By Richard Potter
(PhD student in Communications)

When I first arrived in Panama City, in Panama, it was October of 2000 -- less than one year since the United States had officially handed complete authority over the former Canal Zone to the Panamanian government. My bus crossed the Panama Canal via the Bridge of the Americas, from whose heights I could see the Panamax freighters stretched out toward the Pacific horizon, waiting their turn to pass through what is arguably the world’s greatest engineering marvel and indubitably Panama’s greatest claim to fame. Outside of the Canal and the surf spots, I’d discovered on my way down from Costa Rica my knowledge of Panama’s history and people hardly surpassed that of the average gringo. I knew there had been a coup in 1968, which had ultimately led to Manuel Noriega’s ruthless rise to power and the 1989 U.S. military invasion that separated him from it, and I suspected that the official versions of those events were far from complete. I had no idea, however, that for the next five years of my life I would call Panama my home.

It turned out that way, however, as a friend from university offered me a job editing his short movie, and one thing led to another as tends to happen. During those five years, I made documentaries, music videos, installation art, a fictional film, and some wonderful friends. I learned Panama’s rapid-fire, Caribbean inflected Spanish from the street up, and I spent long, lazy days on the beaches and in the mountains. I also confirmed my suspicions about those official versions of the way things went down, and I came to grasp the history and interconnectedness of abstracts such as colonialism, imperialism, international finance, poverty, development, and corruption; more importantly, I witnessed their concrete manifestations.

I learned that most of Panama had long since been deforested, and that the “impenetrable” Darien rainforest is moving all-too-quickly toward the same fate. I learned that Panama’s wealth inequality ranks second in Latin America and that child malnutrition in the country’s indigenous regions reaches as high as 68 percent. I saw the people riot when bus fares went up by 10 cents and march on the presidential palace when their social security system was in jeopardy. I watched a friend and single mother try to raise her baby on a $170-month maid’s salary, and I started thinking hard about what role I might be able to play in bringing about changes for the better.

continued on page 8
Since I took over the direction of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, my year has been filled with exciting challenges and extraordinary experiences. I am pleased to report that CLACS has been working tirelessly to reach out to the community, both on campus and beyond it. We have made a concerted effort to increase our visibility and become a more valuable resource throughout Central Illinois.

As the following pages clearly show, CLACS has supported a wide array of programming and activities. Our “2006 highlights” include numerous lectures, panels, forums, and workshops on Latin American culture, politics, and scholarship. We have also developed exciting new activities in the community, such as the Latin American film festival and the “Spanish Time” events held at local libraries. These events have greatly enhanced the visibility and impact of the Center, and we look forward to building on their success in the future.

As you will note in the items featured in this issue, U. of I. Latin Americanists continue to distinguish themselves in a wide array of disciplines. The faculty that joined us in 2006 have proven to be an enormous asset, augmenting the breadth and depth of our expertise. Our undergraduate courses are drawing record enrollments, and the number of students majoring in Latin American Studies is steadily increasing. This year, we were able to recruit a stellar team of instructors and teaching assistants for our introductory course, and their efforts have contributed immeasurably to the success of our program. The summary of the Tinker workshop and feature stories vividly demonstrate the incredible work of our graduate students, which—not surprisingly—has earned many of them awards, funding, and other professional opportunities.

So, I invite you to enjoy the impressive array of accomplishments featured here. Believe it or not, they offer only a small taste of the vibrant intellectual life that I have been fortunate enough to experience in the Center this year.

Director’s Corner

CLACS Reception

More than 100 people came to the reception. Food was provided by Dos Reales, Mexican restaurant.
2006 Highlights

Castro and Beyond

The discussion focused on the implications of Fidel Castro’s transfer to power and the future of the Cuban revolution. Speakers: Dara Goldman (CLACS/Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese); Marc Perry (African American Studies and Research Program/Anthropology); and Alyssa García (PhD Student, Anthropology) on Oct. 25 at Allen Hall.

Venezuela Forum

The forum on the Venezuelan presidential elections included Damarys Canache (Political Science); Jonathan Hill (Southern Illinois University - Anthropology); Cristobal Valencia (PhD Student, Anthropology); and moderator Kensey Amaya (PhD Student, Animal Science) on Nov. 20 at 101 International Studies Building.

The Future of the Latin American Left

Moderated by Dara Goldman (CLACS/Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese), the panel was comprised by William Castro (Span/Ita/Port), José Cheibub (Political Science); Ellen Moodie (Anthropology); and Marc Perry (African American Studies and Research Program/Anthropology) on Feb. 22 at the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities.

CLACS designated NRC

The U.S. Department of Education has designated CLACS a National Resource Center (NRC) for Latin American Language and Area Studies.

CLACS is one of the few centers in the country that has been funded uninterruptedly - as a consortium with the University of Chicago - since 1976.

National resource centers are selected through a peer review process conducted on a four-year cycle. The U.S. Department of Education provides grants to establish, strengthen, and operate language and area or international studies centers for teaching any modern language.

Listen to our Podcasts

Visit CLACS to listen to interviews and lectures: http://www.clacs.uiuc.edu

Exhibit featured Rain Forest art

Curated by Dorothea Scott Whitten and Norman E. Whitten, Jr., the exhibit “Rain Forest Visions” presented the art and imagery of indigenous peoples from the rain forests of Central and South America, as well as lectures and gallery talks from February to August at the Spurlock Museum.

Rain Forest Visions

February 28 through August 20, 2006

Rain Forest Visions features the art and imagery of three indigenous peoples from the tropical rain forests of Central and South America: the Waounam of Panama and Colombia, the Canelos Quichua of Ecuador, and the Shipibo-Conibo of Peru.

The Spurlock Museum • 600 South Gregory • Urbana Illinois 61801

For information about the Spurlock Museum, this exhibit, and related educational events and programs, please consult www.spurlock.uiuc.edu or call the information desk at 217-333-2360.

Rain Forest Visions is co-sponsored by the Spurlock Museum and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies through the auspices of the United States Department of Education’s Title VI Program. The exhibit is also supported by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.
2006 Highlights

CAS/MillerComm Lecture Series Fall 2006

Culture and Politics in Mexico: The Symbolism Behind Political Campaigns
Sept. 6

Thanks to the support from the Center for Advanced Studies, CLACS invited Prof. Larissa Adler Lomnitz from the Universidad Autónoma de México to offer a MillerComm conference entitled “Culture and Politics in Mexico. The Symbolism Behind Political Campaigns.” Her presentation focused on the symbolism and the uses of social networks in the last campaign of the PRI, the dominant party for the past 75 years, and the nature of Mexican democracy at the turn of the 21st century. By presenting the structure, beliefs and practices of Mexican political parties, she stressed the vertical and clientelistic nature of Mexican politics. Using an ethnographic approach, and combining it with methods from political science and communication studies, Lomnitz examined Mexican political culture through its political practices, rituals, institutions, mentalities and legal norms. Her analysis presented a detailed description of the campaign activities, its visual and verbal messages, the use of public spaces as well as the use of the cosmology employed by the PRI. This perspective allowed her to focus on the tension and the interrelationship between the formal structure of the Mexican state -- a democracy with division of powers -- and informal practices arising from an underlying political culture, characterized by clientelistic procedures and highly polarized power relationships. Besides this main conference, Prof. Lomnitz participated at CLACS in an informal presentation on the influence of the Chilean political culture in Mexico and discussed her ideas of trust and social networks in the informal economy with the Transnational Seminar in the department of Sociology.

Indigenous Rights in a Global Arena: Globalization from Below
Nov. 14

Organized by the department of Anthropology and co-sponsored by CLACS, among other units, Dr. Luis Macas came to campus to offer a MillerComm conference “Indigenous Rights in a Global Arena: Globalization from Below.” Macas has long been at the forefront of the struggle for political rights for indigenous peoples in Ecuador as a founder and then president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). He is now reaching beyond borders to make intercontinental alliances in the emergent pan-global indigenous peoples’ movement. In this talk he discussed this grassroots form of globalization, pointing to challenges and successes of indigenous people’s movements across the Americas and beyond. A member of the Saraguro indigenous community (part of the Quichua-Kichwa nation), Luis Macas was also the Ecuadorian presidential candidate for Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement, the political branch of CONAIE, in the 2006 elections. Macas’ talk was given in Spanish and simultaneously translated by Professor Linda Belote, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota at Duluth. Later that week, Macas offered an informal talk for students and faculty affiliated in CLACS about “Recientes elecciones en América Latina: ¿Qué nos espera?”
The First Annual Latin American Film Festival at Boardman’s Art Theatre

By Angelina Cotler

Between Feb. 23 and March 1, 2007 the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies in collaboration with the department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese organized the First Annual Latin American Film festival in Boardman’s Art Theatre in downtown Champaign. Thanks to the monetary support of 11 units/programs in the University of Illinois, two local businesses, and the generous support of Boardman, my dream came true.

