Welcome to *Focus on Faculty*

We are pleased to bring you the first issue of our new publication, *Focus on Faculty*. This newsletter reflects the breadth and diversity of our intellectual community and offers a window onto the exciting scholarship across the university involving Latin America and the Caribbean. In this issue, you will find interviews with CLACS faculty and visiting scholars about their research and teaching as well as information about recent publications, conference participation, and awards.

We plan to publish one issue of *Focus on Faculty* each semester, and we invite you to contact us if you would like to be interviewed or have news to share. Note that the deadline for submissions for the Spring issue is March 1, 2013.

Thank you for your interest in and support of CLACS.

Richard Snyder, Director of CLACS

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**Cogut Visiting Professor César Rodríguez-Garavito**

César Rodríguez-Garavito is the founding Director of the Program on Global Justice and Human Rights at Universidad de los Andes (Colombia) and a founding member of the Center for Law, Justice, and Society (Dejusticia). He has authored numerous books and articles including *Balancing Wealth and Health: The Battle over Intellectual Property and Access to Medicines in Latin America* (coed., Oxford UP, forthcoming).

How does your experience at Brown differ from the time you have spent at other universities? It entails a fascinating mix of activities. My main responsibility is to teach a seminar on human rights in Latin America to a group of 20 outstanding students. The seminar offers a multidisciplinary introduction to the key advances in and challenges for the protection of human rights in the region, ranging from freedom of expression and transitional justice to socioeconomic rights, environmental justice, and indigenous peoples’ rights. I am also actively involved in colloquia and conferences organized by CLACS and the Watson Institute, and advise graduate and undergraduate students writing dissertations and theses on Latin America.

This experience has allowed me to appreciate the success of institutional efforts aimed at increasing diversity within a top academic institution. My students’ diverse backgrounds have made seminar discussions all the more interesting, and go well beyond what I had experienced at other leading universities in the U.S. and Latin America.

What are you working on now? I am completing a book manuscript on socio-environmental disputes over development, natural resource extraction, and indigenous peoples’ rights in Latin America. It draws on a comparative ethnography of three highly visible conflicts in indigenous territories that have led to key rulings by the Inter-American Human Rights System: oil exploration in the Sarayaku people’s land in the Ecuadorian Amazon, the impact of the Urrá dam in northern Colombia, and the construction of the Belo Monte dam in the Brazilian Amazon. The book focuses on political and legal disputes over consultation with indigenous peoples prior to undertaking such projects.

Your discipline is law and sociology. What is it about studying these subjects in the region that fascinates you? I combine my training in sociology and law into a hybrid that some call “public sociology.” It includes research and teaching, participation in the public sphere (media, social movements, etc.), public policy and legal advocacy, and the construction of institutions that embody and promote public sociology (for example, research centers and NGOs). Latin America offers a propitious setting for this type of professional practice, as scholars can more easily straddle the divide between academic work and public engagement. I find this fascinating, as it means experiencing, in a matter of hours, the transition from the introverted world of classrooms to the extroverted world of media and meetings with activists and public officials.
You are currently a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences at Fundación Juan March in Madrid. What is the experience like? How does it differ from Brown? What is your favorite part of the experience? As a visiting scholar, I'm not doing any teaching this year. This gives me lots of time to devote to my research, which is a great opportunity. Nonetheless, I miss the back and forth exchanges that come with teaching; I'm looking forward to getting back to the classroom next year. Luckily, there is a dynamic group of young scholars at Fundación Juan March, many of whom also study Latin America. This is a fascinating, and in some senses difficult, time to be in Spain, which is suffering through a serious economic crisis.

As a political scientist, what drew you to the Latin American region as a focus for study? I grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., which sparked my interest in studying politics. I became especially interested in Latin America after I spent a semester studying abroad in Argentina as an undergraduate. I was particularly fascinated by the political and economic diversity within Argentina-- in that sense, it's not dissimilar from the U.S.

