CLACX provides important perspectives on critical issues

Supported by the Department of Education's Title VI International Education funding, Vanderbilt's Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies (CLACX) fosters interdisciplinary research and teaching collaborations that inform the university community and general public about critical issues. The center’s focus is on examining the borders and intersections between Latinx, Latin American, and Caribbean studies. Founded in 1947 at Vanderbilt University, CLACX has received Department of Education Title VI funding for Foreign Language Area Studies training since the late 1960s. Since 2006, CLACX has been designated a Title VI National Resource Center. As a comprehensive NRC, the center maintains a remarkable concentration of Latin Americanists, with special strengths in Brazil, Central America, the Andes, and Afro-Latin America, and supports programs that educate students, teachers, the private sector and the general public about Latin America. Between August 2019 and October 2021, CLACX informed nearly 163,000 people nationwide, promoting greater understanding of Latin America’s history, economy and social organization.

CLACX provides instruction for languages critical to national need

Vanderbilt is committed to supporting less commonly taught languages, especially those deemed critical to national security and economic prosperity. With Title VI NRC support, CLACX provides instruction in Portuguese, K’iche’ Mayan, and Haitian Creole to students at Vanderbilt University and partner universities through face-to-face and virtual classrooms.

- **Portuguese** is the sixth-most-spoken language in the world and the official language of Brazil, the most populous country in Latin America and an emerging global power with the world’s ninth largest economy. The U.S. State Department considers Portuguese to be a “critical language.” Since 2018, CLACX has supported Portuguese language instruction at Tuskegee University and hosts the intensive Summer in Brazil program in São Paulo with Tulane University.

- **K’iche’ Mayan** is spoken today by more than 1 million people who are native to Guatemala, and there are an increasing number of K’iche’ speakers in Tennessee. CLACX established the first program in the country teaching K’iche’ and sponsors the Mayan Language Institute, an intensive summer language program in Guatemala, in partnership with Tulane University.

- **Haitian Creole** has been identified as an “area of national need,” and CLACX programs in Haitian studies also support an increasing number of speakers in the U.S.

CLACX works with governments

With support from Title VI funding, CLACX provides educational seminars, advice and counsel on Latin America to governments at all levels: local, state, national and international. CLACX has worked with the Tennessee Attorney General’s Office and Vanderbilt Law School to host workshops on international arbitration, drug trafficking and gang networks. CLACX works with the Latin American Public Opinion Project, located at Vanderbilt, to disseminate research on democracy and trust to institutions across the Americas to post-secondary and K-12 educators. LAPOP data is widely employed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.N. Development Programme, and other organizations.

CLACX partners with local businesses

CLACX has advised more than 800 members of the business and government communities over the past five years through public and private partnerships. CLACX works with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and the World Affairs Council to share expertise on Latin American markets with the local business community. CLACX hosts events along with Vanderbilt’s Owen Graduate School of Management on conducting business in Latin America for leaders in global businesses based in Tennessee, including Nissan, Bridgestone and Caterpillar. Recent events include talks for Alliance Bernstein and Asurion in 2020.
CLAX collaborates with area schools

CLAX provides professional development workshops for teachers from across the state and the country. Recently, CLAX has been working closely with Metro Nashville Public Schools to help teachers better understand their increasingly diverse student population. Supported by Title VI funding, CLAX collaborates with Fisk University, Tennessee State University, and Middle Tennessee State University to support their teaching on Latin America and language instruction. CLAX has offered Medical Spanish and cultural content for the Vanderbilt School of Nursing, the Vanderbilt Master of Public Health Program, and Meharry Medical College students for the last four years. CLAX holds K-16 educator workshops, cultural arts events and international conferences, often in partnership with other universities. Most recently, a monthly local book club provides sustained engagement for educators and material for new curriculum. Over the past five years, K-16 programs have been attended by more than 18,000 educators and students and have impacted many more.

K-16 instructional resources

CLAX works with K-16 educators and Vanderbilt faculty to produce curriculum resources for direct use in the classroom. Title VI funding allows the K-16 resources to be openly accessible on the CLAX website and available for free download.

- Since 2017, CLAX has collaborated with Readworks to produce more than 80 English- and Spanish-language articles on Latin America for their reading comprehension program. More than 492,184 students and teachers from across the country have used these articles, which are accessed most frequently during Hispanic Heritage and Black History Month.

- CLAX houses a lending library of books with Latin American content accessible to teachers and curates Culture Boxes with items from various Latin American countries and ships them nationwide; these have been used by more than 6,800 teachers and students in the last five years. In total, more than 500,000 students and teachers have engaged with CLAX instructional resources over the past five years.

- Since 2018, CLAX has provided professional development workshops on Central America for 650 educators in partnership with Metro Nashville Public Schools.

- CLAX partners with Tulane University and the University of Georgia to offer an annual weeklong summer institute for educators from around the country; the topic of the most recent institute was “People and the Environment in Central America.”

- CLAX supports post-secondary educators, especially at HBCUs and other MSIs. For the last two years, CLAX sponsored a symposium on the Caribbean and the Andes with the International Studies Consortium of Georgia, composed of several MSIs. In 2020 and 2021, CLAX hosted the Global Studies Symposium for MSIs and Community Colleges with Florida International University.

- CLAX works with the Library of Congress to host the annual Américas Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature.

CLAX educates through cultural arts programming

CLAX regularly partners with local arts institutions to introduce Tennesseans to a variety of Latin American topics and to the rich artistic and cultural traditions from this diverse region of the world. For example, CLAX supports citywide cultural events including El Día de los Muertos with Cheekwood Estate and Gardens and the Celebrate Nashville Cultural Festival. CLAX partnered with the Nashville Children’s Theatre on their original performances of Return to Sender and Around in the World in 80 Stories. CLAX has partnered with Nashville Opera to present Florencia en el Amazonas, Nashville’s first Spanish-language opera, and to host public programming for Maria de Buenos Aires, an Argentinian tango opera. With the Nashville Public Library, CLAX created a marionette show, The Amazing Twins: Ancient Maya Tales from the Popul Vuj. CLAX provides related curriculum for educators for these performances. CLAX regularly partners with the Global Education Center and OZ Arts Nashville to bring music and dance to Nashville. In total, CLAX-supported cultural events have been enjoyed by nearly 170,000 over the past five years.

Other examples of programming include a Science in Latin America series on topics such as the process of genetic admixture in the Brazilian population and the global implications of deforestation in the Amazon. Title VI funds also support the digitization of unpublished literary manuscripts, the World Congresses of Black Culture, radio programs on Afro-Hispanic folklore, and ethnographies. CLAX affiliated faculty in the Vanderbilt Blair School of Music have strong links to groups across the Americas; in 2021, CLAX faculty organized the Festival Internacional de Bandas to showcase the rich regional traditions of wind band music with ensembles based in Argentina, Colombia and Costa Rica, along with the Vanderbilt Wind Symphony; the livestream was viewed by over 13,000.