

# THE LATIN AMERICAN IST

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UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA  
CENTER *for* LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

## Bacardi scholars talk green business in lecture series

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## Charles Wood Thesis Award winners turn to the archives to challenge dominant narratives

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# Director's CORNER

DR. LEONARDO A. VILLALÓN

Thank you for the warm welcome during my first semester as Interim Director of the Center for Latin American Studies! It was a busy but rewarding spring, with academic milestones, encounters for learning and dialogue, and opportunities for me to get to know the students, faculty, and staff who make the Center a special community.

Congratulations to another cohort of Latin American Studies students who graduated in May! Our MALAS and MDP students culminated two years of work on their research and practicum projects, ready to carry their passion and knowledge into PhD programs and careers in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Our undergraduate class grew to 16 students graduating with an LAS minor, emphasizing the relevance and versatility of area studies for young scholars. (p. 16)

In February, we teamed up with the Centers for African and European Studies and the Raymond and Miriam Ehrlich Chair of Political Science to host our annual conference, "The Struggle from Below: Democracy and Civil Society in the Age of Backsliding." Over two days of panels, attendees and speakers exchanged in dialogue across disciplines and regions, offering the kinds of valuable insights that come from learning across borders. (p. 7)

Typically, the Center hosts a Bacardi Family Eminent Scholar each spring. This year, we welcomed four! Across the semester, four different experts on green business came to Gainesville to give a talk, connect with colleagues and new networks, and meet and mentor students. The resulting lecture series offers an interdisciplinary look at the future of sustainability, through the diverse backgrounds of our Bacardi scholars, their fields of work, and their expertise.

Each talk can be viewed on the Center's YouTube channel. (p. 5)

Our faculty continue to publish quality research and earn various grants, awards, and fellowships, in addition to their instrumental roles in teaching and mentorship. Both Rafael Ramírez Solórzano and Meg Weeks were named 2025 Rothman Faculty Summer Fellows by the UF Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere. Rebecca Hanson published her latest book, *Policing the Revolution: The Transformation of Security and Violence in Venezuela during Chavismo*. (p. 14)

Karen Kainer, along with Bette Loiselle, Jon Dain, and Pilar Useche, received a \$890,000 grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to advance Amazonian conservation. (p. 20)

We were delighted to welcome Jairo Baquero-Melo as our newest member of the Center's faculty; he teaches courses on environmental justice and labor and ecologies.

(p. 15) Meanwhile, we extend a special farewell with much gratitude to Mary Risner (Associate Director of Outreach and Business Programs) as she retires after 25 years at the Center. (p. 14)

This summer, our students will again conduct fieldwork research thanks to support from the Tinker Foundation and Center funds and donors. We look forward to welcoming new cohorts of MALAS and MDP students in the fall, and a new director in the spring. In the meantime, I look forward with pleasure to another engaging and fruitful semester in Latin American Studies!

Have a great summer,



**Dr. Leonardo A. Villalón**  
CENTER INTERIM DIRECTOR

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Center for Latin American Studies  
319 Grinter Hall  
PO Box 115530  
Gainesville, FL 32611-5530  
(352) 273-4705  
[latam.ufl.edu](http://latam.ufl.edu)

## CENTER-BASED FACULTY

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<b>Carmen Martínez Novo</b> (LAS)	

Writer, editor, designer: Christa Markley

**ON THE COVER:** Eleven of the fourteen graduating MALAS students pose for their cohort photo at the Latin American Studies historical marker on the Plaza of the Americas. **Read more on page 4.**

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# Parting words from SALAS leadership

SALAS UPDATE FROM PRESIDENT MARÍA DE LA CRUZ MORA



As this semester wraps up, I want to take a moment to say thank you and share a quick farewell as President of the Student Association for Latin American Studies. This past year was such an exciting and successful run for us! From fun cultural events, and panels to meaningful

collaborations, we were able to bring people together and celebrate the richness of all cultures on campus.

One of our biggest wins this year was boosting undergraduate interest in the Latin American Studies program. *[Undergraduate LAS minors quadrupled in Spring 2025; see page 16 for more.]* It was amazing to see so many new faces curious about what we do and eager to learn more, whether it was through classroom visits, tabling events, or just spreading the word.

I'm super excited to pass the torch to Artis Trice (MALAS 2026), who's going to bring a lot of energy and new ideas to the table. I have full confidence that under their leadership, SALAS is going to thrive even more in the upcoming year.

Thank you to everyone who supported us, showed up, and made this year so memorable. It's been a real honor leading this organization and being part of such a passionate, brilliant community.

Con cariño,  
María de la Cruz Mora



FAREWELL FROM SALAS OFFICERS DANIELA LIZARAZO AND JORGELINA BENITEZ



It feels unreal, but the moment to say goodbye has arrived. It has been almost two intense and unforgettable years that we now carry with deep affection. Everyone always told us these two years would fly by, but we never thought it would be this fast.

The beginning was uncertain, confusing, and unusual. We were people from different places, with diverse backgrounds and expectations, brought together by a common interest and the desire to better understand Latin America. We remember how strange it felt to share spaces with people who were strangers. But little by little, we realized how close we were in many ways. Now we see that those people became a very important part of our lives and our story, and that going through these two years with people who were once strangers has been a true blessing.

The Center has been much more than an academic space. It became a place of connection, of exchange, of community-building. One of the few places where

speaking English, Spanish, or Portuguese, sometimes all at once, was not only accepted but also valued and celebrated, where speaking loudly, making jokes, and laughing all the time was never frowned upon. Our voices came with different accents, but with a shared desire for dialogue, respect, mutual learning, or just having a good time together.

The Center became our second home, a safe space. It hosted formal meetings and intense debates, but also birthday parties, baby showers, holidays... One thing is for sure: we loved to celebrate or simply be together at the Center. We enjoyed coffee breaks and lunch chats in the kitchen, one of our favorite spots.

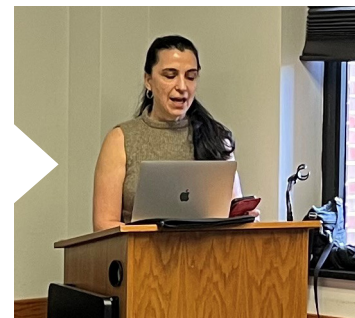
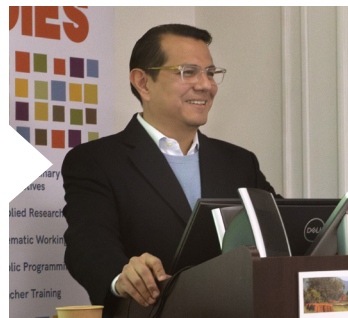
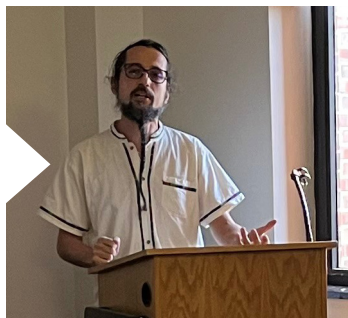
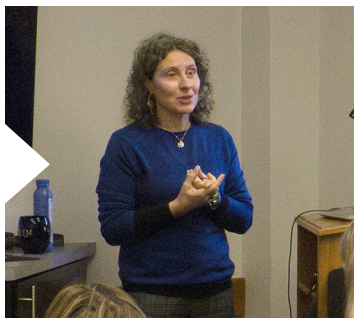
To all the Center staff, thank you for making our daily life at the Center so special. Truly, we couldn't have finished without you guys. To Dr. De la Torre, thank you for your commitment to building a welcoming, diverse, and academically vibrant center. To our dear professors, who from their various areas guided us to improve and learn every day: words are not enough to thank you for all the support and help you gave us during this process, whether in the classroom, your offices, the kitchen, or other spaces on and off campus. Thank you for everything.

Now it's time for each of us to continue on our paths. We laughed together, got stressed together, and supported one another when things got tough. We lived through good times and difficult ones, but there was always someone nearby to listen, to comfort, or to laugh and cry with us. We made friendships that we will carry with us for life. And we know that it's not always easy to leave. It's hard to say goodbye to a place that has been our home for so long. But we take with us everything we lived and learned together, and that gives us the strength to keep moving forward. May the experiences we've shared be the foundation that helps us reach our goals with courage, joy, and love.

To our friends from MALAS who are staying and those yet to come, we wish each of you success, courage, and many joyful moments on the road ahead. May we never forget the strength we have when we walk together in community, and may the spirit of welcome and support we found at the Center follow us wherever we go. Never hesitate to be critical and question things when they aren't going well. The Center is that space where we can be critical and still feel safe.

With love,  
Dani and Jo





## Bacardi scholars bring insight on green business to lecture series

*Perspectives on sustainability connect economic, environmental, social needs*

This spring, in lieu of a sole Bacardi Family Eminent Scholar, the Center welcomed four: Dr. Michela Accerrenzi, Dr. Clayton Cunha Filho, Mauricio Chavarria, and Dr. Teresa Longobardi, all part of a lecture series on green business, “Exploring the road ahead for sustainability.” Over the course of the semester, each scholar spent a week to 10 days at UF, where they connected with students and faculty, attended classes and activities, and gave a public talk. These talks offered multidisciplinary perspectives on green business supported with research and case studies, illuminating challenges and opportunities for sustainability solutions that meet economic, environmental, and social needs.

“Green business is essential because it connects economic growth with environmental responsibility,” says Mauricio Chavarria, a Corporate Sustainability Advisor who presented his work on Aliados por el Agua, Coca-Cola’s successful water stewardship program across 19 countries in Latin America. “By aligning business goals with the needs of communities and ecosystems, we can create scalable solutions that safeguard natural resources and build resilience in the region.” Mr. Chavarria’s work underscores the importance of public-private partnerships to co-create positive impact.

In other cases, the balance between the economic, environmental, and the social falls short. Dr. Clayton Cunha Filho presented his research on the nascent green hydrogen industry in Ceará, Brazil, where legislators and businessmen promise economic prosperity through foreign investment in clean energy. But the competition for international capital and technological advancement means that the project’s advocates often minimize concerns about social or environmental impacts. “The legislation that has been enacted for this green hydrogen industry hardly ever contains proper fora for discussions with the affected communities,” Dr. Cunha Filho emphasizes. “But it’s important to be researching this to know the pros and cons. We have to minimize the risks, because if we don’t, the impacts could be costly.”

In Dr. Michela Accerrenzi’s research, sustainability solutions are promising in the “circular economy” model, a cycle wherein products and materials are circulated in their highest value, waste and pollution are eliminated by reinserting byproducts in the production cycle, and nature is regenerated. “Circular economies actually mimic the environment,” Dr. Accerrenzi explains. “If in the environment nothing is really destroyed and everything has another purpose, then we can also use that same model.”

Dr. Accerrenzi conducts research on coffee production in Honduras with Center faculty Dr. Catherine Tucker. One aspect of their research is determining possible applications of a circular economy, such as innovating business opportunities for coffee byproducts that would otherwise be considered waste, like biogas, coffee flour and coffee tea. Such commercialization initiatives offer opportunities for local farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs to gain greater economic benefits and access to resources.

Ensuring communities have access to resources, services, or opportunities is critical to meeting the social goals of sustainable initiatives. Dr. Teresa Longobardi’s work addresses water shortages in Puerto Rico, where residents once collected rain in cisterns under their homes for personal use, but since the 1970s, receive water through a centralized water distribution system. Although the system was cost-efficient and permitted frequent contaminant testing, the poorly maintained infrastructure poses significant challenges today. “Leaks account for 50 to 60 percent of water loss in the underground system,” Dr. Longobardi explains. To empower local communities with information about water sustainability, she is producing an educational documentary for outreach. She has also founded the nonprofit Vaso Lleno to develop innovative solutions to meet public need. “The ‘glass half full’ perspective represents optimism and a positive outlook on the issue. We want to focus on imagining and implementing solutions,” she says.

