

# Center for Latin American Studies

## 2022-2023 End of Year Report

Presented by Aldo Lauria Santiago, Director

### Introduction

This has been a bit of a whirlwind year with many accomplishments but some significant challenges as well. We have developed a model based on the dispersion of limited resources to a growing nucleus of participants. Next year's focus should be on how CLAS can mobilize as intermediary and catalyst to help faculty and graduate students leverage external resources.

### Technical

The pandemic has helped us normalize virtual meetings via Zoom, most of them recorded. Additionally, we transitioned staff to using storage space on BOX and Microsoft Teams for tasks, active file sharing, scheduling, etc.

### Website and communications

After a full redesign of the website early in 2021-2022, this year we paid special attention to entering additional information including regular news updates from graduate students and faculty. Outwardly communicating our independent and collective activities remains a work in progress. We also updated our presence on Facebook including the posting of events and news, with growth in the number of Facebook subscriptions. Javier Gonzalez (History Department, PhD Student) and I collaborated to improve this presence as well as the templates used for flyers and for the new weekly email update. Instead of sending many emails a week we now just send one or two summary digests. The news update includes events and internal news items.

The SAS *Joomla!* team have been wonderful in helping us further fix and develop the website and obviously the largest component there is the Puerto Rico project. Eddie and especially Laura were very helpful. Of course, we all had to learn Joomla! We are now in the process of transitioning to a new version as well as a new SAS template. The website will look very different by the end of the summer. I also created a youtube channel for the Center and will be posting available event videos. I also monitor website metrics on Google Analytics. Some of these tasks are best suited for a Program Assistant or Administrator for their long-term sustainability.

### Socials

We held a Fall term beginning of the year reception and we will be holding a graduation end of the year reception, both of them together with Latino and Caribbean Studies. We

have special cords for our three graduating minors and majors. **We need to find a new source of these cords because this previous supplier no longer exists.**

### **Library Support Services**

We have been without a dedicated Latino, Latin American, Iberian librarian for half a decade at least. After a major push with library administrators in the summer of 2022 coordinated with Marcy Schwartz, our effort went nowhere. The news is very discouraging. There are no new research or reference resource commitments for CLAS at this time.

### **Visiting Scholars**

Jennifer Carcamo, a UCLA grad student whose partner is working at Rutgers Newark Medical Center is visiting scholar and more recently we recruited a local colleague, Elena Sabogal, Sociology Ph.D. formerly at William Paterson University, join us as a visiting scholar. Both colleagues participate in events and projects and will help in the Andean Studies Working Group and in the new Central American Working Group.

### **Courses, Majors, and Minors**

The Center's recruitment of undergrads depends on two contexts. One of them is our own sections of Introduction to Latin American Studies (101) which have declined in number somewhat, but we still manage to offer at least two sections every semester. In the spring it will be three. Our Dean authorized us to offer an online only section again covered by SAS. The second source are students enrolled in faculty-taught courses in Spanish and Portuguese and the other departments. But interest in Latin America and Spanish language studies has declined tremendously throughout SAS. As a result, we have few majors (we are graduating one this year). We have more minors (we are graduating two).

We work through dedicated email lists to communicate with the students that have declared majors or minors, or who are enrolled in our courses in any given semester. I have also worked with the undergrad director in Spanish and Portuguese to share information with their students (our language requirement means Span/Port students already fulfill some of our requirements). We should do a review of the undergraduate work and the Major requirements specifically. Our course offerings in other departments are very poor and that represents a structural limitation. After our experience last year encouraging the hiring of faculty in indigenous studies, I am not particularly keen on investing in lobbying any sort of hiring. In general, our undergraduate presence and focus has fallen out completely compared to 15 years ago.

### **Working Groups**

The area/thematic working groups have been a great success this year. These are the Ande; Brazil; Caribbean; Colombia; and Indigenous Studies working groups. I assigned them initial budgets which most of them used and they were led by a combination of graduate students

and faculty. To some extent they figure out what their priorities are and raise funds in collaboration with other groups for specific events. It not only has been a source of organic ideas for events that have interest behind them but also for collaborations and fine-tuning the pockets of grad students and faculty that want to discuss specific agendas. Next year I hope to assign them a bit more money and also encourage them to plan a little more carefully in relation to existing courses. All the same, the events of all been very successful and bring the center to a higher level of decentralized event organizing. Also, we helped fund a conference on indigenous studies of Mexico organized by Prof. Townsend in the history department. Next year we will highlight the work of another Working Group, but I am not sure what that will be. It means mostly an additional allocation of money for a larger event. We will also be organizing a Central American Studies Working Group and hopefully a Mexico Group as well.

### **Student Assistants**

This year we were glad to have Daria and Cheyenne work with us. We managed to have undergrads do advanced assistance work. Daria coordinated many different sorts of work and worked in other capacities as my research assistant etc. She helped direct our work-study students for the digital library that is part of the Puerto Rico archival collaboration. It's the first time that we get to take advantage of this sort of free student labor. However now that Daria is graduating, I selected one of the work-study students to replace her next year, her name is Hely Dodia. We have also had help from graduate students, in addition to the ones that invest in helping coordinate the working groups, our social media presence has been enhanced by the work of Javier Gonzalez and our Graduate Representative Laura de Moya Guerra helped with multiple tasks.

Because of the lack of administrative support since our previous admin inherited two jobs and then was removed from supporting us, I have had to take on and distribute to students many, many tasks that were formally done by the administrator. This has meant many hours of paid labor that came out of our budget without compensation from SAS. I am still working on trying to get them to cover some of those expenses. Essentially our student budget was twice what I had planned.

