FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to share some of our achievements from the past year. This was an exciting year as a total of more than 120 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in our program in 2014, including six PhD students. We hosted more than 40 lectures, panels, forums, and conferences on campus by LLILAS faculty, visiting faculty, and scholars. I am also thrilled to share that we once again received accreditation from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and attained a stellar evaluation from a group of Latin American specialists from across the country.

This year we asked alumni and friends to contribute to the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA). We are happy to report that this has been our best email campaign to date, raising almost $7,000. Great friends of LLILAS Benson Joel and Dina Sherzer have matched these funds with a $10,000 gift. Because of these contributions, the AILLA technology will be receiving a long awaited upgrade. This upgrade will streamline and speed up the ingestion workflow and will adapt our website to the changing needs of the digital audience. We thank all of the contributors for continuing to help us work with indigenous communities to keep their languages alive, to enhance linguistic research and other scholarship, and to enable future generations to remember their cultural heritage and perhaps relearn their languages.

Finally, it was a banner year for archival acquisitions. We acquired a wonderful collection of Mexican Communist Party materials, the personal papers of Ecuadoran diplomat Diego Cordovez, the Perry Films archive of the movie Valley of Tears, and records of zine publisher Puro Chingón Collective. We also collected digital photographs from Dallas-based photographer Carolyn Brown, which were the centerpiece of our Inside the Baroque exhibition this fall. Lastly, we gained the folk art collections of local collectors Maline and Dudley McCalla and Laurence Miller.

We would love to share our newest 2015 exhibit with you in person. So, we invite our alumni back to campus for our fourth annual alumni reunion. Please mark Saturday, April 18, on your calendars for this gathering.

Saludos cordiales,

Charles E. Hale
Director
LLILAS BENSON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES AND COLLECTIONS
My first trip to Mexico was with my father, who sold fresh limes shipped by train from Monterrey to Ponca City, Oklahoma. I was in junior high school, and I was totally bewitched by the culture.

My enchantment with Latin America only grew as my studies advanced. I took summer school courses at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) while studying at Stephens College. Following my BA, I studied International Relations at George Washington University (GW), where I took excellent courses in Latin American politics and history. Ironically, GW was located only a few blocks from the Organization of American States (OAS), where I would be working three decades later.

After completing my master’s degree in librarianship and having worked as head of the Fine Arts Library at UT, I accepted a position at Trinity University as the Latin American librarian and archivist. A couple of years later, I would complete a master’s degree in Latin American studies at UT. I knew my dream was to work in a job where I could use my skills in the field of Latin American librarianship, archives, and history, but for this, I needed further education at UT.

The ILAS PhD program was by far the best fit for me. I could spread my wings and take most any class I wanted. The institute gave me scholarships for every year of coursework and helped me get the Fulbright-Hays scholarship and all the others I would need to finish my dissertation.

I was the only student who took every course Dr. Nettie Lee Benson taught in Latin American history, archives, and library science. Dr. Benson could quickly reduce the size of her seminars from 16 students to 5 just by handing out the very demanding class syllabus. I felt privileged to have Dr. Benson as my teacher, mentor, and friend. I found out many years after the fact that she had once called a head librarian whom she didn’t know and told her she had to hire me. I got the job.

Dr. Benson was a scholar who was totally devoted to her work—her coffee break amounted to putting instant coffee in her cup of cold water and continuing to work. Most days, she didn’t eat lunch until 3:00 p.m. She was ever present in the library—evenings, weekends, and holidays—she knew who was working and it had better be on her classes. Her students were in key political, academic, and library positions throughout the hemisphere, and scholars from across Latin America and the United States often consulted her.

While I held various positions throughout my career, in the end, it was the fine education from ILAS and the excellent reputation of the Benson Collection that allowed me to find my dream job as director of the Columbus Memorial Library at the OAS. This was no ordinary job.

The OAS is the oldest regional international government organization, dating back to 1889, predating the United Nations. When I was director of the library, I was one of only two women among the 28 directors at the OAS. I worked for 35 member countries spanning the hemisphere, operating in four official languages (Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French). A deep understanding of the politics of these countries was essential, and I had to learn how to work with high-level diplomats. The job was exciting and very challenging. However, as a director, I was always treated with kindness and respect.
Katie Floyd was awarded a Liberal Arts Undergraduate Research Scholarship, which she will use to pursue research at Mexican archaeological sites in summer 2015 for her Plan II/Latin American studies honors thesis.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.
I am an undergraduate senior in LLILAS and Plan II Honors at UT. My interest in Latin America was sparked by encounters with various people and cultures of Central America very early on in my life. When I was nine, I found myself in the colonias of Reynosa, Mexico, building houses alongside Mexican friends. When I was fourteen, my summer ventures migrated south and I fell in love with Guatemala as I worked at an orphanage in the highland communities outside of Guatemala City. This has been an annual trip for me since. My passion for travel in Latin America has been a powerful one for most of my life. It has extended beyond the geographical borders of Latin America and permeated my life here in Texas as I work with Latino youth communities. Above all, it has been a passion that has molded me into the lover of culture, art, language, and history that I am today.

Why did you decide to come to LLILAS at UT Austin?
I am an Austin native, and my college search extended far and wide. After seemingly endless applications and visits to college towns across the country, I found myself clicking “I Accept” on the admissions screen at UT. I could not find a better fit than LLILAS. I was aware that my passion for the people and the culture of Latin America extended beyond my personal life, and I was certain that I wanted to pursue these interests in an academic setting. The resources that exist within the walls of places like the Benson Collection, and the location of the institute itself, my culturally diverse and ever-changing home, made LLILAS not only a logical decision but also the best one.

What are you currently researching?
In the spring of 2014, I studied at Casa Herrera, UT’s Mesoamerican research center in Antigua, Guatemala. The Casa Herrera program allowed me to dive deeper into pre-Columbian studies and to interact personally with this landscape, both material and spiritual, as I explored the art and archaeology of an ancient Mayan world. I’m currently writing my senior thesis about an Olmec object that is part of the university’s pre-Columbian collection. My project is concerned with attempting to place the object in the archaeological record, as it has no context or apparent provenance, and also with discussing the ethics of archeological collections. My research will likely require me to travel to what was once the Olmec heartland in the Mexican state of Veracruz.

What are you planning to do with your Latin American studies degree?
The million-dollar question. Many people say, “So you’re going to be an archaeologist . . . ” and the honest answer is no, I don’t think so. I won’t fake it and say I have some great plan. I don’t. What I do know, though, is that I am a more diplomatic ambassador, an even more passionate person, and, most importantly, a more culturally sensitive human being because of my LLILAS education. Post-graduation, I would love to return to Guatemala and perhaps continue my work with the orphanage as an English or art teacher. More long term, I see myself getting certified to teach in secondary education, specifically working with low-income students in underperforming schools. Although I am aware of the challenge that this would present, my love for learning is something that I would be thrilled to instill in young people, and I believe that my experiences both at home and abroad would make me a window into a world of possibilities beyond the traditional classroom education.
What have been your areas of research during your career?
My main area of research is how both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights can be used to improve the human rights situation in Latin America. I am also interested in how states implement human rights norms at the local level. I think that there is not enough attention being paid to the local dynamics of international human rights law, and that is something I’m starting to research by comparing the work of local tribunals in Argentina and Mexico. I also conduct research on the protection of indigenous and Afro-descendent rights, and I’m a member of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

What are you currently working on?
I run the Human Rights Clinic at the UT School of Law, where my students are working on specific human rights cases, including projects on the right to health, the situation of extreme heat in prisons, and the situation of indigenous communities affected by mining operations.

In my writing and research, I’m currently working on a paper about the case law of the Argentine Supreme Court and its effects on how provinces apply international human rights. I’m also starting work on a paper exploring the theory of repeat players, or the group of lawyers who litigate often in front of a particular human rights tribunal.

How did you become interested in inter-American human rights?
I am from Argentina, and I grew up under the military dictatorship. I was part of the first class to enter law school after the return of democracy. For me, studying law meant looking at the human rights debates that were taking place in Argentina at the time. I also have a family connection with human rights abuses. Two of my mother’s cousins disappeared in 1976 and 1977.

How would you describe LLILAS students?
I always open my human rights clinic to non–law school students, and in particular I try to reach out to LLILAS students. I believe that there is no way of protecting and enforcing human rights norms through a purely legal approach. There are economic, social, cultural, and historical factors that influence those responsible for facilitating, encouraging, and permitting human rights abuses. LLILAS students are often much better prepared than law school students to do research on complex human rights situations abroad because they have the language skills and the training in interdisciplinary approaches needed to understand these issues.

What are the benefits of being an affiliated faculty with LLILAS?
For me, it’s everything I said about interdisciplinary discourse and research. I cannot conceive any of my work on Latin America without talking about and discussing and reading the work of my colleagues in Sociology, Anthropology, History, Government, Spanish & Portuguese, or Journalism. The space and opportunity to have those conversations is something that I truly value.

Is there anything else that you would like to add?
One of the areas I’m excited about is the opportunity LLILAS has to create more spaces for alumni to engage with current students and faculty. I believe we do an excellent job engaging with alumni who go on to become academics, but I believe we can also benefit from the experience, views, and ideas coming from the deep practical experience of our alumni working outside of academia. I see a lot of space to move and grow in that direction.
The first-floor gallery space at the Benson Latin American Collection showcases a series of Sam Coronado’s mixed-media silk-screen prints depicting Latino/a World War II veterans in conjunction with selections of archival material from the VOCES Oral History Project. The Benson Collection serves as the official repository for Mr. Coronado’s papers as well as for the VOCES project, which inspired this series. The VOCES project was created by the UT School of Journalism and is designed to give voice to the U.S. Latino/a experience.

The exhibition is co-curated by Dr. Juli-anne Gilland, Associate Director of Scholarly Resources and curator at the Benson, and Tatiana Reinoza, a doctoral candidate.
The Benson’s second-floor gallery showcases the work of Salvadoran photographer Walterio Iraheta, whose Faraway Brother Style series focuses on the changing architectural landscapes and home construction styles of Mexico and Central America as a result of financial remittances from family members living in the United States. Dr. Sarah Lopez of the UT School of Architecture, whose research focuses on migratory urbanism and cultural landscapes, was instrumental in bringing Mr. Iraheta’s work to campus.
The LLILAS Alumni Reunion will take place **SATURDAY, APRIL 18** at LLILAS Benson. Join us for a wonderful gathering of **friends** a “back to school” class with a LLILAS professor, and a **networking** event with **alumni** and students followed by dinner with former classmates.

For more **details**, please contact **gbustos@austin.utexas.edu**.

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