Letter from the Director
Expanding Collaboration and Exchange with Latin America
The Author as a Reader: A Conversation with Mario Vargas Llosa
Making Sense of Peace: Working through the Colombian Peace Process from Chicago
The Modern American Frontier
‘Field Notes’ Features CLAS Tinker Field Research Grant Recipients
Highlighted Faculty Publications & Awards
Slavery and Visual Culture: Faculty Launch Interdisciplinary Working Group
Tinker Visiting Professors
Turning Research into Public Impact: Political Scientists in the Media
Undergraduates Supplement Latin American & Caribbean Studies Major with Summer Internships
Doctoral Certificate Program in Latin American & Caribbean Studies
Reflections from the BA Preceptor: Working with a Diverse Array of Undergraduate Students
Contextos
2016–17 Graduates
Reflections from the MA Lecturer: Two Years of Professionalization at CLAS
Alumni Profile: Jimmy McDonough
Katz Center for Mexican Studies

COVER PHOTO
Tombes dans le cimetière de Jérémie,
Grand’Anse, Haiti
Christopher Grant
PhD Candidate, Anthropology

While conducting research on the historical connections between New Orleans and southern Haiti in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Grant found himself among the tombs of the Jérémie cemetery on a hot summer afternoon. Grant is working on a dissertation titled “Crafting Community: Race, Creative Labor, and Everyday Aesthetics in the Creole Faubourgs of New Orleans, 1790–1896.”

Established in 1968, the University of Chicago Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) brings together faculty and students across the University in interdisciplinary and interdivisional research, teaching, scholarly events, and public engagement related to this vital region of the world.

DIRECTOR
Brodwyn Fischer

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Natalie Arsenault

OFFICE MANAGER & STUDENT AFFAIRS COORDINATOR
Jamie Gentry

CLAS LECTURER (2015–17)
Pablo Palomino

CLAS LECTURER (2017–18)
Stefanie Graeter
One of the standout moments of the 2016–17 CLAS calendar occurred in the twilight of the academic year, at the beginning of a seminar titled “Grief as Resistance,” organized by Assistant Professor Yanilda María González from the School of Social Service Administration. On a beautiful spring evening, more than a hundred people gathered in the atrium of SSA to share in the stories of six women who had lost children, family members, and friends to state violence in Colombia, Brazil, and the United States. These women, two from each country, did not all know one another, and did not speak a common language. The Colombian and Brazilian participants had traveled over half a continent to reach that stage, to face an audience where few people knew about the histories of civil war, violence, and corruption that had upended their lives. The US participants had traversed a distance that was less obvious but perhaps equally daunting, generously engaging a University community that has not always welcomed outsiders and confronting the challenges of communicating their stories and insights across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In the audience were community members and academics, activists and analysts, individuals from many walks of life who shared little beyond a desire to understand what might connect Black mothers’ experience of violence across the hemisphere, and what might convert that overwhelming personal grief into impactful political action. Dependent on fragile headsets transmitting simultaneous translation in three languages, could this crowd find common ground and shared meaning? And could participants with little knowledge of Latin America attain deeper understanding and solidarity through their encounter with the Brazilian and Colombian trajectories of violence, grief, and politics?

The answer, in those few hours and in the closed-door conference that stretched across the following day, was a resounding “yes.” And what that seminar achieved under Dr. González’s leadership encapsulates much of what CLAS has aspired to over its nearly 50-year history. It is not enough to “study” Latin America from our academic perch. We hope also to be a conduit for meaningful collaboration among Latin American activists, artists, scientists, thinkers, leaders, and scholars and their counterparts in Hyde Park, Chicago, and beyond. In 2016–17 our students, visitors, faculty, and staff embodied that aspiration to an inspiring degree.

It would be impossible to do justice to the more than 100 events that CLAS and the Katz Center for Mexican Studies sponsored or cosponsored over the course of the year. They ranged from a highly specialized scientific workshop on dengue fever in Rio de Janeiro to a musical performance by our Latin Grammy laureate, Tinker Visiting Professor Sérgio Assad; from jam-packed panel discussions of Latino politics and Trump in Mexico to poetry readings, film screenings, and discussions of modernism, the visual cultures of slavery, and immigration. Our faculty and staff collaborated with teachers, filmmakers, photographers, and journalists in outreach activities and public events organized for the wider Chicago community. The Katz Center continued its close collaboration with the Colegio de México and the CIDE through events held on our campus and in Mexico City. These events were individually meaningful for the communities they gathered; together, they represent a collective commitment to ensuring Latin America and Latin Americans a vital voice in UChicago’s intellectual and community life. This mission feels especially important at a time of such tension, crisis, and rising nativism in the United States and beyond.

We were grateful this year for the visitors who joined our community for periods ranging from a few weeks to a few years. With support from a new provostial initiative and the Tinker Foundation, we hosted scholars, writers, and artists from Honduras, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Cuba, and Colombia. Our Tinker Visiting Professors—guitarist and composer Sérgio Assad, historian Erica Pani, and political scientist Joy Langston—earned rave reviews from their students and forged enduring ties across the University. It was especially difficult to say goodbye this spring to Pablo Palomino, whose energy, collegiality, and inclusive engagement did so much for our community during his two years as Postdoctoral Lecturer.

We are very proud of all that our students and faculty achieved in 2016–17. Twenty-one students, from BA minors to PhDs, earned their degrees, and we look forward to following their paths in universities, NGOs, schools, and political and policy circles around the hemisphere. Our graduate student affiliates from History, Comparative Literature, Romance Languages and Literatures, Art History, Linguistics, Anthropology, Comparative Human Development, and Biology earned more than two dozen national awards and fellowships, and CLAS affiliates had especially wonderful success in earning five competitive Fulbright-Hays awards for 2017–18. CLAS-affiliated faculty published books and articles, and made their voices heard in newspapers, magazines, and media outlets across the United States, Mexico, and the hemisphere. They also won some of their fields’ highest honors, including the American Organization of Teachers of Portuguese award for the best educational project (Ana Lima), the American Political Science Association’s best dissertation award in public administration (Alan Zarychta), and the LASA Bryce Wood Book Award (Michael Albertus). Such recognition tells us what we already know: it is an incredible privilege to be surrounded by such dynamism, creativity, and energy.

Those of us who care about Latin America face 2017–18 with somber news: earthquakes, hurricanes, political crises, rising waves of xenophobia, authoritarianism, homophobia, and violence. More than ever before, what happens in Chicago or the United States cannot be separated from what happens in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Venezuela, or Brazil. As we welcome a new cohort of students and visitors to our community, I hope we will all renew our commitment to the spirit of generous, inclusive, and rigorous collaboration and inquiry that has sustained CLAS since its birth in an equally turbulent time five decades ago.

Saludos cordiales,

Brodwyn Fischer, Professor in History
Director, Center for Latin American Studies
Expanding Collaboration and Exchange with Latin America

CLAS has always emphasized direct engagement with Latin American scholars and intellectuals: for us, it is impossible to conceive the study of Latin America without Latin American collaboration and leadership. Over the past several years, we have expanded our direct support of collaborative research projects, offering funding and administrative assistance to incubate new and burgeoning scholarly relationships. In 2016–17, CLAS supported several meetings and events that grew out of faculty research collaborations, representing a diverse array of academic fields and engaging a number of faculty, graduate students, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and community members from the United States and Latin America.

