

## Reflections on a Common Past: MIFLA and Sigma Delta Pi

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Over 100 years ago, on November 14, 1919, the University of California Berkeley's Ruth Helen Barnes, an undergraduate junior, hosted six classmates at her residence at 2545 Dwight Way to start what would become what is today the largest collegiate foreign language honor society in the U.S.: Sigma Delta Pi, *Sociedad Nacional Honoraria Hispánica*. That same November 14, Barnes was elected Sigma Delta Pi's inaugural president, yet 32 years later another pioneer would lead a new professional organization: Professor Beth Brady of Pikeville College (KY) was confirmed the first president of the then Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference (MIFLC) on September 29, 1951.<sup>2</sup> However, no one could anticipate that these two entities founded on opposite sides of the country, and with no real connections until the early 1970s, would today share the College of Charleston as the site of their respective headquarters; and even more coincidental is that, as initially led by women, MIFLA and Sigma Delta Pi would begin co-existing at the College of Charleston during the start of this institution's "Year of Women," which during the 2018–19 academic year commemorated the centennial of the first female

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<sup>1</sup> Del Mastro serves as the Secretary-Treasurer of MIFLA since 2018 and as the Executive Secretary-Treasurer/Director of Sigma Delta Pi since 1997.

<sup>2</sup> MIFLC was renamed the Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Association (MIFLA) in October 2018.

students admitted in the fall of 1918 to what was formerly an all-men's school.

But before coinciding at the College of Charleston, the Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Association (MIFLA) and Sigma Delta Pi had also shared the time of several academic leaders whose contributions helped promote and advance both organizations in a myriad of ways. First among those notable leaders was the late Dr. Gastón Fernández of Clemson University. In the fall of 1972, he founded his institution's Iota Phi Chapter of Sigma Delta Pi and subsequently served as the chapter's adviser for several years. In 1973, Fernández became MIFLC's vice-president, and then president in 1974 when Clemson hosted the 24<sup>th</sup> annual conference. He again served as MIFLC vice-president in 1979, and then as president in 1980, when Clemson hosted the 30<sup>th</sup> annual MIFLC meeting. A year later in 1981, he was elected Sigma Delta Pi's vice-president of the southeast and served two full terms through 1986. Culminating his work for MIFLC, Fernández served over 20 years as the organization's secretary-treasurer until he declined a nomination for reappointment in 2009 at MIFLC's 59<sup>th</sup> annual business meeting at Furman University.

Fernández's successor, Dr. Justo C. Ulloa of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), had already led MIFLC during a period of over 30 years before his appointment to the secretariat in 2009. In 1975, Ulloa served his first term as MIFLC vice-president, and then repeated in 1982, 1991, 1997, and 2006. He also was MIFLC's president in 1976, 1983, 1992, 1998, and 2007 for the 26<sup>th</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup>, and 57<sup>th</sup> annual MIFLC events respectively, which earned Ulloa the distinction of serving more presidential and vice-presidential terms than anyone in the history of the organization. Today Ulloa continues to serve MIFLA as Associate Editor of its journal, *MIFLC Review*. In addition to this impressive record, Ulloa also managed to impact Sigma Delta Pi. Like Gastón Fernández, Ulloa founded a chapter of the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society at his institution in 1977 and subsequently served several years as Chapter Lambda Psi's founding adviser. Again mirroring Fernández, Ulloa was elected Sigma Delta Pi's vice-president of the southeast and completed one term from 1986-89. Ulloa's loyalty to both organizations also drove his work to help establish scholarships for members of Sigma Delta Pi as well as MIFLA through the Spanish-language institute Estudio Internacional Sampere.

Justo C. Ulloa's spouse and long-time professional collaborator, Dr. Leonor A. Ulloa of Radford University, also distinguished herself as a proactive agent for MIFLC's and Sigma Delta Pi's missions. Like Fernández and her husband, Dr. Leonor A. Ulloa founded a chapter of the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society in 1980 at her home institution, and continued serving as Chapter Xi Iota's faculty adviser for 26 consecutive years until her retirement from Radford in December 2006. During her time as chapter adviser, she also managed to lead MIFLC: she served as vice-president in 1989, 1994, and 1999, in addition to three years as president in 1990, 1995, and 2000, when she hosted the 40<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup>, and 50<sup>th</sup> annual MIFLC events at her university. It was during Dr. Ulloa's presidency in 1990 that she founded MIFLC's scholarly journal, *MIFLC Review*, which she directed as founding editor until passing the torch some 26 years later to the journal's current editor, Dr. Jeremy Cass of Furman University.

Leonor Ulloa's contributions to MIFLC, however, were not limited to her officer positions: in 1993 she successfully proposed the adoption of MIFLA's current logo, which she designed. She then served from 2005–07 on an ad hoc MIFLC Constitution and Bylaws Committee with Clemson University's Gastón Fernández and Wake Forest University's Stanley Whitley. This committee's efforts resulted in substantial revisions to the organization's governing documents that were eventually approved in two stages, in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

The interesting historical trend of MIFLC leaders founding chapters of Sigma Delta Pi continued with Dr. R. Terry Mount of the University of North Carolina-Wilmington (UNCW). In 1988, along with his wife Dr. Joann McFerran Mount, Terry co-founded the Rho Lambda Chapter of the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society at his home institution, and similar to Dr. Leonor Ulloa, he continued as chapter adviser for 26 consecutive years until retiring as a UNCW faculty member in 2014. While leading his local chapter of Sigma Delta Pi, Dr. R. Terry Mount also led MIFLC as vice-president in 1995 and 2000 and as president in 1996 and 2001, when UNCW hosted the 46<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> annual conferences. In addition, he served a term as Sigma Delta Pi's vice-president of the southeast for a full term from 1989–92.

Shared leadership in Sigma Delta Pi and MIFLA also emerged with students: Jeremy L. Cass, a Ph.D. student at the University of Kentucky (UKY) in the early 2000s, led his Epsilon Upsilon Chapter of Sigma Delta Pi as president and was consequently granted Sigma Delta Pi's national

Gabriela Mistral Award in 2003 for his exemplary contributions at the local level. Such professional initiative, and the experience he gained with co-organizing the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference during his time at UKY, afforded Cass the opportunity a decade later, in 2013, to become vice-president of MIFLC and then president in 2014, when Furman University hosted the 64<sup>th</sup> annual conference. Dr. Cass's impressive contributions to MIFLC subsequently earned him an appointment in 2016 as Dr. Leonor Ulloa's successor as editor of the *MIFLC Review*.

Despite these impressive examples, this brief historical summary undoubtedly overlooks the roles of other dedicated colleagues whose work continues to benefit both MIFLA and Sigma Delta Pi today in various ways. However, and in light of the centennial celebration of the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society in 2019, the common past of MIFLA and Sigma Delta Pi as reflected in the exemplary work of such prominent figures as Gastón Fernández of Clemson University, Justo C. Ulloa of Virginia Tech University, Leonor A. Ulloa of Radford University, R. Terry Mount of the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, and Jeremy Cass of Furman University, underscores the joint mission that these two accomplished professional organizations share and will continue to foster in the decades ahead.

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