After 10 months of planning, contacting and negotiating with distributors, and selecting among 20 released films, I selected these five excellent movies: Machuca (Chile, 2004), Havana Blues (Cuba, 2005), Blessed by Fire (Argentina, 2005), Hopeless (Colombia, 2005), and Favela Rising (Brazil, 2005). Each film represents a different and unique genre and raises specific contextual issues. From poverty and violence, social class differences, musical success, memories of war, the loss of a loved partner, and coming to age, each film depicts the main problems and hopes of these selected countries. The availability of the film and international recognition by prestigious awards determined my selection, and I hope that in the future I can include films from other countries that have a large film industry, such as Mexico.

The main goal of the festival was to bring Latin American culture to the community and to stress the rich and diverse cultural heterogeneity of Latin America.

To be fair the outcome of the event exceeded my expectations. The local press coverage was fantastic. Students, faculty, and community residents filled the theatre every night. People stayed and watched two films in a row and let their friends know about the event. On Saturday, after the screen of Favela Rising, the spectators enjoyed a live performance by the Capoeira Club of the University. And, as a good Latin American event, we closed the week dancing at Kofusion to the rhythms of Sandunga, a local band that plays Cuban music, and the beats of DJ Mambo Italiano. The response from the public was phenomenal. For instance, Linda Tabb, a professor at Parkland College wrote in an e-mail: “This is such a worthwhile event. I took in all five films, two on Friday and the other three on Saturday... Thanks for your help in bringing it to this community.” For all that, I look forward to planning the next film festival and hopefully everyone will enjoy it again.

Despite the cold, hundreds of people attended the Film Festival, organized by Angelina Cotler, on Feb. 23 to March 1, 2007 at Boardman’s Art Theatre.
“Matamoros makes it sound so easy,” Jesús laughed as he continued to work at cleaning out the güira. It was Friday afternoon, and I was sitting on the banks of the small Río Bano, along the northern boundary of Reparto Caribe, Guantánamo, Cuba, with Jesús Miguel Fernández Alfonso and his son, Carlitos. Earlier in the day, we set out on our project of making a pair of maracas.

Jesús is the director and laudista of Grupo Amancer, a Guantánamo música campesina (“country” music) group, with whom I’ve been studying the laúd, a twelve-stringed instrument similar to a very stout mandolin, since 1998. He’s widely recognized as the best laudista in the province of Guantánamo, some would argue in all of Oriente. He also prides himself for making a decent pair of maracas. Taught by his uncle José Morejón, as a child Jesús honed his skills by making maracas for his father’s group in Camagüey and he continues to do the same for his own groups.

As Matamoros points out in the song lyrics (next page), it is essential to find güira (the local name for both the tree and the fruit), preferably two that are roughly the same size. The fact that the two güira fruit will never be exactly the same contributes to the dynamics of the sound, one is inevitably slightly stronger sounding than the other. Thus, we began our search for the right güira. As we crossed the river on two railway ties that serve as a makeshift bridge, Jesús greeted a man walking the same direction and asked him if he knew of any güira along the river. The man responded that it just so happened that he had a tree in his yard and we should accompany him to his house to pick some. Later when I asked Jesús how long he had known the man that kindly supplied us with the two nicely shaped güira, he stated that they had just met right then on the
bridge.

Jesús, Carlitos, and I made our way up the river, taking advantage of the shade and the relative coolness of the river to escape the midday heat of eastern Cuba, no easy task. With the aid of two pieces of copper wire and a pocketknife, we sat down to clean out the pulpy mass and seeds of the güira. When the majority of the pulp was out, we filled the güira with small rocks and broken bits of glass, shaking them for another 30 to 45 minutes in order to completely clean out the inside. The cleaning of the güira is the most time and labor-intensive part of making maracas, and it was this, more than anything else, that tío José had Jesús doing as a child.

The next evening, Jesús cut a stick into two small pieces, which we then shaved and sanded down so that they would make a perfect fit into the hole of the now cleaned and polished güira. After the güira were more dried out, we filled them with a red and black seed from a reed called pepusa. Jesús explained that any small, rounded, hard object would serve, be it shot (municiones) as Matamoros suggested or the dried seeds of pepusa or quimbombó (okra). The final step was placing the sticks through the güira and a small tack in the top, securing the güira to the palito, thereby converting the various assorted materials into a new pair of maracas. Y ya está.