Although each case is unique, all sustainability solutions require collaborative exchange. The Bacardi Scholar lecture series embodied this same principle during each guest speaker’s visit. “I always enjoy the opportunity to share ideas and experiences and build networks,” reflects Dr. Accerrenzi, who departed with plans brewing for future collaborations. “I had a great time connecting with the faculty, sharing fresh ideas, and diving into our research discussions,” echoes Dr. Longobardi, whose presentation included a 30-minute screening of documentary footage. “The students I met with were all engaged in the topics, and asked interesting questions,” adds Dr. Cunha Filho. “It was a productive week in Gainesville and I really enjoyed it.”

“I appreciated the opportunity to share real-world lessons from partnerships across the region—and to hear fresh perspectives from students exploring how they can contribute to global development,” Mr. Chavarria reflects. “It was an energizing and hopeful experience.” ♦

# Charles Wood Thesis Award winners turn to the archives to challenge dominant narratives

*Research analyzes discourses of liberation in writings from 19th-century Puerto Rico, 1970s Puerto Rican U.S. diaspora*

**Q:** What are your thesis topics?

**JESSICA ALVAREZ STARR:** My thesis examined connections between abolitionist and nationalist discourses in 19th-century Puerto Rico through what I term a shared rhetoric of liberation. I traced the history of antislavery and anticolonial mobilizations in Puerto Rico to examine how historical actors employed discursive strategies in pro-abolition and pro-independence publications, positing that this shared rhetoric of liberation informed both movements and broader revolutionary alliances. My thesis argued for the importance of considering both antislavery and anticolonial, in tandem, as central to the longstanding legacies of liberation struggles by Puerto Ricans in the archipelago and beyond.

**TANIA TREJO-MENDEZ:** My thesis examines the writings of the women of the New York Young Lords Party, which was a revolutionary nationalist and civil rights organization focused on political and community empowerment. I specifically analyze articles authored by women in the party's bilingual newspaper, *Pa'lante*, during the years 1970 to 1971. I argue that these writings constitute what I term a Third World feminist counterpublic: a space where women of color challenged dominant narratives about Puerto Ricans and working-class communities, while articulating their own visions for liberation.

**Q:** What challenges did you face in your research?



Jessica Alvarez Starr

**JAS:** For me, the biggest challenge was that I had to rely on only published and digitized primary sources, which definitely informed the scope of what I was able to examine. Source limitations meant that my analysis focused mainly on elite, formally educated men who had the access to publish written works. I wasn't able to get as much documentation for more on-the-ground mobilizations without traveling to conduct archival research, so that led to my focus on the discursive strategies employed in abolitionist and nationalist propaganda rather than other forms of antislavery and anticolonial efforts.

**TTM:** My challenges were similar, in terms of the source material I was able to work with. I had wanted to research what the women were doing in the organization, and I realized pretty quickly that there wasn't a ton of archival material focused on them. So I had to shift, and look where I can actually see women's words and thoughts represented—which is in the newspapers.

**Q:** Both of your theses seek to expand or add nuance to topics that aren't included or accurately represented in existing scholarship or popular narratives. Why was that important for you to pursue?

**TTM:** With the writings in *Pa'lante*, these women were trying to put themselves into the historical narrative. In the 1970s, the dominant narratives in public schools and mass media portrayed their communities in negative, harmful ways. Or, women of color were not included in the narratives, period. I think this is why a lot of them were motivated to write about local struggles they were facing. In a weird way, it felt meta to be reading them 50 years later, knowing that it's such a struggle to find anything



Tania Trejo-Mendez

other than these newspapers that focuses on the women of this organization. It motivated me to try and add to that gap, and maybe in the future more folks will push the research further.

**JAS:** I was specifically engaging with narratives of insularity and insignificance that have relegated Puerto Rico to the margins of Atlantic historiography. Specifically, for the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, a lot of scholarship has painted the archipelago's population as passive in the revolutionary movements of the time. For me, it was important to challenge those narratives that conflicted with what I had seen in the primary source material and really center that Puerto Rico was in fact a major player in the antislavery struggle for the Spanish Caribbean as a whole. More broadly, I believe it is the work of all historians to ensure that stories of the past, especially those that have been intentionally silenced, are heard and given the respect and recognition they deserve. That's what I hope to do.

**Q:** Jessica, you've continued to a PhD program. Tania, you're pursuing a career outside academia. How did you decide that each of your paths was right for you?

**JAS:** The timing for that decision is really hard, because you're still in the thick of writing the thesis and trying to do PhD applications and make big life decisions that feel completely overwhelming and permanent. My biggest takeaway is that the choice doesn't have to be permanent; there are always other options. For me, support from my incredible advisors, our cohort, and Center staff and faculty was crucial in guiding me through this process and reminding me that it is not a life-or-death, binding decision.



**TTM:** Yeah, I realized there weren't any negatives to me waiting and taking the time to think through where I might want to go, if I want to do a PhD. This is going to sound very "mom" of me [*laughs*] but every year that I get older I realize, "Wow, I've grown so much in the past year." That can only benefit me in whatever work I do next. Going back to do a PhD is not off the table, but I've also appreciated being in a non-academic role. And honestly, I'm still doing things that I was interested in as a grad student. I'm still learning. I'm still reading books. I'm still teaching in a lot of ways. The work doesn't have to stop, no matter what path you take.

**JAS:** I love that. I want to reiterate the same thing from "the other side." If you choose to continue in academia, it may look different, but public history, outreach, and activism work also don't have to stop.

**Q:** Maybe we need to take to task this idea of two paths. Maybe it's a false binary.

**TTM:** Yeah, I think so.

**Q:** Do you have any other advice for MALAS students?

**JAS:** Remember to make time for yourself and your community! It's easier said than done because of all the deadlines and expectations, but I think that's crucial for any program. And specifically for the MALAS program, don't forget about the library. We are so lucky to have amazing librarians, collections, and resources at UF, so take advantage of them.

**TTM:** Yeah, UF is such a big school, with a ton of resources. Take advantage of all the resources there. In terms of research, stick to whatever you want to study, even if it doesn't feel like the most perfect fit. Being at the Center for Latin American Studies, I psyched myself out a little bit doing a Latinx Studies topic, about these folks that grew up in New York and Chicago. But I'm really happy I stuck with it. I found professors and advisors who encouraged me, and really taught me to think of my work in an expansive way.

**JAS:** Yes, if we're talking about challenging binaries, the imposed binary between Latinx and Latin American Studies is another one. So many of the publications I analyzed were published in New York, Tampa, Haiti, Mexico—everywhere across the diaspora. There's a sense that Latinx Studies is somehow separate from Latin

American Studies, and I think both of our work suggests that this is a false dichotomy that should be disrupted.

**Q:** Even though your research sources are from different geographies, time periods, and social contexts, both of your theses explore the idea of liberation. What does liberation mean for the authors writing in 19th century Puerto Rico compared to the 1970s diaspora of New York City?

**JAS:** There's no single definition. The meaning of freedom and independence was highly contested in the 19th century. Different people, based on their different positionalities and perspectives, had very different ideas. One of the major aspects of liberation for the 19th-century context was an end to slavery, but this was often a top-down, legalistic framing of an end to the licit slave trade and official systems of slavery. On-the-ground realities could differ, as we see the continuation of exploitative systems based on enslavement practices in post-emancipation societies after official abolition. It's important to note, too, that many published *proclamas* or demands for abolition came from people in positions of privilege—literate men with access to education—who defined liberation differently from people themselves enslaved, who also fought for their own conceptions of freedom.

**TTM:** The women of the Young Lords Party argued that liberation was a socialist, decolonial, feminist society rooted in the struggles of working class people. Their view of liberation was a really big, expansive view of society that provided for all people, regardless of race, background, income, any of these other identities that they viewed as marginalized identities. But they also faced unequal internal gender dynamics within the organization. So for these women, liberation also meant getting the men alongside their ranks to view them as equals and to treat them as such.

**Q:** The difference in scope is so interesting and challenging—the question of how to scale social changes from the individual to a society is an evergreen one.

**TTM:** Absolutely. Something that I focused on a lot in my thesis is that the women were writing about their very specific personal stories and experiences, but also trying to scale them out and say, "It's not just me. It's not just us who are facing these issues of inadequate access to healthcare or gender oppression or U.S. imperialism."

They wanted to communicate that these issues also affect a broader community. Their vision of liberation was really interconnected with the struggles of people across the globe, because they knew that these core motors of oppression that they identified as capitalism and imperialism were not solely impacting them. So to them, liberation starts at home, yes, and then you can't talk about liberation at home without talking about what liberation would look like to women in Vietnam or folks in Mexico, for example.

**JAS:** I think it's really fascinating to see that expansion of scope. In the 19th century, there were shared efforts between the antislavery and anticolonial struggles within Puerto Rico, and ideas of regional alliances like an Antillean federation, although it never actually came to fruition. Within the Black Atlantic specifically, we see regional solidarities in the struggle against slavery and colonialism. I think it speaks to the power of history itself: we always build off the work of those who came before us. We can look critically at the abolitionist publications I analyzed and acknowledge the lack of consideration for enslaved women's experiences or emancipated individuals who continued to face exploitation, but can also recognize the value of these discourses to inform later expressions of alternative visions for more expansive liberation. That is what history is—looking to those in the past for this foundation to learn from the limitations and to continue building upon.

**TTM:** Beautifully put.

**Q:** Any final remarks?

**JAS:** I want to emphasize that my thesis and current position would not have been possible without my incredible advisor, Dr. Fernanda Bretones Lane, my committee members Dr. Max Deardorff and Dr. Paola Uparela, and my cohort. I thank them all for their support!

**TTM:** I would echo that too, with my advisor Dr. Rafael Ramírez Solórzano and committee members Dr. Paul Ortiz and Lourdes Santamaría-Wheeler. I'd also like to say that the beauty of the MALAS program is how interdisciplinary it is. It allows you to explore different fields, work with different professors, and create something really expansive and robust. Those interdisciplinary connections made the thesis really fulfilling to research and write. ♦

## Conference brings together scholars to discuss global struggles for democracy

*International scholars share insights from Africa, Europe, Latin America*

In early February, the Center hosted its 73rd annual conference, “The Struggle from Below: Civil Society and Democratic Backsliding in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.”

The conference was a collaboration with the Center for African Studies, the Center for European Studies, and the Raymond and Miriam Ehrlich Eminent Scholar Chair in the Department of Political Science, to strengthen ties between the area studies and offer valuable insights on democracy from different regions of the world.

