

## PROGRAM IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

### LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues and Friends of PLAS:

2012–13 was another great year for PLAS, full of lectures, conferences, and new courses. In the fall, we had with us Giancarlo Mazzanti, one of the most important young architects in Latin America, best known for his Biblioteca España in Medellín, Colombia. Giancarlo spent the fall semester at PLAS and taught two courses cross-listed with the School of Architecture. His seminar on “Social Architecture” – the theory that well-designed architecture has the power to solve the social problems of a city – attracted students from a variety of disciplines and generated much enthusiasm. Giancarlo also traveled to Medellín with a group of graduate students from his studio course so they could see first-hand the effects of his library in a former slum.

Another highlight of the fall semester was the historic conversation on “Mexico and Violence” by Juan Villoro – a former PLAS fellow – and Javier Sicilia, a peace activist and the founder of Caravana por la Paz in Mexico. This conversation focused on the recent wave of drug and criminal violence in Mexico and the role intellectuals can play in building a peaceful society. This event drew an audience of over two hundred and generated interest among New York and Philadelphia audiences.

Timothy J. Smith, a visiting fellow in fall 2012, taught an undergraduate seminar on “The Politics of Ethnicity in Latin America” and took the students enrolled in the course on a one-week trip to Guatemala in December 2012.

During the academic year we had with us two of Mexico’s most important young writers: Jorge Volpi and Álvaro Enrigue. Jorge taught a seminar on “Narco Literature” and Álvaro offered a creative writing workshop in Spanish – a first for Princeton.

During the spring, Pedro Meira Monteiro, Bruno Carvalho, João Biehl, and Edward Telles organized a Brazil seminar – a series of lunch lectures on Brazilian politics, culture, and history. This new initiative was designed to take advantage of the many Brazilian scholars who came to campus in the spring, including PLAS fellows Lena Lavinas and James Green.

The fall promises to be a very exciting semester: Mario Vargas Llosa will return to PLAS to co-teach a seminar on Latin American literature and Enrique Krauze, one of Latin America’s most distinguished historians, will teach a graduate course on “Intellectuals in Latin America.”

Have a relaxing and productive summer. I look forward to seeing you in the fall.

All my best wishes,

Rubén Gallo  
Director, PLAS



From left to right, top to bottom: Flora Thomson-DeVeaux, Amy Olivero, Carrie Diamond, Courtney Crumpler, Erika Smith, Thomas Irby, Briyana Davis, Monica Beltran, Emily VanderLinden, Alexander Aguayo, Ubaldo Escalante, Dimitris Papaconstantinou, Carly De La Hoz, Aseneth Garza

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## STUDENTS VISIT GUATEMALA

BY TIMOTHY J. SMITH

During December 2012, five Princeton undergraduate students enrolled in LAS 401/ANT 434 Latin American Studies Seminar: The Politics of Ethnicity in Latin America traveled to Guatemala. This trip, led by Professor Timothy J. Smith (Visiting Research Scholar in PLAS and Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology and PLAS), was sponsored with the generous support of PLAS, the Department of Anthropology and the Fred Fox Fund. Also accompanying the group was Christina Maida '14 who made a short film of the trip as part of her junior thesis. What follows is an account of the travels and encounters Professor Smith and his students experienced.

Given the seminar's focus on indigenous representation, social movements, and ethnicity in Latin America, I wanted to introduce students to particular themes on the ground that included governance, economic transformations, tourism, religion, and history. We were able to touch upon all of these topics in the short week, spending our time in Sololá (my primary field site for 16 years), Antigua, and Tecpán. The trip, however, was also linked to the so-called "end of the world" and "new era" narratives stemming from a western-borne "Maya prophecy" around the end of a calendar which hasn't been used in nearly 1,200 years. With regards to representation, our overall objective was to see how competing interpretations of the December 20–21, 2012 events (doom vs. dawn, non-indigenous vs. indigenous, etc.) played out on the ground.

