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Conference Celebrates 100th Birthday of UCSB Professor Luis Leal

To celebrate the 100th birthday of Luis Leal, a distinguished professor of Chicana and Chicano studies, the University of California, Santa Barbara will host a two-day conference featuring panel discussions, special remembrances, and the premiere screening of a film commissioned specifically for the event.

The conference will take place October 1 and 2 on the UCSB campus, and the public is invited to attend.

A member of the UCSB faculty since 1976, Leal is an internationally recognized scholar of Mexican, Chicano, and Latin American literature. Throughout his career he has held teaching positions at the University of Chicago, the University of Mississippi, Emory University, and the University of Illinois. His book, titled "A Brief History of the Mexican Short Story," is considered a landmark of modern literary scholarship.

The first panel discussion, which will be conducted in English, begins Monday, October 1, at 3:30 p.m. in UCSB's McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building. Moderated by Mario García, a professor of history and Chicana and Chicano studies at UCSB, it will feature three prominent scholars: Seymour Menton, Sandra Messinger Cypess, and Manuel Martín-Rodríguez. Menton, a professor emeritus in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Irvine, will present "Prologues and Epilogues: Luis Leal, Carlos Fuentes, and un servidor."

Cypess, chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Maryland, College Park, will discuss "Reading the Layered Universe of Tlatelolco with Don Luis Leal and José Emilio Pacheco," and Martín-Rodríguez, professor of literature at UC Merced, will speak on "Reading Gaspar de Villagrà (in the Seventeenth Century)."

The second panel discussion, which will be conducted in Spanish and moderated by Francisco Lomelí, a professor of Chicana and Chicano studies at UCSB, begins at 4:45 p.m., also in the McCune Conference Room. Participants include Miguel Méndez and Hernán Lara Zavala. Méndez, one of the leading writers in the field of Chicano literature, will discuss "Mis inicios en la literatura chicana y el encuentro con Don Luis Leal." Zavala, a writer and essayist, will speak on "Los mejores cuentos mexicanos de acuerdo con Don Luis Leal."

The conference continues Tuesday, October 2, with a reception beginning at 4 p.m. in UCSB's MultiCultural Center followed by informal discussions with Sara Poot Herrera, a professor of Spanish and Portuguese at UCSB; Victor Fuentes, also a professor of Spanish and Portuguese at UCSB; Mauricio Parra, a professor of Hispanic studies at Illinois Wesleyan University; and Mario García.

The screening of the film, "Luis Leal: A Journey of 100 Years/Luis Leal: Un Camino De 100 Años," begins at 6:15. The film was written, directed, and produced by Janette Garcia.

Leal, author of more than 45 books and 400 scholarly articles, remains a prolific researcher and writer. He has received numerous honors, including the Distinguished Scholarly Award, which was presented to him by the National Association for Chicano Studies in 1988 in recognition of his lifetime achievement. In 1992, he was awarded the Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor granted to foreign citizens by the Mexican government, and in 1997 he received the National Humanities Medal, which was presented to him at The White House by then President Bill Clinton.

In 1995, UCSB established the Luis Leal Endowed Chair, which he held until 1997. At that time, María Herrera-Sobek, a professor of Chicana and Chicano studies at UCSB, was named the first permanent holder of the endowed chair. She also serves as associate vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and academic policy.

"Professor Leal is a national treasure, one who inspires us all," says UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang. "At this century mark in his life, as we take stock of the enormity of his unceasing contribution to literature, culture, and education, we also stand in awe of his humility, his kindness, and his generosity of spirit. In addition to his prolific and life-long scholarly achievements, he has served as a caring mentor and role model to generations of students and faculty colleagues alike. His intellect and humanity have won the respect not only of scholars in his own field, but of people from all disciplines and all walks of life. We at UC Santa Barbara are honored and proud to have Don Luis as a 'sabio maestro' (wise elder) of our campus community."

Added David Marshall, executive dean of the College of Letters and Sciences: "We're privileged to have Professor Leal as an active participant in our academic community. His intellectual energy and productivity, even in retirement, are of great benefit to our campus."

Among the conference's many sponsors is the Mexican Consulate of Oxnard. UCSB sponsors include the Office of the Chancellor; Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor; Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Academic Policy; Office of Academic Preparation; Office of Equal Opportunity; Department of Spanish and Portuguese; Latin American and Iberian Studies Program; Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies; Center for Chicano Studies; Luis Leal Endowed Chair; and the MultiCultural Center.

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