One of the ways CLAS has traditionally supported exchange with Latin America is through the Tinker Visiting Professorship, which brings prominent Latin American scholars and practitioners to teach at the University. These residences regularly lead to joint projects and events with faculty. Most recently, in Autumn 2016, Dain Borges (History), Salikoko Mufwene (Linguistics), and Evani Viotti (Spring 2015 Tinker Visiting Professor, Linguistics) organized “Linguistic and Other Cultural Exchanges across Brazilian History: The Indigenous Role,” which brought together 16 scholars from across the United States and Brazil whose work explores indigenous peoples’ contact, exchange, and integration with outsiders across historical time and Amazonian geographies. Among the presenters were historians working on 19th-century contacts among indigenous persons, African Brazilians, and Luso-Brazilians; historical linguists examining language exchange and change over several centuries; and anthropologists and linguists discussing contemporary linguistic change and cultural policy. CLAS will continue programming on this topic, with more events planned for 2017–18.

In the Spring, Brodwyn Fischer (CLAS director) and Keila Grinberg (Autumn 2015–Winter 2016 Tinker Visiting Professor, History) organized a conference on “Slavery, Freedom, and the Making of Modern Brazil.” Slavery and abolition have always been central to Brazilian historiography, but in recent decades the field has burgeoned with path-breaking research.
and creative energy, deepening our understanding of old questions and extending our grasp of slavery’s constitutive role in forging Brazilian modernity. During Grinberg’s residency in Winter 2016, CLAS sponsored a conference on “Frontiers of Slavery and Freedom in the 19th-Century Lusophone World,” which gathered prominent scholars to share their work. A year later, this second conference brought together 15 coauthors and 11 outside specialists in Atlantic slavery, race relations, gender, family, and rural social movements for two days of intensive discussion of pre-circulated texts. This conference and the edited volume that will result from it aim both to deepen Brazilian debates about the national and global impact of Brazilian slavery and to make Brazilian scholarship more accessible to an English-speaking public.

While the Tinker Visiting Professorship has nurtured inter-regional collaborations for more than 30 years, more recently CLAS has accelerated its ambitions to support faculty engagement with Latin America across departments, divisions, and professional schools beyond those that have traditionally worked with CLAS. This year, we helped facilitate research collaborations launched by faculty in four divisions and professional schools.

In collaboration with Alan Zarychta (School of Social Service Administration), CLAS organized “Experiences and Assessments of Health Sector Reform in Honduras: Past Experiences and Future Directions.” The conference brought together scholars and policymakers from the Honduran Ministry of Health, the Inter-American Development Bank, the University of Chicago, and the University of Colorado Boulder for a three-day workshop. A public event featured Honduran policymakers who discussed how, in light of recent health sector decentralization and reform, local governance systems do or do not serve their communities. Panelists discussed the successes and failures of policy changes, the consequences of these policy changes in the everyday administration of health care throughout the country, and future needs and goals for health-care reform. Workshop sessions revolved around completed data-collection efforts about health sector reform in Honduras, preliminary findings, and plans for continuing field research. As a result of discussions during the workshop, significant progress was made on three working papers that will be presented at the Political Networks Conference, the Society for Institutional and Organizational Economics annual meeting, the International Population Conference, and the American Political Science Association annual meeting. A second workshop and stakeholder meeting is being planned to take place in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, next year to continue the conversations begun at UChicago and to share this research with a larger group of policymakers and government officials in Honduras.

Yanilda María González (Social Service Administration) proposed an ambitious public event and workshop titled “Grief as Resistance: Racialized State Violence and the Politics of Black Motherhood in the Americas.” The workshop brought together scholars and activists from the United States, Brazil, and Colombia in an interdisciplinary space to discuss the racial violence faced by Black people in the Americas, as well as the central role of Black mothers in organizing resistance to state violence. A public event featured testimonials by American, Brazilian, and Colombian mothers about the loss they have suffered and the activism in which they have engaged. They shared their struggles and strategies of resistance against police violence, mass incarceration, and the unrelenting injustices facing Black communities around the world. The following day, the mother-activists, joined by scholars from the University of Chicago, the College of Staten Island, Williams College, and Universidad Icesi (Colombia), held a full-day workshop to share strategies of healing and resistance and to develop a plan for collaboration, research, and activism. The workshop generated plans for a joint publication that brings together academic and activist perspectives across the three countries, a digital repository of documents and testimonies, and a future meeting among the same participants to be held in Colombia in 2018.

Finally, CLAS worked with Mercedes Pascual (Ecology and Evolution) to organize a meeting on “Mosquito-Borne Diseases, Climate Forcing, and Urban Environments: Dengue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.” Infectious diseases transmitted by mosquito vectors are on the rise, posing a threat to public health globally. A better understanding of their transmission dynamics under the variability of climate and the socioeconomic heterogeneity of large urban environments of the developing world is critical to better inform control efforts. This meeting brought together researchers from the Fundação Getulio Vargas and Fundação Oswaldo Cruz in Rio de Janeiro, the University of Chicago, and the University of Michigan to study the transmission of dengue in the city. The meeting involved detailed discussion of the case and mosquito surveillance data for dengue since the late-1980s emergence of the disease in Rio de Janeiro. Preliminary temporal and spatial patterns were considered to formulate a series of hypotheses on the transmission system and the role of climate variables in the annual and seasonal variation of incidence. The meeting also addressed research on two other infectious diseases: malaria and seasonal influenza. Plans were formulated to follow up on these three lines of research, including the implementation of two modeling approaches to address the hypotheses on the role of climate forcing, human movement, and socioeconomic variation for dengue in Rio de Janeiro. A follow-up meeting to discuss research results will take place in Rio de Janeiro in the coming months.

CLAS’s support of faculty engagement and exchange with their Latin American counterparts has allowed us to greatly expand our research collaborations, broaden our fields of engagement, and deepen the networks so vital to faculty and student research. These collaborations solidify the University of Chicago as a center for engaging conversations on the most cutting-edge research from and about Latin America.
A

s part of the 2017 Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures, Peruvian Nobel Prize—winning author Mario Vargas Llosa visited the University of Chicago and delivered four lectures that delved into the creative and writing process behind some of his most important works: The Time of the Hero (1963), Conversation in the Cathedral (1969), The War of the End of the World (1981), and The Feast of the Goat (2000).

As a complement to this event, CLAS, the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, Berlin Family Lectures, and the Division of the Humanities sponsored a separate, more intimate event—“Vargas Llosa, Lector”—that focused on the author’s experiences as a reader himself.

