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.

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We invite you to attend CLAS events; visit our website to stay up to date about initiatives at the Center; read our blog; listen to our podcast; and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
Letter from the Interim Director

Claudia Brittenham, Associate Professor in Art History

Like many scholars of Aztec and colonial Mexico, I’ve spent the past year re-reading Hernán Cortés’s letters to King Charles V of Spain, retracing the footsteps of the Spanish invasion of Mexico five hundred years ago. Starting with the departure from Cuba in February of 1519, through to the first view of Tenochtitlan on November 8, to the Spanish flight from the Aztec capital on the night of June 30, 1520, to the siege and eventual fall of Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521, it’s been striking to contemplate in real time just how quickly events unfolded. As I’m writing these words in September 2020, what happened five hundred years ago seems especially relevant: a devastating smallpox epidemic was beginning to sweep through Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the first of many waves of disease that would devastate the continent, just as they had the islands of the Caribbean in previous decades. Many sources attribute the arrival of smallpox in Mexico to Francisco Eguía, an enslaved African man who accompanied Panfilo de Narváez’s forces in 1520, a potent evocation of the ways that the evils of slavery intertwined with the colonization of the Americas.

It’s particularly resonant to read about that smallpox epidemic in the Florentine Codex, the 12-volume Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España, which was composed during yet another outbreak of disease in 1576. On November 8 of that year, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún wrote, in an unusual direct address to the reader, about the exponential rise in the number of cases and the uncertainty about the future that he felt at the peak of the epidemic. This time the disease was huey tōoltzli, perhaps a hemorrhagic fever, and its impact was greatly exacerbated by poverty, disease, and racial inequality. As Nahua chronicler Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin wrote, “And during this time, there were deaths all over New Spain; we Indians died, together with the blacks, but only a few Spaniards died.” Like the coronavirus epidemic today, race and wealth shaped the experience of epidemics in sixteenth-century Mexico. A few months later, Sahagún interrupted his text again, with a more hopeful note: “What I estimate as to this matter is rather that soon this plague will cease and that many people will still remain…And I still think that there will always be numbers of Indians in these lands.” The present pandemic, too, will end, but it will remain important to study how the legacies of that early colonial moment continue to shape modern experience.

In the meantime, the Center for Latin American Studies will keep on going. Coronavirus disrupted our plans last spring, but under the able leadership of outgoing director Brodwyn Fischer and associate director Natalie Arsenault, CLAS still sponsored over 60 events last year, including a Zoom conversation about the impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America. We’ve posted the video of that conversation, along with other talks, panels, interviews, podcasts, and student blog posts, on our website at https://clas.uchicago.edu/multimedia-resources, where you can also find a compilation of online resources related to Latin America. Over 1,750 people attended CLAS-sponsored or cosponsored events in 2019–2020, and even more will continue to be able to find our materials online.

In addition, CLAS offered or cross-listed 77 courses with Latin America-related content last year, which collectively attracted over 1,000 enrollments. Highlights included The Mexican Political Essay, led by Jesús Silva-Herzog, and State Formation in Latin America, led by Tomás Straka, both Tinker Visiting Professors; the Ignacio Martín-Baró Prize Lectureship, taught by anthropology graduate student Alejandra Azuero Quijano, on Anti-Corruption Politics in Latin America; Popol Vuh: Epic of the Americas, led by Edgar Garcia; and a course on Andean textiles taught by Art Institute of Chicago curator Andrew Hamilton, in which students learned to spin, dye, and weave while also studying the long history of textile production in the Andes.

In 2019-2020, we also made significant changes to our graduate and undergraduate programs. CLAS phased out the dedicated MA in Latin American Studies, replacing it with a graduate certificate in Latin American Studies, available to MA and PhD students alike, which will appear on student transcripts. We expect that more students with interests in Latin America will be able to engage with CLAS in this new format. In addition, after a curriculum review of the BA major and minor programs, we developed a new set of requirements that will take effect for the graduating class of 2022. The new requirements for the major allow for greater flexibility in meeting the language requirement; mandate coursework that introduces new disciplinary perspectives, methodologies, and skills; introduce alternative formats for the final BA project; and integrate experiential learning to expand the scope of students’ academic engagement with the region and its peoples. The new experiential learning component of the major may be fulfilled by a study abroad program, a research assistantship, an internship, or a project of the student’s own design. We have already implemented a number of internships with campus and local organizations, including the Smart Museum of Art, the Centro Romero, and Casa Michoacán, but if you’d be interested in hosting an internship, please be in touch. Finally, CLAS has joined the Tinker Field Research Collaborative, which will allow us to share experiences and expertise with other schools sponsoring field research in Latin America through the generosity of the Tinker Foundation.

Many of our courses and events this year will, of necessity, be remote, but this has allowed us to foster closer connections with colleagues and audiences in Latin America. And perhaps some of you, too, may be able to tune in to CLAS events even if you are far from Chicago. Whatever this year brings, understanding Latin America and our relationship to it will continue to be of vital importance.

CLAS Events Focus on Democracy in Latin America

As the second decade of the twenty-first century—a decade marked by protests around the globe—inexorably transitions into the third in what has proven to be a year of intense soul-searching in the United States, it is perhaps more important than ever to reflect upon the less-than-certain outcomes of inherently fallible human experiments in government and political economy throughout the Western Hemisphere. Both 2019 and 2020 witnessed the high aspirations and often elusive promises of many democratic projects in Latin America give way to protest and polarization. Meanwhile, a resurgence in populism had already presented a new paradigm within which to consider the perennial debate over the nature, legacy, and future of both socialism and neoliberalism in the region. In the midst of these uncertain circumstances, CLAS continued its tradition of enriching the public conversation at the University of Chicago and in the broader Chicago community by hosting guest speakers who addressed some of the most salient issues currently impacting Latin America and its engagement with the world.

Several CLAS events in 2019–20 captured not only the broad scale of societal challenges facing contemporary Latin America, but also the diverse paths that countries in the region have taken since the end of the twentieth century. A conversation led by Andreas Feldmann (University of Illinois at Chicago) and Natalia Niedmann Álvarez (University of Chicago) provoked analysis and debate about the protests that rocked Chile from October 2019 into 2020—protests which evidenced an unresolved struggle to escape the shadow of the 1973–1990 military dictatorship. Two events with guests from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation focused on Brazil’s polemical populist president, Jair Bolsonaro: Oliver Stuenkel discussed the political dynamics of Bolsonaro’s government and Guilherme Stolle Paixão and Casarões presented on the implications of the religious undertones in Bolsonaro’s metapolitical rhetoric. Finally, a panel of experts—including Tomás Straka (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello), Margarita López Maya (Universidad Central de Venezuela), and Armando Chaguaceda (Centro de Estudios Constitucionales Iberoamericanos)—discussed the complex legacy of populism, socialism, and crisis in contemporary Venezuela. In each of these events, the insight of subject-matter experts provided an invaluable point of departure for analysis, debate, and reflection.

In their panel discussion, “Chronicle of a Social Explosion Foretold: Making Sense of the Chilean Sociopolitical Crisis,” Andreas Feldmann and Natalia Niedmann Álvarez, a JSD candidate at UChicago Law, described the social, political, and
institutional foundations of the recent protests in Chile. Feldmann illuminated the underlying societal conditions that catalyzed the rapidly escalating protests—sparked by police confrontations with citizens practicing civil disobedience against increased subway fares—into widespread anomie and violent unrest. These conditions included “relative deprivation” (as defined by Ted Robert Gurr in 1971), horizontal inequalities attributed to neoliberal orthodoxy, the existence of “grey zones” of limited governance, and a perception of government aloofness. Niedmann, meanwhile, leveraged her research and first-hand experience to describe how existing political institutions had already been widely seen by Chileans as symbolically tied to the Pinochet dictatorship, which had established the current constitution. Furthermore, she explained that those institutions had been designed to resist changes that might weaken the military regime’s political heirs, thereby undermining the durability of their legitimacy. Not only was this historical context all the more impactful given UChicago’s role in providing an intellectual foundation for many Pinochet-era policymakers, but impassioned comments by Chilean expats from the Chicago community served to underscore—preternaturally, it now seems—the very personal stakes of unresolved social injustice in ostensibly democratic societies.

