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**COVER PHOTO**  
*Heladería after rain, Plaza de la Danza, Oaxaca, Mexico*  
Luke Pluta-Ehlers  
BA Student, Global Studies

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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Letter from the Director

Brodwyn Fischer, Professor in History

It is a bittersweet pleasure to write these lines. Even as I marvel at the creativity, intelligence, and warmth that our students, faculty, and visitors brought to CLAS in 2018–19 and look forward to a rich slate of activities in 2019–20, it is tough to ignore the stark news from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinx USA. Hurricanes are the new normal, and the illegal torching of the Amazon seems unstoppable. Latinx communities live in fear of being torn violently apart; migrants face inhuman treatment at every border; economic crises in Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere are snuffing out whatever was left of the dream of development; criminal governance has expanded within and beyond national states; and lawful regimes have seen their legitimacy crumble with the erosion of democratic practice and the dismantling of economic, social, and educational policies that once promised some shot at prosperity and citizenship to marginalized peoples across the Americas.

The scale and complexity of these challenges are bewildering, and we feel their impact in real time. Anyone with deep ties to the region has heard the fear, anger, and depression in the voices of friends, family, and colleagues, felt personally the bitterness of public discourse, and watched institutions deteriorate and life projects crumble. And now more than ever, Latin America’s problems respect no borders; no wall—literal, legal, or strategically imagined—can hide the fact that the United States is implicated in and deeply impacted by Latin America’s struggles.

In this context, half a century after our founding, it is worth thinking critically and deeply about CLAS’s mission and relevance. We exist to push back against the ignorance and disrespect that have so often shaped perceptions of and policies toward Latin America outside the region; to catalyze vital research and bring it to public awareness; to diffuse Latin American scholarship, creativity, and innovation; to approach common problems across disciplinary lines; and to nurture a sense of community and solidarity among everyone at UChicago and across the region who cares about Latin America. The students, alumni, professors, staff, activists, community members, and visitors who have created and sustained CLAS across generations have forged these values through active, creative dedication, and the current conjuncture requires us to reaffirm, reimagine, and revitalize those commitments.

Under the able leadership of Michael Albertus and NatalieArsenault, CLAS and its affiliate faculty did much to serve those aims in 2018–19. Dozens of courses and nearly a hundred public events took thousands of participants beyond the headlines, fostering not only deeper understandings of our tumultuous times, but also a greater appreciation of the creativity, tenacity, and vitality that negative news can so easily overshadow. We were able to advance student research by financing 19 graduate-level research projects in Latin America, and we welcomed eight Latin American doctoral students, visiting scholars, and Tinker Visiting Professors across a broad range of departments. Our faculty and alumni lectured and published widely in the US, Europe, and Latin America, and many participated actively in vital debates about inequality, governance, and violence across the hemisphere. In thoughtful conversations about future directions, CLAS committed itself to a diverse slate of geographical and thematic priorities. These include amplifying our traditional strength in Mexican studies with increased emphasis on Brazilian, Caribbean, Latinx, and Afro-Latin American studies; they also include working within CLAS and with partner programs across the University to develop deeper critical exchanges about the arts, the environment, policing and security, indigeneity, democracy, and urban studies.

As 2019–20 shifts into high gear, a dynamic cohort of new staff, students, and faculty will bring new insights, skills, and passions to our community. CLAS itself will welcome two new full-time colleagues to Kelly Hall. Diana Schwartz Francisco (PhD’16), a historian whose work focuses on indigeneity, development, and environmental disruption in Oaxaca, Mexico, returns to Chicago as CLAS Assistant Instructional Professor; Diana’s creativity and leadership will help us expand and revitalize our undergraduate and MA curricula and open new exchanges and collaborations north and south of the US-Mexico border. Lindsay Ortega brings a wealth of experience and energy to the position of student affairs coordinator; students (and faculty) in need of advice on anything from major requirements to fellowship applications to GIS mapping will be lucky to have Lindsay on board. CLAS will also welcome Tinker Visiting Professors Antonio García de León (Romance Languages and Literatures), Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez (History), and Tomás Straka (Harris School), as well as a slew of new professors, lecturers, and students; we look forward to getting to know them and their work in classrooms, workshops, and events throughout the year. Last but not least, we are thrilled to introduce UChicago’s new LACS Librarian, David Woken, who has given up the misty beauty of the Pacific Northwest to breathe new life into the Latin American collections at the UChicago Library.

These newcomers are part of a larger transformation that has dramatically expanded and diversified UChicago’s Latin Americanist cohort over the last decade. Among our more than 60 affiliates across the University, roughly half have come to Chicago since 2010, in a wide range of fields, from Literature and Cinema and Media Studies to Political Science, Ecology & Evolution, and Public Policy. Every one of these people reinforces our ability to educate, advocate, connect, and create. They join a committed, dynamic community with a vital role to play in engaging today’s challenges and ensuring that a broader public understands Latin America in all of its complexity and dynamism. We look forward to catalyzing those strengths in the year to come.
In late June 2019, a group of approximately 40 scholars, artists, and students from the University of Chicago and other institutions throughout the Americas and Europe gathered in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, to explore the multilayered relationship between slavery and visual culture in the Americas. The second international colloquium organized by the Working Group on Slavery and Visual Culture, “Esclavitud, visualidad y memoria: prácticas de reactivación” (“Slavery, Visuality, and Memory: Reactivation Practices”), was held in collaboration with Yale University, the Universidad de Cartagena, and the Santuario San Pedro de Claver.

As one of the most important slave-trading ports in the Atlantic world in the first centuries of the slave trade, Cartagena de Indias received more than 1.1 million enslaved Africans in the 16th and 17th centuries. Yet the history and experiences of Afro-Colombians today are marked by a profound contradiction: in spite of their hyper-visibility in touristic images such as the palenqueras (Afro-Colombian street vendors), the memories of slavery in intellectual and political forums in Colombia have fallen into virtual oblivion, reflecting an attempt to “turn the painful past into a tabula rasa (blank slate),” in the words of Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, professor at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

By holding the colloquium in a city replete with the lived aftermath of slavery, the Working Group aimed to activate and be activated by the city’s memories, engaging with local communities—scholarly, artistically, or otherwise—in debates it had explored at UChicago during the academic year.

