Introducing the CLAS Alumni Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of our alumni newsletter! The CLAS Alumni Newsletter will be distributed electronically every year, and will include alumni profiles, alumni news and publications, information on the paths of new grads, and CLAS program updates.

We encourage you to contact us with questions about how to connect to CLAS and to current students. Opportunities for alumni involvement include our career webinar series (more info on p. 6) 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.

We also welcome alumni updates via our online update form.
Professor Brodwyn Fischer joined the University of Chicago’s History department in 2013 after making the short trip across the city from Northwestern University. Fischer has led the Center in coordinating University interests in research and teaching on Latin America since 2015. As a historian of Brazil and Latin America her research focuses on the historical dynamics of Brazilian racial inequalities, criminal law, the 20th century’s great migrations, and the relationship between the urban poor and the country’s political left.

Her first book, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro*, examines how weak citizenship rights and residential informality came to define urban poverty, popular social struggles, and the political dynamics of inequality in modern Brazil. Professor Fischer is also co-editor of *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America*, which explores the many ways in which poverty and informality have shaped the Latin American urban experience. She is currently organizing, with 2015–16 Tinker Visiting Professor Keila Grinberg (Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro), an edited volume on slavery, abolition, and the making of modern Brazil.

Fischer is now one-third of the way through her third year as CLAS director, during which time CLAS has expanded its events programming—with more than 100 events organized or cosponsored by CLAS last year—and its support of faculty collaborations with Latin American colleagues in units across campus. Last year, with Fischer’s guidance and encouragement, CLAS support of faculty collaborations led to a meeting with Honduran Ministry of Health officials about health sector reform in their country; a gathering of Black mothers from Brazil, Colombia, and the US who have lost children to state violence, including a powerful public event in which mother-activists shared their struggles and strategies of resistance; an agenda-setting meeting for a research group working on mosquito-borne diseases, climate forcing, and urban environments (with partners from Fundação Oswaldo Cruz in Rio de Janeiro); and a workshop on “Slavery, Freedom and the Making of Modern Brazil,” which brought together some of the most important scholars of Brazilian slavery and abolition. Fischer’s vision of CLAS as a place that facilitates these cross-regional collaborative networks has engaged faculty and students beyond our traditional disciplines, and has helped CLAS to “create increasingly vital spaces on campus for innovative Latin American scholars, activists, artists, and policymakers.”

**Tinker Visiting Professorship**

The Center for Latin American Studies continues the tradition of hosting distinguished international scholars, artists, and journalists through its endowment from the Tinker Foundation. Sharing their diverse disciplinary perspectives, Tinker Visiting Professors provide students and faculty at the University with the opportunity to engage with some of the most dynamic scholarship generated in the region. They establish and maintain close working relationships with faculty and graduate students, and foster constructive dialogue beyond their tenure at UChicago. Their residencies serve as the foundation for long and intellectually productive relationships. **Do you have particularly fond memories of a Tinker Visiting Professor from when you were a student? Please share your story with us at clas@uchicago.edu.**

**2017–18 Tinker Visiting Professors**

**Argentine poet, critic, and scholar Tamara Kamenszain** (Autumn 2017) taught “Nuevas formas de la intimidad en las escrituras latinoamericanas actuales.”

**Biologist David Alonso** (Autumn 2017), from the Center for Advanced Studies of Blanes (CEAB-CSIC) in Spain, taught “Stochastic Processes in Continuous Time: Ecology and Epidemiology.”

**Musicologist Miriam Escudero** (Spring 2018), from the Colegio Universitario San Gerónimo de La Habana, Universidad de la Habana, Cuba, will teach “Research and Performance: Latin American Baroque Music.”

**Anthropologist Olívia Gomes da Cunha** (Spring 2018), from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro/Museu Nacional, will teach “The Maroon Societies in South America.”
Ahmed first worked with the Chicago Cubs as an editorial intern. Returning as an editor after a brief internship with the White Sox, he saw opportunity for growth: “As the organization started modernizing under its new owners and UChicago alumni, the Ricketts family, I realized that there may eventually be a place for my analytical background in baseball operations. Working toward that became my focus. I quit my editorial job to focus entirely on building the skill set and portfolio necessary to join this department. Two years later, it paid off in a full-time position as an assistant in the baseball operations research and development department, where today I am an analyst.”

