

# EL TERRAPINO

2024-2025

YEARLY PUBLICATION OF THE LATIN AMERICAN  
AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES CENTER AT UMD

A LOOK BACK AND  
A LOOK AHEAD



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LATIN AMERICAN AND  
CARIBBEAN STUDIES  
CENTER

SEPTEMBER 2025  
LACS.UMD.EDU

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# A Letter from the Director

It is an honor and a delight to serve as the Director of LACS, a role I took on in July 2024. It is humbling to follow in the footsteps of previous directors who have established the Center's academic programs, organized groundbreaking conferences and brought distinguished guests to campus, collaborated with faculty across the University, and helped generations of undergraduate and graduate students learn about Latin America and the Caribbean and contribute to the Center's decades of accomplishments and its ongoing legacy.

The most rewarding and important part about being at LACS is working with people, including undergraduate students in our classes and degree programs, affiliate faculty and other collaborators on campus, the Advisory Board, visitors, and the fantastic staff here at the Center. I was sorry to see Eric Tomalá, the long-time Assistant Director, leave LACS last fall, but I am happy that he has found a new home at the Maryland Robotics Institute. He is the MRI's Assistant Director, and I am sure his coworkers and supervisors there are benefiting as much from his exceptional energy and dedication as myself and previous LACS directors have. Joining us last fall was our new Graduate Assistant, Noelia Mantilla, a PhD student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. I am very pleased that she is here again this academic year. In February, LACS was very fortunate to hire Maya Labarca as its new Program Manager. Maya previously worked in the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, and she earned a BA in Arabic and minors in Spanish and Middle East Studies from UMD before earning her MA in Arabic from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. It was bittersweet to bid farewell to our Postdoctoral Associate of two years, Juan Manuel Díaz, who in June returned to his home country of Argentina, where he is working on several writing projects, including a novel and a long essay. I am thrilled to announce that our new Postdoctoral Associate, who is jointly appointed in the Graduate School, is Jonathan Brower, who earned his PhD in History from UMD. At LACS, Jonathan will continue his research on gender and political discourse in the decades following Haiti's Revolution and independence from France, teach LACS's core courses, and help the Center thrive. Jonathan has dedicated himself to LACS for years, including organizing writing groups and conferences. He also brings a remarkably varied and extensive record of teaching as well as experience in student government and mentorship to LACS and the Graduate School. I look forward to joining our staff, students, and faculty in seeing everything we have planned for this year come to fruition: including LACStories, an initiative that Maya is developing; this spring's Graduate Student Conference titled "Community and Resistance: Reclaiming Knowledge Production," whose planning and organization Noelia is leading; and the events and educational and mentorship opportunities Jonathan will put together, including professional development workshops and continuing the Graduate Lecture Series that Juan Manuel hosted during his time here.

My main goal as Director is to continue providing a space where faculty and students can talk and learn about topics essential to understanding Latin America and the Caribbean, such as those related to events we hosted or co-sponsored last year, including critical and original approaches to the Caribbean, language learning and power dynamics, documentary fiction, immigration and maintaining contacts with countries of origin, Central American film, and efforts to stop deforestation in Brazil. The LACS community has already made strides in additional goals: establishing new ties with local organizations, increasing the Center's inter-college collaboration at UMD, fostering undergraduate student involvement, and sustaining LACS's long history of providing a space for students at all levels to come together, support one another, write, and find a space to relax and have fun. I can't wait to see how this academic year comes together, and I thank everyone who contributes to the Center's success and who is interested in learning more about and adding to LACS's accomplishments and promise.

# Meet our 2024-2025 Postdoctoral Fellow: Dr. Jonathan Brower!

We are excited to welcome Dr. Jonathan Brower as the new Postdoctoral Associate at the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center (LACS) and The Graduate School (TGS)!

Dr. Brower is a historian of Haiti and French colonialism whose work examines how postrevolutionary political leaders used gendered discourse to shape ideas about citizenship, power, and nationhood in 19th-century Haiti. He earned his Ph.D. in History with a certificate in Latin American and Caribbean Studies from the University of Maryland in 2022. His current research explores how Haitian political elites employed familial language and gendered metaphors to convey their visions of the nation, citizenship, and authority in the years following independence.



Dr. Brower's connection to LACS runs deep. As a graduate student, he helped establish and lead both the LACS Graduate Writing Group and the LACS Dissertation Support Group, creating vital spaces for mentorship and scholarly development. He also worked closely with undergraduates in the LACS Capstone course, supporting interdisciplinary research on Latin America and Latinx communities in the U.S. Most recently, he has led Café con LACS, a weekly graduate writing group that fosters community and collaboration in scholarly endeavors.

Beyond his research, Dr. Brower brings a deep commitment to graduate student success. As president of the History Graduate Student Association, he organized professional development workshops, co-founded the HGSA Colloquium on Teaching, and advocated for diversity, equity, and inclusion within and beyond his department. His extensive experience mentoring students—especially through writing groups and interdisciplinary research—aligns with TGS's mission to support graduate students across disciplines and backgrounds. In this role, he will collaborate with TGS to expand professional development programming and introduce graduate students to a range of post-degree career paths.

As Postdoctoral Associate, Dr. Brower will help strengthen LACS's interdisciplinary curriculum and research community. He will teach core undergraduate courses—including LACS234, LACS235 and LACS458—and support graduate students through advising and programming with TGS. His leadership, student-centered approach, and commitment to promoting and advocating for an inclusive, anti-racist pedagogy will be a tremendous asset to both LACS and TGS.

# LACS Calendar

✱ 2025 - 2026

## September

- 17** LACS/SACNAS Graduate Student Open House
- 22** Grad Soup Social (Discussion: Research Resilience)



## November

- 6** Frida and Diego's Other House (and the Mystery of Eileen Gray in Mexico) - Lecture
- 12** Undergraduate Open House
- 19** Grad Soup Social



## February \*

- 11** Ángel Rama Commemorative Event
- TBD** Grad Lecture Series



## April \*

- 10 - 11** Annual Grad Student Conference
- 20 - 24** Caribbean Week
- 22** Caribbean Music Event



\*Spring Dates Subject to Change

## October

- 22** Grad Soup Social
- 21** Celia Cruz Lecture and Commemoration
- 30** Día de los Muertos



## December

- 12** Undergrad and Grad Joint Soup Social
- TBD** Grad Lecture Series



## March \*

- TBD** Grad Lecture Series
- 12** LACS 235 Class Visit with Oscar Casares



## May \*

- TBD** Grad Soup Social



- Every Wednesday: ChillLACS **3**
- Every Wednesday: Café con LACS

# Year of Music

At LACS, we are excited to declare 2025–2026 the Year of Music.

