

# The Center for the Americas



## THE CENTER FOR THE AMERICAS

at the University of Houston

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### 1. Mission Statement

The Center for the Americas seeks to promote knowledge of America as a hemispheric region. The Center is founded on the recognition that America is not synonymous with the U.S. but is, rather, a complex region of inter-related cultures and nations. The programs and projects supported by the Center are designed to foster closer relations and increased understanding among these diverse American cultures and nations.

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### 2. Programs and Projects

The Center will facilitate the comparative study of American cultures by fostering exchanges among faculty and students in universities throughout the Americas; by raising funds for fieldwork, research and publication; by offering consultancy services to the public and private sectors; by providing a forum for the discussion of issues relating to North, Central and South America. The Center will organize international symposia, lecture series and publications that address a full range of issues affecting cultural, social and political relations in the Americas.

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### 3. The Institutional Location

The University of Houston is well situated to establish The Center for the Americas. We are geographically at the center of the Americas, in a state that borders Mexico and is washed by the same Gulf waters that also wash the shores of Central America, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean countries. The diverse and international character of our student body as well as the expertise of faculty offer an ideal institutional context for The Center for the Americas. With approximately twenty-five specialists on Latin America and the Caribbean, and many more specialists on the United States, we already have a strong nucleus upon which to build. Many of our faculty--from the Colleges of Business, Education, Engineering, Humanities, Law, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences--have

published widely on American topics (in the hemispheric sense of the word American.) We have strong programs already in place: the new American Cultures Program (see item 6, below); Arte Pœblico Press and the Recovery Project for Hispanic literature in the U.S.; the Institute for Public History; large programs in international law and international business; a strong Ph.D program in Latin American history and a new Ph.D. program in Latin American literature; a summer Spanish language program that has taken place in a variety of Latin American countries. Furthermore, the Moores School of Music is in the planning stages for The Music of the Americas Press, which will publish under-distributed Latin American composers.

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#### 4. The Research Agenda

The Center for the Americas will support research on a wide range of cultural, political and social topics, including trade and economic reform, the environment, pressing social issues such as street children, the status of indigenous peoples, drugs, civil-military relations, freedom of the press, human rights, and American cultures. Areas of special emphasis include:

##### A. North American Integration:

The political, social, and cultural consequences of North American integration, including the foreign policy implications of regional economic integration for Canada, Mexico and the United States, the issue of labor rights and free trade in North American, and the impact of market opening and technological change on Mexican society and politics.

##### • B. Political Transition:

Political transition in the Americas in comparative perspective, including such specific topics as the dilemmas of political change in post-revolutionary regimes in Latin America, the role of political parties in democratization in the hemisphere, the QuŽbec question, the changing political role of the U.S. in hemispheric policies and politics.

##### • C. Migration:

Mexican and Latin American migration to the United States in comparative perspective, with special reference to the utilization of immigrant labor in the U.S. economy.

##### • D. Economic Restructuring:

The political, social, and environmental consequences of economic restructuring in Mexico and Latin America, including agricultural modernization and the transformation of social relations in the Mexican countryside, the emergence of new patterns of state-society relations, and the relationship between economic restructuring and political liberalization.

##### • E. Cultural Coherence and Nationalism:

The intensive study of American literature and art as expressions of national and cultural identity; the comparative functions of art as political expression in the U.S. and Latin America; the invention of a usable past in contemporary literature of the Americas.

##### • F. Science & Technology

Initiatives in Chemistry, Biochemistry, Physics, Biology, Geology, Health Sciences, Engineering and in collaboration with the Colleges of Natural Sciences & Mathematics, Engineering, Pharmacy, Optometry and Law, and with the Communication Disorders Program in the School of Communication of the College of Humanities, Fine Arts & Communication.

## 5. Programmatic Initiatives

### • A. Undergraduate and Graduate Studies

- On campus, the Center will promote the cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural study of American cultures at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. It will coordinate course offerings and provide a mechanism for bringing together faculty and students from across the University, and from other universities, to discuss comparative American topics.
- Study-Abroad: The Center will aid and encourage UH students to study abroad. We will advise students on study and research opportunities in Canada, Latin American and the Caribbean, and encourage them to apply for Fulbrights and other study-abroad scholarships and fellowships.

The Center will also establish its own study-abroad programs on the graduate and undergraduate levels. Our first study-abroad program will be in Mexican literature and literary culture in QuerŽtaro in the summer of 1997; the program is designed for advanced undergraduates and graduates in Humanities and Fine Arts, and for students in other disciplines who are interested in humanistic study. Eventually, the Center will administer a number of such programs, based in Latin American universities but tailored for UH students' needs.