Moderated by Agnes Lugo-Ortiz (Romance Languages and Literatures), the event revolved around Gustave Flaubert’s pivotal novel Madame Bovary, which Vargas Llosa described as the most influential work shaping his identity both as a reader and as a writer. Led by Lugo-Ortiz’s provocation “Why Madame Bovary?,” Vargas Llosa described the myriad reasons it remains a fundamental work of literature. He suggested that the novel encompasses perhaps the most important feature of a great literary work: it is able to install itself in the reader’s imagination, where it continues to grow and transform itself. Herein lies the pleasure of multiple readings: the rediscovery of a story that has never truly left us. In sharing several of his experiences reading the novel, Vargas Llosa demonstrated that they are all unique in their own way. The first reading is a lived experience of sorts: the moment of passion and enjoyment. Further readings build on one another, never truly ceasing to astound and galvanize the reader, as they constantly awaken new sensibilities. The author also shared that this novel provided him with several tools he has incorporated into his own writing. An example of this is the “free-indirect style,” in which the voice of the narrator can be mistaken for that of a character, as the distance between them diminishes.

Considering that reading and writing remain inextricably linked, the conversation ultimately drifted to Vargas Llosa’s writing practices. The Nobel laureate explained that each draft brings with it its own challenges, the first ones being a battle against insecurity and the fear that a story will elude its own creation. Indeed, in proposing Madame Bovary as the book to be discussed for this event, and in sharing his writing techniques, Vargas Llosa sought to encourage the audience to think about the craft of writing. On a final, cheerful note, Vargas Llosa urged aspiring novelists to work hard on their craft every day, relying on Gustave Flaubert as the utmost example of how genius can be constructed through dedication and perseverance.
On October 2, 2016, Colombians across the University of Chicago campus intently followed their news feeds as their home country voted in a popular plebiscite. The peace agreement on which they were voting had been painstakingly developed over four years of negotiating in Havana, Cuba, and included special attention to international standards of justice, lessons from past transitional justice processes, and the human rights of victims, indigenous groups, and women. In contrast to what polls predicted during the weeks before, the Colombian electorate voted down the peace accord by the slimmest of margins, 50.2 percent to 49.8 percent. The result threw into doubt the peace process between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), as the two sides sought to end more than five decades of armed internal warfare. In early October, just weeks into the 2016–17 academic year, it was difficult to know what had led to the surprising result at the ballot box and, perhaps more important, what the future held for Colombia and for those of us at the University who follow, study, or are interested in Colombia.

In response, a number of students with academic and personal connections to Colombia began to develop strategies to stay on top of the constant changes occurring in the peace process. Under the auspices of the Pozen Family Center for Human Rights, and with the support of CLAS, we organized a special project titled “Peace, Transitional Justice, and Human Rights in Colombia.” The group held monthly lunches to bring together Colombians on campus, students doing research on the peace process, and community members outside of the University who were involved in this topic. During these meetings, we discussed developments in the peace process, presented on the work that participants were doing in Colombia, and planned future collaborations and events.

The group contributed to the planning and execution of the forum “A Path to Peace for Colombia: What’s Next?” Cosponsored by CLAS, the event brought together Sergio Guarín (Dejusticia and Universidad Nacional de Colombia) and Camilo Sánchez (Fundación Ideas para la Paz), both working at think tanks related to peace and justice in Colombia; Juanita Goebertus (Institute for Integrated Transitions and Post-Conflict Brain Trust for Colombia), a member of the Colombian government’s negotiating team; and Ana Arjona (Northwestern University), a scholar investigating how communities experience the conflict. The forum drew a diverse and engaged crowd from across the University and offered many insights about the intricacies of how the accord was constructed and what the future holds for the attempt to build peace in a country long affected by violence.

Throughout the year, regular meetings and events were a space to connect and to talk about the ever-evolving adaptation of the accord. The monthly meetings ended on a positive note as the final session incorporated a newly formed student group, Colombians at UChicago, into the discussions. While the academic year ended with the peace process in Colombia moving forward but with the same uncertainty as at the beginning of the year, for those students participating in these CLAS-supported events, the University of Chicago provided opportunities to process and reflect from afar on these complex and consequential events in the land of the cafeteros.
The Modern American Frontier

Rohan Chatterjee
CLAS Communications and Events Assistant/ LACS MA Student

For Dominic Bracco II, a South Texan photojournalist now based in Mexico City, documenting the modern American frontier is the professional culmination of a lifetime living in the vicinity of the world’s busiest and most porous border. In May 2017 Bracco presented a public lecture on “The Modern American Frontier” as part of CLAS’s Latin American Briefing Series, sharing his unique experience and perspective of documenting the changing dynamics of the human landscape on the Mexican-American border.

Using Mexico City as a base, Bracco works as a contract photojournalist for leading international news and media outlets covering current events across Latin America. When not working elsewhere in the region, Bracco focuses on documenting the human landscape of the US-Mexico border. A short distance from his family home near Corpus Christi on Texas’s gulf coast lies the demarcated border on which he has centered most of his professional life. As a young child, awareness of the realities of this major sociopolitical frontier was a foreign concept. But, with growing numbers of migrants traveling north from Mexico and from war-torn Central America in the 1980s and 1990s, Bracco came face-to-face with the realities of an increasingly porous and traversed border. Recalling a particularly crystallizing moment, Bracco reflected on the confusion he felt after seeing migrants chased by police through his hometown for the first time. His mother attempted to explain this event, opening him to a new world of human activity around him. For Bracco, the realization that for many the border region was a fraught transient route to escape sociopolitical unrest elsewhere proved foundational to his future work. Moreover, Bracco credits his mother, who shouted warnings to the migrants about the oncoming police officers, as being the first person in his life to challenge the morality of law and order on the border.

Years later, as a photography student documenting migration routes, Bracco came face-to-face with an elderly woman who had made a perilous three-month journey only to find herself near death on a South Texas ranch. According to Bracco, the rancher had called local authorities but left the woman without aid to await her fate. Bracco offered her water and talked with her about her journey, an experience that laid bare the need for serious personal reflection on the morality of migration. As an adult, Bracco also learned that his much-loved deceased uncle had been a coyote (human trafficker). This knowledge further twisted the complexity of morality and migration on the border for Bracco, who expresses uncertainty about whether his uncle’s actions had helped or caused harm.

Bracco’s life has been dominated by trying to grapple with understanding these contested geographical, political, and moral landscapes. He now attends to these questions in a professional context, but this time from across the Rio Grande. In addition to exploring underlying trends such as the violence and trauma that bring Central American migrants through Mexico to the US-Mexico border, his work has also centered
on focal points along the border. He has documented how local and global forces come to a head in border towns such as Ciudad Juárez, which exploded into violence in 2010 as a confluence of a cartel war, migration for low-paying jobs at the maquila factories, increasing gang numbers, and tightened border security that pushed gang activity into the confines of the city. He also aims to challenge prevailing narratives of violence and peril along the border through his work. In Juárez, for example, where in recent years violence has subsided, Bracco documented a gang mural painting project as well as the city’s return to normalcy through everyday activities, like picnics in public parks, which were once unimaginable in the shadow of the violence that shaped life on the border.

For Bracco, it is essential to go beyond the boundaries of photography to understand the complex and challenging factors of border life. He says he relishes public talks at institutions like the University of Chicago as they create spaces to explore his “understanding of the border landscape through interaction with different interpretation and voices.” Much like the challenging encounters faced in his line of work on the border, the dialogue creates a space for people to disagree and challenge his conceptions, which he credits with “helping shift my perspectives and rethink approaches” to his work.

