From a Shared Border to Western Hemisphere Concerns: The History of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin

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The history of Latin American studies at the University of Texas at Austin dates back to the late 1890s. In piecing together the story, I have drawn directly from the History of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin compiled by Lewis Di Felice and Shannon Speed as students of the program in 1976 and 1991 respectively. It has also led me to the shelves in the Benson collection, and some dusty files in the corners of the LLILAS storeroom. This presentation will look to the nuts and bolts of developing a world-recognized program in Latin American Studies, an anatomy of program building as it were, and in doing so will focus more on the early years.

Texans have a long-standing interest in Latin America, dating from the territory's separation from Mexico in 1837. Latin American studies evolved from historical research on the Spanish heritage of Texas. The first recognized Latin American thesis written at UT was submitted in 1897 by Walter McCaleb, entitled The Spanish Missions of Texas.
In 1900, the University Catalogue announced that the topic for Professor George Garrison’s Historical Seminar in 1901 would be “Filibustering Attacks on Mexico, 1789-1821” followed in 1902 with “The Spanish Government and Province of Texas, 1722-1799.” From 1900 to 1906, the Spanish Department offered a course in “Historical Spanish,” for the study and translation of Spanish sources, chiefly of Texas history.

The appointment of Herbert E. Bolton to the Department of History in 1902 was a major factor in establishing Latin American history as a permanent part of the curriculum. In his first year at UT, Bolton taught a course entitled “European Expansion,” which by the 1904-05 academic year would be confined to Spanish colonization. This course is recognized as the first Latin American content course taught at UT.1

After Bolton transferred to the University of California in 1909, his course work was continued by Dr. William Manning. In the following year, Manning introduced a new Latin American course entitled “History of Latin America.” Also in 1910, the Chair of Latin American Studies was established at UT and was filled by Dr. Manning until 1916.

In 1915, UT published a bulletin entitled “Facilities at the University of Texas for the Study of Latin America.” The importance of and the need to study Latin America were pointed out in the introduction of the bulletin:

1 Charles Hackett, “A Summary of Pan-American Activities at the University of Texas from 1904 to 1946 and the Need for a Pan-American Center,” mimeographed, 1946, p.1.
The European War, which has cut off most of the communications between Latin America and many of the countries of Europe, the opening of the Panama Canal, the recent Pan-American Exposition, the Pan-American Financial Congress, Pan-American cooperation in the affairs of Mexico, and the growth of Pan-Americanism have all combined in a most unusual and powerful way to direct attention toward the boundless possibilities and opportunities offered by a closer connection and heartier cooperation between the United States and Latin American countries. Students who have vision keen enough to see the opportunities and who have energy and ability enough to prepare to take advantage of them are sure to reap rewards worthwhile.

The introduction concluded by saying that in order to provide the training needed to study Latin America, The University of Texas “is correlating many courses already in the curriculum, modifying others, and offering new ones, placing emphasis upon subjects which are thought to be most useful.”

Although the bulletin suggested that students should study the language, history, government, resources, and geography of Latin America, no separate degree in Latin American Studies was contemplated at this time.

The development of a true Latin American curriculum at UT began in earnest during the 1920s and early 1930s with the offering of Latin American content courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Under the direction of Carlos Castañeda, the Latin American Collection was established and expanded during the 1920s and 1930s. The origin of the Latin American Collection can be traced back to the university’s purchase of the private library of Mexican historian Genaro García in 1921 at a cost of $100,000. The García Collection contained 25,000
volumes of printed items and over 250,000 pages of manuscript. The purchase was also credited with stimulating interest in Latin American Studies at UT.  

During the 1920s, two scholarships were established at UT based on interest in Latin America. In 1921, the Board of Regents endowed six fellowships of $600 each to aid Mexican students studying at the university. In 1929, a second scholarship was endowed by E. D. Farmer of Fort Worth, Texas. The E. D. Farmer International Scholarship Fund provided $1,500 grants for both Mexican students to study at UT and for students enrolled at UT to study at the National University of Mexico.

By the 1935-36 academic year, a total of 15 Latin American content courses were taught by ten faculty members from six different disciplines. Total course enrollment for the same year was 260 students. By the end of June, 1935, 68 MA theses had been accepted in the field of Latin American history and an additional 30 MA theses in the field of Spanish American literature. Also, 11 doctoral dissertations had been accepted in the field of Latin American history.

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3 “A Summary of Pan-American Activities at the University of Texas from 1904 to 1936, p. 2. (For a list of theses and dissertations, see Latin American Research and Publications at the University of Texas at Austin, 1903-1968, pp. 23-27 & pp. 95-108.)
A further indication of the interest in Latin American Studies at UT was an attempt in 1936 to establish a Pan-American Center. UT President Benedict appointed a committee “to consider the making of a request for a Pan-American grant from either the General Education Board or the Rockefeller Foundation to The University of Texas.” Beauford Jester, a member of the Board of Regents, was appointed chairman of the committee while Charles Hackett was named vice-chairman.