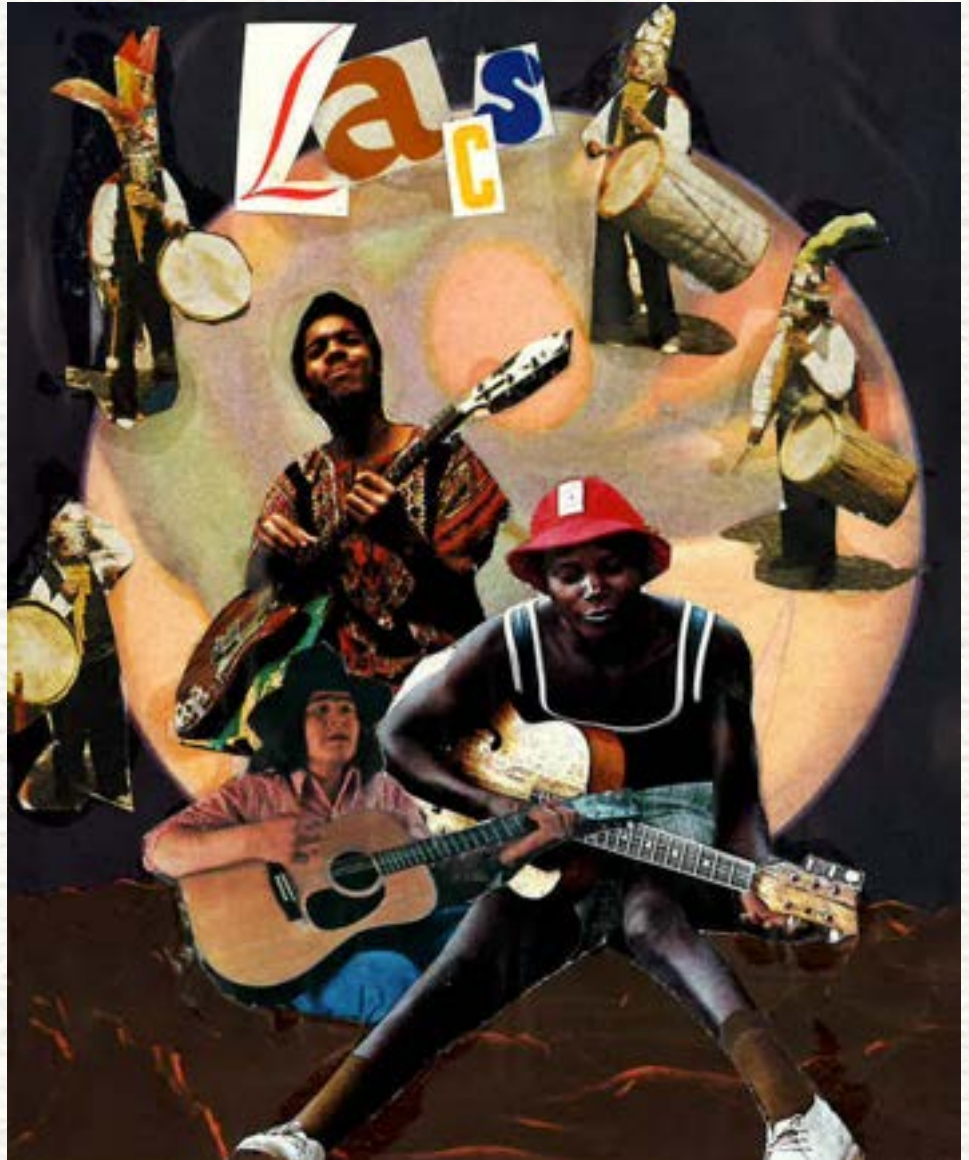
In a time marked by uncertainty and injustice, the need to connect—in solidarity, in empathy, and in joy—feels more urgent than ever. Music offers us a powerful invitation to come together. It welcomes us to listen deeply, to learn from perspectives different from our own while celebrating the shared rhythms that unite us, and to discover moments of peace amid the chaos. Music is an ocean—vast, ever-moving, and filled with stories that reflect the richness and complexity of the human experience. Its genres and innovations are the currents sweeping us toward each other, offering not only a chance to hear but to truly listen—to be transformed by the voices and visions of others. As Anamaria Sayre, host of NPR's Alt.Latino, says of the importance of music to the Latino community today:

**“Being seen in this country... I think one of the most effective ways to do that is to see our art, to hear our art, to hear the variety and the diversity and the complexity of our expression and our experiences. It all lives in the music.”**

In this Year of Music, we invite our community to explore, create, and find moments of musical connection together. Let music be our shared language—one that brings us closer, helps us feel seen, and strengthens the bonds that hold us all.

## **Musical Events and Initiatives:**

- \* ChillLACS – this year, each ChillLACS will focus on a different musical genre or artist from the region paired with a visual artist. Art is never created in a vacuum, and these relaxing sessions will explore the social and political context that led to musical and artistic innovation across Latin American and the Caribbean.
- \* Graduate Student Conference – the graduate student conference will culminate in a DJ set by the keynote speaker Yuliana Ortiz to celebrate the power of music.
- \* Caribbean Week – Dean Stephanie Shonekan will hold a conversation with LACS alumni about Caribbean music during Caribbean Week in April 2026.
- \* Celia Cruz Event – Juan Carlos Quintero-Herencia, Rosa Marquetti, and Rebeca Moreno will hold an event celebrating the 100th birthday of legendary Cuban singer Celia Cruz.



# Call for Papers

## COMMUNITY AND RESISTANCE: RECLAIMING KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

A Conference at the University of Maryland, College Park

**April 10-11**

Keynote Speaker: Yuliana Ortiz

The graduate students of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) at the University of Maryland, College Park, invite proposals for our upcoming conference, "Community and Resistance: Reclaiming Knowledge Production." Our conference seeks to create a horizontal and transdisciplinary space to learn about, consider, and practice ways of producing knowledge that counter and offer alternatives to the kinds of knowledge that depend upon and reproduce that which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes as "epistemic violence." In contexts of epistemic violence, dominant actors and structures often invalidate and seek to silence or discredit ways of knowing that emerge from marginalized agents and communities. One example of that is the destruction of Indigenous knowledge by colonial education systems and the imposition of dominant narratives that erase the experiences of marginalized people, leading to their reduced credibility as knowers within the academy. At the same time the acts of resistance keep emerging to deal with the impositions of power and violence. Such is the case of what Cristina Rivera Garza proposes in *The Restless Dead: Necrowriting and Disappropriation*, where she states that communal writing is a practice of resistance to necropolitics and contexts where violence has become commonplace. Thus, necrowriting is understood as processes of "[...] eminently dialogical writing, that is; that in which the empire of authorship, as a producer of meaning, has radically shifted from the uniqueness of the author to the function of the reader, who, instead of appropriating the material of the world that is the other, disappropriates it."

We are also inspired by Edouard Glissant, who invites us to think about how interdependence, opacity, and cross-cultural influences can be forces of knowledge and resistance. In his book *Poetics of Relation* (1990), for example, Glissant describes a "latent, open poetics, with a multilingual intention, in tune with all that is possible." This poetics conceives of the conditions created by coloniality as providing spaces for encounter and openness to multiple cultures and communities. Thus we do not seek to define community as a shared essence or a closed identity, but rather to think about its capacity to relate to other communities, bodies, and territories.

We invite academics, artists, and scientific researchers, especially graduate students and early career scholars, to present papers that address the topics of how knowledge is or historically has been generated and transmitted in Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **The following questions may help guide proposals:**

How is knowledge relational? How is it shaped by communities, orality, and corporeality?

What forms of knowledge are produced at the margins, and how do they challenge epistemic hierarchies?

What poetic or scientific methodologies can be imagined from communality and relation?

How is knowledge produced from territorial resistance, memory, and collective care?

### **Possible Topics Include:**

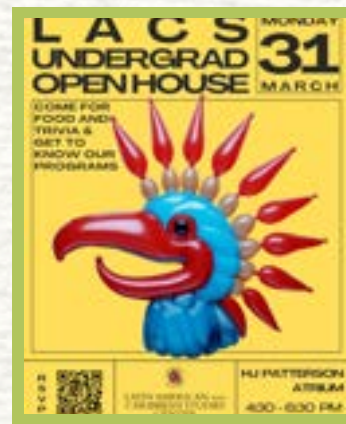
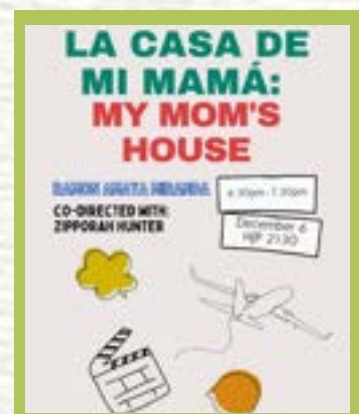
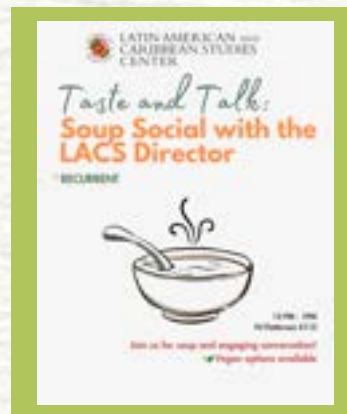
- Embodied knowledge: Art, body, and memory
- Situated science, community feminisms, and collaborative practices
- Poetics of opacity, miscegenation, and relationality
- Communal experiences of knowledge creation and dissemination
- Decolonial education and pedagogies of care
- History and memory
- Epistemic injustice and epistemicide
- Cultural heritage preservation

Presentations can be  
in Spanish, English,  
French, or  
Portuguese.

Formats accepted: Panels and papers. Please send proposals consisting of a title and an abstract of no more than 250 words to [lacs@umd.edu](mailto:lacs@umd.edu) by

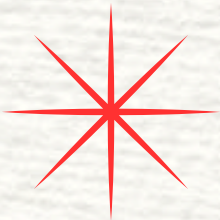
**November 28.**

# A Look Back: A Year in Events



# Welcome Event for Ryan Long and Open House

On September 10, 2024, the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center proudly announced the appointment of Dr. Ryan Long as its new director. Dr. Long brings a wealth of academic expertise in Latin American literature and culture to the Center. Dr. Long's research primarily focuses on Mexican literature and culture. He has authored two monographs: *Queer Exposures: Sexuality and Photography in the Fiction and Poetry of Roberto Bolaño* and *Fictions of Totality: The Mexican Novel, 1968, and The National-Popular State*. His extensive background, which includes a deep commitment to encouraging student engagement and diversity on campus, makes him a valuable addition to the Center. His vision, which includes deepening the Center's local connection to the University of Maryland's Latin American and Caribbean communities, gives us confidence in his leadership.