Across two days of themed panels, 26 conference speakers presented research from political science, history, sociology, and ethnography, with cases from West and Southern Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central and South America. Each panel was followed by questions and discussion with attendees and panelists alike. Dr. Mark Beissinger (Princeton University) gave the keynote address, “Civil Society Resistance to Democratic Backsliding” and the conference was concluded with a roundtable synthesizing key lessons from the presentations. ♦



## Center events AT A GLANCE SPRING 2025



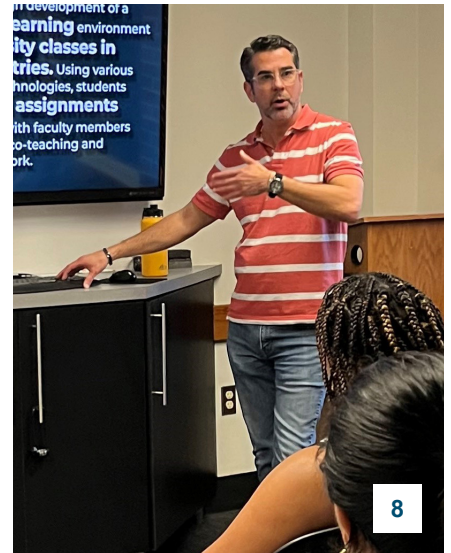
- **Sustainability, coffee production and circular economies: Applied experiences from Honduras** Michela Accerenzi, Bacardi Family Eminent Scholar Lecture Series\*
- **Meet the Author Club de Lectura** Liliana Colanzi°, Gabriela Ponce°, Hubert Matiúwà°
- **Bridging Borders | Collaborative Initiatives in Latin America: Insights from Colombia and Ecuador** Luis Alfonso Mejia Puig\* & Karla Saldaña Ochoa\* [6,8]
- **73rd Annual Conference | The Struggle from Below: Civil Society and Democratic Backsliding in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America** with the Centers for African Studies and European Studies and the Raymond and Miriam Ehrlich Eminent Scholar Chair in Political Science [2,4]
- **Radical Right Populism in Latin America** Clayton M. Cunha Filho° and Enrique Peruzzotti° [7]
- **Is all that glitters green? Promises and challenges of Green Hydrogen in Ceará, Brazil** Clayton M. Cunha Filho, Bacardi Family Eminent Scholar Lecture Series\*
- **rivers in nomos: sounding law in transit from the fluvial terrains of Western Amazonia** Richard Kernaghan\* [1]
- **Innovating for impact: Careers & Entrepreneurship in Sustainability** Mauricio Chavarria° [11]
- **Becoming water neutral through public-private partnerships** Mauricio Chavarria, Bacardi Family Eminent Scholar Lecture Series\*
- **MALAS capstone student film screening** Rebeca Almonacid Leal†, María de la Cruz Mora†, Diana Rodríguez Allende† [10]
- **Fieldwork Festival** Field research presentations by LAS, MDP, and TCD students† [5]
- **Las Guaracheras** Class visit with Colombian music group° [8]
- **Vaso Lleno: Harnessing Opportunities for Water Sustainability in Puerto Rico** Teresa Longobardi, Bacardi Family Eminent Scholar Lecture Series\*
- **Climate change impacts on Indigenous Peoples and local communities** Victoria Reyes-García, UF Distinguished Alumna† [9]

\*Guest speaker from outside institution

† Center student or alum

\*Center faculty (Core, affiliate, or visiting scholar)









## New study abroad programs strengthen connections with professional schools

*Center supports programs to Panama, Costa Rica*

Two new study abroad programs took flight in Spring 2025, thanks to developing partnerships between the Center for Latin American Studies and professional schools.

In January, eight students embarked to Panama on the 8-day immersive program “Exploring the Canal Across Disciplines,” led by Dr. Pingchien Neo, Director of International Engineering Programs at the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering. The students learned about the Panama Canal through the interdisciplinary lenses of the program’s collaborative sponsors: the Center, the College of Engineering, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Beyond120, the Warrington College of Business, and the College of Health & Human Performance.

The Center also supported the study abroad trip for Cynthia Barnett and Dr. Gabby Salazar’s Environmental Reporting class. Over spring break, the group of journalism students headed to Costa Rica to report on environment-based development and ecotourism by conducting interviews, videography, and photography at farms, research stations, and national parks. See the students’ final projects at [wuft.org/the-price-of-paradise](https://wuft.org/the-price-of-paradise).



## Center delegates attend education conference in Mexico for international exchange



In late January, in collaboration with UFIC’s Office of Global Learning (OGL), the Center sent a delegation of faculty and staff to Monterrey, Mexico for Monterrey Tech’s annual Institute for the Future of Education (IFE) Conference with the goal of growing US/LAS programs with a focus on teaching and learning.

The Center’s delegates were Dr. Swapna Kumar, Clinical Professor at the UF College of Education and Dr. Alex Bitton-Bailey, Director of the UF Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). Dr. Kumar is a longtime collaborator with the Center’s outreach initiatives on globalizing curriculum; Dr. Bitton-Bailey is a recent collaborator with the Center’s outreach initiatives. For each of them, it was their first academic conference in Latin America, making it a valuable opportunity to network and propose future collaborations.

“I envision a collaborative effort where materials and resources are shared, and faculty from our Latin American partner institutions help create workshops, courses, and videos,” Dr. Bitton-Bailey shares. “These resources will equip faculty to better understand their international students and create meaningful learning experiences for all. Additionally, this collaboration will ensure that faculty feel prepared to facilitate study abroad and virtual exchange experiences.” ♦

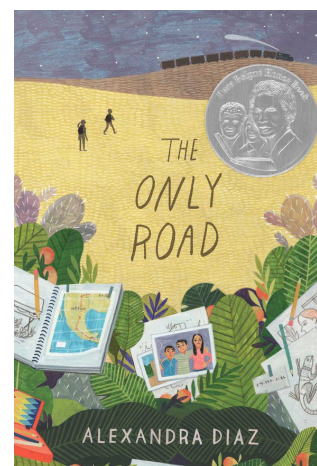
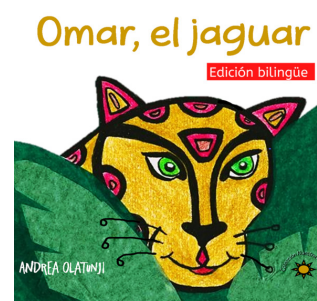


# Author visits bring Latin American stories, languages to life in K-16 classrooms

The Center's outreach program continues to promote Latin American Studies with children's and young adult literature. In addition to donating classroom sets of books with Latin American and Latino/a/x themes, the Center also sponsors virtual visits from authors to engage in discussion with students in the classroom.

Author Andrea Olatunji of Cuentacuento spoke to ten elementary school classrooms across the U.S., reaching over 800 students. Her interactive visits introduce readers to Omar the Jaguar and other rainforest protagonists who teach simple Spanish vocabulary and impart life lessons through encounters with their peers.

The Center also sponsored author Alexandra Diaz to visit middle school ELA classrooms as well as pre-service teachers from Florida Gulf Coast University. Her young adult novel *The Only Road* tells the story of a young boy who must make the arduous journey from Guatemala to the U.S. to live with his older brother when it's too dangerous to stay in his hometown. Reflecting on the novel after the virtual visit, one middle school student shared: "The book really gave me insight on how dangerous the journey is and the sacrifices that anyone has to make just for their safety and freedom. What I took away from reading this book was that it's important to remember that no matter what background or ethnicity someone has, everyone is human and deserves to be treated fairly and equally." ♦



## Outreach activities incorporate Spanish for construction, Mexico school visits

*Top:* When Bacardi scholar Mauricio Chavarria visited Gainesville to give his lecture on green business for the Center, he also had a busy schedule connecting with students and faculty across campus! In addition to meeting with sustainable development students and giving interviews about the importance of Spanish for careers, he gave a talk for the newly formed Spanish for Construction Student Club.



*Bottom left:* In January, Dr. Eileen Pesantes (School of Construction Management) and Dr. Mary Risner presented "Improving Student Employability through Interdisciplinary Curriculum and Interpersonal Communication Skills" at the 2025 Florida Career Pathways Network (FCPN) Symposium.



*Bottom right:* Santa Fe Little School teachers visit the Campeche Colegio Xail, where they met with students and fellow teachers. ♦



## Rebecca Hanson advances scholarship on crime and Venezuela

*Timely research topics and expert analysis define year of fellowships, book projects, and public scholarship*

The past academic year hasn't exactly resembled routine for Center faculty Rebecca Hanson: in the fall, she was the Peggy Rockefeller Visiting Scholar at Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies; in the spring, she was a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. During the year away, she published one book and began developing another, in between the usual lectures, seminars, and other activities of a visiting scholar. "It was so valuable to connect with scholars and students who are working on similar issues, in an almost incubator-like setting," Dr. Hanson shares. "There were a lot of consistent, intense conversations about the topics I'm interested in, like authoritarianism, security, and violence."

These topics are at the center of much of Dr. Hanson's recent work on Venezuela, whether in her fellowship presentations, her latest book (*Policing the Revolution: The Transformation of Coercive Power and Venezuela's Security Landscape During Chavismo*) or her upcoming book project examining the country's authoritarian consolidation under Nicolás Maduro. Dr. Hanson emphasizes that the uniqueness of the Venezuelan case makes it an important addition to scholarship on authoritarianism: while we tend to think about the centralization of coercive power, the Venezuelan context is characterized by decentralization. In short, coercive power was dispersed among multiple state and nonstate armed groups. "This is absolutely crucial to understanding how authoritarianism operates in the country," says Dr. Hanson. "I hope my work corrects some long-held misconceptions about the Venezuelan case that have been circulating for a long time."

Misconceptions about Venezuela have only become more salient in past year, as the U.S. government

designated the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua a "transnational criminal organization" and a "foreign terrorist organization." In March 2025, after the Trump administration invoked the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, 238 Venezuelan immigrants were deported to El Salvador. The administration claimed that the deportees had ties to Tren de Aragua without substantiating evidence.

Equipped with over a decade of data to dispel myths about Tren de Aragua, Dr. Hanson has penned two articles for *The Conversation*, appeared on the NPR Podcast "On Point," co-authored an op-ed for *The New York Times*, and been quoted in news items for *Reuters* and *USA Today* to challenge ideas about the group's presence in the U.S. "Policies are being implemented based on hyperbolic political discourse, poor police reporting, and a few salacious cases that whip up fear in the media," she states. "It really shows why rigorous, empirical academic research is so important."

As Dr. Hanson prepares to return to Gainesville, it's clear that despite the year's changes in routine, the core values of her academic life have remained constant: empirical scholarly research, intellectual exchange, public scholarship—and of course, teaching, which she'll resume in the fall at UF. "I'm always inspired by the MALAS students and their interests. Our cohorts are always so special," she reflects. "I'm really looking forward to being back in that environment, interacting with them and supporting them in their research." ♦



## Center faculty and associate director Mary Risner retires

*Twenty-five years at the Center defined by stewardship of outreach, business programs, and languages for the professions*

Dr. Mary Risner is retiring with emerita status after 25 years at the Center for Latin American Studies, where she has served not only as Center faculty and coordinator of the Latin American Business

Manager on two Title VI National Resource Center grants, and Co-Principal Investigator for a third.

Over the course of her career, Dr. Risner has dedicated herself to facilitating, developing, and leading innovative collaborations to advance global education. She began her career as a language educator, teaching Spanish for high school students as well as medical professionals. She has a Bachelor of Business Administration, a Master of Arts in Spanish, a Master of Arts in Latin American Studies, and a Doctor of Education in

Environment and Education in the Americas specializations, but also as Associate Director of Outreach and Business Programs, Project Manager for the Florida-Brazil Linkage Institute, Project



Curriculum and Instruction; the latter two she earned here at the University of Florida, making her an alumna of the Center as well.

As Associate Director of Outreach, Dr. Risner leads efforts to share resources and opportunities related to Latin America and the Caribbean to K-16 educators and other community members. In addition to classroom resources like the traveling suitcases and guest speaker program, Dr. Risner also focuses on leadership development and study abroad opportunities for educators interested in internationalizing their curriculum and careers.

Dr. Risner's vision for outreach extends to the business world and career development, emphasizing the importance of student readiness for global workplaces. She has authored numerous publications on conducting business in Brazil, Spanish and Portuguese education for careers, and the importance of language proficiency and intercultural competence for business success. In 2009, she founded the Network of Business Language Educators (NOBLE) and disseminates resources related to Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) internationally.

With advancing technologies opening new ways for students to experience other cultures, Dr. Risner spearheaded a virtual exchange (VE) program at UF in 2018, in collaboration with the Office of Global Learning (OGL) at UF's International Center. To support this initiative, Dr. Risner was awarded the UF Creative Campus grant as well as a grant from the Longview Foundation.

Reflecting her value for strong networks and the importance of strategic vision, Dr. Risner has served in leadership roles with multiple organizations for global education, including the Florida Consortium of International Education (FCIE), the Florida Foreign Language Association (FFLA), the International Business Education Society (ISBE), and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). Following her roles as the Portuguese representative and resource coordinator at AATSP, in 2024 Dr. Risner was elected President of the organization. At UF, she served two terms in the Faculty Senate. In 2019, she received the UF International Educator Award; two years later, she received the UF Career Influencer Award. In 2024, she received the Excelência em liderança leadership award from the American Organization of Teachers of Portuguese (AOTP).