### • B. Institutional Cooperation

The University of Houston has well-developed ties with a number of Latin American universities and other cultural and political institutions. The Center will build on existing institutional ties in order to increase interactions between the University of Houston and other American institutions.

### • C. Electronic Communication and Distance Learning

A leader in the application of new computer and information technologies in education, the University of Houston is committed to working closely with scholars in Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean to establish new avenues of electronic communication and create on-line research archives and teaching resources.

An initial program to foster electronic communication is being established in conjunction with H-Net: Humanities On-Line. The University of Houston will host intensive training sessions for Latin American scholars in electronic communication and research systems. The plans for this training program call for bringing 30 Latin American humanists and social scientists to the university each summer for five years where they will be given intensive training by our staff, and work with UH faculty members in their own disciplines.

### • D. U.S.-Latin American Business Relations

The Center will promote interaction between businesses in Houston and Latin America, especially in the areas of energy, environmental protection, medical technology, and telecommunications.

### • E. U.S.-Mexican Political Relations

The Center will organize an on-going international, multidisciplinary forum for the presentation of new research and public policy perspectives dealing with Mexico and relations between Mexico and the United States.

### • F. Researchers-in-Residence Program

The researchers-in-residence program will promote the research of senior scholars and the training of a new generation of academic specialists in the Americas. The program will bring together researchers from institutions in several countries, representing the humanities and social sciences, law, business, and interdisciplinary fields such as urban and regional studies, interAmerican studies, environmental studies, and international development studies.

It is also the aim of the Center for the Americas to encourage and support research residencies for University of Houston faculty in Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

- G. Summer Seminar in U.S. Studies

Responding to the rapidly growing need in Mexico and other Latin American countries for more academic and non-academic professionals with expertise on the United States, the center will conduct a multidisciplinary training program in U.S. studies. The center will invite Latin American academics, public officials, journalists, and representatives of non-governmental organizations, for an intensive four-week course on U.S. political, legal, economic, social, and cultural topics. This training programs is designed to stimulate the development of research and teaching programs in Latin America that focus on the United States.

- H. Public Education Activities

In order to improve public understanding of Latin America and U.S.-Latin American relations, the center will organize lectures, briefings, and roundtable discussions on key issues affecting Latin America and bilateral relations between Latin America and the United States for journalists, public officials, business executives and labor leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and the general public. Through public outreach activities, the center will seek to be of service to the local community of which it is a part.

- I. Publications

The Center's publication program will seek to publish cutting-edge research on Mexico, Latin America, and U.S.-Latin American relations, which will be available to a broad readership in the United States, Latin America, and elsewhere. Most Center publications will result from lectures and symposia held under the center's auspices, and from the work of its visiting research fellows and affiliated faculty.

## 6. Curriculum Innovation: The American Cultures Program

Drawing on faculty from more than ten departments and schools in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the American Cultures Program offers truly hemispheric, interdisciplinary, and multicultural perspectives on the history and cultures of the Americas. Cutting across traditional departmental and disciplinary boundaries, the program encourages faculty members to combine methodologies and source materials from such disciplines as anthropology, art, communication, economics, history, literature, music, philosophy, political science, psychology and sociology.

The program's central theme involves the creation of distinctive American cultures as a result of the complex relations and borrowings among African, Asian, European and indigenous peoples and cultures. Specially designed to take advantage of Houston's distinctive location and resources, the American Cultures Program combines four focus areas:

- A. American Identities:

The critical analysis of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and national identity in North, Central, and South

America, and the Caribbean.

- B. The Borderlands in the Southwest:

The historical study of the collision and cultural hybridization of African, Asian, European, Hispanic, and indigenous cultures in the Southwest and critical examination of the region as "contested terrain" in which diverse peoples have struggled over resources, language, culture, politics, and economic control.

- C. Transnational Processes:

Economic, political, social, and cultural developments that transcend national boundaries, including migration, urbanization, colonial legacies, postcolonial struggles, modernization, underdevelopment, transnational communities, religious movements, nationalism and nation building.

- D. Cultural Media and Cultural Studies:

Critical analysis of the hemisphere's literary and aesthetic traditions and belief system, including the study of media, film, literature, material culture, popular cultures, social thought, intellectual movements, and forms of modernity in the arts. Particular emphasis will be placed on the problematic ways in which different kinds of minority or subnational groups are represented in relation to hegemonic or national communities.

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Go to:

[Houston International Community Health Summit](#)