

Internal Evaluation Report
Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute
University of Georgia

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Introduction and overview of internal evaluation process

Faculty and survey research staff of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG) conducted an internal evaluation at the request of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute (LACSI) at the University of Georgia as part of the requirements for their Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL) Title VI grant from the United States (US) Department of Education. This evaluation focused on the new Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) undergraduate major at the University of Georgia (UGA) and was conducted from November 2006 to April 2007. We employed a variety of methods and received feedback about the new major from university administrators, faculty, staff, and students at UGA.

We developed the study design with input from the faculty and staff at LACSI: Dr. Brent Berlin, Paul Duncan, Marty McCarthy, and Dr. Sergio Quesada. We first emailed members of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute's advisory board asking them to respond to a few questions about the LACS major and received responses from six of the eight advisory board members. We were also able to interview eight of the eleven current majors (and one submitted responses via email while studying abroad) about their experiences at UGA and as Latin American and Caribbean Studies majors. We also asked about their future education and/or career plans after graduating from UGA. We also interviewed Dr. Kavita Pandit, the Associate Dean for the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences; Dr. Trish Kalivoda, the Associate Vice President for Public Service and Outreach; and Dr. Paul Matthews, co-director of the Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education (CLASE), about institutional support for and their interactions with LACSI.

As part of our internal evaluation, we also conducted two web surveys: one with faculty and staff with an interest in Latin American, Caribbean, or Iberian Studies and the other with undergraduate students at UGA. For both the faculty and student surveys, we sent an initial email invitation with a description of the survey and link to the opening page. We then sent two follow-up emails about a week apart to those who had not yet completed the survey. Access to the web surveys was controlled using individual access codes, which were provided in all contact emails. Faculty responded to survey questions about the LACS undergraduate major, their

involvement with LACSI, and the role of LACSI as a campus wide area studies institute at UGA. Forty-eight of the fifty-nine faculty and staff members we emailed completed the web survey¹².

Lastly, we surveyed all undergraduate students in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, which encompasses a number of different departments in the arts and humanities as well as the social, biological and physical sciences. In addition to the Arts and Sciences majors, we also surveyed all International Affairs majors in the School for Public and International Affairs (SPIA) about their potential interest in the LACS major or certificate. Rather than sample from these email lists, we chose to email all students because the initial email mentioned the new LACS undergraduate major so students would learn of the major even if they did not complete the survey. In all, we emailed survey invitations to 13,391 students (13,039 invitations to students in Arts and Sciences and 298 invitations to students in SPIA)³. We received completed surveys from a total of 1,222 students (1,158 from students in Arts and Sciences and sixty-four from International Affairs majors)².

We first discuss the importance of Latin American and Caribbean area studies at UGA and how LACSI contributes to the university's strategic goal of expanding its international dimensions. We then explain why the undergraduate major in Latin American and Caribbean Studies was created at UGA and what types of students will benefit most from the new major, focusing on summarizing responses from the LACSI advisory board and from LACS majors. We also analyze awareness of and experience with the new major from the faculty and student web surveys. Next, we discuss results from the web survey about what types of students expressed interest in pursuing an undergraduate certificate, minor, and major in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Then, we focus on summarizing responses from faculty and LACS majors about the undergraduate major requirements and the proseminar series. Finally, we provide an overall evaluation of the new major and the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute based on responses from faculty and LACS majors.

The importance of Latin American and Caribbean area studies at UGA

The University of Georgia has indicated that expanding its internationalization is important in helping the university compete globally and has specifically identified strengthening area studies programs in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences as one of the key strategies for increasing its focus on international studies. In UGA's strategic plan for 2000 to 2010, "competing in a global economy" was identified as one of the three strategic directions to guide the future of the university. As part of this strategic direction, the report mentions several key ways that international dimensions need to be expanded at UGA:

¹ We were unable to contact two of the faculty and one declined to participate because of not having interest in Latin America or the Caribbean.

² We do not calculate response rates for the faculty and staff web surveys but rather provide the total number of completed surveys because we are unable to determine how many emails actually made it to the intended recipients. Email forwarding, spam filters and blockers, and other email options prevent us from knowing whether our email invitation was successfully received by the intended recipient.

³ Emails to 187 students, all in Arts and Sciences, were undeliverable because of invalid email addresses or students whose email accounts were over quota. No emails from students in SPIA were returned undeliverable.

In order to serve Georgia and Georgians in the 21st century, the University of Georgia must accelerate dramatically its international dimension in a variety of ways: By strengthening its current international programs that have achieved international distinction, by establishing new academic programs focused on the international dimension of academic disciplines, by increasing the number of languages taught and the variety of methodologies for teaching languages; by increasing the number of students engaged in study abroad by a factor of ten by the end of the decade; by strengthening the area studies programs of the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences and by developing UGA Study Abroad Centers throughout the world; by integrating multicultural awareness into student, faculty, and staff orientation programs; and by enhancing relationships and partnerships with multicultural populations, both locally and throughout the state, that allow for success in a global economy and promote a climate where inclusiveness and diversity are respected as core values at the state's flagship institution (*Building Georgia's World University*, updated June 2003, page 7, available at <http://www.uga.edu/effectiveness/sp.html>).

LACSI works to promote several of the goals outlined in UGA's strategic plan. It is an area studies program in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences that UGA identifies should be strengthened to help the university compete in a global economy. LACSI highlights the international dimension of departments in Arts and Sciences by promoting interdisciplinary studies focused on the Latin American and Caribbean region. Students can pursue an undergraduate major or certificate in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UGA. Students are required to demonstrate a high-level of proficiency in one of the languages of the region (Spanish, Portuguese, and French) and take several courses in a second language. As part of this effort, LACSI has played a key role in expanding Portuguese language courses at UGA and in increasing the variety of methodologies by offering distance learning language courses. LACSI also strongly encourages their students to study abroad or intern in Latin America or the Caribbean as part of the major and works to establish relationships with universities abroad helping UGA meet its study abroad goals. Lastly, LACSI also engages in public service and outreach with the local community and across the state.

Even though the university has focused on increasing its international dimensions, the initiative to expand Latin American and Caribbean Studies specifically at UGA and offer a new undergraduate major was driven by the energy, hard work, and passion of Dr. Berlin, the director of LACSI, and other faculty and staff on campus, as well as students interested in Latin American and Caribbean studies. Dr. Kavita Pandit specifically mentioned the entrepreneurship and ingenuity of Dr. Berlin and other faculty and staff in creating the new major and working to increase the opportunities available to students at UGA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. She also expressed that the faculty and staff at LACSI were extremely effective in how they utilized the limited resources that have been provided by the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences. Hopefully, UGA administrators will continue to recognize the efforts of LACSI and be able to increase the institutional support offered.

One advisory board member discussed the importance of students in creating the demand for a LACS major at UGA: "student demand was the greatest factor leading to the creation of a major in LACS. UGA students increasingly sought out classes with a Latin American emphasis. As these classes were located all over the university, often students were limited by the fact that diverse classes were 'elective.' Providing a framework in which credit from Latin American courses counted toward a major has allowed students to pursue their interests more fully."

Another advisory board member discussed how the major will help to expose more students to Latin American and Caribbean Studies, “Up to this point, students had to take classes taught in Spanish offered by the Department of Romance languages if they wanted any exposure to Latin America. With LACSI, we will be able to offer courses in English reaching a wider number of students, which will serve as a motivation to encourage them to explore other possibilities in the region and its languages.”

Although some programs and departments across campus integrate international issues into their courses, very few areas studies programs exist at UGA where students can be exposed to a variety of different topics as they relate to a specific geographic region. Several LACSI advisory board members mentioned the importance of area studies in exposing students to cultures and places beyond their own immediate environment. One board member said, “Area studies are essential in any major university because they are interdisciplinary and allow for creation of knowledge and expertise in international issues.” Another board member said, “Area majors also provide students with a greater knowledge of their own American culture since we are able to understand our culture better, when we study others.” These thoughts were echoed by yet another board member who said, “UGA needs to graduate informed individuals that understand the complexities of their own country and the world at large.” Lastly, one board member wrote “Knowledge of peoples, places and cultures is essential for success in a competitive global environment . . . UGA students need the education, our community needs citizens and workers with such knowledge, and the global community requires a continual and expanding effort to learn and understand the local and the global.” Thus, area studies can help students understand both their local and global positions in the world and help them to make comparisons across different regions.

Area studies expose students to a new region of the world, but many courses and majors within a particular discipline or department can also inform students about international issues or how issues operate in different countries in the world. One of the key strength of area studies is that it encourages students to analyze international issues using multiple disciplinary perspectives and to examine the combined influences of historical, cultural, social, political, biological, environmental, and other factors within a particular region. One LACSI advisory stated “I’m a strong believer in interdisciplinary studies and area majors provide an opportunity for students to experience many disciplines as they focus on a particular area of the world.” Another board member mentioned that students are often more connected to an area studies major “From my experience, some students feel more committed within a focused and multidisciplinary program such as that offered by LACSI.”

In addition to the emphasis on international issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, LACSI also offers courses covering various aspects of Latino Studies. Students at UGA are increasingly interested in studying issues facing Latinos in the US and particularly Latinos in the Southeast. The number of Hispanics in Georgia increased by 300% from 108,922 in 1990 to 435,227 in 2000 and the Hispanic population is growing faster in the South than in other regions of the United States (“The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth” 2005 *Pew Hispanic Center*). As one advisory board member noted, “Given the growing presence of Hispanics in the Southeast, more attention of a focused character is needed within higher education. Latin American and Caribbean Studies is one concrete way this can be addressed.” Another board member said “LACS is particularly relevant for the US Southeast. The students themselves are aware of the growing presence of Latin America in their lives, and they want the education to engage with this reality.”

Another way LACSI is working to accelerate the international dimensions of the university and help UGA compete in a global economy is through their involvement in public service and outreach in the United States and abroad. LACSI works to promote relationships with people in Athens-Clarke County and throughout the state of Georgia by engaging in public service and outreach. Dr. Kavita Pandit discussed how service is not a core component of LACSI as an academic unit, but that LACSI has maintained an emphasis on public service and outreach in the local community and across the state. In addition, Dr. Trish Kalivoda, the Associate Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, praised the impact that LACSI has had on the local Latino community in Athens and beyond because of their public service and outreach.

Faculty who responded to the web survey indicated strong levels of support for LACSI's participation in public service and outreach activities with the local Latino community in Athens-Clarke County. Thirty-four (71%) of the faculty and staff think it is very important for LACSI to participate in public service and outreach with the local community and twelve (25%) think it is somewhat important whereas only two (4%) said it is not at all important (see Table 1). In addition, several of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies majors discussed how public service and outreach is an essential part of their career aspirations.

Table 1: Faculty evaluation of the importance of LACSI's involvement in public service and outreach

How important do you think it is for the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute to ...	Very important		Somewhat important		Not at all important	
participate in public service and outreach activities with the local Latino community in Athens-Clarke County?	34	71%	12	25%	2	4%
be involved with an outreach project with K-12 schools throughout the state to strengthen Georgia's Performance Standards for Latin American Studies content?	39	81%	8	17%	1	2%

LACSI also works in collaboration with CLASE at UGA to promote Latin American Studies education in K-12 grades and to improve education for Latinos across the state of Georgia. Thirty-nine (81%) of the faculty who responded to the web survey think it is very important and eight (17%) think it is somewhat important for LACSI to be involved in outreach with K-12 schools throughout the state to strengthen Georgia's Performance Standards for Latin American Studies Content whereas only one (2%) thought it was not at all important (see Table 1). LACSI's involvement in public service and outreach in the local community and across the state will continue to be of importance with the increasing number of Latinos living in Georgia and the South.

The need for a Latin American and Caribbean Studies undergraduate major at UGA

Several members of the LACSI advisory board expressed how an undergraduate major in Latin American and Caribbean Studies strengthens the curriculum at UGA and how the major will help expose students to an important region of the world economy. One advisory board member said, "In a research one university such as UGA, not having a major in Latin American and Caribbean studies was a gaping hole ... Latin America and the Caribbean are geographically closer to the U.S. than other world areas. In addition, interest in Latin American and Caribbean culture and issues is a must in a country like the U.S. in which the latest wave of immigrants

come from this area.” As one advisory board member said, the LACS major “is part of maintaining UGA’s curriculum current and relevant in the era of globalization. It focuses attention on a key part of the world; key in terms of economic, political, scientific, and cultural influence.” Another board member said, “Until this year and in spite of its crescent economical impact, UGA did not offer our students a major that will prepare them to deal with this new area of the world economy.”