For three days, scholars, artists, and students participated in discussions, talks, workshops, conference presentations, and artistic performances, examining themes such as the role of passports in the (im)mobility of enslaved populations in the 19th-century Caribbean, the material culture of 17th-century Maroons, environmental history of Maroon communities, the practices of black religious confraternities in 17th-century Colombia, and Afro–Latin American artistic production in the 20th and 21st centuries. Scholars from Colombia, the United States, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Mexico engaged with one another, fostering not only the development of knowledge on these topics,
but also interpersonal and interinstitutional connections around them. Jane Landers, professor in history at Vanderbilt University, and Alejandro de la Fuente, director of the Afro–Latin American Research Institute at Harvard University, were the keynote speakers of the event.

In addition, participants visited San Basilio de Palenque, a nearby town founded by fugitives from slavery in the early 18th century that serves as a beacon in projects related to remembering slavery in Colombia and South America. The visit was led by a member of the community who spoke to the group about the town’s history and introduced one of its most elderly residents, 84-year-old musician Rafael Cassiani. On the evening of the second day, the inner plaza of the Universidad de Cartagena’s colonial campus provided the stage for a stunning performance by the Afro-Colombian music group Tambores del Cabildo.

On the last evening of the colloquium, Colombian artists Mercedes Angola and Liliana Angulo presented their work at the Museo del Santuario San Pedro de Claver, just steps away from the eponymous church dedicated to the “patron saint of slaves.” Mercedes Angola’s photographic exhibit, “Angola: objetos y conexiones,” explores her identity as an Afro-Colombian woman living in Bogotá as well as her connections to Angola, the country at the origins of her last name which she has nonetheless never visited. Liliana Angulo’s art installation maps locations related to the Royal Botanical Expedition led by Celestino Mutis around the turn of the 19th century to highlight the roles played by enslaved laborers in much of the manual and intellectual work of the “enlightened” enterprise. The performance that supplemented Angulo’s exhibit was developed collaboratively with a local Afro-Colombian contemporary dance group, Permanencias, directed by Nemecio Berrio. For the performance, the dancers enacted and reacted to stories from documents kept in the Jesuit convent library related to the order’s evangelical project among the enslaved in the 17th century, provoking reflection about the memories of slavery in the Santuario San Pedro de Claver itself.

The Working Group on Slavery and Visual Culture is supported by the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture (CSRPC) and the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Chicago. It was founded in 2016 by Agnes Lugo-Ortiz (Romance Languages and Literatures), Larissa Brewer-García (Romance Languages and Literatures), and Cécile Fromont (Art History, now at Yale). Danielle Roper (Romance Languages and Literatures) joined the organizing group in 2018, as did Christopher Taylor (English) and Allyson Nadia Field (Cinema and Media Studies) in 2019.
Students Participate in Sensory Analytics and Visual Studies Workshop

In the Spring Quarter, CLAS welcomed Patricia Álvarez Astacio (Brandeis University) for a two-day event on the subject of sensory ethnography. Anthropologist Álvarez Astacio is a scholar-practitioner whose research and films capture issues of gender and race in Latin America, with a specific focus on the Peruvian alpaca wool industry. Her film *Entretejido* (2015) offers an intimate experience of the supply chain of alpaca wool in Peru, from the painstaking manual shearing of the animals in the highlands of Huancavelica to the glossy fashion runways of Lima. Historically, textiles have been subject to profuse scholarly analyses, particularly at the level of interpretation, yet Álvarez Astacio asks the audience to consider the material itself, and its manipulation, as embedded with a particular form of knowledge. Her film encourages viewers to enlist their entire sensorium when faced with its images—to feel the muted thud of a bale of wool hitting asphalt or to shudder at each near-pinprick of the needleworkers’ hands. Beyond a phenomenological linkage with the fabric, the close-up, claustrophobic framing of the entire production process suggests an ethical engagement with the labor of the film’s many artisans and workers. This methodology, Álvarez Astacio argues, is able to replicate embodied forms of knowledge that would otherwise escape the conventions of the page or audiovisual media, ways of knowing currently underserved by traditional documentary and ethnographic modes.
The screening of *Entretejido* was intended as a segue into the following day’s workshop, “Sensory Analytics and Visual Methods,” in which participants—master’s and doctoral students across several disciplines—had the opportunity to create and share their own bits of knowledge, tactile or otherwise. After a short introductory lecture, Álvarez Astacio led students in an exercise that built on the sensory-ethnographic methods of her film. Midway through the event, participants were encouraged to put down their pens and notepads and pick up crayons, and were set free to explore alternative ways of engaging all of their senses to produce ethnographic work. They were split up into small groups and asked to produce field notes based on their conversations with each other. They were encouraged to write, or draw, their findings without relying solely on sight and hearing, spurring them to account for the less-privileged senses in their descriptions. This exercise in self-imposed synesthesia resulted in a few impenetrable doodles and bad handwriting, but it also helped reveal just how much information is lost when one adheres too closely to ethnographic convention.