On the first full day in Guatemala, I introduced students to a representative of the town hall of Sololá, located in the western highlands, who has been involved with development projects that includes the construction of a tourism welcome center and two small museums. Students learned about the history of the town and how local indigenous leaders actively negotiate how they are representing the town to outsiders.

I then introduced students to my colleagues at both the town hall and the indigenous municipal government. The latter is a semi-autonomous organization which has existed for nearly 450 years. At the town hall, students met with the vice-mayor who welcomed them and spoke to the group about the current administration's development initiatives and the issues surrounding continuing discrimination against indigenous citizens. They then met with the indigenous vice-mayor and four members of the indigenous municipal government across the street. During their conversation with this group, students heard about Maya law and the growing presence of NGOs in the region to specifically help indigenous populations with regards to education, health, and agriculture. The students also heard about the link that this organization provides between the rural villages and the police in combating crime and lynchings.

On day three, I took the students to the local market and introduced them to a number of families who are involved in weaving and the poultry industry. They heard about not only the symbolic and social significance ascribed to the wearing of *traje* (indigenous dress), but also the economic realities which many of the families traditionally involved with weaving face with regards to a sluggish economy and the abandonment of *traje* by community boys and men. Afterwards, the students took a break and met as a group to discuss everything they had experienced for the day and how this related to the readings of the seminar.

One of the themes which ran throughout the semester was an apparent dearth of scholarly literature on gender within social movements and emerging forms of indigenous representation in Latin America. After a short discussion on this, I brought the group to a weaving cooperative formed by 187 widows in 1987 whose male members of their families had either been killed or disappeared by the military during the height of the Guatemalan armed conflict, which spanned 36 years (1960–96). What makes this a special cooperative is that the women chose to initiate a program in which chenille products were woven on backstrap looms. Moreover, it is entirely owned and managed by women. Many of the young women now working at the cooperative are involved in both local and national movements around women's rights and collective indigenous representation. At the cooperative, students met with the office manager and a number of the weavers and board members, who spoke with the students about issues relating to economic empowerment and gender relations within their natal communities, as well as issues of indigenous representation.

Day four began early as the students wanted to watch the sunrise over Lake Atitlán. After a few group photos, we boarded a boat and headed to the south shores of the lake, to the Tz'utujil-speaking town of Santiago Atitlán. I gave them a tour of one of the first churches built in Guatemala and spoke with the students about the arrival of the Spanish to this area in the 1520s, aided with Kaqchikel allies from Sololá and Tecpán (located to the east). I discussed with them colonial architecture (pointing out embedded indigenous symbols throughout the structure) and the importance of Catholic saints and the introduction of *cofradias* (saints societies) in the 16th century to indigenous towns (with regards to indigenous governance and leadership). The students also learned more about the history of the Guatemalan genocide and we discussed a 1990 massacre which took place in the town, for which a memorial resides in the church. I also talked to them about Hurricane Stan in 2005 which caused a large landslide that buried alive nearly 700 community members, and the town's refusal of aid offered by the Guatemalan military based upon their memory of the 1990 massacre.



Back row from left to right: Christina Maida, Kelsey Byrne;  
Front row from left to right: Aseneth Garza, Briyana Davis, Flora Massah, Carra Torres

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## GUATEMALA

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We then visited the shrine of Rilaj Mam ("Revered Grandfather"), also known as "Maximón." Local cofradías take turns caring for this indigenous figure who takes on particular guises: healer, trickster, and (during Easter Week) Judas Iscariot. I introduced students to the caretakers and a healing ceremony took place during which students learned about particular rites and forms of reverence towards Maximón.

