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"Truly Transformative:" Study Abroad with the UNC Pembroke World Languages Program

Dr. Richard Gay

Welcome to *30 Brave Minutes*, a podcast of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In *30 Brave Minutes*, we'll give you something interesting to think about. I'm Richard Gay, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and with me is Dr. Joanna Hersey, Associate Dean of Student Success and Curriculum. Joining us today are faculty from the Department of World Languages, Dr. Ana Cecelia Lara and Dr. Milagros López-Fred. Now get ready for *30 Brave Minutes*.

Hello everybody, Dr. Lara, would you please introduce yourself to our listeners, please?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yeah, thank you, thank you for having me over here today. I am a professor in the Department of English, Theatre, and World Languages, I'm here since 2010. Right now I'm the director of the World Language Program and Coordinator of the Spanish teacher licensure K to 12, and now the Director of a new program with the graduate program of the Spanish Education. I am a professor who teach many different courses, well basically the advanced courses, but also elementary Spanish courses, and also the grammar, culture, phonetic. My specialization is in Central America and Latin American culture.

Dr. Richard Gay

And Dr. Lara will you tell us your country of origin?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

El Salvador.

Dr. Richard Gay

El Salvador, okay.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

I am from San Salvador, El Salvador.

Dr. Richard Gay

Excellent, and I know recently you published a book, right?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Oh, yes, my book basically, the name is *Huellas de la Guerra y la Violencia en la Literatura Contemporánea Salvadoreña*, and it's about the violence you know, that is perpetuated and shows in the literature, of women literature, and there is show after the civil war that we live in El Salvador.

Dr. Richard Gay

Excellent, I wanted to be sure that everyone knew that you were a scholar as well as an administrator. You wear many hats here at UNCP and I certainly want to give you credit where credit's due. So, I appreciate all the various things that you do here for the University. So, anyone who is interested in learning a world language, particularly Spanish, can reach out to Dr. Lara, or Dr López Fred. So, Milagros would you please introduce yourself to the group?

Milagros López-Fred

Yes. Hi, I'm Milagros López-Fred, I am from Puerto Rico. I work at UNC Pembroke since 2015, but I teach before for the state, Cumberland County schools for eleven years. I teach many of the courses of elementary courses, for example, Elementary 1 and 2, Intermediate 1 and 2, and also Conversation, and also the first course for writing for the students.

Dr. Richard Gay

Those are all real important things. I'm a big advocate for learning an additional language. I feel like it helped me so much as a writer in English, to learn grammatical constructions and by comparing English to other languages, I feel like it's a real advantage for everyone so I certainly want to take this opportunity to encourage people to consider studying another language, as many as possible in my opinion. So, one of the things we wanted to talk today, with you guys about, is the UNCP Study Abroad program. I know that both of you have lots of experience though, so for those of our listeners who aren't really familiar with Study Abroad, could you tell us what Study Abroad is and how it works here at UNCP.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yeah, let me start with this, Study Abroad is a course that you take, there is two ways to take that course, one, you can get credit through the university, so you can be in an elective

course, you know, university elective course, and the other one, it can count as a minor course in the Spanish program. There are many opportunities, there is a financial aid that you can go and request, and also you do it as a part of the minor, there also is some other scholarship that you can request. But also, what is a Study Abroad? It's not just a course or vacation, okay, it's a course where you take it very seriously. The courses start over here with us, before we take the trip, we start getting to know what we're going to do, we start getting to see the research about and to get excited about what is it that they are going to see. And once we're going over there, to whatever the country is that we're choosing, is the compliment of the class, okay, is the cherry on top, where they have the opportunity to experiment, to live, okay, what the culture, what the language is. We try for them to have all this experience that otherwise would not be possible for them, okay, we choose very carefully what they're going to do. We do a very detailed research before we decide where we're going to go, so the students can have the best experience ever, and with that research is not just about the places that we're going, but also, how can we make that trip affordable for each of them.

Dr. Richard Gay

Excellent, and that can take many different forms right? I know we have many students who go for an entire semester on their own, but some of our students aren't really ready to do that. But the way you described it is that the student would take a class here, learn some of the basics, and then go with you for an intensive, usually what, two week stay, and learn about the culture firsthand, is that accurate?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yes, it is about 10 days.