Álvarez Astacio’s forthcoming article, “Tactile Thinking: Touching as a Collective Act,” gathers strategies she has used across various media to construct what she calls a “tactile essay.” Álvarez Astacio’s prose is minutely descriptive, not unlike her cinematography, as she reflects on the methodology she has developed in her time researching the Peruvian wool industry, repurposing the memory of her material engagement with objects of study as extension of the ethnographer’s field notes, and extending them the same scholarly regard afforded to more official forms of evidence. The goal of her current project is to suggest ways of conducting ethnographic observation “beyond the primacy of sight.” She argues for a privileging of the other senses, with particular attention placed on tactility, given its deindividualizing potential as well as its quotidian quality. Thus, it could be said that her project is recuperative in its scope—it shifts the analytic attention placed on texture away from an interpretative paradigm and admits touch as a mode of creating and transmitting knowledge. If seeing is believing, Álvarez Astacio presents feeling, in both its physical and affective sense, as a way of knowing.
In March, CLAS, with support from the Franke Institute for the Humanities and the Department of Art History, organized the one-day conference “New Narratives for Contemporary Art.” Former Tinker Visiting Professor Ricardo Basbaum (Universidade Federal Fluminense) conceived the idea based on his own artistic work. The topic of how his practice and that of his peers, as Brazilian artists, can enter art history and influence the critical and theoretical discussion of contemporary art is a theme regularly discussed in Brazil, especially after the 1980s, when the world became “global” and problems became “international,” and not merely local anymore. Basbaum proposed the conference theme to Megan Sullivan (Art History), whose research engages these issues, and together they defined a guiding vision for an event that brought together artists, curators, and art historians to ask how these fields, individually and collectively, can produce accounts of the current and future trajectories of art and art-making that more fully reflect the diversity of understandings of contemporary art. They sought to frame a discussion that is relevant to current dialogues in contemporary art and related fields, in connection to Latin America and other world regions that fall outside of hegemonic art history, bringing forward other narratives that might open historiographical debates in different directions in the 21st century.

To Basbaum and Sullivan, the impulse to consider new narratives in contemporary art indicates, at least: (1) a concrete need to write other histories and stories that might change or deviate from the current ways of receiving and comprehending dominant Eurocentric art narratives, and that fail to adequately respond to present-day formations of what it means to produce, exchange, experience, and share art objects; and (2) a world that is unequally integrated and therefore demands a perpetual
El 10 de abril se cumplen 100 años del asesinato de Zapata, y el Gobierno federal ha decretado al 2019 como “Año del Caudillo del Sur, Emiliano Zapata”. En contrapunteo a los ánimos celebratorios y mitográficos que seguramente han de prevalecer, el director del Centro Katz Emilio Kourí publica en la Revista Nexos una serie de textos mensuales que recuerdan otras historias que reflejan las aspiraciones y el devenir de aquel movimiento popular, sepultadas por el tiempo y por nuestra recurrente ansia de redención.

https://www.nexos.com.mx/

Abril: La historia al revés
Mayo: El ejido de Anenecuilco
Junio: La caja de hojalata
Julio: El alma perdida del Plan de Ayala
Agosto: Chico Franco y Nicolás Zapata
Highlighted Faculty Publications

Michael Albertus
Political Science

Larissa Brewer-García
Romance Languages and Literatures

Claudia Brittenham
Art History
“When Pots Had Legs: Body Metaphors on Maya Vessels,” Vessels: The Object as Container (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Frederick de Armas
Romance Languages and Literatures
Sinfonia salvaje (Editorial Verbum, 2019)

Brodwyn Fischer
History

René Flores
Sociology
“Examining Americans’ Stereotypes about Immigrant Illegality” coauthored with Ariela Schachter Contexts (2019)

Ryan Cecil Jobson
Anthropology

Benjamin Lessing
Political Science
“Legitimacy in Criminal Governance: Managing a Drug Empire from Behind Bars,” American Political Science Review (2019)

Megan Sullivan
Art History
“Popularity Balladry in Colonial America,” The Rise of Spanish American Poetry (1500–1700), Rodrigo Cacho and Imogen Choi, eds. (Legenda, 2019)

Miguel Martínez
Romance Languages and Literatures

Kaneesha Parsard
English

Danielle Roper
Romance Languages and Literatures

Haun Saussy
Comparative Literature
When the Pipirite Sings
Selected poetry of Jean Métellus, translated by Haun Saussy (Northwestern University Press, 2019)

Megan Sullivan
Art History

Mauricio Tenorio Trillo
History
La Paz 1876 (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018)
CLAS’s Tinker Visiting Professor program remains a vital part of our efforts to support the teaching of Latin America by experts from the region: over the past 30 years, we’ve brought more than 115 scholars, artists, journalists, and policymakers from Latin America to teach at UChicago, and they have taught in more than a dozen departments and programs across the University. Each year, our students benefit from a variety of courses not normally offered at the University, and this past year was no different.

In “The Audience, the Archaeologist, and the Art Historian,” Mexican visual artist Maríana Castillo Deball, who currently teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Münster, Germany, addressed archaeological objects as well as the techniques that have been developed to capture them in a broader sense: their meaning, their form, their trajectories. She noted, “The archaeologist collects fragments of material culture left by time, and while doing so, produces other objects in an attempt to better remember or observe those fragments. These techniques have included plaster molds, facsimiles, drawings, photographs, and scale models. When made, they emerge from a specific moment in time, producing a doppelgänger of the original milieu, which then takes its own course.” Through the course, students explored and produced different techniques related to the understanding of archaeological material to capture and recognize sites, textures, and surfaces. These techniques included mapping, tracing, paper squeezes, paper molds, and rubbings.

Physicist Alexandre Ramos, a professor and researcher at the Universidade de São Paulo, has been politically and socially engaged on Brazilian policy questions. Ramos described his course, “The Brazil-Argentina Nuclear Cooperation Agreement and the Hydroelectric to Thermoelectric Transition in Brazil,” as an opportunity “to study international relations, aiming at understanding the evolution of the relation between Brazil and Argentina from mutual distrust towards confidence through: (1) mutual control and accountability of nuclear materials in all facilities of the two countries; and (2) cooperation on applications of nuclear power and nuclear processes, as exemplified by the multipurpose nuclear reactor being [jointly] constructed by the two countries. For the students it was an opportunity to learn about how to distinguish the technical aspects characterizing the duality of nuclear technologies and its influence on geopolitics.”

