Welcome to Focus on Faculty

CLACS is pleased to bring you a new issue of Focus on Faculty. The CLACS faculty community comprises over 140 Brown faculty members in the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, public health, and medical school, all of whom work on Latin America, the Caribbean, and/or Latinx topics (see page 12 for a complete list of CLACS faculty affiliates). Focus on Faculty is our annual celebration of the research, pedagogy, and public engagement of our colleagues. This issue highlights exciting scholarship and teaching by CLACS-affiliated faculty on topics ranging from government accountability, to the effects of air travel on literature, to boxing and culture. We invite you to contact us if you would like to be interviewed or have news to share for our next issue, and to visit our website to look back at previous editions of Focus on Faculty. Thank you for your support of CLACS!

Jessaca Leinaweaver
Director, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies
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Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Brown University, Box 1866
Providence, RI USA 02912
(401) 863-2106

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Erica Durante, Visiting Associate Professor of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, discusses her new monograph, archival research, reading group on cultural production in contemporary Latin America, as well as the challenges of teaching an introductory course on Latin America.

CLACS: You are completing a new monograph titled Destination Global: Air Travel in Contemporary Film and Fiction. What are some of the main themes you explore in this book?

Erica: Over the past years, my research has focused on the effect of globalization on literature across the world. I have explored the impact of globalization on the writings of prominent contemporary authors from regions of the Global South, such as Francophone Africa, the French Caribbean, and Latin America, highlighting common socio-economic paradigms such as inequality, interdependence, and mobility.

In these pursuits, a consistent part of my research has focused on hypermobility as a particular pattern of cultural globalization. The constant presence of today’s “air world,” as a significant narrative setting, defining an original spatiality and temporality unique to contemporary fiction, has led me to devote my scholarly efforts to this specific societal space of global flows, encounters, and stories. Through the interdisciplinary analysis of dozens of recent sources spanning novels, short stories, and films, with additional references to poetry and songs as well as TV series and commercials, the book will illustrate the increasing and largely inescapable presence of air travel in the current global lifestyle and cultural imaginary.

Based upon a comprehensive exploration of a wide range of sources across different languages, cultures, and regions around the world, my monograph will provide a global comparative study of contemporary “aeromobility,” as reflected in literary and cinematic fiction over the past thirty years. Emphasis will be placed on Spanish and Latin American writers such as J. Carrión (Spain), R. Fresán (Argentina), A. Fuguet (Chile), S. Gamboa (Colombia), and J. Villoro (Mexico) who have repeatedly located their characters and novels in a permanent aerial displacement across the world.

The book will not only provide a novel perspective on contemporary international fiction, but will attempt to fill an important gap in the study of globalization within literary and film studies. Indeed, thus far, existing research has primarily focused on demonstrating how the process of globalization redefines literature and cinema in terms of production, distribution, and reception. My book takes a step further and considers how globalization, through the dramatic increase in air mobility and development of the air world, has reconfigured the poetics and writing of international contemporary fiction. In light of the complexity of this phenomenon, Destination Global adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, combining fundamental insights on the study of air travel from a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, geography, architecture, and contemporary philosophy.
CLACS: In addition to your book, what other research have you recently conducted?

Erica: Nearly a decade ago, funded by the Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University, I explored the archive of the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges and compiled the edition of his personal library catalog. This private collection contains three thousand books, spanning a wide range of subjects and disciplines, with authentic handwritten annotations and writing drafts. This personal library is particularly valuable since the majority of Borges’ archive has unfortunately been dispersed.

In the context of this archival research, I have explored the interesting nexus between Borges’ writing process and reading practices as reflected by the marginalia found in his personal library. Using the methodology of genetic criticism, in a forthcoming essay, I analyze Borges’ autograph reading notes contained in his personal copy of *Der Golem* by Gustav Meyrink. While reading this novel, Borges drafted a book project on the myth of the *Doppelgänger*. Although he never completed this project, the references listed in his marginalia demonstrate how his readings progressively nourished his fiction and poetry related to the double self. My essay further suggests that the genetic material constituted by the marginalia is a significant scientific tool for the study of the sources of influence in the literary creative process.

CLACS: Are you currently involved in any collaborative projects here at Brown or elsewhere that you would like to share with us?

Erica: Four years ago, I launched an international project aimed at mapping the existence of archives and private collections of Latin American writers and artists across Latin America, the Caribbean and around the world. Orbescrito is designed to provide scholars from the fields of Latin American and Caribbean studies, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature with information about the locations and content of Latin American archives and thus to contribute to the preservation and valorization of precious Latin American cultural and documentary heritage, while fostering research in the study of writing and creative processes.