CLAS, in conjunction with the University of Chicago area studies centers, has long worked with local educators to address how to bring global issues into the classroom. We recently launched a partnership with the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting to bring innovative programming to Chicago educators, with specialized programming for the City Colleges of Chicago. Pulitzer Center–supported reporting projects serve as departure points for multidimensional educational experiences that integrate digital educational resources provided by both the Pulitzer Center and the area studies centers, as well as visits by the journalists themselves. Pulitzer Center–funded journalists, including Dominic Bracco II, have been featured at several professional development workshops for educators over the past two years.

‘Field Notes’ Features CLAS Tinker Field Research Grant Recipients

“What you put into your grant will be very different from what actually happens,” advised second-year Anthropology student Steven Schwartz to an audience of attentive peers. “Don’t take logistics for granted, and do as much research as you can in advance in order to avoid any surprises that might disrupt your plans.”

Schwartz, recipient of a 2016 CLAS Tinker Field Research Grant, was one of three presenters who discussed the experience of conducting graduate field research at the “Field Notes” roundtable in April. Joining Schwartz were Franco Bavoni, a 2016 graduate of the Master of Arts Program in Social Sciences, and Agnes Mondragón, a second-year doctoral student in Anthropology.

Annually, CLAS awards graduate students in their first years of study modest travel grants to support preliminary thesis/dissertation field research in Latin America. In 2016, 11 MA and doctoral students received CLAS Tinker Field Research Grants to undertake exploratory research in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. As part of their grant requirements, grantees must present on their work at a scholarly forum. While they may choose to satisfy this requirement through a presentation at a conference or graduate workshop, each year a number of grantees do so through a CLAS-sponsored colloquium.

In an effort to energize the dialogue surrounding field research, and to open it to a wide body of students, this year CLAS launched “Field Notes,” a roundtable to discuss the ins and outs of conducting field research in Latin America. This year’s “Field Notes” allowed undergraduate and graduate students to discuss research best practices with the CLAS Tinker Field Research Grant recipients, and facilitated lively discourse about how to synthesize field research into usable material for academic work. Attendees posed questions that ranged from how to put together a good research proposal to the logistics of time management in interviews to obstacles in archival work. Presenters and participants left the event with a number of new ideas to explore.
Highlighted Faculty Publications & Awards

**Michael Albertus**
Political Science
Gregory Luebbert Award for Best Book in Comparative Politics and LASABryce Wood Book Award for Autocracy and Redistribution: The Politics of Land Reform (2015)

**Claudia Brittenham**
Art History

**Angela S. García**
Social Service Administration

**Yanilda María González**
Social Service Administration
2017 William Pollak Award for Excellence in Teaching at SSA

**Dwight Hopkins**
Divinity School
Black Theology: Essays on Gender Perspectives and Black Theology: Essays on Global Perspectives (Cascade Books, 2017)

**Alan Kolata**
Anthropology

**Emilio Kourí**
History
“La promesa agraria del artículo 27,” Revista Nexos (February 2017)
“Sobre la propiedad comunal de los pueblos, de la Reforma a la Revolución,” Historia Mexicana 66, no. 4 (April–June 2017)

**Benjamin Lessing**
Political Science

**Ana Lima**
Romance Languages & Literatures
American Organization of Teachers of Portuguese 2017 Award for Best Portuguese Language Educational Initiative/Project in the US—The Illinois Portuguese Language Connection is an annual event that connects students from UChicago, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for a day of presentations and interactions in Portuguese, and also highlights the presence of Brazil in our respective communities.

**Mauricio Tenorio**
History
“El mexicano feo,” Revista Nexos (March 2017)

**Mareike Winchell**
Anthropology

**Alan Zarychta**
Social Service Administration
American Political Science Association’s 2017 Leonard D. White Award for best dissertation in the field of public administration—“It Takes More than a Village: Governance & Public Services in Developing Countries”
In 2016–17 a group of CLAS-affiliated faculty—Larissa Brewer-García (Romance Languages and Literatures), Cécile Fromont (Art History), and Agnes Lugo-Ortiz (Romance Languages and Literatures)—formed the Slavery and Visual Culture Working Group to provide an interdisciplinary forum for the discussion of research on the visual imagining of slavery and the slave trade as well as on the production and usage of images and material objects by enslaved peoples and slaveholders.

With support from the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture, Franke Institute for the Humanities, France Chicago Center, Art History, History, Romance Languages and Literatures, and CLAS, the group launched an ambitious year of programming. Each quarter, they convened a reading group to discuss scholarship on slavery and visual culture from a variety of disciplines, and invited a guest speaker to deliver a public lecture and facilitate a workshop about their work. SlavICult featured work by the following scholars:

• Simon Gikandi (Princeton University)—The reading group read Slavery and the Culture of Taste (Princeton University Press, 2011) in preparation for his visit. Gikandi then delivered a public lecture on “The Spaces of Enslavement: Rethinking the Architecture of the Castle/Dungeon,” in which he interrogated the commemorative function of the bifurcated architecture of slave castles in West Africa: at the top, the visible castle is a replica of European domestic spaces at the dawn of modernity; at the bottom are “medieval” dungeons where the repressed bodies that enabled the civilizing process were kept out of sight. The lecture asked how we can read the castle and the dungeons below it as part of the same scheme. Gikandi also presented “The Archives of Enslavement” as a workshop.

• Carmen Fracchia (University of London)—Fracchia spoke on “Picturing the Emergence of the Emancipatory Subject and the Formation of the Black Nation in Seventeenth-Century Spain.” The lecture explored how certain early modern Spanish visual representations of slavery both reproduce and contest hegemonic visions of Black men and women as inferior types of humans. Fracchia then led a workshop based on a chapter from her book manuscript on the same subject.

• Anne Lafont (Institut national d’histoire de l’art/INHA, Paris)—Lafont presented a public lecture on the theme “How Did Skin Color Become a Racial Marker? The Contribution of Art in the Eighteenth Century.” Drawing from philosophical debates regarding the Enlightenment, the abolition of slavery, racial categorization, and aesthetics, Lafont’s lecture explored how fine arts participated in the impulse to compare, classify, and rank human beings throughout the 18th century. She then participated in a workshop based on the introduction of her forthcoming book manuscript on the same topic.

Overall, the working group’s goal was to explore the multivalent relationships between slavery and visuality, investigating themes such as the mechanics and disruptions of the disciplinary gaze in slave societies and societies with slaves; trans-historical comparative approaches to the study of visuality under slavery; visual culture and its connections to regimes of racialized enslavement in modernity; and the roles played by the visual logics of slavery in processes of self-fashioning and the accumulation of (visual/cultural) capital. The events held over the course of the year allowed them to meet this goal and inspired them to continue to plan events in the coming years.
Tinker Visiting Professors

CLAS continues the tradition of hosting distinguished international scholars, artists, and journalists through its endowment from the Tinker Foundation. Sharing their scholarship and diverse disciplinary perspectives, more than 100 Tinker Visiting Professors have provided students and faculty at the University with the opportunity to engage with some of the most dynamic scholarship generated in the region. Here we profile our cohort of 2016–17 Tinker Visiting Professors and announce our incoming Tinker Visiting Professors for 2017–18.