José María Portillo Valdés, University of the Basque Country, is one of the leading legal historians of the connections between New Spain and the larger Spanish Empire. At UChicago, Portillo taught “Territorial Identities, State Formation, and the Experience of Modernity in the Iberian World,” about which he wrote, “My experience of the course has been extremely positive for two reasons: on the one hand, my students worked very well, supported the class with their ideas, comments, and doubts; on the other hand, I think I certainly contributed to widening their conception of the relevance of the history of Latin America for the study of aspects (like state-building processes) usually reserved for the ‘canonic’ Western Hemisphere. They had the occasion to see aspects of Latin American modern history that go beyond the ethnic and ‘otherness’ perspectives.”

Antonio Sérgio Guimarães, from the Universidade de São Paulo, is a leading scholar of race relations, racial identities, and racial politics in Brazil, and the author of more than eight monographs and edited volumes. About preparing for his UChicago course, “Historical Sociology of Race and Racism in Latin America,” he commented, “One of the best pieces of advice I received was to devote a great deal of time to the discussion of texts and ideas. Not only to teach didactic content, but to make it the object of reflection and research. The main objective of the course was to convey a vision of the way Latin American and American social sciences analyze the history of race relations, and racism, in Latin America. It would therefore have to present a historical sociology—an approach that was neither purely historical nor purely sociological. An approach that contemplated the development of several countries in the region, taken as exemplars, investigating their national formation, and the peculiar way in which the national narrative intersected with race categories forging a peculiar way of racial inequalities and their political confrontation.”

Tinker Visiting Professors, 2019–20

**Autumn**

Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez History, Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM)

**Winter**

Tomás Straka Harris School of Public Policy, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Venezuela)

**Spring**

Antonio García de León Romance Languages and Literatures, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
In early June, the University announced the winners of the Llewellyn John and Harriet Manchester Quantrell Awards, an annual award that recognizes exceptional teaching and mentoring. The Quantrell Awards are believed to be the nation’s oldest prize for undergraduate teaching. Two of this year’s five award winners are CLAS affiliates. CLAS congratulates them for their well-deserved recognition! Here we share excerpts from UChicago News’s story, which was featured on the University’s home page all summer.

**Claudia Brittenham, Art History**

Claudia Brittenham has built her work on the premise of looking closely—both as an art historian and as a teacher. Brittenham is focused on the art of ancient Mesoamerica, particularly how the materiality of art and the politics of style contribute to our understanding of images. In her Introduction to Art course, Brittenham helps undergraduates develop skills for looking at visually interesting things—wherever they may find them.

“Whether it’s a work of art in a museum, a monument on the street or an ad that they’re seeing in their web browser, all of these things can be analyzed visually,” Brittenham said. “It’s our conviction that it’s really important that people learn how to look.”

By incorporating hands-on activities, like asking students to examine an ancient form of book called a screenfold codex and calculate how much they owe in taxes, or taking a field trip to view murals in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood, Brittenham aims to get her students to think of the images they study in her courses as objects out in the world.

“Prof. Brittenham has the superhuman abilities to animate a classroom or lecture hall, and to communicate the amazing treasure that ancient Mesoamerican art is,” wrote a student who nominated Brittenham for a Quantrell Award. “She fosters and celebrates the multidisciplinary makeup of a class and makes each student feel worthy of participation.”

**Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, History**

A historian of Latin America, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has been a scholar for over two decades, including 13 years at the University of Chicago. He has written more than a dozen books and won numerous awards. But none of that would be possible, he said, without teaching.

“The only real mark we are going to leave in this world is in the minds of our students,” Tenorio-Trillo said. “The rest is very important. Yes, we publish books, and we research. But without teaching, there are no great ideas.”

“How are you going to test your ideas, if not in the classroom? How are you going to imagine how to synthesize big concepts if you haven’t tried it in the classroom?” Tenorio-Trillo asks.

Tenorio-Trillo speaks highly of his relationship with graduate students, whom he compares to colleagues, but said he finds “real fun” in his interactions with undergraduates.

“Maybe I like it better because they mold my mind,” he said. “They are very inquisitive. They have a way of seeing things that I not only don’t have, but I can’t predict. They teach me things. I can catch up with books; I cannot catch up with what’s happening in the world. They make me catch up.”

For more on faculty teaching awards, please visit UChicago News at [https://news.uchicago.edu/story/faculty-who-inspire-students-honored-teaching-awards](https://news.uchicago.edu/story/faculty-who-inspire-students-honored-teaching-awards).
Each issue of Dialogo, a publication of the Division of the Social Sciences, features a Common Ground Conversation between two faculty members from different disciplines who have overlapping interests. In the excerpt below, CLAS affiliate Susan Stokes (Political Science) engages in a conversation with Elisabeth Clemens (Sociology) about how their research interests have evolved in response to social and political trends, and where they see connections between their work. To read the full conversation, please visit Dialogo at https://dialogo.uchicago.edu/content/com.

Dialogo: What are the social or political questions that drive your research?

Clemens: I’m interested in how models of action and institutional structures are created and how they change over time. This interest in mobilization and innovation means that I look for moments of political ordering and political unraveling, rather than starting with an assumption that this kind of regime works in this particular way….

I think coming from outside of political science helped me to see a puzzle about a transition in American politics from a party-dominated system to one that was much more electorally open to pressure by private and voluntary groups. My focus has also extended to the role of private organizations—both voluntary civic groups, and private firms—as components of a system of governance.

Stokes: My original area of regional expertise is Latin America, however I’m broadly interested in how democracy works and doesn’t work in developing countries. I co-authored a book, called Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism (Cambridge, 2013), about vote-buying and clientelism in democratic systems. I’ve also written about why politicians sometimes run for office promising one set of policies and then, when they win, immediately adopt the opposite ones. This happened a lot in Latin America, where presidential candidates promised not to implement economic shock treatment and then did exactly that, once in office. My recent work has brought me back to questions of political participation—voting, but also protest participation, which has led me to read work from sociologists who do great work in this space.

