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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Department of Latina/Latino Studies

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

A View from the Interim Chair

Gilberto Rosas

As I begin my second semester as interim chair, temperatures are plummeting. A major snowstorm is imminent.

But the sunshine, warmth, and promise of the spring beckon.

I want to thank the faculty, staff, students, affiliates, administration, allies, and larger LLS community for their ongoing support of our unit. We have lost people over the years to attrition.

We are in a moment of transition...and one of promise.

The dedicated work of our faculty—their research, their teaching, their service to our communities and the institution—continue to bolster us. Our faculty win awards, as I documented in the last newsletter. These include **Natalie Lira**, who was named one of the College of Liberal Arts & Science's 2022-2023 Helen Corley Petit Scholars for outstanding early career scholars. Or there are our faculty fellows at the Humanities Research Institute, **Janett Barrágan Miranda** and **R. Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada**. And **Nic Flores**, who received the Lincoln Excellence for Advanced Assistant Professors (LEAP) award, as well as **Angharad N. Valdivia**, who was the faculty curator of **Quinceañeras: Celebration, Joy, and Ethnic Pride** at Spurlock Museum. Please see below for more recent good news.

Our staff is in moment of deep transition. Alicia P. Rodriguez, our dedicated and tireless academic advisor & administrative coordinator, will enter a new chapter of her life this summer. And we have a new office manager, Marisol Hughes. Please see below for more details about both.

There will be events this spring. They include a party to honor the books authored by Natalie Lira and Mirelsie Velázquez, academic talks, an LLS alum panel, and the like. Please follow us on Facebook and elsewhere to learn about them. They mark both the continuities and the changes that make us LLS.

Our students, too, feel the changes. They push us. They ask questions. They want answers.

It is these and related commitments that remind us that Latina/Latino Studies both as a unit and as a field demands rebirth. They kindle alternative ways of thinking, imagining, and living life. They inspire our intellectual pursuits and our quest for justice, while recognizing how knowledge and power prove inseparable, when we speak truth to power.

I can't wait for the warmth of spring. I wish you a warm and productive semester.

DEPARTMENT NEWS

Professor Mirelsie Velazquez Joins LLS

LLS is pleased to announce that **Mirelsie Velázquez**, PhD, has joined our faculty as an associate professor of Latina/o Studies. She is teaching LL 238 Latina/o Social Movements. As an interdisciplinary scholar, her work centers the history of education, women's history, Puerto Rican studies, gender and sexuality, and teacher education. Her book, *Puerto Rican Chicago: Schooling the City, 1940-1977* (University of Illinois Press 2022), chronicles the Puerto

Rican community's response to the urban decay in which they were forced to live, work, and especially learn. Her work has most recently appeared in the journals *Latino Studies*, *Centro*, and *Gender and Education*.

Dr. Velázquez is working on a second book that historicizes Puerto Rican women and other Latina activists in higher education across the Midwest, from the 1970s to the 1990s, as they worked to create homespaces.

Professor Velázquez is a three-time alumna of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, earning her BA in political science and both an MA and PhD in educational policy studies. She was active as an undergraduate and graduate student at both La Casa Cultural Latina and Latina/o Studies. Having attended Chicago Public Schools, she is engaged in supporting the professional development of teachers and staff in local schools.

New Faculty and Affiliate Accomplishments

Latina/Latino Studies is pleased to announce that **Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada** has been selected to co-lead the second Humanities Research Institute Interseminars Initiative with colleagues **Maryam Kashani** (Asian American Studies and Gender & Women's Studies) and **Junaid Rana** (Asian American Studies). Their project, titled "Improvise and Intervene," challenges scholars to reimagine how scholarly theory and methods are taught and practiced, expanding the possibilities for innovation in interdisciplinary, collaborative research design. Faculty and students will explore texts and creative works that wrestle with pressing social issues and the multiple methods used in conducting and presenting research. They will also interrogate genealogies of improvisation and intervention through reading, listening, and watching, while engaging in weekly improvisatory exercises and responses drawn from surrealism, documentary and neorealism, speculative fiction, theater, music, and other sources.

More details are available on the **HRI website**.

