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## Public policy faculty join Central American presidents for forum

**By Elizabeth Jenkins**

Several Harris School faculty members traveled to El Salvador last month to speak at a forum of Central American presidents focusing on security, democracy and trade.

Co-sponsored by the Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies and Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social, a local non-partisan think tank, the meeting brought together presidents Antonio Saca of El Salvador, Manuel Zelaya of Honduras and Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, as well as officials and business leaders from throughout Central America.

Faculty members James Heckman, William Howell, Robert LaLonde and Jens Ludwig provided insight into the issues of human capital, presidential powers during war, immigration and the economics of crime, respectively. The need for investment in education came up during many of the faculty presentations.

“We at the Harris School are honored to have collaborated with FUSADES to help provide Central American leaders with an external non-partisan perspective,” said Susan Mayer, Dean of the Harris School. “Besides informing these leaders as to what has worked—and not worked—in the States, we also hope to demonstrate the important role research plays in U.S. policy-making.”

Heckman, the Henry Shultz Distinguished Service Professor in Economics, the Harris School of Public Policy Studies and the College, appeared via teleconference to discuss modern Western welfare states. He addressed the need for drastic reforms and incentives, including better education, to promote worker mobility and to deter people from relying on welfare.

Ortega and Heckman debated issues of how to promote well-being and social welfare in Central America. Both Ortega and Zelaya are interested in having similar forums held in their countries.

Ludwig, Professor of Social Service, Law and Public Policy in the School of Social Service Administration and an affiliate professor in the Harris School, presented on crime and its effect on society: “In addition to the terrible human toll, the costs of crime include adverse effects on economic development.”

He pointed to the need to invest in better technology, particularly data systems and information technology, and the the possibilities of

combining positive incentives—such as early education opportunities and better quality schools for underprivileged children—with the threat of punishment for crimes. He also discussed the role the private sector can play, along with government, in fighting crime.

LaLonde, Professor in the Harris School of Public Policy Studies, who researches the economic effects of immigration on developed countries, talked about the close link between immigration policy, human capital investment and government regulation of labor markets. He called for “increased investments in schooling, including English language education” to improve Central America's future economic growth. “Such opportunities will reduce the considerable incentives for workers to emigrate from this region,” he concluded.

Howell, Associate Professor in the Harris School of Public Policy Studies, who focuses on American political institutions, discussed presidential powers during war. He talked about the president's use of unilateral power to influence policy—both in the United States and Latin America—and then talked about how Congress tries to limit these powers.

“Depending on who we elect to office and who we give the authority to check executive power, we establish the conditions under which presidents can freely wage war abroad or under which they must constantly justify their actions before an attentive, and sometimes hostile, adjoining branch of government,” he concluded.

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