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Hannah Dhue
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Students Receive Inaugural Hispanic Studies Scholarship

March 26, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Two Illinois Wesleyan students, Thalia Novoa '16 Hispanic Studies major of Marquette Heights, Ill. and Huyen Nguyen '17 international business major of Arlington Heights, Ill., are the first winners selected by the Hispanic Studies Department for its inaugural Luis Leal Endowed Scholarship. This is a competitive, two-part award given to qualified students who carry out Hispanic Studies research while enrolled in an IWU-affiliated program off-campus.

Novoa, who will receive \$1,000 for her study abroad research in Ecuador in the fall of 2014, said, "I chose this program because Ecuador is multicultural and multilingual. I plan to do my research on how the geography of the indigenous affects their self-esteem and their education. My goal is to start a movement so that every minority has the same opportunities regardless of where they live."

Nguyen plans to improve her Spanish skills both culturally and linguistically while participating in the IWU Spain program in the spring of 2015. For her research endeavors, she will receive \$250, and will document and share her experiences with the campus community.

"As an international business major, I want to hopefully work for an international corporation based in an Hispanic country," said Nguyen.

According to the Hispanic Studies Department webpage, the scholarship is named for Dr. Leal because "throughout his life he realized his own individual intellectual potential and fostered that goal in others by living and teaching within a framework of social justice, global citizenship and respect for diverse communities, values that both the Department of Hispanic Studies and IWU carry in their mission statements."

A native of Mexico, Leal was a very prominent critic of Mexican, Chicano and Latin American literature. He was grateful for the institutional support he received to pursue higher education in the United States. He has been credited as one of the first critics to teach the works of Latin American and Chicano writers as part of the Spanish curriculum, and for this Leal was given the Distinguished Scholarly Award from the National Association of Chicano Studies.

For his service to his community and academic achievements, Leal was awarded the United States National Humanities Medal. He also received the highest honor the Mexican government awards foreign citizens – the Aztec Eagle.

For additional information regarding the scholarship, contact Sherry Wallace, director for news and media relations at (309) 556-3792, or see other [undergraduate research scholarship opportunities](#) at Illinois Wesleyan.

Contact: Hannah Dhue, '15, (309) 556-3181, univcomm@iwu.edu