Many of the LACS majors echoed the thoughts of the board members in describing why they chose the major. One major mentioned that he chose the major because “cultural studies is something that needs to be really focused on ... Latin America is definitely a very important part of the world economy, especially for the raw products that they produce, and also because of immigration issues.” One student discussed her interest in the major “since I have lived in Latin America and the United States, I am interested in learning about the relationship between the two countries ... and I also like the Hispanic or Latino influence in the United States in politics and culture.” Another student expressed his interest in the major by discussing how “it would be a lot more worthwhile for me to go after than just a language. You also get a very broad background of the culture and the history.” Also, many of the LACS majors mentioned that one of the strengths of the major is the ability to pursue their individual interests within a broader interdisciplinary major that allowed them to examine their interests from a variety of perspectives.

The faculty and staff at LACSI have emphasized the importance of viewing LACS as an area studies major that can appeal to students from a variety of different backgrounds, not only to Hispanic or Latino students. Dr. Brent Berlin, the director of LACSI, said in an online UGA news story that “this major will allow UGA to compete for the best and brightest students in Georgia and throughout the nation who are interested in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino studies” (News release 8-17-2006 “Board of Regents approves Latin American and Caribbean studies undergraduate major at UGA). The faculty and staff at LACSI have had to work hard to dispel the notion that Latin American and Caribbean Studies is for Latino students only. An article by Deshaun Harris in UGA’s student newspaper *The Red and Black* incorrectly stated that the new major in Latin American and Caribbean Studies was primarily aimed at recruiting Latino students to UGA and was part of improving outreach to the Hispanic community (8-18-2006). Although LACSI does engage in outreach with the Latino community, the major was created for students to pursue Latin American and Caribbean studies and Latino studies. One advisory board discussed how LACS is different from other area studies by the types of students they want to include.

I imagine that while programs like African-American Studies and Women’s Studies do offer a special boost to African Americans and women, with LACS rather more is offered; Hispanics will perhaps feel at home there but there is also very extensive room for anyone of non-Hispanic background, as I think the current crop of students demonstrates. Thus, the idea is not just to showcase an important part of the world culture for its own sake, but also to promote a measure of understanding that is less limited, I believe, than some of the other area studies. LACS reaches out to promote understanding and knowledge, while de facto, some other area studies tend to reach in (email response from LACSI advisory board member).

Overall, LACSI strives to provide a setting for faculty and students of all backgrounds to pursue coursework and research on a variety of issues in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as

engage in public service and outreach locally in Athens-Clarke County, across the state of Georgia, and abroad in the region.

The LACS major appeals to students who are interested in Latin America and the Caribbean and/or Latino Studies and often to students who wish to combine their interests and pursue a double major or dual degree. One advisory member said that the major will benefit “students with an interest in Latin America and the Caribbean. Also, students in any major that would like to have an expertise in this area of the world. I envision many will be double-majoring.” Another board member said, “any student will benefit from this major. I believe that students should double major with LACSI and students will come from very diverse fields as business, pre-medicine, journalism, etc.” Another board member agreed that all students benefit from some exposure to Latin American and Caribbean studies.

Eight of the ten LACS majors we interviewed are double majoring; four students are double majoring in International Affairs, four students in Spanish, one in Romance Languages, and one in Sociology. Three of these double majors are also pursuing a minor in Portuguese, and the two LACS majors who are not double majoring are planning to complete a minor in Spanish. All of the double majors added the LACS major as their second major once it was approved, and the two other majors (LACS only) changed their major to Latin American and Caribbean Studies after it was approved. Three of the LACS majors are planning to graduate Spring semester 2007, five next year (either in Fall 2007 or Spring 2008), and two students are planning to graduate in more than two years.

There are a variety of career and educational possibilities for LACS majors in the United States and abroad in Latin America or the Caribbean. One board member said that LACS majors will have opportunities to “work abroad in Latin American or Caribbean countries, or in any corporate, non-profit, or governmental organizations with an interest in Latin America and the Caribbean”. Another advisory board member said, “This major will benefit and interest students that plan to be directly involved with Latin America and/or its crescent Latin population in the United States.” Lastly, one faculty board member said, “a student that has a major in Latin American studies will be much better prepared to enter the professional world in the US and abroad.”

Many of the LACS majors interviewed chose the major to help promote their future education or career goals. Two of the students are planning to attend law school after graduating from UGA (both mentioned interest in immigration law) and three of the students are interested in graduate education but unsure in what field. Students mentioned interest in pursuing careers in international business, teaching languages abroad, international government service, and working with non-profit organizations helping immigrants in the US. Many students expressed general interest in traveling in Latin America and the Caribbean or teaching English or other languages in the region. One student discussed her future plans, “What I want to do is probably law school and my concentration is going to be towards the Latino community, probably immigration or civil rights law ... and if for some reason I cannot go to law school ... I can use the international affairs and LACS major to work for a non-profit or in a different country.” Another student mentioned interest in non-profit work with immigrants “helping in any way that I can to mitigate the psychological or emotional effects of not being able to communicate and having to get by in a country that you don’t really understand.” Another student discussed her interest in becoming a “cultural consultant, where you work for a company and are supposed to be an expert on a region, country or area. When they have to do business with that certain country, then you go and teach the employees what to expect, how to talk to the people, what to do, what not to do, what

offends people, and stuff like that.” Overall, the LACS major can appeal to students interested a range of future career and educational possibilities and prepares students to be able to work abroad if they desire.

Since the undergraduate major in Latin American and Caribbean Studies was approved by the Board of Regents in the Fall of 2006 and officially added by the university in the Spring of 2007, we asked students and faculty about their knowledge of and experience with the new undergraduate LACS major. Almost half of the students who responded to the web survey (43%, n=520) have heard of the new undergraduate major in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. These numbers are encouraging particularly considering that the major was only officially added the semester the web survey was conducted. LACSI should continue to work with the university to educate faculty and staff about the new LACS major and to build student awareness about the major across campus.

