

Annual Report, 2010

UBC Program in Latin American Studies

The Latin American Studies Program at UBC dates from the early 1990s. A group of leading Latin Americanists on campus—many of them now Professors emeriti, comprising Roderick Barman (History), Alfred Siemens (Geography), Marian Coope, Antonio Urello, and Isaac Rubio (Spanish), Blanca Muratorio (Anthropology), and former Dean of Arts Patricia Marchak (Sociology)—along with a number of current faculty, including William French (History), Marvin Cohodas (Fine Arts), Rita De Grandis, (Spanish) and Michael Blake (Anthropology), laid the foundations for a dynamic, long-lasting and successful undergraduate interdisciplinary program in the Faculty of Arts. Since then, it has evolved from a thematic option within the General B.A. to a program offering its own Major and Minor degrees that feature innovations such as the following team-taught undergraduate interdisciplinary core courses:

* LAST 100, Introduction to Latin America

* LAST 201, Introduction to Latin American Popular Culture

* LAST 301, Human and Civil Rights in Latin America

All other courses are offered within the various departments that comprise the program by faculty specializing in the Latin American area, including Anthropology, French, Hispanic and Italian Studies, Geography, History, Political Science, Social Work, and Visual Art, Art History, and Theory.

Ideally, the LAST Program should feature a semester abroad at least every second year and has done so in the past. Two one-semester programs have been held in Mexico (in 2005 in Oaxaca and in 2007 in Chiapas); this concept has now been expanded to other regions and will feature a UBC program in Ecuador this summer (2010). Interest in the program among students has been astounding; although only recently announced, almost 70 students have inquired and 35 applied to participate. A community service-learning course with community-based research has been developed in the Latin American area in conjunction with the School of Social Work. This fits well with a new International Service Learning Placement in Cuernavaca, Mexico, organized by Go Global, and with the ongoing relationship of a number of the faculty and students in the Latin America area with the Maya in Exile Garden at the UBC Farm. With relatively little funding from several partner departments and matching funding from the Faculty of Arts, the program has grown into one of the most successful interdisciplinary and internationally focused programs in the faculty. The continuation of such funding is crucial to the ongoing viability of the program.

Over the last six years, participation in the program has fluctuated between 10 and 16 majors and 5 and 12 minors.

2005, 11 Majors / 7 Minors;

2006, 16 Majors / 5 Minors;

2007, 13 Majors / 6 Minors;

2008, 11 Majors / 12 Minors;

2009, 12 Majors / 10 Minors; and

2010, 10 Majors / 6 Minors.

Faculty members in the Latin American Studies Program in their respective disciplines also supervise a growing number of graduate students who have presented their finding at interdisciplinary graduate conferences held at UBC such as “Beyond Imagining the Nation” (2007). Graduate students from the partner units of the program organized an extremely lively seminar series last year, with faculty and student participation and attendance under the title The Liu Research Group on Gender and Sexuality in Latin America.

In the past year, the LAST Program has been actively involved in organizing and participating in events concerning Haiti relief efforts that were recognized by the Governor General Michaëlle Jean at a reception for organizers held in Vancouver in February 2010. With Simon Fraser University, the LAST Program co-sponsored a very successful workshop on Colombia, featuring speakers from around North America, and another graduate colloquium on “Memory and Narrative,” which included graduate students from History, Political Science and Spanish, and faculty members from both universities. Such cooperation has also led to the joint publication of research, most recently resulting in the book *Latin America's Left Turns* (2010). The Program also ran a Monday-at-the-Movies evening during the second semester, attended by students and faculty.

Individual faculty members presented their research in various venues, including the organization of a photographic exhibition entitled “New Cultural Landscapes of Migration in the United States-Mexico Borderlands.” As well as an integral part of the recent addition of its Multidiversity Gallery, the Museum of Anthropology has included the display of a section of its Central and South American Research Collections. They contain a few pre-Colombian pieces, but the majority are folk art objects and textiles produced in the last one hundred years from Mexico to the southern Andes to which faculty members and emeriti have contributed substantial pieces from their personal collections. Most of the items can be viewed in MOA’s online catalogue (MOACAT).

The key challenge to the Latin American Studies Program remains space. Without a common hub (lounge or common room) it is extremely difficult to create a sense of academic community or to increase the visibility of the program on campus. The issue of time is also pressing; faculty release time is needed for coordination, administration and running a full, functioning program that would include terms abroad and community-service learning.

Key opportunities in the coming year include the continued development of semester abroad programs for undergraduate students, a time-consuming task that can only work with the support of the contributing departments. The program also needs to determine if the support and funding would be in place to develop an interdisciplinary Masters program in Latin American Studies.

Rita De Grandis and Bill French, October 10, 2010