el program in Peru to introduce students to the importance of conserving rain forests, while using their Spanish-speaking skills.

“The growing number of Spanish students in our region and the current emphasis at BSC on environmental studies led us to consider developing a travel Interim to Peru,” says Domcekova. “The group project will combine the interests of students in Spanish, environmental studies, and the Latin American Studies courses.”

**Spanish in demand**

Birmingham-Southern’s LAS program offers students a historical, economic, cultural, political, and environmental consideration of Latin America, as well as an overview of the living conditions of millions of Latinos living in the U.S. It is an interdisciplinary minor at BSC which consists of six units for courses which include Music of the World, Politics of Mexico and Central America, and Modern Latin America and Revolutionary Tradition.

“There is a noticeable rise in students enrolled in Spanish here, which I think is a national trend,” notes Domcekova. “In Jefferson County alone during the past 10 years, the Latino population has grown 285 percent. The humanities faculty is noticing an increasing number of minors in Spanish and more students taking intermediate-level courses beyond the normal language requirement. Plus, another attraction for students is the marketability of the language after they graduate.”

The Latin American Studies program at BSC was established in 1992 by Brazilian and former BSC Political Science Professor Dr. Gama Perruci. “He really did wonderful things for the program and energized the student community at BSC,” Domcekova explains. “A lot of students, particularly in Alabama, did not see the importance of Latin America and of learning the Spanish language before Perruci’s involvement in the program.”

Perruci also is credited with founding BSC’s annual Latin American Studies Symposium, now in its 12th year. He wanted students with high-quality LAS research to share their results not only with peers on the BSC campus, but with those from other Associated Colleges of the South institutions as well. “That’s what is most unique about the two-day symposium,” says Domcekova. “Most professional conferences are a forum that graduate students and professors attend. At our symposium, we witness students who are proud to share what they have researched and learned. In addition, faculty get to chair panels, facilitate group discussions, and listen to national speakers, which increases dialogue among professors from different institutions.”

The symposium has been steadily growing as it gains more research submissions from students and establishes more contacts with schools in the U.S. and Latin America. “We would like to have more of an international presence at the conference,” says Domcekova.

For the 2003 conference, she invited students from an art school in Puerto Rico to design the cover for the symposium brochure. “We also had an exhibit of artwork from these students that was on display,” she says.

**Reaching the U.S.**

Domcekova, who joined the BSC faculty in 1999, received her bachelor’s degree from Comenius University in Slovakia and her master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Florida. In addition to her native language of Slovak, she is fluent in Czech, English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian. “Czech and Slovak are very similar languages as are Spanish and Portuguese,” she says.

She is a native of Slovakia, a part of former Czechoslovakia, which was a federation of the Slovak and Czech republics. Domcekova began studying