



Rigoberto Lopez (1957-Present)

Professor

**Agricultural and Resource Economics,
University of Connecticut**

“Trying to balance your career and a suitable working environment is important.” Rigoberto Lopez, 2006.

Early Life and Education

Rigoberto Lopez was born in Nicaragua to parents Nicolas, a journalist, and Nora, a photographer. Lopez grew up immersed in agricultural, environmental and development issues, as all are very central to life in Nicaragua; his cultural background and physical environment influenced him to want to do something about these issues.

Lopez began his post-high school education in Honduras, where he received two degrees—one from an agricultural school, and the other a bachelor’s of science degree in agriculture from the University of Honduras in 1977. Lopez continued his studies at the University of Florida, Gainesville, from which he received a master’s degree in Agroecconomics in 1979. In 1983, Lopez earned his Ph.D. in food and resource economics, also at Gainesville.

After completing graduate school, Lopez’s first job was at Rutgers University, where he stayed from 1984 until 1990. There, he was an assistant professor engaged in both teaching and research in cooperatives, marketing, and some environmental economics work. Lopez then moved to the University of Connecticut as an assistant professor. Today, he is a full professor of agricultural and resource economics, a position he was promoted to in 1996. At the University of Connecticut, Lopez focuses on teaching and research in the area of food marketing and agricultural policy, and continues to do some work in environmental economics.

Career

Lopez did not have a career mentor until he came to University of Connecticut. As a graduate student, Lopez received much guidance from his Ph.D. advisor; upon arriving at the University of Connecticut, the head of his department became a significant mentor for Lopez. “He gives me advice related to my job—teaching, research, and my career in general. [When I first arrived] he gave me advice on what directions to take, which was good because I was younger,” Lopez explains.

Mentoring

Lopez has the opportunity to mentor other minorities in the field through his role as an advisor. Lopez has a few graduate students who work with him doing research; he gives them advice on how to conduct research, what kind of jobs to take, and what career directions they should work towards. He also mentors some undergraduate students.

Highlights

For Lopez, the highlight of his career is now. He enjoys both interacting with students and the research component of his job. To have a career in the environmental field, “just feels natural to me, so I wouldn’t say it is something I’ve had to ‘stick’ with,” Lopez says. “I never made a conscious effort, I’ve never thought of changing”. Lopez does not have one, single significant achievement that he looks to as a measure of success. Rather, seeing his students succeed brings great satisfaction. The international recognition he has received for his publications is also an achievement of which Lopez is proud. The lowest, or most challenging, point of Lopez’s career was the gap between graduating and finding his first job at Rutgers in which he went through a six month period of “bouncing around.”

The University of Connecticut has various diversity programs in which Lopez is actively involved. He is part of a wider effort that works to develop diversity and multicultural courses across departments at the university level. He is also involved in curriculum development related to diversity. In addition to his responsibilities as a professor of agricultural and resource economics, Lopez is also a part of both the Latin American studies program and the African studies program.

Advice to Young Professionals

“Trying to balance your career and a suitable working environment should be important,” Lopez cautions minorities who are considering a career in the environmental field. For young minorities considering an academic career, it is important to ask additional questions of the position being considered, “Is the environment here minority friendly?” Lopez suggests. “You should go to a department where you will feel comfortable and accepted.”

This interview was conducted in 2015.