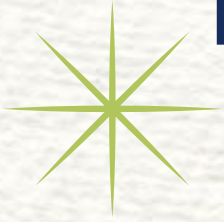


Right: Dean Shonekan delivers opening remarks with Dir. Long.

Below: Dr. Long addresses Open House guests.

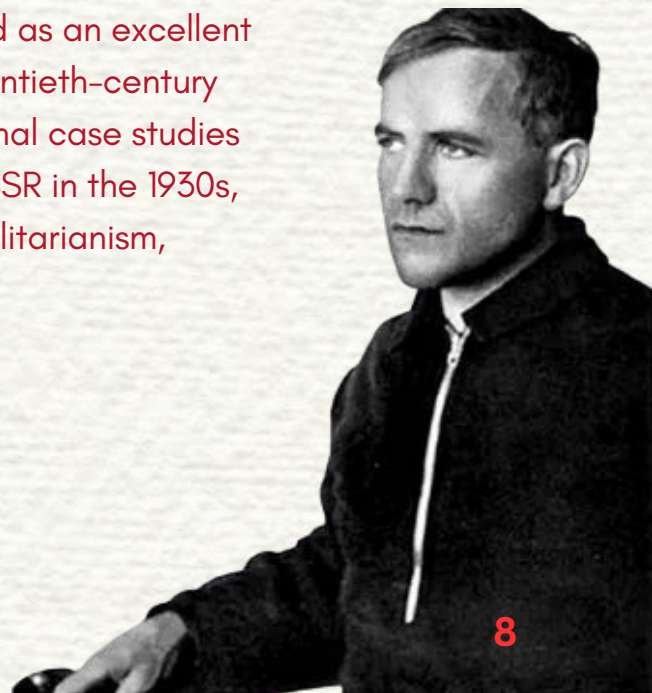


# Georg Leidenberger Presents New Book about Architect Hannes Meyer and Radical Modernism



On October 8<sup>th</sup> Georg Leidenberger, professor of History at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, visited for the presentation of his book, ***Architect Hannes Meyer and Radical Modernism***, a biography about the polemical architect, second director of the Bauhaus, and administrator of social housing and hospital design in Mexico. Out of curiosity and “drawn by the originality and powerful language of his modernist manifestos,” Georg Leidenberger explores Hannes Meyers’ work and trajectory in his book published with the support of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, which provided two research fellowships that allowed Leidenberger to travel to Germany and the United States to access the archives. He also stayed at the University of Louisville as a semester-long Frederic Lindley Morgan Scholar of Architecture, which allowed him to advance the project. The author states that he applied his formation as a historian to understand Meyer by examining *his* times rather than judging him based on present-day categories and values. This is the biography of a figure who inspires in his biographer “a dynamic in which empathy and comprehension coexisted with criticism and outright rejection” (10).

For Leidenberger, Meyer’s work and trajectory served as an excellent window through which to expose key aspects of twentieth-century history, including modern art and architecture, national case studies such as the republic of Weimar Germany and the USSR in the 1930s, and the relationship of art to the turmoil of war, totalitarianism, and displacement.



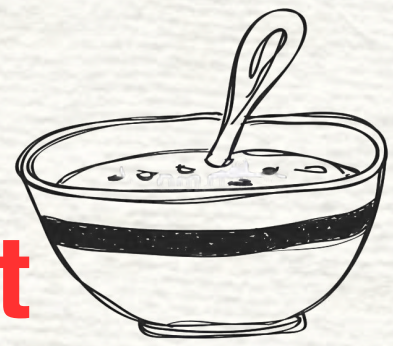


One of the buildings that best evokes Meyer's architectural vision is the Children's Home in Mümliswil, Switzerland, completed in 1939. It has an oval cafeteria and rectangular wings of classrooms and dormitories. The common area is the most important feature, yet for Meyer, the private spaces were also carefully designed.



During the book presentation, Leidenberger showed photographs of Meyer that are included in his book. The book also includes drawings and paintings that were part of various archives consulted by Leidenberger, who was also aided by his collaboration with Pierre Meyer-Zamora, Meyer's grandson.

# Taste and Talk: Soup Social Event



On September 17, 2024, the LACS community gathered for a delightful Soup Social to welcome the new director of the Latin American & Caribbean Studies Center. The event was not only a chance to indulge in homemade soups, but also an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation and forge connections. Since its first iteration, there have been four editions of this event that have strengthened the LACS community and served up delicious meals in the process!

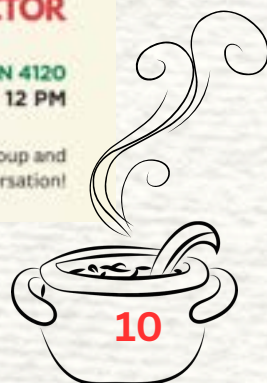


## TASTE AND TALK

**SOUP SOCIAL  
WITH THE  
LACS DIRECTOR**

**HJ PATTERSON 4120  
12 PM**

Join us for soup and  
engaging conversation!



# Soup Social Recipes

## LOCRO DE PAPA – Potato Soup

Traditional Ecuadorian Dish

- 4 cloves garlic, finely minced
- Oil
- 3/4 cup diced yellow onions
- 3/4 teaspoon cumin
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper, plus more to taste
- 1 teaspoon achiote powder (annato)
- 1 1/2 lb. peeled and roughly chopped yukon gold potatoes
- Avocado
- 1 teaspoon salt, or as desired
- 3/4 cup of milk (we used coconut milk for our own vegan version)
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped cilantro



In a large pot over medium heat, add in a tablespoon of oil and the achiote powder and cook for about a minute.

Next, add in the onions, cumin, and black pepper. Cook for about 4 minutes or until the onions begin to soften, then add the garlic and cook for a minute more.

Add in the potatoes and mix until. Cook for about 5 minutes.

Pour in water along with the salt and bring everything to a boil. Once boiling, lower to a simmer and cover the pot. Cook for 25-30 minutes, or until the potatoes are soft.

Remove the lid. Mash the potatoes but try to leave some cubes to keep some texture in it.

Add in the milk and allow the mixture to come to a low boil until the soup thickens.

Adjust seasonings to taste and serve with a side of cheese and/or avocado.

# SOPA DE MAÍZ – Corn Chowder

NYT Cooking recipe by Mark Bittman

- 4 to 6 ears of corn (or frozen)
- 1 tablespoon butter or neutral oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tomatoes, cored, seeded and chopped (optional)
- 1 cup whole or low-fat milk (can be substituted for coconut milk)
- ½ cup chopped parsley (optional)

Shuck the corn and slice the kernels off with a paring knife into a bowl. Place the cobs in a pot with 4 cups of water, bring to a boil, cover, and let simmer while you prepare the rest.

In a saucepan over medium-high heat, melt the butter or heat the oil. Add the onion and potatoes with a pinch of salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion softens, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and cook for another 1-2 minutes.

Once the cobs have simmered for at least 10 minutes, strain the liquid into the onion-potato mixture. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. When the potatoes are tender, add the corn kernels and milk, and heat through. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Garnish with parsley and serve.



# SOPA DE SETAS – Oyster Mushroom Soup

From the Mexican Vegetarian Cookbook by Margarita Carrillo Arronte



- 4 cups vegetable stock
- 3 pasilla or mulato chiles, seeded
- 6 slices of vegetarian bacon, chopped
- 1 onion, minced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 600 g of oyster mushrooms, shredded (can use other mushrooms if desired)
- 2 large sprigs of epazote
- sea salt and black pepper

Bring half of the stock to a boil and add the chiles. Remove from heat and let the chiles soak and soften for 15 minutes. Tip into a food processor and blend into a paste. Pass the paste through a strainer and set aside.

Fry the veggie bacon in a pan over medium heat until golden and crispy. Remove from heat and place on a paper towel to absorb excess fat.

Sauté the garlic and onion in the remaining bacon fat (top up with olive oil as needed). Add the mushrooms and cook until they have released their juices. Add the Chile paste, epazote, and the remaining stock, and simmer to allow the flavors to mingle.

Season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve hot with bacon as a garnish.

# REPE – Plantain and Potato Soup

From the Loyalita's Recipes website

- 10 green plantains peeled and diced.
- 1-2 small potatoes peeled and diced.
- 2 tbs oil
- 1 white onion diced
- 2 garlic cloves crushed
- 4 oz of cheese: quesillo a fresh farmer's type cheese – can also use queso fresco or mozzarella
- ½ cup of milk or cream
- 1 bunch of cilantro finely chopped – about ½ cup already chopped
- 8 cups of water
- Salt to taste.

