

The Rutgers Center for Latin American Studies

Annual Report, 2024-2025

Aldo A. Lauria Santiago, Director

Introduction

This was the first year of my second three-year term as director of the CLAS. I was initially appointed to a one-year term (2024-2025) by SAS Dean Wade, pending reforms to the Centers that did not materialize. In August 2025, I was then appointed to complete the ordinary three-year term (2024-2027).

There were many challenges in the last year. These included the late approval of our budget and the decision by SAS to retain all our income from summer and winter session teaching. This had been around 50% of our operating budget in the previous two years as part of an earlier agreement with SAS. The new income-sharing system should provide the Centers with twice-yearly payments. One initial payment of nearly \$10,000 was approved in June 2025, which will pass to the 2025-2026 fiscal year budget. But in the 2024-2025 fiscal year, we were left with a reduced budget. We also learned this summer that our Post-Doctoral Associate position would not be funded after our current associate leaves in 2026.

As previously stated in other reports, it is very important for the CLAS to be based on building an active community of scholars focused on Latin America at and around Rutgers. This year, the participation of our graduate students proved critical to the work we did.

Events and Co-sponsorships

This year, the CLAS organized (at least) seven events, including those initiated by our faculty/student working groups. We also co-sponsored twenty programs, including major initiatives, with funding support. We facilitated various sessions of the Princeton/Rutgers History of Latin America Workshop, coordinated by Rutgers History graduate student and CLAS Program Assistant, Nathan Darmiento.

I also organized a three-talk series focusing on *Violences in Latin America*. This series will continue next year. CLAS provided funding for the Barbados Study Abroad trip organized by Hyacinth Miller. We also held a poorly attended (six faculty and students) end-of-year reception.

The Center's events, which totaled \$7,000 (covering speakers and food), saw strong attendance, ranging from ten participants for smaller events to over 60 for major colloquia and presentations.

The CLAS also promoted dozens of other events, including many online events sponsored by sister centers and institutions within Rutgers and other universities. Our community can be proud of the hundreds of participants in our events this year, including significant involvement from individuals in New Jersey, other states, and Latin America.

Working Groups

We had six working groups this year. Some of these groups initiated and organized events, which the Center funded and co-sponsored. The most active were the Colombia, Andean/Amazonia, and Caribbean working groups. The Andean/Amazonia group organized a major conference jointly with the Department of Spanish/Portuguese.

Post-Doctoral Associate

Our postdoctoral associate, Vierelina Fernandez, served two terms of her four-term appointment. Vierelina taught two sections of our 101 course. Unfortunately, due to low enrollment, her topics course was not offered. She participated in many (nearly all) of CLAS events and has played an important role in supporting CLAS's work with graduate students. She participated with a group of graduate students who attended the MACLAS conference in Maryland. She also worked on her book manuscript and organized a manuscript critique workshop for September 2025.

SAS denied our request to renew our Post-Doctoral Associate position. The search for this position would have been carried out in the next academic year (2025-2026). This decision will significantly impact our hemispheric visibility and the density of our community locally.

Website and Communications

We have continued to emphasize improvements to our website and direct communications. Our weekly bulletin continued despite a slightly lower number of events. We always included nearby events and major online events from other Centers and Departments. We also posted dozens of news items from faculty, graduate students, and other affiliates. Our assistants Jeynelee and Javier have been critical in maintaining this visibility.

Undergraduate

This year, we offered a total of five sections of our 101 course during the Fall and Spring semesters (one was fully online) and two during winter/summer sessions. Enrollments ranged from good to excellent, with the online asynchronous spring term section leading the enrollments. Geisa Rocha, Vierelina Fernandez, and Antonio Hernandez Matos served as our instructors, with Jian Ren, Vierelina Fernandez, and Antonio Hernandez Matos teaching in winter/summer.

With the full dissolution of our previous revenue-sharing agreement with SAS, these courses were fully supported by SAS. We also cross listed or cross-listed two dozen other courses offered by faculty from various departments.

Advising of our few majors and minors continued in person and on Zoom sessions.

We collaborated with the Spanish/Portuguese Department and the Department of Latino & Caribbean Studies to cross-promote undergraduate recruitment. Our strongest faculty presence is from Spanish/Portuguese, History, Latino/Caribbean Studies, and Geography, but we have significant weaknesses in sociology, anthropology, political science, and various interdisciplinary fields.

Support for Graduate Research

CLAS sponsored a half-day research symposium in November 2024 with presentations from past grant recipients and other students. This event is typically very well attended and celebrated by our graduate students. This year was no different.

For a second year, RAICCS (Directors Carter Mathes and Nicole Burrowes) joined CLAS in supporting graduate student research grants. Together, we funded 13 graduate students for summer research. CLAS dedicated \$10,000 (a reduced amount given our budget cuts) to student grants. RAICCS spent \$6,000 on Caribbean-focused proposals.