While the Chilean crisis is arguably attributable to bottom-up dissatisfaction with an unfulfilling effort to evolve from the recent past, the contentious political climate in Brazil was described by CLAS’s subsequent guest speakers as stemming from a populist executive’s dramatic top-down rejection of the status quo—an experiment with its own significant consequences. Oliver Stuenkel shed light on the unique internal tensions within the Bolsonaro administration, which he described as buoyed by the support of three often-conflicting factions: Bolsonaro’s dedicated anti-globalist political allies, a pragmatic military establishment, and neoliberal economists. In his presentation, “How Bolsonaro Is Reshaping Brazil,” Stuenkel emphasized the administration’s reliance on a narrative of internal and external tensions to justify the president’s political continuity, as well as the negative impact of those tensions on Brazil’s foreign policy—with the United States and other powers having to maintain discordant dialogue with all three influential groups.

The foreign policy implications of Bolsonaro’s political strategy also served as a key focus of Guilherme Casarôes’s presentation, “A Blast from the Past: Bolsonaro’s Metapolitical Crusade for a New Brazilian Identity.” He argued that Bolsonaro aims to perpetuate his anti-establishment and anti-globalist politics by actively trying to create a new Brazilian identity that is centered on his own brand of Christian nationalism. Casarôes emphasized Bolsonaro’s success in the employment of metapolitics: a strategy to perpetuate a particular set of cultural ideas, attitudes, and values in a society in order to lay the groundwork for deeper political change. This strategy, he explained, is achieved through the use of social media-based targeting of perceived political enemies, such as the political establishment, social justice activists, and the press. Casarôes went on to describe how the ideological influence of polemical voices like Olavo de Carvalho and Steve Bannon has led the Bolsonaro administration to upend the traditional multilateralism, universalism, and pacifism of Brazil’s foreign policy in favor of forging a conservative alliance, often at the expense of Brazilian economic interests. Perhaps most troubling, Casarôes pointed out, is that Bolsonaro’s metapolitical project risks marginalizing the democratic participation of the political opposition, potentially threatening the nature of Brazilian democracy.

The challenges to democracy presented by ideology and populism from the other side of the political spectrum were tackled by the panel of experts that CLAS invited to describe the legacy of Venezuela’s Bolivarian socialist project. In “Lost Illusions: Democracy, Socialism, and Bankruptcy in Venezuela,” three scholars described how one of the richest countries in the world only 50 years ago could now find itself facing unmatched economic adversity. First, Tinker Visiting Professor Tomás Straka highlighted the myopic refusal of Venezuela’s late twentieth-century rentier-state society to reform its increasingly unsustainable economic model, as well as the widespread resentment of belated attempts to implement austerity that ultimately propelled Hugo Chávez to the presidency. Margarita López Maya then described how Chávez’s populism, buoyed by high oil prices in the 2000s, reinforced the longstanding rentier tradition and legitimized a consolidation of power—undermining the voices of opposition and ensuring the durability of support for Chavismo. Finally, Armando Chaguaceda used the Venezuelan case to challenge the position of political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who has argued for the value of leftist populism in the midst of increasingly polarized politics. Chaguaceda pointed out the risks of confounding the populist tendency for cooptation with empowerment, and of overlooking the unreadable need for populists to divisively point out adversaries to “the people” while emphasizing their own personal importance to the system—characteristics evident in the political strategies of Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro.

Despite the heterogeneity of the societies that comprise Latin America and the disparate challenges that face them, these events served as a reminder of a universal risk of human governance: the marginalization by incumbent leaders of opposition voices and minority groups. In a year that has tested governments’ ability to balance societal well-being with both the limitations of authority and the political inconvenience of truth amid uncertainty throughout the hemisphere, it is all the more critical to debate the merits of systems ostensibly designed to offer a dignified life for all citizens. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic made clear the unmitigable capriciousness of the status quo, and it continues to escalate in Latin America as the academic year comes to a close. Meanwhile, disturbingly salient evidence of still-unresolved racial inequality in the United States, the hemisphere’s oldest continuous democracy, has caused simmering discontent to boil over into widespread unrest, provoking similar protests throughout the region. Whether ideologically neoliberal, socialist, or nationalist, democratic governments consistently struggle to truly represent the interests of all constituents. CLAS events this year looked to the cases of Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela to broaden the University’s conversation and to debate the appropriateness of various political projects as they ideally contribute to the universal, yet interminable, cause of creating more just societies.
CLAS Stays Connected during the Pandemic

Natalie Arsenault
Associate Director

In mid-March, when we last stepped into the small suite that CLAS occupies on the first floor of Kelly Hall, few of us imagined how long it would be until we could return to that space—the actual center in which we regularly host classes, workshops, and meetings. The transition to remote learning for the Spring, and the closure of the UChicago campus, meant an interruption to CLAS activities that bring together faculty and students to discuss and debate myriad topics relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean.

CLAS is, above all, an intellectual community. Working from home, CLAS staff members immediately began to brainstorm new ways to promote Latin Americanist research, teaching, and events in the absence of being able to gather in person. Our communication plan for the Spring integrated a variety of digital tools to share new content with faculty, students, and friends. We made concerted efforts to stay connected to our community, even as we were isolated in our homes and dispersed around the globe.

Contextos, the CLAS Blog
Since we launched Contextos in 2014, the blog has focused on graduate student research, allowing students to produce written commentary outside of their formal academic work. Contextos provides contributors an opportunity to share memorable moments during fieldwork, exciting archival finds, and other observations that are often abbreviated or cut entirely from their academic writing. This Spring, our public engagement intern, Anjelica Fabro (PhD student, Music), worked diligently to ensure that Contextos continued to post new reflections penned by students, including “A Language Puzzle in Panama” by Carlos Cisneros (PhD candidate, Linguistics), on the aspects of the Chibchan language family that piqued his interest; “Powers of Terror: Esotericism and the Argentine Dictatorship” by Laura Colaneri (PhD candidate, Romance Languages & Literatures), about Perón adviser José López Rega and sinister forces in Argentine politics; and “On Archives, Dissertations, and All We Cannot Control” by Hanna Manente Nunes (PhD candidate, History) about the role of luck and uncertainty in research.

EntreVistas, the CLAS Podcast
EntreVistas, launched two years ago, provides an informal space for our faculty and visitors to engage in short conversations about their work, with the goal of making their research more accessible to the general public. We had several unedited interviews, due to lack of time to polish them up for sharing. This Spring, CLAS student affairs coordinator, Lindsay Ortega, taught herself to use audio editing software, consulted with friends who worked on professional podcasts, and dedicated herself to the task of working through our backlog. She has posted two additional podcast interviews: Sarah Osten (University of Vermont, LACS AM’04/History PhD’10) on her experience as an MA student, her transition into the History doctoral program, and her experience navigating the job market post-graduation; and Mareike Winchell (Anthropology) on her research in Bolivia, where she studies questions of indigeneity and governance and how histories of agrarian servitude have shaped the terms of citizenship and political inclusion in the present. Ortega is also putting the finishing touches on a fascinating interview with CLAS guest speaker Marcel Pinas, a Surinamese artist known for incorporating elements of traditional Maroon culture in his work; she has distilled Pinas’s nearly hour-long interview into our 15-minute podcast format, and we will post the entire conversation on our website.

Social Media
One of our student workers, Tania Escobedo (MA student, Social Service Administration), focused on social media messaging. She highlighted news—publications, grants, awards, honors—about our faculty and academic visitors. Facebook posts included announcements of op-eds in Foreign Policy and The Washington Post by Michael Albertus (Political Science); new books by Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky (Cinema & Media Studies) and Anna Caballé (Tinker Visiting Professor, 2015–16); Neubauer Collegium funding for the Working Group on Slavery and Visual Culture, led by Agnes Lugo-Ortiz, Larissa Brewer-García, and Danielle Roper (all from Romance Languages & Literatures), Allyson Nadia Field (Cinema & Media Studies), and Chris Taylor (English);
In early October 2019, the Katz Center held a community-wide debate featuring prominent Mexican intellectuals to discuss Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s first year in Mexico’s top post—the presidency. The event welcomed more than two hundred community members from the University and beyond and featured Gibrán Ramírez Reyes, Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez, Blanca Heredia, and José Antonio Aguilar Rivera as panelists and Emilio Kourí, director of the Katz Center, as moderator. Since these public intellectuals rarely share debate space, this platform offered a unique opportunity to gain insight into the new president’s political impact. They provided catholic and critical evaluations of the president’s type of government, national security plan, and propinquity to other international actors, coinciding on the point that his rhetoric is one of the left. They emphasized the need to devise new conceptual frameworks to make sense of this “one man’s movement” that has revitalized the working class and the marginalized. Since this is his first year in office, only time will tell if praxis aligns with his leftist rhetoric.

