

# Habra first to complete Spanish Ph.D.

**Dissertation explores the work of Peruvian novelist**

By: Nick Schwerin, **Western Herald**

Issue date: 5/31/07

The dissertation of Hedy Habra marked the culmination of years of work and the first doctoral dissertation in the department of Spanish, one year after the program was scheduled to be cut. She obtained a doctorate of philosophy.

Habra feels her dissertation reflects well on the efforts of the department. She is fluent in Arabic, French, English and Spanish, and preferred to respond to questions via e-mail.

"As the recipient of the first Ph.D. in Spanish, I hope that my dissertation will reflect the solidity of the program, which resulted from several years of efforts on the part of the department," she said.



*Media Credit: Mercedes Tasende*  
Hedy Habra, second from right, after her doctoral dissertation defense May 23.

"I was extremely disappointed and concerned when I heard about the decision of cutting the program. I felt that my degree would no longer hold the same status in the academic world if granted from a no longer existing program. This is, of course, a thing of the past and I am proud to be the first one to graduate from a viable Ph.D. program."

Mercedes Tasende, chair of the Spanish department, agrees that Habra's dissertation reflects well on the department.

"A dissertation is the capstone of the Ph.D. experience," Tasende said. The program began in 2003 and Habra's dissertation creates continuity in the program, she said.

"The Ph.D. program in Spanish is not dying; it's just beginning," Tasende said.

A dissertation should be an original, high-quality, contribution to scholarship in an area of particular interest to the student, according to the Department of Spanish. For instance, Habra focused on narrative of writer Mario Vargas Llosa.

"My project was already outlined during my course work," Habra wrote. "I decided to analyze

the function of the visual linked to the creation of 'small worlds' in the narrative of the Peruvian novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa - one of Latin America's most prominent writers. I was doing a lot of research on his work and at the same time was studying pertinent theoretical approaches."



The dissertation is a learning experience and is guided by faculty. The research and writing of

this book-length manuscript requires a great deal of independent work on the part of the student, according to the Spanish department.

There are several requirements before a student can be admitted into the program. Among the requirements are a minimum GPA of 3.25 for all graduate courses, submission of Graduate Record

Examinations General Test scores, three letters of recommendation, and a 500-word statement written by the applicant.

To attain a Ph.D. in the department of Spanish, one must complete 36 hours of course work beyond the Master of Arts degree with a minimum GPA of 3.0. All these classes are at the 600 level or above.

The student must also have a working knowledge of another language beyond English and Spanish, with a reading level equivalent to the third year of college study. There is also a Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination.

"My work represented the culmination of several years of intellectual pursuit," Habra said. "This project was an opportunity to consolidate everything I had learned about literature and theory."

"I was also very lucky to have met Vargas Llosa in person. This past year, I have attended several of his lectures and was granted an interview in order to discuss my thesis. Writing a doctoral dissertation on the work of a writer I greatly admire has been a considerable challenge as well as a rewarding experience."

"My biggest challenge has been to maintain, throughout the writing of my manuscript, a quality that would eventually translate into a book publication," she said.

With her dissertation completed, getting it published as a book is Habra's immediate goal.

"At this point, I'm still taking every day at a time," she said. "All the options are open. I'd like to teach, of course."