

After eleven years at LLILAS, Dr. Shumway finished his term as Director in August 2006 and is now Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. He was succeeded at LLILAS by Dr. Bryan Roberts, C. B. Smith Chair in U.S.-Mexico Relations and Professor of Sociology, now Interim Director.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

AT A RECENT MEETING OF AREA STUDIES PROGRAM DIRECTORS, A FAMOUS POLITICAL SCIENTIST upset almost everyone by informing us that centers like those we directed were academic dinosaurs. He let us know that “real” scholarly work in the social sciences is nowadays so comparative, so global, and so imbued with theoretical considerations that old-fashioned notions of country, region, or even continent should be cast aside. Then he let slip that he never had actually lived abroad for any length of time and that he could not converse in any language other than English. Hmmmm ... Forgive me for wondering how someone incapable of discussing the peculiarities of a particular region somehow felt qualified to discuss the world.

Of course, his criticisms of area studies are widespread, so much so that self-confessed Latin Americanists, Asianists, or Africanists in certain social sciences are increasingly scarce. Good arguments are offered for these trends, although as a humanist, I wonder about the long-term value of research that ignores cultural and historical contexts.

Still, controversies that pit discipline against area studies may be asking the wrong question. More important questions might be, What do area studies programs accomplish? Do they provide a framework for good research, good teaching, good publications, and a good exchange of ideas? As you peruse this publication about the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) at the University of Texas at Austin, you will find good reasons for answering these questions in the affirmative. For example, last year, one of our professors, Rodrigo Sierra, received a major grant from the Moore Foundation to study how national parks in Latin America can help protect endangered species while also contributing to sustainable development. The Mexican Center at LLILAS is doing first-rate work in studying the evolution of political parties in Mexico as that country embraces an increasingly open political system. In collaboration with the UT Performing Arts Center, LLILAS has helped develop a program that facilitates tours for Latin American performing artists, offers extensive community and K–12 outreach on Latin America as viewed through the arts, and even subsidizes the creation of new works. In these three examples, we move from a rich mixture of policy and science in environmental studies to an empirical research project on Mexican political parties to a performing arts program that both presents and subsidizes concerts and plays. These worthwhile activities share one important attribute: they all are done under the umbrella of an area studies program.

So maybe people who see areas studies as too general, too loose, too intellectually vague have a point. But those of us who believe that areas studies also provide an administrative and financial home for worthwhile activities that might go orphaned otherwise also have a point. And that’s my point—and the point of much of what you will read in this publication. Enjoy. ☀

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Shumway'.

NICOLAS SHUMWAY, DIRECTOR  
*Teresa Lozano Long Institute  
of Latin American Studies*

