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Out on a High Note

Over the course of his distinguished career at UC Santa Barbara, Francisco Lomelí has been the focus of innumerable accolades. Now, as he wraps up 40 years on campus, he has been honored once again.

HispaUSA, an association of Chicano literature scholars in the United States and Spain, where it is based, has presented Lomelí the Luis Leal Award “for his inestimable contribution to the recognition of Hispanic culture in the United States.”

Lomelí, a professor of Chicano studies and of Spanish and Portuguese, accepted the award in Salamanca, Spain. Leal, one of the most celebrated scholars of Chicano and Latin American literature, taught at UCSB from 1976 to 2006.

“I’m very proud,” Lomelí said, “especially since it’s associated with Don Luis, who was just a great person — quite an institution here at UCSB.”

The Luis Leal Award was established in 2012 and is given every two years when HispaUSA holds its international congress. Maria Herrera-Sobek, UCSB’s associate vice chancellor for diversity, equity and academic policy and a professor of Chicano studies, received the award in 2014.

In accepting the award, Lomelí acknowledged the previous honorees — Nicolás Kanellos, Sobek and Gary Francisco Keller — and told the audience, “That’s pretty good company. I feel like I’m in Chicano heaven.”

Lomelí, who is retiring after four decades at UCSB, has been a pivotal figure as the university evolved into one of the premiere Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the U.S. When he arrived in 1978 as an assistant professor, Latinos made up roughly 3 percent of students on campus.

“Now we have about 27 percent, which is amazing,” he said. “I’m extremely proud to have been part of that process, directly or indirectly, because I have helped out in certain things. You try to recruit students, you try to retain them, you do all kinds of things that are necessary to work for their success.”

A prolific author, editor and translator, Lomelí said he intends to stay busy in his retirement — if at a slightly more leisurely pace.

“I’ve got a bunch of projects still,” he said. “I’m going to slow down a little bit.”

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.