RUSK CENTER CONFERENCE EVALUATES IMPACT OF NAFTA

Just ten months after the North American Free Trade Agreement was passed, trade between the three signatories accelerated dramatically, a whopping increase of 22 percent, according to Robert Pastor, director of the Latin American and Caribbean Program at the Carter Center of Emory University. But NAFTA has not been a panacea, Pastor noted in his keynote address of the law school’s February NAFTA conference.

“NAFTA is all about increased competition,” Pastor said. “The question for the economy is — Is competition beneficial? In my opinion it is, although it has its costs. NAFTA will result in more skilled jobs, but some lower-technical jobs may be lost. All three countries are already facing widening income gaps. In Mexico, this gap is far more dangerous and serious.”

Pastor led a distinguished group of scholars from the fields of international law, political science, sociology and economics in a discussion, “Joining Together, Standing Apart: National Identities After NAFTA.” The conference focused on three areas: economic integration, cultural sovereignty and environmental sustainability. It was sponsored by the Dean Rusk Center for International and Comparative Law and the UGA political science department, and was supported by grants from the Canadian Embassy and the UGA State-of-the-Art Conference Grant Program. It also was designated a regional meeting of the American Society of International Law.

“NAFTA attempts to reduce trade barriers between the three countries and hopefully, finally eliminate them,” Pastor said. However, he concurred with other panelists that reconciling non-tariff barriers such as healthcare laws, agricultural price supports and environmental regulations will be difficult.

Alejandro Nadal of the College of Mexico’s Center for Economic Studies argued that on both sides of the border, NAFTA may help big business, but hurt people. The treaty is good for “fat cats,” Nadal said, but overall for Mexican agriculture, “it’s a disaster.”

The answer, panelists agreed, is harmonization, creating a level playing field with no competitive advantages for any one country. But harmonization at what price?

“The problem with harmonization is that the easiest way to do that is to adopt the lowest common denominator,” said David Wirth, a Washington and Lee law professor and former Natural Resources Defense Council lawyer. “It’s called the race to the bottom.”

Experts from the United States, Canada and Mexico participated in the NAFTA discussion.

UN PEACEKEEPING ROLE EXAMINED DURING INTERNATIONAL LAW CONFERENCE

Support of the United Nations’ efforts to maintain and restore peace is in the best interest of the United States, an accomplished panel of 15 international law scholars affirmed during a two-day colloquium on the issue, held in March.