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UNH Professor Awarded Fulbright to Work in Mexico City

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DURHAM, N.H. , Clifford Wirth, associate professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire, has been selected as a Fulbright Scholar to research and teach in Mexico City for the 2002-2003 academic year.

Wirth, who has been at UNH since 1981 and is coordinator of the Masters in Public Administration program, has studied transportation policy and democratization in Mexico City since 1988. This award will allow him to complete his research on the government policies designed to protect the Ecological Zone of Xochimilco, an ancient agricultural area in the Federal District of Mexico City. Xochimilco is known for its unique method of farming using chinampas ã long plots of land surrounded by canals, resulting in a built-in irrigation system.

"Much of the area where there was chinampa farming has been drained and destroyed, and while what is left is designated a protected zone, urbanization has continued," Wirth says. "I want to see whether the process of urbanization is slowing down as a result of the new democratic government, which has pledged to reduce corruption in illegal land sales that facilitate the construction of housing in the protected zone."

This will not be the first time Wirth has examined the sensitive issue of corruption. His research in Mexico City's transportation sector revealed much corruption and was undertaken shortly after three government officials were assassinated.

Wirth will evaluate how well Mexico City is protecting this important environmental resource by interviewing public officials and researching whether the

enforcement of land regulations has increased, water quality has improved, and government programs for farmers have improved. He will share his research with Instituto Mora, where he plans to teach during the year, and with local officials in decision-making positions.

"I'm honored and humbled to receive this award," Wirth says. "It is recognition from scholars in your field who have examined your work and decided it's valuable and useful. Although I do speak and read the language, teaching in Spanish will be interesting and my biggest challenge."

The Fulbright Program was established by Congress in 1946 to "increase mutual understanding between people of the United States and people of other countries." Named for its sponsor, the late Sen. J. William Fulbright, the program is the U.S. government's premier international educational exchange program. Since the program's inception, more than 36,000 U.S. Fulbright Scholars have taught or conducted research in 140 countries. More than 25 UNH faculty members have been Fulbright Scholars in the last 10 years.

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