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Distinguished professor joins Florida Studies program as Hough Family Endowed Chair

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ST. PETERSBURG, FL (May 3, 2012) — One of the country’s leading experts on the history of the Spanish colonial experience in Florida is joining the highly regarded Florida Studies Program, the University of South Florida St. Petersburg announced today.

J. Michael Francis, Ph.D., professor and chairman of the History Department at the University of North Florida, joins the Florida Studies Program Aug. 1, Regional Chancellor Margaret Sullivan said today at the USF St. Petersburg Campus Board meeting.

Dr. Francis, who received his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, will hold the newly created Hough Family Endowed Chair in Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.

“I am grateful for the generosity of the Hough Family for an endowment that will benefit generations of students,” said Dr. Frank Biafora, Dean of the USFSP College of Arts and Sciences.

USF St. Petersburg Regional Chancellor Margaret Sullivan also thanked the Hough family and praised Dr. Francis for joining the Florida Studies Program.

“His arrival comes at a particularly propitious time as Florida prepares to observe the 500th anniversary of Ponce de Leon’s expedition,” Dr. Sullivan said. “Dr. Francis represents the vanguard of scholars who are reinterpreting the meaning of 1513 and the complexities of issues resulting from that encounter.”

Dr. Francis is a distinguished scholar with more than two dozen state, national and international honors, including a four-year appointment as a research fellow at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and a research fellow at the Library of Congress.

Because of his expertise in early-Florida history, U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar appointed Dr. Francis as one of only two historians on the St. Augustine 450th Commemoration Commission. Dr. Francis also is curator of a traveling exhibit called *Imagining La Florida: Ponce de Leon and the Quest for the Fountain of Youth* that will open at Miami’s Frost Museum in April 2013.

He is the co- author, most recently, of *Murder and Martyrdom in Spanish Florida* (2011). He also is the author of *Invading Colombia: Spanish Accounts of Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada’s Expedition of Conquest* (2007). He also was a contributing editor of *The Encyclopedia of War* (2011). He is currently working on a book titled, *Before Jamestown: Europeans, Africans and Indians in La Florida, 1513-1607*.

Dr. Francis is the only faculty member at the University of North Florida to receive the Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Award, the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award and the Outstanding International Leadership Award. He also received three Dean’s Leadership Council Faculty Fellowships.

“I am delighted to be joining the distinguished faculty at USF St. Petersburg and the premiere Florida Studies program in the state,” Dr. Francis said. “I look forward to introducing students to the rich but often neglected history of early Florida.”

One of Dr. Francis’ specialties is Spanish paleography, the study of ancient, hand-written texts. He plans to teach a class on the subject and conduct field trips to Spain where students can get hands-on experience.

Gary Mormino, Ph.D., who will soon retire as Frank E. Duckwall Professor of History and senior Scholar in the Florida Studies Program, was bestowed the title of Professor Emeritus today by the USFSP Campus Board in honor of his distinguished work.

Dr. Mormino praised Dr. Francis’ appointment.

“Michael Francis is one of the brightest, most engaging and serious scholars of Spanish Florida,” Dr. Mormino said. “He brings all of the qualities one could possibly imagine for a candidate holding the prestigious Hough Family Chair in Florida Studies: passion and

compassion, success tempered by a sense of humor and dedication matched by loyalty. The University of South Florida St. Petersburg and the Florida Studies Program is immeasurably better with the coming of Professor Michael Francis.”