PLAS: A Retrospective
by Michael Stone

Stanley J. Stein was named the first director of Princeton's Program in Latin American Studies in 1967. But according to Stein, PLAS's origins really should be traced to the scholarship and dedication of Professor of History Dana Gardner Munro. At a January 1967 dinner honoring the Doherty Foundation's gift to endow PLAS, Stein remarked,

"The development of Latin American Studies until very recently was left to the labors of a few hardy souls, in history and literature, scattered in a few universities of the United States: Berkeley, Stanford, Texas, Duke, Harvard, Columbia, Yale and Princeton. One of those hardy souls is Professor Dana Munro. Fulfilling the precept that Latin America must enter the scholar's being through practical experience, he traveled as a graduate student through Central America, 1914-15, collecting data for his doctoral dissertation, The Five Republics of Central America (1918), still a standard work on the pre-1918 years. Like so many of the students he was later to train at the Woodrow Wilson School, Professor Munro utilized his research experience, his study and his understanding of what was then a tension-ridden and critical area of U.S. foreign policy, the Caribbean and Middle America, in government service, in the State Department. After more than a decade of such service, he lost neither interest nor expertise in his area: on leaving the State Department, he published in 1934 a second major study, The United States & the Caribbean Zone, and in 1942 he offered the general public a synthesis, The Latin American Republic, a work already in its third edition."

"In a very real sense, it is Professor Munro who laid the foundation of Latin American Studies at Princeton, and in a variety of ways: through his teaching in the History Department; through undergraduate conferences in the Woodrow Wilson School which focused on problems of the area; through judicious grants, financed by the Doherty Charitable Foundation to undergraduates who needed field experience to gather material for senior theses. His attention to undergraduates in the Woodrow Wilson School sparked the interest of historians (or Latin Americanists among the historians) such as Richard Morse of Yale and Milton Vanger of Brandeis."

"It was at the beginning of a decade of stagnation or, if you will, withering of Latin American Studies throughout the United States that Professor Munro with the support of the Doherty Foundation initiated and maintained one of the vital, almost unique and surely essential national programs for the training of specialists in Latin American Studies: the Doherty Fellowships for advanced study in the social sciences [1948-1985]. Since 1948 Professor Munro and the selection committee he has chaired have awarded over 160 fellowships in the field of history, anthropology, sociology and economics. Nor did Professor Munro neglect Latin American Studies at Princeton. He arranged to have both the History and Romance Languages and Literatures departments add faculty members with major interests in Latin America, subsidize the field research of three to four juniors each summer in Latin America; allocated funds for the improvement of the Latin American collection in Firestone Library; and encouraged an interdisciplinary senior seminar in History and Literature [co-taught by Stein and Jack Hughes of Romance Languages]. It is a fact that the record of 10-11 senior theses per year on Latin American themes since the late thirties down to 1961, when Professor Munro retired, is a most decisive tribute to his little-advertised yet unserving support to Latin American Studies at Princeton. I might add that Professor Munro has not abandoned his scholarly interests. Two years ago he published what has already become a major contribution to the field in which he has immersed himself, Intervention & Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean 1900-1921, and he is currently at work on the second and complementary volume covering the following decades."

"This, in brief, has been the legacy of Professor Munro to Latin American Studies at this University as teacher, administrator, scholar, and I think that you will agree that this legacy is a most substantial one."