Dialogo: How do your individual research areas intersect?

Stokes: There are always trends or waves that break over the social sciences, or start in one social science field and then spill over onto others. One of the things that’s been very influential in recent years is network theory, which offers a way of thinking about how individuals’ behaviors are influenced by the people whom they have contact with in their day-to-day lives. Sociologists have known about this longer than the rest of us, but there is a huge amount of political science interest in social networks.

I think it’s such a good thing when disciplinary boundaries erode. I always enjoy interacting with political theorists and philosophers, who can help us figure out what questions we should be asking, by clarifying the normative underpinnings of the phenomena that empirical researchers study.

Clemens: The intensity of the interaction between disciplines also varies with the sense of ‘settledness’. It is something of a cliché in studies of American politics that political science looks at the inside where the power is, and political sociologists focus on the outside where the aggrieved and the dispossessed are. This divide has always been much blurrier in comparative politics and comparative political sociology, making those subfields particular rich sites of intellectual interaction.

But at this moment, because there’s such a sense of the constructed and fragile character of political orders, it’s a vibrant time for cross-disciplinary conversation. It’s clear that one can’t understand contemporary politics without understanding contemporary business structures and financial flows. One needs both institutional regimes and attention to the possibilities of protest and disruption. The moment demands much more interaction.

Dialogo: How does the current political landscape affect the direction of your work?

Stokes: The one silver lining is that it is so easy to teach Latin American politics to undergraduates now because we deal with concepts like populism, executive self-aggrandizement of presidents and prime ministers, attacks on political institutions, and the fragility of democratic institutions vis-a-vis certain kinds of leaders. I lecture on these things now, and the students say ‘yeah, that sounds familiar.’
“This is the water!” Elena exclaimed. She scurried back to the living room from the kitchen and excitedly set the glass down on the table in front of me.

“Wow, it looks pretty clean,” I responded. I was not exaggerating. Specks of distant sunlight shimmered in the translucent water, whose unblemished appearance belied the fact that it had been collected from rainfall in a city notorious for its air pollution. For the past few years, Elena and her husband, Antonio, have relied on a household rainwater harvesting system to meet a substantial portion of their family’s water needs. Isla Urbana, an organization dedicated to the proliferation of rainwater harvesting in Mexico City, designed and installed this system, which captures water from Elena and Antonio’s roof, passes it through a series of filters, and stores it in a 5000-liter plastic cistern in their backyard. In their kitchen, another set of filters purifies the water to a quality suitable for drinking. They’ve done tests, Elena told me, and the quality is consistently excellent.

Elena and Antonio’s lack of formal land tenure explains how they discovered rainwater harvesting, and why they are so enthusiastic about it. The family’s home sits in a rolling mountain valley on the southern periphery of Mexico City within the city’s “ecological zone,” a conservation area in which human habitation is prohibited. Elena, Antonio, and their young children settled the unoccupied piece of land without legal sanction in the early 2010s. The growing family had become too big for their small house in San Gregorio Atlapulco, an urbanized area located a few miles away in the borough of Xochimilco. They had to build a home from scratch on the mountainside, but they found relief from the cramped conditions in which they had been living. Yet, because they had illegally occupied their land, they were ineligible for almost all government services. They would make trips down to a pump in San Gregorio, fill up a half-dozen or so 19-liter jugs with water, and either hire a taxi to bring them home or haul the jugs back uphill themselves in a cart. It was tiresome work, but unless the city government redesignated their community’s land tenure status as part of the “urban zone,” rather than the “ecological zone,” avenues for improvement remained limited.

Elena and Antonio’s decision to seek a better life on Mexico City’s geographic and legal periphery repeats a logic that has been commonplace in the city for nearly a century. Since the end of the Mexican Revolution, inner-city residents have looked to the city’s periphery as a place where single-family home ownership could be realized, far from predatory landlords, burdensome rents, and squalid living conditions. Meanwhile, since the end of the Second World War, informal settlements on the periphery have also absorbed influxes of rural migrants seeking economic opportunities in the national capital. Over time, many informal communities have received legal recognition from the state, and have been integrated

This essay appeared in Contextos, the CLAS blog, in January 2019. The research was funded by the Tinker Field Research Grant.
Isla Urbana’s rainwater harvesting systems offer one solution to this dilemma, as the contraptions can expand water access without placing additional stress on the aquifer. Most of Isla Urbana’s work consists of government-sponsored programs, in which they install rainwater harvesting systems in formally recognized communities where water infrastructure performs poorly. Yet, through private donations, Isla Urbana is also able to service informal communities, many of which are in the “ecological zone.” After connecting with Isla Urbana through mutual acquaintances, Elena and Antonio rounded up enough interested neighbors to begin a project of their own. The couple had to pay 3050 pesos (about $150 US) to cover part of the cost of their own system, but they began harvesting rain shortly after its installation.

So far, Elena and Antonio are thrilled with the results. During Mexico City’s rainy season, roughly between June and October, powerful rains fill their cistern with water that lasts into the dry season….In the coming years, the couple hopes to expand their storage capacity so that their supply will last even longer.

While rainwater harvesting has brought greater stability and comfort, the couple still expressed a desire for legal land tenure and improved infrastructure….Elena argued, “Just as we have a right to light, we have a right to water. We have rights to comfort, the couple still expressed a desire for legal land tenure and improved infrastructure….Elena argued, “Just as we have a right to light, we have a right to water. We have rights to comfort, the couple still expressed a desire for legal land tenure and improved infrastructure….Elena argued, “Just as we have a right to light, we have a right to water. We have rights to

into the city through the extension of public services. These patterns of migration, settlement, and eventual legalization have played a key role in Mexico City’s rapid expansion from a contained city of 369,000 in 1900 to a sprawling megalopolis of over 20 million today.

