

## ON THE PROFESSION

## Some of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Programmes in Canada

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### LAS at the University of Toronto

A new programme in Latin American Studies has been recently launched at the University of Toronto. Although concentration on Spanish and Portuguese literatures and the development of fluency in languages remains important, the new LAS@UofT is envisioned as a truly multi-disciplinary unit reaching out to a wider constituency of students, faculty and visitors.

LAS@UofT exists to inspire deeper knowledge and experience of Latin America across the University's three-campus community, in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and beyond. Affiliated faculties encourage students to situate their special interests in fields such as Anthropology, Political Science, Spanish and Portuguese Literatures, Geography, History or Sociology within a broader multi-disciplinary framework.

The new programme's deepening and widening is occurring in five ways. First, through course offerings that enhance students' understanding and experience of the region. Browsing the new programme's website and clicking on "courses" reveals what Latin Americanists are currently teaching across the Humanities and Social Science departments and the three campuses at the University of Toronto. A number of the courses are available to students as part of a complementary programme for the first time. In addition, LAS@UofT currently sponsors an introductory undergraduate course on Latin American History, Civilisations and Cultures taught by Victor Rivas, and three specialised seminars for students in the third and fourth years of study. Lorena Gajardo's seminar on "Latino/a Identity in Canada" will explore how Latina/o diasporas have been constructed through the experiences of exile, migration, immigration, and the ways in

which a *Latinidad* emerges both within Latina/o communities and in relation to the Canadian nation and transnational realities. Victor Rivas offers a course on "The Postcolonial Imaginary in Latin America." Current social movements, political events and films in Latin America will be studied in relation to notable expressions of resistance originating in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, visiting anthropologist Susanna Rosenbaum will teach a seminar on "Gender, Migration and Globalization." Here, she will put her own research about Guatemalan and Mexican domestic workers and their employers in Los Angeles, California, into conversation with other experiences and settings in the Americas, including Toronto.

Second, LAS@UofT hosts a variety of regular talks, panels and cultural events that feature visitors from Latin America and around the world. The extra-curricular programming stretches across the disciplines and features both the work going on within our community of scholars and regular injections of energy and ideas from scholars outside. The popular LAS Luncheon Series, held on Wednesdays over the past academic year, has seen discussions of such topics as the neo-Inca rebellion in colonial Andes, the cultural history of the Dominican Republic, the political reforms in modern Colombia and the political mobilizations that have led to Evo Morales's election in Bolivia.

Third, the programme aims to foster equitable engagements and exchanges of knowledge and pedagogy with scholars and students in Latin America. In this central sense, LAS@UofT looks to seize upon the tremendous opportunity and responsibility proffered by its location, its library and other resources to share with others and to lead by example. Fourth, the new unit in Toronto seeks meaningful and sustained engagement with Latin American

communities in the GTA and across Canada—an engagement that will be signaled by its teaching, its efforts at outreach, and in the range of extracurricular programming.

Fifth and finally, Latin American Studies at the University of Toronto looks to be a connective unit, seeking collaborations and intersections with other units at the UofT, across Canada, in Latin America and further abroad. The programme's cooperation has already been various, from a collaboration with geographers and economists from the Universidad de Guadalajara and the University of Toronto at Mississauga on the subject of water shortages in Mexico to film screenings and discussions on Colombia, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Most notable have been Latin Americanists' efforts over the past eighteen months to engage with colleagues, students and visitors from around the world about a centre for the study of the Americas.

The emergence of a reinvigorated Latin Americanist community, innovative curricula and some steadily broadening collaborative horizons are now part of the landscape at the UofT. Latin American Studies at the University of Toronto seeks to become a new blueprint for what an integral, area-based initiative can be. All interested persons are invited to learn more, to participate in its upcoming activities, to share their ideas for improvement and to show support in any way possible. For more information, visit [www.utoronto.ca/las](http://www.utoronto.ca/las), and send your ideas to Ms. Camille Harrison at [camille.harrison@utoronto.ca](mailto:camille.harrison@utoronto.ca). Tel. 416-946-8972.

### **Indigenous Studies Minor Program at the University of Victoria**

The Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences jointly offer an Interdisciplinary program in Indigenous Studies intended to provide both indigenous and non-indigenous students with a core program incorporating indigenous world views and ways of knowing. This is a general program (with focus on the Americas) leading to the BA degree. Students may obtain a Minor by completing the requirements for the General Program together with a Major of Honours program, or other degree program, in another department.

The core program will prepare any student intending to enter a vocation jointly serving indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. It will further prepare indigenous students who are planning to serve in indigenous communities and are enrolled in professional programs at the University of Victoria.

The Indigenous Minor Program is open to all registered students at the University of Victoria.

For further information, please contact Dr. Lidio M. Valdez, acting Director of the program. Telephone 250-472-5094; e-mail: [lvaldez@uwic.ca](mailto:lvaldez@uwic.ca).

### **Simon Fraser University's Latin American Studies Program**

Simon Fraser University has a long tradition of being a strong centre for Latin American Studies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and recently the program has been enhanced by new initiatives by faculty to renovate the program. Within the last couple of years, new faculty have been hired in history (Alec Dawson—emphasis on

ethnicity and nationalism, Mexico); Political Science / Economics (Andy Hira—industrial and innovation policy, Southern Cone); Archeology (Ross Jamison—colonial period, Andean Region); Sociology (Hanna Wittman—MTS and rural agricultural movements, Brazil); and Sociology (Fernando de Maio—Health and inequality, Argentina). In addition, faculty members with related interests (Yildiz Atasoy, Sociology, and Habiba Zaman, Women's studies, both specialists in gender and development) have been added.

