

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The publication of this 11th edition of *Portal* signifies a time of reflection, transition, and excitement at LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections. At the end of the 2015–2016 academic year, we celebrate five years of our LLILAS Benson partnership. The collaborative work taking place between librarians, faculty, students, staff, and partner organizations has allowed LLILAS Benson to build upon our historic strengths and become international leaders in exciting areas

that push the boundaries of scholarship on multiple levels.

This edition of *Portal* is filled with examples of how our work is turning the field of Latin American studies and collections in new and exciting directions. We are pleased to announce the launch of *Portal* online at [llilasonline.org](http://llilasonline.org). In addition to the articles contained in the current print edition, the online publication will feature stories from past issues, multimedia posts, and a new series of student contributions.

One of the most notable developments of the past year is the launch of the Black Diaspora Archive at the Benson Collection. We welcome Rachel Winston, our archivist building this collection, and in these pages celebrate the scholarship of our faculty and students focused on the Black diaspora with articles from Dr. Christen Smith and LLILAS MA students Jheison Romain and José Rubio-Zepeda.

We continue to be leaders in post-custodial archiving, preserving the cultural patrimony of historic and sensitive documents while digitizing and making them available to the world. This year saw the launch of the Mellon Foundation–funded Latin American Digital Initiatives (LADI) project, as detailed in the article written by our post-custodial archivist, Theresa Polk. We are also blazing new trails in the digital repatriation of historical documents, described by Dr. Kelly McDonough herein.

LLILAS Benson continues to deepen its focus on indigenous languages and issues. The 2015–2016 academic year brought the instruction of Nahuatl to campus for the first time, as well as the development of online, open-access K'iche' Maya curriculum. We also welcomed two Tinker visiting professors whose research focuses on indigenous issues. Dr. Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj writes about her work in Guatemala to bring justice to indigenous women violated by war criminals, and Dr. Ruud van Akkeren is

interviewed about his work on ancient Maya texts and collaboration with Guatemalan Mayan communities. LLILAS alumnus and chair of the board of directors of the Avina Foundation Sean McKaughan writes on the work of Avina in Brazil and elsewhere, focusing on partnerships with indigenous peoples.

Our graduate and undergraduate programs encourage original scholarship and intellectual exchange among peers. The student-organized ILASSA conference celebrated its 36th year this spring, convening students from throughout the hemisphere. We proudly publish the conference paper on La Santa Muerte by recent LLILAS master's graduate Kathryn McDonald. Finally, doctoral candidate Ruth Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada contributes a fine article about this spring's Lozano Long Conference on refugees and migrant detention.

These are but a few examples of how LLILAS Benson embodies the motto of The University of Texas at Austin—what starts here changes the world. Of course, LLILAS Benson takes that motto one step further in promoting the idea that what starts in the world also changes us here. We have learned through our partnerships that we are stronger together: Together we preserve and more fully represent history. Together we document and fight injustices. Together we form and are formed by scholars and leaders whose work in academia and beyond is not only inspirational but transformative.

As we reflect upon and celebrate the accomplishments of these first five years, we congratulate, deeply thank, and bid a bitter-sweet farewell to Dr. Charles Hale, the inaugural director of our partnership. He has helped to re-chart the course of Latin American studies and collections on this campus and beyond, and we are forever grateful. We are also thrilled to welcome our new director, Dr. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, professor of history at UT Austin. We look forward to her leadership, to building upon the strong foundation laid during these first years of our partnership, and to all that awaits in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Gatlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'H' and 'G'.

Heather Gatlin  
Executive Director  
LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections