January 1, 2019

Position: Director, Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida, #40783

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to submit my application for your consideration for the position of Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. I am enthusiastic about the possibilities presented by this extraordinary opportunity to build on the many successes of the Center. I have long admired the Center for Latin American Studies and the University of Florida for its leadership role in Latin American Studies and significant research collection.

I believe my skills and experience are an excellent match for the interdisciplinary approach, dynamic mission and shared governance of the Center. I have reviewed the candidate specifications and I am confident that my qualifications correspond to the professional characteristics, scholarly achievements, managerial experience, and personal qualities you are seeking.

I am currently Professor and Chair of Anthropology at Lehman College and a member of the Doctoral Faculty at the CUNY Graduate Center. I am also the founding director of the Lehman Center for Human Rights & Peace Studies. I am a socio-cultural anthropologist by training and have a doctorate in Anthropology from Stanford University where I also completed coursework in International Human Rights Law and Immigration Law at Stanford Law School. I hold a Certificate in International Human Rights Law from the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights in San Jose, Costa Rica. I am a public scholar and an internationally-recognized expert on the Guatemalan genocide and feminicide in contemporary Guatemala. I have published extensively and am frequently interviewed by media outlets in the US and abroad – most recently on National Public Radio’s All Things Considered. I have also published op-eds in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and other media outlets. In November, the New York Times published my op-ed “Criminals? Hardly. That’s Who the Caravan Flees.”

I have conducted field research in Guatemala since 1990 and in Colombia since 2000. I have spent over 50 months living, working, and researching in Guatemala. My most recent research trip to Guatemala was in 2010 when I was conducting research on feminicide. In April of 2015, I was in Cartagena for a special session of the Inter-American Court to document the hearing of a Guatemalan feminicide case I have been working on since 2007. I am currently completing the book manuscript on this project - Bittersweet Justice: Feminicide, Impunity and Courts of Last Resort. During the summers of 2016 and 2017, I was a Visiting Professor/US Fulbright Scholar at the Universidad Libre Law School in Bogota, Colombia where I assisted in the development of transitional justice curriculum, gave lectures on feminicide, gender violence, gang violence, social cleansing, the role of the state in post-conflict citizen security, and held workshops on anthropological methods for documenting human rights violations and genocide.
My research on gender violence, feminicide, and the structures of violence that perpetuate gender violence and impunity is multidisciplinary integrating ethnography, testimony, archival research and forensic investigation. The Pan-American Health Organization classifies more than 10 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants as an epidemic and public health crisis. In 2017, the homicide rate in Guatemala was 26 per 100,000 and the rate was 101 per 100,000 in Guatemala City. The homicide rates are expected to rise this year and 97 percent of the homicides go unpunished. This combination of impunity with gender-based discrimination grounded in patriarchy are among the factors that nurture a culture of violence in which men, whether spouses, relatives or security forces, believe that women are their property to do with what they wish. It is also a driving factor of the migration of women and children from Central America to the United States.

In *Bittersweet Justice*, I explore the costs of these murders for individuals, families and Guatemalan society by exploring the case of Claudina Isabel and others within the wider context of gender violence in its multiple forms, including the killing of women in Guatemala. Claudina Isabel’s murder and the efforts of her father to bring her murderer(s) to justice provide a lens not only into the suffering and loss of an affected family, but also offer an up-close appraisal of the inner-workings of the Guatemalan criminal justice system and its role in the maintenance of inequality, patriarchy, power and impunity.


My areas of scholarship include human rights, genocide, feminicide, gender violence, forensic anthropology, post-conflict violence, corruption, organized crime and drug trafficking, displacement, migration, child soldiers, humanitarian aid, conflict resolution, reconciliation, truth commissions and community healing, gender-inclusive development, theories of violence and terror, indigenous rights, Maya nationalism and Afro-Colombian identity within the framework of globalization and transitional justice. My research has been supported by the International Women's Program of the Open Society Institute New York, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, Soros Foundation Guatemala, the United States Institute for Peace, Fulbright, Rockefeller, Mellon, Fulbright-Hays, Fulbright Research and Teaching, and MacArthur Consortium fellowships as well as a post-doctoral Bunting Peace Fellowship at Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies.

