palma, a Chilean exchange student at LaGuardia who is studying to become an English as a Second Language teacher. “In my second year I switched from physical education to ESL and lost all my credits. It was a huge waste of my time and my family’s money.”

Rector Alday noted that the Chilean government and the business community have signed on as partners to make this concept a reality through community and workforce development initiatives.

“Chile is invested in this idea,” said Rector Alday. “The creation of a two-year institution is an endeavor undertaken by the Chilean people, for the Chilean people.”

Located in Long Island City, Queens in New York City, LaGuardia Community College, part of the City University of New York, is a nationally recognized leader among community colleges. Founded in 1971, LaGuardia has been recognized as an innovator in educating students who are under prepared for college work and/or are not primary English speakers. LaGuardia students go on to baccalaureate education at over three times the national average, and the College supports such activity through its innovative joint programs with Vassar College and Barnard College in Exploring Transfer. To learn about LaGuardia Community College, please go to www.laguardia.edu.