Yet, city and municipal governments are often hesitant to recognize informal settlements. In decades past, officials marshaled concerns about sanitation as a justification. Today, environmental considerations, specifically those surrounding water, occupy a central role in government discourse. The vast majority of the “ecological zone” occupies territory in the southern portion of Mexico City comprised of rural towns, farms, and mountain forest. The area’s vegetation plays a vital role in absorbing rainfall and recharging the subterranean aquifer upon which the metropolis depends for its water supply. Authorities are concerned that unrestricted settlement will lead to urban sprawl and loss of this important green space. These apprehensions are justified, as the future of Mexico City’s water supply looks bleak. Indeed, Mexico City is running out of water, and years of unsustainable growth have threatened the city’s survival.

However, the city’s vigilance over the aquifer also means that residents living in hundreds of informal settlements within the “ecological zone” are unlikely to receive the adjusted land tenure that will be necessary for basic improvements in water services and infrastructure. “It puts us in a dilemma,” one municipal official told me, because on one hand, [water] is a right that everyone has. But by beginning to recognize these irregular communities, then what becomes of the conservation of natural land? Yes, [water] is a right, we cannot deny it. But also, there are certain limits that we cannot exceed through our actions.”

Previously, I had spoken with numerous residents of formally recognized communities, most of whom saw rainwater harvesting as more of a temporary fix that could never truly substitute for efficient piped water service. Elena and Antonio, on the other hand, seemed committed to rainwater harvesting for the long-term and relatively unfazed by the improbability of infrastructural improvement in their community. When I asked them why, they stated that they were concerned about the dwindling aquifer, and felt that rainwater harvesting and water conservation were essential steps for a better future. Even if their land tenure changed and services arrived, they said, they would continue to harvest rainwater.

Mexico City’s water crisis is not simply an environmental issue, but cuts to the core of the city’s longstanding struggle with social inequality. Rainwater harvesting appears to do an excellent job of meeting informal residents’ water needs, and provides them with a greater sense of security that they can remain in their homes for the immediate future. Yet, the systems do not resolve critical legal issues surrounding land tenure in informal settlements that would establish permanent residence. Residents’ ambivalence toward resolving these issues may simply reflect doubt that their day of recognition will ever come. Their passion for rainwater harvesting is inspiring, but laden with resignation toward a tolerable, but rightless, livelihood on the periphery.

Both authorities and residents of Mexico City care deeply about their city’s environmental future. However, reaching a sustainable solution to an increasingly dire water crisis will require reckoning with difficult questions about what it means to be a full citizen of Mexico City and who can acquire this status. Until then, every raindrop that falls in the Valley of Mexico will be worth saving.
Images from the Field

CLAS has long been the primary source for short-term, preliminary field research funding for graduate students who concentrate on Latin America: since 1983, we have awarded 600 field research grants through support from the Tinker Foundation. In December 2018, we were awarded a new grant from the Tinker Foundation that will allow us to continue our strong support of MA and PhD students. As we write this, all of our current grantees are still in the field—in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Peru. Here we feature photographs by some of the students who traveled with CLAS field research grant support in 2018.

Isabela Fraga
Romance Languages and Literatures

*Sick Minds, (Non-) Working Bodies: Illness and Slavery in Late-18th and 19th-Century Cuba and Brazil*
I spent time in Cuba and in Brazil doing research in order to strengthen my understanding of the relationship between medicine and New World slavery, focusing on conceptualizations of the enslaved mind through medical discourses on mental illnesses—medical manuals, letters, medical dictionaries, hospital records, etc. My goals were to enhance the possible corpus for my dissertation—that is, representations of the ill slave—and to refine my knowledge of the historical context in which these representations are situated.

Rachel Carbonara
Divinity School

*Assemblages of Spiritual Tourism in Cuzco and the Urubamba Valley*
I spent three weeks conducting research on spiritual tourism in Peru, in the city of Cuzco and the surrounding Urubamba Valley. My goals for this trip were to strengthen relationships with contacts I have made during two previous trips to the area and to connect with more people involved in, or affected by, spiritual tourism. This research has given me a much clearer sense of the complex social and economic dynamics surrounding the phenomenon.
Laura Colaneri
Romance Languages and Literatures

The Sinister Influences of the Spirits: Spiritism, the Occult, and the Political in Argentine Dictatorship and Post-Dictatorship Cultural Production

I conducted preliminary dissertation research in Buenos Aires about esoteric practices associated with key political figures in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular José López Rega and the Peróns. The goal of the trip was to learn more about these practices, associated beliefs and actions of these political figures, and related cultural attitudes in Argentina during this time.

Alba Miranzo Vieco
LACS MA

The Embodied Transmission of Queer & Trans Temporalities through Chilean Performance Art

My thesis examines the embodied transmission of social knowledge, identity, and memory through performance art carried out by trans artists and activists in Santiago de Chile. I aspire to expand and clarify the concept of queer temporality, which I split into micro temporality (where some of the affects projected onto the queer person acquire their own unique character with trans people) and macro temporality (collective affects for the future and the present, including the global circulation of queer historical timelines, theories, and anxieties).

