In September 2011, the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) joined forces under a single leadership team. This historic agreement between two venerable units of The University of Texas at Austin is opening new opportunities for collaboration and building stronger institutions while realizing significant cost savings. This strategic plan summarizes the vision that drives the partnership and outlines its constituent parts. Toward these ends, we seek, first, to take a leap of analysis and imagination to describe a single composite institution that will come fully into existence five years hence, in 2017. Second, we outline the key actions to be taken over the next five years, in order for both units to reach their full potential and to realize this central unifying objective. We expect this strategic plan, fully implemented, to be profoundly transformative: raising Latin American Studies at UT to new heights of excellence in teaching, research, digital scholarship, and public engagement, and placing UT in a class of its own as the destination for Latin American Studies and a model for the global public university of the twenty-first century.
Since its founding in 1940, LLILAS has grown to become a vibrant center for the interdisciplinary study of Latin America and for the dissemination of this research and creative production through diverse means, from teaching, to publications and digital archives, to scholarly exchange. Our faculty—some 140 strong—teach courses on an astounding array of topics and train students for BA, MA, and PhD degrees in Latin American Studies. In addition, these faculty train students in their respective disciplines in more than thirty academic departments across the university, melding a Latin American focus with their particular areas of expertise. Our faculty carry out research through hands-on engagement with the region—fieldwork, archival study, quantitative data collection, and other methods. LLILAS disseminates the results of this work in diverse media and forums, including conferences, research working groups, professional development seminars, and workshops with community partners, as well as film, digital, and print publications. Through a vibrant and nationally recognized public engagement program, we make this expertise available to broad audiences beyond the university, from schoolteachers to private sector leaders, to Latin America—born residents of Central Texas. In all activities we make a special effort to practice the UT principle—“What starts here changes the world”—addressing the hemisphere’s pressing problems at their roots and empowering successive generations of students to become agents of change in their own right. Students who leave UT with a degree in Latin American Studies gain a combination of hands-on and theoretical training from a multidisciplinary perspective, with appreciation for the historical depth and cultural context of the specific problem under study. Whether their career paths lead toward academia, the private sector, government, or civil society, we equip them with skills of critical analysis and a keen sense of ethical commitment to use these skills for the social good.

Since its founding in 1926, the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection has grown to become a mecca of scholarly resources for research, teaching, and public engagement related to Latin American and U.S. Latino/a populations. The Benson’s vast holdings of Latin American and Latino/a materials—second only to the Library of Congress—came of age under the leadership of the renowned historian and librarian Dr. Nettie Lee Benson, who established the bold principle that the collection should hold a copy of every published work of scholarly interest on Latin America in Spanish, Portuguese, or English. The result, many decades later, is a collection exceeding one million volumes, with an astounding scope and depth, that attracts scholars from across the globe and provides a solid bibliographic foundation for nearly any Latin American topic of study. The Rare Books and Manuscripts division is one of four UT Austin sites with extensive holdings of rare materials—from the “first books” published in the Americas in sixteenth-century Mexico to the personal libraries and papers of key figures in the contemporary history of Latin and Latino/a America. Access to these print and digital collections, combined with expert guidance from library staff, enables a steady stream of groundbreaking research. The Benson also features an open door of access and assistance for students learning to use libraries for the first time, and for the community at large. Periodic public engagement events—exhibitions, lectures, cultural happenings—turn the library into a gathering place and send the message that the Benson’s larger purpose is to serve the communities whose histories we preserve.
BLUEPRINT FOR TRANSFORMATION

The plan presented here builds on these inherited foundations while mapping a path of transformation to be implemented over the next five years. The foundation for this plan is the creation of the newly branded LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, which operates under a unified leadership team and carries out a wide variety of activities in accordance with a single mission. Students stand at the center of this mission, and each constituent part of LLILAS Benson—Student Programs, Scholarly Resources, Public Programs, and Development—derives its core purpose from this objective: We want Latin American Studies training at The University of Texas—whether for a degree in Latin American Studies or a disciplinary degree with a Latin American concentration—to be a life-changing experience. We strive for this experience to be one that is guided by the very best faculty, fed by an outstanding array of scholarly resources, enriched by opportunities for community engagement and exposure to a cutting-edge scholarly program, deepened by interactions with accomplished fellow students, and actively engaged with the sociohistorical realities of the region and its people.