Heat the oil in a large soup pot, make a refrito or base for the soup by adding the diced onion and crushed garlic, cook until the onions are soft, about 5 minutes.

Add the 8 cups of water and bring to a boil.

Add the diced green bananas to the boiling water. Add 1-2 small potatoes, peeled and diced.

Cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the bananas or plantains are soft, about 15-20 minutes. It will take longer for the plantains to cook than the bananas.

In the same pot, gently mash some of the plantain pieces to help thicken the soup.

Crumble the cheese and add it to the soup

Stir in milk or cream, cilantro and salt

Remove from the heat and serve with slices of avocado and cheese.



# Día de los Muertos Celebration

On October 30, LACS and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) came together to host a vibrant Día de los Muertos celebration that brought students and faculty together for an afternoon of reflection and creativity.

The event began with setting up and decorating a traditional altar. The altar was adorned with meaningful offerings and paper marigolds, creating a space for remembrance and honoring loved ones who have passed.

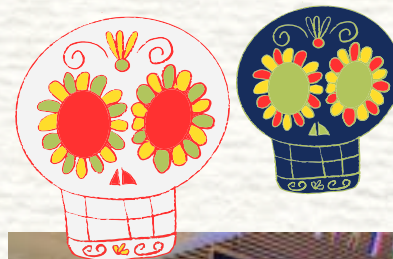
The event formally opened with brief remarks from LACS Director Ryan Long and representatives from both SACNAS and LACS. This was followed by a presentation from Edgar Moctezuma, who shared the cultural and historical significance of Día de los Muertos.



The scent of Pan de Muerto and warm Champurrado (Mexican hot chocolate) welcomed everyone to enjoy a communal meal, followed by a hands-on papel picado workshop, where participants cut intricate designs into colorful tissue paper.

This event was a wonderful reminder of the importance of collective memory and cultural celebration. It honored the spirit of Día de los Muertos not only through ritual and food, but through the act of gathering—

bringing together community in a space of reflection, joy, and shared heritage.



# Café con LACS: Community Writing Hours

Postdoctoral Affiliate Jonathan Brower hosted open writing hours every Thursday throughout the academic year. Café con LACS will continue this year every Wednesday from 12-2pm and is open to anyone looking to write in a shared space with the encouragement of others.





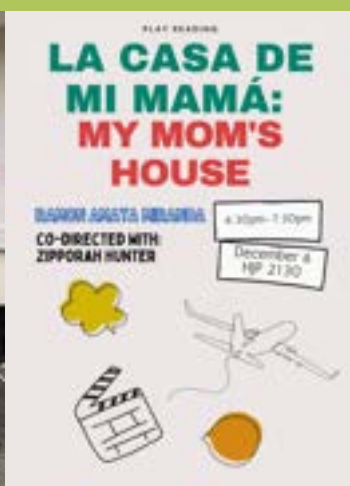
# THEATRE, COMMUNITY, MIGRATION

In December 2024, LACS had the pleasure of hosting a dramatic reading of ***La casa de mi mamá: My Mom's House***, a two-act bilingual play written by Ramón Miranda Amaya and co-directed by Zipporah Hunter. The event brought together students, faculty, and community members for an evening of storytelling that explored themes of home, language, and generational healing.

The play invited the audience to reflect on the complexity of culture and the ways language—slang, dysfluencies, and accents—shapes how we express ourselves and connect to others.

Following the reading, attendees engaged in a conversation with the playwright, discussing the challenges of writing across languages, the personal roots of the narrative, and the broader significance of reclaiming intergenerational narratives.

*La casa de mi mamá* was more than a performance; it was a space for community and reflection.

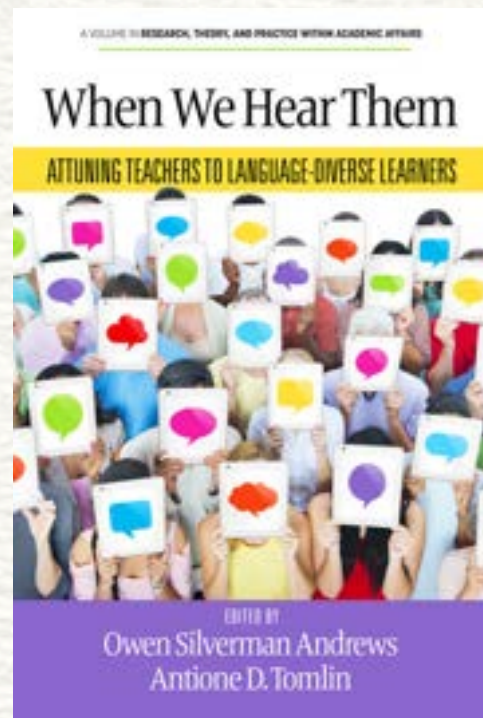




# Language Justice in the Americas



Owen Silverman Andrews with Director Long



In Fall 2024, LACS hosted “Language Justice in the Americas,” which brought together educators and scholars committed to advancing equity for language-diverse learners. Centered on the new book ***When We Hear Them: Attuning Teachers to Language-Diverse Learners***, co-edited by Owen Silverman Andrews and Antione D. Tomlin, the conversation highlighted the urgent need for educators to recognize and affirm students’ full linguistic repertoires. The event emphasized that language is deeply tied to culture, belonging, and power, and that classrooms can either reinforce or resist structures of oppression depending on how language is treated.

Owen Silverman Andrews, a co-editor of the book and a proud LACS alumnus, framed the conversation by emphasizing the need for educators to listen more carefully and intentionally to the linguistic realities of their students. His dual role as a language instructional specialist and a doctoral student reflects the book’s roots in both theory and classroom practice.

Speakers explored how language justice intersects with heritage language education, anti-colonialist knowledge production, and student support systems. They stressed that affirming students’ linguistic practices can challenge racism and linguistic subordination, while also empowering communities that are navigating intergenerational language loss. The event invited participants to reflect on their own practices and commit to creating educational spaces that not only accommodate but actively celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity.



## A Word from Juan Manuel Díaz



### Our wonderful 2023-2025 Postdoctoral Fellow reflects on his time at LACS.

My experience as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center (LACS) has been invaluable. I had the opportunity to design and teach courses in my area of specialization, testing new materials, ideas, and approaches with students from a wide range of disciplines. This diversity turned the classroom into an extraordinary space for experimentation, discussion, and mutual understanding. I can't say for sure whether I'm a good professor now, but I'm certain that I'm a far better one than I was two years ago.

For any literary critic, time is the most essential resource—reading and writing demand a great deal of it. At LACS, I had the privilege of time to continue my research, as well as multiple opportunities to share and refine my work. Forums such as the Writing Workshop and Café con LACS allowed me to discuss my findings with advanced Ph.D. students, whose feedback has been truly significant.

LACS also provided the material and human resources necessary to organize a series of events I consider crucial for recognizing the contributions of graduate students: the LACS Graduate Lecture Series. Through these monthly lectures, our graduate students asserted their roles as professionally trained scholars, offering insights into their research and its future potential. The goal was to inspire and motivate the academic community, encourage thoughtful reflection on policy and funding decisions, and contribute to the ongoing development of Latin American and Caribbean studies and its community.

Finally, the most difficult aspect of my time at LACS to evaluate in strictly academic terms—and yet perhaps the most remarkable—was the prevailing atmosphere of friendship and camaraderie. LACS offers many opportunities to build meaningful connections, from the Lecture Series and book presentations to cultural celebrations like Día de los Muertos and the Open House. For me, LACS was not only a place of study and research, but also a space for personal growth and self-discovery, something deeply connected to the experience of happiness.



# The LACS Graduate Lecture Series

**JOIN  
FEARLESS  
IDEAS**

Each year, the LACS Postdoctoral Fellow organizes a series of lectures featuring research related to Latin America and the Caribbean from graduate students across disciplines. LACS would like to thank all of the wonderful graduate student researchers who contributed to a year of intellectually enriching content. And thank you to Juan Manuel Díaz for organizing this series.