World-renowned classical guitarist Sérgio Assad, who performs with his brother Odair as the Assad Brothers, is a Latin Grammy–Award winner, celebrated composer, and prolific recording artist from Brazil. Assad’s 33 albums of classical and popular music since the 1970s include collaborations with Yo Yo Ma, Paquito D’Rivera, and Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg.

During his residency, Assad taught History in Practice: Musical Multiculturalism in Brazil. The class, which traced the evolution of Brazilian music, illustrated how African, indigenous, and European musical styles and techniques coalesced over the 19th and 20th centuries to form an enormously diverse tradition of Brazilian music. The course was very popular with students. As one noted, “Application is a critical component of the course and of Assad’s teaching style. Students are encouraged to try out different rhythms in class, listen critically to new sounds, and articulate what they hear and experience. Additionally, the course includes something rare in history classes: live performance! Students have the opportunity to listen to a world-class guitarist play musical examples of topics discussed in class. Not only is this an immense treat, but it is also a way to sharpen listening skills and achieve a much deeper understanding of the musical complexity of each genre.” In addition to the course, Assad offered a public lecture and performance, “Evolution of Samba in Brazilian Music.” Joined by his daughter Clarice, he presented about and performed several examples of the music that contributed to samba as we know it today.

Erika Pani is Research Professor at El Colegio de México, where she serves as chair of the Centro de Estudios Históricos. She is one of the leading scholars of 19th-century Mexico and one of the pioneers of the internationalization of Mexican history.

During her two-quarter residency, Pani taught Revolutions, Constitutions, and War: A Continent Transformed—The United States and Latin America, 1850–1880, which explored how political and territorial control were refashioned, as were some of the central tenets of the political order (e.g., sovereignty, property, citizenship) during these turbulent decades, and From ‘Mestizaje’ to the ‘Mexican Genome’: Imagining Mexican Society during the 19th and 20th Centuries, which focused on the categories of class, culture, and race, which have been used by Mexican politicians, writers, scientists, and intellectuals to forge a “national identity.” Although Pani enjoyed the opportunity to conduct research on her new book project at the University, she observed, “It is interaction with UChicago’s wonderful, intense students, staff, and colleagues which is probably the most fertile [aspect of the Tinker Visiting Professorship], because it is so thought provoking and intellectually challenging.”

UChicago alumna (AB’86) Joy Langston is Professor in Political Science at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) in Mexico. Langston is a prominent scholar of politics who works on the transition to democracy. Her book, Democratization and Authoritarian Party Survival: Mexico’s PRI, was published by Oxford University Press and released in May 2017, during her residency.

While at the University, Langston taught Clientelism and Elections in Latin America. Although many believed clientelism would naturally disappear as citizens in developing nations became wealthier and less tempted by the exchange of government goods and services in return for votes, in Latin America clientelism continues to play an important role in mobilizing voters. This course used several nations in Latin America, including Mexico, Argentina, and Peru, to illustrate why clientelism has survived; how both politicians and parties use it; and some of its consequences for politics, especially representation. Teaching the course contributed to Langston’s current project. She commented, “This course and the materials I taught in it gave me an important head start in my book manuscript on congressional campaigning in Mexico. After my course ended, I was able to write a substantial section of the theory chapter for the book, with a much better idea of how to frame the question and the overall study.”

Tinker Visiting Professors, 2017–18

AUTUMN 2017
Tamara Kamenszain Writer/Universidad Nacional de las Artes, Argentina
David Alonso Center for Advanced Studies of Blanes (CEAB-CSIC), Spain

SPRING 2018
Miriam Escudero Colegio Universitario San Gerónimo de La Habana, Universidad de la Habana, Cuba
Olivia Gomes da Cunha Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro/Museu Nacional, Brazil
Turning Research into Public Impact: Political Scientists in the Media

Academic publishing, which advances scholarship across fields, has long been the focus of faculty research and scholarly communication. But for scholars who want a role in public discourse, writing op-eds, editorials, and other mainstream pieces allows them to increase the impact of their work outside of academia. Scholars are able to share their analysis of current issues with a wide audience, and in real time. A number of University faculty, most often in Political Science and Public Policy, regularly publish op-eds. Two CLAS-affiliated political scientists are part of this trend, and their work highlights the relevance of Latin America to the US public.

Benjamin Lessing studies “criminal conflict”—organized armed violence involving non-state actors who, unlike revolutionary insurgents, are not trying to topple the state. Additionally, he has studied prison gangs’ pernicious effect on state authority and how paramilitary groups use territorial control to influence electoral outcomes. His book, Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press), examines the logics of state-cartel conflicts in Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil. Together with UChicago colleague Paul Staniland, Lessing founded and directs the Program on Political Violence, part of the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST).

In the past two years, Lessing has published on comparing anti-gang initiatives to proposed policing in Muslim neighborhoods, the challenge of prison-based criminal organizations, and Brazil’s prison massacres as a window into gang warfare. His work has been cited in a Newsweek article on the Aryan Brotherhood in Mississippi, due to its roots as a prison gang, and in an article about death squads in the Philippines in Foreign Policy.

Michael Albertus focuses on the political conditions under which governments implement egalitarian reforms. His book Autocracy and Redistribution: The Politics of Land Reform (Cambridge University Press, 2015) examines why and when land reform programs are implemented. It won the 2016 Luebbert Book Award for the best book on comparative politics published in the previous two years, as well as the 2017 LASA Bryce Wood Book Award for the best book on Latin America in the social sciences and humanities. Albertus’s research interests include political regime transitions and stability, politics under dictatorship, clientelism, and civil conflict. Albertus has published 20 op-eds and opinion pieces since 2011 in many popular media outlets, including the Washington Post, the New York Times, Forbes, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, and USA Today.

Albertus has written several op-eds based on his book, covering the debate over land reform in South Africa, political logic and patterns of land distribution in Venezuela, the peace process in Colombia at pivotal moments in 2015 and 2016, and Peru’s presidential election.

Whether they address current events in Latin America or use their knowledge of Latin America to shed light on challenges faced in the United States and elsewhere, CLAS-affiliated faculty are entering the public discourse and using their research to increase public understanding of the issues that affect our world. CLAS will continue to highlight their good work.

Street criminals can have many reasons to obey prison-gang rules. The most important is probably the one a Rio trafficker gave me: “Whatever you do on the outside, you have to answer for on the inside.” Moreover, the likelier you are to go to prison, the stronger your incentives to stay friendly with the gang that runs the place. This means that higher incarceration rates and anti-gang crackdowns can actually increase prison gangs’ influence over street-level actors.

This influence...allows prison gangs in Southern California to govern otherwise unruly and violent urban drug markets, increasing overall profits and taxing the surplus. Indeed, from Los Angeles to Rio, prison gangs’ projection of power has transformed retail drug markets. These are usually fragmented, because it is difficult for one organization to control much turf. Mass incarceration solves this elegantly, arresting street criminals and physically confining them where prison gangs can easily reward obedience and punish defection.


Yet the failed referendum suggests that Colombia’s voters are at war even in how they think about peace. The greatest support for the peace agreement came from the countryside—the rural areas hit hardest by FARC-driven violence. Civilian massacres, guerrilla recruitment, internal displacement, and land dispossession were documented features of the FARC’s operations.