The new faculty members are working together with the Director, Gerardo Otero, on restructuring SFU LAS into a new Centre for LA development Studies (CLAS). The new program will allow students to choose from a wide range of courses with Latin American content across the university, with gateway interdisciplinary courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In their senior year, students will complete a capstone project of original research under the direct supervision of an LAS faculty member in their area of interest. The graduate program will ensure that students have strong and secure funding and teaching opportunities in their home department and a solid disciplinary background. LAS will provide additional funding and guidance to promote their field research and supervision.

The end result should be to widen MA course offerings; ease the financial burden on students; and create larger cohort groups. Graduates will have the advantages of both discipline and area specialization and field research.

Recently SFU has been experimenting with a new collaborative MA program called the Master's in Policy and Practice with Capillano College, which prepares students for management positions in the private, non-profit, and public sectors in Latin

America and East Asia, and includes paid work experience in overseas positions. SFU has also started a graduate Development Studies Certificate that offers students a wide array of courses including a seminar specifically geared towards that topic.

Please direct any inquiries to Andy Hira at [ahira@sfu.ca](mailto:ahira@sfu.ca).

### **Latin America at the University of Saskatchewan**

Faculty members at the University of Saskatchewan focus on Latin America in the Colleges of Arts and Science, Agriculture and Medicine, and have initiated new opportunities for students. Research from our faculty members across these colleges and departments spans diverse thematic and geographic topics: from traditional healing techniques among the Maya in Belize to religious conversion in Northern Mexico and the environmental consequences of cotton cultivation in Brazil. Of popular interest to students are the various opportunities for focused study on Latin America. The College of Arts and Science has a LAS stream within the International Studies Program. As well, a significant number of the students in the large Development Studies stream of the same program focus their attention on Latin America. Students in all the colleges in the University have access to a number of study abroad opportunities in Latin America. The largest is the winter term in Guatemala, held in collaboration with the University of Guelph. There is a summer long International Health term in Nicaragua and a shorter summer study term in Cuba. The College of Agriculture has opportunities for study in Mexico and Brazil, as does the College of Commerce. The University also has exchange programs with universities in Mexico.

## DEBATES

## For and Against Chávez The Debate Continues

GOMEZ continued...

Graduate study on Latin American topics at the University of Saskatchewan can be pursued in a variety of different areas. Among the most active are Community Health and Epidemiology where students do work on numerous issues to do with public health options. They are joined by faculty in other departments to create a particular strength in health research in Latin America. The University also has a special focus on indigenous concerns, including work on indigenous issues in Latin America that spans numerous colleges and departments. Each year, a number of graduate students in the Department of History work on Masters and PhD degrees focusing on environmental, indigenous, and peasant topics in Latin America. Opportunities for graduate study also exist in Political Studies, Sociology, Psychology, and in such thematic centres as the Centre for the Study of Cooperatives (which has recently received a large grant to work on cooperatives and globalization) and the Centre for the Study of Agriculture, Law, and the Environment. Relatively generous graduate funding (especially when compared to the cost of living in Saskatoon—called the “Paris of the Prairies” by the Tragically Hip) is available for well qualified graduate students.

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### Countervailing Powers

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Incompetence, corruption, and authoritarianism: on these three pillars, opponents of Hugo Chávez build their case. A comparative defense can be made against any one of these charges in relation to past Venezuelan governments, or, for that matter, to other reformers, from FDR, to Jacobo Arbenz, or Salvador Allende. Indeed, the latter's commitment to proceduralism is often used to bash Chávez, although Allende strengthened the executive branch to advance Chile's economic policies. But comparison to past progressive governments for one that claims to represent a new form of democracy is not enough, so let's take them one by one.

Incompetence is the most difficult charge to make stick. His coalition enjoys not just electoral success, but economic indicators that are the envy of every Latin American country save perhaps Argentina: strong growth, particularly in the non-oil sector of the economy; decreasing unemployment and poverty; rising tax revenue; high currency reserves; and increased savings and consumer power, especially among the poorest fifth. Critics say Caracas has the luck of expensive oil. But Chile's heralded social neoliberalism is equally dependent on the high cost of copper. And the relationship between high oil and Chavismo's accomplishments is not unidirectional: one of Chávez's first initiatives was to end Venezuela's habit of pumping more oil than was allowed under OPEC quotas, helping to prompt a steady increase in world prices.

The success of Chavismo's social *misiones* (described by an Inter-American Development Bank official as striking at the “heart of exclusion” at a “reasonable, sustainable cost”) is confirmed by the opposition's acceptance, however tactically, of the terms of a new social contract. In last month's election, Chávez's challenger, Manuel Rosales, promised to “distribute land to the peasants,” expand the *misiones*, and dole out oil profits directly to the people.

There is a chaotic energy to Chavismo, driven as it is by a lack of ideological rigidity that has generated innovative social experiments. Some work, some don't. Chávez's role as a broker, mediating between contentious constituencies within a broad coalition, adds to the government's try-as-it-goes style. Detractors use this apparent incoherence as cover to distort his administration's record, seeing failure where there is significant improvement. This is most common when commentators cherry-pick outdated statistics to assert that poverty has either remained the same or increased during Chávez's tenure, when it has in fact declined from 41.6 to 33.9 percent between 2000 and 2006.<sup>1</sup> There are shortcomings: an urban housing shortage, crime, capital flight, and not-fast-enough job creation are some areas where there has not been enough progress.

Corruption is a major problem. Nevertheless, prior to 1998, crime flourished in the very institutions that supposedly serve as controls on the executive: in the legislature, courts, and the two-party system. This suggests that it is not Chavismo's unchecked power, but its limited reach that is responsible for the persistence of institutional venality. As a political movement that came to power through the ballot (as opposed to a protracted insurgency that could count on ideologically focused