Dr. Richard Gay

About 10 days. Excellent. Dr. López-Fred, tell us about one of the recent trips that you organized.

Milagros López-Fred

In this spring we went to Madrid, and also Sevilla, and we took eleven students and two faculty, which is Dr. Love and myself. The success of the trip okay, is not when we're there, but all the planning that we do before we get there. So, it's a lot of planning, that the students don't see that. It's just us that know that this is happening. Just mainly to make sure, you

know, that everything is in place and of course, everything is safe and sound for them and for us, when we get there.

Dr. Richard Gay

That's one of the great things about traveling with a group, particularly when you have experienced leaders like yourself, you don't have to worry about your itinerary. You don't have to worry about how to communicate with the bus driver, right, in another country, but it's nice that our students can look to you for your expertise and your ability to help them, and I do think this is an excellent way for students to first experience another culture if they're uncomfortable going on their own. So Cecilia, you mentioned earlier about there's some funding to help students pay for their trip, could you talk a little bit about that, about what it might cost, a typical trip?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yeah, it depends. Sometimes it can go from \$2000 to \$3000 dollars, there is a scholarship in the Global Engagement, there is the Mayor scholarship, there is the Deon Green Scholarship and also the financial aid that they can request.

Milagros López-Fred

One of the things that we need to make sure that the students know that the Study Abroad, okay, they can do installment payments, that they don't have to pay all at once. Okay, so we start making these payments, you know, they start making these payments well ahead of time, so that way it's a little bit easier for them to fulfill the payment for the trip. Okay so that is important. They don't have to come with the entire amount all at once.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Beside the Study Abroad, like, we did last year in November, we took the students for the Acto Latino, we request to PURC. Okay, PURC help us with that. And even though we went to a specific purpose, you know, to enhance the theater performance for the students. We always take the opportunity to find, to take the students to a different city. Like, we went to Toledo and years before we went to Salamanca. You know, to the oldest university of the whole, you know, medieval times. We always try for them to bring something different even if it's not a Study Abroad group, we made that happen for them because we want that to be an enrichment, an educational trip, all the time.

Dr. Richard Gay

Yes. and these are experiences that students will cherish for a lifetime. I was fortunate enough to get to travel when I was an undergraduate and it really sparked a lifelong passion to travel. I certainly hope that others have the opportunity to experience that. So, could you tell us a little bit about Acto Latino, you mentioned that as a group that was funded by PURC?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yes, Acto Latino is a student organization that we have, anybody can join Acto Latino, we just want them to be enthusiastic with the language. They are going to perform Hispanic plays, basically, we tried to look for plays that portrayed the violence, of the problems the society is going through, in Latin America, and that's, sometimes the plays are not that funny. Sometimes over here for the festival we make some funny plays, you know, for to entertain people, but really the Acto Latino have more meaningful...meaning to the performance, and basically, if we have the opportunity, we try to go away, you know, we try to take them to different places so they can have the opportunity to get the direction for other theatre directors, because I am not actually a director. I just love the theatre, okay, and I'm just fan of it and I do my best to direct the students, but I'm not a theatre director, I just do it for fun. So, I look for real theatre directors to help me when the show is ready to be performance and to be put it to the public, I really want to have this help hand with a good director.

Dr. Richard Gay

Right. It takes a community to put on a play in any language, and, I'm sure that by performing in the Spanish language, it helps individuals perfect the language as well because they're not having to make the phrase themselves in their mind, but they have to be able to communicate what's written on the page, and in a way that's convincing, and I know I've had the opportunity to see the group perform and it's always a real delight. I saw them at the Fall Festival. So, Milagros can you tell us a little bit about the Fall Festival?

