

noticias

INSTITUTE OF
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Following a week of protests, fisticuffs, and chaos within the Chamber of Deputies between supporters and detractors, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa followed constitutional protocol and took the oath of office in record time: just under five minutes.

2006: A NEW TIME FOR LATIN AMERICA

PROFESSOR ALBERT FISHLOW
COMMENTS ON THE POLITICAL AP-
PROACHES THAT CONSOLIDATED
THEMSELVES IN THE REGION

Socialism, we all know, was long ago consigned to the ashcan of history. But someone forgot to inform the voters of Latin America. In some countries – notably Venezuela and Uruguay – leftist alliances have replaced long established center-right ruling parties. And even where there has been apparent continuity – as with *Peronism* in Argentina – dissatisfaction with the consequences of more than a decade of free market reforms has led politicians to trim their sails. Indeed, across Latin America, the failure of deregulated markets to kindle Asian-style economic growth or to relieve grinding poverty seems to be generating a nasty backlash.

Today's political environment, however, only superficially resembles the atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s, when fire-breathing politicians from Chile to Peru to Nicaragua promised Socialist revolution and delivered only inflation and economic paralysis. But in searching for an explanation of what is happening now in Latin America, the past is still a good place to start because the legacy of economic failure helps to clarify why the New Left is for the most part avoiding that well trod path. Indeed, a close look suggests that Latin America's political left isn't really straying very far from the market-oriented economic policies of the 1990s.

Past governments of the left in Latin America (which, by the way, weren't all that common) had a clear vision of priorities. Their implicit economic model turned on a dash for growth underpinned by greater self-sufficiency and redistribution of income to the poor. However, economic disappointment with the

meager fruits of free market reforms brought populists to power in much of South America as the 21st century began. But the spasm of rejection of what was widely perceived as policies dictated by foreign financiers left open the question of what the newcomers could really do to satisfy their constituents.

Luck intervened. Explosive economic growth in Asia sharply increased the price of Latin America's core exports – minerals, farm products and, above all, oil. Yet the prices of manufactured goods on world markets continued to fall, making it possible for countries in the region to buy more with a lot less of what they had to sell. These good years have largely eliminated the continent's dependence on foreign financing to cover external trade deficits. Now, for the first time, domestic savings exceeds investment, and foreign exchange reserves are increasing.

In broad terms, the new governments adopted one of three approaches to eco-

conomic policy. In Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez concentrated economic power, using increased oil revenues to buy the allegiance of the country's disenfranchised. What's new are bold spending programs aimed at improving the lot of those at the bottom of the economic pecking order. Indeed, instead of saving the windfall gains, as Chile is doing with its copper bonanza, Venezuela is spending like there is no tomorrow.

By contrast, Brazil's nominally populist government has not broken with the centrist economic policies of the previous administration. The government still runs a budget surplus but it has resisted the standard mix of populist policies, including sharply higher minimum wages, fatter government budgets and protection against imports.

The third approach is exemplified by Argentina's eclectic response to economic crisis in 2001. It imposed heavy costs on foreign creditors in settling its outstanding debts. And it used a variety of measures to favor Argentine producers over foreign competitors – a policy that has led to considerable political friction with Brazil. But in a break with conventional populist doctrine, the currency exchange rate has been deliberately undervalued – increasing inflationary pressures, but giving exporters a break. The policies have paid off, albeit modestly: the economy is growing, the budget is balanced and the country is no longer on the IMF's short leash. Foreign investment has not boomed, but there are signs of interest.

A big issue in all the Latin countries enjoying the fruits of the commodities boom is the prospect of "Dutch Disease." This time

around, however, there seems to be greater sensitivity to the problem (think Argentina, with its undervalued exchange rate). Chile's large fiscal surplus is being squirreled away for the future, and the central bank is plainly conscious of risks of appreciation in the exchange rate. In Brazil, ongoing reduction of the central bank's official overnight lending rate (begun last September) was in part motivated by the worrying rise in value of the Brazilian real.

The inauguration of Evo Morales as president of Bolivia in 2006 marks a watershed for the region as the first self-identified indigenous individual reaches the highest political office of a country while Bolivia's long history of party fragmentation since democratic transition seems changed by his support by the majority of the population. This is an important event for 2006 in symbolic terms for the region even if the social and political polarization that ensued confirms regional historical tendencies.

M. Victoria Murillo
Associate Professor, Political Science

One striking fault line in Latin America is between countries seeking closer economic ties with the United States and those eager to distance their economies from gringo power. The Mercosur trade treaty countries – Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and now Venezuela – want nothing to do with the effort to conclude a regional free trade pact with the United States. By contrast, Chile and

the Central American economies have bilateral free trade agreements ratified by the United States Congress; Columbia and Peru have also signed up, and Ecuador is likely to follow suit.

Bridging the gap with the born-again populists

Those who believe that free market capitalism still constitutes Latin America's main chance for sustained economic growth could meet the new populists halfway by focusing on strategies that serve the long-neglected interests of the poor. Start with a substantial commitment to more and better education. For a host of reasons, Latin America has been inexcusably late to recognize the importance of universal education to both economic growth and a fair distribution of income. The catchup has begun, but most of the region lags far behind Asian countries at comparable levels of development.

A second issue is fiscal policy. The region's fiscal concerns may start with achieving macroeconomic stability that protects the purchasing power of the poor as well as improves the business climate. But they hardly end there. Even in countries with high levels of public spending, investment in both physical and social infrastructure has been inadequate. Little, for example, has been invested in appropriate research and development capacity. Consequently, the region is less likely than India, East Asia or Eastern Europe to be able to capture the dividends from imported foreign technology.

Political reform is needed in much of a region in which democracy means government by political machine, and loyalty in public sector employees trumps competence. The countries of Latin America find themselves globally challenged once again. Not so long ago, they compared themselves to South Korea and Taiwan. Now they must compete with economic newcomers ranging from India to South Africa to Vietnam. Bolstered by the windfalls from the commodity boom, a new generation of populists is advocating a regression to the big-government policies of the 1960s and 1970s – only this time with a greater commitment to reducing poverty. That approach puts at risk the modest gains from a generation of reforms. Plainly, the last generation of free market policymakers erred in giving short shrift to the needs of the poor. But the fact remains: only through productivity growth, fueled by advances in technology and greater domestic savings, will Latin America be able to dig its way out of the morass.

Professor Albert Fishlow is the Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies and the Center for Brazilian Studies. This article is a condensed version of one recently published in the Milken Institute Review, Third Quarter 2006.



Presidents Nestor Kirchner of Argentina, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Luiz Inacio da Silva of Brazil and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela represent some of the various iterations of the Left in power in Latin America.

Thomas Trebat, Executive Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies, moderates the political economy panel during LASA's recent "Latin America at a Crossroads" conference. Panel presenters are, seated from left, Carlos Guimaraes, Private Sector Coordinator at the Inter American Development Bank, Prof. Diego von Vacano of Texas A&M University, and Prof. Luis Jacome of Georgetown University.



THAT'S A WRAP

LASA Conference a Success, Board to Renovate This Week

Mingling around the lobby of the 15th floor with students, panelists and guests who managed to slough through a full day's slate of academic presentations, with a view of the Manhattan skyline at night as the backdrop, the students of the Latin American Student Association Executive Board were all smiles as the day drew to a close and their first academic conference with it.

Drawing close to a hundred people, LASA's "Latin America at a Crossroads" inaugural conference, held Friday, November 17, was without a doubt a success. "There were a few hiccups, I ran around more than I should have, but all told I've heard great things from everyone, panelists and audience members alike," said Jorge Rafael Manzano (MIA/EPD '07), LASA Academic Co-Chair.

The event was kicked off by Dean Lisa Anderson, who commended LASA for its efforts and the broad topics to be covered – especially those included under a "culture" panel that explored issues related to Latin American identity from an arts and literature perspective. The culture panel, last event on the day's schedule, attracted a sizable crowd.