The justification for LLILAS Benson is fourfold. First, there are activities that both units have carried out separately in the past, as mentioned above, which we can pursue with greater efficiency, vigor, and ingenuity by working in unison. Second, LLILAS Benson will enable vibrant new areas of collaboration, which otherwise might not prosper. Examples here include digital scholarly resources, our publications program, and the indigenous language initiative, which brings together archiving, research, and teaching in unprecedented ways. Third, LLILAS Benson will open up a steady stream of innovative uses for our shared physical space, unlocking doors and repurposing underused areas. Examples here include a new second floor conference room and exhibition space, which bring diverse publics into the library and strengthen our shared intellectual community. Fourth and finally, Latin American Studies at UT saves significant costs in the joining of these two previously separate units: instead of downsizing, we can anticipate the enhancement of LLILAS Benson’s material resources and institutional aspirations.

In sum, this transformation will place us on a rapid upward trajectory. Propelled by the advantages of collaboration, favored by geography, demography, shared cultural heritage, and the inherited building blocks of excellence, LLILAS Benson will lead the nation in forging an exemplary approach to globalized university education.
LLILAS Benson will operate according to one mission, under a single brand, in accordance with five unifying principles.

**FIRST,** we will tap the collective energies released by placing collection development at the juncture of research, teaching, and scholarly exchange. Acquisition strategies and priorities will be gauged to complement our present and projected strengths in Latin American Studies, and our scholarly activities will be planned to take full advantage of the spectacular collections available at our fingertips.

**SECOND,** state-of-the-art tools for digital scholarship must continue to enhance our acquisition plans and drive our strategies for access to scholarly resources, with consequent transformations in how we educate, carry out research, and inspire diverse groups with knowledge on Latino/a and Latin American realities.

**THIRD,** we will bring both units fully in line with a central feature of Latin American Studies in the twenty-first century: reciprocal relations with our colleagues and sister institutions in the region. This is both an ethical imperative and a profoundly generative principle for academic excellence.

**FOURTH,** we affirm our commitment to scholarship and education that advances the social good, encouraging critical analysis of the most pressing problems of our hemisphere at their roots, producing knowledge and practical experience oriented toward lasting solutions.

**FIFTH,** we will pay the utmost attention to budgetary realities, while always keeping the principle of academic excellence front and center. This means taking full advantage of savings reaped through consolidation and innovation, taking vigorous action to reduce dependence on state funds, applying new resources (staff, budgetary, etc.) according to established priorities, and conducting periodic evaluation to make sure that we remain strictly on course.

The work of LLILAS Benson will be organized into four divisions: **STUDENT PROGRAMS, PUBLIC PROGRAMS, SCHOLARLY RESOURCES, AND DEVELOPMENT.** Our aspiration is for all of these divisions to embody the objective of one unified vision and purpose. Without compromising certain functions that must remain largely in one unit or the other, we want all staff to see themselves as participants in this larger endeavor and to place high priority on working collaboratively toward shared objectives. The pages that follow describe each division and highlight its key priorities over the strategic plan period.
The Latin American Studies undergraduate major gives students a broad base of knowledge about the cultures, histories, and politics of Latin American societies; exposes them to contemporary challenges facing the region; and explores the complex relationship between Latin America and the United States. Undergraduate students complete a sequence of five core courses and fulfill a concentration in one of a dozen disciplines, from Anthropology to Spanish. Students also may opt to design special concentrations that span more than one discipline, such as Brazilian Studies, Women’s Studies, Environment, or Religious Studies.

The Master of Arts in Latin American Studies provides interdisciplinary training for students whose career plans require specialized knowledge of Latin American societies, from politics and economics to language and culture. The curriculum includes courses offered throughout the university and features dual degree programs in Business, Communication, Community and Regional Planning, Information Studies, Law, and Public Policy. LLILAS also offers a PhD in Latin American Studies for students pursuing an advanced interdisciplinary program of study not available in traditional departments. The institute provides financial support to some 70 percent of our graduate students in the form of fellowships, research funding, teaching and research assistantships, professional development conference awards, and stipends for study abroad.