Live stream of event available at: www.facebook.com/katzcenter/videos/1383441058479494/
Spanish transcription of event in NEXOS magazine: www.nexos.com.mx/?p=45948

Katz Center for Mexican Studies

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Reflections on Art and the Archive in Greater Latin America

Pedro Noel Doreste
PhD Student, Cinema & Media Studies/CLAS Communications Assistant

Last winter, Diana Schwartz Francisco, Assistant Instructional Professor at CLAS, was preparing to teach a Spring Quarter class on the relevance of the archive in the artistic practice of Greater Latin America. Schwartz Francisco was planning to examine how Latin American artists continue to remix, reclaim, and borrow from archival material in their respective practice, paying particular attention to how this mode of artistic production can serve to redress official histories of people and places within the Western Hemisphere. The course, Art and the Archive in Greater Latin America, was intended to be a broad theoretical, historical, and practice-based survey of the enduring valences of the archival document in the art of the Americas, from the colonial to the contemporary period. However, when the COVID-19 outbreak turned global and the United States slowly began implementing preventive measures, the University and the Center had to move quickly to transition to remote learning. In the scramble to prepare for the unprecedented challenge of teaching during a worldwide pandemic, I was asked to assist Schwartz Francisco as she retrofitted the syllabus to accommodate the inherent limitations of an online classroom. I viewed the class as an opportunity to blend two of my own research areas, media archival studies and Latin American film and video.

Given the central theme of the class, redesigning the syllabus presented a series of problems. Logistical concerns weighed heavily on the minds of any instructor who was scheduled to teach in the Spring. Synchronous class meetings twice per week did not seem feasible with enrolled students dispersed across several different time zones, not to mention those who found themselves without reliable access to the internet. We had to be mindful of moderating a reading load that now included dozens of classmates’ weekly posts on online discussion boards. Time allotted for film screenings, presentations, and discussion would have to be shifted around, with most of these activities happening outside of contact hours. Like all instructors, Schwartz Francisco wrestled with these questions while improvising pedagogical strategies, and solicited my ideas and feedback on challenges related to this course in particular. How do you teach a class about archival research and practice when access to physical collections has been cut off? How do you teach the major interventions of the archival turn in art and criticism—broadly understood as an acknowledgment of the archive as an instrument of power in the production of knowledge—when a global crisis is revealing such institutional deficiencies in the present moment? Given the scope implied by the course title, how do you familiarize students with the art and thought of Greater

Latin America through the narrow mediums of Zoom video conferences or 250-word Canvas discussion posts? Due to the temporary closure of campus facilities, students could not tour the University Archives or learn to handle delicate materials at the Special Collections Research Center. They could not walk into the Logan Center Film Vault or schedule print viewings at the campus Photographic Archive. Before offering any methodological alternatives to in-person archival research—and even before attempting to arrive at definitions of the archive—the course focused on the speculative and/or personal aspects of engaging with archives. Before the initial class, students were asked to share an image of themselves doing something they enjoyed and to provide a short description. Students drew from their own repositories, whether that meant selecting an image from themselves or their smartphone’s picture rolls or taking a spur-of-the-moment screen cap of their latest family Zoom chat. The photos they shared showed the diversity of interests within the class, ranging from quarantine staples such as taking up baking and Hulu watch parties to nostalgic images of life before the pandemic, which included scenes of students making pottery, live DJing Brazilian music, and ice-skating on the Midway. This introductory activity allowed students to appreciate the individual care that goes into the act of selecting, cataloguing, and ultimately exhibiting an object, in anticipation of the final project in which they would develop their own virtual exhibition.

Along with this curatorial exercise, students read Walter Benjamin’s “Unpacking my Library” and Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Library of Babel” as points of comparison. Benjamin’s affective prose describes his purchase of a book for his home library, in which the process of browsing, acquiring, and rehoming a book serves as a sort of metatext to its content and the act of collecting becomes a means of personal expression. Borges’s description of a library containing every book in existence, albeit with unreliable or incomplete indexing, served as a counterweight to the studied intimacy with which Benjamin assembles his own. Implied in each writer’s pre-archival act of accession is the timely question of access, of assembling a personal collection whose order and meaning is only known to its collector versus a repository of infinite knowledge defined by its disorder, which would call attention to the tension between individual and political subjectivities in the creation of the archive. Perhaps it is counterintuitive to invoke these two authors’ works in an attempt to demystify archival practice, yet this particular pedagogical experiment of weighing Benjamin’s archive-as-reading-nook against Borges’s labyrinthine variant sought to empower students to imagine alternative approaches to constituting an archive.

The class advanced rapidly from this initial provocation. Following Michel-Rolph Trouillot, readings addressed both how the archive produces history and how historical narratives themselves, under the sway of the dominant ideologies of the day, constitute the archive in the first place. Course materials were designed to complicate the appearance of symbiosis between hegemonic histories and archival institutions, often to the detriment of Black, Indigenous, and other minority-identifying communities, which we aimed to center through case studies. For example, the class discussed lithographs of Afro-Brazilian religious festivals as well as pictorial representations of Toussaint Louverture’s likeness across history to reconsider them as performing an archival function in the absence of robust documentation of the cultural practice of enslaved peoples and in spite of the deliberate erasure of Blackness from institutional archival projects in Latin America. Students viewed installations by Amalia Mesa-Bains and her experiments in rasquachismo, or the irreverent and spontaneous embrace of household materials—bibles, sewing kits, kitchenware, etc.—as tributes to working-class Chicana identity, daring the viewer to read the objects as kitsch. Students surveyed exemplary films from the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and ’70s, a period of revolutionary fervor in the region which saw filmmakers blur the lines between fiction and documentary, produce anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist newreels at a lightning pace, and create new distribution networks and archival sanctuaries for the militant, transnational cinemas of the former third world. In the last two weeks, students considered case studies, performance, and oral histories as embodied forms of knowledge that resist the archive’s impulse toward emplacement and serialization. Similarly, students viewed community multimedia initiatives such as the Chiapas Media Project—whose output ranges from textiles bearing Zapatista slogans to short video featurettes on rural self-management directed by the workers—and a self-funded, community-organized museum of folk art in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. As the course concluded, the emphasis on community archives and folk art was an attempt to deconstruct archaic conceptions of the archive as necessarily tied to hierarchical power structures, nationalist ends, or even adherence to media specificities.

For the final project, students created an original online exhibition on a subject of their choosing. Recalling that the first class discussion became entangled in the distinction between an archive, a collection, an exhibition, and a repository, Schwartz Francisco challenged students to work through these categories in a practical sense. The final assignment required students to create their own online collections using the content management system Omeka, which allowed them to fashion their repositories of Latin American art and documentary materials into myriad forms. From photo essays to databases of primary source documents to virtual art exhibits, students had the freedom to organize and display each of their items according to their individual preferences, with the caveat that each entry should have its relevant metadata or bibliographic information, include a brief “wall label” or image caption describing the piece, and that each folder would be organized thematically so as to replicate the experience of navigating either a museum gallery or an archive’s file box. In the end, students’ submissions were exceptional. They included an exhibition on Mexican American border photography, which probed the obelisk’s historical use as a symbol of conquest and as a type of document in and of itself—one that marks, delimits, and reifies empire’s abstractions. One submission highlighted visible instances of humor in turn-of-the-century Native American portraiture, combating the nefarious stereotype of stoicism with the inclusion of humor in ethnographic photography. One particularly striking project told an oral history of a young man growing up in urban Colombia during the height of the narcotics trade, but it featured no archival documents as such. Instead, the man’s hazy anecdotes about altercations with members of local cartels are counterposed with pop culture misrepresentations that romanticize the drug trade, from Pablo Escobar souvenir t-shirts to scenes from the recent cycle of narco-media. In this class, Latin American art, and the spaces in which it is housed, had no shortage of stewards and interlocutors.