Adriana Abdenur, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the New School and a presenter in the social policy panel, expressed nothing but praise. "I met interesting students and learned quite a lot through the exchanges with the audience and my fellow panelists. Last but not least, I was very impressed by the

organization of the event."

LASA's academic conference concludes a productive year for the 2006 Executive Board. Alongside the immensely popular parties held every semester and the gamut of cultural programming, LASA introduced two new programs – the conference and a travel grant program – that Board members hope will be institutionalized by future boards. Renovation of the LASA Board will take place this week, and campaigning has begun as first-year and second-semester students jockey for increased participation in one of SIPA's most active student organizations.

As for this year's Board members, talk of board elections brings about moments of reflection. Melissa Hall (MIA/EPD '07) said, "As the co-social chair, I expected to be fully engaged in involving the SIPA community in culturally representative and entertaining activities with LASA. The experience and my work with the board far surpassed any of my expectations. The excitement and support of the Columbia community allowed us to leverage our notoriously popular social events into an impressive academic, cultural and social program. We exceeded our expectations as a student group and were able to achieve very ambitious goals!"

LASA is a group of SIPA students interested in analyzing current economic, political and social issues in the region, promoting its culture and enhancing opportunities for future cooperation. Its aim is to foster constant interaction with academic, private and public organizations interested in Latin American and Latino affairs. The members of LASA are students from all ethnicities and backgrounds.

Regional Roundup:

A slightly irreverent look at the news related to Latin America...

1. Party like it's 1959

An ailing Fidel Castro kicked off his 80th birthday party gala by not attending. A military parade, which lasted about two hours, culminated five days of celebration; its most obvious purpose was to warn the U.S. against taking advantage of Castro's illness to attack the island. In the last 15 years, the Cuban military has taken on a purely defensive role, and is trained to repel invaders, like hurricanes.

2. El otoño del patriarca

Former Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet suffered an "acute" heart attack and underwent angioplasty to stabilize his condition, though doctors have ruled out bypass surgery as too risky a procedure. A week earlier, on his 91st birthday, Pinochet issued a statement in which he took "political responsibility" for acts that took place under his rule, saying that he had believed they were in Chile's best interests. "Today, close to the end of my days, I want to make clear that I hold no rancour toward anybody, that I love my country above all else," he said. Last rites have been performed.

3. Estamos aquí y somos gay

In the heartland of this fiercely Catholic nation, Mexico City's Assembly has backed a law recognizing same-sex civil unions, the first such move in the country's history. The ruling applies to the estimated nine million inhabitants of Mexico City. President Calderon's ruling (conservative) party is considering filing a legal challenge, saying the law violates a clause in the country's constitution protecting the family.

4. This sounds like an EPD workshop...

Xavante Indians living in the Amazon have begun selling mobile phone ringtones based on traditional chants. The initiative was suggested by a company that helps communities in the area find alternative sources of income. Plans are to sell the ringtones outside of Brazil.

5. Pero yo quería Mi Negra...

Hugo Chavez soundly defeated former Zulia governor Manuel Rosales. Chavez may well deliver on his promise to curb crime and corruption stay in power until 2021 and beyond. He joins outspoken Bush critic Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Bolivia's Evo Morales in opposing U.S. trade policies. Bush speechwriters look up Spanish for "axis of evil."

¡DALE CORREA!

Ecuadorians sound off on Nation's New President



US Ambassador Linda Jewell visits President-Elect Rafael Correa, signaling American interest in working with the US-trained economist and critic of the Bush Administration, who referred to President Bush as "dmitwitted" during the general election.

The Latin American left had its fifth electoral victory of the year on November 26, when Rafael Correa won Ecuador's presidential run-off election with the largest margin in

In my opinion, for change to be effective it must be gradual. I don't ask for 10% GDP growth, 0% unemployment, or low inflation. These results will come about if and only if the political system is stabilized. If presidents serve their full terms, creating a trend of political stability, will generate these outcomes. My question is, will Correa be the pioneer of this trend?