"In the five years since Professor Munro's retirement Princeton has tried to build on his foundation. Since 1963 a Latin American Studies Committee has met regularly... Our guiding principle, as members of this community of scholars, is to achieve understanding of the area we are dedicated to study. We must have no parti pris, no axe to grind, except the search for profound understanding of the past and present of Latin America. Perhaps this lays a heavy burden upon us, but one we cannot in all candor shirk. We must try to see Latin America from the inside, not from the outside, not as rich cousins charitable toward improvident relations, but as colleagues humbly engaged in the great struggle for human decency and fulfillment everywhere" (from the Princeton Alumni Weekly, October 17, 1967).
Nearly 40 years later, many at Princeton would be moved to a testimonial of similar tenor in honor of Stanley J. Stein, as the Princeton faculty member longest associated with PLAS. Stein arrived at the History Department in 1953, when Munro was still a reigning presence. Regarding Munro, Stein observes, "He was the youngest person ever to have the post of Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs. After graduating from Brown, he went on a post-university tour that took him to Central America, Cuba and Mexico, the early cockpits of American imperialism. While at the State Department he was posted to Nicaragua, Haiti and Santiago. So when he came to Princeton he had a solid understanding of Latin America. When I came here, Dana was the only faculty member teaching Latin American history. He was a tolerant gentleman, and he certainly tolerated my few excursions outside the norm."

Stein continues, "By the time Dana Munro retired in 1962, I felt that we should have a program in Latin American Studies. I approached Dean Brown, and he suggested approaching the Woodrow Wilson School." A Latin American Studies interdepartmental committee operated from 1964 to 1967, and Dean Brown, Dana Munro and Cyril Black (a scholar of Russian history, and then-director of the Council on Regional Studies) approached the Doherty Foundation to secure the original PLAS endowment. "The Department of Education's Title VI funds for foreign language and area studies became available in the mid-1960s, but I never wanted to pursue it, because one never knew when it might dry up." The Doherty endowment provided a more reliable means of program sustenance.

Stanley J. Stein was appointed as the first PLAS director for 1967-1968, and served through 1971-1972. He relates, "Our goals were to determine what the requirements would be for the LAS certificate, to get undergraduates into the field in Latin America, and to create a fellowship to be given at the end of a graduate student's first year, in order to facilitate their second year at Princeton. How would we go about filling gaps in the departments in Latin American Studies? We also had to decide how to allocate the endowment income, and to determine what we could afford in the way of new materials for the library."

A major influence with regard to the latter concern, Barbara Hadley Stein became the University's first Bibliographer for Latin America, Spain and Portugal in 1966, serving until 1977. As noted by her successor, Peter T. Johnson, Stein's appointment contributed to the Program's professionalization, with major consequences for the quality of the collections. Her systematic approach informed the forward-looking social sciences and humanities acquisition policies and priorities elaborated with the PLAS faculty committee. Indeed, her familiarity with trends in Latin America and Europe, and her broad collection development interests anticipated the interdisciplinary research of today. (Elsewhere in this issue, see remembrances of Barbara Stein by several Princeton colleagues and alumni.)

Public programming was another core concern. Stanley Stein recalls, "We had some very good visitors in those days, such as when Sidney Mintz led a seminar on the Caribbean, a course that influenced Rebecca Scott, as I recall." (Rebecca Scott *82, Stein's former student, is professor of history at the University of Michigan.) Mintz also served on a committee of outside scholars who evaluated applications for Latin American research support under the Doherty program based at Princeton. Stanley Stein took over direction of that committee upon Professor Munro's retirement, and headed it until 1985, when the Doherty Foundation exhausted its funds.

Following Stein was economist Shane Hunt (director, 1970-1974), whom the former recalls as a "very engaged" PLAS director: "Shane gave a lot to the program." Stein also recalls the contributions of historian Michael Jiménez during the 1980s. "Michael attracted many students into the program, and was an excellent lecturer who drew large audiences."

Other faculty involved in PLAS's evolution included Paul Sigmund (Politics), who arrived in 1963, first serving as acting director when Stein went on leave during 1969-1970. Sigmund recalls, "I arrived in February 1963, took my first trip to Latin America in June of that year, and visited nine countries. I really became a Latin Americanist at Princeton." Regarding teaching and student research, Sigmund notes, "From the beginning, we prioritized awarding summer field research support for students to work in Latin America. The PLAS committee members would meet regularly over lunch. Among other things we discussed Latin American acquisitions for the Firestone Library. We could only give very small honoraria to speakers, but in the 1960s, students organized a big conference every year on Latin America, more or less from 1965 to 1970. They raised their own funds elsewhere on campus, and from businesses and corporations. Then, in 1970 another group of students, critical of the kind of support the conference sought, organized their own 'anti-conference', and that was the last of that."