With Dr. Risner departing the Center, its faculty, administration, and students are losing a wellspring of institutional knowledge and a tireless advocate for international education. Visitors to Grinter Hall might recall the sticker emblazoned on Dr. Risner's office door: "More solutionaries, please." Across her wide range of career pursuits, academic interests, and professional roles, "solutionary" is perhaps the best description uniting them.

Congratulations on a distinguished career, Dr. Risner, and thank you for your contributions to the Center! Best wishes as you embark on your future endeavors. ♦



## Welcoming Jairo Baquero-Melo

*Dr. Baquero-Melo completes his first semester as Center-based faculty*

**Q:** What is your research and writing about?

**JAIRO BAQUERO-MELO:** I have been working on several topics that have allowed me to collaborate with actors and

relation between labor and ecologies, including the effects of extreme climate events in the situation of vulnerable workers in Latin America.

**Q:** What were you most excited about starting a new job at UF?

**JBM:** When I decided to join UF there existed several reasons. Besides it represents a new personal and professional challenge, another motivation is tied to the scholars that have studied and worked in this university as well as current Faculty. In different periods, outstanding academics have made relevant contributions to different fields of study such as sociology, environmental studies, agrarian studies and Latin American Studies in general. I think it is not a coincidence. UF has offered an interesting and stimulating academic atmosphere, building dialogues and bridges between the academia and society, with a strong Latin America focus. I am interested in drawing on that legacy and institutional memory to develop new projects.

**Q:** What has been most rewarding in your first semester?

**JBM:** Since I started this process, I've had the opportunity to meet and know some students from the Center of Latin American Studies. The academic quality of its students is a notable strength and a defining characteristic of the Center. It brings together students from different backgrounds and interests, who serve as a source of critical and engaged thinking. I hope this continues to thrive over time. **CONT'D ►**

organizations across different regions in Colombia. One of my current projects involves synthesizing results from fieldwork and research experiences I have conducted, primarily in relation to so-called transitional processes underway of the implementation of the Peace Accord in Colombia, as well as recent political changes. Building on my previous work on violence and inequalities in regions such as Choco, I am interested in local agendas of communities working in the search of alternatives to war-related economies. My interest is in local initiatives that aim to link inclusion and peace, and broadly contribute to solve ecological crises. I aim to shed light on the efforts and knowledge of indigenous people, Afrodescendants and peasant groups.

A number of my current publication works are focused on coca crop substitution, the integration of communities into just value chains, agroecology, agrobiodiversity, and economic alternatives for women and youth populations. Another field of inquiry is related to labor studies, connected with analyses of informality, labor regimes, and agrarian economies. I'm focused on the

◀ **CONT'D** Another meaningful aspect has been the learning process related to academic life, and having the Center as a hub for encounters with guest speakers and visiting scholars. I am also grateful to the faculty and administrative staff, who have helped facilitate my adaptation process. UF's infrastructure is impressive, and Gainesville is a fascinating place to live—rich in natural beauty, local landscapes, and biodiversity.

**Q:** What are your teaching styles and goals for your classes?

**JBM:** In Spring I taught a course on Environmental Justice and Development in Latin America. For Fall 2025 I'll offer courses on Environmental Peacebuilding [embedded in the Celebration of Orlando Fals-Borda Year], and on Consumption and Social Change in Latin America.

As a scholar from Latin America, I aim to connect different goals. We come from countries and regions with multiple social issues and our academic work responds to having in mind a social responsibility of contributing to understanding, analyzing and offering proposals to solve social issues.

In my classes I aim to connect different sources of knowledge, and prompting critical thinking, from Latin America and elsewhere. I have learned that when working on social topics, it is crucial to connect our personal, family and social experiences with the topics that we are working on. When teaching, I also include my research experiences, because inquiry and teaching are mutually beneficial. It is also crucial to integrate creative methods that enrich students' experiences, as well as the application of mixed methods, knitting case study, participatory approaches, visual tools, but also collection and analysis of data.

Currently, being in contact with challenges is part of our work in academic sectors. It may come from society that demands engagement from us. Students also challenge traditional knowledge and approaches. Knowledge is dynamic, and new technologies move us towards uncomfortable questions on how to respond and to adapt to it in working environments. Challenges let us connect our work with local communities, students, institutions and actors interested in finding solutions to current crises. ♦

## Fieldwork FESTIVAL

*Congratulations to 2025 Fieldwork Festival winners!*

*Grand Prize*

**DANIEL  
HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO** [1]

The coast of North-Central Chile as an anthropogenic landscape: An assessment from the Longotoma Dune Field (32°24' S)

*MALAS First Prize*

**ANA MARÍA RAMÍREZ  
GÓMEZ** [2]

Socioeconomic Challenges Faced by Afro-Colombian Women Entrepreneurs

*MDP Honorable Mention*

**ROSEMARY  
GODFREY MARO** [3]

From Landfills to Zero Waste: Mitigating Greenhouse Gases for Climate Action

*MALAS Honorable Mention*

**THAÍS DE MENEZES  
GONÇALVES  
ZSCHABER** [4]

This Is Not About Voting Machines: Populist Strategies in Debating Electoral Integrity During Brazil's 2022 Elections

*TCD First Prize*

**THOMAS KELLY**

Antimicrobial resistance prevalence in populations of Goodman's mouse lemur (*Microcebus lehilahytsara*) across a gradient of direct human interaction

*MDP First Prize*

**SYDNEY  
KHANTHAVONG**

Dammed Futures: The Social Impacts of Hydroelectric Dams Along the Mekong River in Thailand

*TCD Honorable Mention*

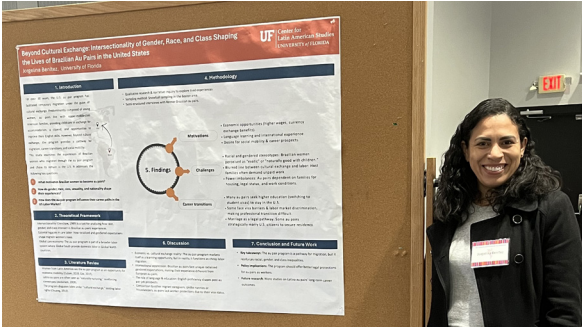
**LYDIA SOIFER**

Impacts of Microclimates on Biogeographic Patterns of Epiphytes in Cerro Chucanti, Panama





# Student CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS



## JORGELINA BENITEZ

### BEYOND CHILDCARE: INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER, RACE, AND CLASS IN THE LIVES OF BRAZILIAN AU PAIR CAREGIVERS IN THE UNITED STATES

“This presentation served as an opportunity to practice articulating my findings and refining my ability to explain key aspects of my study to an academic audience. Engaging with attendees and discussing my research allowed me to strengthen my arguments in preparation for my thesis defense, which took place just a week after the conference. This experience was an enriching step in my academic journey, providing me with the confidence to present my work.”



## MELISA MANTILLA

### GENDERING RESISTANCE: INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND SOCIAL UPRISINGS IN ECUADOR

“Most analyses and writings about Ecuador's Indigenous movement overlook the participation of Indigenous women. Interviews with Indigenous women, both leaders and grassroots participants, challenge mainstream narratives by highlighting women's significant contributions and unique experiences. My research contributes a gendered perspective to discussions about the Indigenous movement by amplifying the voices of the women who participated in the 2019 mobilizations. In doing so, it uncovers Indigenous women's active role and contributions during the uprising.”

# Student SPOTLIGHT

The undergraduate students of Introduction to Latin American Studies were tasked with developing a culminating art project that evoked an aspect of the Latin American experience, open to the artist's interpretation. On this and the following page are three examples of the students' work: *Tendedero*, *Llamada Perdida*, and *Wings of Many Roots*.



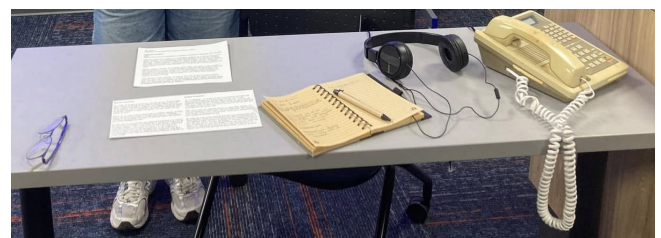
## TENDEDERO MIXED MEDIA ASSEMBLAGE

### GIOVANNA GASPARINI

This piece reflects the experience of growing up outside of Latin America while remaining immersed in its traditional

and contemporary cultures. Symbolic elements like the tendedero (clothesline), palm trees, cultural garments, and scattered images—including music albums and a photo of my grandparents—capture the coexistence of nature and Latin American culture. These come together to illustrate how Latin American culture remains deeply rooted in one's identity, despite physical distance.

## LLAMADA PERDIDA INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION NIC SOLANO



The piece includes a phone, a recording, a notebook, and a pen. By lifting the receiver, the spectator hears a Latin American mother saying the usual things that any Latin American mother tells her son or daughter who is studying in another town. So, the voice becomes the voice of the spectator's own mother. After listening to the recording, the spectators are invited to write on the notebook the feelings provoked by that "lost call."

CONT'D ►



This collage depicts the tocororo, Cuba's national bird—known not only for its vivid colors but for the fact that it cannot survive in captivity, making it a powerful symbol of freedom, identity, and cultural resilience. The piece is built as a mosaic of layered photographs, where each section of the bird represents different elements of Cuban history and collective memory. The **head** honors language, spirituality, and Indigenous and African roots. The **white chest** symbolizes migration and displacement—journeys made across waters and borders, often marked by separation, hope, and transformation. The **red lower belly** speaks to pain, loss, and collective wounds—the struggles carried through generations. The **wings** carry resistance, art, and celebration; and the **tail** speaks to land, food, and everyday life. Surrounding the bird are ancestral words and phrases: Yaya, Ashé, Sleeping languages, not dead, and Martí's line "Yo vengo de todas partes" (I come from everywhere). This is not just a bird in flight; it is a living archive, built from images, stories, and voices that together express what it means to belong to a culture shaped by memory, migration, rhythm, and resistance. It flies not only through space, but through time—carrying everything that refuses to be forgotten.

## LAS minor enriches undergraduate experience

*Students highlight quality of professors, depth of learning, and intercultural skills*

This spring, sixteen undergraduate students are graduating with a bachelor's degree and a minor in Latin American Studies. Thanks to the efforts of undergraduate coordinator Professor Luis Felipe Lomelí and the Student Association of Latin American Studies, that number has quadrupled from Spring 2024's total. Two of the graduates are already enrolled in the MALAS program, thanks to the Center's 4+1 combined degree option.

Although the students all come from different majors—political science to computer science to health science—they're united in their passion to learn more about Latin America. "No matter what field you're in, it is all so fascinating," says Sofía Muñoz-Repiso, a Legal History major whose academic journey was shaped by a Latin American History class she took with Professor Fernanda Bretones Lane her first semester at UF. "It was just a flyover course, but I found there was so much to dig into and so many questions that I had."

Thanks to Professor Bretones Lane's encouragement, Sofía opted to pursue the minor, collecting classes with Professor Lomelí as well as Professors Lillian Guerra and Carlos de la Torre. By the end of her studies, she'd pivoted from her plan to attend law school. "I want to do research and eventually get my PhD," she affirms. "I realized I want to contribute to the world by adding to academic knowledge, and that's because of the work I've done with the professors in Latin American Studies."

For Marcello Pecl, a Foreign Languages and Literatures major, the value he found in Latin American Studies is best represented by his major's two language specializations: French and Haitian Creole. While they may share common roots and similar vocabulary, the two languages are distinct. "Haitian Creole isn't just a 'dialect' of French; it has its own history, culture, grammar, and orthography," he says.