--Juan Mosquera, PEPM '07

almost 30 years. Correa, a former finance minister and economics lecturer, received 57% of the vote, defeating Alvaro Noboa, Ecuador's richest man and a fierce anti-communist, banana-plantation owner and advocate of neoliberal economics. As President-Elect Correa well knows, staying in the Office of the President in Ecuador is a challenge. SIPA's Ecuadorian representatives chime in on the politics of their país:

After Alvaro Noboa's win in the first round over Rafael Correa on October 15th, the political scenario in Ecuador was totally fragmented and each one of the finalists expected not only to have the support of their constituents but also the public backing from their previous opponents. The overwhelming defeat of traditional parties in these presidential elections evidenced the loss of their fol-

lowers' confidence and the lack of positive results after two and a half decades of ineffective policies adopted since the return to democracy in 1979. In fact, both candidates were perceived as outsiders that became an alternative to status quo politicians. They projected themselves as the image of possible "saviors" who were not going to betray the trust and support received from the masses as most of traditional politicians had. Although Noboa had a considerable advantage over Correa in the exit-polls taken between the first and second round, last Sunday's results surprised more than one.

Correa, a former Economics and Finance Minister of the current government, obtained 56.7% of the vote while Noboa, the richest businessman in the country, received 43.3% in which is his third attempt to become president. Populist proposals were the common factor in their campaigns and, evidently, the best way to reach

low-income population's consent. Two clearly marked tendencies were confronted: Correa's leftist populism versus a right-wing, pro-free trade and market driven economy that Noboa proposed. After all, the large amount of support Correa gained legitimates his mandate and opens the possibility of reinstalling governance in a country whose last three elected presidents were overthrown by massive popular protests.

On the one hand, the main challenge for Correa is to finish the four year term for which he was elected. On the other hand, the biggest struggle will be the lack of political support in Congress.

To be consistent with his idea of installing a National Constituent Assembly that proposes a reform of the Legislature, his political movement did not present candidates for provincial representatives. Considering that Noboa's party has the largest percentage of deputies in Congress, the new president must pursue general consensus and avoid the permissiveness of acts of corruption. Even though, he projects having an extreme-left-wing ideology and strong linkages with Chavez, he moderated his speech during the second round campaign. His opposition to Washington Consensus policies and institutions, willingness to limit the level of intervention of U.S. government, his negation toward signing the FTA agreement, and the announcement of external debt restructuring or potential default, all

generate certain level of instability and some distrust in international markets. Although, it is to be expected that his focus on social and macroeconomic policies would improve the productive sector capacity and productivity, reduce the levels of poverty, and decrease inequality. Stability and governance are, as a result, the two main targets of his government if he leads Ecuador to return to the path where social harmony and governance lead to the establishment of a process of growth and development.

-- David Falconi, MPA '07

"Ecuadorians must now decide between AIDS and Cancer," Leon Roldos was quoted as saying upon being notified that he was the losing candidate in the first-round of elections. I shared his views as I felt neither Rafael Correa or Alvaro Noboa had the vision or a concrete plan to bring back political stability and policy reforms to spur growth. While attempting to decide which candidate to back, I often asked myself, "who are the campaign managers putting together these lousy ideas?" Noboa, with his populist rhetoric and demagoguery, promised to build \$1.2MM houses, reduce unemployment through tourism and ask his benevolent millionaire friends to invest in Ecuador. Correa, a U.S. educated Ph.D. in economics, proposed more concrete, executable policies, yet his left-leaning ideas reflected those taken from a Chavez speech rather than economic theories. Correa's win provides some relief as his cabinet is more qualified and experienced to handle the economic, political, and social problems Ecuador faces. However, I feel his success in becoming the first elected president to finish a full 4-year term in the last 10 years, lies during the first half of his presidency. The changes he brings about with the Constituent Assembly, decision on the Free Trade Agreement, and expansion of social programs must have a positive and immediate impact on the economy and the political atmosphere. Otherwise, as it so often has happened in the past, the Ecuadorian people, in particular those who gave him 60% of the vote, will remove him from office.