Sigmund relates, "I was interested in political philosophy and development theory, so Latin America seemed a natural place to work. In 1964 I taught a course on political development, and Latin America comprised a major component. My first Latin American undergraduate politics seminar was in 1965, and my first Latin American Politics course [LAS 367] in 1967. It's been taught every single year since then, right into the present." (Now an emeritus professor, Sigmund again taught LAS 367 in spring 2006.)

Professor Sigmund directed PLAS from 1981 to 1987, returning as acting director in 1992-1993 and 1996-1997. Of his 1980s directorship, Sigmund observes, "We shared a secretary, Alice Garrison, with European Studies. I had no desk, but would come to her office and sit for an hour or two and dictate letters and memos."

León-François Hoffmann (director, 1975-1978, 1985-1986, 1988-1990) reports that he was made director "by default" after Stein and Sigmund. Hoffmann brought a new perspective to the directorship, bringing Haiti into the realm of Latin American Studies at Princeton. He, too, recalls Alice Garrison as the Program
anchor. "At the time, PLAS was a little family affair, very informal," Hoffmann remarks. "My tenure was marked first of all by the aftermath of the Chilean coup."

According to Paul Sigmund, the student group "Princeton for Chile" led a boycott of Chilean grapes and wine after the coup. And when Pinochet's U.S. ambassador, an Air Force general, came to speak on campus, Sigmund recalls, "The ambassador was met by a very hostile audience in McCosh 10." Professor Hoffmann likewise recalls that the talk "generated a strong student protest."

Hoffmann relates, "We decided to offer Clodomiro Almeida, Allende's ex-foreign minister, a chair at Princeton, Orlando Letelier came up from Washington to confer on how to write a letter to the Pinochet government to secure Almeida's release. Letelier was an impressive individual, and tragically, a couple of weeks later [September 21, 1976] he was assassinated on the streets of Washington, D.C. Almeida did finally get out of Chile, although not because of Princeton; the Mexican president intervened on his behalf." [Sigmund also remembers a large protest meeting outside the University Chapel following Letelier's murder.]

James Irby, who took a post in Romance Languages in 1959 (now emeritus), directed PLAS for the period 1978-1981. As all those interviewed emphasized, Peter Johnson's tenure as Latin American bibliographer was critical to PLAS's growth. Says Irby, "Peter arrived around the time that I became director. He approached me to see whether PLAS might provide funds to acquire the manuscripts of prominent Latin American writers. Things were done more slowly in those days, and I set aside a few thousand dollars to help promote an acquisitions process that has continued to grow. Don Skeyer [Curator of Manuscripts, Firestone Library] also was involved in this process."

As a result, says Hoffmann, "Princeton probably has one of the top university collections for the papers of prominent Latin American authors, and Peter is responsible for that." Irby observes, "Peter Johnson was always very much involved with PLAS, and he had a very sharp eye that helped the program get the most out of its growing endowment." Stanley Stein adds, "Peter has always taken an avuncular interest in PLAS, as should be evident from his acquisitions record, his teaching, his involvement with Princeton-in-Cuba, and his ongoing contact with students and alumni."