Special Projects

CLAS continued its partnership with the Puerto Rico Archival Collaboration (R/PRAC). At the start of the 2024-2025 academic year, the R/PRAC received a million-dollar grant from the Mellon Foundation, and we were able to expand dramatically the scope of the work. The 2024 summer program welcomed Geography Graduate student Lauria Rosa as an intern. This summer, the PRAC summer program (July/August 2025) welcomed one Rutgers graduate student, Santos Rivera Cardona (Political Science). The PRAC supplemented their CLAS awards so they could spend two months while learning and helping organize archival collections in Puerto Rico. For more information, visit <https://prac.rutgers.edu>

Professional Networks

CLAS continued to share information on in-person events in the tri-state area and important online events. Our graduate students formed and continued their partnership with their peers at Princeton, running a historian's workshop.

This year, CLAS hosted one active visiting scholar: Sociologist Elena Sabogal. Sabogal contributed to the work of the Latino Studies Research Initiative and its book on Latinas/os in New Jersey (<http://LSRI.Rutgers.edu>)

Administrative Support

Nancy Rosario continued to provide administrative support to the CLAS. Her dedicated ten-month support has been crucial.

SAS offered two changes to our administrative flow at the end of 2024-2025. We were assigned a new dean (Robin Leichenko) and were promised a new shared team of administrators and support structure for Fall 2025. As of this writing, this reformed administrative support setup has not been implemented.

Undergraduate and graduate assistants have been vital to our communications. Jeynelee Ortiz (undergraduate) and Javier Gonzalez Cortes (History) continued to work on our website, social media, and events coordination, with contributions from Nathan Darmiento (History).

In response to a request for an update on the Center's 2022 evaluation, a detailed report was submitted to address and clarify earlier criticisms that were inaccurate or unfair.

Library Support Services

We have been without a dedicated Latino/Latin American Studies librarian for nearly a decade. Repeated efforts combined with faculty from Spanish/Portuguese and the Latin American history Ph.D. group have failed.

Executive Committee

The reduced executive committee met once at the end of this year to discuss budgets, administrative changes, and other issues. I explained how we were not able to fund the faculty research fellow that was agreed upon over a year ago.

At the end of this year, three members cycled out of the EC.

During the year, these faculty colleagues served as EC members:

- Andrea Restrepo, Bloustein School
- Kenneth Sebastian León, Assistant Professor, Department: LCS and Criminal Justice Program
- Isaias Rojas-Perez, Associate Professor, Department: Sociology and Anthropology, Rutgers-Newark

I thank all faculty involved with the EC for their support of the Center's activities.

New nominations and, if required, elections will be held in September 2025.

Facilities

This year, we hosted some of our events in the Academic Building of the College Avenue Campus. On Livingston, we continued to be hosted by the Department of Latino and Caribbean

Studies, which provides one office to the Center and access to its various classrooms and meeting rooms.

Due to recent administrative changes, CLAS lost one of its offices, which we have formally requested be returned. Our current facilities include a dedicated office for the post-doctoral associate, various meeting rooms, one classroom, and a shared office for part-time faculty. The Center also co-hosts a digitizing lab with the Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies.

Budget and perspective

Our events and labor budget continue to be sourced from an SAS allocation. The new formula for shared income from our winter/summer teaching was implemented in June with an initial payment, which will become part of the 2025-2026 budget.

SAS funded salaries for our post-doctoral associate, part-time lecturer courses, and the Director's salary supplement, single course release, and research funding.

Appendices

I. Graduate Student Grant Recipients

Gloria D' Alessio	I will conduct preliminary fieldwork for my Ph.D. dissertation at the UN migrant's campsite in the Darien jungle, Panama, and continue the exploration I started on the Colombian side of the border.
Nathan Darmiento	Research trip to Mexico's national archive to explore archival material on President Luis Echeverria (1970-1976)
Leonardo Calzada	Connecting communities with forest monitoring
Jeffrey Aizprua	Traveling to Ecuador, my main priority will be to contact participants to provide them with information about my research project to gauge their interest and willingness to participate as research subjects.
Javiera Madrid-Salazar	Conduct preliminary fieldwork for my dissertation project, which focuses on the historical development of the geosciences in Chile and its implications for the expansion of mining frontiers in Chile and Latin America.
Santos Rivera-Cardona	Conducting semi-structured and unstructured interviews with experts, political actors, and citizens in Puerto Rico.
Laurian Rosa Rosa	Visit the National Archive in Philadelphia to access the records related to the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base, which were included under the 10th Naval Sd.
Javiera Barrientos	Visit the National Archive, the National Library, and the Biblioteca del Convento de Santo Domingo in Lima, Peru.
Nia Cambridge	Project Title: Hurricane Riskcapes and Post/Post-disaster Futures in the Caribbean.
Sandra Acocal	I focus on working on the Indian nobility of central Mexico in the 16th century, specifically the Indian nobility of Tlaxcala.

Maria Cecilia Chacon Rendon	Collect missing publications of the column Callejon Oscuro (1936-1937) and bibliographic material on the newspaper La Calle and Bolivian political journalism.
Alejandra Lopez-Oliveros	My research investigates the collaborative roles of women photographers, designers, editors, and publishers in the creation of contemporary photobooks in Latin America.
Ana Llurba	Gastronarratives and Postnatural Entanglements of Meat and Soy in Contemporary Argentine Literature and Art.

II. Events (see attached appendix)