

**SPECIAL 40TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE-SPRING 2021**

# NOTICIAS

The newsletter of the Latin American & Iberian Studies Program at UC Santa Barbara

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## LAIS Alumni Reunion, Celebrating 40+ Years of Masters

On April 29th-April 30th the Latin American Iberian Studies Program hosted its first-ever alumni reunion in celebration of the 40th+ anniversary of the first Master's degrees. The exciting two-day Zoom event began with welcoming remarks from LAIS Director Professor Cecilia Méndez, followed by a speech from Chancellor Henry Yang, words from Acting Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts Mary Hancock, and former LAIS Director Professor John Foran. The inauguration panel ended with a -much praised- presentation of the history of the LAIS Program prepared and read by LAIS senior Amy Houser, who will join our MA Program this Fall (read her full speech below!).

Nineteen alumni who graduated between 1985 and 2018 shared their professional and work experiences after graduation in seven informative career panels on History, Film and Journalism, NGOs, Business and Administration, Anthropology, Political Science, and Education. Panels were moderated by current and former LAIS faculty including former LAIS directors Gabriela Soto Laveaga and Kathleen Bruhn.



Photos of the flyer used to publicize the alumni reunion.

# LAIS Alumni Reunion

## Celebrating 40+ Years of Masters

The mixer at the end of the first journey, was a more informal time in which alumni exchanged memories and experiences about their endeavors beyond their professional lives. Daniel Smith (1986) talked about his passion for playing the Andean *sicuri*, which he learned when he was in Peru, and Miguel Becerra (2010) and Jorge Gonzales (2012), delighted us with you tube videos of shows they performed in Santa Barbara, when they established the band Los Huachinangos—some recalled with nostalgia the music they played at our end of the year lunches a over a decade ago!

The reunion closed with a memorial for Professor Emeritus Frank Dutra, a founding member of LAIS. During this time, colleagues, family, students and former mentees of Professor Dutra reflected on his career and influence at UCSB and how he impacted the careers of his passionate students.

The alumni reunion provided an opportunity for the entire LAIS community to look back on their time with the program and look forward to a bright future, thanks to the passion and dedication of LAIS faculty, staff, alumni, and students. A recording of the opening address by Chancellor Yang is available [here](#) and the full program is available [here](#).



Chancellor Henry Yang delivered the opening remarks of the event



Audience during the opening remarks

## Student Highlights

### LAIS, A History: An Ever-Evolving Interdisciplinary Program

*The following essay on the origins and history of the LAIS program was prepared and presented by LAIS senior and incoming graduate student **Amy Houser** in the opening remarks of the reunion.*

#### The Origins of LAIS: Hispanic Civilizations

The Latin American Iberian Studies Program at UC Santa Barbara was originally known as Hispanic Civilizations, which first awarded undergraduate degrees in 1957. The first Master's degree in Hispanic Civilizations was earned in 1974, followed by one in 1976 and larger cohorts beginning in 1980. The Hispanic Civilizations Program was structured as a collaboration between the History and the Spanish and Portuguese departments. Professors Francis Dutra and Phillip Wayne Powell from the History Department were the initial collaborators for the program. Later on, Professor Víctor Fuentes (Spanish and Portuguese) took on the directorship. Professor Fuentes recalls the program's initial focus was on the "Iberian tradition and influence in Latin America" and he, like many other directors, sought to cultivate the diverse interests of the faculty and student body by organizing events on campus. Professor Fuentes proudly shared his fond memories of the Festival del Cine Latinoamericano for which he invited famous film directors from Latin America to present their films in Campbell Hall. The event took place in 1987 and attendees included

# Student Highlights

Miguel Littín (Chile), Paul Leduc (México) and Jorge Ali Triana (Colombia). Passionate faculty and staff members have continued to shape the program and work to expand its presence on campus and within the greater academic community. The Hispanic Civilizations program set the foundations for what would later become the LAIS program, and it is where the history began.

## The Name Change: Transitioning from Hispanic Civilizations to Latin American Iberian Studies

During the mid-1980s in the political atmosphere which followed the Chicano Movement and other similar movements, there was a push on campus to transform the Hispanic Civilizations program into a broader, more diverse and timelier program. UC Santa Barbara Latin Americanists in the History, Spanish and Portuguese, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, and Communications departments collaborated and brainstormed about how they could change the program for the better. Professor Sarah Cline (History) recalls that the intention was to create a Latin American Studies program that benefitted from many departments on campus and boasted a larger portfolio of areas of study.



