



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN & LATINO STUDIES

*Message from the Director
Spring 2020*

Dear CLALS Community,

In this moment when the COVID-19 pandemic is sweeping the world and causing unprecedented dislocations, our first concern at the Center is with the safety and good health of our students, faculty, staff, and Research Fellows, as well as our colleagues in partner institutions in Washington, DC and beyond. American University has moved virtually all of its operations online, as every effort is being made to continue to pursue our educational mission and research agendas while prioritizing protection of our community and doing everything we can to reduce the spread of the virus that is causing so much havoc all around the planet.

The weeks prior to the shutdown were eventful and productive. Center-sponsored delegations took part in meetings in Havana and Bogota in December. In January we convened an international workshop on environmental migration in Brasilia and orchestrated a high-profile public launch in Guatemala City of a report on the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). In February, we partnered with the Washington College of Law and the American Immigration Lawyers Association to assemble roughly 300 people for a two-day symposium at AU on the Best Interests of the Child as a principle guiding immigration law and policy. That same month we held a productive workshop on campus that advanced our project, developed jointly with the College of Arts and Sciences, on how the concept of transnationalism has shaped humanistic research focused on Latin America. A series of early March events in Argentina devoted to our work on organized crime in Brazil and the Southern Cone was also highly rewarding.

The unforeseen challenge of the pandemic then disrupted plans for an array of activities that had been scheduled for April through June. We have delayed an April launch in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, of a report on "Lessons Learned" from that country's Mission Against Corruption and Impunity (MACCIH); a presentation that same month – with the Metropolitan Policy Center in the School of Public Affairs – of results of the DC Area Survey regarding racial and ethnic disparities across neighborhoods in the Metropolitan Area; a screening at the School of Communication of a noteworthy environmental film produced by our partners at Caracol Television in Bogota, Colombia; a May meeting in Guadalajara, Mexico, that was to advance the Robert A. Pastor North America Research Initiative, which we operate in partnership with the School of International Service, has also been postponed indefinitely; as has a two-

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week training program for Salvadoran university faculty establishing a Center of Research for Democracy, which was to take place at AU in June.

As those efforts are on hold, we are adapting our work to the exigencies of remote operation while elaborating an agenda devoted to better understanding the pandemic and its consequences. Nearly 40 of our faculty and intellectual partners outside the University took part in a March 24 conference call on impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America, and at the request of UNICEF Country Representatives we are convening next week a similar discussion of these issues with regard to the Northern Triangle of Central America. We have launched a page on our website devoted to analysis of the pandemic and its implications for Latin America. And, at the same time, we have elaborated a survey of Latino-owned businesses in the DC Metro Area, in collaboration with AU's Kogod School of Business and the Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. We hope that this can be distributed before the end of this month, following approval by the University's Institutional Review Board, which appropriately must evaluate our plan to ensure the protection of survey respondents. Our hope is that this research will both illuminate the impact of this shock on the Latino community in our region and inform policy responses by local, state, federal and non-profit agencies.

We will do our best to communicate progress on these and other initiatives that endeavor to comprehend and mitigate the consequences of the pandemic for Latin America and for Latino populations in the United States. The work will take place under difficult conditions, and the isolation that has been imposed on all of us may reduce the frequency of our communications. But we remain eager to receive your ideas about how we can be most impactful.

In solidarity with all of you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Hershberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Eric Hershberg
Director, Center for Latin American & Latino Studies