**STUDENT PROGRAMS**

- **Unsurpassed graduate education.** We will strengthen our graduate program through a revitalized and expanded PhD in Latin American Studies, linked to LLILAS Benson programmatic priorities; we will raise all dual degree MA programs to the highest level of efficacy, and eliminate those that do not meet this standard.
- **Excellence in undergraduate education.** We will grow and strengthen our BA, making it more rigorous by adding courses that train students in research and writing. We will design the major to better reflect the interdisciplinary nature of Latin American Studies and integrate service learning into the program of study.
- **Teaching integrated with the Benson Collection.** We will devote special resources to the development and support of courses that make use of Benson Collection materials.
- **Latin America–based learning.** We will expand opportunities for study abroad and research placements such that every student will have a substantive Latin America–based research or study experience before receiving a degree.
- **Service learning.** We will establish academic service-learning and internship opportunities for our students, providing a context for educational interaction with nonprofit organizations, while contributing to the welfare of our communities at home and abroad.
- **Graduate employment.** Making full use of our invigorated alumni network and other resources, we will provide Latin American Studies students with effective career counseling in order to connect their skills with the hemispheric job market.
**PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

LLILAS Benson Public Programs is comprised of scholarly programs and public engagement. Scholarly programs encompass support for faculty research, scholarly exchange, and linkages among scholars of Latin America, within the university, across the nation, and at sister institutions in the region. Each year we award funds to faculty to conduct original research in the region, and we provide a one-semester sabbatical to an especially deserving faculty member. Our scholarly programs yield a vibrant calendar of Latin America–related events and bring numerous scholars to campus each year, including: visiting professors, who teach courses in our graduate program; visiting resource professors, who come for brief stays to collaborate with our faculty; and visiting scholars, who come to make use of the Benson Collection. We also maintain strategic partnerships with numerous institutions in Latin America that enable collaboration and exchange.

The objective of the LLILAS Benson public engagement program is to enhance public understanding of Latin America and U.S. Latino/a communities through arts and culture. Through events, exhibitions, and education programs, public engagement extends LLILAS Benson’s core activities of education, research, and exchange to the general public, with a specific focus on reaching K–12 and postsecondary schools, civic and nonprofit organizations, and organizations that serve Latinos/as and Latin American–born residents of Central Texas.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

- **The UT LAS Clearinghouse.** LLILAS Benson will serve as the clearinghouse at UT Austin for all Latin America–related activities such that communication and opportunities for coordination across the campus will be maximized.
- **Connect faculty research with public policy.** We will promote cutting-edge research on core interdisciplinary issues such as immigration, violence, and social inequality, while strengthening links between research findings and policy deliberation.
- **Thematic postdoctoral program.** The one missing piece from our vibrant visiting scholar initiatives is a resident postdoctoral fellowship program to nurture young and emerging scholars. We will establish priority thematic areas and seek the necessary funding in order to establish such a program.
- **Engaging the Latino/a community in Texas.** We will expand our public engagement program, with a particular focus on partnerships with organizations that serve Latin Americans and Latinos/as in Central Texas.
- **Exhibiting the Benson.** Our newly launched exhibitions program will expand the visibility of and access to Benson special collection materials with a vibrant calendar of temporary exhibitions. We will engage new audiences through exhibition-related public events and through digital exhibition resources that can reach local, national, and international audiences. We will also integrate exhibition programming and materials with LLILAS course offerings, faculty and student research interests, and scholarly programs.
**SCHOLARLY RESOURCES**

The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection provides a unique configuration of information resources for research and instruction. Printed materials, principally books and periodicals—already numbering more than one million volumes—grow at a rate of roughly 10,000 items each year. Print collections are augmented by a large store of microfilm reproductions of published and archival sources. In recent years the Benson has increased its access to digital resources, now numbering in the tens of thousands of refereed collections. The Benson’s rare books throughout the community of Latin America. These range from the famous pictorial prepared to describe regions of Mesoamerica in the sixteenth century, to the literary such as Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, philos such as Arturo Taracena Flores clude thousands of photographs and maps, depicting many areas of Latin in compliance with national patrimony guidelines, as opportunities present themselves. Our Reference and Circulation division handles circulating materials, maintains library stacks and binding, and offers guidance on effective use of collections. The Benson provides an increasing number of academic services, including tours, class presentations, and supporting courses associated with the student programs of Latin American and Mexican American–Latino/a Studies.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

- **Leadership in digital scholarship and communication.** Building on two decades of experience with the Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC), and drawing on the vast technical expertise and capacity of the UT Libraries, LLILAS Benson will provide unparalleled access to a wide array of scholarly resources in our area of specialization.

