

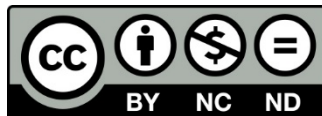
Special Note

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A Shared Century of Leadership
and Collaboration**

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Special Note

Sigma Delta Pi and the AATSP: A Shared Century of Leadership and Collaboration



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The AATSP has concluded its impressive centennial celebration in 2018 while Sigma Delta Pi, the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society, begins its own in 2019. The juncture of these commemorations provides a unique opportunity not only to reflect on the growth and success of both organizations and the many individuals responsible for such progress, but also to highlight the shared leadership, collaboration and mutual support over the past century.

With its founding on December 29, 1917 in New York City, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish (AATS) for the first and only time in its history named co-presidents for 1918: Juan C. Cebrián, Archer M. Huntington and Lawrence A. Wilkins. Cebrián and Huntington would later be named Honorary Presidents of Sigma Delta Pi in 1931 and 1935 respectively and would thereby start a long history of accomplished academic leaders who would dedicate their time to supporting the missions of both organizations in substantial ways.

Another accomplished academic, John D. Fitz-Gerald, was AATS president in 1921 and 1922 while a faculty member at the University of Illinois, and he was later named one of Sigma Delta Pi's first three honorary presidents in 1931 after he had joined the University of Arizona. Fitz-Gerald served the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society in many capacities to include close adviser of the first national president, Leavitt O. Wright, and chair of the Committee on Constitution in 1938 that drafted Sigma Delta Pi's first national constitution that was ultimately approved and adopted during the Society's first triennial convention held in conjunction with the joint AATS-MLA conference in New York City on December 31 of that same year. This date marks the initial joint meeting of Sigma Delta Pi and the AATS, and the first of many subsequent collaborations to present.

A decade later in 1948, and four years after the AATS was renamed the AATSP, the University of Oregon's Dr. Leavitt O. Wright became AATSP president after already completing a successful six-year term as Sigma Delta Pi's first national president from 1931–37. Wright is considered instrumental with nationalizing Sigma Delta Pi and for rescuing the Society from near collapse when local leadership in California struggled with managing the organization's rapid growth.

Sigma Delta Pi's fourth national president from 1949–59, Dr. Carl A. Tyre of New Mexico State University was the only person to serve simultaneously as national president of both organizations when he was AATSP president in 1957. Tyre was also responsible for founding two different chapters of the AATSP.

Also in 1957, the University of Connecticut's Robert G. Mead, Jr. began his eight-year run as Editor of *Hispania*, and immediately upon concluding his term in 1965 he became AATSP president; then in 1986 he was appointed honorary president of Sigma Delta Pi.

Further cementing the bonds between these organizations was the decision rendered at the AATSP's 50th anniversary meeting in San Antonio, Texas on August 28–30, 1968, when the AATSP Executive Committee voted “to recommend that the AATSP officially recognize Sigma Delta Pi as an instrument for encouraging the study of Spanish in colleges and universities, and that the AATSP list in its official program the activities of the society at meetings held jointly with the association.”

Also historically noteworthy was the Sigma Delta Pi presidency of the University of Arizona's Anita Dolores Brown, the first national female president from 1969–71, and later president of the AATSP in 1979.

Shared leadership was not restricted to presidents, however, as Mississippi State University's James Chatham was Executive Director of the AATSP in the 1980s, and his outstanding service to Sigma Delta Pi earned him admission in 1989 into the Order of Don Quijote, one of the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society's highest honors; ten years later he was further recognized as an honorary president of Sigma Delta Pi.

Another impressive organizational leader was the University of Southwestern Louisiana's Dr. Richard E. Chandler, the longest continuously serving president in the history of Sigma Delta Pi, who formalized in October 1984 what had been a regular practice since 1938: Sigma Delta Pi's holding its triennial convention in conjunction with the annual conference of the AATSP.¹ Chandler's verbal commitment to this arrangement on behalf of Sigma Delta Pi was a clear sign of the importance that the National Collegiate Hispanic Society placed on its relationship with the AATSP.

And, in turn, the AATSP demonstrated its own esteem for Sigma Delta Pi. In 1986, for example, the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society held its triennial convention at the AATSP's annual conference in Madrid, Spain at the Hotel Eurobuilding, where during the AATSP awards banquet on August 12 at 9:00pm, AATSP president Nancy A. Humbach presented a check for \$500 to Richard E. Chandler as a gesture of support for Sigma Delta Pi's promotion of Hispanic Studies in the United States.

Twenty four years later at Sigma Delta Pi's triennial convention in 2010 in Guadalajara, Mexico during the AATSP's annual meeting, Domnita Dumitrescu (Emerita, California State University–Los Angeles), who, at the time, was a member of the AATSP's Executive Council, a long-standing Sigma Delta Pi chapter adviser, Sigma Delta Pi's regional vice-president of the west, and newly appointed Sigma Delta Pi honorary president, asked national leadership to consider more meaningful collaboration between these two organizations beyond the triennial joint-meetings. Dumitrescu's point resonated with Sigma Delta Pi's Executive Committee, and by 2011 the AATSP and the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society agreed to establish and co-sponsor the annual Mario Vargas Llosa student award, a recognition that has continued annually with great success. It was also Dr. Dumitrescu's push that ultimately led to additional joint projects with the AATSP's Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica in 2017 to further benefit and recognize chapters and members of both organizations.²

Today Sigma Delta Pi and the AATSP still enjoy shared leadership with the Editor of *Hispania*, Dr. Benjamin Fraser, serving the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society in 2018 as a member of the Orden de Don Quijote Selection Committee—inducted himself in this prestigious Order at the AATSP conference in Chicago on July 6, 2017—and AATSP Executive Director Sheri Spaine Long as a member of Sigma Delta Pi's exclusive Order of the Discoverers—inducted at the AATSP conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico on July 7, 2012.³

As Sigma Delta Pi embarks on its own centennial celebration in 2019, of equal importance is remembering the long history of the AATSP's strong and fruitful relationship with the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society, and the many academic leaders over the past 100 years who helped advance both organizations and augment collaborative efforts toward similar goals.

With another century before us, Sigma Delta Pi and the AATSP will continue to strengthen our partnership while working together to serve our members and bolster the discipline.

Todos a una.

Spanías Didagéi Proágomen.

NOTES

¹The University of Southwestern Louisiana was renamed the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1999.

²Noted here are select historical connections between Sigma Delta Pi and the AATSP over the last 100 years, although a more comprehensive summary will be available in my forthcoming book *Sigma Delta Pi: Rediscovering a Century, 1919–2019* to be published in 2020 by Juan de la Cuesta Hispanic Monographs.

³The Order of the Discoverers was renamed Order of José Martí in 2018.

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Mark P. Del Mastro (PhD, University of Virginia) is currently Professor and Chair of Hispanic Studies at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He is also founding director of the *South Carolina Spanish Teacher of the Year Program*; Executive Director of Sigma Delta Pi, the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society; and Secretary-Treasurer of the *Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Association*; among other activities. His current research examines the history of Hispanic professional organizations in the United States, and his publications include a forthcoming book on the history of Sigma Delta Pi (2020), a Spanish literature anthology (1998), and various critical essays. In addition, Del Mastro is co-founder of the journal *Decimonónica*, founder of the student publication *El Cid*, director of Sigma Delta Pi's annual *Entre Nosotros*, founding advising editor of *Hispanic Studies Review*, editorial board member of *Juan de la Cuesta Hispanic Monographs* and *MIFLC Review*, and council member of the *Association of College Honor Societies*. He is also a full member of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language.