Milagros López-Fred

Yes, well, we've been doing this, what, every fall, and we try to get all the community involved to attend, before Covid it was different, we're getting back little by little back to the way that it used to be. We tried to get all the students motivated to perform, to sing, any skills that they might have, we're trying to get a little bit, they enjoy, the students and all the community enjoy having our traditional foods. This past year, we did a table competition where the students were able to decorate the tables and that really was a success for the first time we did that. So the Fall Festival, we already have the place reserved and everything, and then once we

start the semester we start going back to get these students that want to act, perform, sing, help with anything that we need to make sure that the festival, you know, is a success. Okay, and we have a lot of the turn out, a lot of people come in, little by little, it's getting better. We have students from everywhere, I mean, some of them are not native speakers. Okay, but they also want to perform and they do an excellent job. We have students from Puerto Rico, from Mexico, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and but we motivate students okay, that have skills to come over. Of course, we try to see what they're going to present before, we do so because some of them, they get nervous about how good or bad they are, and we try to put that confidence on them. So that way they can go ahead and do the performance.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Some of the students, yes, they are international students, but the majority they are students from here, from the United States, they are just, they are heritage students so they want to represent that, and that's what they love about UNC Pembroke, that's what they love about our program. They come to us and they say, 'we love the World Language Program, we love the Spanish program, because this is a place that we can represent our countries.' And that's why they, when they see the flags that we have, they wanted to represent their own countries or they want to represent the girlfriends that they have, the boyfriends that they have, you know. We actually have a student who is from Paraguay, we normally don't have students from Paraguay, in Paraguay they have both language the Guaraní, and the Spanish, and is very interesting, you know, the culture in Guaraní, so I am, I'm also learning from that student. I love our Fall Festival because every year is something new that we offer, and something new that we learn. Actually, the show that you saw from Acto Latino, that was written by one of my students. One of them came and say 'I have an idea' for the Acto Latino you know, and I let them do it and we practice. I put it up there and I said, okay, let's do it.

Dr. Richard Gay

I remember once when I studied abroad, we did a, we went for a month, and we still had to do pre and post writing experiences, to show, you know, reflection upon the experience and the like. So, do you require that in your courses as well?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yes.

Milagros López-Fred

Yes.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

They do have to do some research at the beginning and then, when they come back, they do have to, you know, write reflections, they have to have the journal and the presentations. Yes.

Milagros López-Fred

All these requirements before we go help the students to be more motivated because, I mean, they're gonna be researching, I guess, at Prado Museum, then when we go there they say, 'oh, my God, I gave my presentation on this' and so they can talk a little bit more. Instead of me telling them what is it that they're going to be seeing there, and the presentations are very, a little bit informal and the things that they would like to see when we go there. And so and that, that helps a lot, and they don't realize that they're learning at the same time, but, you know.

Dr. Richard Gay

Exactly, that's the fun type of learning.

Dr. Joanna Hersey

The best kind!

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yes.

Milagros López-Fred

Yes.

Dr. Richard Gay

Exactly.

Chancellor Cummings

This is Chancellor Robin Cummings and I want to thank you for listening to 30 Brave Minutes. Our faculty and students provide expertise, energy, and passion driving our region forward. Our commitment to southeastern North Carolina has never been stronger through our teaching, our research, and our community outreach. I want to encourage you to consider

making a tax-deductible contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With your help, we will continue our impact for generations to come. You can donate online at www.uncp.edu/give. Thanks again for listening. Now back for more 30 Brave Minutes.

Dr. Richard Gay

Now, I know that you guys are planning a trip for next year, right? So, could you please talk a little bit about your future plans for Study Abroad in World Languages?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yeah, we have two trips right now, one we hope to have it in the Fall 3, is very soon, it's coming up, we want to offer a choice for students to have 3 credits in 10 days. So they're not going to need to memorize anything, they just need to plan what we're going to ask them to do, and then go on a trip for 10 days. So, I think it's a wonderful experience, and some good opportunity to do that, and there will be 3 credits that they can earn, and so if they're missing those 3 credits for graduation, that's the opportunity, and then we're planning another one for the first time we're going to do it, that we're going to offer a course for a Grad Program. The one for the Fall 3 is going to Madrid and Toledo, the one for this spring is going to Madrid, Barcelona, and the whole World Languages will go in the spring.

