

LLILAS and the Economic Crisis

by **BRYAN R. ROBERTS** | University of Texas at Austin | b.roberts@austin.utexas.edu

The most immediate impacts of the economic crisis on Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin have been the withdrawal of potential endowments and greater difficulty in getting Foundation funding for research projects and student support in Latin America. Other possible negative impacts, such as a decline in endowment income, less faculty hiring in Latin American Studies and a decline in University support for Latin American Studies are not yet apparent and we do not expect them to be severe. In its current capital campaign, the University is giving priority to matching the endowment of the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin America Studies (LLILAS), but it is clear that it will not be easy in the current economic climate. LLILAS continues to be protected by its reasonably high endowment income, state/university funding of staff positions, as well as Title VI support. The College and University administrations have long been supportive of Latin American Studies for both geographical and institutional reasons such as the visibility of the Benson Latin American Collection, the Blanton Museum's Latin American Art Collection, and the long history of the Institute, which dates to 1940 and to 1962 as one of the first five Title VI National Resource Centers. Unlike many area studies centers, LLILAS did not begin as a language center and draws much of its strength from faculty and students in a broad range of disciplines throughout the University. A University policy to develop collaborative scholarly relations with different Latin American countries, which began last year with a weeklong series of seminars with Mexico City universities, continues, albeit in a more modest form, with meetings in Brazil to coincide with the 2009 LASA Congress.

The impact of the crisis cannot be disassociated from new and old challenges to Latin American studies and to area

studies more generally. The possibilities of collaborating with Latin American universities, research institutes, governmental and non-governmental organizations are now considerable and the vitality of Latin American Studies depends on our developing more teaching and research programs with our colleagues in Latin America. The model of the isolated researcher carrying out studies in Latin America with relatively little collaboration with local institutions and researchers is disappearing, but to replace it with a more effective peer collaboration is costly. One way forward is to develop a coordinated program of student exchanges, joint virtual teaching with universities and colleges in Latin America, collaborative research projects and faculty exchange. These are all developments that we are trying to advance at LLILAS with partner universities and research centers in Latin America, and they usually require not only funding to send our students, researchers and teachers to Latin America, but to help bring their counterparts from Latin America. We would like, for instance, to bring Mexican students in a virtual seminar that we are organizing in the fall of 2009 to Austin for a short period and send our students to Mexico. In the best of times, these developments are difficult to finance, but now there is a clear danger that they will have a much lower priority than the need to sustain existing programs in face of funding shortages.

Other challenges are curriculum changes that threaten to dilute Latin American Studies by reducing our ability to provide a coherent interdisciplinary curriculum. At Austin, this is represented, ironically, by two very positive initiatives: one to internationalize the curriculum and the other to provide a more diverse and intense experience for all undergraduates through a school of undergraduate studies and its core curriculum. The threat is basically to our

command over teaching resources. We have a considerable number of Latin American specialists in a broad range of departments, but we have little control over teaching and thus over the planning of a coherent and interesting Latin American Studies curriculum. The teaching obligations of Latin American specialists at Austin are primarily to their departments. The demands to contribute to the new core curriculum in undergraduate studies and its signature courses, which are financially rewarding to departments, have become new pressures that take away teaching that otherwise would have contributed to the Latin American Studies curriculum. Despite the size of the university and the numbers and breadth of interest of our Latin Americanist faculty, we are finding it difficult to provide an attractive and coherent set of undergraduate courses in Latin American Studies that can satisfy the undergraduate demand for the major. Solutions to this challenge, which involve LLILAS providing some financial incentives to departments and teachers, are made more difficult by financial constraints on the Institute and the University.

I fear that an international studies curriculum may become an even more insidious threat to the integrity of area studies. International studies are attractive for their comparative focus. They can be developed relatively quickly through team teaching of area specialists as well as through the contribution of those disciplines that feel less constrained by the need to understand cultures and language. They can make use of virtual teaching and make contact with students and teachers throughout the world, using inexpensive modes of communication, such as Skype and operating with English as the language of communication. They can be provided cheaply and don't even necessitate studying or travelling abroad. There is the danger