In March 1936, the “Jester Committee” recommended the establishment of a Pan-American Center and expressed its belief that the proximity of The University of Texas to Mexico, combined with

…its commendable progress during the last 32 years in promoting a friendlier understanding between the peoples of these two Americas through the development of an intelligent interest in and knowledge of Latin America justifies it in asking for an endowment to assist it in establishing a real and outstanding Pan-American Center.

The Jester Committee did not envision the Pan-American Center as a coordinating agency for an area studies program, but rather, to sponsor non-classroom activities. The Committee concluded its report by noting that the increasing diplomatic and commercial interest in Latin America created an “opportune time for the establishment of such a center.”

Though the recommendation was approved by the Board of Regents, no university funds for the estimated $87,000 in costs were made available and the Rockefeller Foundation declined to support the project.

In June of 1938, a report published by the University Public Relations Committee recommended that the establishment of an Institute of Latin American Studies should be one of the objectives reached by UT prior to 1950, and efforts for a Latin American center were renewed by Walter P. Webb, the famed historian.

Webb was a fervent believer in the potential greatness of The University of Texas and he saw the establishment of a Latin American institute as one means to achieve this goal. Webb met with Dr. Waldo Leland, director of the American Council of Learned Societies. The council had recommended that a summer Institute of Latin American Studies be held at UT in 1940, but now Webb wanted Leland’s opinion about the possibility of establishing a permanent Institute of Latin American Studies. Dr. Leland recommended that the university again approach the Rockefeller Foundation. Leland also

4 Letter, Beauford Jester to H. Y. Benedict, March 6, 1936. ILAS files.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 10.
7 “Report of the Special Committee of the Public Relations Committee to Consider Objectives of the University’s Public Relations Program.” The University of Texas, June, 1938, p. 2.
suggested that an area program comprising language, literature, art, and the social sciences would appeal to the Rockefeller officials. 8 Webb wrote UT President Calhoun to urge him to appoint a committee to investigate the possibilities of establishing an area study program and the immediate recruitment of distinguished scholars where they were lacking in existing departments. 9

Charles Hackett

On June 22, President Calhoun instructed Professor Hackett, librarian Coney, and Dean Brogan to draft a tentative plan for a Latin American studies program. One month later, the three men submitted a report entitled “A Program for the Development of an Institute of Latin American Studies at The University of Texas.” Incorporating the suggestions made by Dr. Leland, the report recommended the establishment of an Institute of Latin American Studies quite different in function and scope from the proposed Pan-American Center. The basic function of the institute would be to coordinate undergraduate and graduate study and Latin American oriented research. The curriculum would include course work in anthropology, art, economics, education, geography, government, history, language, law, literature, and sociology. Moreover, the report recommended that funds be obtained for the support of a Latin American Museum, a publications program, and travel and research grants for faculty members. 10

8 Letter, Walter P. Webb to John Calhoun, University President, June 8, 1938. ILAS files.
9 Ibid.
10 Donald Coney and Charles S. Hackett, “A Program for the Development of an Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas.” The University of Texas, July 1938, p. 10.
The program outlined would have been relatively expensive to implement. It was estimated that an annual sum of $52,000 for a period of six years would be required to expand the present program of Latin American Studies and fully establish the institute. Since UT did not at this time have a Geography Department and no Latin American content courses were offered in sociology, law, or education, a major expense would be associated with recruitment of new faculty members.

Webb urged President Calhoun to take immediate action to implement a program lest another university establish a Latin American program first. Webb believed that “our greatest competitor, outside the East, will be California, but we have such obvious advantages that we ought to win if we act decisively.” He further warned President Calhoun that if UT did not establish an Institute of Latin American Studies, it would remain a “state institution instead of becoming an international one.”

On January 2, 1939, J. R. Parten, Chairman of the Board of Regents, told reporters that “…the development of a Latin American Institute is our aim during the next decade.” Three days later, President Calhoun appointed a special committee to work out plans for the organization of such an institute. At a news conference held on February 2, newly appointed UT President Homer P. Rainey approved the proposed establishment of an Institute of Latin American Studies. On February 6, while speaking before a joint session of the Texas Legislature, Dr. Rainey listed the establishment of an Institute of Latin American Studies as one of the five major goals of his administration.

The major problem for the special committee was to create an organizational framework for the institute and to establish requirements for the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees. Since there were no precedents to follow, either from other universities or from the work of earlier committees at UT, these matters occupied much of the attention of the committee, which submitted their final report to acting UT President Hanson Parlin on March 15, 1939.