LAIS Office Sign in Phelps Hall

Professor Frank Dutra (History), a specialist in medieval and early modern Portugal and colonial Brazil, advocated for the inclusion of “Iberian” in the program’s name, and thanks to him UCSB’s program was reborn as Latin American Iberian Studies. The inclusion of “Iberian” speaks to the diversity of the faculty, has shaped the interests of the graduate students and generated well-rounded scholars from the undergraduate program. The first undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded for Latin American Iberian Studies proper, were granted in 1990, serving as a testament to the hard work of the new Latin American Iberian Studies faculty members which began many years prior. The first director of LAIS, Professor Cline, looks back on the difficulties securing funding and an administrative headquarters for the program. Her efforts, supported by fellow LAIS affiliates, culminated with the designation of an office space in Phelps Hall and a permanent budget for the program. Professor Cline reminisces on the proud moment when she ordered the sign, which remains mounted on the door, indicating the home of Latin American Iberian Studies.

## Institutionalizing LAIS

The LAIS program from the beginning had daring goals and dedicated staff and faculty, however, the program faced institutional level struggles. Under the directorship of Professor John Foran (Sociology) from 1995 to 1999, the program’s bylaws were drafted and passed, which are still in use today. Additionally, Professor Foran developed the first FTE (full time equivalent) hiring plan in hopes of attracting and supporting affiliated staff and faculty, which continues to be an ongoing project. Professor Foran was fundamental to the solidification of the LAIS academic program. Under his tenure the curriculum for graduate and undergraduate studies was revamped to include an introductory course for undergraduates, LAIS 10, additional upper-division courses LAIS 101, 102, 190, 194AA-ZZ, 195ABC as well as adding the graduate courses LAIS 202, 203, 293ABCD, and 294AA-ZZ. An honors section to the pre-existing LAIS 100 course was also added. Professor Foran’s efforts worked to institutionalize the LAIS program by securing funding, creating administrative continuities, and expanding the course offerings for undergraduate and graduate students. After Professor Foran’s term, there was still work to be done to institutionalize the program. Professor Silvia Bermúdez (Spanish and Portuguese) who served as director from 1999-2002, expanded the



# Student Highlights

graduate program through a partnership with the Spanish and Portuguese Department, which provided TAs and funding for an additional 4-5 students. This partnership allowed the program to grow by attracting more graduate students who would contribute to the growth and sustenance of the program.

## Graduate Students: Building and Sustaining the Program

Over the course of the program's history, 121 Masters degrees have been awarded, including Hispanic Civilizations degrees. Alumni of the Master's program have gone on to pursue diverse careers in and beyond academia. Many of the alumni have continued to work in academia, becoming professors, academic coordinators, and program directors in institutions across the country and beyond. LAIS alumni also work in diverse fields beyond academia. Alumni have gone on to become prosecutors, artists, high school teachers, community organizers, administrators and have also found careers in the business world, in state consulates, and NGO's. The diverse and broad careers of the LAIS alumni speak to the strength of the interdisciplinary program which provides students with a wide range of knowledge and exposure to current issues, history, and cultures. During their academic careers at UCSB, LAIS graduate alumni have produced unique and distinct theses covering topics and issues across Latin America and Iberia. Theses have spoken directly on issues in Mexico, Brazil, the United States, Chile, Guatemala, Peru, Portugal, Venezuela, Argentina, El Salvador, Spain, colonial New Spain, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Uruguay, Guyana, Honduras and Nicaragua (Figure 1). The theses have used various different disciplines, such as, History, Language and Linguistics, Literature, Music, Political Science, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, Theater and Dance, and Film and Media (Figure 2). Focuses include gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, education, land reform/social movements, revolution and rebellion, political economy, music, dance and film, literature and language, immigration, religion, state violence and dictatorship, history of the conquest and colonialism, politics, identity, crime, sports, and art and architecture (Figure 3) The diverse interests of the LAIS MA graduates speak to the diversity of the program and its affiliates, as well as the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach which continues to broaden.