Is there anything you are working on now that you are particularly excited about? I've recently started a new project in which I examine voting behavior and citizen attitudes towards corruption in Brazil. After spending the past decade working mostly on local politics in Argentina, it's exciting to improve my Portuguese and refresh my familiarity with Brazilian politics.

CLACS would like to extend a special thanks to Corinne Cathcart, who gathered the information for Focus on Faculty and conducted all of the interviews. Corinne is double concentrating in History and Political Science and writes for numerous publications in the Brown community. She is currently a Communications Assistant at the Watson Institute.
What attracted you to Herbert Daniel as a biographical subject? Herbert Daniel is a fascinating figure. As a young medical student, he joined the student opposition to the military regime and joined a revolutionary organization that foresaw the demise of the dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 by establishing a guerrilla movement in the country.

Herbert was also gay, and one of the issues that I am addressing in this biography is the ways in which he negotiated between his personal sexual and romantic desires and the compulsory heterosexuality that was a norm within the Brazilian revolutionary movement and Brazilian society at large in the 1960s and 70s. After surviving underground from January 1969 until September 1974, Herbert and his future lifetime partner slipped out of the country for exile in Europe. He returned in the 1980s and became involved in the democratization process. He eventually discovered that he was HIV positive and became an important spokesperson for people living with HIV/AIDS until his death in 1992. In this biography I am trying to capture the complexity of his life and the contexts in which he challenged first the military regime and then other social norms.

You study Latin America, and Brazil in particular, from a historical perspective. Why did you choose to focus on this region? In August 1976, I flew from Bogotá, Colombia to the border of Brazil, Peru, and Colombia in an upper branch of the Amazon River to travel through the country. My intention was to stay six months, and I ended up living there six years. I fell in love with the country and its culture, participated in the movement against the military regime, and co-founded the gay and lesbian movement. Many years later, when I decided to go to graduate school, I chose to focus on Brazilian history because I found it fascinating, extremely complex, and filled with the unexpected. History also allowed me to try to understand Brazil more fully. I enjoy teaching about the country precisely because of the ways it is unique.

You are currently working on new editions of two historical texts. What does that work entail?

I am working with my co-editor Peter Smith to complete the eighth edition of Modern Latin America, a textbook that was originally co-authored with Thomas E. Skidmore, Professor Emeritus of Latin American History at Brown. The book is the mostly widely used text on Latin America, and it is a challenge to find the best way to communicate the vastness and richness of the region’s history to students who know little about it. I am also working with a team of students, headed by Cameron Parsons, in developing a companion website to accompany the textbook that is produced by and for students and offers them multiple pathways into the material introduced in Modern Latin America.

At the same time, I’m collaborating with two co-editors in producing a comprehensive collection of documents on Brazilian history for the second edition of The Brazil Reader. With the support of several students, we have been translating original documents from Portuguese into English so that they can be available to a broader audience. In addition, another team of students, headed by Emma Wohl and John Beckett, is developing a companion website to Skidmore’s textbook, Brazil: Five Centuries of Change, which I use in the classroom.

What work are you particularly excited about right now?

I have been working with Patricia Figueroa, the Curator of the Latin American and Caribbean collections in the Brown University Libraries, on developing the Brasiliana Collection, that features Brown’s diverse holdings on Brazil. This also entails collecting the papers of scholars who have worked on Brazil to augment the Thomas E. Skidmore Papers that have been deposited at the John Hay Library.

I am also working with my colleagues in the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, faculty across the campus who do research on Brazil, and the Office of International Affairs in developing the Brazil Initiative. Brown has an amazing group of scholars who work on Brazil in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Our goal is to transform our academic program at Brown so that it is the best place to study Brazil outside of Brazil. Brown has a long tradition of working on Brazil, and the University is positioned to become the academic leader in the country in this area of knowledge.
Luiz F. Valente is Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown. His article "History, Fiction and National Identity in J. U. Ribeiro’s An Invincible Memory and R. Coover’s The Public Burning" was recently chosen by the Brazil Section of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) as the best scholarly article about Brazil published in 2011. Valente gave the keynote address at a symposium on Paul Ricoeur sponsored by the Research Group on Literature and Theology at the Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro. He is currently serving as President of the American Portuguese Studies Association (APSA) and is a member of the executive committee of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL).

