

## ICS Latin American and Latino/a Studies Cluster Report

The goals of the ICS Latin American and Latino/a Studies Cluster (LALSC for short) can be summarized in these three:

- 1) Increase the visibility of the Latin American and Latino/a Studies fields on campus
- 2) Create the conditions for a productive intellectual exchange, and stimulate research agendas
- 3) Connect research, engagement and teaching

Through organizing public events with invited guests from abroad and the region, holding intensive workshops, and carefully preparing the events, **the cluster not only met but also exceeded these goals in past academic year (2008/9)**. The pace of events with the direct involvement of cluster members was impressive. As one cluster member put it, *The cluster is fulfilling its university role of making information about Latin American and Latino/s Studies available to the community at large. It keeps faculty exchanging information and sharing ideas; and it makes the students an important part of the equation. The cluster is enriching my academic life at BGSU.*

### 1. Membership

Group membership has expanded considerably in the last year (see Table 1), a goal set out in the first organizational meeting. Some members who were not able to attend to cluster meetings still were able to participate in public events and participated online. Besides the use of blackboard, communication was facilitated by the use of an email listserv ([lalsc@lists.bgsu.edu](mailto:lalsc@lists.bgsu.edu)). The use of the list facilitated the incorporation of the growing number of members in the group.

Table 1: LALSC Members

Name	Department	Core in 2008/9	Joined during 2008/9
Francisco Cabanillas	ROCS	Yes	
Amílcar Challú	HIST	Yes	
Federico Chalupa	ROCS	Yes	
Cindy Ducar	ROCS	No (on leave)	
Valeria Grinberg Pla	ROCS	Yes	
Dalton Jones	ETHN	No	Yes
John Kaiser Ortiz	ETHN	No	Yes
Lynn Pearson	ROCS	No (on leave)	
Susana Peña	ETHN	Yes	
Pedro Porben	ROCS	No	Yes
Nathan Richardson	ROCS	No	Yes
Scott Sanborn	FIRELANDS	No	Yes
Amy Robinson	ROCS	Yes	
Mariella Zucchi-Bingman	ROCS	Yes	Yes

Note: Core members are those who regularly attend internal cluster meetings.

## 2. Events

The following is a brief description of the events.

9/19: **Leonel Rivero**'s public lecture on his experience as a Human Rights attorney in Mexico, particularly his involvement in the investigation of the recent murder of a FLOC officer in Monterrey. The attendance reached thirty people, despite short notice.

10/16: **Pablo Delano**'s public lecture entitled "In-Betweenity, or Navigating the Spanish and English Caribbean: A Photographic Exploration of Migration and Cultural Identity". Organized by Francisco Cabanillas and Mariella Zucchi-Bingman and endorsed by the cluster, the event had strong participation of students and faculty, including members outside Arts and Sciences. The organizers successfully requested ECAP's funding to invite the presenter, as well as resources from other departments. After the lecture, Delano met with faculty and graduate students for a workshop to discuss his work.

2/11: Discussion with **Scott Magelssen**, Assistant Professor in Theater and Film, about his work in progress on border crossing reenactment. Attendants engaged in a discussion of the precirculated paper. Magelssen later wrote

*I'm very grateful for the group's careful attention to my paper. Please convey my thanks to the rest of them. Also, let them know that I'll thank the ICS cluster in print as well*

Eight cluster members and graduate students participated in the event.

3/18: **Matt Gutmann**'s ICS Lecture and Workshop. Cluster members collaborated in making recommendations for the ICS Lecture, Matt Gutmann being one of them. Cluster members participated in the workshop and lecture and linked the events with their graduate and undergraduate classes.

4/2: **Latin American and Latino/a Studies Conference**. The Conference's intention was to provide a place for undergraduate and graduate students to engage with each other's work and to increase the visibility of our fields on campus. The event had widespread support from several departments, as well as ECAP. The call for papers was well received and in total we received 23 proposals. More impressive than the quantity was the diversity of interests and high quality of the papers. A large proportion were Masters and Ph.D. students. The event was very well attended, with 30 to 50 participants in each panel. The conference concluded with **Manuel Monestel**'s public lecture entitled "Calypso and Resistance in Costa Rica" followed by a performance. There were about 140 attendants in the BTSU Theater. the dynamic exchange of questions and answers between the lecturer and the attendants was also remarkable for this kind of setting. On 4/3 Monestel's visit concluded with a workshop with cluster members and graduate students. (Conference program available at <http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/bgsu/file59552.pdf>)

## 3. Assessment of achievements

This section is a self-assessment based on a simple survey and open comment section circulated to core members of the cluster.

### 3.1. Increase the visibility of our fields on campus

All cluster members available for this report agree that **the activities planned were helpful in making our fields of study more visible on campus**. For examples, members wrote:

- *I thought we did a great job hosting a lot of events that encompassed many of our interests and that attracted many faculty members, students and others*
- *I think this year we ... were able to move the cluster up a notch (in particular in regards to increasing the visibility of our fields)*

**The cluster activities were a common place for faculty and campus members of different colleges to realize shared interests and generate collaboration.** For instance, students who submitted conference proposals reported majors in American Cultural Studies, Business Management, Economics, English, History, International Studies, Journalism, Romance and Classical Studies, Sports Management, and Theater and Film. Faculty in Arts, Music, and Popular Culture participated or collaborated with the events as well. For example, Manuel Monestel visited “Black Aesthetics,” a course offered in the College of Music, while photography students and faculty actively participated in Delano’s presentation.