In these times of mass dispersal and social distancing, the study of archives in relation to Latin American artistic production is perhaps more crucial than ever. While access to physical archives remains limited in most of the Western Hemisphere, artists and archivists have been vanguard of the cultural sector's impermanent transition to digital platforms. Now more than ever, it is the responsibility of scholars at every level to familiarize themselves with archival offerings in any form, analogue or digital, and support the continued safeguarding of cultural heritage while insisting on the inclusion of histories that are underrepresented in their collections. Moreover, the terms and concepts upon which the study of the archive once turned—“acts of transfer,” “isolation,” “archive fever,” or, to quote Carolyn Steedman, “that which does not go away”—have taken up entirely new meanings, perhaps permanently so. The goal is not to archive everything but, as scholars in decolonizing fields are calling for, to archive otherwise.
have been asked to introduce myself to the CLAS community after my first year here at the University of Chicago. It has been quite the eventful time to arrive here, but as a lifelong Midwesterner raised in Illinois and married to a lifelong South Side native, it has felt like returning home. Before coming to the University of Chicago I was the University of Oregon’s History and Latin American Studies Librarian (the first librarian there specifically tasked with serving their Latin American Studies program), where I was the curator on the farmworker union Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN). I received my MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison prior to that, and before leaving to UW’s library program had been ABD in Latin American History at Indiana University, where I studied Buenos Aires’s early-twentieth-century anarchist labor organizers. My research interests, and collecting interests, remain focused on radical social movements, bohemian and avant-garde countercultural movements (an outgrowth of my immersion in the punk-rock scene of Chicago and the greater Midwest during my teens and twenties), critical pedagogy with primary source materials in archives, and the ways in which scholarly communication and library collecting can either silence or raise up marginalized voices. This last concern has been especially present in my year here at the University of Chicago, particularly in these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In more “normal” times, a librarian entering a position like mine would spend their first years getting to know the particular needs of their campus, faculty, and students, and their scholarly interests. While that has been a crucial concern for me, circumstances have made that process more complex than usual. Area studies of all sorts have been steadily eroding across the United States in the face of declining federal and state funding and trends away from deep curricular focus on social sciences and humanities, but the sudden move to online-only education is bringing particular challenges that we must face if we are to continue the levels of work we have done in the past. Digital publishing in Latin America is still in its infancy, with commercial publishers offering little in digital formats, especially where the academic monographs and new literature that are the bread and butter of academic library collecting are concerned. While open-access projects have proven successful in providing access to academic journals, the materials we need from Latin America still largely appear in small print runs that are distributed only in their home countries, and once they have sold out are largely no longer available.

As the many facets of the COVID crisis undermine these already fragile publishing markets, my colleagues and I in the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials (SALALM), the professional association of Latin Americanist academic librarians and libreras serving Latin Americanist academic libraries, put together a statement1 calling on our colleagues to remain vigilant as our universities adjust our budgets and collecting priorities to meet current challenges. As universities continue to shift to online-focused learning, and academic libraries focus on digital collecting, we run the risk of undermining our ability to continue our commitments to area studies in the future, and the ability of future scholars to understand the diverse peoples of Latin America. As our statement notes, “e-preferred collection development policies will exclude non-English language materials and Latin American and Caribbean cultural and scholarly production, including the voices of Black, indigenous, LGBTQ, and transnational authors, which are so critical to advancing the research and learning of the region and their diasporas in the United States.”

This statement has been widely hailed among area studies librarians, and our colleagues in the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA),2 the Committee on South Asian Libraries and Documentation (CON SALD),3 and others have joined us in the call for our universities to be mindful of what it means to support area studies, and to represent truly global perspectives. This is not us opposing digital publication or scholarly communication. As mentioned above and in SALALM’s statement, there are exciting open-access digital projects from Latin America, and others built by academics in the global North working in collaboration with our Latin American colleagues. I am personally co-PI with John Lucy of an NEH-NSF project to enhance organization and discoverability of digitized collections of notes, recordings, and publications about Mesoamerican languages collected by University of Chicago faculty over the decades. However, we must be strategic about the ability of our digital resources to serve our community, and not lose sight of the fact that print remains one of the main means we have of documenting the diverse peoples of Latin America. It is a perilous moment to be starting as a librarian for the University of Chicago, and I look forward to working with faculty to ensure that we continue our legacy as a world-class Latin American Studies institution into the future.

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Claudia Brittenham

Art History

“Architecture, Vision, and Ritual: Seeing MayaLintels atYaxchilan Structure 23,” The Art Bulletin (2019), which was awarded theCollege Art Association’sArthur Kingsley Porter Prize (2020)

Jessica Swanston Baker

Music

“Small Islands, Large Radio: Archipelagic Listening in the Caribbean,” Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking, Michelle Stephens andYolanda Martínez-San Miguel, eds. (Rowman and Littlefield, 2020)

Larissa Brewer-Garcia

Romance Languages and Literatures

Beyond Babel: Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada (Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Michael Albertus

Political Science


Claudia Brittenham

Art History

“Architecture, Vision, and Ritual: Seeing MayaLintels atYaxchilan Structure 23,” The Art Bulletin (2019), which was awarded theCollege Art Association’sArthur Kingsley Porter Prize (2020)

Brodwyn Fischer

History

“A ética do silêncio racial no contexto urbano: políticas públicas e desigualdade social no Recife, 1900–1940,” Anais do Museu Paulista (2020)


Edgar García

English

Signs of the Americas: A Poetics of Pictographs, Hieroglyphs, and Khipu (University of Chicago Press, 2019)

Ryan Cecil Jobson

Anthropology


Miguel Martínez

Romance Languages and Literatures

Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching (2020)

Saliloko Mufwene

Linguistics

“Creoles and Pidgins: Why the Latter Are Not the Ancestors of the Former,” The Routledge Handbook of Language Contact, Evangelia Adamou andYaron Matras, eds. (2020)

Bridging Linguistics and Economics, edited withCécile B. Vigoroux (Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Brodwyn Fischer

History

“A ética do silêncio racial no contexto urbano: políticas públicas e desigualdade social no Recife, 1900–1940,” Anais do Museu Paulista (2020)

“From the Mocambo to the Favela: Statistics and Social Policy in Brazil’s Informal Cities,” Histoire et Mesure (2019)

Jana Saramago

Romance Languages and Literatures


Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky

Cinema and Media Studies


Benjamin Lessing

Political Science

“Conceptualizing Criminal Governance,” Perspectives on Politics (2020)

Miguel Martínez

Romance Languages and Literatures

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On the Retirement of John Lucy

In 2019–20, John Lucy, William Benton Professor in Comparative Human Development and Psychology, retired after more than two decades of teaching at the University of Chicago, where he also received his PhD. Lucy, an internationally recognized expert on the relation between language and thought and author of two landmark books (Language Diversity and Thought and Grammatical Categories and Cognition), has long served as chief coordinator of CLAS’s Indigenous language programs. His work with CLAS included the development of an archive of literature written in Mesoamerican languages, improvement of instructional resources, and supervision of Yucatec Maya, K’iche’ Maya, and Nahuatl.

Lucy followed in the footsteps of Norman McQuown, from whom he first learned Yucatec. McQuown taught courses in Mesoamerican languages from 1954—with a hiatus in early retirement—until 2000. McQuown’s Yucatec and K’iche’ courses, developed in the 1960s, with support from the then federal Office of Education, were widely shared and formed the basis of nearly all Yucatec and K’iche’ teaching programs in the United States. Taking up the task of Mesoamerican language teaching in 2001, Lucy soon turned to updating the long-established courses and making them available on the internet. As a result, in addition to generations of UChicago students who have studied Mesoamerican languages with John Lucy, students at institutions across the United States have learned Yucatec and K’iche’ from Lucy’s digitized course content.

Over the past 15 years, often in collaboration with CLAS, Lucy has been awarded major national grants focused on modernizing Indigenous language courses and digitizing resources. From 2005–08, he was co-PI on a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, “Digital Preservation of Mesoamerican Linguistic Archives.” This was followed by a 2007–12 US Department of Education International Research and Studies grant for “Digital Chicago Maya: Modern Spoken Yucatec and K’iche’” to modernize the courses and offer them online. He also received a small subcontract grant through the US Department of Education Technological Innovation and Cooperation for Foreign Information Access (TICFIA), “Digitization of the Chicago Archive of Indigenous Literatures of Latin America” in 2007–08. In 2010, he was awarded an NEH Documenting Endangered Languages grant for the “Chicago Historical Archive of Mesoamerican Linguistics,” which aimed to digitize and describe UChicago’s archive of textual materials documenting Mesoamerican Indigenous languages in order to enhance discoverability and access.