Taking classes in Latin American Studies underscored how vital historical and cultural context are to understanding the



*Sofía Muñoz-Repiso, second from left; Emily Winter, third from left; Marcello Pecl, far right*

profile of a region, from its peoples to its languages to its politics. "The seminar classes were so great for studying a really specific topic with an expert professor," says Marcello, who seized opportunities to take courses with visiting scholars Jennifer Fuenmayor from Venezuela and Flávia Biroli from Brazil. "The biggest takeaway for me was that you really need to learn about a region deeply if you want to understand the issues, current events, or challenges there. You can't just apply what you might know from European or North American cases."

Emily Winter, who graduated with a major in Animal Sciences, highlights how learning about other cultures transforms not just our knowledge but our perspectives. "I think it helps make us more empathetic and open-minded," she says. This mindset helps her in her future career, as she plans to work in animal agriculture, perhaps as a Livestock Extension Agent or a large animal veterinarian. "Agriculture transcends borders and cultural differences, and there are many connections between the agricultural industries in the United States and Latin America," Emily shares. "My knowledge of Latin America and of Spanish will help me communicate and collaborate with stakeholders in agriculture."

Going forward, Professor Lomelí hopes to continue bringing undergraduate students not only into the minor program but also the sense of community the Center offers its students. With the goal of transforming classmates into a cohort like that of the MALAS program, hopefully the interest in Latin American Studies among undergraduate students will continue to flourish. "For me, the experience was incredible," Sofía says. "You get another component to your degree, the professors are amazing, and you learn a lot. I hope more people pursue it because I think it's worth it." ♦



# Student SPOTLIGHT



## Adriana Sela connects research and policy in multifaceted academic path

*MALAS student maximized interdisciplinary opportunities across undergraduate, graduate, and professional experience*

From the moment she applied to the MALAS program, Adriana Sela knew she wanted to pursue an internship. She had attended UF as an undergraduate during the COVID pandemic, shuttered in her dorm taking classes online, distanced from peers. “When I graduated, I just felt behind,” she shares. “I wanted extra experience beyond my studies, and I felt like I didn’t have it because the entire world stopped.”

As a result of this experience, Adriana knows the value of being in a room—most of all when the room is full of other students, mentors, professors, or professionals from whom she can learn. But securing an internship in the narrow window of time for a master’s degree is tricky, especially in the competitive world of international policy research and analysis, Adriana’s preferred field. So, where most students would pursue an internship in lieu of a thesis, she found herself in the unique position of conducting research and writing a 150-page thesis as a back-up plan.

Although she hadn’t yet secured an internship, Adriana was still working as a research assistant at the Florida Policy Institute, where she aided a team advocating for increased protections within child labor bills proposed by the Florida legislature. Here, she drew inspiration for her thesis, titled “‘Tuve Que Trabajar’/‘I Had to Work’: Understanding the Work Experiences of Latin American and Caribbean Immigrant Minors in Florida.” As she continued applications and interviews for internships, she went forward with her fieldwork.

For her thesis, Adriana conducted interviews with immigrant youths in South Florida and Gainesville, ranging from 18 to 24 years old. “It was important to me to highlight their experiences with work, because they’re a vulnerable population and work is exploitative,” she explains. Her role at the Florida Policy Institute put her in the unique position of hearing two distinct perspectives, miles apart. “I would listen to lawmakers talk about the value of work for young people, and then hear from these teenagers that had to choose between working and going to school because their family needed money. Those are the narratives that don’t necessarily make it onto the floor in Tallahassee.”

In the spring, with her thesis nearly written, Adriana finally got the opportunity she’d been working toward: she’d landed an internship with the prestigious Brookings Institution, a nonprofit organization conducting nonpartisan research for policymaking. She was placed on the 17 Rooms project, an experimental initiative designed to innovate solutions for the United Nations’

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Finally, Adriana was not only in the room—she was in 17 of them, with the opportunity to observe and support a multidisciplinary group of specialists tackling cooperative problem-solving on a global scale.

Not only that, but her internship tasked her with a research assignment that diversified her knowledge base even further: how can artificial intelligence be used to support organizations like Brookings? With little background information on the topic, Adriana set about investigating possible applications to improve workflows, assessments, reporting, even recruitment. “It took me out of my comfort zone and it made me rethink my perceptions about AI,” she reflects. “There’s a lot of value in figuring out how AI can be used to boost social good.”

Over the course of her time at UF, Adriana has maximized every opportunity to soak up knowledge across her ever-expanding list of interests, not just through professional experience. Her course roster from six years of study resembles something like a mosaic of interdisciplinary topics across Latin American Studies. “Between undergrad and grad school, I probably have taken more LAS classes than any other student,” she laughs. Among her most memorable are classes on transnational migration, race in the Americas, political ecology, facilitation skills, and even law—the last of which she took alongside third-year law students.

But this hardly reflects a lack of focus; instead, it demonstrates the full spectrum of Adriana’s interests. Connecting research to policy remains a cornerstone of her academic and professional pursuits, focusing her far-reaching, interdisciplinary curiosities towards a purpose for public good. “Research is essential to policymaking,” she asserts. “Sometimes it helps us see what the consequences are of bad policymaking, but it also can paint a picture beyond narratives in the media, and use data and analysis to add value to arguments, or hone in on what’s good.”

With this north star guiding her, Adriana is graduating from the MALAS program with both a thesis and internship experience, and her career options open. “Right now, the avenue that I’m taking is policy analysis,” she says. “But I’d love to do something program-related eventually, like overseeing a development project. I’m always looking for Latin America, but if I get a more global opportunity, I’d be happy with that too.” Whether she winds up in policy research and analysis, labor law, conservation and development, or program management, Adriana has maximized the diverse opportunities available at UF and the Center to customize her own toolkit for multiple paths toward success. ♦

## In conversation with José Miranda

*Latin American Studies alum named one of 40 Gators Under 40*

José Miranda graduated from UF in 2014 with a BA in Political Science and International Studies with a concentration in Latin American Studies and a Latin American Studies minor. Eleven years later, he is the Director of Government Relations at the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) in Washington, D.C. where he advocates for community, technical, and junior colleges across the U.S. This year, he has been named one of the university's 40 Gators Under 40, which recognizes young alumni for their outstanding professional achievements and contributions to society. Read on to learn more about José's journey from Latin American Studies to his role today!

**Q:** How does Latin American Studies help you in your job?

**JOSÉ MIRANDA:** Something that I utilize on a regular basis is looking at things from a lot of different angles, perspectives, and viewpoints. I obviously have my own beliefs, but my job is a nonpartisan role, and I have to interact on a regular basis with trustees across the political spectrum. I also have to interact with members of Congress and their staff from across the political spectrum. So identifying how something can be perceived from different perspectives is very helpful. It's also helpful to be able to critically analyze the impacts of different proposals.

**Q:** What motivated you to pursue Latin American Studies in the first place?

**JM:** I'm originally from Latin America; I came to the U.S. from Nicaragua when I was 11 years old. I have my own perspective, my own lived experiences, but I wanted to get a bigger sense of the interactions of the geopolitical world in Latin America, the history of Latin America and how those correlate with the U.S. I wanted to ensure that when I had an opinion about geopolitical affairs from the U.S. that it wasn't just from my personal limited vantage point, but also that I could take a look at the whole regional landscape. One of the classes I took was Latin American and Caribbean migration to the U.S., and I was able to look at why we personally came to this country, and how that fit with the push and pull factors of immigration we studied. It taught me what were some of those bigger trends that impacted us once we were here in the U.S., establishing our own culture and presence and community here.

**Q:** What was the most valuable part of your Latin American Studies experience or your undergraduate experience in general?

**JM:** One thing that I loved about the Center was that most of the classes that I took were already at the 3000 level, which allowed for

a lot more dialogue and conversations. I really appreciated that. It made a huge difference in the way you interact with the professor and with your classmates. It wasn't a one-directional learning style, where the professor was just giving us facts and information, but rather we looked at a situation and then we talked about it overall—engaging in dialogue, hearing multiple perspectives. For example, somebody who is an immigrant who comes from a country where U.S. influence impacted their government and their economy versus someone who was born here, has never left the country, or has never seen anything outside of the worldview that the US provides. Those two perspectives probably have very different opinions about different historical situations and so in

a way, it helped them because they could hear some from my perspective, but also it helped me because it showed me that people know what they know and they don't know what they don't. That was an important piece of learning.

I like to say that my role nowadays is 33% policy analysis, 33% member education, and 33% relationship building. I have to know what is happening on Capitol Hill and what proposals are being done either at an agency or in Congress that are going to impact community colleges. I have to be able to educate our member trustees about those impacts, but then I have to also have the right relationships and the right conversations, and look at the right perspectives to influence how those proposals change or don't change, how they move forward or don't move forward.

**Q:** Analysis skills in particular are so distinct from people skills, and not a lot of people are able to do both very well.

**JM:** I'll tell you, the people skills are probably my stronger side, but I learned the analytical. I already had the base from my education at UF—if you know how to analyze a text or a historical occurrence and look at it from different viewpoints, which is what I learned when I was an undergrad, then you can easily figure out how to analyze a legislative bill. The language probably takes a learning curve, but the base is already there.

I think most students, when they look at International Studies, or when they look at the Center for Latin American Studies, they understandably think, "Oh, this is for people who want to be researchers in that specific area and get a PhD to become professors, or they want to work in international relations or development in that region." That's true, but the underlying skills that you learn are transferable anywhere. It's the people skills that





you develop by engaging in smaller classes, on specific topics, and having different discussions around it. And then it's the research piece that you have to do, the writing piece that you have to do, and the analysis piece. You can take all of that with you anywhere, into any profession.

**Q:** What advice would you give students as they're pursuing their Latin American Studies classes, still in school?

**JM:** One, take the classes that are most interesting to you, because you're going to enjoy them a lot more. That's another thing that I really loved about the Center: it provides interdisciplinary opportunities. Obviously everything is focused on Latin America, but you can take a class on the history, the anthropology, the politics of Latin America. I took a Spanish class that was about soccer in Latin America, and I absolutely loved it because they talked about the role of the sport in different countries and cultures. Two, keep an open mind as to how the different classes and activities that you have to do can help develop a wide array of

skills. Think broadly about what you can get out of those classes. It's not just the topic itself, but what are the underlying skills or connections that you can get from those classes?

**Q:** What career advice would you have for students who are about to graduate?

**JM:** Your plan A is very often not what plays out. If it does, I tip my hat to you. For many of us, it doesn't. But that doesn't mean that it's a complete failure. You just have to be able to pivot and figure it out. My trajectory has not been linear. When I graduated, I taught high school. I thought I was going to go to law school. I also considered doing international relations, which is why I took the degree. If you had asked me a decade ago if I would be in this role, I would have told you no. So just be flexible. Persist, and leverage everything that you learn during your undergraduate time—again, the soft skills, the hard skills, and the connections, and keep an open mind on what careers are out there that you can still leverage your education with. ♦

## Recent NEWS

### Former prosecutor from Guatemala makes new connections at UF

This academic year, the Center for Latin American Studies has co-hosted Guatemalan former prosecutor Eva Siomara Sosa Pérez, funded by a fellowship from the Institute of International Education Scholar Rescue Fund. At UF, she is enrolled at the English Language Institute, and participating in Center events and activities. In March, she was honored with the Alice Zachmann Human Rights Defender Award by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission for her work as a human rights lawyer on corruption cases. We're proud to host Siomara at the Center, and sincerely congratulate her on this deserved honor!

**Q:** Could you introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your background?

**EVA SIOMARA SOSA PÉREZ:** I'm Eva Siomara Sosa Pérez, I'm Guatemalan, a lawyer for many years, and I was a prosecutor in Guatemala, where I worked on cases related to corruption and femicides. Three years ago, I had to go into exile in Mexico because of political persecution in Guatemala. I'm currently at the University of Florida to improve my English, thanks to a scholarship provided by the Center for Latin American Studies.

