

La Compañera



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Foro Latinoamericano 2015



On April 17-18, the Latin America Studies program held the annual Foro Latinoamericano. This year Constanza Ocampo-Raeder was tasked with putting the event together. Constanza is an assistant professor in anthropology specializing in environmental anthropology. She is particularly interested in how people manage local resources and how these activities impact different environments. As she noted on opening night, she elected to focus on food, as “Food is no longer about nutrition or flavor; today food is about sustainability, resilience, identity, creativity and opportunity. Latin America seems to be taking center stage in this movement and the cuisines of countries like Peru and Mexico are making headlines in gourmet magazines, and being touted as the way to bring culturally sensitive sustainable development to rural farmers and small business owners. In the United States the Latin American diaspora is also asserting itself in new ways and actively using food as a way to rearticulate place, memory and identity in their new homelands.” The two day event was well attended by students and faculty, and it seems that we all walked away with a new perspective on food.

The speakers all had different views on how food interacts with society. The first speaker was Virginia Nazarea a renowned ecological anthropologist who has published on the connections between culture, memory, and biodiversity. Nazarea’s talk was on how food and memory can create nostalgia. For immigrants, it is common to see gardens that resemble closely those in their native countries. In Florida, people tend to plant a variety of products because the environment is conducive to growing crops. Humans have a memory palate, which allows us to associate certain memories with flavors.

The following day Mariano Valderrama, who came all the way from Peru, joined us. He is a sociologist, a food writer and a gastronomist, and he is currently the vice-president of APEGA, the Peruvian Gastronomic Society, an influential organization that promotes sustainable development through gastronomic initiatives. Valderrama spoke on how Peruvian cuisine is a vital part of his culture and society. He noted that farmer markets are overflowing with people from around the world who are interested in Peruvian crops, which are so exquisite that they can be incorporated into other cuisines to enhance flavor. He is now working on ways to assure that small farmers are getting the most revenue for their products.

The final speaker was Lauren Baker a notable food activist and scholar who is currently the coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council. Her research examines food systems in a transnational context and has coordinated workshops and exchanges between Mexican and Canadian food activists and farmers. Baker offered an interesting perspective into the mobilization of seeds. She showed images of different rooftop gardens that have been part of a movement to make Toronto more beautiful, by removing the barren rooftops and growing crops. Her interest in food originates from her strong passion for corn, and the endless possibilities that can be done with it. As she continues to speak about her travels in Mexico, we were all able to try her delicious chocolate that was infused with maize.

The event was a refreshing look at Latin America. By focusing on food, the world is able to see that Latin America has more to offer than drug cartels, violence and corruption.

SOMOS: St. Olaf Talks Politics

On Friday, April 24, St. Olaf College hosted a one-day conference entitled “Political Transparency: Insights From Latin America,” which dealt with issues of democracy and government in the region. The event was organized by SOMOS, a student organization with current members representing the countries of Argentina, Bolivia, Columbia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela, and the U.S.. According to their mission statement, SOMOS (“we are” in Spanish) aims to provide the college community a space of dialogue and discussion on issues related to Latin America, promote the Spanish language as a means of enhancing intercultural conversation and share different perspectives on Latin American culture and history.



One of the two speakers was Chris Chiappari, a professor of sociology and anthropology at St. Olaf. He offered a framework for understanding corruption in Latin America. He noted that most of the corruption in Latin America is due to the unequal distribution of power and resources, and the weakening of political and social institutions to counter these inequalities. Professor Chiappari was insightful about the rise in corruption in Latin America. While violence and drugs has a strong presence in Latin America, he felt that these atrocities are not exclusive to the region, as they can be found in any part of the world. Instead, he mentioned the people's main oppressor is the inability to

mobilize. Chiappari offered an in-depth historical context and current examples of corruption in Latin America.

On the other side, we were fortunate to have Lindsay Mayka; she is a professor of government at Colby College and a Carleton graduate. Her talk was about how democracy can be promoted in Latin America through public involvement. To get the public involved, it is vital that Latin America has participatory institutions that engage the people in policy debates and decision-making. She discussed three different pillars of democracy: voting, checks and balances, and civil society. She was very vocal about the third pillar: participation. It is important to create a system where the people are well informed about all civic issues: “The people should hold the government accountable by creating institutions that oversee certain agencies”.



This informative event was well planned and gave great insight on Latin American politics. The event was well attended due to student interest in creating a better tomorrow through such events and conversations.