Ahmed credits his interest in Latin America to classes taken with CLAS-affiliated faculty. “I actually entered college loving math, science, English, philosophy—everything but history and social studies, which had appeared to me to be so focused on the “what” but not the “why.” But [Dain Borges’s] Latin American Civilizations courses intertwined both, with a syllabus that challenged us to read through primary sources both for their authenticity and their biases. Concepts like personalismo and machismo stick with me today, and they were some of the lenses with which I viewed the 2016 and other recent US elections. Dain’s lectures were the reason I pursued Latin American Studies.”

Minoring in Latin American Studies, Ahmed “studied the incentives young Latinos had to make it to the US and ultimately the major leagues as well as the influences their culture had on their style of play. There’s an expression in the Dominican Republic that “you can’t walk off the island,” suggesting that the way you get noticed is by hitting, not by taking walks. As the game started increasingly to value getting on base in the early 2000s, that created an interesting dichotomy between the average skill sets of many Latin American players and US-born ones.”

Ahmed’s work in baseball eventually intersected with his interest in Latin America: “By far my most treasured opportunity was the chance to go to the Cubs’ Dominican academy in 2010. It all felt like a summer camp—a summer camp at a baseball paradise. Coaches would be instructing players until the sun went down, and the evenings were filled with music and loud, animated games of dominos. I wanted to practice my Spanish, but several of the 16- and 17-year-old players wanted to talk to me in English. So, many of our exchanges were Spanish one way, English the other. It culminated in me addressing all the players and coaches in Spanish on the last day I was there, a small but rewarding experience in connecting with young players.”

Of course, the highlight of Ahmed’s professional career is fairly intuitive: “Let’s state the obvious: my biggest highlight with the Cubs was our World Series championship that ended a 108-year drought and meant so much to our fan base, our city, and my friends. While it’s easy to have tunnel vision while sitting in baseball’s equivalent of the ivory tower, it’s important to realize that the Cubs matter to actual, real people. The team brought Chicago together in a way that reminded me of election night 2008 in Grant Park or election night 2012 in McCormick Place. Different faces, different backgrounds, one common goal, one shared passion. As a microcosm of that shared passion, my personal favorite memory came in Cleveland, when our entire baseball operations department ran to the pitcher’s mound for our victory photo. They are the best teammates in the world, and sharing every emotional high and low with them and my wife, a former UChicago soccer player, was very fulfilling.”
Sarah Moga’s academic interests led her to CLAS’s MA program, from where she quickly launched her career. “As an undergrad I studied English and Spanish and always had an interest in Latin America. I went right into graduate school at UChicago, and from there I started working in media.”

Moga remembers her time at the University of Chicago very fondly. “I was impressed by the professors on every level, and the students as well. It’s full of first-class minds.” What’s more, she credits UChicago with fostering a rigorous environment to develop her writing and critical thinking skills.

Before completing her degree, Moga began her professional path in a position that put her Spanish skills to good use and served as a springboard for her career. “When I was still working on my thesis, I worked in then-Senator Barack Obama’s Chicago office helping with press and translating town halls into Spanish. I looked for work directly related to Latin American Studies but ended up working as a writer for several news stations in Chicago. After that I moved to NYC for a job with CBS National News, where I worked for years.”

Moga has had an impressive career thus far. After leaving CBS, she went to work for Anderson Cooper and for Participant Media. Among her credits, she helped to develop the PBS interview series, The Artist Toolbox; launched the first season of Cooper’s syndicated daytime talk show, Anderson; and was recruited to help expand original programming for The Daily Beast. Today Moga works in Public Relations and handles communications for small media companies, like IndieFlix. And, although her work is not directly related to her background in Latin American Studies, her knowledge and expertise has served her well over the years. “I often use my Spanish and my knowledge of Latin America. I’ve been sent on assignments to Mexico and Argentina for CBS, and I’ve often covered stories that involve Spanish speakers.”

While at the University of Chicago Moga focused on Latin America literature, and penned a Master’s paper on Isabel Allende. Moga was fortunate enough to meet the subject of her paper study a few years after graduating. “I was working as an Executive Producer on The Artist Toolbox for PBS. The show is a half hour-long interview program hosted by writer/director John Jacobsen. The program focuses on the creative process of a selection of master-level artists in disciplines such as music, architecture, comedy, fashion, acting, ballet, writing, design, etc. We were lucky enough to interview Isabel Allende at her home outside of San Francisco for the show. We spent the day with her and talked to her about her writing, her inspiration, and her life. She was very welcoming and made us feel very at home. It was a wonderful experience.”

Given that her job does not always connect her to the region, Moga stays in touch with Latin America in her personal life, by using her “language and cultural skills all the time” and her involvement with “Latin American film festivals and many other things that relate to my degree.”

On a personal level, Moga keeps in touch with Latin America through extensive reading. Her current book recommendation is a book for which she helped to conduct some of the research: Open for Business: Building the New Cuban Economy by Richard Feinberg.

Sarah Moga, LACS AM’06
TV Producer
Alumni News and Publications

Ellery Roberts Biddle (LACS and PP AM’11) Fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Advocacy Director of Global Voices
At Global Voices Biddle supports reporting and advocacy on Internet censorship and surveillance around the world. At the Berkman Center her research and writing focus on the politics of Internet use in Cuba.

Rafaela Fiore Urizar (Romance Languages and Literatures PhD’09) Assistant Professor of Spanish, California Lutheran University

Ray Hernández-Durán (Art History PhD’05) Associate Professor of Early Modern Ibero-American Colonial Arts and Architecture, University of New Mexico

Patrick Iber (History PhD‘11) Assistant Professor of History, University of Texas at El Paso
Iber was awarded the 2017 Luciano Tomassini Book Prize from the Latin American Studies Association for Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America (Harvard University Press, 2015).

Ander Iruretagoyena (LACS AB’16) Investment Banking Analyst, Bank of America Merrill Lynch
Working in Equity Capital Markets, Iruretagoyena helps companies from all different industries within Latin America gain access to equity markets.

Aiala Teresa Levy (History PhD’16) Visiting Assistant Professor of Latin American History, University of Scranton
Levy was awarded the Latin American Studies Association, Brazil Section Dissertation Award for “Forging An Urban Public: Theaters, Audiences, and the City in São Paulo, Brazil, 1854–1924.”

Clay Oppenuizen (LACS AM’14) PhD Student, History, Michigan State University
Oppenuizen has appeared as a guest on the popular literary podcast The Casual Academic, run by CLAS alumnus Alex Johnson (LACS AM’14), to discuss the role of academia and his recent article, “Ursula LeGuin’s Anarchism: Subversion within Narrative.”

Katja Schatte (LACS AM’11) PhD Candidate, History, University of Washington
As the 2016–17 Greenberg Research Fellow, Schatte was in residence at the USC Shoah Foundation in early 2017 to research trangenerational trauma and resilience among the descendants of female Holocaust survivors.

Antonio Sotomayor (History PhD’12) Assistant Professor, Historian, and Librarian of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
New Graduates

BA Major & Minor

Peter Ballou, LACS AB’16
Post-graduation: Program Assistant, Latin America, World Bank

Chelsie Coren, Anthropology (LACS Minor) AB’17

Tiphaine Kugener, Economics (LACS Minor) AB’17

Saul Levin, Geographical Studies and Environmental Studies (LACS Minor) AB’17

Christopher Munoz, LACS and International Studies AB’17
Post-graduation: Summer internship with Illinois Office of the Comptroller, Susana Mendoza

Steven Vincent, Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities (LACS Minor) AB’17

Adela Zhang, LACS and Economics AB’17
Post-graduation: Anthropology PhD student at Stanford University