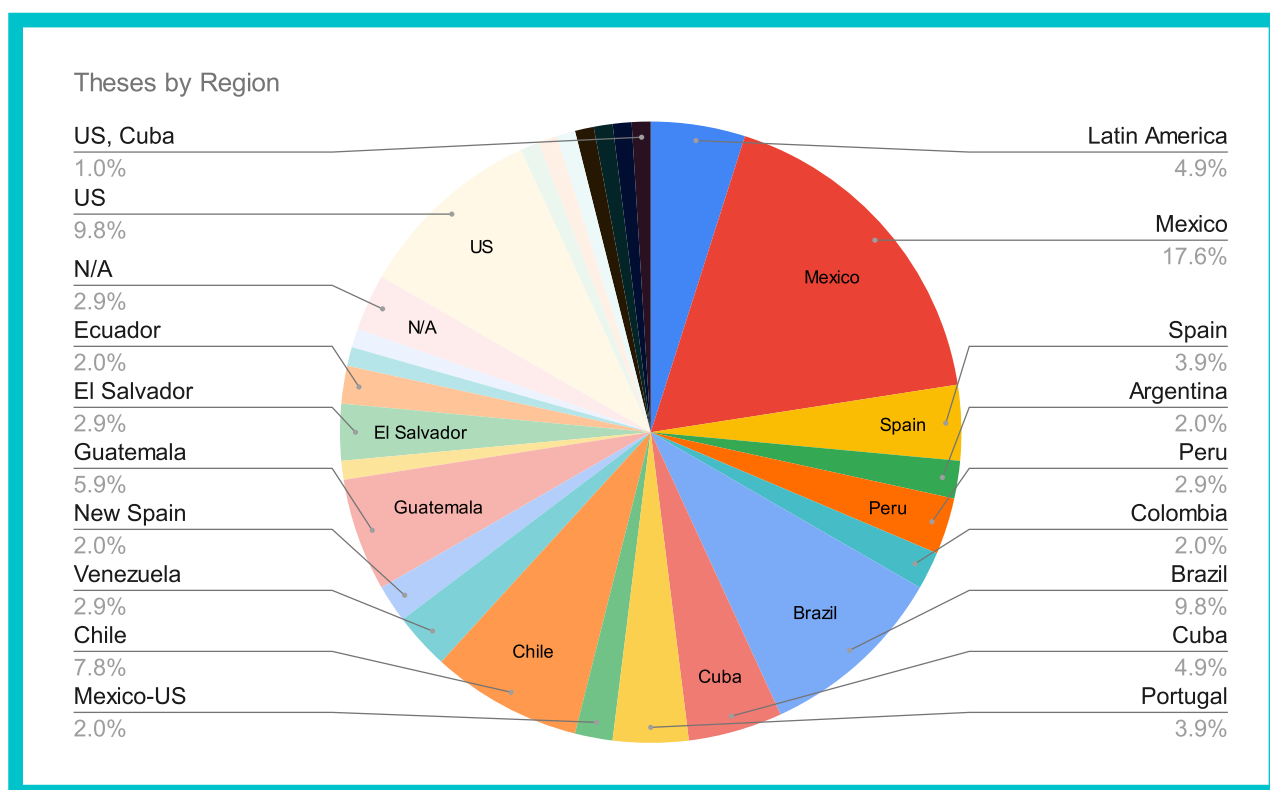


Figure 1, Theses by Region

# Student Highlights

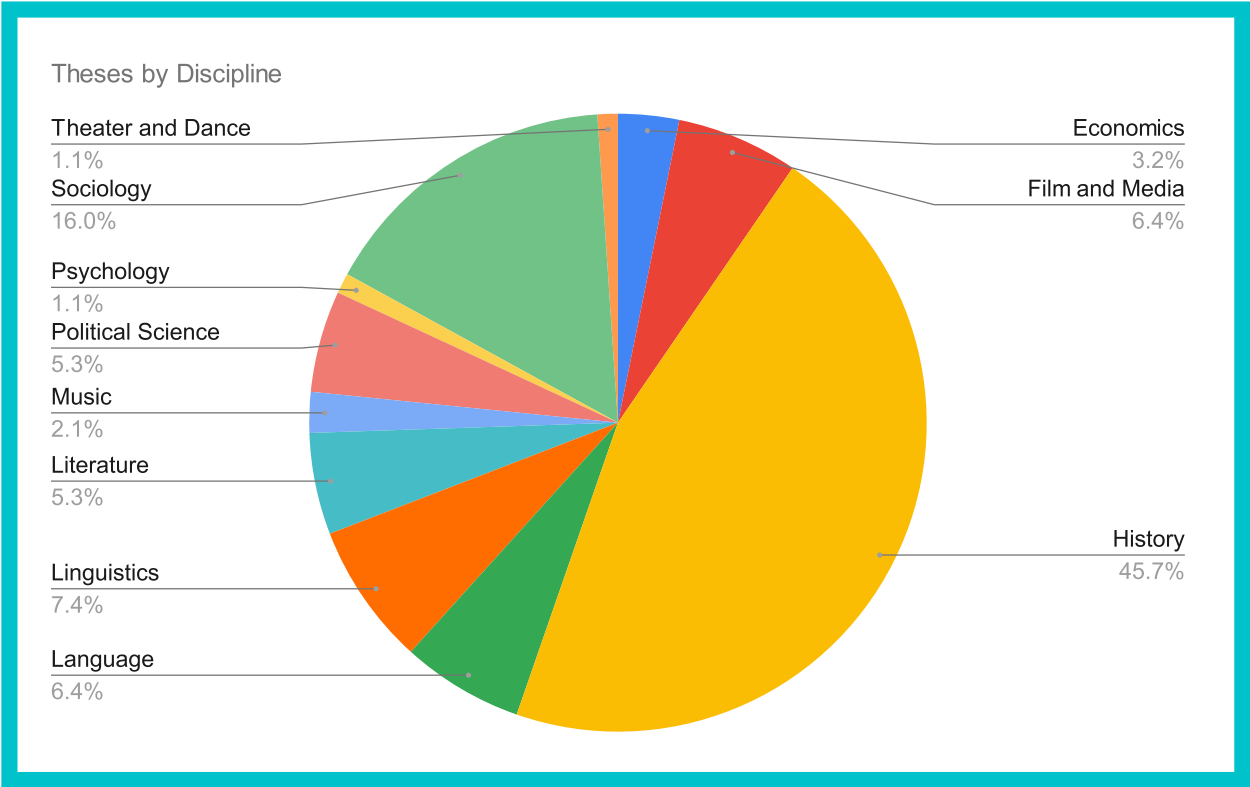


Figure 2, Theses by Discipline

**LAIS Today: Testimony from Director Cecilia Méndez**

Since her arrival on the UCSB campus in 1997, Professor Méndez (History) has always been passionate about LAIS. In 2018, Professor Méndez became the program director with high hopes of revitalizing the program, increasing LAIS’ presence on campus and beyond, and supporting a thriving LAIS community.