In his retirement, Lucy continues to work on the digitization and sharing of Indigenous language resources. Building on previous grant-funded projects, he and David Woken (LACS Librarian) have been awarded a 2020 National Endowment for the Humanities–National Science Foundation grant for “Preserving Indigenous Mesoamerican Language Heritage.” The project seeks to refugue and improve infrastructure for the University’s collections of materials documenting the Indigenous languages of Mesoamerica to ensure that they remain an important and useful repository by enhancing the collections’ sustainability, discoverability, and accessibility.

In addition to two decades of service to CLAS’s Indigenous language programs, Lucy has continued to teach courses related to language, culture, and thought and to conduct research in the Yucatán, where he has been working for more than 40 years. Lucy has been instrumental to CLAS’s efforts to promote Indigenous language learning and to share the University’s considerable Indigenous language resources in the most open and accessible formats. We are grateful to John Lucy for continuing UChicago’s long tradition of Mesoamerican language teaching, and for his work to bring our resources firmly into the digital age.

Having the chance to learn Yucatec Maya from a renowned scholar and gifted teacher was a remarkable opportunity for me and other students at the University of Chicago. Thanks in large part to John’s expertise and deep interest in language, the Yucatec Maya course was an exciting undertaking for his students. Classwork typically involved a small group of us sitting around the table, listening closely to recordings and working through the sounds and the grammar, which was challenging work at times. John’s own personal history with the Yucatec Maya course at this university enriched his teaching of the class. As a doctoral student, he had taken the course from Norman McQuown. It was inspiring to see him captivated by certain of the same materials he had worked through years ago as a student. My fellow students and I appreciated that, in working through the lessons under his guidance, we were participating in an important intellectual tradition at the university....

John’s teaching and guidance shaped the trajectory of my academic studies in direct ways. After taking his courses, I decided to focus my own dissertation research on Yucatec Maya language and culture. In establishing and developing my project in the Yucatán, I benefited greatly from his insights, and from local and scholarly networks to which he introduced me. And so, the impact of having John Lucy as my language teacher extended well beyond the domain of language—and brought me into larger dialogues.

—Christopher Bloechl, PhD Candidate, Anthropology
Aquél e-mail fue a la vez una explosión de alegría y de temor. La Universidad de Chicago me informaba que había sido nombrado Tinker Visiting Professor. Sólo me quedaba por aprobar un examen de inglés y escoger en cuál de los trimestres de 2020 podría ir. Faltaba más de un año, pero había que moverse rápido. Era necesario redoblar mis estudios de inglés. También ponermelo de acuerdo con James Robinson, quien me había postulado, para escoger un trimestre. Y además preparar el curso. En otro idioma, en una universidad que en todos los ránquines está en el Top Ten y además junto a una figura de fama mundial: aquello requería dedicación. Todo indicaba que el de invierno era el mejor para mi agenda, pero nunca había experimentado uno por más de un par de días. Robinson barajó varias oportunidades, y al final me propuso dictar un curso con él. Los retos eran tantos como las oportunidades que se abrían. Y eso que ni yo, ni nadie, podía imaginar qué los desafíos que estaban por venir. Hoy todo aquello parece lejano. Ya el invierno pasó, casi está terminando la primavera, el trimestre por el que inicialmente vine a Chicago se ha convertido en dos, la humanidad entera está detenida en una cuarentena, no sabemos realmente cuándo esto va a terminar. En un primer momento me dije que si de esta experiencia me quedaban al menos unos aprendizajes, me daría por satisfecho. Sin duda, han sido seis meses en los que me había muchísimo que aprender.

Lo primero, fue el curso en sí mismo. Su objetivo era comprender en términos históricos por qué América Latina ha tenido tantas dificultades para alcanzar el desarrollo. El eje estaba en el proceso de State-building, desde los antecedentes coloniales hasta la actualidad. ¿Por qué no surgieron o en todo caso se desarrollaron determinadas instituciones? ¿Qué nos dicen las variables sociales, económicas y culturales? ¿Por qué, si en el siglo XVIII en conjunto la América Española era más rica que las trece pequeñas y relativamente pobres colonias inglesas de Norteamérica, en cosa de cincuenta años las tendencias cambiaron tan abruptamente? El curso se dictó en la Harris School of Public Policy, de modo que no podía estar diseñado para historiadores, sino para personas que se formaban en ámbito de las políticas públicas. Debía ser, por lo tanto, tanto práctico y vinculado con su realidad como fuera posible. Robinson y yo nos solíamos dividir las clases en dos partes, en las que en torno a un problema cada uno desarrollaba un aspecto, o incluso hacíamos comparaciones sobre un problema tomando regiones distintas, de América Latina o el mundo.

Unos veinte de alumnos, de casi una decena de nacionalidades, se inscribieron. Alrededor de la mitad eran latinoamericanos, y entre los que no lo eran, muchos tenían algún tipo de relación con Latinoamérica. Tuve la oportunidad de hablar con la mayor parte de ellos en las oficinas, lo que me permitió conocer las preocupaciones de los que llegaron a la Harris School y recibir algún feedback del curso. En general, se trata de jóvenes funcionarios públicos latinoamericanos, recién salidos de sus universidades, y que aspiran a hacer carrera como hombres y mujeres de Estado en sus países. O estadounidenses que en su carrera como funcionarios diplomáticos o en otro tipo de organización, han trabajado en América Latina. Solían hacerme detalladas explicaciones de sus experiencias o problemas en la administración pública, de los conflictos políticos en los que participaban (como es de esperar, muchos tienen claras militancias), lo que para mí fue un aprendizaje, y me pedían que les diera detalles de la crisis venezolana. La mayor parte confesó que en el curso aprendió cosas de la historia de sus propios países que no sospechaba, y sobre todo de sus países vecinos. Si un problema tenemos en América Latina es que no conocemos nuestra región.

Este ambiente estimulante y retador se daba, además, dentro de una universidad que tiene por lema Crescat scientia; vita excolatur, y que además parece tomárselo muy en serio. Un centenar de Premios Nobel entre ex alumnos y profesores dan aval a este cometido. El nivel de conexión entre esa vita excolatur con la crescat scientia. Descubriéndolo lo que se hace en las aulas, laboratorios y oficinas de los profesores, la multitud de almuerzos, conferencias que terminan con ágapes, talleres en los que hay bastante comida y bebida para socializar, clubs de los alumnos con cafeterías y mesas de pool, ¡hasta servicios religiosos que le ofrecen café y galletas a los feligreses que desafían el invierno para asistir!: todo invita a pensar, a discutir, a crear.

En el Center for Latin American Studies, la unidad que administra la Cátedra Tinker y que ha sido mi principal apoyo, especialmente cuando la pandemia me impidió regresar a Venezuela, pasó otro tanto. Esos agradables talleres donde jóvenes que se forman para latinoamericanistas presentan adelantos de sus investigaciones, se leen entre sí, discuten con vehemencia y después se quedan departiendo, fueron de mis experiencias más agradables (me tocó presentarme ante su escrutinio y agudas observaciones). Si algo estoy casi seguro que llevaré a Caracas es esa experiencia. Pero vino el Nuevo Coronavirus y toda esa vida intensa entró, como resto del mundo, en suspenso. Y muy rápidamente ha revivido de forma virtual. Se sigue hablando y pensando, pero ahora en el omnipresente Zoom. La crescat scientia no se detendrá en la era del Internet. Los webinarios y los correos pidiéndonos propuestas para enfrentar al Nuevo Coronavirus lo demuestran.

La pandemia, que para todos los humanos ha significado alguna forma de aprendizaje, en lo particular, vivida en UChicago, le da una connotación en toda su dimensión. ¿Qué lecciones y enseñanzas puede extraer una universidad como la de Chicago volcándose a dar respuestas a algo como esta pandemia. Solicitudes de proyectos, foros online, investigaciones en curso y redobladas, la crescat scientia en toda su dimensión.

