



CENTER FOR  
LATIN AMERICAN & LATINO STUDIES  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC

*Message from the Director*  
*July 2016*

Dear CLALS Community,

The 2016-17 academic year will be replete with exciting initiatives at American University's Center for Latin American & Latino Studies. Our work on religion and climate change, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, will be the focus of several workshops held in collaboration with partners in Washington, Peru, India, and the Caribbean, reflecting our continuing commitment to transcending the boundaries of conventional area studies scholarship. In this vein, we will also launch the Robert A. Pastor North American Research Initiative (NARI), in partnership with AU's School of International Service, affording an opportunity for AU to catalyze the emergence of a new generation of scholars who will endeavor to set the intellectual agenda for the next phase of engagement between Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Together with the Schools of Communication and Public Affairs, we will host Spanish-language broadcasts of television programming focused on the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. In collaboration with the Washington College of Law, we will convene a National Science Foundation-funded workshop to discuss how social science research can inform judicial decision-making on the growing number of asylum applications submitted by Central American children and families. And with faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences we will continue our path-breaking work on public policy challenges involved in welcoming Central American youth who have settled in the Washington, DC metro area over the past couple of years.

Analysis of issues facing Latino communities in Washington and beyond will remain central to our agenda. The Center is committed to supporting the DC Area Survey, launched by the Metropolitan Policy Center in the School of Public Affairs with participation of faculty across each School and College at AU, and the data we are gathering about Latino neighborhoods in the region will inform public policy and advocacy across a wide range of areas, from health to housing to business development. The focus on business is critical, as in partnership with the Kogod School of Business and community actors we intend to sustain attention to the needs of Latino entrepreneurs. Exploring how best to increase Latino business access to capital will be central to those efforts, and it is likely that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Latino Public Affairs Forum (ALPAF), scheduled for early 2017, will be devoted to that urgent issue.

We continue to publish research intended to enhance the impact of the Center's work within and beyond academe. Over the past year we released scholarly volumes addressing strategies for achieving innovation and inclusion in Latin America; the implications of normalization between the United States and Cuba; Central American elites and fiscal policy; and religious responses to violence in Latin America, in the past as well as in the present. We recently submitted for publication an edited volume examining religious contributions to environmental conflict across the region. And we are now in the final stages of a multi-year research project on the MS-13 gang, which has entailed gathering and analyzing data on the gang's criminal activities and social networks in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and El Salvador.

The Center's dynamism is only made possible through the engagement of faculty, students, staff, and research fellows, and we are fortunate to count on an ever expanding pool of colleagues in each of these

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categories. The university is better positioned than ever before to provide state of the art knowledge on issues ranging from health disparities in the Americas to South American responses to the end of the commodity boom that fueled growth for much of the first decade and a half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The end of the commodity super-cycle poses immense challenges for the region, and we hope to develop initiatives that not only illuminate its implications but also point the way to overcoming the challenges that it poses to public finances and social welfare.

Our academic work matters only to the degree that it informs public awareness of critical issues, and through our work, and our various means of disseminating scholarship, we aim to play a useful role to that end. Engagement in this effort by colleagues throughout the University promises to keep the Center relevant and open new avenues for research and debate during the year that lies ahead. We welcome all who wish to join us in these endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Hendler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

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