Faculty are extremely important in educating students about the new LACS major. Thirty-one (65%) of the faculty who responded to the web survey have undergraduate students in their classes or department who may be interested in the LACS major, and eight of the faculty (17%) said they were unsure whether students in their classes or department may be interested. In addition, fifteen of the faculty members (31%) know a lot, twenty-five (52%) know some, and eight (17%) know very little about the new LACS undergraduate major at UGA. We encourage LACSI to continue to work with faculty members to identify interested students, provide information for these students about the major requirements, and be able to advise them about future career possibilities with the major. Overall, increasing awareness about the new LACS major will help to grow the major and expand the opportunities for courses and research in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UGA

General student interest in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UGA

Over half of the 1216 students who responded to the web survey began their studies at the University of Georgia in the last two academic years: 35% are in their first year, 27% are in their second year, 16% in their third year, 16% in their fourth year, and 7% have been studying at UGA for more than four years. We asked students about their current majors and students could report up to three majors⁴: 29% of the students are double majoring (n=377) whereas only 2% are triple majoring (n=31). Thirty-two percent of the students reported that at least one of their majors is in the social sciences, 31% in humanities, 22% in biological sciences, 10% in business and in journalism, and 9% in fine arts (less than 5% for all other major categories). Thirteen of the students who responded to the web survey (1%) are majoring in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. We also asked students whether they are pursuing any minors or certificates and in what fields; 37% (n=398) of the students are pursuing a minor and 6% (n=58) are pursuing a certificate. Two-thirds of the students who are pursuing a minor are studying a humanities field with a third of the students (33%) pursuing a Spanish minor. Of those pursuing a certificate, 21% are pursuing a certificate in music business, 13% in new media, 11% in leadership and service, 10% in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, 10% in Geographic Information Systems, and less than 10% in all other fields.

⁴ Since students were allowed to report multiple majors, total percents add up to more than 100%.

Seventy-three percent of the students reported that they chose their current major(s) to help them meet their future career goals (n=890), 62% chose their major(s) because they have significant interest in the field with no specific career in mind (n=758), and 50% chose their major(s) to prepare for graduate or professional school (n=614). Less than 10% of students chose their major based on a recommendation from someone, because they could not pursue their desired major, or because it was practical (easy to graduate quickly, in-state).

Sixty-one percent of students reported that their current major(s) is very related to their future academic or career plans (n=744), 26% reported their major is somewhat related (n=312), and only 2% reported their major is not at all related (n=27); 11% of students were unsure of their future academic or career plans (n=137). More students majoring in physical and social sciences (69% each) business (72%), and journalism (86%) reported that their major is very related to their future academic or career plans whereas fewer students majoring in math and engineering (43%), fine arts (47%), humanities (55%), and biological sciences (56% each) reported that their major is very related to their future academic or career plans.

Thirty-four percent of the students (n=410) are studying a language beyond the minimum graduation requirements. Of those studying a language beyond the minimum graduation requirements, 62% are studying Spanish, 16% French, 9% German, 7% Japanese, 6% Portuguese and 6% Italian; less than 5% of students were studying other languages. Seven percent of the students surveyed have studied abroad in Latin America or the Caribbean while at UGA (n=82) with more of these students studying abroad for a Maymester (48%, n=40) than a full semester (29%, n=29). Of those students who have not already studied abroad in Latin America or the Caribbean, 17% of students are not sure whether they would study abroad in the region and 8% are very likely, 19% are somewhat likely, and 56% are not at all likely to study abroad in the region while at UGA. Those who are very or somewhat likely to study abroad in the region are more likely to study abroad for a Maymester than a full semester (57% vs. 25%). Lastly, 31% (379) of the students surveyed are very interested in doing an internship in Latin America or the Caribbean. 51% are somewhat interested (n=622), and 18% are not at all interested (n=214) in interning in the region.

We asked students who responded to the web survey about how interested they are in the Latin American and Caribbean region and in issues concerning Latinos in the United States. Thirty-one percent (n=379) of the students who responded to the web survey are very interested in Latin America or the Caribbean region, 51% (n=622) are somewhat interested, and 18% (n=214) are not at all interested. Of those students who are very or somewhat interested in Latin America and/or the Caribbean, we also asked what countries and topics they were most interested in within the region. The top five countries students mentioned specific interest in are: Costa Rica (15%, n=125), Argentina (12%, n=100), Brazil (11%, n=92), Mexico (10%, n=87), and Cuba (9%, n=71). At least 5% of the students specifically mentioned interest in Chile, Peru, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. Less than 5% of students mentioned interest in the other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The top five topics students mentioned specific interest in are: Culture, including literature, dance, and music (21%, n=156), political and international issues (18%, n=124), nature and the environment (10%, n=73), history (9%, n=69), and languages (9%, n=63). Less than 6% of the students mentioned interest in topics ranging from economic development and poverty, to healthcare, education, and traveling or recreation.

Regarding issues concerning Latinos within the United States, 24% (n=286) of the students surveyed are very interested, 54% (n=660) are somewhat interested, and 22% (n=271) are not at all interested. We also asked students who said they are very or somewhat interested in

issues concerning Latinos within the United States what specific issues they are most interested in. All of the top six issues that students mentioned specific interest in center around immigration. 31% of the students (n=307) mentioned interest generally in immigration, 12% (n=123) mentioned specific interest in legal issues of equality and civil rights, 10% (n=98) mentioned specific interest in stopping illegal immigration, 10% (n=93) are interested in communication and language issues, 8% (n=83) are interested in issues about employment and labor conditions, and 8% (n=82) mentioned specific interest in issues regarding adjustment and integration of immigrants to the US. As we discuss in the next section, students who are very or somewhat interested in the LACS region and in issues concerning Latinos in the US are more interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, minor, and major.

Student interest in the Latin American and Caribbean Studies certificate and major

Since LACSI, currently offers a certificate in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS), we asked students about whether they would be interested in pursuing this certificate. LACSI may consider offering a minor in LACS so we also asked students about their interest in pursuing a minor. More students who responded to the survey would be interested in pursuing a minor than a certificate. Four percent of the students reported that they would be very interested (n=45) and 14% (n=167) would be somewhat interested in pursuing a certificate whereas 5% of the students reported they would be very interested (n=57) and 20% said they would be somewhat interested (n=239) in pursuing a minor in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (see Table 2). In contrast, 58% of the students are not interested in pursuing a certificate or minor in LACS (n=697). Interest in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor did not significantly vary by the year students began at UGA or expect to graduate; however more students are very or somewhat interested in pursuing the LACS certificate or minor who are majoring in humanities (54%, n=196) and social sciences (49%, n=189) than students majoring in fine arts (38%, n=43), biological sciences (34%, n=89), physical sciences (34%, n=15), or math and engineering (30%, n=18).

