

# ALUMNI UPDATE

**Alicia Juarrero received all her degrees in philosophy from UM: A.B. 1969, M.A. 1972, Ph.D. 1978. Among her many other honors, she was selected as one of four *U.S. Professors of the Year* by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 2002, and was presented the *Edward T. Foote Alumnus of Distinction Award* by UM's Alumni Association in 2003.**



I always assumed I'd be a political science major (as a child of Cuban political exiles, politics was all anyone discussed at the dinner table!). But when I took Dr. Werner's philosophy of religion course at UM, philosophy grabbed me and didn't let go. Declaring a philosophy major was also helped by UM's regulation that allowed students to substitute symbolic logic for a math requirement, which I was keen to do (even though I've regretted not taking more math ever since)!

The Honors courses I took were among the high points of my years at UM. Dr. John Hall, who had been an underwater archeologist, enthralled students with his accounts of the way he had retraced Odysseus's itinerary; Dr. Douglas Browning's philosophy course on Philosophical Anthropology was also legendary... so many of my fellow students really majored in "Browning," not philosophy! It was fabulous teachers such as these, as well as Dr. Ramon Lemos's incredibly organized delivered lectures (decades

later, I still use the notes from his classes!), that taught me the difference a good teacher can make in the lives of his/her students.

I really never thought of becoming "a philosopher" (what conceit!). I just learned these ideas, but the Philosophy Department generously offered me a graduate fellowship and so, quite frankly, if I could have, I would have just taken courses forever. After completing the requirements for the doctorate, however, I moved to Berkeley, California, where I was fortunate to audit courses by Searle (whom I've since come to know as a colleague on the Council of the National Endowment for the Humanities), Grice, Dreyfus, and others. To make ends meet I taught as an adjunct at San Francisco State University and the (Community) College of Alameda in nearby Oakland.

Among the courses I taught at SF State was a junior level course on Latin American Philosophy. It was an interesting experience. First, to my surprise I learned that virtually none of the well-known names (such as Vasconcelos) had been translated into English, and Chicano students did not read Spanish. Then, in an uncomfortable confrontation on the first day of class, I discovered that the Chicano student group was up in arms over the fact that the Philosophy Department had hired a Cuban-American (who, they presumed, would be far to the right of Attila the Hun) to teach that course. "Why are you teaching these bourgeois authors?" My answer, "Because that's what's translated into English and you guys don't read Spanish!" When the student leaders realized that I intended to teach, not preach, we became quite friendly, and even shared a laugh over the appearance of the "Blue Meanies" (the TAC – or tactical -- squad in full riot gear) outside the classroom. The early 1970's does seem now like a different millennium!

However, I was glad to get back to the East Coast, to the Washington D.C. area, in 1975. Professionally, though, the combination of the end of the Vietnam war, the elimination of the draft, and the

consequent precipitous decline in enrollment, meant that colleges and universities nationwide were not only not hiring at all; they were cutting back on the positions that had not been awarded tenure. I was very lucky to find a position at Prince George's Community College in the Maryland suburbs of D.C., where I have had a very full and enriching quarter century, in a setting that offers the opportunity to make a real difference in someone's life. At the same time, the numerous colleges and universities in the DC area allowed me to continue to stay current in philosophy. I audited lectures on medieval philosophy at Catholic University, Philosophy of Science at the University of Maryland, and even taught as an adjunct at both of these institutions. In 1992 I was appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate to serve on the National Council on the Humanities, the advisory board to the NEH, where I served for 8 years, most of the time as Chair of the Committee overseeing the \$32 million distributed annually to state humanities councils.

After publishing a dozen or so articles in respected journals, friends and colleagues kept insisting I had to put it together in a book. *Dynamics in Action* (MIT Press) appeared in 1999 to very positive reviews, with the paperback edition less than three years later. And as a very positive unintended consequence of its publication, I was invited to present my work – which is on the way *open* systems far from equilibrium can ratchet up and evolve, whereas *closed* systems devolve towards stasis – at the Instituto de Filosofia in Havana.

What next? Who knows?! Wherever my philosophical journal takes me, I will always be glad that it began at UM!

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## ALUMNI UPDATE FORM

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