Extending Barbara Stein's initiative to begin collecting the ephemera publications of Castro's Cuba and Allende's Chile, Johnson pursued a major expansion by topic and geographic coverage, building a unique collection of Latin American ephemera among U.S. academic libraries today. Johnson also was instrumental in giving academic substance to and deepening the experience of the Princeton-in-Cuba (PIC) program in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Originating as a student initiative from the precept of Bill Potter '68 for Paul Sigmund's Latin American Politics seminar, PIC took students to Cuba every spring from 2000 to 2004, when changes in U.S. Treasury rules effectively ended PIC. Johnson also established the LAS 301 seminar, Research Methods, Sources & Trends in Latin America Area Studies, which he taught for a number of years. Upon retiring from Firestone Library, Johnson served as PLAS acting director (2002-2003). As Jeremy Adelman observes, "Peter Johnson made the Firestone Latin American holdings into one of the world's treasure collections for scholarship on the region."

In his view, the Stein-Johnson legacy "is like a great flowering perennial. It represents a unique contribution to research for many, many generations to come."

Interviewees unanimously agree that another key figure in the Program's growth has been Rosalia Rivera, who (after two decades in the Technical Services Department of Firestone Library) assumed the post of program manager in August 1991 and quickly became a PLAS mainstay. As historian Ken Mills (director, 2001-2002) relates, her colleagues marvel at "how Rose manages to be so incredibly organized, efficient and business-like, while at the same time always seeming to be having so much fun." Moreover, says Mills, "Rose has been the invaluable constant amid much change."

Indeed, she has presided over three major office moves, has seen certificates awarded to some 400 PLAS concentrators, and continues to be in touch with a surprising number of PLAS alumni.

At the end of the 1980s, the Program was primed for a new phase of growth. Hoffmann notes, "We requested an external review of PLAS, which the Provost approved the last year I was director (1989-1990). At that point, I nominated Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones [now Emory L. Ford Professor of Spanish, and Professor of Spanish & Portuguese Languages & Cultures] to become director. I thought he would do well, and he did. The Program really began to grow under his direction. Prior to that it had been pure serendipity, with no systematic coverage of Latin America in the various disciplines."

According to Professor Stein, "Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones (director, 1990-1994) consistently devoted himself to establishing PLAS as an independent entity, distinct from other area studies. He took it to heart and saw to it that we had a constant stream of excellent speakers. He also was very much interested in having a suitable office, and secured a space worthy of the Program, in Joseph Henry House. I think that was critical. He turned PLAS into a first-class program." Irby confirms this view: "The Program's enhanced campus profile really came about under Arcadio, building on the external review requested by Professor Hoffmann."

Hoffmann elaborates, "Arcadio got the University behind him in his goal to have PLAS and the study of Latin America be taken seriously. Some important hires resulted, including Kay Warren, Alejandro Portes, Patricia Fernández-Kelly, Jeremy Adelman, Deborah Yashar, Ken Mills, Ricardo Piglia, and so on. Undergraduate course enrollments and the number of senior theses on Latin American topics reflect that."

Jeremy Adelman (director, 1997-2001, acting 2003-2004) observes, "Qualitatively, Arcadio took things to the next level. He really converted PLAS from a good, small academic boutique into a..."
solid, quality Latin American Studies program. He made it a lively, welcoming intellectual and cultural home, especially for assistant professors and students; that was important for later arrivals like myself and Michael Jiménez. His active engagement as a director made PLAS into a very exciting gateway for Latin Americanists of all kinds, from politicians to scholars, artists, writers and students alike. He created a great wake behind Latin American Studies that opened the way for much that has developed subsequently. (In this regard, it bears mention that Adelman himself was responsible for a fundraising initiative on PLAS’s behalf that resulted in the establishment of the William Ebenstein Student Research Fund; in addition, he created the Sigmund Scholars Award in honor of Professor Sigmund, as a vehicle to get outstanding students into the field early in their undergraduate careers.)

Díaz-Quiñones was responsible for promoting the renaming of the Latin American Studies Senior Thesis Prize (awarded 1974–1988) to honor Stanley Stein, who retired in June 1989. Approved by the Dean of the College, the first Stanley J. Stein Senior Thesis Prize was awarded at Commencement in 1989. Adelman characterizes Professor Stein as “one of the great Latin Americanists in the United States. He represents a time when historians, social scientists, artists and writers spoke with one another much more freely, in truly interdisciplinary fashion. He got PLAS off to a great start, taking the baton from Dana Munro and consolidating an enduring foundation for Latin American Studies at Princeton. Those who succeeded him carried on a great tradition of interdisciplinary, creating something of great value for undergraduates in particular.”