I offer this anecdote as a brief description of a moment shared during my Tinker-sponsored summer field research on the roles of musicians and musical production in the Cuban Revolution and the influence of the social revolutionary process on the musical traditions of Cuban Son and Punto Guajiro. In addition to providing a how-to guide for aspiring maraqueros, it is my intention to suggest ways in which the ethnographic project can ground interpretation and analysis of broader social and cultural moments in consideration of the lived experiences of real people. In this case, these include the transformation of natural resources into expressive cultural tools, ongoing processes of cultural transmission and innovation in the art of instrument making across generations, and the significance of sound in the formation and maintenance of collective identities, be they local, regional, national, or transnational.

“Y luego a tocar...” well, that’s another story altogether.
That thought process ultimately brought me to the Institute of Communications Research at U. of I., where I work to integrate ethical theory with political economic analysis in order to derive on-the-ground practices that will enable communities to take charge of the narratives that shape and express their existence. Toward this end, I applied for a 2006 Tinker Field Research grant that enabled me to return to Panama and investigate the current and potential levels of community participation in the communicative aspects of development projects being facilitated by the Panamanian Center for Research and Social Action (CEASPA).

One of the projects is in Achiote, a community of perhaps 80 residents that sits at the edge of the San Lorenzo Protected Area in what used to be the U.S. Canal Zone. CEASPA has been working to implement a community centered vision for the care of San Lorenzo’s ~46 square miles of rainforest and wetlands, including the superabundance of avian life that has earned it worldwide fame among bird-watchers. The new community and visitors’ center in Achiote is meant, in part, to attract eco-tourists and generate economic opportunities for the San Lorenzo community. Of this initiative’s many components, my attention was drawn to a community art project that emphasizes the representation of local wildlife and cultural traditions.

...the application of local talent to communal projects provides a tangible manifestation of the cohesiveness and pride that the broader initiative has generated...

My guide in Achiote was the project’s facilitator, Alberto Sanchez, a professional graphic designer and graduate from Panama’s most esteemed pedagogical academy. He had conducted several workshops on drawing and painting in the community center, as part of a program that supplements the training of local birdwatching guides, generally young adults, who transmit knowledge gained from their naturalistic depictions to tourists who are much less familiar with the local wildlife. Alberto stressed, however, that the application of local talent to communal projects provides a tangible manifestation of the cohesiveness and pride that the broader initiative has generated, and he proudly showed me some nearby examples, including a decorated bus stop and a series of roadside signs that feature not only wildlife but local cultural traditions, the Canal, and even...
a map of the area as it was during the Canal Zone era.

Alberto also brought me to a small farm, tucked into a narrow valley, where one of his more active students lived with his family growing rice and tending cattle. I’d met the shy young man years before when I’d created a short video on the San Lorenzo region, but he only recalled me when I mentioned the camera. Then he opened up a little more, explaining that the head of the local public school had seen the work of the art group and requested that several of the members embellish an existing but rudimentary mural on an exterior wall facing the school’s recreation area. He had some brushes, since CEASPA provided them as part of the workshop, but the school had paid for the paint as well as a nominal wage for the artists. I asked if the art group was planning on producing more of the souvenirs that I had seen on sale in the visitor’s center, and he explained that the group was having difficulties getting organized outside of the CEASPA sponsored workshops. This proved to be an important observation as it highlights one of the common problems of participatory production initiatives such as the community art project – while technical knowledge and tools are made available, the skills needed for group self-organization are often elided so that projects have a hard time gaining the vital quality of self-sustenance that would reduce or remove their dependence on the facilitation of outside “experts” and make of them truly community run endeavors.

One of the most pleasurable stops in my tour of the art group’s output was the Cascá, a recently constructed restaurant whose name comes from a local bird and whose main wall is covered with an intricate mural, painted by community members, which depicts all sorts of local birds perched on a twisting pattern of leafy vines. The building site had formerly been a community run nursery (also a CEASPA initiative), but that project had failed. After tasting the wonderful food served by the several women working in the small kitchen, it was hard to think that the Cascá would suffer the same fate. We ate fried whole fish, a puree of ñame (which is something like a cross between sweet potato and yucca), salad, and one of the most delicious beverages I’ve tasted yet. I had no idea what was in it but told Alberto and my other companions that it tasted like Christmas to me. They got a real kick out of that, as did the women of the Cascá who explained that it was made from zapallo, a gourd common to the Panamanian kitchen that is not unlike a pumpkin. Thus, with a touch of spice, the drink wasn’t far from liquefied pumpkin pie, and my odd connection bore a degree of sense.