ON THE PROFESSION

El futuro de los estudios latinoamericanos en las universidades estadounidenses

Una perspectiva desde Miami

ROBERTS *continued*

por CRISTINA EGUIZÁBAL | Florida International University | Cristina.Eguizabal@fiu.edu
y ANA MARÍA BIDEGAIN | Florida International University | bidegain@fiu.edu

that they provide a cheap substitute for area programs, such as Latin American Studies, that provide an interdisciplinary, in-depth knowledge of an area, its languages, culture, politics and socio-economics. Latin American Studies when practiced properly is expensive. At Austin, we would like to ensure that all Latin American Studies students at both graduate and undergraduate level spend part of their time in Latin America, learning and/or perfecting a language, taking disciplinary courses in local universities, undertaking small-scale research projects and engaging in service oriented internships. Tuition and living costs may not be substantially higher than those at Austin, but cannot be offset, as they are here, by various forms of part and full-time employment. This is becoming a substantial deterrent to study abroad as the economic crisis reduces savings and limits parental contributions.

To end on a positive note, we are experiencing an increase in applications for Latin American Studies graduate work and the climate for collaboration both on our University's side and on that of our colleagues in Latin America is as good as its ever been in my twenty odd years of being attached to UT at Austin. ■

Cuando las universidades estadounidenses incorporaron a los estudios de área en sus planes de estudio, los estudios latinoamericanos constituían las joyas de la corona. Los países de América Latina eran todavía lugares exóticos, relativamente poco conocidos, pero al mismo tiempo suficientemente cerca desde el punto de vista geográfico para ser accesibles en un día de viaje a más tardar. Para rematar, tanto el español como el portugués eran fáciles de aprender. Treinta años más tarde, los “latinos” hemos dejado de ser exóticos para convertirnos en una “minoría” que está presente en todos los estados de la Unión y posiblemente solo en los lugares más remotos de Hawái haya todavía estadounidenses que no hayan tenido nunca interacciones con latinos—porque hasta en Alaska la migración latina ha estado creciendo. Dos millones de ciudadanos norteamericanos viven en México y cientos de miles de turistas originarios de este país visitan la región al año. En el mundo, solo México tiene un mayor número de hispanohablantes que Estados Unidos.

Como todos sabemos, los estudios de área fueron establecidos por el gobierno federal de Estados Unidos con el fin de construir una base intelectual a la proyección global del país después de la segunda guerra mundial. La necesidad de alimentar a la inteligencia militar en plena guerra fría llevó al Congreso a votar en 1958 la ley de Educación para la Defensa Nacional que creaba los donativos de apoyo federal a los programas universitarios de idiomas extranjeros y estudios de área. En un principio fueron administrados por el departamento de defensa. Con el desarrollo del interés por los estudios internacionales, la administración de los programas internacionales pasó a ser responsabilidad del departamento de educación bajo el Título VI de la Ley de Educación Superior de 1965. Pese a su corte liberal, las

fundaciones privadas Mellon, MacArthur y Ford fueron también importantes financiadores de los estudios de área paralelamente a los estudios internacionales que ayudaron a establecer en varios lugares del mundo, no solo en Estados Unidos. Cuando el presidente Reagan intentó hacer desaparecer al departamento de educación, fue Caspar Weinberger, a la sazón ministro de defensa, quien salió en defensa de los programas Título VI con el argumento de que los militares los necesitaban. El apoyo federal a los estudios de área se mantuvo, aunque se redujo considerablemente.

El fin de la guerra fría y la que parecía ser una marcha inexorable hacia la globalización puso, una vez más, en entredicho a los estudios de área. No solo eso: en la medida en que los programas de estudios de área se multiplicaban en las universidades, surgieron rivalidades presupuestarias con los departamentos y desacuerdos teóricos y metodológicos con las ciencias sociales que siguen considerando a los estudios de área poco rigurosos. Por otra parte la bandera de la multidisciplinareidad e interdisciplinareidad que la concentración en áreas geográficas y culturales favorecía y que los especialistas de área habían enarbolado con gusto ahora la compartían con otras áreas multidisciplinarias tales como estudios culturales, transnacionales, étnicos y de género.

Los atentados del 11 de septiembre demostraron que la historia no había llegado a su fin, que el capitalismo y la democracia liberal tenían poderosos enemigos y que el terrorismo y la guerra iban a ponerle severos límites a la globalización. La vinculación entre inteligencia/defensa y estudios de área volvió a hacerse patente sobre todo con respecto a la necesidad de conocer mejor al mundo islámico.