- **Collaborative curation as centerpiece.** Expansion of archival holdings no longer depends on the acquisition of unique physical copies of rare materials. Instead, we will give priority to collaborative arrangements whereby library experts work together with local archives to organize and digitize their contents, keeping originals in place and making digitized copies universally available on the Internet.

- **Collaborative approach to acquisition of widely held published materials.** Before the twenty-first century, research libraries—including the Benson—acquired materials with little regard to the holdings of peer libraries. Recent advances in bibliographic networking provide instant identification of scholarly resources worldwide and rapid access to them through either interlibrary lending systems or the Internet. Consequently, the Benson can now make acquisition decisions based on analysis of a large universe of peer library holdings, and opt not to acquire materials held by and easily accessible from others. We will work with peer libraries toward an increasingly collaborative implementation of this new acquisition strategy.

- **Shift toward increased acquisition of rare and unique materials.** The Benson Collection will deploy an increased proportion of its budgetary resources and staff expertise toward the acquisition of rare and unique materials. This refocusing of collection priorities will further enhance the Benson’s reputation and resources as a research destination, and will dovetail with broader goals of deepening the integration between collection development and the Latin American–Latino/a scholarly program.

- **Renewed commitment to acquisition trips.** The Benson was built through periodic trips to Latin America, which allowed librarians to foster institutional relations while collecting material that would otherwise not be found. We will strengthen this practice, especially in Mexico and Brazil, while relying on purchasers for basic coverage.

- **Publication for institutional advancement.** The venerable LLILAS publication series—a cooperative arrangement with UT Press—will acquire a sharpened focus: published works will be linked directly to the LLILAS Benson intellectual program. Through this link, we will heighten and advance our reputation in the field.
This fourth area is crucial to the success of the other three. Currently, about one-third of the LLILAS budget comes from state funds; while the Benson’s proportion is higher, the trend will inevitably be downward. State funds continue to be essential, especially for core staff salaries, but the transformations envisioned here cannot be achieved through internal means alone. We will carry out vigorous fund-raising efforts to reach the goals outlined here. Under the leadership of the associate director for development, the LLILAS Benson Development Office will generate additional external revenue through:

- **Major gifts campaign and annual giving.** Our central priority is to match the generous $10 million gift from Joe and Teresa Long. These new funds will support our full range of commitments, with the largest portion devoted to direct support for students.

- **Grants from government and private foundations.** We will significantly expand our grant-writing activities, both to gain core support for internally generated programs and as a means to advance and sustain faculty-led collaborative research.

- **Research contracts.** As we advance toward our objective of orienting a portion of our intellectual program toward policy and practical solutions, we will more assertively pursue opportunities for research contracts in our priority areas.
LLILAS Benson will conduct annual reviews of this strategic plan, adjusting course as needed based on changes in resources. In 2013–2014, LLILAS Benson will conduct a rigorous external review of our operations. In 2015–2016, when LLILAS Benson is halfway through this five-year plan, LLILAS will mark its seventy-fifth year and the Benson its ninetieth. We will organize a major celebration of these two milestones, and use the occasion both to take stock of our transformative vision and to look ahead toward its further consolidation. This celebration will feature a high-profile academic event that will reinforce the role of Latin American studies and collections at UT, and will showcase LLILAS Benson’s approach to internationalization of the university. When the plan is complete in 2017, major renovation of Sid Richardson Hall will have become a central priority.

With modest budgetary allocations and much ingenuity, significant physical transformations will be achieved in the course of the five years. In the subsequent period, LLILAS Benson will need to undertake a thorough renovation of the entire four floors of shared space. The vision contained in this strategic plan will culminate with this renovation, which is also a key facilitating condition for its long-term success.