Several institutions have joined the initiative both in Latin America (National University of La Plata and the University of Misiones in Argentina) and in Europe (Centre de Recherches Latino-Américaines, in France). And now that I am here at Brown, CLACS has joined this collaborative research platform as well.

CLACS: You are co-leading a faculty-student reading group this year on Women, Violence, and Cultural Production in Contemporary Latin America. What are you looking forward to exploring in the spring semester with this group?

Erica: The CLACS interdisciplinary reading group that I am co-leading with Elizabeth Gray (PhD Student in Comparative Literature and holder of a Graduate School Interdisciplinary Opportunity fellowship at CLACS during 2017-18) reflects on theoretical and artistic responses to forms of violence against women in present-day Latin America. Bringing together faculty and students from a range of disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, this interdisciplinary reading group aims to establish a collaborative research environment in which participants could benefit from intellectual exchange centered on a broad spectrum of theories and cultural productions. Through readings, discussions, and presentations by faculty and artists, the group examines how scholars and creators represent and challenge ongoing conditions of gender-based violence in Latin America.

Our meetings thus far have been devoted to “Reproductive Rights and Health Justice in the Global South,” and “Domesticity and Violence in Latin America.” While choosing these topics for our discussions, our purpose was to compare the current Latin American context with analogous circumstances occurring in other peripheral...
post-colonial settings in which women have been equally overexploited and abused. In particular, our first guest, Françoise Vergès, emphasized the importance of denationalizing and decolonizing women’s narratives and feminism across the world, and transcending the Eurocentric white perspective by including the work of Black and chicana feminists.

The uniqueness of the group stems from its focus on contemporary cultural production (novels, poetry, films, performances) that portrays this issue from an artistic perspective. Thus far, our discussions have been inspired by contemporary literary and cinematic works such as the film La teta asustada (The Milk of Sorrow) by Peruvian filmmaker Claudia Llosa and the “arpilleras” movement in Chile during Pinochet’s dictatorship. In the Spring semester, the group is exploring issues related to “Biopolitics and Beauty in Latin America,” “Commodification of Women’s Bodies in Illicit Transnational Networks” as well as “Femicides and Necro-Politics.”

CLACS: This semester you are teaching Introduction to Latin America. How do you determine what content to include or exclude when teaching an introductory course on such a diverse and complex region?

Erica: In light of the cultural and human diversity as well as the complex political and institutional transitions that have characterized this area of the world in the course of human history, it has been indeed rather challenging to design a new introductory course to Latin America. In particular, the difficulty has been to select representative samples of pre- and post-Columbian cultures, historical events, political junctures, and literary and artistic productions that would highlight the unique characteristics and the cultural complexity of this region.

I have ultimately structured the course around three main themes that capture the central features of the region: Diversity, Nature and Habitats, and Instability. Considering the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, I have designed the course so as to provide students with the opportunity to reflect upon Latin America from a wide range of perspectives, combining knowledge from the fields of anthropology, economics, history, political science, literature, musicology and arts. Further, I have integrated five guest lectures that permit students to benefit from the insights of scholars that have contributed to the understanding of Latin America from different perspectives, and I have exposed students to the valuable historical documents and resources related to Latin America that are preserved in the collections of the John Carter Brown Library, the John Hay Library, and the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology.
A Conversation with Professor Luis Miguel Estrada Orozco

--By Jazmin I. Piche ('19), Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies/CLACS Undergraduate Fellow--

Entering his second semester as a Postdoctoral Fellow in International Humanities at Brown University's Cogut Institute for the Humanities, Estrada Orozco hopes to turn his doctoral dissertation into a manuscript while teaching Brown students about the significance of sports in relation to Latin American national narratives, politics, race, and gender.

Finding time to write becomes more difficult as your professional life grows; however, if you don't write, you don't grow as an author. This is a struggle Luis Miguel Estrada Orozco faced while working in his home country of Mexico. Following the example of authors such as Ernest Hemingway and Julio Cortázar, he decided to take a side job as a sports writer. The experience proved to be enlightening. “You work with different points of views, different characters, and different narratives. The more I wrote about boxing, the more I realized I had to go back for research, dates, characters from history, and how things developed over time.”

In his dissertation, Estrada Orozco discusses why he believes boxing, as popular and culturally important as it is, rarely has nonfiction novels. The intelligentsia established the construction of national identity in Mexico. They regarded popular products such as sports with contempt in spite of the fact sports were in the dialogue of the nation. “Despite being in pop culture, cinema, magazines, sports were still very distant from literary circles. Sports did not permeate completely into national identity until 20th century, and not into literature until after the 1968 Olympics in Mexico. It was a time of open challenges to the government, with one of their responses being a student massacre.” He concluded his summary with an analogy for national construction. In the circus, everyone pays attention to the main stage. Yet, around and behind the stage, there is bustling activity supporting the main stage and also allowing the backstage hands their moment to shine. The complete picture must be seen to fully appreciate the spectacle.