**Q:** How has your experience at the Center for Latin American Studies been?

**ESSP:** Being at the Center for Latin American Studies has been a very beautiful, important, and enriching experience for me because I've had the opportunity to meet other professionals who are knowledgeable about problems similar to those in my country, at the Latin American level. So, it's been very nice to share opinions and realize that the problems we face in Guatemala are also present in other countries in the region. And that there are many of us working to improve the situation in our countries.



**Q:** We heard you recently received an important award. Can you tell us about it?

**ESSP:** Recently, in March of this year, I was awarded a prize by the Guatemala Human Rights Commission in the United States. It's an award given by a person named Alice Zachmann, who was a nun in Guatemala in the 1980s and founded this organization to defend human rights, at that time focusing on indigenous peoples whose rights were being violated. The organization has continued its work always defending human rights in Guatemala, and every year it gives this recognition to people who have worked for human rights or the fight against corruption. In my case, it was given to me for that reason—for fighting against corruption and for wanting Guatemala to be a better country, because the idea now is that corruption is part of the looting of state institutions, and it prevents them from fulfilling their role of protecting citizens. ♦



## TCD grant to advance Amazonian research through partnerships and exchange

*Activities include thematic workshops, specialized training clinics, targeted knowledge and communication products, and 2026 Amazon Summit at UF*

BY VANESSA LUNA CELINO (MALAS 2019)

In partnership with the Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) Program and the Moore Foundation, the Center is launching a series of workshops and gatherings that bring together diverse voices working to protect the Amazon region. “The Power of Connections: Harvesting Lessons and Strengthening Coalitions for Amazonian Conservation” will help advance thinking and create pathways for enduring conservation.

Climate change and the pandemic have made it clearer than ever how vulnerable and interconnected we all are. The Amazon, long known as a climate regulator, is dangerously close to flipping into a carbon source. But across the region, Indigenous communities, researchers, NGOs, and other partners have been building knowledge and action for decades. It’s time to reflect, share, and build on that work.

“We are at a pivotal moment of accelerated change in Amazonia, and because conservation is at its core a human endeavor, agility,

creativity, and the sharing of successful lessons are essential to navigating these changes,” said Dr. Karen Kainer, Project PI and Professor in LAS/TCD and SFFGS.

From May to December 2025, five workshops will take place across the Amazon basin, each focused on a key theme: legal and policy tools, community-led conservation, sociobioeconomies and conservation finance, research innovation, and preparing the next generation of conservation leaders. These events are meant to be open, honest spaces where people can talk about what’s working, what’s not, and where we go from here.

The series will wrap up with a UF Amazon Summit in February 2026 at Austin Cary Forest, an exciting chance to bring everyone together and look toward the future. At the heart of it all: connections. Across generations, sectors, and countries, we are learning from one another and working together for the Amazon. ♦

## Endowment establishes professorship for Jewish Studies in Latin America

EXCERPT COURTESY OF LAUREN BARNETT, COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES



The story of the Jewish people is one of adaptation and resilience. It is a narrative that’s powerfully evident in the unlikely communities that still dot the isles of the Caribbean and Latin America today. Sand-floored synagogues and gravesites nestled at the feet of volcanoes stand as physical testaments to this spirit of tenacity, forming lasting imprints on the area’s collective history in ways that challenge and expand all we know – or think we know – about Jewish heritage.

Now, with the establishment of an endowed professorship to study Jews in Latin America and the Caribbean, the University of Florida is poised to lead a vital yet under-examined chapter of global history.

This initiative is made possible by a generous gift from Bruce Greenberg (*pictured, above*) to the Bud Shorstein Center for

Jewish Studies. A voracious scholar and advocate of Jewish education, Greenberg serves on numerous Jewish not-for-profit boards and educational committees across the country. He’s taken an active lead in the Jewish community his entire life.

“Bruce Greenberg’s generosity and vision enable us to explore uncharted territories of Jewish history,” said Interim Dean Mary Watt. “The Shorstein Center is already widely recognized for its scholarly excellence and impact, and this gift will put us on another level by building bridges between diverse Jewish communities worldwide.” The newly established Bruce Greenberg Professorship in Judaism will support in-depth research, education, and cultural engagement, with a focus on elevating the Jewish experience in the Americas and preserving Jewish history and memory.

The professorship search will commence later this year, and a lecture series will be held throughout the fall surrounding the initiative. The center seeks a senior scholar with a robust research profile, a passion for celebrating Jewish history, and a desire to delve into Atlantic, Jewish and Caribbean history. ♦



## Undergraduate LAS Certificates & Minors

**Braden Bodenstein** (International Studies, Spanish & Portuguese) **Caroline Centeno** (International Studies, Portuguese)  
**Valentina Correa Ospina** (Political Science)  
**Cecilia Edelberg** (Public Relations)  
**Yael Hamaoui** (Political Science, Religion)  
**Anthony Esquivel** (History)  
**Chloe Fiffe** (Chemistry, Biochemistry)  
**Gabriella García-Urbay** (English/ Hispanic American Languages)  
**Xiomy Hernández Hernández** (Anthropology)  
**Sofía Muñoz-Repiso** (Legal History, Philosophy)  
**Marcello Pecl** (Foreign Languages and Literatures)  
**Rachel Riklan** (Political Science)  
**Benjamin Ruddy** (Computer Science)  
**Vanessa Sánchez-Abella** (Health Science)  
**José Sinfón** (Advertising)  
**Emily Winter** (Animal Sciences)

## MALAS Degree

**Rebeca Almonacid Leal**  
 Capstone: Indigenous Resistance Against the Marco Temporal Thesis in Brazil  
 Specialization: Development Studies and Economic Analysis  
 Chair: Cynthia Simmons

## Jorgelina Benítez

Thesis: Beyond Cultural Exchange: Intersectionality of Gender, Race, and Class Shaping the Lives of Brazilian Au Pairs in the United States  
 Specialization: Race, Gender, and Sexuality and Latinx Studies, Migration & Transnational Studies  
 Chair: Meg Weeks

## Ashley Borges

Capstone: The Impact of Immigration Laws and Policies in Florida  
 Specialization: Race, Policy, and Immigration  
 Chair: Rafael Ramírez Solórzano

## María de la Cruz Mora

Capstone: Oral histories from the Meseta P'urepécha on customs and traditions post-NAFTA  
 Specialization: Development Studies and Economic Analysis  
 Chair: Ariadna Tenorio

## Sixta Chaverra Martínez

Capstone: Renacer Desde Adentro (Rebirth from Within: Restorative Black Women, Healing the Social Bonds in Quibdó)  
 Specialization: Education in the Americas  
 Chair: Ariadna Tenorio

## Daniela Lizarazo

Thesis: Building a Home Away from Home: The Role of Latina Migrants in Florida Construction Industry  
 Specialization: Latinx Studies, Migration & Transnational Studies  
 Chair: Rafael Ramírez Solórzano

## Alfredo Ortiz

Capstone: Repaying Injustice: Colonial Debt, Austerity, and Resistance in Puerto Rico  
 Specialization: Development Studies and Economic Analysis  
 Chair: Clate Korsant

## Nilton Quiroli Jr.

Thesis: Give Me the Facts, and I Will Give You the Law: The Challenge of Hybrid Jurisdiction in Brazil's Courts of Domestic and Family Violence Against Women  
 Specialization: Crime, Law, and Governance in the Americas and Race, Gender, and Sexuality  
 Chair: Meg Weeks

## Carlos Paredes

Thesis: Authorizing Empire: Myths and Narratives of Empire and Colonialism through Spanish Accounts of the Americas  
 Specialization: Latin American Politics and History and Culture, Theory, and Society  
 Chair: Luis Felipe Lomelí

## Ana María Ramírez Gómez

Thesis: Socioeconomic Challenges Faced by Afro-Colombian Women Entrepreneurs  
 Specialization: Development Studies and Economic Analysis  
 Chair: Pilar Useche

## Diana Rodríguez Allende

Capstone: In/Visible Hope: Haitian Oral Histories in the Dominican Republic  
 Specialization: Caribbean Studies and Latinx Studies, Migration & Transnational Studies  
 Chair: Clate Korsant

## Adriana Sela

Thesis: Tuve Que Trabajar, I Had to Work, Understanding the Work Experiences of Latin American and Caribbean Immigrant Minors in Florida  
 Specialization: Development Studies and Economic Analysis  
 Chair: Cristian Pérez Muñoz

## Gabrielle Soto

Thesis: Gender, Labor, and Global Trade: The Impact of NAFTA on Women in Mexico's Maquiladoras  
 Specialization: Development Studies and Economic Analysis  
 Chair: Ariadna Tenorio

## Thaís de Menezes Gonçalves Zschaber

Thesis: This Is Not about Voting Machines: Populist Strategies in Debating Electoral Integrity during Brazil's 2022 Elections  
 Specialization: Latin American Politics and History  
 Chair: Carlos de la Torre

## Graduate LAS Certificates

**Guadalupe Gimenez** (Spanish)  
**Yerson Fuentes** (Spanish)  
**Carla Nelson** (MDP)  
**Hailey Muchnok** (MDP)  
**Daneille March** (MDP)  
**Estefany Guecha Sanchez** (MDP)  
**Veronica Rosich** (Spanish)  
**Salvador Cuadros Cerpa** (MDP)

## MDP Degree

**Salvador Alexander Cuadros Cerpa**  
 Specializations: Latin American Studies, Global Health, Public Health, TCD  
 Chair: Joseph Bisesi (Environmental & Global Health)  
 Field Practicum: "Public Perception of Exposure to PFAs and their Presence in Blood and the Willingness to Receive PFAs Blood Test."

## Bailey Dunn

Specializations: African Studies, TCD  
 Chair: Brian Child (Geography / African Studies)  
 Field Practicum: "Addressing Livelihood Strategies, Attitudes Toward Wildlife, Governance, and Direct Cash Transfers in the Niassa Special Reserve, Mozambique."

## Estefany Güechá Sánchez

Specializations: Latin American Studies, Organizational Leadership for Nonprofits, Entrepreneurship, TCD  
 Chair: Muthusami Kumaran (Family, Youth and Community Sciences)  
 Field Practicum: "2811 Ventures: Outcomes Evaluation and Investing opportunities of the acceleration process of 20 ventures working on climate change and gender in Colombia."

## Garon Joannou

Specializations: Organizational Leadership for Nonprofits, TCD  
 Chair: Susan Paulson (Latin American Studies)  
 Field Practicum: "Enhancing Sustainability of SWAG's food security programs."

## Sydney Khanthavong

Specializations: Organizational Leadership for Nonprofits, Urban Planning, Global Health, TCD  
 Chair: Kai Lorenzen (Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences)

Field Practicum: "Dammed Futures: The Social Impacts of Sustainable Hydropower Development Along the Mekong River."

#### **Daneille March**

Specializations: Latin American Studies, Organizational Leadership for Nonprofits, Gender & Development, Global Health, TCD  
Chair: Muthusami Kumaran (Family, Youth and Community Sciences)  
Field Practicum: "A customized fundraising plan for IIM International."

#### **Rosemary Godfrey Maro**

Specializations: African Studies, Climate Science, Gender & Development, Global Health, TCD  
Chair: Renata Serra (African Studies)  
Field Practicum: "Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Zero Waste Local Models to Reduce Landfill and Incineration for Climate Action in Gainesville."

#### **Carla Lissa Nelson**

Specializations: Latin American Studies, Medical Geography, Global Health, TCD  
Chair: Sarah McKune (African Studies / Global & Environmental Health)  
Field Practicum: "Health Information Exchange in the U.S.: Myth or Reality?"

#### **Jennifer Quartey**

Specializations: African Studies, Organizational Leadership for Nonprofits, Gender & Development, Global Health, TCD  
Chair: Brian Child (Geography / African Studies)  
Field Practicum: "The Impact of Direct Cash Transfers on Conservation and Community Development: A Case Study in Mozambique's Niassa National Reserve Hunting Block L7."