Jorge Trinidad Espinoza
LACS MA


This thesis examines the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign as a case study of the power dynamics between emerging pedagogical institutions and the mobilization of Cuban citizens who participated in the revolutionary project. Rather than exploring the Cuban Revolution from the top down, or “from below,” I argue that mid-level pedagogues and teachers contributed to the formation of a new pedagogical culture built on the dissemination of paternalistic notions of “revolutionary consciousness” and notions of respectability.
BA MAJOR IN LATIN AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN STUDIES (LACS)

Henry Bacha LACS, with honors; Anthropology, with honors
“Resistance Through Re-Articulation: The Extirpation of Idolatries Campaigns and the Rise of the Cult of the Saints in Cusco, Peru”

Josiah Brown LACS, with honors; Statistics
“Climate Change as an Issue of Inequality: A Study of Four Latinx Climate Leaders from New York City”

Emily Feigenbaum LACS, with honors; Political Science, with honors
“Contesting the Deterrent Impact of Transitional Justice Mechanisms on Criminal Violence in the Brazilian Context”

Kelly Keough LACS
“The Regenerated Republic: An Examination of the Inheritance and Popular Memory of the Bolivian Federal War of 1899”

Martina Lentino LACS, with honors; Art History, with honors
“Segurismos: Spatial Subversions of Argentine Ideology”

Timothy Jose L’Heureux LACS, with honors; Public Policy Studies, with honors
“Strangers in Their Own Land: The Participation of Arizona’s Hispanic Immigrants in Middle-skilled Healthcare Occupations”

Zachary Sherman LACS, with honors
“Campeones de la WWW”

BA MINOR IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES —

Esmeralda Barajas Comparative Human Development

Madeleine Beckner Statistics

Victoria Lawless Biological Sciences

Diestefano Loma Romance Languages and Literatures

Hayden Mans Computer Science

Jacqueline Ortiz Public Policy Studies

Rosana Rabines Economics

Hannah Skaran English Language and Literature

MA

Brittany Glass LACS
“Eyes Wide Shut: The CIA, Cold War Logic, and the Moral Economy of Covert War in 1980s Nicaragua”

Charles Lumsden LACS
“One Hundred Days: The Cuban Revolutionary Alliance of 1933”

John (Jack) Mensik LACS
“Looking to the Clouds: Rainwater Harvesting and Water Politics in Mexico City”

PhD

Marcel Anduiza Pimentel History
“From Pacific Gateway to Tourist City: Mobility, Revolution, and the Development of the Mexican Seaside, Acapulco, Mexico, 1849-1970”

Ebenezer Concepción Romance Languages and Literatures
“Inverting Transmodern Subjects: A (Re)Vision of Sex, Gender, and Race in the Narrative of Alfonso Hernández-Catá (1885–1940)”

Karma Frierson Anthropology
“Jarocho Publics and the Presencing of Blackness in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico”

Laura Horton Comparative Human Development
“Conventionalization of Shared Hesomesin System in Guatemala: Social, Lexical and Morphophonological Dimensions”

Tania Islas Weinstein Political Science
“Politics in a House of Mirrors: Art, Nationalism, and Representation in Contemporary Mexico”

Erin McFee Comparative Human Development
“An Ambivalent Peace: Mistrust, Reconciliation, and the Intervention Encounter in Colombia”

Carly Offidani-Bertrand Comparative Human Development
“Understanding Collective Adaptation to External Threat: A Case Study of a Mixed Status Immigrant Community in Chicago”

Adam Singerman Linguistics
“The Morphosyntax of Tuparí, a Tupían Language of the Brazilian Amazon”

Laura Southcott Evolutionary Biology
“Mate Choice Behavior and the Evolution of Butterfly Species”

Christopher Todd History
“The Slaves’ Money: Bondage, Freedom, and Social Change in Jamaica, 1776-1832”

Nadxieli Toledo Bustamante Comparative Human Development
“Socializing Attention: Emerging Participation and Language Choice: Three Case Studies in Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico”

Gabriel Velez Comparative Human Development
“Conceptualized Peace: A Study of Colombian Adolescents’ Meaning Making and Civic Development”
BA Focus: Ann Chandler Tune’s Path to Colombia

Rising fourth-year Ann Chandler Tune spent summer 2019 in Colombia conducting research for her thesis project. We corresponded with her about what drew her to LACS as a major, her fieldwork this summer, and why she chose to focus on Colombia for her thesis.

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 did not begin my first year at the University of Chicago with a specific major in mind, but rather felt drawn to many disciplines at once. I decided to major in psychology due to my interest in mental health, but alternated between potential additional majors that caught my attention, such as human rights, public policy, Spanish, and anthropology. I took my first Latin American Studies class during the Autumn Quarter of my second year, and was thrilled to discover that this major would allow me to explore Latin America through each of these diverse academic fields, as well as others. Rather than looking to explore a specific discipline using Latin America, I was drawn to the opportunity to learn about (and learn in) a part of the world that both surrounds and forms the United States.

Tell us a little about your project. What are you working on?

I am currently engaged in two different projects in Medellín, Colombia. First of all, I was hired for the summer to support the psychology team at an organization called Corporación Hogar, a residence for children and adolescents aged 10–18 who have been placed under state care due to situations of vulnerability, including abuse, neglect, and abandonment. These young people live, attend school, participate in extracurricular activities, and receive health services (including psychological attention) at Corporación Hogar for a period of roughly 1–18 months, until their home situation has been resolved or a more permanent placement has been found. My responsibilities at Corporación Hogar include assisting with individual, family, and group therapy, and completing clinical documentation and reports. Furthermore, I plan and teach an extracurricular English class of my own, as well as supporting all English classes at Corporación Hogar’s secondary school.

In addition to this internship, I am conducting research this summer for my BA thesis on the uses of music therapy and art therapy to address psychological trauma in Colombia. When I secured this position in Medellín and finalized my thesis topic around the same time this past spring, I realized I had been presented with a fantastic opportunity to take my thesis research even deeper and conduct interviews with various mental health practitioners throughout Colombia. The questions I hope to better understand through these interviews include: How are expressive therapies used to address trauma, at both the individual level and the community level? What roles do expressive therapies play in the process of peace and reconciliation? What do the experiences of mental health care providers reveal about (a) the impacts of recent conflict on mental health and (b) the intersections of mental health treatments with music and art in the Colombian context?

What led you to this topic? And why Colombia?