Díaz-Quiñones takes a similar view, noting, “As was the case with Albert and Sarah Hirschman, I’m extremely grateful that Stanley and Barbara were so welcoming, from the very first day my family and I arrived in 1982. One of the first phone calls I received was from Stanley and Barbara.”

“I admire and am inspired by the example of his teaching and research. Stanley was incredibly supportive when I became director of PLAS. He offered excellent advice and was always available for consultation, particularly when the Program was struggling to find a dignified space on campus, to gain control of its own budget, and to define its own institutional identity. Stanley wanted only the best for the Program, and that’s important when you’re trying to direct something like PLAS, to have people like him at your side. He also helped me to create PLAS’s first Advisory Council, which assembled a remarkable group of people, including Albert Hirschman, Hilda Sábat, Rebecca Scott, Peter Smith, Marcia Rivera and other equally distinguished scholars, including alumni such as John Schmitt.”

“The steady support and rich experience of my colleagues James Izby and François Hoffmann was absolutely essential. Along with a group of extremely devoted junior faculty such as Michael Jiménez, Miguel Centeno, Ken Mills, Forrest Colburn and Jeremy Adelman, who then went on to become a superb director, they contributed enormously to the intellectual vitality of the Program. PLAS played a role in hiring outstanding senior faculty, all of whom enriched our understanding of the fields, including Rolena Adorno [director, 1994–1996], David Carrasco, Jorge Klor de Alva, and Ricardo Piglia. This new strength in literature, anthropology and religion was crucial in transforming the Program.”

“Of course, nothing would have been possible without the active encouragement of then Provost Paul Benacerraf, Dean Robert Gunning and the deep commitment of Dean Ruth Simmons. The goodwill of French scholars Karl D. Uitti, François Rigolot, Lionel Gossman and Victor Bromberg, then at the helm of the Council of the Humanities, was decisive. Puerto Rican artists Lorenzo Homar and Consuelo Gotay created lasting graphic images for our Program, which David Myhre, an excellent executive director, later would use in our publications. This was all happening at a time when a new wave of Latino immigrants was changing the cultural and political landscape of this country.”

Díaz-Quiñones continues, “Stanley Stein has been an exemplary scholar and colleague, a man of unimpeachable integrity, immense generosity, remarkable experience and sage advice. Both Stanley and Barbara exemplified that. They represent a particular breed of Latin Americanist and Caribbeanist, a remarkable generation—I also think of Albert Hirschman, Sidney Mintz, Gordon Lewis and Richard Morse. I see them together, and I feel honored just to know them, their inspiration, their true dedication to and respect for the countries and their peoples, not simply as an object of study. They brought real passion to understanding cultures and languages, including Brazil and the Caribbean. To them it was far more than a job, or the motivation to write another paper. This was a generation that opposed fascism and military dictatorships. They discovered Latin America and the Caribbean in the postwar period, and they truly sought to understand the region and its relationship to the wider world while engaging in conversation with Latin American scholars.”

“This is why PLAS created the Stein Prize, an honor that was long overdue. Stanley has been loyal in his friendship, and I owe a lot to him, personally and professionally. Es un verdadero caballero, something rare in academia. I’m quite certain that many others see him and Barbara in that way too.”

As Stanley Stein emphasized more than once in the course of this article’s preparation, “A program is the work of many hands.” Just as he reminds us of the essential work of Dana Munro, leading as it did to PLAS’s 1967 foundering, today PLAS pays tribute to the dedication and vision of all Munro’s intellectual successors, not least among them Stanley and Barbara Stein.”