Nunca estará lo suficientemente agradecido con James Robinson, con la Tinker Foundation y con los muy generosos amigos del CLAS, por estos seis meses. Si en alguien también se ha cumplido lo de la ciencia que crece y la vida que se enriquece, es en mí. Ojalá yo haya contribuido también, al menos en algo, en la vida y en la ciencia de los demás.
I
n the Spring Quarter, I taught Anti-Corruption Politics in Latin America after being awarded the CLAS Ignacio Martín-Baró Prize Lectureship. Drawn to the lectureship by my engagement since 2014 with the Center, my desire to teach this lectureship is grounded in the commitment to Latin American Studies and critical reflections on Latin America that I have been able to cultivate as a graduate student in Anthropology at the University of Chicago. Moreover, the prize lectureship offers a unique opportunity to teach a course in regional studies and to connect with the vibrant community of undergraduate students that have personal backgrounds, as well as academic interests, in Latin America.

My own research grapples with the vigorous mobilization of anti-corruption discourse in Colombia at a time of political transition. In particular, I investigate the specific ways in which the fight against corruption has intensified in the immediate aftermath of a historic peace agreement between the country’s once largest insurgent group and the state. My dissertation, entitled “Forensics of Finance: Transitional Liberalism, Fiction, and Colombia’s New Science of Public Truth,” explores the emergence of a type of forensic expertise that takes finance in general, and the finances of organized crime in particular, as its primary object of concern.

In the dissertation, I argue that the transformation of Colombia’s prosecutorial apparatus in preparation for the signing of a major peace agreement between the government and the insurgent group, FARC, created the conditions of possibility for the epistemological recalibration of Colombia’s forensic knowledge production practices: concretely, the rise to prominence of finance as an object of forensic knowledge and source of criminal liability. In each dissertation chapter, I trace the manifestation of this forensic shift in various realms, from the displacement and reconfiguration of previously established modes of detecting, investigating, and prosecuting organized crime, such as “follow the money” approaches to money laundering, to the impact of forensics of finance in the prosecution of major corruption cases, such as the Odebrecht scandal. In doing so, I place Colombians’ widespread public anxieties concerning large-scale corporate corruption scandals against the backdrop of a transformation in forensic knowledge, as well as in relation to ongoing transformations of corporate and financial power in the aftermath of political transition.

My course offered students the opportunity to critically examine anti-corruption politics as constituting one of Latin America’s most salient frameworks of accountability in the present. Instead of providing students with a more positivistic approach to corruption and its remedies, our work in the classroom centered on addressing corruption as an “analytical fiction,” as defined by Michel-Rolph Trouillot: that is, we engaged in the critical work of investigating corruption as a concept and object of analysis that could be interrogated both historically and anthropologically. This approach provided students with the opportunity to recalibrate their understanding of corruption, as a matter of public concern in Latin America, as we studied various examples of anti-corruption practices and analyzed them from the perspective of Latin American postcolonial theories.

Given that the course required each student to develop a final project on an issue pertaining to the mobilization of anti-corruption discourse in the region, students benefited from the opportunity to work over nine weeks on an issue that was of particular interest to them. The result was a fantastic set of projects, ranging from Twitter threads to podcasts, in which undergraduates situated the concept of corruption and its mobilization in relation to the region’s robust trajectory of critiquing power through the analysis of corporate power as well as the mobilization of Human Rights discourse.

This Spring the challenges of teaching a new course were twofold given the shift to online instruction prompted by the spread of COVID-19. This new context for both teaching and learning entailed new constraints as the students and I tried to create the conditions for the class to be successful. The syllabus had to be reworked in substantive ways, including combining synchronous and asynchronous methods. However, logistical challenges aside, this was a very rewarding experience, one that I will regard as formative to my pedagogy and teaching philosophy. Without a doubt, the most rewarding aspect of this quarter’s teaching was the students. Their hard work, commitment, openness, and curiosity made the course into a genuine exploration of ideas, including each other’s. Gathering with the students every week felt like a much-needed antidote to the quarantine and doing so with the support of CLAS made it even easier.

Teaching this course offered me the opportunity to deepen and refine my own conceptualization of the politics of anti-corruption from a postcolonial and anthropological perspective, precisely at the time when I am writing my dissertation. It was both exciting and helpful to bring my own research questions and analyses to the classroom, where students’ curiosity as well as their search for conceptual clarity and historical meaning helped shape my own thinking.
Shaping the BA Curriculum

Diana Schwartz Francisco
History PhD’16

Three years after earning my PhD at the University of Chicago, my transition back as Assistant Instructional Professor at the Center for Latin American Studies has been smooth and rewarding. Upon my return to UChicago last August, I was warmly welcomed back to the collegial, rigorous, and supportive intellectual space that CLAS faculty, staff, and students continue to foster. But while the essence of CLAS that I had appreciated so much as a student had not changed, my role here certainly has.

I was drawn to the position I now hold at CLAS for a number of reasons, but what attracted me most was the possibility that I could help shape the Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) undergraduate curriculum. Teaching undergraduates in a way that is pedagogically engaging and intellectually enabling is challenging and invigorating on its own; revising a curriculum and expanding a program requires a comprehensive perspective of both the forest and the trees in any given field. As I’ve witnessed decreased support at the federal level for area studies centers and the closure of Latin American Studies programs at universities across the country in the past several years, I’ve become increasingly conscious of the need to articulate the relevance—and necessity—of our field. Something synergic happens when an area studies center attracts cutting-edge scholars and committed educators across the disciplines: that energy and vigor nurtures and is itself enriched by students. Shortly after I began my new position, we undertook a curriculum review of the undergraduate program, and as part of the process I found myself thinking back to my training as a graduate student: Why should we study the region we call “Latin America and the Caribbean”? What knowledge and analytical skills can be gained from an area studies perspective? And, more specifically, when our undergraduates complete their program in LACS, what knowledge and skills will they have that can be marshaled for their respective futures, likely beyond UChicago and academia more broadly?

Through conversation, the curriculum review committee recognized that knowledge and skills are essential, but so is experience. The LACS undergraduate program was already strong and flexible, allowing students to tailor coursework to their particular interests and academic needs. We wanted to build on that structure to include—not just as a requirement but in terms of co-curricular programming as well—opportunities to engage in a practical sense issues of relevance to the peoples and places of the region, including Latinx United States. Initial ideas about how to integrate real-life experience and praxis into the curriculum began to take form as we drafted new requirements for the major, whether it be participation in the Oaxaca program or other study abroad opportunities in the region, internships with organizations in the hemisphere, or research assistantships on relevant topics. Curating the new landscape of the program has had me thinking about curriculum at every scale and in ways I could not have anticipated in my previous life at the University.

This year I have been motivated, more than ever before, to holistically integrate my research and professional experience into my engagement with students. Other academic units—especially interdisciplinary programs—have pioneered novel ways of combining life experience and classroom know-how into what many have termed experiential learning. What I am pursuing now is a series of approaches—both tethered to and separate from traditional classroom learning—that is unique to CLAS and the particular history and contemporary reality of the city of Chicago. The approaches are interrelated in that I see the experiences that engage students within a course as pedagogically connected to and even fortified by internships or other, traditionally “extra-curricular,” options. Both within and outside coursework, students have the opportunity to engage concepts such as (Greater) Latin America and categories like Latino/a/x by connecting to the work of local community organizations, public art and artists, and local archives and archivists. Together with CLAS staff, we have planted the seeds for such programing, and it has begun to bear fruit: internships with the Smart Museum connected to the lived experiences of Latinx families in the city are a beginning we expect to expand moving forward.

These considerations became even more critical as we entered the Spring Quarter. The twin issues that we’ve faced since early spring—the pandemic and widespread unrest over the country’s (and hemisphere’s) enduring systemic racism—pushed me to sharpen my approach to pedagogy, both in the “classroom” and beyond. If an abrupt, unanticipated pivot to online teaching required me to rethink how I would create an intellectual community and enable student learning, the remote setting also meant that all of us were at once isolated and more directly connected to the world (or our worlds) beyond the university. UChicago certainly remains a place where the “life of the mind” is sacred, but I think such a life is, perhaps now more than ever, increasingly connected to that which exists beyond the mind. And students, more than ever, are energized by intellectual engagement that bridges that divide. For me, CLAS has always been a place that connects Latin Americanists to the region in concrete, meaningful ways. The changes we’ve made to the undergraduate program underscore and expand opportunities for engagement for our students. To say the least, I’m delighted to be back at CLAS and look forward to building LACS programs that extend the energy of students and colleagues in new directions.
Falling Head Over Heels for Brazil

Colin Andrew, who completed his MA coursework in LACS in 2017–18 and wrote his thesis on “An Unsettled Calm: Volcanic Risk Perception during a Period of Quiescence in Popayán, Colombia,” received a National Security Education Program Boren Fellowship for 2019–20 to serve as an intern for the nongovernmental organization Catalytic Communities in Brazil. His work involved interviewing community organizers and leaders of sustainable development initiatives in low-income, informal communities throughout Rio de Janeiro. His fellowship ended a few months early when Boren recalled its fellows during the coronavirus pandemic.