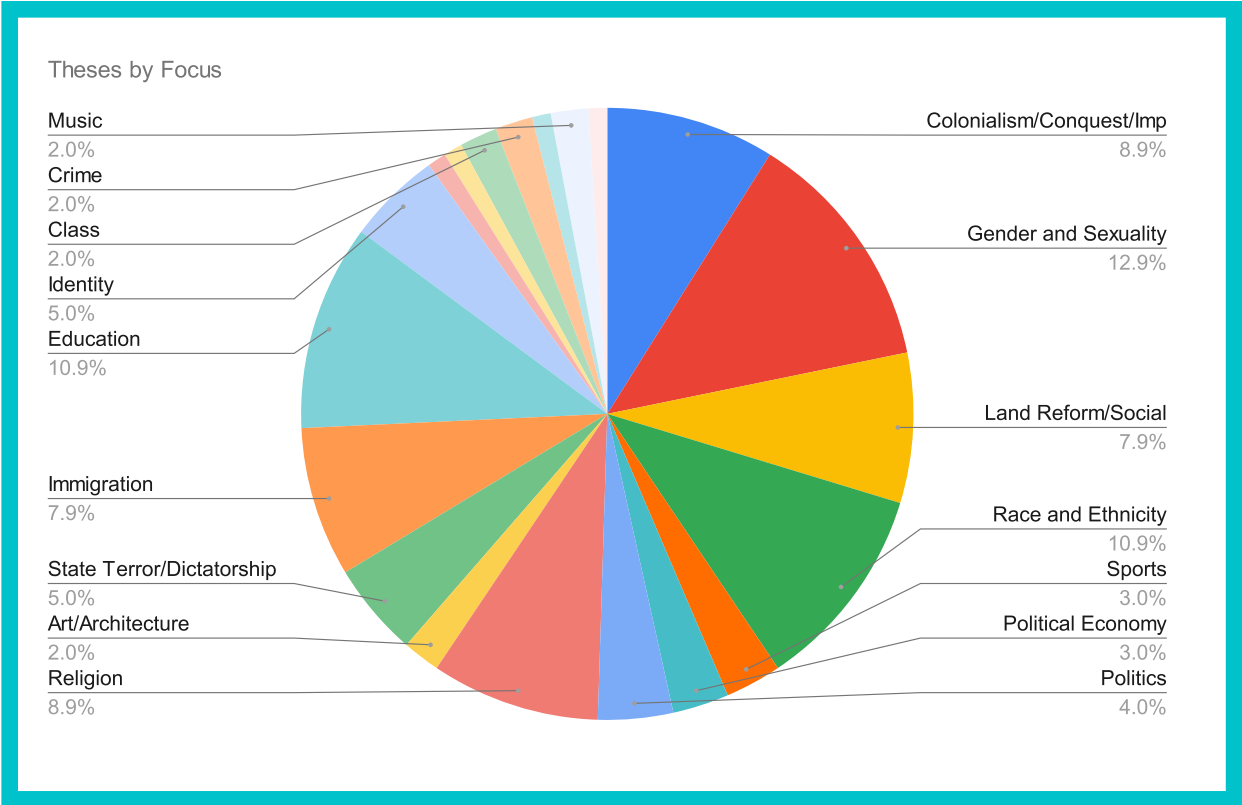


Figure 3, Theses by Focus

# Student Highlights

Professor Méndez's passion for our program has fueled the impressive accomplishments of her term, with the help of Professors Juan Cobo Betancourt (History) and Juan Pablo Lupi (Spanish and Portuguese) in the expansion of LAIS-sponsored events and conferences as well as the revitalization of the academic program. Additionally, Professor Cobo Betancourt is currently serving as the first vice director of LAIS, a new position created by Professor Méndez. Perhaps the proudest accomplishment of her term is the tradition of tertulias, which she initiated in 2018 with a roundtable on the rise of fascism in Brazil, co organized with graduate students in Global Studies. Tertulia is not a random term to describe the informal gathering of faculty and students to discuss and reflect upon events and issues of current relevance in Latin America, Iberia and beyond. In thus labeling them, Méndez was inspired by the early-nineteenth century tertulias, or the soirées where intellectuals, men and women, gathered to talk about politics and forbidden books. LAIS tertulias not only foster discussions among the faculty, but both encourage and rely upon the participation of graduate and undergraduate students. The events have featured discussions with scholars from campus, as well as national and international guests, particularly shining a light upon scholars working in Latin America, who have been frequent guests in the tertulias. While the discussions have continued, and even expanded, during the age of Covid-19, Professor Méndez laments the loss of the social gathering aspect of the tertulias, which increased awareness of the LAIS program on campus.



*Tertulia* "Protests and Politics in Latin America: What is new in Chile and Colombia?" 3/3/2020

Despite the pitfalls of the Covid-19 pandemic, the LAIS program has seen impressive improvements over the past few years, which continue to support and attract students and foster engagement with the affiliated faculty. LAIS has been resilient during the pandemic, for example the second international graduate student conference, "Borders, Power and Transgression" was held via zoom, allowing for the participation of graduate students and scholars from around the world. This conference, originally scheduled for Spring of 2020 but rescheduled due to the pandemic, follows in the tradition of the first international graduate student conference, "Violence, Memory and History" in 2018 and the first all-California LAIS undergraduate conference, "Displacements; Peoples, Politics and Rights" in 2019. As her tenure as director of LAIS comes to an end, Professor Méndez is proud of her accomplishments and hopeful that LAIS continues to grow and prosper as a site of academic formation, intellectual debate, and political engagement.

