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Literary Dynamo

Author of more than 200 publications, books, essays, articles, reviews and short stories, UC Santa Barbara professor Sara Poot-Herrera is known for “always working” — organizing conferences or speaking events on Mexican and Spanish American literature, as well as writing, editing and teaching.

“According to my friends, I don’t sleep,” Poot-Herrera joked. Initially “torn” about missing her apartment and friends in Mexico, she sustains her cultural ties by inviting Mexican writers to speak to her students at UCSB, such as Elmar Mendoza, a key figure in the genre known as narcoliterature — crime fiction. The students, she noted, “were captivated.”

"For me, it’s not a job,” said Poot-Herrera, a professor in UCSB’s Department of Spanish and Portuguese. “I like to do this type of activity. I am here because I like to work with my students. They need to know their roots are very important. Be proud of roots always.”

Seizing on her passion for literature, art and education, students often crowd into Poot-Herrera’s small office at various times of day — as sort of a cultural gathering spot. Education is the basis for forming a “new generation with ideas,” Poot-Herrera said. “The students must know that all of us have a very special place in the world.”

Her infectious drive also inspires her peers. So much so that she received a Special Award from Feria Internacional de la Lectura Estado de Yucatán (FILEY), an international book fair — featuring esteemed writers, poets and artists — that she

helped coordinate in Mérida, Yucatán. The award recognizes her “cultural, literary and academic trajectory, both in the book fair and in the state of Yucatán.” It is her second award this academic year, adding to her long list of honors.

"I obtain it for my work on Mexican culture in Mexico and here,” said Poot-Herrera, who also is a recipient of the Gold Medal of the International Mayan Culture Festival.

Constantly moving, Poot-Herrera now splits time between Santa Barbara and Mexico for three reasons: to embrace Mexican culture; help build UCSB relations with educational institutions like El Colegio de Mexico, where she earned her Ph.D.; and promote the work of UC-Mexicanistas, an intercampus research program based at UCSB and made up of Mexican culture studies scholars from the UC system.

As director of UC-Mexicanistas, Poot-Herrera has helped the members bond through teaching, literary gatherings and working meetings, all based on their respective research in different areas of Mexican culture and literature. The members — totaling more than 100 from the U.S., Mexico and Europe — are credited with producing a large number of books, anthologies and articles, as well as reviews on history, culture, literature, film, painting, sculpture, music, and journalism.

“Almost always, we’re organizing activities, publishing or conferences regarding my specialization on contemporary literature or colonial literature,” Poot-Herrera said. “I like to share my interests with the association and my students, including the annual Colloquium on Mexican Literature in November.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.