What explains this seeming contradiction? As several accounts have suggested, rural inhabitants understand the enormous stakes and knew that any peace deal is better than none. But a more likely reason is because the less-discussed but critical component of the peace agreement—rural land reform—promised the moon to Colombia’s millions of farmers. The agreement envisioned a regionally based land fund to dole out property to the land-poor, the development of rural infrastructure and education, and greater subsidies and credits to small farmers.

Students

Undergraduates Supplement Latin American & Caribbean Studies Major with Summer Internships

An important part of any education is figuring out how to translate academic interests into a professional skill. While CLAS works to support student career exploration during the academic year through our alumni talks, alumni mentorship program, skills-building workshops, and advising, perhaps the most valuable career exploration occurs through summer internships and employment.

This summer, undergraduates in the Latin American and Caribbean Studies major spread across the globe to put their classroom training into professional practice through internships and jobs that range from community organizing to sustainable agriculture instruction, from arts programming to archaeology, and from consulting work to policy analysis. This variety of work demonstrates just how versatile interdisciplinary training in Latin American and Caribbean Studies can be.

CLAS asked a few majors to expound on their internships—how they came to apply to them, what academic work helped them prepare, and what they anticipate the outcomes of their work will be.

Henry Bach
Teyuna-Ciudad Perdida Field School, Colombia

After receiving a Foreign Language Acquisition Grant last summer and using it to study Portuguese in Brazil, I began to look for a way to return to South America as soon as I could. I chose to apply to the Teyuna-Ciudad Perdida Field School because it would allow me to visit a country I’d never been to before, and to gain plenty of archaeological field experience. During my internship, I’ll participate in the surveying, excavation, and archaeological conservation at several sites in the Teyuna-Ciudad Perdida Archaeological Park.

I really got excited about archaeology in Latin America during my first quarter of Latin American Civilizations with Professor Alan Kolata. My classes in Latin American Studies have again and again fostered my desire to study and explore the region and everything it has to offer. This will be my first time in Colombia—I’m very excited for the opportunity to practice Spanish, to spend several weeks in the rain forest, and to explore other parts of the country after my program concludes.

I’m hoping my experience this summer will help me clarify what direction I would like to take regarding my majors in Latin American Studies and Anthropology, and possibly provide me with some inspiration and connections for my BA thesis research. Whether or not I ultimately decide to pursue archaeology as my concentration, I think this summer will be a remarkable experience for me.

Paula Carcamo
WE ACT for Environmental Justice, New York City

This summer I am interning at the nonprofit organization WE ACT for Environmental Justice. WE ACT advocates for equal access to environmental resources for the residents of Northern Manhattan and against environmental racism. I am working with the organizing team as a bilingual community-organizing intern. Essentially, that means I am doing some of the translation work toward making WE ACT a fully bilingual organization, researching topics of language justice to disseminate to staff, and working with Spanish-speaking members to organize around campaigns they care about.

I got involved in WE ACT through a close friend who is also interning there; she told me about their mission and that they were interested in increasing their Spanish-speaking membership base so as to engage the underrepresented population of Northern Manhattan. WE ACT’s mission aligns with a lot of what I care about. I’m excited to mobilize people in my neighborhood who, like my parents, are more comfortable with Spanish-language communication and care about making their community and the world a healthier, more equitable place.

Several of the courses I’ve taken at UChicago have helped me in unexpected ways in my work. For example, several years ago I took a course in Romance Languages and Literatures
called Regiones del Español that discussed the sociolinguistic history of the Spanish language—I gained experience with the various dialects and pronunciations from different regions of Latin America. The takeaways from this course have been surprisingly practical in helping me interact with people from a variety of countries. I have also found that my knowledge of the history of Latin America and the current social/political climates has been very useful in making meaningful connections with WE ACT members from all over the world.

I am looking forward to my research regarding language justice. I want to help envision practical ways in which multilingual spaces can be created and want to be there for the conversations that come from my work. Fundamentally, I think diversity is an incredible asset to any organization (and humankind), and creating an environment where people with diverse backgrounds and interests can exchange ideas equitably can truly enrich the dialogues we are having no matter the topic.

I can already tell that my time at WE ACT has changed the way I approach problem solving. Working in community organizing has made me quicker on my feet and more able to adapt my plans at a moment’s notice. I think my experiences this summer have reinforced my belief in an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Moving forward, I hope to learn more from fields of study I had never thought to consider.

I think my classes have provided me with the background I need to explore current-events issues without covering only facts or making false assumptions. For example, I will be writing about Maduro’s push to overhaul Venezuela’s constitution this summer. After taking Professor Fischer’s class on Latin American law, I better understand the nature of Latin American constitutions and the place they hold in society. Tracking the revision of a constitution as it happens will no doubt be an illuminating experience.

I am mostly looking forward to attending America Quarterly conferences. This year, the conferences have featured an extraordinary number of heads of states, foreign ministers, and US senators, who’ve spoken on a wide berth of issues relevant to the Americas. Many of the conference topics, like cities or economic development, are the same as classes I’ve taken through the major.

I think this experience will help me think about my career as I come to the end of my undergraduate education. I began studying Latin America as sort of a passion project—I always assumed I would end up in US politics. However, the more I study the region, the more I am interested in considering what a career centered on Latin America might look like. This internship will give me a preview of the think-tank/policy-forum industry. And, doing full-time research at the Council of the Americas might give me more insight into whether I’m interested in (gulp) grad school.

---

**Chase Harrison**  
**Council of the Americas, Washington**

After working the past few summers in American politics, I was eager to try a new industry and begin to use the knowledge I’ve accrued through my major. Thus, I began to search for internships with Latin American think tanks and policy forums. The Council of the Americas was atop my list because I am a big fan of the journal it produces, America Quarterly. When I debated in high school, I read America Quarterly to prepare for Latin American topics. I credit it for helping develop my love of Latin American politics and medium-form journalism.

During my internship I will be involved in a major project studying natural-gas development throughout Latin America. I will also assist in covering current events like the Venezuelan and Brazilian political crises to produce online content. Finally, I’ll aid in organizing Council of the Americas conferences that bring together academics and policymakers to discuss major topics on Latin America.
Reflections from the BA Preceptor: Working with a Diverse Array of Undergraduate Students

Enrique Dávila
PhD Candidate, History

The BA undergraduate thesis requires patience, focus, and stamina. For Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) undergraduate majors, the completion of the BA thesis is the final step toward graduation, but it is no easy task. It is a yearlong process that involves a carefully planned course of action. Beginning in the Spring before the student’s fourth year, LACS majors attend workshops to identify a specific research topic. During the next Autumn, they participate in a research and methods course in which they work toward developing an original research proposal. In Winter, they begin writing their thesis and presenting drafts at workshops attended by their cohort. And in the fifth week of the Spring Quarter, their thesis is due.

They begin the process with a question, and a year later they press “send” on an email containing a 30+-page answer. As fellow researchers know, the feeling one gets when pressing “send” on that email is exhilarating and euphoric. If all goes well, the cohort walks away with a huge sense of accomplishment in addition to having acquired valuable research, writing, and editorial skills. I have been fortunate to be a part of this program for two years as a preceptor, and I continue to admire the process in action.