## 40th + Anniversary of the MA Program and the Resilience of LAIS

Today, we are commemorating the 40th+ anniversary of the first Masters degrees awarded by Hispanic Civilizations in 1980. The celebration was postponed last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This celebration allows LAIS faculty, staff, alumni and current students to reflect upon the growth and development of an ever-evolving program. In the past year alone, LAIS faculty, staff and students have had to adapt to function via virtual learning, remote work, teleconferences and webinars. The program has continued to prosper during these uncertain times, even seeing an increase in graduate applications. The 40+ year old master's program and the 60+ year old bachelor's program have seen great changes in their tenure, but the passion, diversity and talents of the dedicated staff, faculty and students have remained consistent throughout the history of UCSB's Latin American Iberian Studies program.

# Emeritus Faculty Spotlight

## INTERVIEW WITH VÍCTOR FUENTES

*Learn about the important impact of passionate faculty members in the LAIS program. In this special interview LAIS former director Víctor Fuentes discusses his involvement with LAIS and how the program has changed over time.*

**You were born in Madrid, Spain. You left Spain in 1954 and got your PhD from the University of New York in 1964. Then you came to UCSB in 1965. When you first joined UCSB were you involved with the Hispanic Civilizations Program?**

Not very much. The Spanish Department had ties but I was not too involved. It was part of the broader picture. I was interested in the program though. I became more involved once I became the director.

**What do you remember about the program? Who was the director, were the students any different from today? Do you know when the Hispanic Civilizations Program first started?**

The program mostly focused on Iberia, Spain and Portugal, and the tradition and the influence in Latin America. The change to an emphasis in Latin America came later. Students were rarely Hispanic/Latino back then. Despite this, all kinds of students were interested in the program. The program changed to LAIS in the 1980's, I was not too involved until then. It grew, becoming bigger and more interdepartmental/interdisciplinary and diverse. Originally a few famous professors controlled it. After the Chicano Movement diversity in students grew on campus, which increased the demand for cultural studies.



**You were involved with the Chicano Movement in the 60s and 70s. Were Hispanic Civilizations students or faculty also involved? Were there any big events involving Hispanic Civilizations around these issues at the time?**

There were very few Black and Chicano students in the 60s and 70s. They were in my class and I eventually became an advisor to many of these students and promoted Chicano studies and similar programs. At that time there were only 3-4 faculty on campus who specialized in Chicano Studies. I tried to mediate interrelations between the Spanish Department, Chicano Studies and Hispanic Civilizations, I tried to make connections. Our department was a respected academic program rather than a protest. We were able to improve and expand the Hispanic Civilizations program. It was like an evolution; given the time and the influx of new students and new needs of university, we opened up and expanded the program. LAIS was a small program but growing steadily and gaining more interest on campus. Students were interested in the program, but not necessarily part of any movement. The Chicano movement had more impact on the Chicano Studies Program and the Spanish Department. LAIS grew and attracted more students as larger numbers of diverse and underrepresented students came to campus.