Table 2: Level of interest in pursuing a Latin American and Caribbean Studies certificate or minor by level of interest in Latin America and the Caribbean and in issues concerning Latinos in the US

How interested in pursuing a certificate or minor in LACS (n=1205)	How interested in Latin America and the Caribbean region (n=1199)			How interested in issues concerning Latinos in the US (n=1201)		
	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
<u>Certificate:</u> Very	4%	10%	1%	12%	2%	
Somewhat	14%	17%	14%	5%	17%	16%
						5%
<u>Minor:</u> Very	5%	13%	1%	15%	2%	
Somewhat	20%	28%	21%	2%	27%	22%
						9%
Not at all interested in either	58%	31%	62%	92%	30%	58%
						85%

Students with interest in the LACS region or in issues concerning Latinos in the US are also more interested in pursuing a LACS certificate and minor; of those who are very interested in the LACS region, 27% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, 41% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS minor and 31% are not at all

interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor (see Table 2). Of those who are somewhat interested in the LACS region, 15% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, 22% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS minor whereas 62% are not at all interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor. Most students (92%) who are not at all interested in the region are also not at all interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor (5% would be somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate and 2% would be somewhat interested in a LACS minor).

Of those who are very interested in the issues concerning Latinos in the US, 29% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, 42% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS minor and 30% are not at all interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor (see Table 2). Of those who are somewhat interested in issues concerning Latinos in the US, 18% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, 24% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS minor whereas 58% are not at all interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor. Most students (85%) who are not at all interested in the region are also not at all interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor (5% would be somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate and 9% would be somewhat interested in a LACS minor).

More students who are studying Spanish, Portuguese, or French beyond the minimum graduation requirements (n=297) are interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor than those not studying one of these languages (n=910). Of the students studying Spanish, Portuguese or French, 29% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, 34% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS minor, and 37% are not at all interested in pursuing a LACS certificate or minor. In contrast, of the students not studying one of the LACS languages, 14% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS certificate, 21% would be very or somewhat interested in pursuing a LACS minor, and 65% are not at all interested in pursuing the LACS certificate or minor.

We also asked students how interested they are in pursuing an undergraduate major in LACS. As Table 3 shows, 3% (n=31) are very interested in pursuing the LACS undergraduate major and 18% (n=215) are somewhat interested in pursuing the LACS major whereas 80% (n=961) are not at all interested. Interest in the LACS major did not significantly vary by the year students began at UGA or expect to graduate; however more students majoring in humanities (32%, n=120) and social sciences (23%, n=89) are very or somewhat interested in pursuing the LACS major than students majoring in biological or physical sciences (13%, n=39).

Table 3: Level of interest in pursuing the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Major by level of interest in Latin America and the Caribbean and in issues concerning Latinos in the US

How interested in pursuing the LACS major (n=1207)	How interested in Latin America and the Caribbean region (n=1200)			How interested in issues concerning Latinos in the US (n=1203)		
	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
Very	3%	7%		7%	2%	
Somewhat	18%	34%	13%	35%	16%	6%
Not at all	80%	58%	86%	58%	82%	94%

Students with interest in the LACS region or in issues concerning Latinos in the US are also more interested in pursuing the LACS major; 41% of those who are very interested, 13% of those who are somewhat interested, and 2% who are not at all interested in Latin America and the Caribbean reported being very or somewhat interested in the LACS major (see Table 3).

Similarly, 42% of those who are very interested in issues concerning Latinos in the US, 18% of those who are somewhat interested, and 6% who are not at all interested are very or somewhat interested in pursuing the LACS major (see Table 3). Forty percent of the 297 students who are studying Spanish, Portuguese, or French beyond the minimum graduation requirements are very or somewhat interested in pursuing the LACS major whereas only 14% of the 910 students not studying one of these languages are very or somewhat interested in pursuing the major.

We also asked students who they were or were not interested in pursuing the LACS major. Most students (77%) are very or somewhat interested in pursuing the LACS major because of having significant interest in Latin America or Caribbean but have no specific career in mind (n=177), whereas 21% are interested because of career goals focused in Latin America or the Caribbean (n=47), 22% are interested because of career goals focused on working with Latinos in the US (n=50), and lastly 19% are interested because the major will them prepare for graduate or professional school (n=43).

Of those students who are not at all interested in pursuing the LACS major, 34% have no interest in the region (n=316), 28% do not want to meet the graduation requirements for the major (n=262), 18% have interest in the major but it did not exist before their graduation date (n=166), 12% had already chosen their current major or have more interest in their chosen major (n=116), 11% have future career plans that are not related to the major (n=102), and less than 10% of students mentioned that they were interested but not enough to major, were too busy to pursue the LACS major, or were already graduating and did not have time to complete the requirements for the major.

When asked whether aspects of the major would prevent them from pursuing the LACS major, almost three-fourths of the students reported that neither the interdisciplinary nature of the LACS major nor the strong encouragement to study or intern in the region would prevent them from pursuing the major and over half reported that the language requirement would not prevent them from pursuing the major (see Table 4). Only 5% of students reported that the interdisciplinary nature of the major and 12% reported that the study abroad or internship recommendation would prevent them pursuing the major compared to 28% who reported that the language requirement would prevent them from pursuing the major.

Table 4: Would the following aspects of the major prevent students from pursuing the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Major?

	Yes		Maybe		No	
Interdisciplinary nature	59	5%	250	21%	889	74%
Language requirement	334	28%	203	17%	664	55%
Strong encouragement to study or intern in the region	141	12%	190	16%	870	72%

Latin American and Caribbean Studies major requirements

After several years of hard work by faculty and staff at the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute and the advisory board for the Institute, the requirements for the Latin American and Caribbean Studies major are consistent with other institutions and with the

goals of creating the major at UGA. The LACSI advisory board members agreed that the current major requirements reflect the skills necessary to prepare majors in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. One specifically mentioned how this major is going beyond other majors by integrating agricultural, environmental, and medical issues into the curriculum. However, several advisory board members did caution that the major requirements need to be evaluated continually as the number of students increases and as the major continues to grow. One board member said, “More revisions as the time passes will be necessary to accommodate the crescent challenges that Latin America poses as well as the need and interest of the students coming to the University of Georgia.”

The Latin American and Caribbean Studies undergraduate major requires high-level proficiency in one of the three major languages of the region (Spanish, Portuguese and French) and an introduction to one other regional language. Students are also required to take two courses in Latin American history (HIST 2221 and 2222), one in Latin American geography (GEOG 4720), two seminar courses introducing them to Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS 2001 and 2002), and a capstone senior seminar (LACS 4911). Since LACS is an interdisciplinary major, students then choose upper division courses in of three different tracks: humanities, arts, and music; social sciences; and environmental science, policy and historical preservation. LACS majors are also strongly encouraged to study abroad or intern in the region as part of their academic studies. The major requirements allow for flexibility and innovation so that students can choose a course of study to best meet their individual needs.