After over eight hours in a cramped seat, I stared in wonder as the plane skirted over the rumpled green crags of the Serra do Mar and onto a vast coastal plain covered in concrete and haze. When the wheels hit the tarmac of Galeão, I realized that behind me lay the mundane yet now keenly yearned for familiarity of suburban America and in front of me loomed a year in the exotic chaos of the city that had long occupied a central role in my dreams (and a few nightmares). From the first moment I stepped out of the airport into a cool, cloudless day in early July, I felt as if I was an unmoored fishing vessel adrift in the murky waters of Guanabara Bay. In the coming weeks and months, I became well acquainted with feeling lost in the endless canyons of high-rises, coughing on exhaust and jostled by crowds. At first, I relied on the Marvelous City’s laundry list of iconic tourist attractions as points of anchorage and safe harbor from the grind of urban confusion. From the heights of Pão de Açúcar and Corcovado or the sweeping expanses of the beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana, I found clarity of mind even among the crowds of tourists. The paradisiacal geography of Rio can calm the most frayed of a traveler’s nerves.

While these places were indeed beautiful, Lonely Planet could only ever offer a superficial understanding of the place. Gradually, after diligent seeking, I found my own personal Eden in the city’s overlooked corners. It was the quiet bookstore on the third level of Gávea Shopping and the cool darkness of the movie theater in Barra da Tijuca where I lost myself in time and space. It was the aromatic bakery across from the Cardeal Arcoverde metro station and the açai shop on the way to school where I indulged in decadent flavors. It was the Copacabana promenade on a stormy night and the shady trails of the Botanical Garden on a Sunday afternoon where nature drew me in and shared her secrets. It was the cramped alley in Morro da Providência with a brass band blaring and soaked with beer in a sea of crimson and black–decorated fans celebrating another Flamengo goal where I felt the pulse of Brazil. It was the joy of these experiences that sustained me whenever I was crushed in a subway car bursting at the seams with commuters or sweating profusely in a suffocating one-room apartment.
In a nation as vast as Brazil, I came to the conclusion that it would be a shame to spend a year confined to a single city. So, I bought a bus ticket and took to the road. From the powder beaches of Arraial do Cabo to the misty peaks of Teresópolis to the muddy country roads of the interior of São Paulo, I fell head over heels for this stunning corner of South America.

A celebration 38 years in the making. Flamengo, "the most beloved on Earth," finally brought home the Copa Libertadores title, and pandemonium ensued.

I could not get enough, and I felt compelled to go farther, to reach the very end of this enchanted land. I boarded a plane and took off for a tiny archipelago in the middle of the South Atlantic. There on Fernando de Noronha, floating in crystalline water and surrounded by a kaleidoscope of fish and coral, I realized that I wouldn’t mind staying in Brazil for another year or ten.

The impossibly jagged outcroppings of the Serra dos Órgãos mountains. On a clear day, these dramatic peaks are visible from Rio. Most of the time, however, they remain shrouded in cloud and mist.
2019–20 Graduates

BA MAJOR IN LATIN AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN STUDIES (LACS) —

Manxuan Gao
LACS; Economics
“The Socioeconomic Impact of Copper Mining in Peru”

Satyen Gupta
LACS, with honors; Political Science, with honors
“Duende and the Dragon: How Latin American Politicians Use China as a Tool”

Matthew Maxson
LACS, with honors; History, with honors
“Christ and the Men of Plumeria: Colonial Maya Recombination and Subversion of Christianity”

Ann Chandler Tune
LACS, with honors; Psychology
“‘Weave My Pain, Paint My Story, Dance My Suffering:’ How Expressive Therapists are Working to Process Trauma and Build Peace in Colombia”

Romina Vargas Bezzubikoff
LACS, with honors; Public Policy Studies
“Life in the Cowboy Capital: Resources and the Integration of Latinos in Dodge City, KS”

BA MINOR IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES —

Hannah Carr
Biological Sciences, with honors

Angel Chacon
History, with honors

Daniel Eisgruber
Romance Languages & Literatures, with honors

Jesse Martínez
Political Science

Kimika Padilla
Public Policy Studies, with honors; Environmental and Urban Studies, with honors

Sophia Vale
Global Studies, with honors

MA —

Colin Andrew
LACS
“An Unsettled Calm: Volcanic Risk Perception during a Period of Quiescence in Popayán, Colombia”

Sean Roling
LACS; MBA with highest honors
“Populism or Pact: Conceptualizing Civil-Military Relations in Contemporary Mexico”

Christopher Di Trollo
International Relations
“Legacies of Appropriation: Covert Action and Human Rights Violations in the Southern Cone”

PhD —

Kristopher Driggers
Art History
“The History of Idolatry and the Durán Codex Paintings”

José Estrada
Romance Languages & Literatures
“‘El monstro con su figura’: Ruiz de Alarcon’s Transatlantic Self-Fashioning”

Jorge Lefevre Tavárez
Romance Languages & Literatures
“El indianismo en Cuba y Puerto Rico”

Nicholas Carby Denning
Anthropology
“Reconstituting the Nature of the Nation: Extractivism, Biodiversity, and the Rights of Nature in Ecuador”
We corresponded with rising fourth-year Rebecca Álvarez-Ramos to ask about her interest in Latin American Studies, her thesis, and her summer internship through CLAS.

**What drew you to Latin American Studies as a major? Are there specific disciplines you wanted to explore using Latin America as a lens?**

I grew up in [Chicago’s] Little Village community, which is predominantly Latinx. Having this huge Latinx influence not only from my family but from my community sparked my interest in learning more about the history of Latin America. When I got to UChicago I made sure that every quarter I took a class related to Latin America. At first, I had LACS as a minor until my adviser told me if I was so interested in the topic why not major in it and, that same day, I declared it as a major. I wish to explore the issues of femicides and corruption in Latin America and how people have been fighting back for years now.

**Tell us a little about your thesis topic.**

My thesis topic is a bit up in the air, but I have narrowed it down to exploring Latinx college students’ sexuality and how their culture, upbringing, and, if applicable, religion have played a role in forming their views regarding sex.

I come from a very religious household in which sex is hardly ever spoken about openly. Many of my peers also come from religious households or very conservative households and have told me they go through the same situation in which sex is a taboo. Although my views regarding sexuality have changed, I do, at times, have my upbringing at the back of my head making me feel guilty for my new beliefs.

I’m hoping to learn how culture, religion, and upbringing can have an effect on an individual’s view on sex. As a first-generation daughter of Mexican parents, sex is not spoken about openly and it’s very much a “hush hush” topic. Many people, especially conservative individuals, still see sex as a taboo even though they may not be living with their family because of college. Many students became more open about sex, but sometimes feel a sense of guilt because of their upbringing. I would like to see just how much our upbringing controls our beliefs and feelings, even as independent adults who may no longer share their parents’ beliefs and ideologies.

**You are currently completing an internship through the Center for Latin American Studies. Could you tell us about your experience thus far?**

The internship I am currently completing is with Casa Michoacán and an artist, Wendy Ewald, to have children express themselves through their photographs. Although it is a bit challenging since it is all online, I am enjoying the internship very much! It’s always fascinating to see what kids have to say because I feel like we tend to underestimate their thoughts on certain topics or even brush aside their feelings and beliefs because of their age. Seeing the kids coming from different, yet similar, backgrounds and sharing similar experiences is very interesting and eye-opening.
Since finishing my studies at the University of Chicago my life has changed significantly. In the ensuing years, I taught English abroad for two years, returned to the United States, and began my PhD. I am now married with twins. I am currently a PhD candidate at Michigan State University researching print media censorship, journalism, state repression, and clandestine print media in Chile from the 1970s to the 1990s. Much of my present research is informed by coursework, discussions with colleagues, and writing workshops I participated in at UChicago.

In my junior year of undergraduate study at Bowling Green State University, I committed to going to graduate school to study Latin American history. At the time I had completed my first bachelor’s in sociology and had begun my second major in history. Working with my undergraduate advisor, Amilcar Challú, I began to apply to graduate programs across the country. Professor Challú fostered my initial interest in Latin American history and served as the advisor for my undergraduate thesis on US-Argentine relations during the first two terms of President Juan Domingo Perón. I was offered a spot at LACS and leapt at the opportunity to conduct research at UChicago. LACS offered an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Latin America and the consistent workshops allowed me, as a young graduate student, a front row seat to observe the innovative research being done at the University of Chicago and that of visiting scholars.

When classes began in fall 2013, I was one of two cohort members for LACS, the other being Alex Johnson. Alex and I became personally and professionally close during our time at UChicago. Before classes started, we met and had coffee. We discussed our interests, our potential thesis topics, and what brought us to UChicago. Alex fast became one of my closest friends and a great colleague. Another benefit of our small cohort size was the close mentorship with CLAS Lecturer Rosario Granados-Salinas that started in our proseminar. Professor Granados introduced Alex and me to a wealth of methodological and theoretical approaches to studying Latin America, since each week had a disciplinary theme (economics, art history, literature, history, etc.).

In addition to the proseminar, my coursework—particularly my courses pertaining to the city in Latin America, law in Latin America, and human rights law—have greatly influenced my work. I had the opportunity to learn from Brodwyn Fischer and Dain Borges in the History Department as well as Andrew Janco, Tianna Paschel, and Hillary Chute across other departments. The ability to learn from a broad range of disciplines and incorporate a breadth of different perspectives not only aided me during my master’s thesis research and writing but has remained an asset as I have continued my graduate studies.

Finally, working with Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo is what best equipped me for my continued study in a doctoral program. He was patient with me as I changed research topics (from Mexico in the 1960s to my thesis topic on Quino and the comic Mafalda) and encouraged me to follow my intuition. Though he was on sabbatical for part of my tenure at UChicago, his guidance and constructive criticism on drafts of my thesis helped me hone my skills as a researcher and writer.

I began my PhD coursework in autumn 2017 working with Edward Murphy at Michigan State University. Similar to how I started my studies at UChicago, I arrived at MSU with one project in mind—analysis of technocratic policy making in the second half of twentieth-century Chile—and have settled on another. As noted above, my dissertation analyzes censored media, specifically informative bulletins and pamphlets produced in exile and locally in Santiago de Chile. I aim to tell the compelling history of not only repression under the Pinochet dictatorship, but also how journalists and activists resourcefully organized to expose misinformation of an authoritarian regime and developed an effective and vibrant public opposition to it. These journalists and activists did this not only by confronting misinformation but by articulating and organizing around specific rights related to freedom of expression, access to dignified housing, and basic necessities of education and healthcare.

In early 2020 I received a Fulbright IIE fellowship to conduct archival research and oral history interviews in Santiago, Chile. These plans, like so much else at present, are currently in flux given the COVID-19 pandemic. I am hopeful that I will be able to conduct my dissertation research in 2021 and will be complete my studies in a timely fashion.
New Classes for 2020–21

Over the past few years, departments across the divisions have hired new faculty members with Latin American interests. Here we highlight a small selection of new LACS courses being taught this year.

Greater Latin America  Diana Schwartz Francisco (Autumn)
What is “Latin America,” who are “Latin Americans,” and what is the relationship among and between places and people of the region we call Latin America, on the one hand, and the greater Latinx diaspora in the US on the other? This course explores the history of Latin America as an idea, and the cultural, social, political, and economic connections among peoples on both sides of the southern and eastern borders of the United States. Students will engage multiple disciplinary perspectives in course readings and assignments and will explore Chicago as a crucial node in the geography of Greater Latin America.

Making the Maya World  Sarah Newman (Autumn)
What do we know about the ancient Maya? Pyramids, palaces, and temples are found from Mexico to Honduras; texts in hieroglyphic script record the histories of kings and queens who ruled those cities; and painted murals, carved stone stelae, and ceramic vessels provide a glimpse of complex geopolitical dynamics and social hierarchies. Decades of archaeological research have expanded that view beyond the rulers and elites to explore the daily lives of the Maya people, networks of trade and market exchange, and agricultural and ritual practices. Present-day Maya communities attest to the dynamism and vitality of languages and traditions, often entangled in the politics of archaeological heritage and tourism. This course is a wide-ranging exploration of ancient Maya civilization and of the various ways archaeologists, anthropologists, linguists, historians, and indigenous communities have examined and manipulated the Maya past. From tropes of long-hidden mysteries rescued from the jungle to New Age appropriations of pre-Columbian rituals, from the thrill of decipherment to painstaking and technical artifact studies, we will examine how models drawn from astrology, ethnography, classical archaeology and philology, political science, and popular culture have shaped current understandings of the ancient Maya world, and also how the Maya world has, at times, resisted easy appropriation and defied expectations.

Colloquium: Approaches to Atlantic Slavery Studies  Rashauna Johnson (Winter)
We are witnessing an outpouring of scholarship on Atlantic slavery even as some historians are increasingly critical of the archival method. This course uses select theoretical readings and recent monographs and articles to examine this conceptual and methodological debate. Topics to be examined include histories of women, gender, and sexuality; dispossession and resistance; urban and migration history; and interdisciplinary and speculative techniques.

Politics of Intimacy  Mareike Winchell (Winter)
This course draws from interdisciplinary debates to position intimate forms in relation to broader textures of emotion and ethics, desire and race, labor and liberation. Heuristically, intimacy allows us to attend to practices that spill beyond more dyadic understandings of ostensibly private domains of sexuality or kinship as opposed to public forms of economic production and labor. Course readings, taken primarily but not exclusively from within the Latin American region, will consider specific instances when the gathering together of bodies in close quarters (e.g., in arrangements of domestic servitude, colonial-era monasteries and convents, indigenous slave-holding in the Americas, settler households and adoptive parentage configurations) became problematic and subject to governmental intervention. We will further ask how, in moments of colonial reform, post-colonial change, and de-colonial mobilization, intimate forms became newly offensive but also grounded (and continue to ground) emergent claims to life and rights. The course ends by meditating on the entailments of intimacy for ethnography, namely, as a model of research rooted in attachments and vulnerabilities rather than spectatorship and distance.

Vidas Infames: Sujetos heterodoxos en el mundo hispánico (1500–1800)  Miguel Martínez (Spring)
En este curso leeremos y discutiremos las vidas de varias mujeres y hombres comunes perseguidos por la Inquisición hispánica entre 1500 y 1800, aproximadamente, tanto en Europa y el Mediterráneo como en las Américas. La mayoría de estas vidas fueron dichas por los mismos acusados frente a un tribunal eclesiástico. Estas autobiografías orales, producidas en condiciones de máxima dureza y precariedad, revelan la forma en que la vida cotidiana es moldeada e interrumpida por el poder. Leeremos las historias de hombres transgénero, mujeres criptojudías, campesinos moriscos, renegados, profetas y monjas acusadas de sodomía, entre otras; y discutiremos temas como la relación entre poder y subjetividad, heterodoxía y cultura popular, las formas narrativas del yo o la articulación biográfica de la clase, la raza y el género en la primera modernidad. Estas ‘vidas ínfimas’, a pesar de su concreta individualidad, permiten ofrecer un amplio panorama de la historia cultural y social de España y América en la era de la Inquisición.

An Island Is a World: Readings in Caribbean Ethnography  Ryan Cecil Jobson (Spring)
This advanced graduate seminar examines the construction of the Caribbean as an object of anthropological study. The aims of this seminar are twofold. Following Michel-Rolph Trouillot, this seminar will attend to “Caribbean as viewed by anthropologists, but also about anthropology as viewed from the Caribbean.” In turn, students will consider whether the Caribbean is an exceptional or exemplary geography in the anthropological imagination. Accordingly, students will consult the writings of Trouillot, MG Smith, Constance Sutton, Lynn Bolles, and Deborah Thomas, among others. Additionally, students will be introduced to the Raymond T. Smith Papers in Special Collections at the Regenstein Library.