**Did you notice any fluctuations in interest in LAIS classes and degrees based on these surrounding political and economic situations? For example, today with the BLM movement, African American studies courses seem to be more popular.**

The Chicano Movement was sort of the turning point, especially due to the increase in the representation of minorities on campus.



# Emeritus Faculty Spotlight

## INTERVIEW WITH VÍCTOR FUENTES



Chicano students protesting outside Campbell Hall

from Colombia. The program hosted a lot of cultural activities and linked to faculty. I taught Latin American cinema in the 80s as it became more popular. At that time only a few universities offered such courses. There was a famous professor from Portugal in the Spanish department who taught Brazilian cinema.

**Were there any other big events with Hispanic Civilizations in the 60s or 70s that you can recall? For example, hosting notable speakers or conferences, important publications or student work, or anything else that made Hispanic Civilizations stand out?**

When I was director, the department organized the *Festival del Cine Latinoamericano* where we invited directors Miguel Littín from Chile, Paul Leduc from México and Jorge Ali Triana

**You became the Director in the 80s, this was when the program's name changed to LAIS. What encouraged this change? Who led this initiative? Was there a lot of debate about this among students or faculty?**

The new faculty and myself thought the name change was a good decision. Latin American Iberian Studies suggests a stronger emphasis on Latin America and broadens the scope of the program. Colleagues from the History department and many others worked on the name change. Students were also more interested in LAIS. It attracted more students, due to the fact that it didn't necessarily have the name targeting one ethnicity group. It broadened the outlook of the program by inviting more students.

**When you were the director, one of your main goals was to diversify and strengthen the program. Can you talk a little bit about why you had this goal and how you achieved it?**

When I was the director, the program became more interdisciplinary, we were able to recruit professors who focused on Latin America in the Sociology, Political Science and History departments. These faculty members continued to strengthen the program after my term as director ended. The goal was to make it more interdepartmental and pluralistic. Some faculty from the Spanish Department were also involved in LAIS, there was a famous Portuguese professor, Jorge De Sena, a poet who was a finalist for the Nobel prize.

**Since you were the director would you say diversity continues to be represented in LAIS? And, is there anything more around diversity you would like to see?**

LAIS continues to be a diverse program, the future is very promising. With the pandemic and political uncertainties, we are currently living in a time of crisis. There is a growing number of Latin Americans in the US, so the destiny of the US and Latin America is linked. Latin America is home to many vibrant and thriving cultures, more and more young people are becoming interested and involved in LAIS. When life returns to normal, the young generations will have a great future, perhaps even embarking on a PhD.



# Emeritus Faculty Spotlight

## INTERVIEW WITH VÍCTOR FUENTES

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*In the US, people think of “America” as a single country, but throughout the continent there are increasingly common goals and needs. America is a great continent that happens to be in a difficult moment at this time, but today’s issues will soon be surpassed. The future of the program and the continent is bright.*

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**Have you noticed any trends or shifts in what majors or Master's students do after graduation?**

I recall a particular MA student who continued his studies, eventually getting his PhD in Ecuador. There was another student who works in an NGO in Santa Barbara. Whether the MA graduates continue in academia or enter other fields, their interest in Latin America and LAIS continues throughout their careers.



UCSB Commencement

**What do you think is unique about the LAIS program?**

The great thing is the program grew and expanded to many more departments, welcomed more diverse students, and offered more interdepartmental programs. LAIS does not have much influence on the departmental level, but the diversity of the students and faculty along with the interdisciplinary nature is a great advantage that is not matched by other departments. Students are exposed to the variety of different matters and topics that faculty cover, and gain knowledge on many different areas.

**What would you like to see be achieved by the program in the future?**

I hope the program continues to be diverse. Perhaps more cultural activities should be offered, such as inviting authors and artists from different countries. Both undergraduate and graduate students should be encouraged to continue on with their studies, forging connections with other universities in the US that offer similar programs. This would help students who wish to pursue a PhD create connections amongst the UC's and other universities.

**Lastly, do you have a favorite memory from when you were director of LAIS or your time working with LAIS students and faculty?**

I fondly recall a student who moved to Peru and went to SDCC. This student earned an MA and PhD in Spanish and Portuguese, very representative of the time. At that time, there was no email, and we exchanged letters while the student was in Peru. I was very moved to see what this student accomplished, and I enjoyed supporting them on their journey.

