Dear Friends,

I am pleased to take this opportunity to share some of our accomplishments from the past year. First, a total of more than 130 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in our program in 2013. Nearly two thirds of these students received fellowships, scholarships, and research grants. We hosted more than 30 lectures, panels, forums and conferences on campus by LLILAS faculty, visiting faculty, and scholars from Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and other parts of Latin America. We also trained more than 300 teachers through workshops that help integrate Latin American studies into the K-12 school curriculum. This past summer, LLILAS Benson led a UT Austin delegation to Brazil to sign three university-wide, binational agreements, and to acquire materials for the Benson Collection. Another milestone was the mounting of the first exhibit in our new gallery space in the Benson, “Mapping Mexican History,” which featured actual-size reproductions of historic maps from the Benson’s rare books and manuscripts collection.

Finally, since early 2013 we have been busy creating a logo and branding to represent our partnership with the Benson Latin American Collection. LatinWorks, an award-winning Latino advertising agency based in Austin, worked with the staff of both LLILAS and the Benson to create a logo that represents our partnership. You can see images of the fruits of our labor and can read more about the event in this issue and on our website.

We would love nothing more than to share these new changes with you in person! So, we invite our alumni back to campus for our third annual alumni reunion. Please mark Saturday, April 26, on your calendars for this gathering!

Saludos cordiales,
When did you become interested in Latin America?
Growing up in Texas, I had a lot of positive contact with Mexican culture. As a freshman at The University of Texas at Austin (Plan II) I listened to the KUT radio show *Horizontes* and fell in love with Latin American music. I studied for a year in Madrid as a sophomore and while there become friends with Latin Americans from Colombia, Mexico, and Argentina. I wrote my undergraduate thesis on U.S. relations with Latin America in the 1960s, specifically the Alliance for Progress, using primary sources from the LBJ library.

What brought you to LLILAS?
When I was looking for graduate schools in 1991, I wanted to combine my interest in Latin America with the emerging area of sustainable development. UT’s joint master’s degree in community and regional planning and Latin American studies offered me that opportunity. Although sustainable development was not taught at UT at the time (I think my thesis was one of the first to focus on it), I was able to find pertinent courses within the broad scope of the joint degree (including economics, policy, and ecology).

In what aspects of your research was LLILAS fundamental to you?
Well, through the Latin American studies program, I gained access to opportunities, for example the FLAS foreign language grant, which is how I learned Portuguese. The Benson collection provided me with the best materials on Latin America. The faculty and visiting professors were a source of ideas and connection to relevant issues in the region. Interaction with the planning program and the LBJ policy school brought added dimensions and practical applications.

How did studying at LLILAS contribute to your career choices?
I have lived and worked in Latin America for more than a decade. My background in Latin American studies, and what I learned while at UT, put me on the path to where I am today. I think that right now, even more than when I was at UT, the opportunities in Latin America for LLILAS students are expanding.

What is your most memorable LLILAS experience?
I suppose what comes to mind first are the uncounted hours spent working at the Benson, lost in the stacks, or books spread out on a table downstairs. What an incredible resource. But also the people, the staff and students. It was a fun and exciting atmosphere.

What counsel would you give LLILAS graduate students as they prepare to graduate?
Get practical experience in the region. Find internships or other similar experiences. There is so much going on in Latin America today. It is very exciting, but hard to keep up with from a distance. The more students and faculty are plugged into the most relevant developments in the region, the more valuable the LLILAS degree will be.

Can you tell us about Fundación AVINA and its role in Latin America?
Avina has been contributing to sustainable development in Latin America since 1994. It has made major contributions to social entrepreneurship, education, corporate social responsibility, reducing deforestation, small business growth and better-run cities.

Is there anything else you’d like to mention that we haven’t covered?
If students or faculty are interested in sustainable development in Latin America, I encourage them to check out Fundación Avina (www.avina.net). The Spanish and Portuguese information on our website, facebook, and twitter is frequently updated with what is going on in the 18 different countries of the region where we work.
The first female Costa Rican in the LLILAS PhD Program, Marianela Muñoz is a philologist and a professor at the Literature Department of the School of Philology, Linguistics, and Literature at the Universidad de Costa Rica. She has worked as a consultant and managed cultural cooperation projects for public institutions and non-governmental organizations. For the last three years she worked as a UNESCO Technical Monitor for the Joint Program of Cultural Revitalization and Creative Productive Development on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. She coordinated cultural research and the publication of a series entitled Identities and Heritage. This series was dedicated to promoting the cultural resources of the indigenous and Afro-descendant populations of Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast.