The Spanish Alumni Panel

On Friday, April 3rd, the Spanish department hosted an alumni panel for all interested in the Spanish major and for graduating seniors that are ready to take on the world. The panel consisted of Amanda Otero '09 (Religion and Latin American Studies concentrator), Ethan Bernstein '11 (Spanish), and Andrew Boddy Spargo '09 (International Relations and a certificate of advance study in Spanish). With the variety of fields between the speakers, it was interesting to learn about the different paths they have taken since graduating and the different futures they envision for themselves.



Amanda Otero had the privilege of living in another country after graduation. She moved to Nicaragua where she lived for almost 5 years. During that time, she worked with a non-profit in Managua, the Centro Cultural Batahola Norte. The organization has a variety of programs all geared towards giving people in the surrounding area the skills and tools needed to break cycles of poverty and violence. She spent a majority of her time teaching English to adults, working with youth, and facilitating the community's relationship with supporters from the U.S.. She has since returned to the United States as a community organizer at TakeAction Minnesota, where she works to expand health care coverage in Minnesota, including making health care accessible to the undocumented, primarily Latino community.

Ethan Bernstein also moved to a different country after graduating from Carleton. To put his degree to good use, he spent a year in Portoviejo, Ecuador teaching English, but he also had a aspirations of being a doctor. When he wasn't teaching English, he worked as a medical interpreter for mission trips, trained doctors for the TOEFL exam, and took salsa classes. Now, he is a 3rd year medical student at the University of Minnesota and considering pursuing internal medicine. He hopes to work primarily with Spanish-speaking patients.



Andrew Boddy Spargo spent an extra year at Carleton as a 5th-year intern for the Cinema and Media Studies department. After the internship, he joined the Peace Corps and was an English Education Volunteer in Nicaragua from 2010-2012. When he returned, he looked for work around Minneapolis and found a job at a private Catholic high school by literally typing "Spanish" into a job search website. He became the assistant to the principle at Cristo Rey High School. During his time at Cristo Rey, he was able to interact with the students and their families through his background of Spanish and the Hispanic culture. Recently, Andrew has been accepted into the MBA program at Marquette University.

The speakers shared a variety of stories, life lessons, and advices for the audience, but it seemed the overall message they provided was to use Spanish to help people. In every situation, they saw how their specific fields didn't have the appropriate sources to interact with the Spanish speaking community. They have a strong passion for the language and helping people, so, it is only fitting that they become the voice of the voiceless.

The Morena Movement: A Better Tomorrow

On Sunday, April 19, 2015, LASO hosted a group of Mexican activists raising awareness for the forty-three missing students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. The Ayotzinapa 43 incident involves 43 male student-teachers (“normalistas”) from Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers College of Ayotzinapa who went missing while on route to a protest in nearby Iguala. The main theory is that the mayor of Iguala and his wife are responsible for the mass kidnapping, with the possible involvement of the police and the notorious drug gang, Guerreros Unidos. Invited to campus were five men from an activist group called Miembro de Frente Unida, and they shared their concerns about the whole situation. They believe: “This event occurred because the government is bothered that Rural Colleges are creating future leaders for the world. The students are pacifists and activists that wants what is best for Mexico. They take upon themselves to inform the public of government wrongdoings”.

The men that came to visit Carleton were all blue-collar workers who felt it was their responsibility to take a stand against this injustice. The sadness and anger in their voices express their disgust for the violence, the corruption, and the drug cartels. However, they knew in order to fight corruption they were going to need support. This is when they discovered the Morena movement, a political affiliation that wants to bring a better tomorrow to Mexico. MORENA is a political party in Mexico with liberal and democratic socialistic



viewpoints. Former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador formalized the party following the 2012 elections. **MORENA** stands for **MO**vimiento **RE**generación **NA**cional (National Regeneration Movement).

MORENA’s mission: “Morena is a broad organization that wants to build a strong solidarity in Mexico. Mexico needs to be a sovereign state where freedom and democracy bring happiness to the Mexican population. MORENA wants a change in the regime through the electoral process and to ensure the Mexican government is meeting their demands. MORENA is ready to combat corruption, injustice, and oppression to ensure a better tomorrow.”

The plan of the MORENA movement is to create new headquarters in every city and college they visit so they can spread their message. At this moment, they have people in most major cities, but the plan is always to grow. For them, it is vital to spread their message to all Mexican communities because they can take this message and share it with their family members back in Mexico, which hopefully will lead to the mobilization of the Mexican people.