Guatemala: Violencia Sexual y Genocidio will be published in Guatemala in 2019. I have published four other books Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala (Palgrave Macmillan 2003); Violencia y Genocidio en Guatemala (FyG Editores 2003, 2008); Guatemala: Del Genocidio al Feminicidio (FyG Editores 2008); and La Masacre de Panzós: Tierra, Etnicidad y Violencia en Guatemala (FyG Editores 2009) as well as more than 40 peer-reviewed chapters and articles. I also co-authored a book about massacres in the early 1980s with the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) that summarizes the research we undertook for the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH—the Guatemalan Truth Commission) which also became part of the final CEH report, Memoria del Silencio (1999). I am co-editor (with Asale Angel Ajani) of Engaged Observer: Activism, Advocacy and Anthropology (Rutgers 2006) and most recently co-editor (with Katerina Stefatos and Cecilia Salvi) of Gender Violence in Peace and War: States of Complicity (2016, Rutgers University).

I have served as a pro bono expert to the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office and the Guatemalan Prosecutor’s Office on high impact human rights cases. I regularly provide expert testimony on conjugal slavery, gender violence, gangs, organized crime and impunity in Guatemala for asylum cases in the United States and have worked closely with the Innovation Law Lab providing pro bono representation to Central Americans detained at the border. In August of 2012, I had the honor of providing invited expert testimony on command responsibility in the Guatemalan genocide at the Spanish National Court for the international genocide case against the Guatemalan generals.

In Guatemala in 2010, my forensic colleagues joined me in presenting our research on feminicide at FLACSO and more than 100 people attended the evening presentation. I also presented my book, La Masacre de Panzós, in Panzós on the 32nd anniversary of the massacre at the invitation of local teachers. Some 600 people attended the presentation. Both events were made available via live feed on UStream. I have provided an invited briefing on “Human Rights and Rule of Law in Maya Communities” to the US ambassador to Guatemala and an invited presentation on “Child Soldiers, Peace Communities and Access to Justice in Colombia” to the United Nations Development Program in New York, and co-authored an expert report on a feminicide case to the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. As an anthropologist, I am particularly proud to have been able to bring the strengths of anthropological research to these critical arenas of legal, social and public policy. My work on the Guatemalan genocide has been featured in American Anthropologist in 2013 (Vol. 115, No. 4, pp. 658–666) and my work as a public anthropologist was highlighted in American Anthropologist in 2014 (Vol. 116, No. 2, pp. 379–389).

My scholarship is grounded in more than a decade of professional non-profit experience working on refugee and public policy health issues. Prior to graduate school, I served as the media relations representative for the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and also founding director of a national refugee legal project providing legal services to Central American asylum seekers. Thus, I have experience in organizational development, staff supervision, community collaboration, strategic media planning, budget oversight and fundraising. These experiences have greatly assisted me in local and international outreach beyond the walls of academia and helped shape the ways I engage in public policy issues as an anthropologist. I also maintain alumni relations with Stanford University as an admissions volunteer and was recently elected to chair the fundraising committee and serve on the board of the Harvard Alumni Association’s Global Women’s Empowerment.
This professional experience outside academia has also helped me to develop administrative and budget management expertise as well as community organizing and outreach skills. I have served as a consultant on women’s rights, indigenous rights, health rights, development projects, organizational development, fundraising and media relations to international foundations and United Nations agencies as well as with international and national nongovernmental organizations. In addition to UN entities and US NGOs, I have strong connections with nongovernmental organizations and universities in Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Colombia, Canada, Ecuador, South Africa, Spain, the UK, Austria, Japan, South Korea, Norway, England, France, and Germany, among others. I introduce my students and colleagues into these networks so that they may benefit from my contacts and also facilitate exchange by bringing international scholars and practitioners to the US.

My teaching and research link the local with the global and offer opportunities for students and colleagues to participate in collaborative community projects that make a meaningful difference in the life of the community. I would estimate that in the past five years: I have presented my work to more than 4,000 people in more than 50 venues in the United States, Mexico, England, Canada, Germany, France, Colombia and Spain; I have published opinion editorials in the New York Times, El Faro (El Salvador), Plaza Pública (Guatemala), Agencia EFE (Spain), and Billmoyers.com; and, I have also given some 40 interviews to radio, TV and print media in the United States, Guatemala, El Salvador, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain – including the New York Times, PBS Evening News Hour and CNN. In the Spring of 2019, I will give an invited seminar on “Feminicide and Impunity in Guatemala,” sponsored by the Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. I will also be giving an invited talk at Yale Law School’s Schell Center for International Human Rights this spring.