My time in Achiote also included walks along a boardwalk behind the visitor’s center and a nature trail not far down the road. Neither had existed when I had first visited Achiote a few years back. At that time, the visitor’s center was just a frame; now it has indoor bathrooms, two dorm rooms, a kitchen, an office, and a lushly landscaped front drive. The front door is beautifully decorated with a mural conceived by Alberto and detailed by community members. The list goes on and it represents the type of positive changes that Panamanian communities need now more than ever, as concerted efforts by the government, including a recently approved Canal expansion project, have sparked a dangerously rapid and concentrated inflow of foreign investment in real estate, infrastructure, and tourism that largely bypasses the impoverished rural areas. I hope my observations, from an academic perspective, can play some role in furthering community based initiatives for a more people centered development in all parts of the world. Panama, however, will always hold a special and profoundly significance for me.
Murillo Campello (Finance) was nominated fellow to the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Damarys Canache (Political Science) presented a lecture “Recent Elections, Ideology, and Democracy in Latin America” at at the Center of Interamerican Studies, Laval University, Quebec, Canada on Dec. 1, 2006.


In November 2006, Don Johnson (Geography) participated in a field course in Quaternary Geology in Tierra del Fuego, where he studied all aspects of glaciation, loess, peat bogs, and general landscape evolution, from one end of T. del F. to the other, and at many different elevations. After the field course, Johnson -- together with two other participants/colleagues -- executed a 3,000 km physical geographical research tour, via auto, of southern Patagonia (S. Cruz Province). Much material was collected for the book he is working on, provisionally titled: The Biomantle (Cambridge U. Press).

Mariselle Meléndez (Span/Ita/Port) published “¡Si tal era el dedo, cuál sería el cuerpo!: The Archival Project of María Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad (1783)”. Hispanic Review 74.3 (2006): 251-277; and “Patria, Criollos, and Blacks: Imagining the Nation in the Mercurio peruano, 1791-1795.” Colonial Latin American Review 15.2 (2006): 207-227.

Jordana Mendelson (Art History) organized an exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid titled “Revistas y Guerra 1936-1939/ Magazines and Guerra 1936-1939.” The exhibition is accompanied by a Web site that was funded by several on-campus grants, including an NCSA/UIUC Faculty Fellowship, with additional support from CHASS, the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, and the School of Art & Design, and a monographic book. An international symposium on “Magazines, Modernity and War” was held immediately following the opening on Jan. 17 and 18.


New Faculty

Miguel I. Gómez is Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics. He holds a BS in Industrial Engineering from the Universidad de Los Andes (Bogotá) and a PhD in Agricultural and Consumer Economics from the University of Illinois. His areas of expertise focus on the food sector and include marketing and price analysis, agribusiness, applied econometrics, and industrial organization. His current research focuses on economics of the food industry, contracts between food suppliers and supermarkets, customer satisfaction in retailing, price analysis and market
power. He teaches a Food Industry Seminar at the Universidad de Los Andes and conducts executive education programs in Latin America. His work has been published in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics, Review of Agricultural Economics, among others. He has served as consultant for various national and international public and private institutions.

Robert L. Thompson holds the Gardner Chair in Agricultural Policy. The first 19 years of his academic career were spent working mainly on agricultural trade in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Purdue University. Thompson was away from academia for a decade in administrative roles in international development organizations. In Latin America his research has focused principally on Brazil, where he worked as a visiting professor at the Federal University of Viçosa. Both his M.S. and Ph.D. theses dealt with Brazil. In his Ph.D. thesis Thompson studied the sources of differences in agricultural productivity among states in Brazil. He has done extensive research on the growth in Brazil’s soybean production and exports. Thompson has also followed agricultural developments in Argentina. His current international work focuses principally on the WTO international trade negotiations and on understanding the changes occurring in international competitiveness in agricultural production.

