

ILASSA: From Brown Bags to Soccer

by MICHAEL GALE

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PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND FUNDRAISING for the annual ILASSA Student Conference is no small task, and it keeps the students of ILASSA extremely busy. Nevertheless, students in the institute find time for other activities as well.

For starters, each summer ILASSA students work to plan new student orientation for the incoming class of Latin American Studies graduate students. The event is a chance for incoming students to learn about their academic options at the institute, meet fellow students and faculty, and familiarize themselves with Austin.

Throughout the year, ILASSA hosts “Brown Bag” events, where distinguished faculty and guests give brief talks on current events, new research, and other topics of interest to students. Last year, ILASSA enjoyed lunchtime discussions with Juan Haro, a leader of Movement for Justice in El Barrio, an organization that advocates for immigrant and African American housing rights in Harlem; Carlos Gaviria, a 1991 Colombian presidential candidate in 2006 from the Polo Democrático Alternativo and featured speaker at the ILASSA Student Conference; and Daniel Bonilla, Professor at Universidad de los Andes School of Law in Bogotá, Colombia, and director of the Public Interest Law Group of Universidad de los Andes.

The ILASSA Cultural Committee and the Spanish and Portuguese Department also cosponsor movie nights. Last year, *Quien Mato a La llamita Blanca*, *Terra em Transe*, *Memória Del Saqueo*, *Diários de Motocicleta*, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, and *Kamtchatka*, among others, were shown.

The ILASSA soccer team, the Chupacabras, is another activity enjoyed by many ILASSA students. The Chupacabras field coed and men’s teams during the intramural seasons. Spring 2008 marked an important chapter in Chupacabra sports history, as the team won the indoor intramural championship for the first time! The Chupacabras also play an annual game against the LBJ School of Public Affairs “Great Society” team. The game, known as the *Sid Richardson Hall Superclassico* after the building that both departments share, always draws the best, or at least most enthusiastic, soccer players from each department, as well as a good number of spectators and “hinchas” on each side. In the spring 2008 game, ILASSA’s Chupacabras beat LBJ 6–2. After the game, the Chupacabras were awarded the Superclassico Trophy, and both teams celebrated a well-played game with *caparinas* at São Paolo restaurant, the Chupacabra team sponsor. For the latest Chupacabra updates and scores, you can check out <http://soccerlover.org/chupacabras/>.

For the past two seasons, ILASSA also has fielded an intramural softball team. Although the Chupacabra softball team doesn’t have the same collection of trophies as does the soccer team, they are equal in spirit and dedication.

ILASSA also administers the “Chupacabra Listserve,” an online community of Latin American scholars, enthusiasts, and professionals in the Austin area as well as around the country and around the world. It’s a place where students, alumni, and community members can post interesting articles on Latin America, get advice for summer



The Chupacabras, the ILASSA soccer team

travel plans to Latin America, find a summer internship or job after graduation, or discuss current events affecting the region. An ILASSA member is always on hand to moderate listserve content and help sign up new members. For more information on how to join the Chupacabra listserve, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/insts/llilas/studentgroups/ilassa/>.

To unwind after a hard week of classes, thesis research, and soccer games, ILASSA also organizes a weekly Friday happy-hour event. The venue of the week is announced over the Chupacabra listserve, and ILASSA students congregate at the Crown and Anchor, Hole in the Wall, Showdown, Dog and Duck, or wherever there are good music and drink specials to relax, catch up with friends, and meet new colleagues. Last year, ILASSA also organized several happy hours in coordination with other departments, such as the European Student Association, School of Social Work, Community and Regional Planning, and the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

At the end of the school year, ILASSA students have multiple reasons to celebrate. Many second-year students have just turned in their thesis or professional reports. Others are preparing to head home for the summer or travel to Latin America to conduct fieldwork. ILASSA organizes several events to celebrate a successful year and ring in the summer. At the ILASSA Potluck, students are treated (or subjected) to the culinary skills of their

classmates. Superlative awards are also given out to deserving students—such as “Most Likely to Wear a Cowboy Hat,” “Most Likely to Teach at LLILAS,” and the prestigious “Best Male Dancer” and “Best Female Dancer” awards.

The last ILASSA-organized event every year is the graduation dinner. Put together by first-year students with the help of the faculty and staff of the institute, the dinner is a chance for graduating students and their families to celebrate their time spent in LLILAS, and with ILASSA. Last year’s dinner was graciously hosted at the beautiful home of LLILAS Director Bryan Roberts. Students and their families, faculty, and staff were treated to gorgeous weather, delicious food catered by Las Manitas, music, and of course Latin dancing.

ILASSA’s varied activities and events, the crown jewel of which is the ILASSA Student Conference, ensure that graduate students in the institute have plenty to keep them busy. Whether with sports, guests lecturers, or happy hours, ILASSA guarantees that the life of a Latin Americanist at the University of Texas at Austin is filled with more than classes and research. If you’d like to join us at a happy hour, enter into a debate on the Chupacabra listserve, attend a “Brown Bag” session, or play some fútbol, you’re more than welcome!

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LLILAS CONFERENCES

Fall 2007

Asia in Latin America:
Across Four Continents

Congreso de Idiomas Indígenas
de Latinoamérica / Conference
on Indigenous Languages of
Latin America-III (See article p. 37)

Spring 2008

XXVIII Annual ILASSA Student
Conference (See article p. 35)

Urban Segregation and Labor
in the Americas

Transitions in the Cuban Revolution
(See article p. 4)

Abriendo Brecha V:
Activist Scholarship at the
Tejas Global Crossroads

North America and the Dilemma of
Integration: Perspectives on the Future
of the Region (See article p. 43)

The 32nd Maya Meetings—Copán
Archaeology and History: New Finds
and New Research

The Performance of Leftist Govern-
ments in Latin America: What Does the
Left Do Right? (See article p. 14)

The Political and Cultural Economies
of Water in the 21st Century

Mexico-U.S. Migration: Rural
Transformation and Development

Image, Memory, and the Paradox
of Peace: Fifteen Years after the
El Salvador Peace Accords
(See article p. 21)

What’s Left of the Latin
American Left?