I believe the arts can be an incredibly powerful tool, and was fascinated to begin learning about the basic science behind this idea in high school after a friend recommended Oliver Sacks’s book *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain.* In fact, for several years I considered pursuing music therapy as a career, and spent the “career week” of my senior year of high school shadowing several music therapists. Although I ultimately decided not to pursue this specific career path, the intersection of music and psychology once again grabbed my attention when brainstorming ideas for my Latin American Studies BA thesis this past spring. I chose to geographically focus my project on Colombia, primarily due to the history of armed conflict of the past half-century. Particularly in the aftermath of the peace accords of the past several years, there has been a great effort to address and reckon with the trauma that many Colombians have experienced, providing an opportunity to investigate where, how, and why the arts can be used to aid in this process.

What has been the most challenging aspect of conducting fieldwork in Colombia? What has been the most rewarding?

Despite my previous experience counseling young people at similar types of organizations in the United States, tackling such a role in Colombia has presented quite a learning curve. I was prepared to face some of the typical challenges of working in a different country, such as being unfamiliar with Colombian slang and having an outsider’s perspective on the region’s history. However, I was not entirely aware of the nuanced cultural knowledge that is necessary for this kind of work in the social services. When working in the United States, I have taken for granted an implicit understanding of the socio-cultural-economic contexts of different neighborhoods, familiarity with local laws and (even more important) their enforcement, and knowing what is and what is not considered a sensitive topic. Noticing these gaps in my knowledge and taking the time to educate myself about the subtle understandings I may be lacking has certainly been one of the more challenging, but nonetheless fascinating, aspects of my work this summer.

One of the many rewarding aspects of conducting fieldwork in Colombia has been connecting with individuals who have devoted their careers to the very ideas I am researching, especially when this connection occurred at unexpected moments. For example, during the second week of my internship, my tasks involved accompanying a child residing at Corporación Hogar to a specialized psychology appointment at an outside organization. Upon arriving at this organization and chatting with the staff, I discovered that the organization’s model is based entirely on the use of expressive therapies (play, dance, music, and art) with children who have experienced sexual abuse. One of the psychologists I met at this organization was eager to hear more about my thesis and ultimately agreed to participate in my research, all due to a chance encounter. Accidentally finding folks like this in Colombia who choose to use the arts in the healing process was an extremely fulfilling and rewarding part of my experience.
CLAS News in Brief

CLAS Welcomes New Staff

Diana Schwartz Francisco has returned campus as Assistant Instructional Professor at CLAS. Schwartz Francisco earned her PhD in History from the University of Chicago (2016). Her dissertation, “Transforming the Tropics: Development, Displacement, and Anthropology in the Papaloapan, Mexico, 1940s–1970s,” examines the ideas, practices, and effects of state-led development programs in indigenous communities of Mexico. Her work integrates economic development, indigenous politics, and environmental issues in interesting and creative ways. As CLAS Lecturer, she will teach the required BA Colloquium and MA Proseminar, as well as courses of her own design; advise BA and MA students; work on curriculum design and promote our degree programs; and develop new experiential learning opportunities for students.

Lindsay Ortega also joined CLAS as student affairs coordinator/office manager. Ortega holds an MA in Political Science/International Affairs and graduate certificate in Latin American and Caribbean Studies from the University of South Florida. She has managed programs at AmeriCorps, coordinated the Global Citizens Project and international internship programming at the University of South Florida, and worked as a GIS analyst. CLAS alumna Jamie Gentry (LACS MA’11), who had served in this position since 2012, has moved on to be senior program manager in the Social Sciences Division.

LACS Librarian

In July 2019, David Woken joined the Library as the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Librarian. He previously served as the History and Latin American Studies Librarian at the University of Oregon, where he sought out titles from small alternative and independent publishers, including Latin American zines, cartonera publishers, and radical or avant-garde small presses. In addition, based on the research interests of UO faculty, he focused on information resources on immigrant and transnational migrant communities, Latin American water and resource extraction politics, anarchist and horizontalist political radicalism, and Latin American queer literature and queer theory. At UChicago, Woken will support research, teaching, and learning for faculty, students, and staff by providing research services such as consultations and customized instruction as well as developing the library collections for Latin America.

Expanding Caribbean Studies on Campus

In the past few years, faculty hires across divisions have increased the depth and breadth of UChicago teaching and research on the Caribbean. New hires in 2018–19 included Natalia Bermúdez (Linguistics), who focuses on documentation and description of indigenous languages of Latin America and the Caribbean; Sarah Johnson (English), who addresses issues of 17th- through 19th-century archives of slavery and manumission in the United States and Caribbean; and Kaneesha Parsard (English), who focuses on Caribbean literature and visual arts and representations of the aftermath of slavery and Indian indentureship. With a number of faculty who have interests in the Caribbean—including Jessica Swanston Baker (Music), Larissa Brewer-García (Romance Languages and Literatures), P. Sean Brotherton (Anthropology), Shannon Dawdy (Anthropology), Dwight Hopkins (Divinity School), Ryan Jobson (Anthropology), Robert Kendrick (Music), Agnes Lugo-Ortiz (Romance Languages and Literatures), Salikoko Mufwene (Linguistics), Stephan Palmié (Anthropology), James Robinson (Harris School), and Danielle Roper (Romance Languages and Literatures)—our coverage of the Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanophone Caribbean continues to grow.

International Year of Indigenous Languages

Linguists estimate that anywhere from 50% to 90% of the world’s 7,000 or so languages will be gone by the end of this century. Due to this, the UN designated 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages to raise awareness of the importance of languages the world over. UChicago’s Department of Linguistics is spearheading “Native and Non-Native Indigenous Languages in Chicago” (October 11–12, 2019), which will educate the UChicago community about the vitality of indigenous languages spoken today in the Chicago area, among both native and immigrant populations, that are a crucial part of the larger social fabric of this vibrant city. One goal of the event is to bring speakers of indigenous languages in the Chicago area to campus to share individual experiences and personalize their history, current contributions, and place in society, with the aim of fostering future collaboration with researchers in departments across the University.

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH CLAS

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

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