**An Affected Vision: A Study of Three Contemporary Latin American Female Writers**

Andrea Torres Armas,  
Spanish and Portuguese



**Disaster Risk Reduction in Guatemala: Case Studies on Information, Communication, and Memory Systems**

Sergio García,  
Civil and Environmental Engineering



**Kodak en Main: Washerwomen, Prisoners, and the Parade of the Picturesque in U.S.-Occupied Haiti**

Danielle LaPlace,  
Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies



**Merging the Agendas of Social Movement Organizations with Twitter Users: The Displacement of the Professional Media by Prosumers**

Alejandra Toxtle-Tlachino,  
Government and Politics



**Impeachment By Popular Demand: Analyzing Citizens' Decision-Making on Presidential Impeachment**

Flavia Batista,  
Government and Politics



**From Individualism and Competition to Cooperation and Solidarity: Can School Change this Paradigm?**

Virginia Gomes,  
International Ed. Policy



**Understanding How Mental Health Professionals Provide Care to Black Caribbean Communities in Three Countries**

Twanna Hodge,  
Information Studies



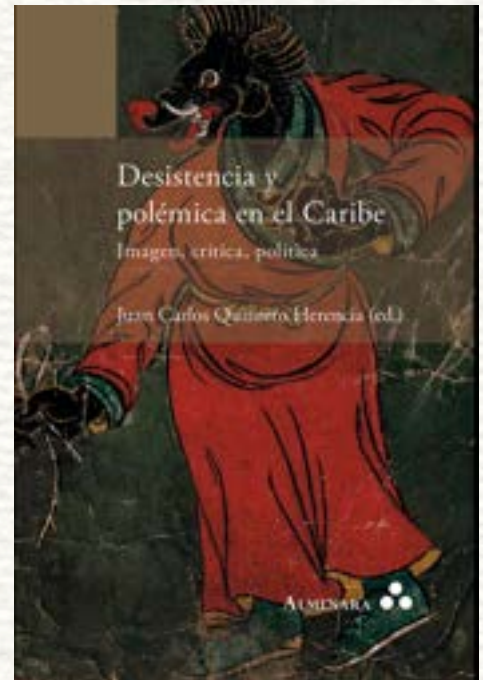
**The Bitcoin Shock: Crypto, Issue Salience, and Audience Considerations in Bukele's El Salvador**

Juan Diego Alvarado,  
Government and Politics

# DESISTENCIA Y POLÉMICA EN EL CARIBE

## Imagen crítica, política

In April, LACS held a presentation and conversation about ***Desistencia y polémica en el Caribe: Imagen, crítica, política***, edited by Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese. Rodney Lebrón Rivera (Princeton University) and Nanne Timmer (Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society) offered timely analyses of the importance of the work. The project was launched at a symposium at UMD in 2019, and the resulting anthology is in dialogue with a fast-changing world that has since seen a global pandemic and a political landscape in flux, with new and evolving relationships to totalitarianism. As such, chapters that explore nostalgia and memory, decoloniality, bodies, and animality, and the development of island poetics invite the reader to deepen their understanding of Caribbean discourse, coastal imaginaries, and aesthetic frameworks that challenge a monolithic or exoticized approach to Caribbean Studies.



# ChilLACS



Program Manager Maya Labarca hosted a weekly art, music, and tea time to unwind from the week with some creativity and calm. Each week, a new artist was featured with historical context to situate their style in its artistic movement. In fall 2025, all are welcome to come to ChilLACS on Wednesdays from 2-4 pm in the HJP Atrium.



# GRADUATES

MEET THE NEWEST ALUMNI OF THE  
LACS GRAD STUDENT COHORT

## DANIELLE LAPLACE



In addition to completing the LACS Graduate Certificate, Dr. LaPlace successfully defended her dissertation, **"HOW WE ACCOMPLISH THIS WORK: BLACK LABOR AND U.S. IMPERIAL PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN, 1898-1934."**

She will be starting as a tenure-track Assistant Professor at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth in Fall 2025.

”

The Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center (LACS) is forever in my heart. This wonderful community of people from across the university has sustained me from the beginning of my time at UMD in 2019. Through the support of LACS graduate students and LACS leadership, I forged connections and remained engaged in my program, and I hope I also enriched the experiences of my LACS peers.

## MARCO POLO JUÁREZ CRUZ



Dr. Juárez successfully defended his dissertation, **"ROUTES AND NETWORKS OF MEXICAN ABSTRACTION ACROSS THE AMERICAS (1958-1970)."**

This fall, he will be starting as tenure-track Assistant Professor of Art History with a specialization in Latin American Art at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

”

As an immigrant, LACS was a welcoming space to celebrate the multi-diverse cultures of the Americas. It gave me friends who supported me throughout graduate school and helped me navigate uncertainty and isolation. LACS also allowed me to practice interdisciplinarity and speak about Mexican cultural heritage while learning pedagogies of care.

# SOFÍA OLIVAR



In addition to completing the LACS Graduate Certificate, Sofía Olivar successfully defended her Master's Thesis, **"DESIGN'S ROLE IN THE REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR ON STAGE."** After graduation, she will be working as a CAD design intern with Disney Live Entertainment in California.



When I was thinking about my thesis project [while in my LACS courses], I had this epiphany about the connection between my work and the importance of representation. It makes me very happy and inspired to find how [my degree and the certificate] both feed into each other and overlap.

# NOHELY ALVAREZ



Dr. Nohely Alvarez successfully defended her thesis, **"EVERYDAY ECONOMIES: NARRATIVES AND NEGOTIATIONS OF CULTURAL ECONOMIC PRACTICES IN LANGLEY PARK, MARYLAND."** After graduation, she will be working as a Postdoctoral Associate at Georgetown University, in the Georgetown-Howard Center for Medical Humanities and Health Justice Initiative.



LACS played a vital role in my doctoral journey, offering a supportive space for intellectual exchange and community-building across campus. Through LACS, I connected with scholars who have become friends and collaborators.

# SERGIO GARCIA MEJÍA



In addition to completing the LACS certificate, Dr. Mejía successfully defended his dissertation: **"TOWARD IMPROVED EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION MESSAGES: A LINGUISTIC COMPARISON OF SPANISH AND ENGLISH SHORT WARNINGS FOR TROPICAL CYCLONES."**

Sergio now plans to complete the recording of his first music album and publish it, and spend more time with his family in Guatemala.



LACS was a genuine hub for the community. The friendships I formed there helped me grow as a student, researcher, and individual —bonds that will endure across time and borders.

# Minor Spotlight: Jacqueline Herrera's Internship with CAFE



Jacqueline Herrera graduated this semester with a major in Studio Art and a minor in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. For her LACS486 Internship, she worked at the Cultural Academy for Excellence (CAFE) in Prince George's County. CAFE is a non-profit organization that supports children by advancing their skills through academic tutoring and creative lessons. Here, she shares her experience.

As an undergraduate pursuing a minor in Latin American Caribbean Studies, it allowed me to interact with students who grew up in Spanish-speaking households, and thus I could communicate with them a little better, such as translating some Spanish words to English for them. There were also multiple occasions where I was requested to translate phone calls, conversations, and announcements, as many parents of the children were Spanish speakers.

I feel that my work has contributed to CAFE's goals through teaching interactive lessons of both English and Art. On Tuesdays, I would individually tutor one or two students, named Oliver and Daisy. I found that the most successful tutoring days were when I created worksheets that allowed for more creativity, such as cutting and pasting answers, or drawing inside squares to match their selected answer. On Fridays, I would have to plan and set up an art activity for the children.

Through my participation in this internship, I have learned about the importance of communication. I found that the people who worked alongside me were very helpful when I had to ask for advice from them.

I think my greatest contributions were assisting in teaching the two students during the tutoring sessions, encouraging them to be creative during the Friday sessions, and helping my peers with occasional translation. For the future, I think that this experience has developed my social skills, as well as helped me understand the importance of giving engaging lessons when tutoring. I am happy that I was able to learn more about myself and the community through my work at CAFE.



# Among Students

LACS connected with students across campus through events like the First Look Fair, Freefest 2024, and Maryland Day. Thanks to our wonderful volunteers, we were able to meet with the community, lead fun trivia games, and spread the word about LACS' undergraduate and graduate programs. Find us at all of your favorite UMD events this year!

**Learn More**



Come visit us in  
H.J. Patterson  
Hall on the 4th  
Floor!

[lacs@umd.edu](mailto:lacs@umd.edu)



**Undergraduate Programs**

**MINOR AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

**Graduate Certificate**

**OPEN TO ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS**



**CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS**

- 3 LACS 608 - Perspectives on Latin America and the Caribbean (or equivalent theory course)
- 3 LACS 609 - Colloquium (1 credit per semester for 3 semesters)
- 3 LACS 688 or 689 - Experiential Learning or Research Praxis
- + 3 One Elective Course - Approved by Director

**12 CREDITS**

In addition to English, students must demonstrate advanced proficiency in one of the other languages of the Americas: indigenous languages, a creolized language such as Haitian Creole, colonial languages - Spanish, Portuguese, French - or other language considered by the program administration to be relevant to study of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The program will help prepare students for an academic career in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, helping them develop skills necessary for the private, nonprofit and government sectors.