Richard Gay

Sounds wonderful. I have very fond memories of Madrid, I recommend it to everybody. I'm sure many of our listeners are going to be interested in participating in your Study Abroad initiatives. So, if someone wants to come to Madrid with you, who do they need to contact?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Yeah, it will be a good idea to contact us directly, we can guide them.

Dr. Joanna Hersey

Can you paint a picture for us of what happens on one of these trips? Maybe one of the ones last year, tell us a little bit about what the students did, where they ate, what sorts of activities they did?

Milagros López-Fred

So I have students, even seniors, that never rode a taxi, a bus, a plane, or the Metro. Okay, so they were in shock there were like, little kids, okay. with the experiences. We also have students nervous about flying, even when there was some bumps, even I'm terrified too, I don't let them know that I am terrified too. It was amazed to see their experiences, you know, how they behave, okay, and they were into all the culture, and these aren't Hispanic students, okay, because we take any student that would like to do the Study Abroad. I did not have any problem with these student, because they want to enjoy and live every minute that they were there. They loved the food, they were shocked about how fast Madrid was, for some of them Sevilla was kind of a little bit more laid back. So, they're younger, so they like Madrid better than other. Then we have some that they like the country. I forgot to mention that we also went to Segovia, and many of the students love going there too. And so that's the main thing, you know, we had students, we only had one student that went abroad before, the rest have never traveled out of the United States. We have students that they didn't even know where the airport was, in Raleigh. So that's the kind of students that we have.

Dr. Joanna Hersey

Can you tell us what sorts of things they did? Did they go to museums? Did they go to street fairs?

Milagros López-Fred

Yes, we went to the museum, we went to different museums, the Prado and then also in Segovia we have the castle and some of the other museums in the area. They went to watch a flamenco show, that was in Sevilla and they loved it. They were able to experience the paella and then we have the paella, you know, a typical dish. I mean, you can see the pictures, it's not the same when you are actually in Spain and you enjoy this. We have the one with seafood, the one with no seafood, because we have different students that are allergic to it and all that. And so, but, yeah, but the students enjoy everything, you know, we try to incorporate a lot of things and they did shopping. But the only thing that they mostly didn't like a lot, even though they knew about, was the walking, the walking. But, I mean, we don't have a car, so we have to walk to get to the Metro to the bus station to get the taxi. Okay that was the only thing that some, 'Why do we have to walk?' I said, 'listen, I'm the oldest of all of us, and I haven't complained at all. So let's keep moving.'

Dr. Richard Gay

Could you tell us a little bit about paella? I've seen it before in big containers that are, like, you know, eight feet across, you know, these really big dishes of paella. So, could you describe it for our listeners who might not be familiar with that dish?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Paella is this rice, with typical, marisco, so seafood, it normally is with seafood, and can be as big, you know, as you can imagine, that can be also a personal paella. Normally they do it for two people, and they can have the paella the seniorito, that one, seniorito, is a little gentleman, or gentlemen, the one that doesn't like to bother their hands by touching the shrimp, because normally the paella is going to come with the head of the shrimp, and with everything, with the legs everything, and the eyes are going to be looking at you, but [laughing] that's the best paella, the one that you can have the taste of the seafood. Yeah, it is the typical food in the whole of Spain, and every region is going to have it differently, okay, you are going to have the one that is black because it come from the calamari, yeah, so it's the best.

Going over there to Spain is like, to take the book coming out of the pages, you know, because when you go, and see Madrid, see Segovia, see Sevilla, you can see the pre-civilizations, they basically live together at one point where you can see all the architecture over there in Segovia, you see the aqueducts, the Roman's aqueducts, it's impressive, every time that I've been there for more than fifteen times already, and every time that I see that, and I have it in front of my eyes is an unbelievable sensation. For the students to be able to experience that, is priceless, and they get emotion too, and you get emotion by seeing them, and even though we go to a lot of work to do this, and to provide these to the students, I don't regret it, not even a single time, even all the work that we do to put this together. I really think there is one of the best thing that we can provide to the students, the opportunity to Study Abroad, because once they come back, they feel empowered, to do many things that they cannot do otherwise.