#### **Sustainable Development Practice Certificate**

**Donal Bissainte**, PhD Geography

#### **Tropical Conservation and Development Graduate Certificate**

**Sydney Khanthavong**, MDP  
**Bailey Dunn**, MDP  
**Rosemary Godfrey Maro**, MDP  
**Jennifer Quartey**, MDP  
**Salvador Alexander Cuadros Cerpa**, MDP  
**Hailey Muchnok**, MDP  
**Daneille March**, MDP  
**Estefany Güechá Sánchez**, MDP  
**Garon Joannou**, MDP  
**Carla Lissa Nelson**, MDP

#### **Tropical Conservation and Development Graduate Concentration**

**Ana Karina García de Dios**, MA Latin American Studies  
**Marliz Arteaga Gómez García**, PhD Interdisciplinary Ecology  
**Yuley Encarnación Pineyro**, PhD Botany

## Alumni UPDATES

**Alumni, want to see your update here?**



Complete our Alumni Update Form online: [bit.ly/3s5H2KA](https://bit.ly/3s5H2KA)  
Let us know what's going on with you! Your update might be included in the next issue of the *Latinamericanist* (space permitting).

#### **Kerri Hannan (MALAS 1999)**

"After graduation, I entered the Foreign Service and served all over the world, including in Bolivia and Argentina. I work in public diplomacy, supporting exchanges, strategic communication strategy and working to explain our foreign policy to the global audience. My degree enables me to understand our region broadly, historic trends and important communities and it informs my work daily. As the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the Department of State for the last 3 years, I have traveled to more than 16 countries in the region across South and Central America and the Caribbean, meeting with government, commercial and civil society leaders. This work has

been rewarding and challenging and I encourage others to consider it as a career."

#### **Hans (Henry) Vogel (MALAS 1981)**

"From 1985 until 2004 I taught Latin American history at Leiden University in the Netherlands, and from 2001 to 2013 I taught European History at two private universities in Buenos Aires. Last year I published a book on Argentinian history, with my personal experiences there over the years woven through the narrative: *Argentine, Land van Vlees en Bloed*. In 2021 I also published a history of 20th-century Europe: *How Europe Became American*. I have published widely on the history of Argentina, Latin America and Europe, as well as military history. (in English, Dutch, German, Spanish). Since 2008 I have been a regular contributor of widely read and influential web sites, including pravda report, globalresearch, theaker, unz review, and arktos journal."

#### **Luísa Bridi Dacroce**

**(MALAS 2023)** published an article based on her MALAS thesis research: Bridi Dacroce, L.R. From the margins: Navigating race as children of Brazilian immigrants in the United States. *Lat Stud* (2025). doi.org/10.1057/s41276-025-00519-0

#### **Beatriz Dominguez**

**(MALAS 2024)** is a teaching assistant at Universidad Alberto Hurtado Ethnography Lab I class for undergraduate Anthropology students, and currently working as a Community Archivist at the Austin History Center and engaging with local community who identify as Hispanic/Latine.

#### **Moisés Moreno-Rivera**

**(MALAS 2017)** is the Government Affairs Senior Program Manager for Climate Resilience with the Trust for Public Land's California team. Previously, he served as Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice, Tribal Affairs, and Border Relations at the California Environmental Protection Agency, as well as Assistant Secretary for Equity and Environmental Justice at the California Natural Resources Agency—both positions appointed by the governor. He has prioritized meaningful community engagement and improved language access, while celebrating cultural diversity in environmental stewardship. Moisés has built strong partnerships with communities most impacted by environmental injustice, including California Native American tribes, low-income populations, and communities of color.



# Welcome NEW STAFF

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**Danny Oquendo**  
Title VI / Outreach Assistant

# Welcome NEW AFFILIATE FACULTY

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**Marlon Barrios Solano**  
Center for Arts, Migration + Entrepreneurship  
College of the Arts

**Dori Griffin**  
School of Art + Art History  
College of the Arts

# Faculty NEWS & PUBLICATIONS

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## **Jairo Baquero-Melo (LAS) Chapter:**

Baquero-Melo, J. (2025), "Proletarización e "involución doméstica" en la transición de la guerra a la paz en Colombia" In: Carton de Grammont, H., P. Mascheroni, A. Riella & K. Sánchez (Coords.), Mercados de trabajo rurales, desigualdades y vulnerabilidad social en América Latina, Bs As: CLACSO, 215-244.

**Presentations:** (1) "Reconfiguring Labor Control Regimes in the Coffee Value Chain: Climate Change and Socio-Ecological Transformations in Colombia", ILPC Conference 2025, April 2025, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile (virtual); (2) Baquero-Melo, J. & J. López-Lozano, "Dinámicas de frontera y violencia rural y urbana en Chocó (1990s-2020s)". Seminar: "20 años del libro "El revés de la nación": Homenaje a Margarita Serje." April 2025, IEP, Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín (virtual).

**Mark Brenner (Geological Sciences)** was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) "for outstanding paleoenvironmental change research and publishing, multidisciplinary contributions and collaborations across geology, geography, and archaeology."

**Publications:** Martínez-Abarca, R., L. Pérez, M. Brenner, F. Schenk, J. Obrist-Farner, A. Correa-Metrio, T. Bauersachs, A. Schwalb. 2024. Climate, environment and human history in lowland Central America: Insights from Guatemalan lake sediments. *Past Global Changes* (PAGES). <https://doi.org/10.22498/pages.32.2.80>

**Robert Buschbacher (School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences)** Four Recommendations for Academia Regarding Dialogues of Knowledge and Biocultural Conservation was published in *ecologíaPolítica* (Barcelona), based on the LATAM-TCD

sponsored Weaving Knowledge Side Event at the UN Biodiversity Convention COP16. On Tap, Not on Tap: An Urgent Call for Academia to Support Indigenous Science and Equitable Conservation was co-signed with 18 leading academic programs and submitted to Environmental Sustainability.

## **Carmen Diana Deere (LAS/FRE Emerita)**

**Presentation:** "1975 and the Emergence of WID & GAD: Perspectives of a Latinamericanist," at the Build Feminist Futures conference co-organized by TCD alum Rebecca Williams at Grand Valley State University, March 2025.

## **Carlos de la Torre (LAS) Publication:**

Populism and Fascism, Elements in the History and Politics of Fascism Online ISBN: 9781009528979, Cambridge University Press, 2025. **Invited Lectures:** (1) "Populism and Fascism" Book Series Launch Cambridge Elements in the History and Politics of Fascism, The New School for Social Research, May 1 2025 (virtual); (2) "Populismo radical de derecha o fascismo" keynote address at the 4to Simposio de Investigadores Jóvenes, University of Puerto Rico, April 22, 2025; (3) "Populism and Fascism", Universidad San Francisco de Quito, March 19, 2025; (4) "Trump and the Bolsonaro Radical Right Populist Projects of Race" invited lecture at the College of Fellows, University of Tübingen, February 19, 2025.

## **International Conference Participation:**

(1) Populism in Historical Perspective Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest, Villanova University, April 8, 2025; (2) "Populism and Fascism" Democracy Disfigured or reconfigured? Political imaginaries, popular participation, and social change in the Americas, University of Tübingen February 20, 2025.

**Silvio J. dos Santos (Music) Chapter:** dos Santos, Silvio. "Heitor Villa-Lobos, Green Mansions (1959), and the Indigenous Other." In *Anais do VIII Simpósio Villa-Lobos*, ed. Paulo de Tarso Salles, pp. 258-67. São Paulo: ECA-USP, 2024. **Conference Papers:** (1) "Decoding the Archive: Heitor Villa-Lobos's Symphony No. 10 "Ameríndia," Ethnography, Histories, and National Narrative." Southern Chapter of the American Musicological Meeting, University of Southern Mississippi. February 2025; (2) "Heitor Villa-Lobos, Green Mansions (1959), and Indigenous Othering." 8th Villa-Lobos Symposium. Universidade de São Paulo. September 2024. **Keynote Address:** "Villa-Lobos: Music, Archive, and the Indigenous Other." Southeast Chapter of the American Musicological Society. East Carolina University. October 2024.

## **Glenn Galloway (MDP LAS/CAS)**

**Publication:** Glenn Galloway, Karen Brown, Pádraig Carmody, Lucia Rodríguez, and Larry Swatuk (eds.). 2025. *Transforming Education for Sustainable Development: Global Perspectives from Classroom to Practice*. Global Association of Master's in Development Practice (GAMDP). Routledge Press. In print. Online version will be available open access.

**David Geggus (History)** Spoke in April on "La perte de Saint-Domingue et de ses plantations" at Les archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve, France.

## **Susan D. Gillespie (Anthropology) Article:**

Susan D. Gillespie (2025) Blocks, Bricks, and Material Practices of Intersubjectification at Pre-Columbian La Venta, Mexico. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 81(2). <https://doi.org/10.1086/735057>

**Rebecca Hanson (LAS) Book:** Policing the revolution: The transformation of security and violence in Venezuela during Chavismo. Oxford: Oxford University Press, published March 2025; Rebecca Hanson, Dorothy Kronick, and Tara Slough. 2025. **Publications:** (1) "Preaching to the choir: A problem of participatory interventions". The Journal of Politics. <https://doi.org/10.1086/732983>; Rebecca Hanson, David Smilde and Verónica Zubillaga. 2025. (2) This is not the way to curb migration. Op-ed in The New York Times, April 4; Verónica Zubillaga and Rebecca Hanson. 2025. (3) "What is Tren de Aragua? How the Venezuelan gang started — and why US policies may only make it stronger". (4) The Conversation, March 3; Rebecca Hanson. 2025. "The murder rate in Venezuela has fallen — but both Trump and Maduro are wrong about why". The Conversation, February 24; Rebecca Hanson. 2025.

**Ben Hebblethwaite (Languages, Literatures, and Cultures)** received a 2024-25 fellowship from the NEH for the project "The Songs and Prayers of Sèvis Ginen: Historical Linguistic Approaches to Haitian Vodou". Published a Chapter in a conference proceeding titled "African Diasporic Consciousness and Haitian Vodou's Lexical Field: Historical Linguistic Approaches to Religious Language and Diasporic Identity" in the volume "Creole Languages in Diasporic Contexts: Language Biographies and Plurilingual Identities" (Lehmanns Media GmbH), and a book review titled "Vodou en Vogue: Fashioning Black Divinities in Haiti and the United States by Eziaku Atuama Nwokocho" (Journal of Contemporary Religion). Our forthcoming textbook (with David Tézil) "Kreyòl pale: A Haitian Creole Textbook for Beginners" will appear in June at LP@UF and in August at University Press of Florida.

**Andrew Janusz (Political Science)** **Publications:** (1) Janusz, Andrew. "Who Donates? Gender and Campaign Contributions in Brazil." Forthcoming at Political Research Quarterly. (2) Janusz, Andrew and Vanessa Carrion. 2024. "Party Elites and Beauty Biases: Candidate Attractiveness and List Placement." Forthcoming at Party Politics. (3) Janusz, Andrew, Andrea Junqueira, and Patrick Cunha Silva. 2024. "Electoral Role Models: Political Empowerment and Candidate Emergence." Political Behavior 1-24. **Conference presentations:** (1) American Political Science Association Conference; (2) Midwest Political Science Association Conference.

**Karen Kainer (LAS/School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences)** **Refereed publication:** Luna-Celino, V., K.A. Kainer, R. Carmenta, B. Loiselle, and A. Cuellar. 2025. Burning perceptions that integrate wellbeing and ecosystem services to inform fire governance in the Peruvian Andes. Journal of Rural Studies 116:103610. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2025.103610>.

**Invited speaker:** Brazil nut (*Bertholletia excelsa*) ecology, management, and sustainable use. The Jones Center at Ichauway, Georgia, 19 Nov 2024. **Award:** Graduate Faculty of the Year, 2024-25. Selected by Forest Resources and Conservation graduate students.