LACS helps contextualize students' graduate degrees and provides regional perspectives that enrich and inform academic and professional objectives.



**CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS**

- 3 LACS 234 Issues in Latin American Studies I
- 3 LACS 235 - Issues in Latin American Studies II
- 3 LACS 250 OR 251 - History of Latin America
- 3 LACS 458 - Senior Capstone
- + 9 Elective Courses 300 and/or 400 levels

**21 CREDITS**

**MINOR REQUIREMENTS**

- 3 LACS 234 OR 235 Issues in Latin American Studies I/II
- 3 LACS 250 OR 251 - History of Latin America
- 3 LACS 486 - Internship
- + 6 Elective Courses 300 and/or 400 levels

**15 CREDITS**

In addition to English, students must demonstrate advanced proficiency in one of the other languages of the Americas: indigenous languages, a creolized language such as Haitian Creole, colonial languages - Spanish, Portuguese, French - or other language considered by the program administration to be relevant to study of Latin America and the Caribbean.



# Meet our LACS Graduate Student Resident: Virginia Gomes

Each year, LACS offers one graduate student a desk in our shared office as well as access to our kitchen, lounge, meeting room, and work room. The Graduate Resident's research is featured in a talk or workshop that showcases the work completed during their residency.

For the 2025-2026 academic year, Virginia Gomes will be the LACS Graduate Student Resident. Virginia is a PhD Candidate in International Education Policy. Here, she tells us a little about her work.

**My research focuses on how students experience for the first time an alternative pedagogy called Cooperative and Solidarity Learning (CSL), which was developed by the community and is now applied in a public school in Northeast Brazil. This longitudinal mixed-methods study tracked the experiences of first-**

**year students across one academic year (2024). It employed three phases of data collection to capture shifts in students' perceptions of their learning and their relationships with peers and teachers. CSL offers students—especially those from marginalized backgrounds—an opportunity to reclaim their agency and sense of community. By shifting away from competition and toward solidarity, students are not just learning to perform academically, but to understand themselves and support others. Ultimately, this study asks whether it is possible to change the paradigm of schooling itself. Early evidence suggests that when students are trusted, supported, and invited to cooperate—not compete—they begin to see themselves not just as learners, but as builders of a more just society.**



# LACS NEWS

**Dr. Francisco Barrenechea** was in Madrid this past June for an international conference, where he spoke about how Spanish Enlightenment playwrights reimagined Greek poetic religion in 18th-century tragedies. He argued that these playwrights portrayed paganism in a terrifying fashion to make it clash with the tender love plots typical of the tragedies of the time. By inscribing the virtuous actions of modern lovers within the confines of paganism, they thus paved the way for the naturalization of Greek tragedy on the Hispanic stage. This paper will form part of a chapter for his book on the reception of Greek tragedy, in which Prof. Barrenechea focuses on late 18th and early 19th-century Spain and Mexico. Prof. Barrenechea also continues to teach a section of LACS 234: Issues in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. His approach to this course highlights the reception of Greek, Roman, and Native American antiquities in the region. The course is an excellent opportunity for him to think about current affairs and explore the ways in which Latin American authors have used ancient texts to address them.



**Dr. Laura Demaría's** most recent book, *Provincias Un-Idas: Un itinerario conceptual en el presente* was published by LASA Press in 2025.



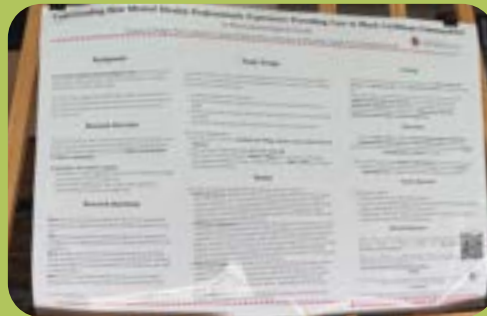
**Twanna Hodge** (INFO) is a newly minted PhD candidate as of July 2025! She recently published her paper, "From Reflection to Action: Redefining Your Mental Health" in *Information Matters* (Vol. 5, No.2, 2025).

2025

# LACS SUMMER TRAVEL AWARDS

THIS SUMMER, FIVE UMD STUDENTS TRAVELED FOR CONFERENCES AND RESEARCH WITH SUPPORT FROM THE LACS SUMMER TRAVEL AWARDS.

## TWANNA HODGE



INFO PhD student Twanna Hodge presented her poster, "**Understanding How Mental Health Professionals Experience Providing Care to Black Caribbean Communities**," at the Caribbean Studies Association Conference in Sint Maarten.

Due to the generosity of LACS, I was able to accomplish many things during my attendance at the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA) Conference in Sint Maarten in early June. I presented a research poster about my integrative paper, "Understanding How Mental Health Professionals Provide Care to Black Caribbean Communities in Three Countries." Very little is known about mental health professionals' experiences providing mental health care to English-speaking Black Caribbean communities in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and the United States. In this critical phenomenological study, information marginalization and critical race theory serve as the theoretical frameworks, with thematic analysis used to interpret how care is provided, reflect on colonial systems in mental health care, and offer perspectives on the provision of mental health care. From the thematic

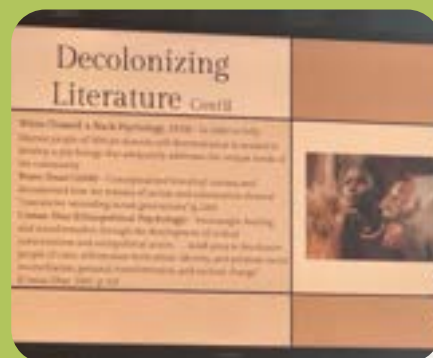


analysis, four major phenomena emerged: 1) patient-facing care, 2) professional engagement, 3) professional responsibility, and 4) professional perspectives on racism, with the salience of ethnic identity and culture in providing mental health care. It was well received and provided some ideas about where to take my research.

My understanding of Caribbean culture and history was enriched through various engaging programs, including the CSA Cultural Night, "The St. Martin Story," which was presented through diverse artistic forms. I also had the opportunity to attend the session, "Decolonizing Our Counseling Practices: A Model for Equity," where the presenters introduced the practical and inspiring Decolonization In Action Model. This model, designed for counselors and educators, offers a proactive strategy to challenge oppressive systems and promote equity and healing.

At the Graduate Student Mentorship Breakfast, I had the privilege of connecting with esteemed scholars. I am particularly excited about the mentorship I have gained, which is helping me deepen my knowledge of Caribbean Studies and providing external support as I work on my dissertation proposal.

At the Graduate Student Mentorship Breakfast, I connected with scholars. I gained a mentor who is helping deepen my knowledge of Caribbean Studies and external support as I work on my dissertation proposal. I plan to be more involved with CSA by serving on the Author Celebration committee for the next conference. Happily, I had the opportunity to meet the esteemed Alexis Pauline Gumbs, author of *Survival is a Promise: The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde*.



# VIRGINIA GOMES



In June, Virginia Gomes traveled to Brazil to present her preliminary findings on the research project titled **"From Competition and Individualism to Cooperation and Solidarity: Can Schools Change This Paradigm?"** Her research is a case study that focuses on a school that utilizes a classroom pedagogy called Cooperative and Solidarity Learning. She employed mixed methods, which included 180 surveys and ten interviews, all of which were conducted three times in 2024.

Virginia hopes that this study will enhance this methodology, which originated as a grassroots movement and is now utilized in a public setting, with a history of community impact dating back to 1994. Virginia is a PhD candidate in International Education Policy and the LACS Graduate Student Resident.



**TO LEARN MORE, YOU  
CAN CONTACT HER AT  
VIGOMES@UMD.EDU.**



# DANIELA GAVA DUARTE



Over the summer, I traveled to Brazil to conduct preliminary research for my Capstone project, which will focus on education policy in the country. During my visit, I engaged in exploratory conversations with local organizations and education leaders, which helped deepen my understanding of Brazil's policy landscape. Through these conversations, I was able to identify key stakeholders and refine both the scope and methodology of my future research.

A highlight of my trip was participating in Festa da Palavra in Itaúnas, Espírito Santo, a vibrant event centered on education and the celebration of decolonial narratives. The gathering brought together influential educators, community leaders, and Indigenous voices, offering powerful insights into grassroots movements and cultural perspectives that often go overlooked in mainstream policy discourse. These experiences not only enriched my research but reaffirmed my commitment to an inclusive and equity-driven approach to educational reform in Brazil.