In the afternoon, I brought the students to another lake town, Santa Catarina Palopó. I introduced them to a vendor whom I have known for years, who now works in the town hall. She introduced them to two cofradías in her town and talked about international development money pledged to build houses for the community (which was also devastated by Hurricane Stan). She then took us to her house where students met with her extended family. They learned about economic hardships in the wake of the breaking of the tourism bubble in past years. With regards to readings in the course, students also were able to learn in person about how tourism and struggles over "Maya representation" has economically empowered women in this community (many of whom are now enjoying growing influence in political affairs both within and outside of the household). Finally, one of the elder sisters talked about how she had taken money earned as a vendor and founded a Spanish language school for tourists.

On day five we arrived to Tecpán in the late morning. Just outside of the town limits is the pre-Columbian site of Iximche'. While many tourists were expected to visit the Tikal archaeological park (located in the northern part of the country), Iximche' provided an excellent place to spend the "end of the world," as indigenous leaders planned a number of ceremonies and political events at the site to mark the event. Iximche' was also chosen as this was a functioning city in 1524. As the capital of the Kaqchikel Maya nation (which governed Sololá) when the Spanish arrived from Mexico, they initially welcomed the Spanish to the city as allies but were later betrayed, with their two kings being executed by the Spaniard Pedro de Alvarado. I gave the students a tour of the ruins, discussing with them topics of archaeological interest that included architectural forms, use of built space, religious and civil uses of particular buildings, and urban design. I was also able to discuss social arrangements and events outlined in the Annals of the Kaqchikels (written in the early 16th century in Sololá) that took place at Iximche' so that students were able to see the linkages between colonial documents and urban design in reconstructing historical events.

Next, I took the students around to view ceremonies which had commenced and gave them an overview of indigenous spiritual practices. A number of fires had already been started and new ones were being initiated so students were able to see ceremonies from beginning to finish and take note of the differences between the larger ceremonies (to which a handful of tourists arrived) and the smaller ones in a different part

of the site, which tended to be family-oriented and more personal. We would return to Tecpán for a meal before returning to the site around 11 p.m. to commemorate the end of the Maya cycle.

After an early wake-up call on day six, we returned to the ruins the next day where a Maya stela (large upright stone with hieroglyphic inscriptions) had been erected. During the Classic Maya period (CE 200-900), these were erected to commemorate historical events. I was also able to give the students a primer in Maya long count cycles of time and the calendar (linked to the 2012 event), showing them how these cycles were captured on the stela. Interestingly enough, indigenous activists had decided to create this new stela and included events from the 20th century (independence, war, revolution, genocide, and the 1985 Constitution...all written in hieroglyphics!). I spoke with the students about linguistic activism and pointed out to them the ingenious way in which particular phonemes from spoken Kaqchikel Mayan today (that did not exist in the Classic Period—the glyphs historically were written in a different Mayan language) were now being represented.

After a small break, the students visited local handicraft booths to see what was being sold and how indigenous vendors were representing Maya culture through the items they were marketing. We also met a middle-aged indigenous carpenter who had lived in Union City, New Jersey for eight years. He was eager to welcome the students

From left to right: Carra Torres, Briyana Davis, Flora Massah, Aseneth Garza, Christina Maida, Kelsey Byrne

to his home town and extolled his experiences in the U.S. Then the "Dance of the Moors" took place, which is a dance-drama that tells the story of the expulsion of Moors from Spain during the Reconquista. While used in the early colonial period (with the urging of Catholic priests and friars) as a demonstration of Spanish dominance and a likely propaganda tool for conversion, indigenous groups today continue to perform the dance,

I've been told that over the years, memories of your college experience become blurred together, and only a few moments retain their vibrant immediacy. The opportunity to travel to Guatemala this past winter, thanks to the events of PLAS, is one of those experiences that will remain with me long after I walk through the Fitz Randolph gates...Overall the trip was one of the most intellectually stimulating experiences I have had while at Princeton. – Flora Massah '13



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## GUATEMALA

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interpreting it as an example of indigenous identity (i.e. costume-making, dance steps, music, etc.). We headed back to Antigua shortly after lunch.