-- Juan Mosquera, PEPM '07

spring courses on latin america

Please find below courses offered by the Institute of Latin American Studies, the Center for Brazilian Studies, and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at New York University for Spring 2007. Note that these courses are subject to changes/cancellations.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

INAF U4410: Political, Social & Economic Development of Brazil (II)
Call Number: 22402 • Points: 1.5
Day/Time: Wednesdays 6:10pm – 8:00pm
Location: 802 International Affairs Building
Instructor: Thomas Trebat

INAF U6625: History of the Brazilian Economy
Call Number: 81354 • Points: 3
Day/Time: Mondays, 4:10pm – 6:00pm
Location: 802 International Affairs Building
Instructor: Albert Fishlow

INAF U8419: The Cold War in Latin America
Call Number: 10290 • Points: 3
Day/Time: Wednesdays 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Location: 802 International Affairs Building
Instructor: John H. Coatsworth

REGN U6425: Social Security Reform in Latin America
Call Number: 15802 • Points: 3
Day/Time: Tuesdays, 4:10pm – 6:00pm
Location: 501B International Affairs Building
Instructor: Jose Savoia

REGN U6429: Social Realism in Mexican Art*
Call Number: 21046 • Points: 3
Day/Time: Tuesdays, 11:00am – 12:50pm
Location: 501B International Affairs Building
Instructor: Renato Gonzalez-Mello

REGN U8427: Art, Power & Violence in 20th Century Mexico*
Call Number: 19704 • Points: 3
Day/Time: Mondays, 11:00am – 12:50pm
Location: 501 International Affairs Building
Instructor: Renato Gonzalez-Mello

* Note: These courses will not fulfill regional context core for MIA degree requirements.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

G10.1024 Education and Development in Latin America
Call Number: 30019 • Credits: 3
Day/Time: Wednesdays, 4:55 – 7:00pm
Location: Silver Center, 413

G10.1048 International Human Rights: Latin America
Call Number: 30021
Day/Time: Mondays, 6:10 – 8:10 pm
Location: 53 Washington Square South, 404W
Instructor: Peter Lucas, Adjunct Professor, CU and CLACS

G10.1545 Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the New Immigration
31416 Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, Professor, Steinhardt School of Education
Wednesday 9:30am - 12:15 pm
Location: Tisch Hall, LC2

G10.2017 Challenges to Democratic Consolidation
Call Number: 30024
Day/Time: Tuesdays, 4 -6 pm
Location: King Juan Carlos Center, 404W
Instructor: Patricio Navia, Master Teacher, CLACS Adjunct Professor

G10.2200 Religions in Latin America
Call Number: 31304
Day/Time: Thursdays, 4:00 – 6:00pm
Location: 53 Washington Square South, Room 404W
Instructor: Alyshia Galvez, CLACS Assistant Professor

G10.2652 Haiti in Caribbean Context
Call Number: 31429
Wednesday 2:00pm – 4:45pm
Location: TBA
Instructor: Michael Dash, Professor of Africana Studies, Dept. of Social and Cultural Analysis

Paulo Kluber (MIA '08).



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Paulo Kluber

This month's Student Spotlight shines upon Paulo Kluber. He's a frequent and welcome visitor to ILAS and often participates in events. Paulo emigrated from Brazil to the U.S. with his family in the late eighties, settling in the Los Angeles area, where he earned a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Southern California. Paulo has retained and built upon his Latin American roots while assimilating well to life in the U.S. We had a chance to speak to Paulo and ask him a few questions...

1. What did you do before SIPA?

I worked for 10 years in business management in the commercial divisions of aerospace entities such as NASA, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin. Since 2003, I've been involved with Gems of the Earth, an NGO focused on bringing the internet to rural communities in Brazil. The Gems of the Earth network supports telecenters in Brazil and has offices in Minas Gerais and Washington DC. I continue to serve on its Board of Directors.

2. Why did you choose to come to SIPA?

SIPA offers a most compelling combination of a cosmopolitan lifestyle, academic excellence, and Columbia's Ivy League prestige.

