

FROM THE DIRECTOR



We always will remember 2013–2014 as the year of the LILAS Benson partnership. It began with a magnificent rollout of our new logo and composite name in October, followed by a strong endorsement of the partnership by the new University of Texas at Austin provost, Greg Fenves, in November. Over the rest of the year, one activity after another—many documented in these pages—built on the partnership, and benefited deeply from its enriching effects. As

we forge these new relations and explore their abundant opportunities, we also affirm our groundings. We are privileged to work in units named for Drs. Teresa Lozano Long and Nettie Lee Benson, two women whose life achievements and contributions to our university inspire us to help LILAS and the Benson—separately and together—reach their greatest potential.

There is perhaps no better example of the fruits of the partnership, and our broader vision of Latin American studies, than the notion of “post-custodial archiving,” the subject of T-Kay Sangwand’s piece. To be successful, this work requires substantive collaboration between library professionals and faculty experts familiar with the archive in question; and it requires horizontal dialogue and cooperation between UT and the given archive in Latin America. With the help of the Mellon planning grant that Sangwand describes, we aim to establish LILAS Benson as a leader in the implementation of this exciting new concept in archival preservation. This, in turn, will facilitate the shift in acquisitions policy—announced in our strategic plan—toward greater acquisition of original and rare materials.

This year’s Lozano Long Conference, which Brenda Xum describes in her piece, offers additional evidence of the exciting potential of the partnership. The scholarly presentations—including one by Xum herself—were excellent, and they were interspersed with formal sessions and informal conversations devoted to the objective of expanding the Benson’s archival holdings on the era of Central American revolutions. Participants were electrified by this dual purpose, which was reinforced by the exhibition *¡Venceremos!*, created by Benson curator Julianne Gilland. Featuring posters and ephemera from the era, *¡Venceremos!* provided a wonderful demonstration of how archival collections enhance scholarly exchange.

It is striking how much the use of space matters in realizing the broader goals of the partnership. Having our own conference room and adjacent exhibition area has been crucial to creating a sense of belonging among staff, faculty, and students. This sense has been further deepened, especially among the students, by the creation of a second-floor study commons, where they can work together undisturbed. It is equally

important to us that LILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections be viewed by the diverse communities of Central Texas as a hospitable place, and a resource they can use. There could have been no better manifestation of this ethos than this year’s ¡A Viva Voz!—the Benson’s signature Latino community public engagement event—where Los Angeles band Las Cafeteras entertained a packed house in the Benson reading room.

There have been many more highlights. Last year culminated with the Brazil Initiative, described here by Fernando Lara, and this year we began reaping the benefits: an invigorated Brazil scholarly program, well-funded opportunities for collaborative research, more Brazilian students across the university. Energized by this success, this year we began a similar initiative focused on Mexico. Scholarly programs, public engagement, student programs, and development all have been accomplished and dynamic, each transformed in its own way by the partnership.

Little of this would have been possible without our stellar staff, who outdo themselves in keeping LILAS Benson on an upward trajectory. Over the past year we were thrilled to recruit several terrific staff members: Lindsay Dudley, public engagement coordinator; Megan Scarborough, grant writer; Carla Alvarez, rare books specialist; Virginia Bustos, development coordinator; Linda Gill, circulation supervisor; José Montelongo, Mexican bibliographer; and Susanna Sharpe, communications coordinator. And it is so gratifying to see this good work properly recognized. This spring Heather Gatlin, LILAS Benson chief of staff, who has done so much to help us achieve our objectives large and small, was honored with the Liberal Arts Staff Excellence Award.

On the faculty side we have one momentous goodbye. Over the past five years, Dr. Juliet Hooker has served as associate director. She leaves the position in August to take up a well-deserved research leave that will allow her to complete her forthcoming book on Afro-descendant political thought in the Americas. Juliet has been a constant font of wisdom and collegiality; she has a special ability to combine close-hewn “systems” discipline with transcendent organizational vision. We are deeply appreciative, and we will miss her.

I have come to look forward to this May ritual: taking stock of the past academic year, making summer plans for lingering to-do’s and to recharge energies. I have a great sense of satisfaction for our accomplishments of the past year, and I already feel the excitement growing for all that lies in store in the fall.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles R. Hale". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Charles R. Hale
Director, LILAS Benson