# Alumni Spotlight

## INTERVIEW WITH JORGE GONZÁLEZ

*In this interview LAIS MA alumnus Jorge Gonzalez (2012) shares his experiences in the LAIS graduate program and how his studies influenced his work in activism.*

### **What spurred your interests in Latin America and/or Iberia?**

I was looking for a program, specifically a postgraduate program, where I could have the liberty of doing an interdisciplinary focus, and a department that would let me collect my personal ideas. I was not sure I wanted to do a PhD. I wanted to pick up tools I did not get in my undergraduate education. LAIS gave me the opportunity to pick what classes and professors I wanted to take, which was exactly what I was looking for.

### **Please tell us a little bit about your MA thesis project, "The (Re)construction of Blackness in Costa Chica, Oaxaca: NGOs and the Making of an Afro-Mexican Ethnic Group". What was it about?**

It began through my own curiosity. I knew that in my lineage there was an African presence and now I consider myself Afro descendant in Latin America. I was interested in the hidden and silenced black family members who were kept secret. It is important to understand and acknowledge the indigenous presence and history. I took courses that covered such topics while I was in undergrad and I took the opportunity to study abroad in Oaxaca. There, I got to visit and encounter a black community in Latin America for the first time. That sparked my curiosity. There was little work on the Afro/Black experience in Mexico, and I knew I wanted to attend graduate school and study the pre- and post-colonial struggle for ethnic recognition in Mexico. I followed a bunch of groups online about the struggle to get recognition in Latin America, worked on an honors thesis doing field work in Oaxaca. I also got the opportunity to meet with leaders in the recognition community, such as Father Jlyn Jemmott from Trinidad and Tobago, a Black priest who went to Mexico to start a social consciousness around blackness in Mexico. LAIS allowed me to peel off the layers of my curiosity, and more clearly articulate what I was curious about.

I was able to reconstruct through a collected memory of people who did not see themselves as Afro-Mexican. LAIS allowed me to peel off the layers of my curiosity, and more clearly articulate what I was curious about. I was able to reconstruct through a collected memory of people who did not see themselves as Afro-Mexican. There needs to be a movement encouraging recognition and awareness of the Afro-Mexican identity. Cecilia Mendez (LAIS Director and Professor of History), Gabriela Soto-Laveaga (History of Science, Harvard University) Casey Walsh (Professor, Anthropology), Emiko Saldivar (Lecturer, Anthropology) were crucial faculty in my growth and learning. They gave me lenses, new theoretical frameworks, and allowed me to dissect this topic more deeply. Through this complexity I began to unpack identity and think about how cultural performance plays a role in identity. I became passionate about how through performance collective identity is formed and how NGOs manipulated this to forward their agenda. I worked with different departments – history and sociology – and use their frameworks to form my thesis.



# Alumni Spotlight

## INTERVIEW WITH JORGE GONZÁLEZ

### Has this work had any influence in your post graduate life?

It influenced me to continue to be an advocate for Afro-Mexican politics. I continue to stay connected to the movement in Oaxaca. In fact, Afro-Mexicans got ethnic recognition in the 2020 census, which was great. I felt anchored and acted as a satellite for that conversation in California. I also direct a department at the World Beat Cultural Center, which organizes virtual forums and puts exhibits together. I am regularly interviewed on blackness and Mexico for local radio stations and other news outlets. My thesis topic and research interests have followed me, which is great as I have a lot to say. So I did not just leave published articles or



theses hidden at a public library. It is part of my identity and allows me to educate youth and others from Mexico. Building bridges between Black and Brown communities. I picked up valuable research skills from studying this topic, and learn how to articulate better and have a clear cohesive story. This has allowed me to articulate my ideas and weave in topics and research topics that present a new lens for seeing complex issues of race and ethnicity.



Fr. Jlyn Jemmott

### How has LAIS influenced your career trajectory?

I was studying social movements of black communities in Mexico, but had an epiphany at the end of my thesis in grad school that I did not really understand social movements happening in the US. I felt like I needed to ground myself in this country, the US, as it is my home. I wanted to get involved, get my hands dirty, and hit the ground running. I moved back to San Diego



and was inspired by my friends that were becoming advocates. It felt natural for me to move into that world, as I had been an organizer/activist in what I had been doing for my research and studies. I wanted to use the research skills I had gained to move policy forward and look at complex social issues with an interdisciplinary lens. It brings so much nuance to singular and two-dimensional approaches used in policy. These allowed

me to see how issues are complex and intersectional, and they need to be examined from different perspectives. In San Diego, I became a community organizer working on immigration and criminal justice reform, and infrastructure projects with local faith-based congregations, such as San Diego Organizing Project – part of the PICO national affiliation – now called Faith in Action.