In the words of the committee, “There is no need to argue the case for Latin American Studies at the university. Courses offered in several departments, its Farmer Fellowships, and its library attest the university’s concern with Latin American Studies.” Moreover, the committee believed that improved U.S.–Latin American relations, increased trade and economic relations, and a growing interest in Latin America among the American people created a favorable time for the establishment of such an institute. Therefore, the committee recommended that “a unit in the university to be known as the Institute for

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11 Ibid. Appendix i.
14 Austin Statesman, February 2, 1939.
16 Charles Hackett et. al. to Hanson Parlin, Acting President of The University of Texas, March 1939, p. 1.
Latin American Studies be created, and that the institute thus established be regarded by the university administration as its agency for encouraging and developing the university’s Latin American interests.\(^{17}\)

The Institute of Latin American Studies was the first inter-disciplinary area studies program to be established at UT and this uniqueness created problems as to where the institute should fit within the administrative organization of the main university. In the judgment of the special committee:

> The Institute of Latin American Studies is not to be a school or a college, nor a department with a school or a college, nor is it to act as a bureau limiting itself to the direction or conduct of research projects; rather it is to be thought of as a new organization within the university which at first focuses attention on existing facilities for Latin American Studies, and later serves as a nucleus to which new university activities in the Latin American field may adhere.\(^{18}\)

The special committee also created a three-tiered administrative organization for the institute. Instead of a chairman or a dean, the institute would be administered by a director who was to be assisted by an executive committee and an associated faculty.

Initially, the major function of the institute was to coordinate and administer the various academic programs in Latin American Studies. At the undergraduate level, the institute was to offer programs leading to a major in Latin American Studies for the B.A. and B.B.A. degrees and at the graduate level for both the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. Since the institute did not have its own faculty, all course work was to be taken through existing departments.\(^{19}\)

The special committee stated that “at the outset…the institute would be mainly a device for drawing together facilities and for displaying them in a pattern already existing but hitherto obscure.” In effect, the institute should at first confine its activities to degree planning. In their final report, the committee stated that the institute could be set up at no added cost to the university and therefore recommended no budget.\(^{20}\)

At the same time, the committee recognized that if the institute was to become an international center for Latin American studies, it would have to sponsor a wide range of non-classroom activities. Therefore, it recommended that in the future the institute should sponsor inter-departmental course work and research projects, a professor of Latin American Studies, a special lecture series, and a publication program. In order to finance

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 1.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 3.
these activities, the university should seek funds from individuals, private foundations, and the state legislature.\textsuperscript{21}

The special committee’s report was approved by the Board of Regents on April 22, 1939. On December 7, during a conference on U.S.–Latin American relations, Charles Hackett officially announced that the Institute of Latin American Studies would open in the fall of 1940. Since the U.S. State Department was at this time attempting to create some type of hemispheric security organization, it quickly took interest in the Institute and gave immediate official approval of its establishment. The next day, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, through a speech read by Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson, praised the initiative of The University of Texas in establishing a permanent method to better relations with Latin America.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{THE INSTITUTE OF LATIN-AMERICAN STUDIES}

HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

THE COMMITTEE ON LATIN-AMERICAN STUDIES
OF THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES
AND THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

AUSTIN, TEXAS
PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY
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\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Ibid., p. 2.
\item[22] The Austin Statesman, December 8, 1939, p. 15.
\end{footnotes}
During the summer of 1940, a six week-long special Institute of Latin American Studies was held at UT jointly sponsored by UT, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

The work of the special institute included classroom instruction, public lectures, a series of radio broadcasts, and, the highlight, a conference on the changes in the economic and political situation in the Western Hemisphere as a result of World War II.  

The special institute served as a valuable introduction to the permanent institute scheduled to open in September. The preparations gave the acting executive committee valuable administrative experience. It also served to introduce a large number of people to the functions of the future Institute of Latin American Studies. Individual enrollment in the institute numbered 520 students and attendance at the open-air lectures ranged from 300 to 600 people.

23 Charles Hackett, “The Special Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas in the Summer of 1940.” Hispanic American Historical Review XX, November 1940, pp. 650-654.
As noted, President Calhoun’s special committee had recommended activities that should be undertaken by the institute besides degree granting but had decided not to request a budget for the 1940-41 academic year. Although several other universities had some type of organized Latin American Studies program, ILAS was the first institute, and probably the most well organized program.