Seven of the ten Latin American and Caribbean Studies majors are pursuing the humanities, arts, and music track within the LACS major and three are pursuing the social sciences track; none of the students interviewed are pursuing the environmental science, policy, and historic preservation track within the major. Most of the LACS majors are double majoring and pursuing another degree in International Affairs, Spanish, Romance Languages or Sociology. Over half of the LACS majors are also pursuing a minor in either Spanish or Portuguese. Students expressed that they liked the interdisciplinary nature of the major where they could pursue courses in their various interests.

Most of the majors in Latin American and Caribbean Studies wanted to learn a general overview of the history, politics, culture, and languages of the Latin American and Caribbean region. LACS majors reported that they are interested in a variety of social sciences (history, political science, and anthropology) and humanities (linguistics, languages, and religion), and a few students expressed interest in environmental sciences (sustainable development, ecology, environmental science, and agriculture). Most of the students mentioned that they are interested in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Students specifically mentioned interest in the following countries (listed in order by the number of students who mentioned that country): Mexico (6), Brazil (4), Cuba (3), Costa Rica (3), Argentina (2), Columbia (1), El Salvador (1), Guatemala (1), Nicaragua (1), and Venezuela (1).

All of the LACS majors are studying Spanish and Portuguese to fulfill the language requirements for the major (none of the students are studying French). All of the students felt that the language requirements for the LACS major are extremely important and that it is essential to learn the language to be able to study and/or work in the region. One student said the language is “the basis of knowing about the region ... I think it is good that they have the language requirement because if not you may know a little or a lot about the history, but if you don’t understand the language, how are you going to go there and apply what you know.” Another student said, “I don’t think you can really participate or really make a difference if you

can't communicate with the people." A third student mentioned how "the language gives you insight into the culture, even more so than just reading a book that was translated into English ... so I view language as the gateway to understanding the culture, the people, and the history but you also need to understand the history and the culture to understand the language."

Two students mentioned that the language requirements could be a barrier for some students interested in pursuing the major and one student discussed how LACS may not be the right major for students who are not interested in learning a language. One student said, "I am thinking about my other friends who may not be native Spanish speakers. It's hard because they have to major in romance languages and that is not easy if they want to also major in international affairs. There should be a choice. They should decide just one language." Another student echoed these thoughts, "I don't know how necessary it is to have two languages." In contrast, three students specifically mentioned the importance of learning two languages. One student said, "I really think it is necessary to have two languages" because Spanish is spoken in so many countries in the region and Portuguese is important because of the role Brazil plays economically in the region. Another student said, "I think that every student should be required to learn a second language from the region because many people do not even realize that there are other languages spoken in Latin America or the Caribbean." Lastly, one student even discussed increasing the language requirement for the second language "I think language is extremely important. I know there is some talk about lessening the language requirement, and I think if anything, it should be more. Two or three classes in the minor language doesn't seem very much at all ... I feel like if you really want to make a difference somewhere or something like that you have to know the language. If you can't talk to the people, what can you do ... if you can't communicate with people, how much can you really accomplish?"

Many students also expressed interest in the LACS major because of previously living, studying, or traveling in the region. All of the LACS majors have lived or studied abroad in Latin America. Two students have lived in Latin America: one in Peru and one in Venezuela. Five students have studied abroad in Brazil, three in Mexico, and one in Costa Rica (two students also studied abroad in Spain). All of the students discussed how spending time living or studying in the region is an important part of the Latin American and Caribbean studies major. One student said, "You get to see everything first hand and you get to understand the culture a lot better. You understand the people more." Another student said "It is hard for anyone that does study abroad, but I think it is a really good experience. It makes you appreciate what you have here, and it makes you appreciate a new culture. It makes you understand the culture from an inside point of view and not just reading about it or looking at it from another perspective." A third student described the impact of studying abroad "I would definitely say that I benefited from the study abroad experience. I learned a great deal, not only about the countries that I visited, but also about myself and my own personality. I think it will definitely help me deal with a wide variety of situations and will be very helpful in my career and future." Lastly, another student expressed how studying abroad changed her "It changes your perspective ... I think that studying abroad opens your eyes so much to everything else that is going on. It gives you a cultural awareness of other things that are going on, and I think that is important."

Another student expressed her concern with the study abroad requirement, "I just see it from the perspective of a Latino student ... financially, it is a privilege to study abroad and immigration status, most of us are residents but not citizens so our visas often state that we cannot leave the country within a certain time." Several students also expressed that studying abroad varies depending on how much you connect with your experience. One student said that

many students go “because they think they are going to have a wonderful experience just seeing the beautiful parts of all these countries, but they don’t analyze that they go to study abroad to learn the real culture ... if you are going to study abroad to live the same way you are living here and to see just the beautiful things, it makes no sense ... studying abroad should have a deeper meaning.”

Evaluation of the Introduction to LACS proseminar series

As mentioned earlier, Latin American and Caribbean Studies majors are required to complete two proseminar courses (LACS 2001 and 2002) that introduce them to a variety of areas of study within the Latin American and Caribbean Studies major. Currently, the proseminar course meets twice a week and is structured such that in the first session each week a faculty member presents his or her teaching and research interests related to Latin American and Caribbean Studies. During the second session, the seminar instructor leads discussion among the students.

Half of the faculty surveyed (50%, n=24) have presented in the Introduction to Latin American and Caribbean Studies proseminar courses. All twenty-four of the faculty who have presented in the courses, are interested in presenting in the proseminar course again; seventeen faculty (68%) are very interested and eight (32%) are somewhat interested in presenting again. Of the faculty who have not yet presented in the proseminar series, ten (43%) are very interested, six (26%) are somewhat interested, and seven (30%) are not at all interested in presenting in the proseminar series. Faculty are interested in presenting about a wide variety of topics ranging from culture (including religion, music, art, and media) and languages of the region to agriculture, the economy, and the environment. Also, several faculty expressed interest in presenting about immigration and issues facing the Latino community in the US. We encourage LACSI to use this data to help identify potential faculty presenters and topics for future proseminar courses.