“...You work with different points of views, different characters, and different narratives. The more I wrote about boxing, the more I realized I had to go back for research, dates, characters from history...”

Estrada Orozco looked to the United States for a PhD after receiving his Undergraduate and Master’s degrees in Mexico. He matriculated into a PhD program in Spanish at the University of Cincinnati and began his studies in the fall of 2013. It was his first time living outside of Mexico. “The community in Cincinnati is historically very diverse. There were many German immigrants and very powerful African communities. There were also noticeable influences of Appalachian, Italian, and Irish cultures. Geographically, everything was so close, and there was also a lot of open space. The history of city and communities living there were also so varying but incredible to learn.” His program at the University of Cincinnati lasted four years. In 2017, he moved to Providence following his acceptance to the Cogut Institute as a Postdoctoral Fellow in International Humanities, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. He is also affiliated with the Department of Hispanic Studies and CLACS, which jointly support the position.
Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro, Associate Professor of Political Science, is spending the 2017-2018 academic year as a visiting scholar at the MIT GOV/LAB and Political Science department. There, she is working on three separate projects that explore government accountability and performance. One project, in collaboration with Matthew S. Winters from the University of Illinois and Aimee Bourassa, a graduate student at Brown, explores how citizens understand and respond to low-level, “petty” corruption they may experience at the hands of bureaucrats. This is a new layer in Weitz-Shapiro’s larger ongoing research into the conditions that lead citizens to punish corrupt officials. A second project explores how political knowledge and political sophistication can be understood and conceptualized in relatively young, middle and lower-income democracies. Finally, a third project, part of an ongoing collaboration with an Argentine government body, uses a field experiment to understand the effectiveness of different forms of bureaucratic oversight. While at the MIT GOV/LAB, Weitz-Shapiro is also participating in a number of workshops and seminars on related themes. You can read more about her research and her stay at the MIT GOV/LAB here: http://www.mitgovlab.org/news/punishing-politicians-and-petty-corruption/

As Estrada Orozco sees it, the future is full of possibilities. After finishing his Sports in Latin America course in the fall, Estrada Orozco is teaching again in the spring semester, this time focusing on the Latin American diaspora in the US. The course is designed to bridge academic learning about Hispanic/Latino culture and volunteer work in agencies serving Hispanics in Providence. Although Estrada Orozco has just begun his fellowship at Brown, he has already grown attached. “My original plan was to use this opportunity as a stepping stone for position somewhere else. But now I have found Brown as one of the most fascinating places. What distinguishes it from other institutions are the interactions I have with the students, the many departments, and my colleagues. It’s amazing! Hopefully I’ll stay!” Given his accomplishments thus far, it will be exciting to see how Estrada Orozco makes the most of his time with the university.
Paja Faudree, Associate Professor of Anthropology, has been advancing a research project focusing on political activism, indigenous languages, and digital media in Mexico. Her research will be detailed in a new book titled *CyberRevival: Indigenous Languages and “Digital Activism” in Mexico*. Based on ethnographic interviews, participant observation, archival research, and media analysis, the book makes visible the largely unheralded rise of “digital activism” in Mexico and the profound consequences of this development for the political standing of indigenous people as well as for academic research. The book views “digital activism” as the emergence of novel and evolving ways that indigenous people use digital media to promote the vitality of their languages – thus taking a deliberately capacious perspective that encompasses activities ranging from the apparently quotidian to the aggressively political. The book argues that through these diverse means of embracing new media, people are subverting received narratives about the place of indigenous people in the digital future while simultaneously transforming the possibilities for indigenous activism. In collaboration with regional leaders, Professor Faudree is designing a publication for local audiences that documents the emergence of song authorship in Mazatec and its unique place in national language revival efforts – a history that, ironically, is being erased by precisely the use of digital media that boosted the movement’s popularity.

In the Loop: News from our Colleagues

Luiz F. Valente, Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and Comparative Literature, traveled to Brazil in September 2017 at the invitation of the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) to participate in an international symposium on the Future of the Humanities. His talk was entitled “Dissidence and the Critical Humanities.”

Jill Kuhnheim, Visiting Professor of Hispanic Studies, whose teaching involves linking the humanities to medicine in a Spanish American context, is teaching a new class in the spring focusing on “Health Illness, and Medicine in Spanish American Literature and Film” (HISP 750Q).

Dr. Simin Liu, Professor of Epidemiology, in the 2017 American Heart Association meeting, met with Dr. Paulo A Lotufo, PI of ELSA Brazil to strategize and discuss continued follow-up of this unique national resource for Brown-Brazil Initiative in Global Cardiometabolic Health.
Join us in welcoming our Craig M. Cogut Visiting Professors of Latin American Studies who are in residence at CLACS and teaching LACA courses during the spring semester.

Vicente Lecuna is an Associate Professor at Universidad Central de Venezuela where he served as Chair (2008-2015), and the Executive President of the Board of Prodiseño, School of Visual Communication. He researches and publishes on topics ranging from populism and violence to urban design and contemporary narratives in Latin America. Lecuna’s recent research has been focused on the construction of space; specifically the architecture of the Venezuelan violent state through Parque Central, a massive residential and commercial complex built in downtown Caracas in the 1970s. Focusing on cultural production such as literature, photography, visual artwork, film, music, and theater that relate to or represent Parque Central, Lecuna shows that this complex functions as a living symbol of state-sponsored middle-class creation. During the spring 2018 semester he is teaching a course titled “Latin American Urban Interventions” (LACA 1503J).

Lucas González is a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and professor at the Universidad Nacional de San Martín and Universidad Católica in Argentina. His current research interests are federalism, redistribution, and the political economy of redistributive transfers. He holds a PhD in political science at the University of Notre Dame. During the spring 2018 semester he is teaching a course titled “Fiction and Methods in Social Research: Debates on Inequality, Poverty, and Violence” (LACA 1503I).

Evelyn Hu-Dehart, Professor of History and American Studies, is teaching for the Brown-administered study abroad program in Barcelona, CASA Barcelona, during the spring 2018 semester. She is teaching a seminar in Spanish on Latin American, North African and Chinese Immigrants to Barcelona and Spain. Visitors from CLACS faculty are welcome!

On November 9, 2017, Evelyn Hu-Dehart was invited by Jinan University of Guangdong Province, China to inaugurate their Latin American Studies Research Center. The Center focuses on scientific research, consultations, talent cultivation, and international exchange as required by China’s Ministry of Education’s Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges to make it South China’s most important research center in the field.
Geri Agusto, “A língua não deve nos separar.” In Denise Carrascoza (Ed.), *Traduzindo no Atlântico Negro: Cartas Náuticas Afrodiaspóricas para Travessias Literárias*. Editora Ogum’s Toques Negros, February 2017


Jessaca Leinaweaver, “The Unsustainability of Transnational Adoption in La Vergüenza.” *Adoption & Culture* 5:29-48, 2017


Patsy Lewis (Editor), Terri-Ann Gilbert-Roberts (Editor), and Jessica Byron (Editor) *Pan-Caribbean Integration Beyond CARICOM*. Routledge, December 2017. (20% discount w/ code FLR40 at checkout)


Andrew Scherer (Editor) and Vera Tiesler (Editor). *Smoke, Flame, and the Human Body in Mesoamerican Ritual Practice*. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, June 2018.

Faculty Affiliates

Africana Studies
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Anthony Bogues
Anani Dzidzienyo
Patsy Lewis
Brian Meeks
Keisha-Khan Perry
Besenia Rodriguez

American Studies
Leticia Alvarado
Monica Martinez
Kevin Escudero
Ralph Rodriguez
Mariaelena Huambachano
Felicia Salinas-Moniz

Anthropology
Lynnette Arnold
Alyce de Carteret
Paja Faudree
Matthew Gutmann
Stephen Houston
Jessaca Leinaweaver
Andrew Scherer
Parker VanValkenburgh

Archeology and the Ancient World
John Cherry
Matthew Reilly

Biology
Christopher de Graffenried
Amanda Jamieson
Gary Wessel

Classics
Andrew Laird

Cognitive, Linguistic, and Psychological Sciences
Scott AnderBois

Cogut Center for the Humanities
Iris Montero
Luis Miguel Estrada Orzoco

Comparative Literature
Forrest Gander
Esther Whitfield

Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
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Justine Hastings

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Jill Kuhnheim
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Julio Ortega
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Roquinaldo Ferreira
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Daniel Rodríguez

History of Art and Architecture
Itohan Osaiymwese

International Advancement
Joshua Taub

John Carter Brown Library
Neil Safier
Kenneth Ward

John Hay Library
Patricia Figueroa
Holly Snyder

Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Erica Durante
Lucas Gonzales
Vicente Lecuna

Literary Arts
Colin Channer

Marine Biology Lab
Christopher Neil

Music
Matthew McFarrell
Joshua Tucker

Political Science
Peter Andreas
Robert Blair
Jeff Colgan
Juliet Hooker
Richard Locke
Richard Snyder
Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro

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Patricia Ybarra

Warren Alpert Medical School
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