Tell us more about your recent award-winning article.

The article is a comparison of two novels: one by a distinguished contemporary Brazilian writer, the other one by a distinguished American writer. It is written from the point of view of the interconnections between history, fiction and the question of national identity. I think fiction has its own unique way of addressing historical questions. These two books both address very interesting questions of national identity. Not a glorification of national identity. Not a glorification of being Brazilian, or being American, but calling into question myths about our nationalities that are accepted without much thought.

You also gave a lecture in Brazil.

I work in many different modes and have many different interests in terms of my approaches to literature. History is one of them, but I’ve always been interested in theological questions, and the Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, our partner university in Brazil, found out about that and they said we would like you to be part of the symposium on the relationship between Paul Ricoeur’s writing and literature.

You hold many positions on Brown’s campus. What is it like to have all of these roles?

I’ve been on the Brown campus all my adult life. I was a graduate student in comparative literature at Brown, and after starting my teaching career at Providence College, I came back to teach at Brown. Certainly, what I enjoy about Brown is really the ability to not only do my research but also connect it to teaching my extremely bright undergraduate and graduate students. It’s hard to think of a better situation for a faculty member. We hear about Brown undergraduates really valuing the flexibility, but I think we can also talk about that from the faculty standpoint. This is why we are at Brown.

Stephanie Merrim Wins Kovacs Prize

In January, Stephanie Merrim’s The Spectacular City: Mexico and Colonial Hispanic Literary Culture (University of Texas Press) received the Modern Language Association’s Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize for an outstanding book in Hispanic Studies. The book offers an interdisciplinary approach to colonial Hispanic writing based on the “Spectacular City,” a model that encompasses three driving forces of New World literary culture: cities, festivals, and wonder. The Spectacular City also brings anthropology, art history, education, history, literary theory, theology, and urban studies to bear on its subjects. Merrim is teaching two courses on Latin America this semester: “Crisis and Identity in Mexico (1519-1968)” and “New Worlds: Reading Spaces and Places in Colonial Latin America.”
Forrest Gander, the Adele Kellenberg Seaver Professor of Literary Arts and Comparative Literature, has translated and co-translated numerous works including Spectacle & Pigsty: Poems of Kiwao, which won the Best Translated Book Award for 2012. Gander also recently held a reading with the renowned Chilean poet Raul Zurita.

Tell us about your newest translation. It’s a book of poetry by a wonderful Mexican poet, Pura López Colomé. This new book, Santa y Seña, which I render as "Watchword," won the Villaurrutia Prize, which is sort of the equivalent of the Pulitzer in Mexico. Pura is a kind of a secular visionary poet who thinks of God and death all the time but believes mostly in redemption through language and living. She wrote this book at a time when she was very ill. So the poems have a tremendous depth and tension that seems both philosophical, spiritual and personal, and that made it very powerful for me.

What fascinates you about translation? One of the ways I educate myself and expand the resources of my own writing is through translations in which I’m encountering different forms of rhythm, image repertoires and syntax—the music of a different kind of mind. That’s very exciting to try to bring into English. It's a challenge and it’s the kind of thing that I think renovates our own language, keeps it from going dead. Translation is what’s always kept languages refreshing themselves.

You have translated a lot of Latin American writing. Have you encountered any major themes or concepts that differentiate it from other regional literature? Themes there are. The Latin Americans are very death haunted, for example. That has to do with their history. And Latin Americans are also capable of handling a level of conceptual abstraction that American readers are less comfortable with. At the same time, the poets I’ve translated have been very different from each other. The poet Alfonso D’Aquino, for example, is interested in ecosystems, botany, stars and the names of rocks. Another Mexican poet I translated, Coral Bracho, breaks down the distinction between subjectivity and world. Hers is a very phenomenological poetry.