### What is your current career and what are your career goals?

I work for the Environmental Health Coalition, which is an affiliate of the California Environmental Justice Alliance. Going towards my ninth year of being an organizer, I worked for the last five years as a community and civic engagement organizer. I implemented a lot of what I learned in grad school including research skills and my approach to complex topics. I look at topics from various lenses constantly. I'm really inspired by the mobilization and organization of community events. Cultural performances play a central role. Today a lot is playing out online in shaping cultural stories.



# Alumni Spotlight

## INTERVIEW WITH JORGE GONZÁLEZ

### What was the most valuable part of your experience as a LAIS MA student?

Having the time and privilege to read the amount of books that I read during grad school was very valuable. I was introduced to important literature from Dr. Emiko Saldívar, and Professors Casey Walsh and Reginald Daniel (Professor of Sociology) on crucial frameworks that are cornerstones of understanding race and ethnicity. The MA program also improved my writing skills, which was very helpful. I eventually went back to grad school to read and write a lot. I knew I had to do that for myself. I never thought I would be in this position, but to pay MA tuition, I taught in the Spanish department. Teaching helped me prepare for giving presentations to large audiences at different conferences, cultural centers, etc, and helped me to feel comfortable teaching a subject that I became an expert on, subject that very few people at the time were experts on.

### What advice do you have for current LAIS MA students?

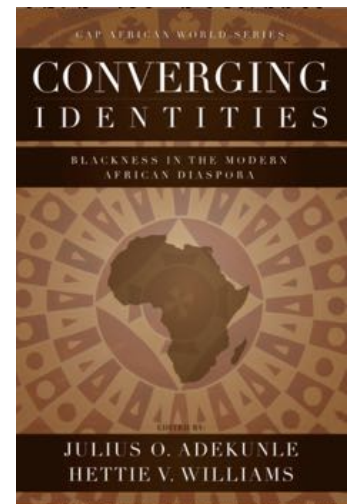
Think about how your masters thesis topic will build a bridge to your next career path. Whatever tools and research you are doing make sure they interconnect to your next big step. Don't see it as pre- and post-. It is something you are building and picking up through the tools you collect. Have a clear vision behind that. Ultimately have fun with the thesis topic. It needs to be fun and something you like. You should find yourself constantly trying to understand the topic through various different lenses and not just through books and reading.

### Any other exciting news you would like to share with us?

I am proud that everything came full circle for me. In my career path, my goal was to publish. I published with a good friend, Miguel Becerra (LAIS MA alumni 2010, did work on Afro-Peru, thesis: *Stereotypes of Afro-Peruvians through the Media: The Case of the Peruvian Blackface*), and Reginald Daniel in *Converging Identities: Blackness and the Modern African Diaspora*.

I manage a Facebook group - AFROMEXICO which has become very popular. It's a platform for people to learn and share information related to Black Mexico, stay updated on current issues facing Black communities in Mexico and the struggle for recognition and visibility of Afro communities. This group has inspired many MA and PhD students to study the Afro-Mexican

identity and experience. I wanted to make the information available in one place for people that was easily accessible. This group has also allowed me to build relationships with professors in Mexico.



**AFROMÉXICO**

Public group · 3.5K members



# Impressions of the Reunion

The alumni reunion and celebration of the 40+ anniversary illustrated how valuable the entire LAIS community is and the importance of the program. Here, some impressions we collected of the events from students, faculty, staff and alumni!

*"The conference was a grand success! It was a wonderful showcase of the importance of LAIS in so many graduates' lives. The conference fostered new connections between alumni...terrific all round!" Congratulations!*

– Former LAIS Director

*"Fue bueno reencontrarme contigo y con otra gente que no veía hace tiempo y conocer a otros estudiantes y ex-estudiantes."*

– LAIS graduate alumnus

*"Its been such a WONDERFUL DAY!! Thanks so much for organizing this!"*

– LAIS graduate alumna



*"Thanks so much for that labor of love, Amy - a superbly wonderful history to have! And such appreciation for your vision and leadership, Cecilia!"*

– Former LAIS Director



*"El evento estuvo super fabuloso!"*

– Former LAIS Director

*"Hearing from our alumni about the things they are doing was not just rewarding but encouraging. They have done so much and the intimate conversations were inspiring."*

– LAIS Affiliated Faculty

*"I really enjoyed getting to see so many familiar faces, including friends and mentors. Great event!"*

– LAIS graduate alumna



*"I thought the panels were excellent. It certainly brought back very fond memories of my time in Santa Barbara. Thank you again. It was a wonderful celebration of the LAIS program."*

– LAIS graduate alumnus

Find more information about our alumni [here](#). For the full program of the event check [here](#) and find the bios of the speakers [here](#). To support the ongoing research of our current LAIS students please donate [here](#)!