

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



With great pleasure and pride, we present you with the 2011–2012 edition of *Portal*, our annual review of LLILAS activities, people, and accomplishments. This year has been especially momentous for us, because we put the LLILAS-Benson partnership into practice and began to reap the benefits of working more closely together. In September 2011, the two units joined under a single leadership team; committees with staff members from each assumed responsibility for collaboratively planned activities

in diverse areas, from public engagement to scholarly program to publications; we hired new staff members and reformulated existing job descriptions to encompass this new collaborative vision; and, most important, in January of this year, we began an unprecedented process of strategic planning, through which LLILAS and the Benson worked to outline objectives and aspirations for the upcoming five years, each in its own distinct sphere, and increasingly, as a unified consortium of Latin American Studies.

At the same time, as this issue of *Portal* attests, in the midst of considerable change we have continued our commitment to the core activities that make LLILAS and the Benson great. Our student program, featured on p. 42, provides outstanding resources for BA and MA degrees in Latin American Studies; our revitalized alumni relations initiative has begun to uncover additional, compelling evidence of this excellence, by tracking our alums more effectively and documenting the diverse, inspiring, and highly successful career paths that so many have followed. In addition, through the strategic planning process, we have decided to recast and modestly expand our PhD degree, building on areas of exceptional faculty strength, offering advanced training that will leave students prepared for both academia and practical applications of their skills. The LLILAS intellectual program has continued to shine, with a highly successful Lozano Long conference (see p. 4), a rich array of activities emerging from our faculty-led research initiatives (the participatory mapping project reviewed on p.12 is one example), and much more. On the Benson side, we are especially excited to have begun our *Jewels of the Benson* series, designed to make the extraordinary holdings in the Rare Books and Manuscripts division of the library appreciated by, and accessible to, a broad public. What better way to begin this series than the feature of Sor Juana de la Cruz, with the original confessional found among the Benson holdings (see p.

34). Other traditional public engagement activities—from the Benson’s *¡A Viva Voz!* to the LLILAS *Foodways of Mexico*—have also continued, enriched by collaboration between staff of the two units.

The LLILAS-Benson Strategic Plan, to be implemented September 1, 2012, charts an exciting upward trajectory of Latin American Studies at UT, propelled by the innovations, mutual benefits, and at times budgetary savings of the partnership. While each unit will maintain its distinct identity and particular functions, by 2017 we expect LLILAS-Benson to operate as a single consortium, following a unified mission. We are already reaping the first fruits of this transformation. We now have a newly created second floor conference room and approval to create an adjacent space for exhibitions: these will allow us to draw audiences into Sid Richardson Hall to showcase all that we have and do much more directly. The Guatemalan Police Archive project, described on p. 18, is another fine illustration: bringing archival documentation, scholarly research, and human rights advocacy together in a single project, achieved through campus-wide and international collaboration. Yet another example is innovative teaching, deepened and enriched through sustained engagement with the Benson Collection. Prof. Lina del Castillo, a newly recruited faculty member of LLILAS and the History Department, developed a course, “Maps in Latin American History,” and held classes in the seminar room adjacent to the Rare Books reading room, taking full advantage of the Benson’s outstanding map collection; other such courses are sure to follow.

These truly are exciting times for LLILAS and the Benson. Our Strategic Plan has set ambitious goals for the next five years, and we urge you to follow our progress toward their achievement. One key to success over the next five years will be to strike the right balance between innovation and affirmation of programs that have been the proven foundation of excellence for decades. Another key will be our outstanding staff, who have risen to the challenge of this partnership, providing many of the ideas, and the creative energy, to make it a reality. *Portal* itself is a wonderful illustration of this initiative, inventiveness, and talent.

Read with pleasure and please share your thoughts on what you discover in these pages.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Charles R. Hale". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Charles R. Hale, Director
Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies/Benson Latin American Collection