**Why LLILAS?**
Professionally, I have been able to combine academic life as a literature professor with “culture for development” in local projects in Central America. So, considering that, I was looking for an interdisciplinary program that allowed me to analyze cultural productions within a dialogue of postcolonial theories, ethnicity and minority cultures. I wanted a program where I could engage in conversations with experts about the complexity of Central American Caribbean contexts. What better place to find that than LLILAS?

**What are you currently researching?**
I am researching literature—narratives and oral traditions of the Afro-descendant and indigenous populations in the Central American Caribbean as a cultural resource for development (social cohesion, entrepreneurship, etc.). On the one hand, the tension between these cultural products and Western paradigms can be analyzed from the very concept of what is considered “literary”, but also, these expressions survive as an example of cultural resistance and affirmation of identity. These discussions and their implications on the understanding of cultural diversity in the Central American region became my research interest.

I want to contribute to the generation of critical discourse about development opportunities that can be fulfilled by the promotion of the cultural expressions of Central American ethnic minorities.

**What are you planning to do with your degree in Latin American Studies?**
After I finish, I will go back to Costa Rica to teach at the Universidad de Costa Rica. I expect to be a better professor of literary theory, plan to offer my support to the chairs of Central American and Caribbean literature in the School of Philology, and also will support the literary and cultural research programs of the Faculty of Letters. I would also want to complement my academic career at the Universidad de Costa Rica with new social service projects. I also wish to continue contributing to the development of the Central American region through its culture.
Born and raised in Los Angeles, Dr. Speed, the fifth of seven children, is of Chickasaw and Choctaw descent and is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Dr. Speed studied International Relations as an undergraduate student at San Francisco State University. It was during the Reagan years that she discovered her dislike for the current policy in Latin America. She had spent a lot of time in Mexico, but also traveled to Central America and eventually lived in Nicaragua teaching technical English at the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (DIRENA) under the Sandinistas.

As a Native American, she has been interested in indigenous issues all her life, and was a LLILAS student herself from 1990–1992. She has researched many topics, including, legal anthropology, human rights, indigenous rights, gender, globalization, and activist research methodologies, mostly in Mexico.

Dr. Speed is currently working on an oral history project with the Hutto Visitation Project with indigenous women migrants from Latin America residing in Central Texas. The project focuses on gender violence and plans to house the oral histories with the Human Rights Documentation Initiative of the UT Libraries. She is also working on another project, States of Violence: Indigenous Women Migrants and Human Rights in the Era of Neoliberal Multicriminalism.

Dr. Speed feels that the benefits of being an affiliated faculty with LLILAS are having the opportunity to work with the students and having such a large number of colleagues doing amazing work on Latin America.
The New Look of LLILAS Benson

ON OCTOBER 24, 2013, LLILAS BENSON HOSTED A RECEPTION TO CELEBRATE ITS NEWLY BRANDED PARTNERSHIP AND RENOVATIONS TO ITS SPACES WITHIN SID RICHARDSON HALL.

LLILAS Benson hosted an unveiling reception to introduce a new logo and branding created to better represent this dynamic partnership.

LLILAS Benson Reception

Attendees at the reception viewed the physical transformation of our space in Sid Richardson Hall while enjoying a culinary exploration of the building, savoring foods from Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico.

New Building Features

For those who were unable to join us, we now have a large banner up on the east side of the building which is visible from the highway and Red River St. At the ground level we have the new logo wrapped around the glassed-in first floor, along with signage on the columns. Within the building, we have new lobby signage and a brightly painted entrance wall to the Benson. Inside the main reading room of the Benson, a lounge and reading area replace the tall bookshelves. The exhibit cases, more integrated into the space, feature small pieces from the collection.

On the second floor, the carrels have been replaced with a sophisticated gallery space showcasing exhibitions of Benson materials on a rotating basis. Beyond the exhibit space, a new conference area has been added. Finally, on the southwest side of the second floor, a new Benson Study Commons provides a quiet area that faces a beautiful vista of the oak trees and the rest of campus.

We hope you come to visit to see the renovations and enjoy the new spaces.
The LLILAS Alumni Reunion will take place on the afternoon of Saturday, April 26, at LLILAS Benson. Join us for a day of networking and lunch with students, followed by dinner with former classmates. RSVP for these events to Virginia Bustos, LLILAS Benson Development Office Coordinator at gbustos@austin.utexas.edu.