The institute was fortunate that the time was favorable to Latin American Studies. The Hoover-Roosevelt “Good Neighbor Policy” had heightened awareness of Latin America in the public mind, and Latin American friendship societies had developed in many U.S. cities. More important for the institute was that in 1940 the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) was established under the direction of Nelson Rockefeller. Although the main function of the OCIAA was to provide technical and economic assistance to Latin America to aid the policy of hemispheric security, a Division of Cultural Relations was created to promote the study of Latin America within U.S. universities. In March of
1941 this agency awarded UT a grant of $37,500 for the development of its Institute of Latin American Studies.
The following image is taken from the report to UT President Rainey prepared by Dr. Hackett on the activities of the Institute of Latin American Studies for the fiscal year 1940–41 and shows the allocation of funds for the federal grant. The budget listed here is a template of core activities that continue to this day in conjunction with our academic program. During the 1940-41 academic year, the associated faculty had 12 professors who taught 20 courses in 10 disciplines: art, anthropology, business administration, economics, education, geology, government, history, Portuguese, and Spanish. A total of 662 students enrolled in at least one Latin American content course during that year. Charles Hackett, the first director, and the executive committee never formulated a master plan for the development of the institute. Instead, they used as a guide the recommendations made by the various study committees during the late 1930s. Dr. Hackett and his colleagues showed extraordinary vision in founding the Institute of Latin American Studies and provided the framework for future development to build LLILAS into a premiere center for study of the region.

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24 See appendix 3 for a list of executive committee members.
There is not time in this presentation to follow the many development that have brought the Institute to where it is today. However, a history on Latin American Studies at UT is not complete without recognizing Nettie Lee Benson.
Dr. Benson was a student of Charles Hackett and began working in the Latin American Collection in 1942. As she is quoted in this newspaper article about a Latin American acquisition trip in 1960, “I want all the books published since 1958.” This sums up pretty well the dedication that helped make the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, named in her honor in 1975, the largest U.S. Library of Latin American documents outside of the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress.
There are also some significant milestones I would like to touch on.

In 1961, the Department of Education decided to contract for the operation of five Language and Area Studies Centers to strengthen the instruction of Latin American languages and area studies in institutions that had already demonstrated a strong commitment to this area. In 1962, awards of $20,000 each were made to the University of Texas, UCLA, Columbia, the University of Florida, and Tulane. Dr. Theodore Andersson, Chairman of the Department of Romance Languages, largely handled UT’s preparation of the proposal and negotiations. The Center would be of great importance to the future development of Latin American studies at the UT and Title VI funding would become the largest single annual outside source of support for the Institute of Latin American Studies throughout the following decades.

In 1970 the Institute of Latin American Studies and the Latin American Collection moved into new facilities in Sid Richardson Hall where they reside to this day. ILAS now had approximately 7,500 sq. ft of office space.

In 2000, ILAS was renamed the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) in recognition of an endowment gift of $10 million to the institute from Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long. The endowment is structured so that 55% of its resources are allocated to student scholarships and awards and 35% to professorships and visiting professorships.

I encourage you to visit the LLILAS Web site to see where we are today.
Given the large number of Mexicanist faculty in a broad range of fields, the holdings on Mexico in the Benson Collection, and the strengthening of bi-lateral relationships with Mexican institutions, in 1980 the Office of Mexican Studies was created to advance the study of issues affecting Mexico and the United States. This office was later renamed the Mexican Center with expanded responsibilities to publicize and develop he university’s role as a major research centre on Mexico.

The Outreach Office was established in 1987 to expand the institute’s activities in the community and has grown to be major force in K-12 teacher training.

The Internet arrived and the Latin American Network Information Center LANIC was launched as a Gopher site in 1992 and a Web site in 1994, providing the first online directory for Latin American studies. Today it receives on average 5 million hits a month and in addition to providing directory services works on joint projects and initiatives to bring Latin American scholarly resources online.

The Brazil Center was inaugurated in fall 1995, following twenty-five years of work by the Institute’s Brazilian Studies Committee to diversify and expand interdisciplinary studies of Brazil on the Austin campus and to increase the number of faculty specializing in Brazil. The Brazil Center supports Brazilian studies across academic disciplines at the University of Texas, promotes collaborative research and exchange between Texas and Brazil, and raises awareness of Brazil and its culture through community outreach.

The Center for Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA) was established in 2001 by Nora England to promote research and teaching programs about indigenous languages.

Early recognition of close ties with our neighbors to the south led to efforts to expand curriculum offerings, scholarships, and library resources and to the establishment in 1940 the Institute of Latin American Studies. Those close ties still hold today as evidenced in the vast resources UT offers for Latin American Studies. The field of study has enlarged to encompass the many joint concerns of western hemispheric nations such as trade, energy, the environment, human rights, and indigenous struggles. The mission, however, has remained basically consistent: to improve knowledge and understanding of Latin America through education, research, and exchange to foster closer collaboration between the United States and Latin American countries. With the growing complexities of our tighter global connections, Latin American Studies at UT has evolved to keep this mission fresh.