Your award-winning translation Spectacle and Pigsty was translated from Japanese, which is a major shift in culture and language. How did that come about? I’ve been interested in Japanese poetry since I was a teenager. I studied Japanese for a short time and I’ve gone to Japan repeatedly to meet writers and Butoh dancers. I translated Spectacle & Pigsty: Selected Poems of Kiwao Nomura with a wonderful co-translator, Kyoko Yoshida. Even though I didn’t have the natural resources to translate his work on my own, I very much wanted to share with Americans what this major Japanese poet, influenced by shamanism and Gilles Deleuze, was doing. I knew that if I didn't, no one else would.

What have you written lately in English? I have a book that came out just this week called Redstart: An Ecological Poetics. It’s a mixed genre book, both prose and poetry, and I wrote it in collaboration with the Australian poet John Kinsella. That’s something about Brown's Literary Arts Program - its international orientation - that draws it into an alliance with CLACS. And that’s one of the reasons that it’s exciting to be here.

Anything you're working on now that you are particularly excited about? I’m currently working with a Brown graduate student Katarina Seligmann on an anthology of Fifty Essential Latin American Poems that North Americans Should Know—we've got to change the title—that Raul Zurita has put together. It will come out next year and it’s one of the most joyous literary projects I've been involved with.
Former Craig M. Cogut Visiting Professor Ruben Oliven

What was your experience like as a Cogut Visiting Professor at CLACS? Did it differ enormously from your work at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul? The people I met at CLACS and the Watson Institute were very nice and interesting. Students were great. Apart from teaching a course a semester, I had the opportunity to do research at Brown's libraries and write. It did not differ enormously from my work at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. What differed a lot was that at Brown I did not have to attend meetings and do administrative work. This meant that at Brown I had more time for research and writing. In Providence, I also had a calmer life than the one I have in Brazil, where I travel a lot to give lectures and attend conferences.

You are currently doing research on Brazilian popular music. How did you get into that line of research? What do you find compelling about it? Are there any particular themes in Brazilian music that you find interesting? I love music, and I think you can learn a lot about society and culture by analyzing songs. I have worked and published extensively on Brazilian popular music. While at Brown, I carried out research on North American popular music of the first half of the 20th century (mainly Minstrelsy, Tin Pan Alley and blues), and I am comparing them with Brazilian popular music of the same period (mainly sambas). Popular music speaks about themes that are crucial to understanding society: work, money, gender, love, race, complaints, etc.

Tell us more about your recent article “Comparing Brazilian and North American Songs about Money.” In this article I analyze some of the results of the research I worked on while at Brown. Working on the lyrics of songs, I try to show how popular music reflects things that are common to Brazil and the United States such as race, urbanization, money, gender, love. Through music, I discuss what is similar and what is different in these two countries.

Hillel Soifer, CLACS Visiting Scholar

Soifer, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Temple University, is finishing a book on the origins and long-term persistence of state strength and weakness in Latin America that focuses on Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. This year, he is also working on a book project about the military and politics in 19th century Latin America, as well as writing papers on other subjects.

What attracted you to Latin America as a region to study political science? As an undergraduate I really got interested in development: to put it crudely, the origins of wealth and poverty, and political stability and instability. I had a great professor who taught Latin American politics. But the theoretical question that has come to drive my set of research interests is: How does politics really work when the rules on paper don’t always translate into reality? So if you look at a Peru or a Bolivia, or really everywhere in Latin America in earlier periods, things are a lot more complicated.