# ANDREA GUTMANN FUENTES

This summer, I traveled to Santiago, Chile, on an exploratory archival research trip to prepare to write my dissertation prospectus on transnational Chilean labor history during the Cold War. I visited the Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, the Archivo Nacional de la Administración, the Biblioteca Nacional, the Centro de Documentación at the Universidad Finis Terrae, and the Casa Museo Eduardo Frei Montalva. I found a wide variety of rich primary source materials, from government memos and communications, to local newspapers and magazines, to grassroots local labor union pamphlets—including many that were published despite heavy political repression and censorship under the Pinochet dictatorship of 1973–1990.

I was also able to conduct an oral history with Oscar Garretón, a political leader of the Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria (MAPU), a left-wing Chilean political party that was part of the socialist Unidad Popular coalition in the early 1970s. We discussed his work of political organizing among labor unions in the port city of San Antonio in the late 60s, and his role as the Sub-secretary of Economy during the Unidad Popular administration.

On the weekends and when the archives were otherwise closed, I visited Santiago's many museums, climbed Cerro San Cristóbal to get a good view of the Andes mountains, and enjoyed delicious traditional Chilean meals like porotos granados and pastel de choclo, my favorite! For a couple of days I was also able to visit my grandmother and family, who live in the south of Chile.



PHOTOS OF ME AT THE ARCHIVO DEL MINISTERIO DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES, AND VISITING SALVADOR ALLENDE'S MEMORIAL STATUE OUTSIDE LA MONEDA, CHILE'S PRESIDENTIAL PALACE.

# FLAVIA BATISTA



Through the support of the LACS Travel Award, I attended the Summer School in International Survey Methods, organized by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and the Center for Global Democracy at Vanderbilt University. Over the course of nine days, I received in-depth training in survey design and implementation. Each day focused on a different aspect of survey research, including questionnaire construction, survey experiments, and measurement strategies. Beyond the academic content, the program provided a valuable opportunity to connect with fellow political scientists, making the experience both intellectually enriching and personally rewarding.



# LACS NEWS

In February, **Dr. Karin Roseblatt** organized a conference on Human Rights in Latin America at UMD. She presented two papers: "Citizen and Human: Global Rights and Latin America" and "Human Rights Beyond Liberalism: Chile's 2021 Constitutional Process."

In May, Dr. Roseblatt traveled to Santiago, Chile to deliver the keynote address at a conference marking the 90th anniversary of the Movimiento por la Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena (MEMCh, Movement for the Emancipation of Chilean Women).

Dr. Roseblatt also published "Investigating Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Politics, Truth, and Mestizo Nationalism in Mexico," in *Empire, Colonialism, and the Human Sciences: Troubling Encounters in the Americas and Pacific*, edited by Adam Warren, Julia Rodriguez, and Stephen Casper. London: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

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**Abigail Smith** (IEP) recently had her chapter, "Inter-Complexity and the Polycrisis: The Bridgetown Initiative and Human-Centered Educational Development in CARICOM Countries," published in *Navigating Learning, Culture, and Identity in Island Education* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2025).



**Dr. Anahí Espíndola** was a 2025 Do Good Campus Fund Recipient in the amount of \$26,000 for her project, "Making K-12 Pollination Science Lesson Packets Accessible to the Diverse Maryland Population." The project, a collaboration with the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, seeks to address the lack of Spanish-language educational materials about pollination. Dr. Espíndola will develop and produce videos on the subject while also translating existing content and lessons.

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**Dr. Ryan Long** published the article, "Those Who (Re)count Matter: Emiliano Monge's *Las tierras arrasadas*," in *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*. Vol. 46 No. 2 (2022) (published in 2024). In addition, two of his book reviews were published in *World Literature Today: The Accidentals* Vol. 99, No. 3 (May-June 2025) and *Otrarse: Ladino Poems*. Vol. 99, No. 1 (January-February 2025). His blog post, "Writing for Her Life: Cristina Rivera Garza's *Liliana's Invincible Summer*," was published on *World Literature Today's* website in April 2024.



# An Interview with Eric Tomalá

Eric Tomalá, who served as Assistant Director of LACS from 2017 to 2024, departed the Center to pursue new opportunities at the University of Maryland. Over his more than seven years at LACS, Eric played an integral role in its growth and success, wearing many hats to help ensure that the Center offered enriching programming and events, while also cultivating a welcoming and inclusive space for all students. Program Manager Maya Labarca sat down with Eric to talk about his time at the Center.

## What first inspired you to want to work at the Center?

When I started my master's program in New Mexico, I was offered a GA-ship advising undergrad students, and that really sparked my interest in helping students. I found it very fulfilling, and I also saw a real need.

Then I went into a PhD program in Sociology. I was a full-time student there and ended up meeting a group of wonderful people at El Centro de la Raza. I sort of rediscovered Latin America from an academic and cultural standpoint and started loving the focus on the region. They were so inclusive and beautiful. I really enjoyed my time there. That was my first direct interaction with Latin American Studies.

## How did you find yourself at the University of Maryland Latin American Studies Center, as it was called at the time?



For a time I moved back home [to Ecuador], then came back and lived in Maryland after spending some time in Miami. One day I saw a posting for the coordinator position for Latin American Studies.

I thought, "Okay, I have all this research experience." By then, I had more than four years in the PhD program and a couple of years assisting at El Centro de la Raza—so, about six or more years of experience. I applied, and one day I got a phone call—it was Laurie Frederick inviting me to an interview.

At that time, the postdoc was Britta Anderson. She's from New Mexico, and I had lived in New Mexico. My heart is in New Mexico—I'm New Mexican by heart. So there was a good connection, good chemistry, I

think. That's how I found out about the position. And I knew there weren't really other institutions or universities around that had a center like this.

## What did being Assistant Director of LACS involve? Can you give us a glimpse behind the scenes?

Back then, the job was about creating and building community through events. Events were a big part of the work. Each director, in their final year, would organize a conference based on their own background or vision.

Laurie Frederick did a Cuba event, and I just hit the ground running. Within two or three weeks, we had to put it together—and we actually ended up having two conferences that semester. It was crazy, but it was very special.

It gave me a strong sense of how the Center worked and the type of events they liked to do.

We celebrated all kinds of events, both small and large, often in collaboration with other departments. Back then, there was a lot of interaction with MICA (The Office of Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy). MICA managed many of the diversity and inclusion programs and was kind of the hub for all these communities coming together on campus.

We also hosted a lot of guest speakers. Grad students had a role in decision-making too, which I really liked.

Advising was another big part of the job—recruiting, visiting classes, and encouraging students to join the program. At that time, we had a certificate but not yet the minor. The minor came within the next two years.

**"Honestly, most of the students I've talked to—I've tried to give my whole self to them. "**

**During your time at LACS you helped oversee and create a lot of programs and initiatives. To name a few: the undergraduate minor, the graduate certificate, a lot of events and conferences, the ReLASC podcast, and even art exhibits at the center. Which of these initiatives or programs are you most proud of?**

In a way, all of them. They were designed to meet the needs of students, faculty, and the broader community.

But the graduate certificate stands out. It was the first time I saw—something I haven't really seen elsewhere—grad students, former students, faculty, and staff all coming together to organize and create the program. That was pretty special. Even some undergrad students participated in the process.

Another would be the conferences—especially one guided by Britta Anderson. It was very cool. We had not only food but also music, alongside the traditional conference format. I learned from that experience that you can approach things differently—from the outside—and still be successful. And because I'm a food person, I love the idea of building community through food.



I think you all are still doing that soup event, right? Meeting a couple of times a semester, offering soup. It's comforting, it brings nutritional value, and it gathers people together in a different way. I'm proud of that too.

**Is there a particular project, event, or even a conversation with a student that still sticks with you today—something meaningful, chaotic, funny—something that comes to mind even now?**

Honestly, most of the students I've talked to—I've tried to give my whole self to them. In one way or another, those moments have been meaningful to me.

I was actually walking this morning, thinking that one of the reasons you stay a bit younger and more active is because you're around young people. Students give you energy—they feed you that stamina you need to get through the day. I had beautiful experiences with most of them. I think of Victor, the previous GA. I knew him from before, and he was at the Center for about three years. He's from the Dominican Republic, an outstanding musician. And sometimes, seeing his struggle reminded me of what I went through in my own PhD journey. Then one day, he graduated. He was done. That was a beautiful moment for me. Watching his whole journey—struggle, success, and his contributions to the community—it was just so powerful.

**What's one challenge that the center faced, and how did you work through it?**

Being a small unit with all the financial challenges that come with that, I think the biggest challenge was hearing about budget cuts every year while knowing that the work we were doing was so unique and important. Many of our undergraduate and graduate students saw LACS as a refuge.