3. What other organizations are you involved

in here in NYC and how do you balance your time between school work and activities?

We are building the foundations to expand the growing Gems of the Earth network to New York, which is already strong in Brazil and Washington DC. TO find the time to handle both school work and these activities, much of my leisure time is given up, but there is tremendous satisfaction in mobilizing people for a good cause.

4. What are your plans for the future?

To mobilize the Brazilian diaspora and "friends of Brazil" such that they can have a positive impact on their lives abroad and on a wide range of issues concerning Brazil.

5. You are often involved at ILAS events. Has ILAS helped you focus your career plan and SIPA studies?

The ILAS events have certainly afforded me an opportunity to meet interesting people, and have given me a better notion about my options at SIPA and what I can achieve in general while pursuing this Masters degree.

6. How do you gauge student involvement?

I believe current student involvement is relatively low. To a certain degree that is understandable, given the diversity of the SIPA student body and the number of options in this city. Nonetheless, there are many areas that should not be too difficult to improve, such as the location and quality of social events, which could serve as a catalyst for more student involvement.

7. Tell us something people don't know about you.

The one thing most people do not know about me is that I grew up on what could be classified as an "urban ranch" in southern Brazil :)

Paulo Kluber is a first-year MIA student. For more information on Gems of the Earth, go to www.gotenet.org. He has just been elected SIPASA MIA President. His e-mail address is pk1234@columbia.edu.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ILAS Welcomes Additions to Latin American Faculty

(This is the second part of a two-part series.)

How often have you wanted to sit down with the author of a book and ask him or her questions? For this last issue of 2006, we had the opportunity to do just this and sit down with the author of the history of Latin America. As promised, we are featuring Dr. John Coatsworth, our temporary migrant from Harvard University and the author of The

Cambridge Economic History of Latin America. Coatsworth is the Director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard and will be teaching at Columbia for the 2006-2007 academic year. Coatsworth reports that he is enjoying his time in New York researching, writing, teaching and frequently visiting with family in the city. No stranger to Columbia, Coatsworth is a long-time friend and colleague of ILAS director Albert Fishlow and has many "terrific" colleagues around campus. We spoke with him for a few moments to find out about his favorite moments in time:

1. As a historian, what's your favorite event in Latin American History? (what could you spend hours reading about?)

My favorite events: revolutions, since Latin America has had so many. The Mexican Revolution in particular. It began in 1910 but when did it end?

2. What's your favorite course to teach?

The Cold War in Latin America, which will be a graduate seminar next semester. The Cold War is a fascinating subject because more documents are released every day which reveal more information as to what was really going on.

3. Who's your favorite former Latin American leader?

Of those I've met, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who has a great sense of humor and the language of an intellectual.

4. Who do you think will come after Fidel?

Raul. And I have a bet with Jeffrey Sachs on this one. Sachs believes that socialism will only last one week without Fidel; I believe it will last longer. Raul has expressed interest in China's system so I think we could expect to see Cuba move to economic liberalism while maintaining a single party system.

5. Out of all your work, what are you most proud of?

Good research and writing. Good students I've been able to help along the way.

6. What's the last book you read?

Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar, by Simon Sebag-Montefiore.

7. What's your favorite meal?

I don't have a favorite—I'm an omnivore! And I drink coffee. With milk and Equal.

8. Favorite fruit you can only get from south of the border?

Chirimoya.

9. If you had to live in one place the rest of your life, where would it be?

New York with Fall weather.

10. If you were to start your career over again, what would you do or who would you be?

History professor. It's a lot of fun, so why not?

11. What's the weirdest thing a student has ever done or asked in class?

I haven't really had anything "weird" happen in class, but I remember one time when I walked into a graduate seminar I was teaching as an assistant professor at the University of Chicago. One of the students sitting there had published a book I had recently read and I hadn't published anything yet! (This was in 1970.) I had the distinct feeling that he should be teaching the seminar and not me.

12. The famous ILAS question: Mets or Yankees? (Red Sox okay, but beware)

I was born in NYC but spent part of my childhood in Ohio, so I'm a Yankees and Reds fan. But I've also spent the last 12 years in Boston and it's hard not to feel sympathy for them.