This summer, however, I was given the opportunity to meet a whole cohort of young researchers who do not attend the University of Chicago. This cohort was made up of undergraduates from across the country heading into their senior year who agreed to spend their summer on the UChicago campus participating in one of two summer programs: the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and the Leadership Alliance. Each of these programs has its own specific application process, funding, and mission, yet both share the difficult and extensive challenge of addressing the problem of underrepresentation in the academy. One way the programs are working to address this problem is by inviting undergraduates interested in pursuing graduate education to participate in a summer intensive research program. For those who plan to go into the social sciences, part of the summer is spent in a research curriculum similar to the one undertaken by LACS majors.

I met many of the Mellon Mays and Leadership Alliance students while working in positions in each program. On the whole, they were an exciting group, extremely committed to both their work and the future of the academy. But then, what else should I have expected from students who signed up to spend their break discussing research methodology and the finer points of academic writing?

It is clear to me that there are many students, from diverse backgrounds, who have their own unique and fascinating research questions and are eager to take up the formidable task that is graduate education. Yet making sure that the academy reflects the entire spectrum of individuals who are ready to do this work will be no easy task. I’m glad to know that programs like Mellon Mays and the Leadership Alliance are crafting carefully constructed plans of action to address this problem. A problem that will no doubt require the same characteristics we ask of students in our BA degree program: patience, focus, and stamina.

Contextos

This November will mark the third anniversary of Contextos, the blog of the Center for Latin American Studies. Contextos provides students, faculty, alumni, associate members, and friends with an interactive space for sharing knowledge, research news, professional projects, and engaging stories and photographs about Latin America and the Caribbean. As the name denotes, Contextos intends to reflect the heterogeneity of the region as seen through a variety of disciplinary lenses, as well as to capture the contrasting political, economic, and social realities that Latin Americans encounter. We have covered an array of topics that highlight the research interests of our community, with recent foci including Black mothers and the struggle for Black life in Brazil; home-sign systems in an indigenous community in Guatemala; language and the ancient history of the New World; and Haiti’s new Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen. Contextos blog posts are published monthly during the academic year and can be found on our website, as well as through our Facebook and Twitter pages.

View of one of the main roads through Nebaj, Guatemala. Photo: Laura Horton, PhD Candidate.
2016–17 GRADUATES

BA MAJOR IN LATIN AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN STUDIES

Peter Ballou Latin American Studies
“The Temple of the Warriors and Its Substructure”
Postgraduation: Program assistant, Latin America, World Bank

Christopher Munoz Latin American Studies, with honors; International Studies, with honors
“Double Play Diplomacy”
Postgraduation: Summer internship, Illinois Office of the Comptroller, Susana Mendoza

Adela Zhang Latin American Studies, with honors; Economics, with honors
“Conflict as Claim-Making and Dialogue as Democracy: Community Resistance to Extractive Capital in Central Peru”
Postgraduation: Entering Anthropology PhD student at Stanford University

BA MINOR IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES—

Chelsie Coren Anthropology, with honors
Tiphaine Kugener Economics

Saul Levin Geographical Studies; Environmental Studies, with honors

Steven Vincent Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities, with honors

MA

Franco Bavoni Escobedo Master of Arts Program in Social Sciences
“Soccer and Translocal Networks of Mexican Immigrants in Chicago: The Case of San Rafael”
Postgraduation: Program manager, Katz Center for Mexican Studies, University of Chicago

Tyler Bos Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Postgraduation: City Year Detroit

Stephanie Cook Latin American and Caribbean Studies
“From Feminism to Federation: Women’s Movements before and after the Cuban Revolution”
Postgraduation: Director of Programming, Lawyers Club of San Diego

Brandy Norton Latin American and Caribbean Studies
“A Categorization and Comparative Analysis of Maya Body Part Caches”
Postgraduation: Archaeology field technician, Seminole Tribe of Florida

PhD

Chelsea Burns Music
“Listening for Modern Latin America: Identity and Representation in Concert Music, 1920–1940”
Postgraduation: Assistant Professor in Music Theory, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester

Zachary Chase Anthropology
“Performing the Past in the Historical, Ritual, and Mythological Landscapes of Huarochiri, Peru (ca. AD 1400–1700)”
Postgraduation: Assistant Professor in Anthropology, Brigham Young University

Genviève Godbout Anthropology
“A House in Waiting: Food and Hospitality on Antiguan Plantations, 1783–1904”
Postgraduation: Editor, Centre Canadien d’Architecture

Eric Hirsch Anthropology
“Investing in Indigeneity: Development, Finance, and the Politics of Abundance in Andean Peru”
Postgraduation: Assistant Professor in Environmental Studies, Franklin & Marshall College

Aiala Levy History
“Forging an Urban Public: Theaters, Audiences, and the City in São Paulo, Brazil, 1854–1924”
Postgraduation: Visiting Assistant Professor in Latin American History, University of Scranton

Mollie McFee Comparative Literature
“Aspirational Nations: Language, Intimacy, and Twentieth-Century Caribbean Culture”

José Juan Pérez Meléndez History
“The Business of Peopling: Colonization and Politics in Imperial Brazil, 1822–1860”
Postgraduation: Assistant Professor in History, University of California, Davis

Ana Paola Sanchez Rojo Music
“Music, Opinion, and Press in Late Eighteenth-Century Madrid”
Postgraduation: Assistant Professor in Music, Musicology, Tulane University

Diana Schwartz History
“Transforming the Tropics: Development, Displacement, and Anthropology in the Papaloapan, Mexico, 1940s–1970s”
Postgraduation: Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Wesleyan University

Daniel Webb History
“Mapping the Apachería: US-Mexico Borderlands, 18th–19th c.”
Reflections from the MA Lecturer: Two Years of Professionalization at CLAS

My pedagogic and intellectual experience as the CLAS Postdoctoral Lecturer has been superb. CLAS is a hub where everyone working on any aspect of Latin America converges, either at CLAS-organized events, talks or seminars sponsored by the Katz Center, or the biweekly Latin American History Workshop and the interdisciplinary Workshop on Latin America and the Caribbean. That continuous stream of in-house and visiting professors, researchers, and students exchanging ideas in a collaborative atmosphere set the tone for these past two years. I had the good fortune to present and receive feedback on my own work at the history workshop, and to obtain institutional support to organize an international colloquium on “The Worlds of Latin American Music in the 20th Century,” with invited speakers from Chicago, Argentina, and France.

Within this fabulous intellectual context, I taught the MA Proseminar to two excellent cohorts (2015–17) of scholars in the making. With them I learned about all sorts of topics and scholarly approaches, and to become a better adviser. We had weekly multidisciplinary conversations with invited guests from an array of departments, and discussed weekly readings covering major intellectual, historical, cultural, and sociopolitical axes of Latin America’s life. With Jamie Gentry’s planning, the second cohort enjoyed a stronger framework for the entire thesis process, from finding the right advisers to organizing the thesis architecture and writing, as well as ad-hoc workshops that I led. This was part of a new format that combines the Proseminar, workshops, and summer assignments to ensure that students adapt and thrive during their yearlong MA studies.