As founding director of the Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Lehman College, I have built an interdisciplinary center that engages faculty, staff and students in Center projects on human rights including curriculum development, student and faculty research, international conferences, and writing seminars as well as speaker and film series. The work of the Center reaches beyond Lehman College and includes the Bronx community and greater CUNY community, as well as colleagues and institutions in other parts of the world. We have hosted visiting scholars from South Africa and Spain as well as colleagues from US institutions. I have worked to co-sponsor and collaborate with colleagues at other CUNY colleges, including City College of New York, Brooklyn College, Queens College and Queensborough College. I have also developed collaborative relationships with other centers at Columbia University, New York University, the University of Southern California, Grinnell College, Rutgers University, Florida Gulf Coast University, and the Arizona State University as well as the BMW Foundation and Auschwitz Institute. I also established Lehman’s minor in Human Rights and Peace Studies.

Since our inaugural conference at Lehman in 2011, I have organized 7 full day annual conferences (each with 8 to 15 speakers), hosted more than a dozen individual presenters in speaker series, hosted two film series (including conversations with the filmmakers), organized an ongoing writers’ workshop, and co-hosted numerous events at Lehman, at other CUNY schools, and with different universities. This past fall, I organized an international conference Atrocity Prevention in the Americas: Gender Violence, Citizen Security and the Role of the Police made possible by generous support from our co-sponsor the
Auschwitz Institute. Our confirmed international speakers included public prosecutors, police and human rights advocates, activists and scholars, including: Marlon Weichert (Brazil); Maria Marvis Jiron (Nicaragua); General Pamela Olivares (Chile); Coronel Luis Ernesto Garcia Hernandez (Colombia); Ximena Antillon (Mexico); Ana Maria Mendez (Guatemala).

As Anthropology Chair and Director of the Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Lehman College, I am responsible for a budget of $995,461 to cover nine full time faculty and 19 adjunct salaries and benefits as well as $32,000 for equipment, instructional materials, department initiatives, travel, and temporary staff services. I supervise the assessment of grant development, teaching, research, and creative/professional activities of internationally renowned scholars of genetics, paleoanthropology, archaeology and cultural anthropology. As department chair, I have sought to represent the individual and collective interests of my faculty and students as well as strengthen shared governance at all levels. Under my leadership, we have recently added two new lines for cultural and forensic anthropology and successfully completed the searches which will enhance the diversity of the department faculty. Diversity of culture within the university experience brings diversity of thought to higher education and the greater society. I believe success in diversity must be solidified as we enhance its depth and breadth through faculty recruitment and retention in higher education.

As a member of the Lehman College Faculty Personnel and Budget Committee, I have worked to make the college budget process more transparent which resulted in a restructuring of the ways in which academic departments access funds. I serve on the Natural and Social Sciences (NSS) Executive Committee working on the NSS section of the Lehman Report for reaccreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. I have also participated in campus-wide prioritization assessments, curriculum development, and served on interdepartmental search committees. I have also served as the elected chair of the American Anthropological Association’s Committee for Human Rights and currently serve as an elected member of the Latin American Studies Association’s Human Rights Subcommittee of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Human Rights. I am also an appointed member of the 2019 LASA/Oxfam America Martin Diskin Memorial Lectureship Selection Committee.

I am committed to student success. My teaching, like my research, is interdisciplinary; it also bridges quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and is grounded in the ethics of human rights. I believe I would make a very positive contribution to UF’s Center for Latin American Studies. Innovation, leadership, and vision are demonstrated in both my career and character. I am passionate about social justice and critical community-based learning and research – it is what I do. My positive outlook, ability to collaborate with and manage people, my problem solving, and decision-making skills have allowed me to shape new initiatives at Lehman and beyond. I believe in the theory and practice of human rights and social justice. I do my best to make this evident in my work each day. It would be my honor to serve as Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information. I can most easily be reached by cell at 347-756-1182 or vdlsanford@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Victoria Sanford

Victoria Sanford, PhD
Professor & Chair, Department of Anthropology, Lehman College, City University of New York
Director, Lehman College Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies
Doctoral Faculty, Department of Anthropology, CUNY Graduate Center