Professor John Coatsworth, pictured here, has joined the Columbia faculty for the 2006-2007 school year.

Parting shot

BEST IN SHOW. During Venezuela's presidential campaign, electioneering played out on the streets of Caracas, with supporters of President Hugo Chavez and Manuel Rosales using everything they could to get their message out. Many Chavez supporters were keen to show they are "rojo, rojito" and wore red shirts or baseball caps in allusion to Chavez's berets. Some Chavistas went so far as dyeing their dogs in shows of support that were anything but subtle. Chavez was handily re-elected this past weekend.



STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Undergraduate Student Group Looks to Shine Light on Latin America at CC

As freshmen at Columbia last semester, Gabriel Grados and Nicolás Alvear (both CC' 09) felt that the current slate of undergraduate clubs didn't offer an adequate space for their narrative – and that of other Latin American students – to be told. Thus began OLAS, the Organization of Latin American Students.

While Columbia College counts with other organizations labeled "Latina/o" such as the Society of Latinos (SOL) and the now-infamous Latino Caucus, OLAS was constructed around a different starting point: to create awareness of the Latin American region, its issues and conflicts, at the undergraduate level at Columbia.

While international issues are part and parcel of life at SIPA, at the College this may not be the case, which prompted the group to fill the gap. Vedova, a sophomore majoring in Political Science and native of Costa Rica, says that there is too much dependence on U.S.-oriented Latino communities, and that more input from Latin American communities is needed.

"We find that there has been a great interest in Latin America," said Lea Udler, a sophomore majoring in Economics and Political Science from Bolivia, "so in that respect, it has been easy to organize a group. But on the administrative aspect, it has been difficult to consolidate the group and get recognized by the University, but we are getting there."

This past term, OLAS was denied permission by ABC, the undergraduate group

charged with reviewing student organizations for recognition. Recognition means funding and access to meeting space on campus. OLAS has, however, found institutional support at ILAS. Gabriel Grados, a sophomore majoring in Economics and Mathematics from Peru, thanked the support of Prof. Tom Trebat, who participated in an academic forum the group organized that also included Prof. Pablo Piccato and Katerina Pizzigoni from the Department of History, as well as our Visiting Professor, Jorge León-Trujillo. OLAS plans to work more closely with ILAS and other Latin American groups throughout the University, such as LABA at the Business School.

OLAS is composed of an "E-Board" where members serve administrative positions and oversee committees. The current board is comprised of: Gabriel Grados, President and Chair of the Outreach committee; Nicolás Alvear, Vice President and Chair of the Programming committee; Laura Blanco, Secretary and Chair of the Social committee; Lea Udler, Treasurer and Chair of the Fundraising committee; and Andrés Vedova, Editor of the OLAS blog and Chair of the Publications committee.

When asked the famous ILAS question (Red Sox vs. Yankees), Vedova replied, "but we like soccer better." Well put.

RISEING STARS: Members of the OLAS E-Board sit down for a chat at ILAS. From left, Gabriel Grados, Andrés Vedova, and Lea Udler (all CC '09).



FINAL REMINDERS!

- The Institute will be closed from Dec. 25th to Jan. 2nd; work resumes on Jan. 3rd...
- Applications for Fellowships will be available both in the office and at our new, redesigned website, in January...

About the Institute

The Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) is the center for Latin America policy development and research at Columbia University. The Institute is housed in the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), which provides our students and faculty with access to the resources of one of the major policy institutions in the world.

For more than 40 years, ILAS has supported scholarship and professional achievement in the field of Latin American Studies. It was founded in 1962 in response to the government's need for knowledge of what was then a relatively understudied region. In recent years, ILAS has become known within the Columbia University community as the best resource for both contextually-grounded information and institutional contacts in Latin America.

DIRECTOR: Albert Fishlow

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Thomas Trebat

ADMINISTRATOR: Eliza Kwon-Ahn

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Jessica Gillota (MIA '07)

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