

The Graduate Program in Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin

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THE TERESA LOZANO LONG Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) may well be the oldest degree program of its kind in the United States. The institute went into operation in the fall of 1940 and was built upon the Latin

American Collection that was started in the early 1920s, a longtime Texas interest in Latin America and Mexico, and the Good Neighbor Policy of the Roosevelt administration. The institute was from its beginning a major player in creating and sustaining academic and public interest in the region.

The graduate program in LLILAS has always offered two degrees—the master’s and the doctorate. The MA is a two-year degree that allows all students to develop a flexible program of work tailored to their own interests. For many MA students LLILAS is a stepping stone toward a PhD in an academic discipline; for others it is a terminal degree that prepares them for work with the federal government in Washington or a nongovernmental or private-sector organization, or to return to Latin America and work there.

The MA offers three plans of study: first, Plan A, which involves writing a thesis in the student’s major area during the second year of work; Plan B, which requires two reports in two disciplines in lieu of a thesis; and Plan C, which lets the student take necessary coursework in methodology that by definition has no Latin American content but that is necessary for completion of a thesis (economics is one such common discipline). All coursework must contain a substantial element of Latin American content to count toward the degree. However, courses that examine a major theme or topic

(e.g., ethnic politics) that does not concentrate on Latin America but permits the student to write a seminar paper on a Latin American topic enable students to obtain disciplinary training while focusing on Latin America.

Each MA student thus creates his or her own program of work. In recent years a prose seminar has been required for all first-year students; it offers a rigorous overview of research questions and methodologies that introduces the students to the current state of inquiry dealing with Latin America, but otherwise students put together their own programs. In Plan A, for example, students name a major field (five courses) and a minor field (three courses). These can be academic disciplines or departments such as anthropology, economics, government, history, sociology, or a language or literature. But the major or minor can also be a regional focus (e.g., Mexican, Brazilian, or Central American studies), or it can be a concentration or theme such as human rights or development studies or race and identity. Students who select either Plan B or C follow this same general scheme, except that in Plan B three fields must be present. With this wide and indeed limitless range of options available, students can create their own course of work to suit their academic interests and career plans.

This flexibility of program creation rests upon having significant resources available on the campus. These include, first, a large number of faculty members, many of whom are concentrated in the humanities (languages and history) as well as the social sciences (anthropology, economics, geography, government, sociology), but who also include scholars from across the campus in architecture,

engineering, law, the natural sciences, and public affairs. In total, around 125 faculty members have Latin America as their major focus of research and teaching. This large number of faculty generates about forty to fifty graduate-level courses every semester with Latin American content. And all of this has as its foundation the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, which is the largest and most comprehensive university library in the United States, and arguably in the world, dedicated to the region. Its total holdings are close to a million volumes, and more, of course, are added each year.

For decades LLILAS has had a range of dual degree offerings with several of the university's professional schools, including the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs, the School of Law, Community and Regional Planning in the School of Architecture, the McCombs School of Business, the Information School, and the College of Communication (journalism, radio-television-film, and communication theory). Students apply and are admitted to each program and complete degree requirements for each MA; they also write either a thesis or a professional report on a topic relevant to both Latin America and the additional program. These dual degree plans prepare the student not only with regional expertise but also with professional training.

LLILAS graduate students can also combine their work with several multidisciplinary institutes on campus, including the Center for Women's and Gender Studies, the Center for Mexican American Studies, the Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, and the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice. These and other centers and institutes allow LLILAS graduate students to expand their expertise and to include insights and perspectives from such areas in their own research.

As noted earlier, LLILAS has from the start offered a PhD degree in Latin American Studies. This degree has been available to a small number of qualified students who can demonstrate to the Admissions Committee that they require a multidisciplinary doctorate that cannot be undertaken in a single academic department. Such students must enter the doctoral program with an MA degree already completed,



Prof. Henry Dietz teaching his graduate seminar.

either at UT or elsewhere. Upon admission, students form a committee that will see them through coursework, comprehensive exams, the development and defense of a proposal, and the dissertation.

The doctoral program recently has undergone some restructuring, and at present has developed three tracks: cultural agency and Maya studies from the Classic period to the present; social inequality, emphasizing race, gender, class, and human rights; and sustainable democracy, with concentrations of law, political institutions, governing resources, and territory. The program also now focuses much of its attention on students from Latin America who have the appropriate training and who will be returning to their home countries in academic capacities.

Latin American Studies at the University of Texas has a long and distinguished history of producing informed and motivated graduates who are well trained to undertake academic work or to become involved in either the public or private sector. With more than seventy years of excellence to build on, the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies looks forward to continuing its mission of encouraging and sustaining highly motivated students to make a difference. ✨

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Lozano Long Endowed Professor Kurt Weyland, Department of Government, highlights a point for his class.