LLS is delighted that **José A. de la Garza Valenzuela's** recent article **"Necessarily Hidden Truth(s)': Documenting Queer Migrant Experience in Rigoberto González's *Crossing Vines*"** (*MELUS* 46.3, 2021) was awarded the Crompton-Noll Award for best essay in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer studies in modern languages, literatures, and culture. The Crompton-Noll

award is presented jointly by the Queer/Trans (Q/T) Caucus of the American Studies Association and the Gay and Lesbian Quarterly (GL/Q) Caucus of the Modern Language Association.

The award pays tribute to Louis Crompton, who passed away in 2009, and Dolores Noll (Kent State University), two early scholar/activists who helped found the Gay and Lesbian Caucus. The award recognizes the important work of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or queer studies/theory in the modern languages and the history that has helped make this current work possible.

LLS Faculty affiliate **Yuri Ramírez**, an assistant professor of history at UIUC with a doctorate from Duke University, has been awarded humanities release time. This will provide critical support for her to integrate ethnographic research that she conducted in the summer of 2022—with research funding through the Campus Research Board Funding Initiative for Multiracial Democracy program—to paint a more nuanced portrait of how indigeneity functions across borders in the communities with which she collaborates.

Her book, *Indigeneity on the Move: Transborder Politics from Michoacán to North Carolina,* is under advance contract with the University of North Carolina Press. It illustrates that Indigenous people, in this case cheranis, have the power to link nations, communities, and individuals across great distances and establish a contiguous communal sense of self. Moreover, Professor Ramírez will explore how people moving across borders, and their communities left behind, have adapted racial and ethnic identifications over time as tools of empowerment to confront intersecting systems of racism and colonialism. *Indigeneity on the Move* traces the movement of Indigenous P'urhépecha migrants from Cherán, Michoacán, México, to and from North Carolina during the late twentieth century. It explores how indigeneity as a formation is at times racialized, and is repeatedly reconstituted, always contingent on time and place.

Lastly, LLS would like to congratulate professor of LLS and Communication **Isabel Molina-Guzmán**, who is now the College of LAS associate dean for student academic affairs.

STAFF TRANSITIONS

Alicia's New Beginning

LLS shares the bittersweet news that Alicia P. Rodriguez has decided to retire from UIUC, effective June 30, 2023, after some 20 years of service to the unit. A tireless advocate for LLS, she has nobly served as the associate director of the Latina/Latino Studies Program and later academic advisor and administrative coordinator of the department as of January 2003.

Alicia has advised hundreds of undergraduate minors and majors and graduate minors. She has been active in curriculum planning for the unit and managing the unit programming activities. She also has periodically taught Latina/o Studies courses and independent studies with many students. She has served on multiple committees across campus, including the Latina/o Family Visit Day Program committee, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration Committee, the College of LAS General Education Committee, and the Provost's Teaching Advancement Board. She is the co-founder of the Latina/o Resilience Network, which was created with Veronica M. Kann in 2014. And, she is an active member of La Estación Gallery and the Brown Theatre Collective, which was housed at LLS over several years.

She was awarded the College of LAS Academic Advising Award and the Campus Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Advising. Alicia was also awarded the Cathy Acevedo Award for Commitment to Students in 2008 and the Outstanding Faculty Award in 2005 at the Latina/o Congratulatory Ceremony. Alicia holds a Ph.D. and A.M. in Social Foundations of Education from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and an A.B. from Hamilton College.

We're going to miss Alicia. We wish her well on this exciting chapter of her life.

Stay tuned for your chance to wish her the best.

New Office Manager, Marisol Hughes

Marisol Hughes is the new LLS office manager as of mid-December. A native of Quito, Ecuador, Marisol earned her bachelor's degree in accounting in 1998 and a master's in audit in 2001 from the Central University of Ecuador. She has worked in the field since 2008, moving to Champaign in 2016.

Marisol is passionate about working with people and helping achieve their goals. She has volunteered as a cultural and lingual intermediary for the

Champaign-Urbana Guatemalan community. She also worked in Extension, where she contributed to effect positive changes in the communities, extending knowledge and changing lives. She looks forward to “getting to know everyone in our department and working together.”

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