Dr. Richard Gay

I think some people think when a trip abroad is being led by the World Languages department that you have to be a World Language student but that's not the case at all. It appeals to a wide group.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Mm hmm, we only ask for them to have at least the Spanish 1 course, and they can take it at the same time, you know, because it is the culture, at least to have some phrases, you know, just to have some phrases to be able to communicate to not be so lost, like, yes, when we're going to Barcelona we're going to go to the Guerra, where the Leeds Museum is, and you know we want to go to as possible the arts, I think that's one of the big part for us, but I also wanted to mention the Study Abroad that we did to Peru, that was organized by Milagros also. It was a wonderful experience, we went to Machu Picchu, we went to Cusco, we went to many things and same thing, you know, the students, one of the comments that the students did was, 'oh my God, everything that we have done, and we haven't moved a finger for it. Okay. Everything was given to us.' It was nice, they notice, they see, but the good thing is that they don't see World Language, they see UNC Pembroke.

Dr. Richard Gay

Yeah, exactly, exactly. Have you guys ever gotten lost as a group when you're out on Study Abroad?

Milagros López-Fred

No, no, [laughing] but we asked for a lot of directions. I'm not going to allow to be lost, and the students say, 'why are we waiting? Why are we stopping?' Listen, we either stop and ask, or are we going to be walking around, and you're gonna walk more than we normally have to. But we also have the maps, you know, we have maps and people are are willing to help regardless. You know, it's a lot of tourists everywhere. I ask a lot, and I don't care.

Dr. Richard Gay

I think, it's not a bad experience to get lost every now and then, particularly in a different country, where you stumble upon something that, can be truly transformative that you never expected, right, and so I think there's a lot worse things than getting a little lost, in a great city. So is there anything else you want to tell us about your Study Abroad experiences?

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Well, I just would like to motivate everyone to take the opportunity, give the opportunity to themselves to go for a Study Abroad, and also if they are going to be a major or a minor in the program, and if they can go for the semester, I would encourage them to come and talk to me, okay, so I can see if we can put a semester where they can go for a semester. There are also opportunities for them to go and places where they can also go.

Dr. Richard Gay

Exactly, if they arrange it all in advance, they can take classes abroad and transfer them back here. So that it's possible to do it without losing any time towards your degree because you would be in school while doing it. So it's something I heavily recommend. It would be a wonderful experience.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

One more thing, is the way that we schedule the Study Abroad over there is like, at 2pm we give them time for them to go and have their own lunch, and then to go on and do their own things, then we get together again around 7-8pm you know, we check back with them. So we give them some free time for them to explore, always they have to go with partners, you know, at least in partners, but we have, one time, I had a student who went with us one time, the breakfast it's always included, so she didn't want to have any breakfast at all at the restaurant in the hotel, because she didn't like the food. So she always went to the Burger King, so the Burger King was closed sometimes so she didn't experience, you know, the food from the Spain. It happened that two years later, she came back, before graduation she came back, and she say 'I gonna do it again, because the first time, I didn't enjoy it. Okay, I wasn't mature enough.' So she went back, and this time she tried everything, she went, and she was telling everybody, you know, she was my best Study Abroad advertisement that I have over there because she was telling everybody to try everything, because they will regret it.

Dr. Richard Gay

I think we also need to acknowledge the fact that there are other Study Abroad programs within the College of Arts and Sciences and at UNCP in general, there are programs that are led by the School of Business, we have programs led by faculty in Political Science and Public Administration, people in English take students sometimes, they often go to other places besides the Spanish speaking countries that we've been talking about today, but there are lots of different Study Abroad opportunities at UNCP, we've just been focusing on the ones in Spain and in Spanish speaking countries today, but there's lots of opportunities to experience the world. You know, at UNCP we have a saying, you can get there from here and I think Study Abroad is a perfect example of that, right? So thank you so much, both of you, I have really enjoyed our conversation today. I feel like I've learned a lot about what you do, and I hope that our listeners will be inspired to Study Abroad.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Thank you, thank you for having us and thank you for this opportunity, so the students will know a little bit more about it.

Milagros López-Fred

Thank you.

Dr. Ana Cecilia Lara

Thank you.

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