On the morning of the last day, I took the students to a nearby coffee finca where they learned about the history of coffee production in Guatemala and discussed issues regarding indigenous participation in a global economy, as well as the topics of land tenure and wage-labor inequalities. After the tour, I brought the students to an adjacent museum established to provide a historical account of indigenous music and festivals from the pre-Columbian up to the present. I took them in the afternoon to the ruins of the San Francisco church, where I gave them a final presentation on the Spanish Baroque period, iconography and painting styles, destruction of the town of Antigua in the 18th century, and rebuilding measures taken by local townspeople (with the aid of foreign tourism dollars).

The students were excited to see many of the things which they had read about in class (both in terms of content and theory) in person and on the ground. Three of them have noted that they plan on returning in the near future and I hope that the new contacts they have made will help them pursue future research projects in Guatemala if they choose. Finally, two of them told me that what they experienced firsthand has helped them reframe some of the issues which they are tackling in their final seminar papers as well as their junior paper and senior theses (one student returned in January 2013). It was a wonderful opportunity for all of us to discuss the seminar's topics while visiting Guatemala and for the students to traverse the (at times) frustrating barrier between the classroom and world. I am grateful to PLAS, the Department of Anthropology, and the Fred Fox Fund for helping make this possible. This trip truly embodied Princeton University's internationalization efforts in that this experience helped to enhance the teaching and learning that took place in the seminar, allowing the students to enrich and expand their education with this firsthand encounter.

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## REPORT FROM THE FIELD

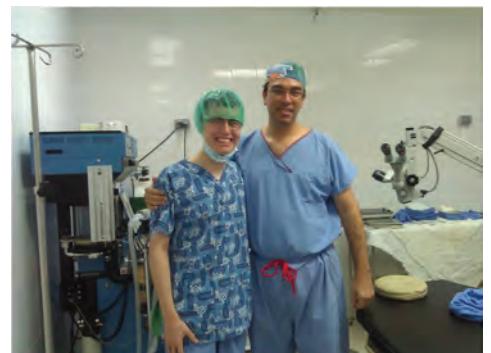
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including a Honduran island off of the Pacific coast (Amapala). On these brigadas, we were able to complete hundreds of eye exams and distribute eyeglasses to all patients who needed them, in addition to arranging for patients with severe eye problems (like advanced cataracts) to be transported back to the clinic in Tegucigalpa for surgery. It was heartwarming to experience the immense gratitude the patients expressed to us for our assistance in improving their vision, but even more rewarding was knowing that their improved eyesight would make an important difference in their daily lives and work.

Regarding the research component of my proposed trip, I was able to carry out a research project for UFS on perceptions of children's eye care by mothers and caretakers. There were three specific objectives: determining to what degree children in Honduras are being provided eye care, investigating which perceptions or social factors may be preventing children from having access to eye care in Honduras, and exploring a possible relationship between poverty and the former two topics. In particular, survey data gathered from non-paying patients on the brigadas and paying patients at the ZOE clinic will be contrasted in order to determine whether there is a difference in these above factors among these two populations and, if so, why this difference is occurring. While in Honduras, I was able to interview 100 patients at the clinic and 60 patients during the brigadas. Currently, I am in the process of collaborating with a past UFS Global Impact Fellow, who conducted a similar research study at one of UFS's partner clinics in Ghana, in writing up a joint article drawing from our research at both locations and attempting to get our research published in a global health journal. The research results will be utilized by UFS and the Centro de Salud Integral ZOE to further eliminate barriers to care for Honduran children.

In closing, my service in Honduras was truly a wonderful experience and I learned a great deal about how a global health delivery program functions on the ground. Furthermore, I observed firsthand how extraordinarily beneficial partnerships with capable local health professionals can be to make a real and impactful difference in the health of underserved populations. I am eternally grateful to the Program in Latin American Studies for providing me with the funds to serve as a Global Impact Fellow and carry out my global health research project.

— Ryan Elliot '14



Elliot with ophthalmologist Dr. Flores