Your recent article, “State Power and the Redistributive Threat Studies,” published in Studies in Comparative International Development, a journal based at the Watson Institute, addresses some of those interests. Can you tell us more? This paper engages with a set of arguments in political science that say that the reason we don’t get democracy in a lot of places in the developing world is that inequality is really high. Under these circumstances, rich people know that if you have democracy and everybody gets to vote, they are going to vote to tax the rich, so they oppose political reform. But when you realize that ineffective governments are going to have a hard time taxing the rich even if they wanted to, you understand that the rich aren’t going to be scared of democracy. Where governments are ineffective, and a lot of places in Latin America fall into that category, it might not be surprising to find democracy and really high inequality in the same place at the same time. That’s the puzzle that this article attempts to explain.
Recent Publications on Latin America and the Caribbean

**Books**

*Havana Beyond the Ruins: Cultural Mappings After 1989* by Anke Birkenmaier and Esther Whitfield

*Watchword Poems* by Pura López Colomé. Translated by Forrest Gander

*Spectacle & Pigsty: Poems of Kiwao* by Forrest Gander and Kyoko Toshida

*Redstart: An Ecological Poetics* by Forrest Gander and John Kinsella

*The Spectacular City: Mexico and Colonial Hispanic Literary Culture* by Stephanie Merrim

**Articles and Book Chapters**


If you would like to submit information for the next issue of Focus on Faculty, please send an email kate_goldman@brown.edu.
Faculty and Staff Working on Latin America and the Caribbean

Almeida, Onesimo Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
Amor y Vázques, José Emeritus, Hispanic Studies
Andreas, Peter Political Science / Watson Institute
Augusto, Geri Taubman Center / Public Policy
Baicchi, Gianpaolo Sociology
Bakewell, Liza CLACS
Bauer, Beth Hispanic Studies
Becker, Adeline Portuguese and Brazilian Studies
Bensmaiä, Réda French Studies
Bianchi, Cesario Medical School
Bliss, Joseph Medical School
Bogues, Anthony B. Africana Studies
Borkan, Jeffrey Medical School
Burgess, Katrina Watson Institute
Bushnell, Amy Research Associate, History
Clayton, Michelle Hispanic Studies
Cope, R. Douglas History
Coulombe, Dominique University Library
Dal Bo, Pedro Economics
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Diaz, Joseph Medical School
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Egilman, David Community Health / Biology & Medicine
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Fagan, Mark Medical School
Faudree, Paja Anthropology
Fiering, Norman Emeritus, John Carter Brown Library
FIGUEROA, PATRICIA University Library
Fischer, Karen Geological Sciences
Flanigan, Timothy Medical School
Gander, Forrest English / Literary Arts
García Coll, Cynthia Education / Psychology and Pediatrics
Goldman, Roberta Medical School
Granai, Skip Medical School
Green, James N. History
Gutmann, Matthew Anthropology, VP International Affairs
Hammerly, Michael John Carter Brown Library
Harrison, Emily Medical School
Hastings, Justine Economics
Heath, Dwight Emeritus, Anthropology
Henderson, John V. Economics
Henry, Paget Sociology
Houston, Stephen Anthropology
Hu-DeHart, Evelyn History
Itzigsohn, José Sociology
Jacoby, Karl History
Jaquette, Jane Watson Institute
King, Dawn Center for Environmental Studies
Kirkman, Geoffrey International Advancement
Kriz, K. Dian History of Art and Architecture
Lagos, Ricardo Professor-at-Large, Watson Institute/CLACS
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Lindstrom, David Sociology
Lowenthal, Abraham Watson Institute
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Mazzucchelli, Aldo Hispanic Studies
McGarvey, Stephen Medical School
Merrim, Stephanie Hispanic Studies / Comparative Literature
Miles, William F.S. Political Science
Miller, Kirr Music
Nagavarapu, Sriniketh Economics
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Nunn, Amy Medical School
Ortega, Julio Hispanic Studies
Pacheco, Maria Portuguese & Brazilian Studies / Education Alliance
Perry, Keisha-Khan Africana Studies / Anthropology
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Rodriguez, Pablo Medical School
Rodriguez, Ralph American Civilization
Saint-Amand, Pierre French Studies
Scherer, Andrew Anthropology
Schuhmacher, Nidia Hispanic Studies
Simas-Almeida, L. Portuguese & Brazilian Studies
Simon, Peter Medical School
Skidmore, Thomas Emeritus, History
Smith, Marcia Medical School
Smith, Victoria Hispanic Studies
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