In order to provide a support for the increasing pace of events organized or sponsored by the Cluster, we revamped the website and moved it to a BGSU server [www.bgsu.edu/organizations/lalsc](http://www.bgsu.edu/organizations/lalsc). The website provides information on present and past events, maintains an updated directory of cluster members, and provides other links for the use of the campus community. The conference printed materials (program, poster) were also available online through this website. **The report of usage for AY 2008/9 shows a high traffic to the webpage.** On average, 300 unique visitors browsed the website every month, while Cluster pages were accessed 13,160 times over the year. Usage peaked from January to April, when we included reference to the webpage in conference-related materials. In January, there were 6,341 hits, 1,148 in February, and 978 in April.

Through publications, conference presentations and grant proposals, **LALSC members also increased the visibility of their work on Latin American and Latino/a Studies with their colleagues in the United States, Latin America and Europe.** According to five reports received, core members published or submitted on average three journal articles or book chapters each. Members sent publications not only to United States journals, but also to venues in the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and Spain. Besides publications, members delivered conference papers, were invited to give presentations, one member received a grant to conduct research at the University of Florida, as well as an FRC Research Incentive Grant, one member participates in a collaborative research project with peers in Spain and Mexico, while two received FRC mentoring grants.

### **3.2. Foster intellectual exchange and stimulate research**

The members’ research interests and overall intellectual curiosity motivates the choice of activities. The cluster models its activities after ICS’s lectures: a public presentation is paired with a more intimate discussion of the lecturer’s work. **The lecture-workshop model has been successful in the past and also this year.** As one member put it:

*Workshops and lectures were dynamic and engaging; I love the exchange of information and the collegiality.*

While all events elicited positive reactions, Gutmann's seminar and lecture, the Conference and workshop with Monestel, and the 2/11 workshop were the events perceived as more intellectually engaging in the members' responses. In particular, Gutmann's workshop and lecture received the highest rate of satisfaction.

Finally, one member expressed the desire to have more workshops and seminars:

*I like the idea of fortifying the existing core membership by doing more activities geared toward engaging us intellectually.*

### **3.3. Connect research, engagement, and teaching**

As the member first quoted put it, the cluster not only keeps faculty sharing ideas, but “**it makes students part of the equation.**” One member commented along the same lines:

*La Mini [for the Conference] has had a strong impact on the dynamics of my classes. It seems that after La Mini the students "discovered" it is OK to challenge intellectually a classmate who is presenting.*

Most of the activities were publicized in related classes and students were invited to attend. Classes linked to the activities included Ethnic Studies 110 and 420, History 152V and 411, and Spanish 368, 401, and 431, among others. Students responded to the invitation. These are some excerpts from reports turned in by students that represent the impact of the events on undergraduate learning:

- *I felt that we didn't have enough time to hear all the presentations, and I would have liked to have more time to listen to more questions from the attendants, and more answers from Monestel. It was an excellent experience to see him talking about his own experiences, and I love how he incorporated information of his studies on cultural resistance and calypso music.*
- *The issue that stood out more in connection with my Spanish 368 class as the concept of art [...] as a method to criticize and resist the dominant culture. Women like Sor Juana, Alfonsina Storni, [...] and Rigoberta Menchú used literature to confront dominant ideologies, and I believe that Calypso music did something similar for the Afro-Caribbean people of Costa Rica.*

**Graduate students were actively involved** as well by participating in the workshops, presenting papers in the conference, and performing the role of moderators in some panels, contributing to their academic and professional development. Graduate classes were linked to cluster activities as well, such as Ethnic Studies 673, History 511 (Modern Mexico) and Spanish 629 (Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Art, Music and Literature).

The cluster strives to connect the understanding of Latin Americans and Latino/as with civic engagement. Cluster members are active in teaching service learning classes in Mexico and the Northwest Ohio region. Cluster activities reflected the commitment to community engagement. Leonel Rivero's visit is perhaps the most obvious, as it involved a close discussion with a human rights activist, who is collaborating with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, based in Toledo. Students also presented on their own community service and service learning experiences. In short, **the Cluster has been a leader in President Cartwright's renewed call for "BGSU's increased commitment to fostering an educational experience in which**

**students use civic and professional knowledge to contribute to the larger community”**  
(Email from President Cartwright to the BGSU community, 5/11/2009).

#### **4. Future plans**

Cluster members present in the last meeting have unanimously voiced their opinion in favor of the continuation of the Cluster within ICS. Francisco Cabanillas was chosen as next year’s facilitator. Plans for next year involve, for the moment, the visit of a film-maker from Uruguay and the organization of a second Conference. Members also discussed the possibility of discussing common readings on memory of the past dictatorship in Uruguay, in connection with the topic of the film. Ideas were exchanged on building upon the successful experience of the Conference and improving it next year. One member indicated, in writing, the need to invite more women scholars for next year’s cycle.

#### **5. Acknowledgments**

The Cluster wants to acknowledge Linda Meeks, secretary of Romance and Classical Studies, for going beyond the call of duty in helping administering the budget and book reservations for cluster-related events. At ICS, Director Vicki Patraha’s support and responsiveness to our plans was vital. Marianne Geisbuhler (secretary) provided excellent administrative assistance. Finally, Dave McCoy (ITS) transitioned our old webpage into the CMS format.