Leigh Binford

I’m an anthropologist who has worked in various areas of Mexico and El Salvador, as well as New York and Ontario, Canada on peasant and peasant artisan production, rural class formation, violence and civil war and international migration. I obtained my doctorate at the University of Connecticut and taught there for 12 years—with shorter stints at the University of New Hampshire and Michigan State—before moving to Puebla, Mexico in 1997 to take up a position at the Social Science and Humanities Research Institute at the University of Puebla. During my sabbatical, I’m attempting to wrap up two projects: one involves a study of contract labor migration between three communities in the state of Tlaxcala, Mexico and southern Ontario, Canada; the other is a testimonio of a former peasant agricultura list, catechist and guerrilla political activist (during El Salvador’s civil war) named Fabio Argueta.

Nancy E. Churchill

I earned a Master’s in Anthropology at the University of Connecticut and a Master of Science in Public Affairs at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. My doctoral studies were in Anthropology at the University of Connecticut, where I found a way to combine cultural process and practice, public policy and social justice in my dissertation on the U.S. welfare reform in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1997, I was offered a position in the Sociology Graduate Program at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Puebla, Mexico, where I have spent the past 10 years teaching and doing research on urban development, planning and policy, cultural heritage, popular culture and everyday life. I have published articles on these subjects in Social Justice, Bajo el Volcan, the International Journal of Cultural Property, among others. I am currently working on a book on popular culture and heritage in and around a tourist-oriented development project in the historic city center of Puebla, and a co-edited volume on the everyday lives of women in Mexico.

Guohui Dong

Dong graduated from Nankai University in Tianjin, P. R. China, receiving M. A. in 1995 and Ph. D in 2001 both in History. He was the Lecturer of the Center for Latin American Studies at Nankai University from June 1995 to December 2002, when he became the Associate Professor of the College of History at Nankai University. At the same year, Dong was appointed as the Academic Secretary of the Latin American History Research Association of China. Dong has published two monographs, Studies on the Economic Thought of Raúl Prebisch (Nankai University Press, 2003) and Human Rights, Sovereignty, and Hegemony: The American Human Rights Diplomacy in Perspective (World Knowledge Publishers, 2003), and some articles concerning Latin American problems. His current research focuses on the American policies toward ECLA and the Argentine political, economic, and cultural history.
José Antonio Cheibub is Associate Professor of Political Science and the Boeschenstein Scholar of Political Economy and Public Policy. He is also associated with the Center for the Study of Democratic Governance. Cheibub received a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. His interests are comparative politics, political economy and democratic institutions. Currently he is working on a project that seeks to account for the adoption of mixed democratic constitutions (often referred to as “semipresidential” constitutions), as well as their implications for democratic performance; a study of the “electoral connection” in proportional representation systems, focusing initially on Brazil; and, a study of the relationship between elections and civil conflict in democratizing countries. He is the author of Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy, Cambridge University Press 2007, the co-editor (with Robert Dahl and Ian Shapiro) of the Democracy Sourcebook (MIT Press, 2003) and the co-author (with Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez and Fernando Limongi) of Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990 (Cambridge University Press, 2000), among others.
I also contributed some time ago when I was an advisor to the Ford Foundation and helped guide funds into the creation of graduate programs in various Brazilian universities, and also in some universities in Peru and Argentina. Finally, I take great pride in the success of our students from Latin America in getting their graduate degrees in the United States, especially in the U. of I, that is, success in both the academies and in public service.

**CLACS: Many of your former students are in leadership positions in Latin America: most recently, Rafael Correa, president of Ecuador. What do you attribute to the success of your students?**

**Baer:** They are talented and received excellent training at the U. of I.

**CLACS: What do you want your students to take from your teachings?**

**Baer:** Better understanding of what lies behind some of the region’s major contemporary problems, and also an understanding that socio-economic problems have no easy solutions, that is solutions that can be reduced to a simple mathematical equation.

**CLACS: You have also been acclaimed for increasing the academic ties between the United States and Latin America. Was it a conscious effort on your part or did it occur gradually?**

**Baer:** Both. I recruit students, I stay in touch with them after they return to their country, I try to have them participate in conferences. It is most important for teachers to look beyond the classroom. I look at my students as part of my family, trying to help them in their careers, and trying to see to it that they help each other over the years. To me teaching and research and continued human contacts are what make my profession as a professor something exciting.

