For some professors, teaching the normal pattern of classes to the same types of students year after year can become rather repetitive.

But that sort of thing doesn’t fit in with the personality or the career of Dr. Barbara Domcekova, assistant professor of Spanish at Birmingham-Southern and chair of the college’s Latin American Studies program.

This energetic scholar, mentor, teacher, and administrator delights in expanding her vision beyond the day-to-day routine of being in the classroom. The grants and awards she has acquired attest to the high quality of her contributions both to her classes and to BSC as a whole.

Domcekova’s leadership is supported by five other faculty members who comprise the college’s Latin American Studies Committee. The group works diligently to not only increase student interest with Latinos who migrate here, but to teach them about the language, culture, politics, history, and art of Latin American countries. “We are also striving to create a Latin American interest among our faculty and to encourage them to integrate LAS into their particular disciplines,” says Domcekova, who took over the program in 2000.

Just this past summer, the college’s LAS program was awarded a $120,000 Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund courses that teach students to relate to the growing Spanish-speaking population, particularly in the areas of business and medicine. “So many of our students are involved in a pre-med or business field that we thought it would be neat to see how interested they are in focusing on Latin America from that perspective,” she explains.

The grant will provide for a larger variety of courses for students, plus support the development of business/medical internships in the U.S. and in Latin American countries, a Spanish course for faculty, and faculty travel to Latin America.

The faculty course “Spanish for Professors” has already begun this fall with two bi-weekly classes being taught by Domcekova and Professor of Spanish Dr. Janie Spencer. In this two-semester course, professors in subjects such as English, psychology, chemistry, art, accounting, and French get to take on the role of a student. When the course ends in the spring, they will travel to Costa Rica or Chile for an immersion in language and culture.

“The professors, just like the students, recognize the need to be proficient in Spanish,” comments Domcekova. “It’s great to see their progress in class. Sometimes they comment on the frustrations they are having while learning the language, and I think that makes us understand how students can feel. I really admire their effort. They work very hard, even with the time constraints they have, and they are seeing the results.”

The Latin American Studies Committee also is working on combining language with various types of classes in a program called Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum. FLAC combines proficiency in language with the content students are learning. So a class in biology or environmental studies would allow students to be enrolled in those courses using English, but the additional coursework would require them to read materials on subjects in Spanish or whatever their target language is.

Last fall, Domcekova and Assistant Biology Professor Dr. Megan Peterson each received $2,000 curriculum grants from the Associated Colleges of the South—a 15-member support organization for private liberal arts colleges in the region. The grant allowed them to establish the upcoming January 2004 Interim trav-