

CAROLYN CÁRDENAS, MAKING IT HERS

At Utah State University, Carolyn Cárdenas has multiple titles. She's a professor of painting and drawing in the Department of Art and also serves as department head. She's an active lecturer, and her work has been exhibited in the Midwest and South at venues that include Carnegie Mellon, Purdue and Texas Women's University.

Recently, she added the title "*student*" and all that goes along with that — sharing a dorm room, late-night talk sessions, study, workshops and more. But that title of "*student*" also includes a prestigious pedigree, since she was attending an institute sponsored by the Higher Education Resource Service — HERS — in Denver, Colo.

HERS is a national leadership development program for women in higher education administration. The organization sponsors professional development activities designed to improve the professional capacity and status of women in higher education.

The Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration, co-sponsored by HERS and Bryn Mawr College, was first held in 1976. Since then, more than 2,000 women administrators from the United States, Canada, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, the Virgin Islands, Guam, Bermuda, Sweden, Wales, Iran, Singapore and the Netherlands have attended. Denver's sessions began in 2007, making Cárdenas a member of the second class.

It is an honor to attend any of the three HERS institutes held across the country, and participants must be nominated — in Cárdenas's case by then-Dean Gary Kiger and Executive Vice President and

Provost Raymond T. Coward. She completed an application essay that was reviewed and screened, and final selections were made by a distinguished committee of higher education leaders.

Coward said he thought Cárdenas was an ideal candidate for the HERS Institute.

"Dr. Cárdenas, a painter herself, has brought to her administrative role at USU valuable experience and perspective on art as an academic discipline," he said. "She has also demonstrated her interest and skill in philanthropic activities, and she has proven her ability to function as a solid academic leader while also being a colleague and valued team player to her fellow department heads and upper administration."

The 2008 HERS Denver Institute began with a six-day immersion program Aug. 3-8. Two-day seminars continued into the fall months in September, October and November.



USU Department of Art Head Carolyn Cárdenas attended the prestigious HERS Institute this summer in Denver, Colo. While attending the institute — a national leadership development program for women in higher education administration leadership — her roommates were a provost and a dean.

Once on campus in Denver, Cárdenas checked into the residence hall, much like students studying across the country. In her case, her roommates were a provost and a dean.

“The women were my ‘suite mates,’ and we shared a bathroom,” Cárdenas said. “When you are living with these women for a week, it allows barriers to be broken and a deeper conversation to occur. You can really get right to it and allow for fierce conversations.”

Thirty-nine women were selected for the Denver sessions, and while all are associated with institutions of higher education, they came from a variety of disciplines and areas. There were deans, provosts, information technology professionals, advisors, professors, department heads, police chiefs and more. Cárdenas met a nun who worked in information technology. The two women were able to learn collaboratively, weaving technology and art together.

“This was an exquisite experience with women committed to higher education,” Cárdenas said. “The capability of the women there was astounding.”

The students at the HERS Institute follow a rigorous curriculum. Sessions are divided into four areas, including *Strategic Vision*, *Resource Management*, *Organizational Skills* and *Institutional Impact*.

The faculty for the institute included a who’s who sampling of top women administrators from across the country representing higher education and the public sector.

Cárdenas said there were lectures, examples and then exercises to put information into practice.

The goal of the institute is to offer an intensive, residential professional development experience for women in mid- and senior-level positions in higher education administration. Those attending learn from senior women leaders and higher education scholars. The curriculum prepares the participants for institutional leadership roles with knowledge, skills and perspectives for achieving institutional priorities, while maximizing institutional resources.

“This was a most fascinating experience,” Cárdenas said. “There were experiences woven into the fabric of teaching exercises that created an environment bigger than the sum of the parts. The leadership training was extremely valuable, but the opportunity to network with other women in higher education was equally important.”

Creating this network with women across the country was a highlight. The conference also advances diversity, Cárdenas said.

“Learning and working with other women in higher education is important,” she said. “It brings together women from across the country with different backgrounds, positions and experiences to help each other. This diversity helps all of us become better leaders.”

At USU, Provost Coward is confident in Cárdenas’s potential.

“During her short tenure at USU, Dr. Cárdenas has already displayed significant leadership and vision and has demonstrated a natural ability to form working relationships with a wide range of individuals and personalities,” he said. “She has also exhibited unusual skill at aligning her efforts with the mission and values of a major land-grant and space-grant research university. She has quickly emerged as an academic leader with substantial promise.”

This is the second year in a row that a female administrator from USU has been sponsored by the university to participate in this extraordinary learning experience, Coward said. Last year, Michelle Larson, assistant provost, attended the HERS institute.

Cárdenas spoke highly of her time at the institute.

“Being a HERS graduate rings all across the country,” she said. “It was an honor to be chosen.”

Contact: Provost’s office (435) 797-1166, Carolyn Cárdenas (435) 797-3460

Writer: Patrick Williams (435) 797-1354
patrick.williams@usu.edu
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