**CLACS: What do you hope will be your legacy?**

**Baer:** I hope to have established the U. of I. and its Latin America Studies as a permanent center of excellence for both Americans and Latin Americans.!
Since October 2006, children of different backgrounds – African American, white, Asian and Latino – have participated in the Spanish Time at local libraries, a program that combines music, stories and crafts organized by CLACS in Urbana and Champaign.

It’s not the first time that local libraries offer programs in Spanish. “We had activities such as this one in 2004 and 2005, but the person in charge, who spoke Spanish, left and the program was ended,” said Amanda Raklovits, librarian at the Douglass Branch Library in Champaign. In fact, libraries all over the country are providing more and more services in Spanish given that the Hispanic population has reached 14 percent of the nation, according to the U.S. Census. So proposing a program in Spanish to libraries in town was an easy task. Both Raklovits in Champaign and Barb Lintner, head of the children’s department, in Urbana, had a strong desire to support Latino programs and quickly agreed to feature the Spanish Time.

It had been less than a month since I started working as the Center’s outreach coordinator, when Angelina Cotler, associated director, talked to me about the need to produce a library program. Cotler told me that one time when she was in a library in Lima, Peru, she saw a father reading stories in English to his child. This image stayed with her: “How fantastic! Why can’t we do something similar here?” Angelina said, “Is there a better and more fun way to expose the Latin American culture and the Spanish language than through stories and music?”

With the help of Ann Abbot, a professor at the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, we found Ashley Mazzola, a senior in Spanish Teaching. Mazzola’s leadership and commitment have played a key role in the Spanish Time’s success. Every month, she chooses a theme and selects the books and crafts accordingly. Last year’s themes were Day of the Dead, animals and Christmas. Mazzola puts an extra effort in coming up with ideas for the crafts. In October, children created a Mexican skeleton, in November an animal puppet and in December a Santa Claus mask. Later other people joined in as storytellers, such as Leigh Binford and Nancy Churchill, both visiting professors from Mexico.

The music was also Cotler’s idea. The Spanish Time has relied on her pool of musician friends and CLACS collaborators: Eduardo Herrera, Adriana Cuervo and Clara Guerrero; Julian Noratores, Mariza Sapatos and Sergio Cristancho; and William Hope and Martin Kowalewski. They all play in bands in town and generously take time aside to help with the program.

Through the music, we manage to attract non-Spanish speakers. The songs’ words are shown on an overhead projector so everyone can sing along. Interestingly, some of our most assiduous participants are families who homeschool their children. This is an important aspect of the Spanish Time. It’s crucial in a globalized world to foster the interest and the practice of foreign languages, both inside and outside the school setting.
At the same time, our goal is to provide a space to Latinos where their language and cultures are valued. We hope to promote cultural exchange and integration in the community.

On one hand, we can say that we are reaching our goal. Angela Supernaw, librarian in Urbana, said she is happy with the attendance of non-Spanish speakers. She put a small display of Spanish and Spanish/English books up around the time of the first story time. “It was primarily picture books, but we had to keep replenishing it so we even-

It’s crucial in a globalized world to foster the interest and the practice of foreign languages, both inside and outside the school setting.

ually put board books, junior fiction, and nonfiction on display as well.” Then they moved the display to a larger space, doubled the amount of books on display. “And I still have to replenish it once a week!”

However, the greatest challenge is to increase the participation of Latin American immigrants. We had a special Spanish Time in the community center at the Shadow Wood Mobile Home Community, where 250 families live; yet no one from the complex came.

Still, we won’t give up. Results are often not immediate but unfold in the long run. We will organize another Spanish Time at Shadow Wood during the summer. This time, we will do it outside, hoping that as soon as families hear the music, they will come along as well.

The Spanish Time is held on the second and third Saturdays of the month from February to April and from October to December. It’s at 2 p.m. at The Urbana Free Library, 210 West Green St; and in Champaign: 1 p.m. at the Douglass Branch Library, 504 E. Grove St.

Become a Volunteer!
If you would like to get involved with the Spanish Time, please contact Renata Johnson at renata@uiuc.edu, telephone (217) 244-2790, or visit http://www.clacs.uiuc.edu/. We need more musicians and storytellers for the next academic year. Experience with children and a love for performing are welcomed but not required!

Sergio Cristacho (left), Mariza Sapatos, and Julian Noratoes at the Douglass Branch Library

Ashley Mazzola

Peter Tanner and his daughter, Exzandria, working on a Santa Claus mask

Children making a paper skeleton for the Day of the Dead
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