Most students enjoyed the breadth of the topics discussed in the seminar classes and appreciated the openness of the classroom discussions. One student mentioned “I liked how faculty were so excited to come talk to us because that opens up so many doors for different people to get to know and talk to people that we would have never had otherwise.” Another student said, “You can express your opinions without anybody saying ‘that’s not right’” and you can openly disagree with other students or faculty. A few students who had taken the seminar course last academic year said that they preferred the new format where one day each week was dedicated to discussion “I think it improved a lot since I took the first one they offered; last year it was a little bit hard to grasp all the information we were given because we didn’t have time to discuss the topic covered last week and then the next week we were already talking about something different.” Most of the students encouraged even more time for discussion, both with faculty presenters and with the seminar leader.

Many of the students also discussed how there could be more variation in the topics covered in the seminar classes and that the classes could be tailored to more closely represent the interests of the students taking the course each semester. Several students expressed that they would prefer more presentations and discussions focused on history, politics, culture, and language rather than on biological and environmental sciences. For example, one student said “The seminar is kind of interesting, but some of the professors are definitely talking about stuff

that I have no interest in, like plant biology or soil biology, but some of them are more interesting, like linguists, kind of more of my area.” Since most of the current LACS majors are pursuing double majors in the social sciences and Spanish (and pursuing the social science and humanities tracks within the major), they expressed a preference for more faculty presentations on topics that cover political and cultural issues in Latin America or the Caribbean.

A few of the students interviewed also mentioned that the seminar classes could be more challenging or rigorous where readings are assigned weekly and discussed in class. One student mentioned how the seminar class “operates more like a graduate level course ... but I think that with undergraduates, there needs to be more follow-up, there needs to be expectations ... I think it would make for better discussions, and I think it would increase the overall depth of understanding and knowledge.” A few students also thought that more themes could be developed across topics and faculty presentations. One student mentioned, “I still think they have to find connections between all the topics because sometimes they’re so different.” A few students also mentioned that it would be great if the seminar classes could be conducted in Spanish and/or Portuguese where students could practice their language skills.

Over half of the faculty who responded to the web survey said they did not know or did not answer the question asking how the proseminar series can be improved. However, those that did provide specific suggestions thought that the course could be more rigorous and structured around core themes. Six professors specifically mentioned that students should prepare for each speaker or subject. One faculty member wrote, “I think the students need to have some reading materials in a bound collection of articles that they can read prior to when the proseminar series topic is discussed. They can also use websites to prepare for the topics.” Another professor said, “Readings materials should serve as basis for an exit examination at the end of the semester.” Another faculty member suggested, “Have students submit questions before the seminar so that the speaker will focus more closely on what students are interested in. Then questions should be sent to the speaker a few days before his/her presentation.”

Other faculty members also commented on the need for the proseminar courses to further promote intellectual growth, including critical reading and writing skills. One professor said, “Some “visiting speaker” courses have minimal intellectual growth expected of the students, but this can be resolved in various ways including a set of core, book-length reading discussed and referred to throughout, or other means.” Another faculty member wrote,

I’m not actually a big fan of the speaker series format. I think the class should be limited to humanities and social science topics and themes and that one instructor should do the bulk of the teaching, with the help of two or perhaps three faculty guests per semester. Perhaps a second course could cover more scientific concerns. The inclusion of both humanities and social sciences and science in one course is too much. I would like to see more emphasis on critical reading and writing skills and more attention to learning the basic history and reading some of the classic texts.

Another faculty member suggested, “Rather than have students be passive listeners, have them research a topic and be active presenters.”

Four faculty who responded to the web survey specifically mentioned building themes for each semester and three suggested reducing the number of speakers each semester. One faculty member said, “There needs to be a better focus on what is to be accomplished in one semester. I believe that it will be more effective to have a ‘theme’ for each seminar and not just professors

presenting their own research.” Similarly, another suggested “It may be worth considering introducing an organizing theme for each seminar year that could be addressed by professors in the various programmatic tracks. This would give students greater depth on a given topic--say, development, or nationalism--, while also giving them a sense of the variety of disciplinary approaches.” Lastly, another professor said, “Some sessions could be jointly taught by professors who work in a similar area, for example a panel discussion. You might think about dividing the two seminars into two focuses: For example, Seminar I could be an introduction to Latin America and the Caribbean and presentations would be more general. Seminar II could be more focused on research in Latin America.”

Both students and faculty are looking for more structure to the proseminar series where students read and prepare for each class and themes are carried across several faculty presentations. Perhaps the seminar leader should develop themes for the course and assign readings to complement the faculty presentations. This could help students make connections across the presentations and help the students engage more with the material being presented.

Several students expressed how the general overview of various topics was more desirable for first or second year students who are still deciding what track to pursue within the major than for third or fourth year students who already knew what topics they are interested in and who wanted to discuss these topics more in-depth. This echoed the thought of one student who wanted to be more prepared going into the proseminar class “I think it needs something to help people like me that don’t have a strong base knowledge to get that kind of knowledge before taking the proseminars. I took the proseminars with some natives and I was embarrassed to say anything because I didn’t know if what I wanted to say would be correct about Latin America. I didn’t feel like I knew enough to make an intelligent comment.” As more students enroll in the LACS major, the 2001 and 2002 seminar courses can be structured to broadly introduce students to the major, covering topics in each of the three tracks, and the senior capstone course can provide a more rigorous curriculum and discussions in Spanish and Portuguese for students who have completed most of their LACS coursework.

Overall evaluation of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute

All of the students praised the faculty and staff of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute. One student said, “I really appreciate how involved they are and how they care so personally for each and every individual in the major. I think being in this major has helped me have what I would have maybe had at a smaller school because we can have that kind of discussion and that kind of personal intimacy with a professor that you don’t always have at a research institution.” Another student discussed how great it is to always know you have someone to talk with “I mean no matter what, you come in and just talk to them, and they will help me out with projects, and research.” They discussed how helpful and accommodating the faculty and staff were as the major requirements were being developed and finalized. One student mentioned that “I think the faculty and staff are working very hard to clarify the major requirements and provide all the support they can.”

Several students expressed concerns with not understanding the major requirements before the major was officially established, but most said that they expect this to get better now that the major has been officially approved by the Board of Regents and added to the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences. Several students mentioned how meeting with the new LACS

academic advisor has helped them understand the requirements for the major and what courses they need to take to complete the major requirements. Having a dedicated academic advisor and final approval of the major and requirements has had an enormous impact on students' abilities to develop programs of study to complete the major. It is important for LACSI to continue to work with the advisors at the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences so they can effectively advise students about the major until they can be advised and cleared to register at LACSI. Several students also mentioned having difficulty registering for classes in other departments. It would be helpful for students if the staff and faculty at LACSI can work with other departments to reserve space for LACS majors in required courses; students mentioned difficulty getting into courses in History, Portuguese, and Spanish. As the major develops, LACSI could also develop a list of courses offered each semester to help students know when courses are offered and plan their course of study. One student recommended updating the website with the new undergraduate major requirements and perhaps a separate section of the website could be devoted to information for majors including courses offered in the upcoming semesters.