### **Graduate Students**

I would like to emphasize here the growing importance of graduate students within the CLAS. They mostly come from three or four departments and a sprinkling from other areas, but they really have been fantastic. Next year I want to focus on finding ways in which I can encourage their energy and their connections. Because history is the largest some of it will be directed in that area but I'm hoping for conversations with colleagues from Spanish Portuguese angiography about this as well.

### **Research Awards to Graduate students**

This year we received 10 applications and were able to fund all applicants. But our amount offered is modest which for summer research is just borderline sufficient. The current and past recipients are posted to other website. All recipients are expected to share their work at next spring's research conference.

### **Spring Research Conference**

This Spring's research conference was a great success. We had about 20 presenters and maybe 30 in the audience total. We managed to organize a model based on short presentations pitched at nonexperts and people who are genuinely interested in each other's work, especially the grad students. They really shined not only in their coherence but also in their interaction with the few faculty who were there. I'm really looking forward to the next one but will likely organize one or two special talks from faculty and students in a separate mode. We are also thinking about paper workshops for grad students in relation to their writing process, especially once they enter third and fourth year. I might hire a graduate student next year to help out with that.

### **Post-Doctoral Fellow**

Our postdoctoral associate Briana Nichols taught two sections of the intro course and one advanced course on Central America and Mexico. She organized a major four speaker event for Spring that had to be postponed to Fall 2023 because of our faculty strike. We held a very useful book manuscript workshop for her in the Spring term with an external expert, so she has an agenda for revising the manuscript in the next year, and she's also receiving a lot of mentoring in relation to the job market, application materials etc. Prof. Berg has been especially helpful here. She will also be important next year to the creation of the central American working group.

### **Puerto Rico Archival Collaboration**

The Puerto Rico Archival Collaboration has developed tremendously since I began that project last spring. This is my "signature" project as Director, although that designation is more of a strategic move that will enhance visibility for the project itself but also for the Center. I am using my own research account (\$12,000 this year) for the expenses but allocated \$2,000 from the CLAS summer/winter income for this project. The project has multiple components and has increased traffic to our website tremendously. Last summer we had three students from Yale and one student from Rutgers participate in the internship at the national archive, and this summer we have one student from Rutgers and to students from other institutions of bring their own funds in this five-week program. The Mellon foundation has expressed interest in helping fund the project. Please check the website for the news updates and the sub-pages that are associated with the project.

### **Global Grant on Immigration and Latino Communities in the US (\$8,000)**

Three semesters ago I secured a two-year grant from Global Studies for a project that would bring scholars in Latin America the work on migration in contact with scholars in the US especially at Rutgers that work on non-immigrant issues within Latino communities. In 2022 I sought to hire an assistant for months but could not find anybody despite having a job advertisement in place for months. More recently I decided to recruit a capable grad student who then suggested I reorganize the entire project around a smaller agenda and connect it to our postdoctoral associate as well. So now they are leading this project together in what will be the second year of the grant and might just be able to pull it off.

## **Finances**

In the attached budget sheet (EC only), I explain where our funds come from and how they were spent. The two sources of income are funds from SAS and our own income from winter and summer sessions. SAS programing, award and student labor funding has been stagnant for a decade except for the costs of our postdoc associate which were offered in exchange of us covering the costs of our PTL courses from our winter/summer income. But because of reductions in the income from winter and summer sessions (by about 2/3) which are probably permanent we no longer have a significant supplement to our expenses from those funds nor can we cover the four PTL-taught courses. This year we moved to supporting only one of the two PTL-taught courses, while we convinced SAS to cover the second course. Next year we expect the same level of support and SAS also agreed to cover a fully online section in Spring.

As a result, we have a complex set of dilemmas: stagnant funding from SAS, doubled or tripled the level of participation especially from grad students in events planning and production, reduced income from winter and summer session, and higher PTL costs because of union contracts.

We also have not raised the amount offered in our research fellowships. And there is some pressure to do that as costs have increased for research and travel.

## **Support from SAS**

We are happy to report that Maria has transitioned to a more advanced position in the Latino and Caribbean Studies Department, which is a tremendous loss for CLAS. Since this change, we have been in dire need of administrative support from SAS. Her former position has been reconfigured so as to no longer be connected to CLAS. We were promised sufficient administrative support from a new hire that would be shared among various centers. Now we are between administrators, sharing time from Christina Pasley and Nancy Rosario. Nancy was just assigned additional work hours and is now catching up with a long list of tasks. In the last year we had reduced administrative support to only room reservations, payments, and course scheduling tasks. Everything else has been taken up by me or student assistants.

Fortunately, a Program Assistant position has finally been authorized and publicly posted, and we look forward to welcoming a new CLAS administrator in the coming months.

## **Challenges**

We are constantly bumping up against the limits of faculty engagement with Latin America and our Center. This is expressed in the limited course offerings but also in limited participation with collaborations, events, and work. Unlike other institutions in which people working in Latin America seek a centered hemispheric discussion, at Rutgers this only exists in smaller spaces, led by a small group of committed faculty.

Last year I asked the Executive Committee to help in three areas of work. Right now, faculty engagement and revisiting the undergrad curriculum are the two priority areas.

The EC meeting May 2023 recommended that the CLAS find the resources for a competitive “Faculty Fellow.” Applicants to the Fellowship would propose projects that intersect a public-facing product, graduate students and their own research. The Fellow would receive expense funds, staff support, and a contribution to their research account. Over the summer I will confirm if our current financial situation will allow for implementing this program in 2023-2024.