First tenured Latina in Texas honored
Recognition adds to law school faculty member’s extended list of accomplishments at UH
By Erica Quiroz

UH Law Professor Sandra Guerra Thompson plans to use her recognition by the Hispanic National Bar Association as the first Latina tenured law professor in Texas to encourage the continued hiring of Latino faculty by the University.

Thompson was honored earlier this month at the annual HNBA convention, which strives to recognize Latinos who contribute to the Hispanic community and legal profession, in the company of other legal professionals in Dallas.

“It was actually a shock, and I didn’t realize until the HNBA started digging around that I was the first,” Thompson said.

“It’s an honor, but at the same time it’s a little disconcerting, because where are the people who are supposed to be my predecessors? And where are the followers?”

The lack of Latino faculty members is an issue Thompson is actively working on with the UH Administration.

“I’ve always wanted to see more hiring, and I’ve urged it here at the law school,” Thompson said.

“If anything (the recognition) puts more of a responsibility on those of us who are here to do a better job.”

The acknowledgement of Thompson is just one of the many accomplishments she has had since joining UH.

Most recently Thompson co-edited “American Justice in the Age of Innocence” with the help of two UH Law students.

The book is a series of research papers that explore how to prevent wrongful convictions and the situational factors that can lead to them. Thompson has been writing about this area of the law for the last five years.
The concept for the book started out as a project with her seminar students while she was serving on the Timothy Cole Advisory Panel for Wrongful Convictions.

The advisory panel was named after Timothy Cole, the first Texan to be posthumously exonerated of a crime through DNA testing.

Created by the Texas Legislature, the advisory panel’s goal is to study the causes of wrongful convictions and to develop procedures to help reduce the number of them that occur.

“I started to realize that the Texas Legislature would probably benefit from having a resource that would be focused on Texas law pertaining to those issues,” Thompson said.

“There are much more effective ways for the police to handle certain kinds of evidence that can make it more reliable.”

Thompson also contributed to the development of a new policy on eyewitness identification procedures making Texas the fifth state to use such policies in order to reduce wrongful convictions.

If approved, the policy will go into effect in January 2012.