Master of Arts

Franco Bavoni Escobedo, MAPSS AM’16

Tyler Bos, LACS AM’16
Post-graduation: City Year, Detroit

Stephanie Cook, LACS AM’16
Post-graduation: Director of Programming, Lawyers Club of San Diego

Brandy Norton, LACS AM’16
Post-graduation: Archaeology Field Technician, Seminole Tribe of Florida

Jian Ren, LACS AM’17

Elizabeth Roddy, LACS AM’17

PhD

Chelsea Burns, Music PhD’16
Post-graduation: Assistant Professor of Music Theory, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester

Zachary Chase, Anthropology PhD’16
Post-graduation: Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Brigham Young University

Genviève Godbout, Anthropology PhD’16
Post-graduation: Editor, Centre Canadien d’Architecture

Eric Hirsch, Anthropology PhD’16
Post-graduation: Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, Franklin & Marshall College

Aiala Levy, History PhD’16
Post-graduation: Visiting Assistant Professor of Latin American History, University of Scranton

Mollie McFee, Comparative Literature PhD’17

José Juan Pérez Meléndez, History PhD’16
Post-graduation: Assistant Professor of History, UC Davis

Ana Paola Sanchez Rojo, Music PhD’16
Post-graduation: Assistant Professor of Music, Tulane University

Diana Schwartz, History PhD’16
Post-graduation: Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Wesleyan University

Alumni Webinars

CLAS launched an alumni webinar series to connect past and present students through sharing the career trajectories of our degree program alumni. The webinars have been curated as a space to explore the divergent paths that formal training in Latin American Studies has opened up for our alumni. Student Affairs Coordinator Jamie Gentry (LACS AM’11) interviews each guest, asking about the academic experiences and professional skills acquired in our programs that led them to their career paths.

In May 2016, we welcomed Alaina Harkness (MPP/LACS AM’06) to discuss her non-profit and think tank work at the MacArthur Foundation and Brookings Institution. Key to this success, Harkness said, were the multidisciplinary options open to Master’s students which allowed her to cast a wide net when scouring the job market and resulted in an unexpected, but happy, career trajectory.

Last year, in March 2017, CLAS hosted Erika Robb Larkins (LACS AM’04), Assistant Professor of International Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Robb Larkins talked about entering a professional career in academia and how her multidisciplinary training at CLAS equipped her with the foundational skills needed to pursue a future in higher education.

Contact Jamie Gentry for more information or to volunteer to participate.

The CLAS Alumni Webinars, part of the Upper Midwest Latin American Studies Initiative in partnership with UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, are supported by Title VI National Resource Center funds and are dedicated to bringing awareness to area studies and foreign language career paths.
Vistas Student Photography Exhibition

Vistas highlights the importance of the CLAS undergraduate and graduate student experience across Latin America and the Caribbean. Students who have traveled in the past year are encouraged to submit captivating photos that depict research, work, volunteerism, and travel in Latin America. Selected images are featured in the CLAS seminar room (Kelly Hall 114) and in various CLAS publications.

The “Best in Show” for 2016 appears on the cover of this newsletter. Other finalists are highlighted below. The 2017 Vistas competition was closing as we completed this newsletter.

(Clockwise, from top left) Regina Favela (BA, Anthropology/Romance Languages and Literatures), “Seaside”—Reserva Punta Curinanco, Chile • Agnes Mondragon Celis Ochoa (PhD, Anthropology), “Donde Dios y la resistencia nunca mueren”—Oaxaca, Mexico • Chelsie Coren (BA, Anthropology), “Graffiti in Response to Police Violence”—Oaxaca, Mexico • Christopher Grant (PhD, Anthropology), “Vue du cimetière de Jérémie”—Jérémie, Grand’Anse, Haiti • Steven Schwartz (PhD, Anthropology), “El Cerrejón Coal Mine”—Upper Guajira, Colombia • Erik Levin (PhD, Anthropology), “Amawaka Girl with Pet Sloth”—Amawaka CCNN of San Juan de Inuya, Peru