Several students mentioned developing information sources for students about graduate programs in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, career opportunities for LACS majors, and study abroad or internship opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean. A few students also mentioned that it would be helpful to connect with other students who have studied abroad in the same country or program that they are interested in before actually studying abroad. We recommend the faculty and staff at LACSI continue to develop centralized information resources for LACS majors that help students in finding study abroad and internship opportunities, perhaps with statements from other students who have studied through particular programs or interned for specific organizations, and in finding career opportunities in the US and abroad.

We also asked faculty to evaluate LACSI in several areas. The faculty who responded to the survey overwhelmingly thought that the faculty and staff at LACSI were responsive to communications from faculty with questions and/or requests. Almost all of the faculty (n=44, 94%) have communicated with the faculty or staff at LACSI. Of the faculty who have communicated with the faculty or staff at LACSI, 38 (86%) said that the faculty and staff have been very responsive, five (11%) said that they have been somewhat responsive, and only one (2%) said that they have been not at all responsive.

Most of the faculty who responded to the web survey are actively involved with LACSI and attend events at LACSI at least occasionally; six (13%) attend events frequently, 28 (58%) attend events occasionally, 11 (23%) rarely attend events and three (6%) never attend events at LACSI. Of those faculty who rarely or never attend events at LACSI, six specifically mentioned that not having enough time prevents them from attending events at LACSI, five said that conflicts with class or travel prevents them, and three said that not having enough information prevents them from attending events at LACSI. One faculty member mentioned that they did not have enough notice about events, another did not attend events because of the commute, and another faculty member did not have interest in attending events.

Most of the faculty surveyed want to be involved with LACSI: 20 (42%) would like to be very involved and 25 (52%) would like to be somewhat involved whereas only three (6%) would like to not be involved with LACSI at all. Of the faculty who would like to be very or somewhat involved with LACSI, nine would like to be involved in planning events and lectures, six would like to be involved by teaching cross listed courses, four would like to be involved in reading or discussion groups, three in attending events and lectures, two with student advising, and two with the advisory board. Many of the faculty also expressed interest in collaboration: six would

like to be involved in collaborative activities, four in collaborative research projects, four in grant applications, and three in collaborative community outreach projects.

Overall, faculty who responded to the survey gave positive ratings of LACSI's performance as a campus-wide area studies institute at UGA: 19 (41%) responded that LACSI is an excellent area-studies institute, 23 (50%) said it is a good area-studies institute, four (9%) reported it was fair, and none said it was poor. More than half of the faculty members discussed ways in which LACSI can improve as an area-studies institute at UGA (n=26). Eight faculty mentioned that LACSI should continue to work in building relationships with faculty across campus, specifically those that have explicitly expressed interest in being involved with the institute. We encourage the staff and faculty at LACSI to continue to build relationships with faculty across campus in three main ways that faculty identified they wanted to be involved: collaborative teaching activities (proseminar courses, cross listed courses, etc.), lectures and events involving faculty and students (including some faculty only events), and collaborative research and service activities. Three faculty specifically mentioned that LACSI could improve by working to develop a research agenda for the institute, which would help to increase collaborative grant proposals and research projects among faculty. Two faculty responded that LACSI should continue to improve relationships with other area-studies programs on campus.

In addition to promoting collaboration, four faculty reported that LACSI should continue to improve communication, particularly about events they are offering and ways that faculty and students can be involved with the institute. Three faculty mentioned that LACSI needs to improve its financial resources. Three faculty expressed that LACSI should place greater emphasis on humanities and social sciences, which was also expressed by major students and specifically about the proseminar. Lastly, two faculty responded that LACSI should have greater involvement in faculty and student recruitment.

Many of the faculty described ways in which they think LACSI excels as an area-studies institute (n=26). Six reported that LACSI excels at creating awareness about Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UGA, four responded that it excels in helping to facilitate communication among faculty and students, and three said it excels because of the events and lectures it sponsors. Three responded that LACSI excels because of the caliber of faculty and staff, two said because of the quality of the students, two said because of the excellence of the academic program, and one mentioned their support for graduate studies. Two faculty members responded that LACSI excels because it: focuses on both academics and outreach, engages in service activities in the community, works to promote diversity, and creates an avenue for interdisciplinary studies. Overall, the students and faculty gave positive evaluations of LACSI.

Conclusion

All of the students gave positive evaluations and were pleased with their experiences as LACS majors. As the number of LACS majors continues to grow and the resources available to LACSI increase, we encourage LACSI to have students complete an entry survey that asks about: their interests in the major, their future academic and/or career plans, the courses they want to take, topics they would like to discuss in the proseminar series, what languages they plan to study and their current level of proficiency, their experience and interest in studying abroad, and any other issues that will help them advise students as they develop their course of study for the major. Over time, this information can be aggregated in a database such that faculty and staff

can access certain types of information about various students. In addition, LACSI should also ask students to complete an anonymous exit evaluation of the major and the institute during their last semester at UGA before graduation. This evaluation can ask about their experiences, how they think the major and LACSI excels, as well as their suggestions for improvement. At this stage, students can speak more freely about their experiences with LACSI. Some of the materials from this internal evaluation may help LACSI in developing an entry survey and exit evaluation. Lastly, as the number of LACS majors increases, student demand for more systematic information about the major, schedules of courses that fulfill major requirements, information about study abroad opportunities, graduate programs, and career possibilities will heighten. We encourage the faculty and staff to be innovative and implement tools to help students as the need for this information grows.

Overall, both students and faculty commended the faculty and staff at LACSI specifically for working with students, staff, and faculty across campus in establishing itself as an important area-studies institute at UGA that is focused on academics and teaching, public service and outreach, and research. As LACSI continues to focus on each of these three goals, they are also playing a crucial role in helping UGA achieve one of its three strategic directions: working to compete in the global economy. Additional financial resources from the university and from federal grants will be needed for LACSI to continue to extend its impact throughout the University of Georgia, across the state, and abroad in Latin America and the Caribbean. The faculty and staff at LACSI have demonstrated how they can effectively utilize those resources to further the goals of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute and the University of Georgia in the years to come.