Both cohorts of MA students comprised bright and engaged young scholars. They developed original and sophisticated work on crucial historical, political, aesthetic, institutional, and sociopolitical issues all over Latin America and the Caribbean—from the mutual influence of economic policies in Mexico and China in relation to the gold standard in the early 1900s, to institutional responses to gender violence in contemporary Guatemala, to original reinterpretations of the agrarian reform in 1960s Peru, to archeological reinterpretations of ancient Mayan bodily remains. I learned from each one of their projects and, above all, from these fantastic students’ intellectual and learning styles.

Teaching other Latin America-related courses to bright students of all levels from first year to fourth year and from MA to PhD helped me consolidate my teaching style and taught me to engage with intellectual rigor and ideological openness in class conversations. The Latin Americanist faculty members were also a source of advice and support, through both formal and informal mentorship. The ongoing conversation with students, colleagues, and mentors resulted not just in my own intellectual growth but also in a more productive relationship with the MA students.

My two years at CLAS were hence a strong professionalizing experience. Behind each and every aspect of this experience, I invariably found the careful, admirably professional, and humanly wonderful work of a small and brilliant organizing group. Director Brodie Fischer, Associate Director Natalie Arsenault, Office Manager and Student Affairs Coordinator Jamie Gentry, and Outreach and Campus Program Coordinator Claudia Giribaldi, together with their excellent student assistants, made possible this constant flux of top-notch events and activities, within the respectful, productive, and cheerful ambience that characterizes CLAS’s daily functioning. This combination of excellence and camaraderie I take with me as a guide to my own professional future.
What do you do as program analyst for Latin America at the Howard G. Buffett Foundation?

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation is a private family foundation focused on mitigating existing conflict and advancing food security. We do this by funding programs with nonprofit partners in Africa, Latin America, and the United States. I support our overall strategy and day-to-day operations in Latin America, where the foundation has existing programs in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Colombia. I supervise a portfolio of existing grants in these countries, research new opportunities that fit within the foundation’s interests, and coordinate with other funders in the region to ensure we are learning from best practices.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

The foundation has deliberately chosen to work within really challenging environments—that makes our work exciting but also daunting. Central America (particularly the Northern Triangle) is resource-poor, scarred by new and historical conflicts, and politically polarized. The hardest part of my job is trying to make recommendations to the foundation’s leaders about where the foundation can be most effective. This requires a lot of discipline because the foundation’s resources are minuscule compared with the scale of the challenges these countries face.

And the most rewarding aspect?

I really enjoy getting to interact with our grantees doing brave and innovative work. It is particularly rewarding to see and hear from smallholder farmers (the foundation has a strong focus on smallholder agriculture) about how they have leveraged support from our programs to improve their quality of life.

Katz Center for Mexican Studies

During the 2016–17 academic year, the Katz Center for Mexican Studies organized 11 Mexican Studies Seminars, as well as numerous events in collaboration with other organizations. One of the highlights of the year was a panel titled “Mexico and Trump: Views from Mexico.” Cosponsored by the Katz Center and the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), this event brought together Mexican scholars, the academic community of the University, and members of the Mexican-origin population in Chicago to discuss the economic, political, and social implications of the Trump presidency for Mexico.

The Katz Center recently established the Fulbright-García Robles COMEXUS Mexico Studies Chair, a visiting scholar program between UChicago and the Mexico-US Commission for Educational Exchange (COMEXUS). For up to five months each year, the Katz Center will host a senior scholar to study and lecture on any topic related to Mexico.

Finally, the second gathering of the Cátedra Internacional Friedrich Katz, which the University launched in conjunction with El Colegio de México, CIESAS, the Free University of Berlin, the University of Vienna, and Columbia University, took place in Mexico City in the fall of 2016. This annual academic meeting is devoted to the exploration of the themes that defined the historical scholarship of Friedrich Katz. The Free University of Berlin will host the next Cátedra in 2017.
LOOKING AHEAD

The Center for Latin American Studies seeks to nurture Latin American expertise in order to enrich scholarship, deepen public debate, and foster cultural awareness and community. Central to our work is the building of a community of scholars—students, faculty, visitors—who come together in Chicago to engage in meaningful exchange and collaboration. We look forward to welcoming new members to our community in 2017–18.

CLAS Lecturer

CLAS welcomes Stefanie Graeter as CLAS Lecturer, beginning in Autumn 2017. She holds a BA in Environmental Sciences from the University of California, Berkeley, and an MA and PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, Davis. Her dissertation, “Mineral Incorporations: Embodied Ecologies and Neoextractivist Politics in Peru,” analyzes the heavy-metal lead as a material-semiotic condensation of the fraught moral disagreements over the human cost of an extractive economy in Peru. Her current research analyzes lead-exposure politics as a key nexus of ethical debates about Peru’s transnational mining industry, one of the world’s top metal commodity producers. In addition to the Proseminar, the required course for our MA students, she will teach Corporeal Collisions: The Catholic Church and Life Politics in Latin America; Science in the South: Decolonial Approaches to the Study of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Latin America; and Latin American Extractivisms.

MA Cohort

We welcome seven new students to the LACS MA program in the Autumn. This year’s cohort has a diverse but complementary range of interests, including Andean political science, history, and geography; diplomatic and political history of 20th-century Cuba; postcolonial studies, inequality, critical theory, intersectionality and racism, and indigeneity; postcolonialism and revolutionary movements in Mexico and Cuba; postrevolutionary Mexico (1930–1940); immigration law and migration along the US-Mexico border and Central America; and social trauma in Latin America (with a focus on Argentina, Colombia, and Cuba) after the 1950s.

Postdoctoral Scholar

Ryan Jobson (Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellow 2017–2019; Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Anthropology 2019– ) is a social scientist and Caribbean cultural critic trained in anthropology and African American Studies. His research and teaching engage issues of energy and extractive resource development, technology and infrastructure, states and sovereignty, and histories of racial capitalism in the colonial and postcolonial Americas.

Academic Visitors

Fernão Pessoa Ramos, Professor in Cinema Studies at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Brazil, will be in residence at UChicago while working on a book about documentary film. Ramos is founding president of SOCINE (Brazilian Society of Film Studies), which he directed from 1997 to 2001. Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak, Professor Adjunto in Economic Sciences at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, will be a visiting scholar at CLAS from September to December 2017. He plans to research the role of the Ford Foundation in shaping the social sciences, and particularly academic economics, in Brazil during the 1960s and 1970s. Reynaldo Yunuen Ortega Ortiz, Professor in Political Science at the Center for International Studies at El Colegio de México, is a visiting scholar at the Katz Center for Mexican Studies from July to December 2017. He is working on a book on presidential elections in Mexico from 1970 to 2012.

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH CLAS

We encourage alumni and friends to keep in touch with CLAS in a variety of ways. While we welcome financial support, we also invite you to attend campus events; visit our website to stay up-to-date about initiatives at the Center; read our blog, Contextos; and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media. Alumni involvement opportunities include our career webinar series and mentorship opportunities that allow students and alumni to connect with one another through one-time meetings, short- and long-term relationships, campus events, or career shadowing. Please contact us at clas@uchicago.edu for more information.

Subscribe to CLAS email lists and visit our online events calendar at clas.uchicago.edu.