**Martha Kohen (Architecture)** has spent the Spring Semester on a partial leave in Uruguay, renewing academic contacts with the Facultad de Arquitectura FADU UDELAR and the Universidad Católica.

**Luis Felipe Lomelí (LAS) Publications:** "Time, embodied: Interview to Cristina Rivera Garza." A Contracorriente, 22.2, Feb. 2025. **Guest Editor:** Laurel Review, special number on authors writing in Spanish in the USA, 2025. **Lecture:** "On Violence and the Drug War in Mexico." UNC-Chapel Hill, Nov. 25, 2024. **Presentation:** "Postmodern matabicho: João Melo's irreverent authors," University of Kansas, "Global Africa: Past, Present, and Future," April 24-26, 2025. **International Conference:** "Mundos que colapsan y ecosistemas que resisten," Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Dec. 1, 2023. **Workshops:** (1) "Creating Dynamic Narrative: Oral History, Ethnography, and Creative Non-Fiction." UF International Ethnography Lab. (2) "Instantes infinitos: Introducción al microcuento (y al haikú)." Universidad de Puerto Rico - Río Piedras.

**Crystal Marull (Spanish & Portuguese)** **Publications:** (1) Marull, C. (2025). "Online Course Design." Texas Tech Univ. Spanish Training Manual, Virtual, Apr. 4. (2) Marull, C. (2025). "AI Innovations in Digital Learning." FL Online Summit, Orlando, Apr. 10. (3) Marull, C. (2025). "AI in Student-Centered Learning." TopKit Conf., Virtual, Mar. 25-27. (4) Feihong, W., Marull, C. (2025). "Engage and Learn," Intersections: Online Learning, Orlando, Feb. 21-23. (5) Marull, C. (2025). "AI in Online Spanish Courses," FDLA/FAMTE, Virtual, Feb. 7-9. (6) Marull, C. (2025). "Tour the Spanish-Speaking World," Univ. of FL, Center for Online Innovation. <https://vimeo.com/1039627980>

**Susan Milbrath (FLMNH)** Imagery of the Yearbearers in Maya Culture and Beyond. In The Materialization of Time in the Ancient Maya World: Mythic History and Ritual Order. David A. Freidel, Arlen F. Chase, Anne S. Dowd, and Jerry Murdock, eds. 299-346. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2024.

**Jeffrey Needell (History)** retired from the University of Florida this past fall, and was awarded the status of Professor Emeritus of History.

**Carmen Martínez Novo (LAS)** was invited to the Institute for Transborder Indigenous Nations at the Labriola National American Indian Center, in Arizona State University on

March 28 to give the conference "Paternalist Governance of Indigenous People in Mexico and Ecuador as Colonial Legacy."

**Susan Paulson (LAS) Fellowship:** Institute for Environmental Transformations, Sciences Po, Paris, 2025-26. **Publication:** Paulson, Susan, Sourayan Mookerjee, Anna Saave. Ecofeminist & Decolonial Feminist Futures. In Routledge Handbook of Degrowth, ed. Ariel Salleh and Vincent Liegey. London: Routledge. **Invited talk:** Anthropology and degrowth: synergies in research and thought. Leadership for the Ecozoic, University of Vermont and McGill University, virtual event, February 2025.

**Charles A. Perrone (SPS emeritus)** Published "Posfácio: Os voos da imaginação de um trovador ultra-moderno." Afterword to Claudio Daniel, *Cabeza de serpiente emplumada* (Curitiba: Kotter, 2025). Translated one segment of *Galáxias* by Haroldo de Campos. Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Press, 2024.

**Rafael Ramírez Solórzano (LAS)** Rothman Faculty Summer Fellow in the Humanities, University of Florida (Summer 2025); **Invited Keynote Talk:** "Virtues, Wisdom, and Chisme: Navigating Ethnicity in Oral Histories and Pláticas," Florida Society of the Social Sciences 19th Conference, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, April 2025; **Invited Talk and Panelist:** Latinx Social Movements at the University of Florida, Museum Night at La Casita, Hispanic Student Association, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, April 16th, 2025; **Panelist:** "Teaching with Palabra: Honoring Ancestral Storytelling Using Latinx Studies Approaches," National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference, Albuquerque, NM April 3, 2025

**Mary Risner (LAS) Book chapter:** "Teaching Spanish for Specific Purposes in Primary and Secondary Education" in The Routledge Handbook of Spanish for Specific Purposes. Lead co-author of journal article: "LSP As a Strategy to Increase Undergraduate Spanish Course Enrollments" in Global Business Languages journal. **Keynote speaker:** Southeast Coastal Conference on Languages and Literatures (SECCLL): "Keeping World Languages Relevant through Innovative Pedagogies and Partnerships".

**Antonio Sajid López Méndez (Spanish & Portuguese)** published his novel *La sombra púrpura del cielo roto* with Editorial Gnomon in San Juan, Puerto Rico (<https://gnomoliterario.carrd.co/>). *La sombra púrpura del cielo roto* emerges as a novel of remarkable depth and narrative ambition, spanning nearly half a century of Puerto Rican history—from the iconic Mar y Sol Festival of 1972 to the devastating impact of Hurricane María in 2017. Through a constellational structure, the novel interweaves the lives of characters whose fragmented subjectivities explore



themes such as motherhood, the economic struggles of theater artists, desire, corruption, the multigenerational impact of Alzheimer's disease, and gender identities in their queer dimension.

**Raúl Sánchez (English)** presented, with Maria Rogal from the School of Art + Art History, "Horizontalidad as a Cultural Rhetorics Theory and Practice" at the Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention in Baltimore, Maryland (April 2025).

**Marianne Schmink (LAS/TCD Emerita)** Hecht, S; Schmink, M; Abers, R.N; Assad, E; Bebbington, D.H; Brondizio, E; Costa, F de A.; Durán, A.M.C; Fearnside, P; Garrett, R; Heilpern, S; McGrath, D; Oliveira, G de L.T; Pereira, H; Pinedo-Vazquez, M. 2024. Amazonia in motion: Changing politics, development strategies, peoples, landscapes and livelihoods. Acta Amazonica 54(spe1): e54hu22306.

**Maya Stanfield-Mazzi (Art+Art History)**  
**Book chapters:** "The Passion Cloths of Chachapoyas, Peru: Eternal Life Expressed in a Local Idiom [in German]," in Fastentücher - Neue Forschungen, eds. Anja Schöne and Peter Knüvener. Waxmann, 2025; and "A World Beyond the Mines: Birds in the Flower Paintings of San Martín de Tours in Potosí, Bolivia," in Exhibiting Animals in the Early Modern World, eds. Elizabeth Boone and Lianne McTavish. Routledge, 2025. **Book reviews:** Andrew Hamilton, The Royal Inca

Tunic: A Biography of an Andean Masterpiece (2024), Journal of Anthropological Research, v. 81(1), 2025; and Claudia Ruth Brosseder, Inka Bird Idiom. Amazonian Feathers in the Andes (2023), Ethnohistory, v. 72(1), 2025. **Invited lecture:** "El tapiz como portador del canon artístico andino," Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino, Santiago, Chile, March 19, 2025.

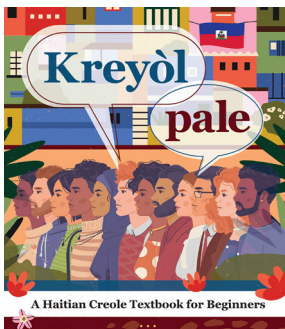
**Carlos A. Suárez Carrasquillo (LAS)** Who gets to brand Puerto Rico: Its tourism agency or its biggest star? The Conversation, March 24, 2025

**Paola Uparela (Spanish & Portuguese)**  
**Teaching recognition:** University of Florida's Career Influencer Awards in the Career Influencer, Faculty category - nominated.  
**Research award:** 2025 Alfred B. Thomas Book Award by the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies (SECOLAS).  
**Publication:** "Gender, Transgender, and Queer Inbetweenness in Cabeza de Vaca's Relación." Approaches to Teaching Cabeza de Vaca's Account and Other Texts. MLA Series. New York: Modern Language Association, 2025.  
**Grants and Fellowships:** CHPS Speaker Series Grant; 2024-25 Research Associate position (alternate) in the Women's Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School.

**Denis Valle (School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences)**  
(1) Brack et al. 2025. Estimating abundance of aggregated populations with drones while

accounting for multiple sources of errors: a case study on the mass nesting of Giant South American River Turtles. Journal of Applied Ecology. (2) Brack et al. 2025. Counting animals in orthomosaics from aerial imagery: challenges and future directions. Methods in Ecology and Evolution. (3) Haneda et al. 2025. Assessing Edge Effect Impacts on Forest Structure and Carbon Stocks in REDD+ projects: an assessment in the Amazon using UAV-LiDAR. Forest Ecology and Management. (4) Lemos et al. 2025. Including the urbanization gradient in the people-centered conservation in Amazonia. Conservation Biology.

**Wagner Vendrame (Environmental Horticulture)** To date for 2025: 7 manuscripts submitted for publication in refereed journals, under review; 2 international invited guest lectures: (1) Vendrame, W. Bioreactors. (2) Vendrame, W. Microgravity. Both presented for Instituto Agrônômico de Campinas (IAC), Brazil. February 19, 2025. Between March 11-14, hosted a group from Colombia, the Corporación Autónoma Regional del Atlántico (CRA), from Barranquilla, Colombia. MOU signed between UF and CRA for collaborative research, similar to a previous MOU with CVC, Corporación Autónoma Regional del Valle del Cauca, Cali Colombia. In March, his students (3) and biologist (1) submitted abstracts for the Florida State Horticulture Society Annual Conference in June 2025.



## UF team co-creates beginners Haitian Creole textbook

*University Press of Florida and Library Press part of team co-led by affiliate faculty Ben Hebblethwaite*

Thanks to Title VI funding, the University Press of Florida, and the LibraryPress@UF, the 29-chapter textbook *Kreyòl pale* (Creole is Spoken) will be available online in June and in print in August. Affiliate faculty Ben Hebblethwaite co-authored and co-edited the textbook. *Kreyòl pale* is designed for beginner learners of the Haitian Creole language, focused on communication scenarios that are the most important for navigating daily life in Haiti and its Diaspora. Dr. Hebblethwaite is also designing an asynchronous, fully online version of first-year Haitian Creole to be offered for the first time in Spring 2026. The course will use *Kreyòl pale*. ♦

## Two Center faculty named Rothman fellows

*Rafa Ramírez Solórzano and Meg Weeks awarded fellowships for humanities scholarship*

Center-based faculty Rafa Ramírez Solórzano and Meg Weeks have been awarded summer fellowships by the UF Center for Humanities and the Public Sphere! The Rothman Faculty Summer Fellowships recognize and support faculty members as they make significant progress on existing research and creative projects during the summer months. Dr. Solórzano and Dr. Weeks are two of six awardees in 2025, both representing Latin American Studies.

Congratulations to Profes Solórzano and Weeks! ♦

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# Snapshots FROM THE SEMESTER



L-R: Center students, staff, faculty celebrate "Galentine's Day;" faculty Pilar Useche, Mary Risner, Rafa Ramírez Solórzano, Luis Felipe Lomelí, and Ariadna Tenorio welcome Bacardi Scholar Mauricio Chavarria (third from left) at dinner reception



L-R: Interim Director Leo Villalón and Event Coordinator Kym Hodges at the end-of-year graduation celebration; Profe Rafa Ramírez Solórzano chats with MALAS first years Jonny, Melisa, and Isabel at the spring brunch; faculty emerita Marianne Schmink reunites with TCD faculty Bob Buschbacher and TCD alum Sinomar Ferreira



L-R: Center faculty celebrate graduation with MALAS cohort; the Centers for African, European, and Latin American Studies and the Mexican American Student Association face off in a friendly football tournament





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