It was a place where they could buy themselves more time—just survive, sometimes. So to me, that was the function of LACS. And thinking about how much more we could have done if we had more resources... It would've meant more services and more support for students.

The Center is such a unique space. There are probably other centers out there, but I couldn't find another place where so many people from different countries, speaking different languages, and working across disciplines, could come together and speak a common language—not just Spanish or Portuguese, but a cultural language that's so precious.

That was the biggest challenge: knowing we had something so beautiful, but not being recognized financially in a way that would let us do even more.

**"I couldn't find another place where so many people from different countries, speaking different languages, and working across disciplines, could come together and speak a common language... a cultural language that's so precious."**

**LACS has always been super interdisciplinary. What are your thoughts on that? Was it part of what made the Center so special—bringing people together across fields and languages into one shared academic space?**

The short answer is: yes. LACS being independent—not under a single department—gave students the opportunity to connect to a more universal space.

If LACS belonged to a specific department, some students might have felt like they didn't belong—like, "I'm not in that discipline." But the center's independence allowed all kinds of beautiful people to gather and build community.

So yes, interdisciplinarity is part of the DNA of the center. It wasn't always like that. It used to be under Spanish and History, and while it was popular then, it mostly catered to those specific communities. Now, I think it serves a much broader and more inclusive range of students—engineers, biologists, musicians, historians, educators, and more.

**What do you hope students take away from engaging with the center?**

I hope they're getting a model they can take with them wherever they go. That's what the world needs: to be more inclusive, more welcoming. Just because you're from a particular discipline or speak a certain language doesn't mean you have to stay in that box. If students can take that model with them, I think the world would be a better place.

In terms of research, we're seeing more and more interdisciplinarity. For example, in my current position, I saw someone from the arts working with robotics—and that's beautiful. That's what I think LACS should foster. People who go through LACS will carry that openness with them.

**If you could give advice to current students—undergraduate or graduate—on how to combine their interests and their passion for cultural work with impact, what would you say?**

This is sort of my utopia: my advice is to know that you have the ability to be a mentor. Whatever you're building in your research, in your career—you have the mission to mentor those coming after you. It's a path that keeps going. And especially in the Latin American community, many of us are first-generation or come from complex circumstances. So when you've had those experiences, you don't necessarily have to create a model that goes against your department or university. But you should remember that what you do *can* become something that matters.



So yes, think about the people who came before you and the people who will come after. Find support, but also give it.

LACS has done a great job of fostering that kind of mentorship. Undergraduates are mentored by graduate students; graduate students are mentored by postdocs; postdocs by faculty. The only missing piece was high school students, and I think that's doable.

Mentorship is essential. We don't always know how to become mentors, but in some capacity, we all can be. By showing others what we've done—and how we've struggled, and maybe how to struggle a little less—we become that reference for someone else.

**Do you have a favorite memory of LACS—something that still makes you smile when you think about the center?**

There was a phenomenal time when Britta Anderson and I were planning an event around food and nutrition. My job was to find chefs—people from the community who could cook. The goal was to break that invisible wall between the university and the surrounding community. We wanted to invite students to learn about Latin America through food, and have the community learn about the university. We had a tiny budget, so I had to create business cards for the cooks, because many of them didn't have businesses—they were just passionate about food.

Britta told me, "I don't think a lot of people are going to come to this," and I said, "Look, when there's Latin American food, we're going to be packed."

She was supposed to be doing what the director does: welcoming people, just chilling and enjoying the event. But when about 200 people showed up, she was overwhelmed! We were in the atrium, and the place was packed. We had planned for an hour and a half, but it turned into a four-hour event. There was food, conversation about nutrition, community, and celebration. It was beautiful. The event was called Barriga Llena, Corazón Contento.

That moment stays with me. It reminds me that there *is* a need for, and deep interest in, Latin America. Some people may say, "There's nothing happening in Latin America," but come on—so much of this country is Latin America. That day was proof.

**"Mentorship is essential. We don't always know how to become mentors, but in some capacity, we all can be. By showing others what we've done—and how we've struggled, and maybe how to struggle a little less—we become that reference for someone else."**

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

I think, in many ways, I just hope that the Center continues with that unique structure—but with a lot more funding, so it can develop more programs and have an even greater impact on the community.

I hope, as I mentioned earlier, that the spirit of mentorship remains.

And I hope the center continues to be that space—that safe zone—where the community can go to recharge, to find support, to gain the energy they need. Where there's always someone available to listen and offer the best advice possible. That's what the center has always been, and I hope it continues to be that way.

All my best to you, to Ryan, and to the next generations. You all have the power and the ability to keep LACS going—to continue making it a wonderful oasis for students. So that's the note I'd leave you with.





# Stories

THE THREADS THAT CONNECT US  
AND THE PEOPLE WHO WEAVE THEM

LACS is very excited to announce our newest initiative, LACStories. This developing series is designed to share a glimpse into the vibrant lives, experiences, and ideas of the students, scholars, and community members who pass through our doors. Whether through personal narratives, reflections on cultural identity, or conversations about research and creative work, LACStories celebrates the diverse voices that shape our community. As the project grows, we hope it will become a space for connection, dialogue, and mutual inspiration—offering a deeper understanding of the people and stories that give meaning to the work we do at the Center. Stay tuned for the publication of this initiative on our site later this fall!



**SAÚL SOSNOWSKI**

FOUNDER AND  
FORMER DIRECTOR

Hear about the founding of LACS, its notable projects and initiatives over the years, and why a center like LACS has persisted as an important hub for thought, community-building, and an exploration of the intersections of culture, policy, and identity.



**MERLE COLLINS**

FORMER DIRECTOR

Learn about the switch from LASC to LACS, the importance of representation, and Merle's reflections on the future of a center like LACS.



**KARIN ROSEBLATT**

FORMER DIRECTOR

Learn about the Center as it worked to foster community among graduate students, navigated university changes, and continued its student-focused mission.



**NOHELY ÁLVAREZ**

ALUMNA

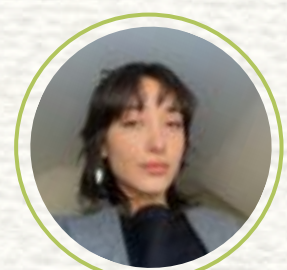
Learn about Nohely's research on everyday economies, urban space and planning, and what got her interested in the field.



**SOFÍA OLIVAR**

ALUMNA

Learn about the ways that LACS coursework helped inform Sofía's thesis project, the art of representation in set design, and how place and space can shape us.



**NOELIA MANTILLA**

GRADUATE ASSISTANT

Hear an interesting fact from Noelia about her childhood relationship to books and reading.

# Spring 2026: Ángel Rama Event



Ángel Rama in his office in Jiménez Hall, 1982

In Spring 2026, we will hold a commemorative event to honor what would have been the 100th birthday of Ángel Rama, the celebrated Uruguayan writer and literary critic. From 1979 to 1983, Rama served as a professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Maryland. Despite earning tenure, he was never granted legal residency in the United States. Labeled a “subversive” by the U.S. government—a term used to imply communist sympathies—he found himself entangled in a Kafkaesque ordeal, forced to

defend himself against accusations that were never fully disclosed. The alleged evidence against him was classified, leaving Rama unable to challenge or even fully understand the case the federal authorities had constructed.

The University of Maryland, under the leadership of President John Toll, stood firmly by Rama, offering unwavering support as he pursued a grueling and ultimately futile appeal. Even Colombian President Belisario Betancur made a personal appeal to President Ronald Reagan on Rama’s behalf during a diplomatic tour through Latin America. Rama spoke openly about the toll this process took on him in interviews with *The Diamondback*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, revealing that he had begun to consider leaving the United States for good. However, he also shared that the support of his students gave him renewed strength and purpose.

In 1983, Rama accepted a Guggenheim Fellowship in Europe, a chance to temporarily escape the absurdity of the U.S. immigration system. Though the Immigration and Naturalization Service assured him he would be allowed to return, he remained deeply anxious. In a *Diamondback* Article from February 17, 1983, Rama expressed his dejected state: “ ‘I feel horrible, Rama Said. ‘There is no worse thing that can happen than to have to pick up all your belongings and move. It makes you realize how precious life really is, and how close to death we are.’ ”

On November 28, 1984, while en route from Paris to Colombia for a conference, Rama and his wife, the distinguished art critic Marta Traba, were killed in a plane crash near Madrid.

Rama’s scholarship remains vital and widely cited, and his unjust treatment at the hands of U.S. immigration authorities continues to resonate today. Through this centennial celebration, LACS seeks to honor his life and work, in conversation with scholars such as Saúl Sosnowski, who chaired the Department of Spanish and Portuguese during Rama’s time at Maryland.

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