Brazil Business Briefing

As part of its mission, the Brazilian Studies Program of the Center for Latin American Studies organizes, on a regular basis, policy conferences on issues critical to the U.S. and Brazil.

CLAS hosted the first Brazil Business Briefing on May 8, 2003. This briefing was designed for companies in the Western Pennsylvania region who were interested in understanding Brazil and doing business in the country. The briefing consisted of panels of experts (corporate executives as well as university faculty) who discussed the Brazilian political environment, the Brazilian economy and business environment, and business experiences in Brazil. At the time, Brazil’s first working-class president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, had held office for only six months and it was still unclear what direction his administration would take.

Over the next year, Brazil experienced its worst recession in a decade, but then a return to rapid economic growth. Therefore, a follow-up briefing was held in conjunction with the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh and Pitt’s International Business Center on July 21, 2004. The Global Business Dialogue on “Politics, Economics and Business in Brazil: Views from the Inside” featured presentations by several middle to upper-level managers of multinational and Brazilian companies, who were also students in the University of Pittsburgh Katz Graduate School of Business International Executive MBA (IEMBA) Program in São Paulo, Brazil. Sharing their insider views on the current Brazilian situation were: Fernando Lopes (Partner/President of Backsoft Brasil/Intech), Vitor Fabiano (Financial Services Director, Nokia Brazil), Alexandra Athayde (Manager of Government Affairs, Monsanto Brasil), and João Pimentel (Amazon Purchasing Manager, Ford Bahia). The event was held in cooperation with the Katz Graduate School of Business, the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Chrysler Corporation Small Business Development Center, and the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance and was attended by over 90 persons.
Former CLAS Director Heads South

As might be noticed in the list of departures under Faculty Changes above, Mitchell A. Seligson was one of those to whom we bid adios. Professor Seligson served as Director of the Center for Latin American Studies from 1986 to 1992— to date, the third of only five directors to lead CLAS. He was no stranger to the University of Pittsburgh when he became director and professor of political science in 1986. Twelve years earlier, he had received his PhD in Political Science from Pitt. (He also completed the Graduate Certificate in Latin American Studies in 1971.) According to Dr. Seligson, his primary accomplishments as Center director were to create a stable funding base for faculty and student research and the undergraduate seminar/field trip, gain recognition and expanded funding for the Latin American library collection, and maintain CLAS’ standing as a U.S. Department of Education-designated National Resource Center. He played a major role in providing the Center with long-term financial security by nurturing and increasing the value of CLAS’ initial general endowment fund and by laying the groundwork for the creation of additional endowments for graduate fellowships in Latin American social/public policy and archaeology.

Having retired as director, Mitch returned full time to his position as professor in the Department of Political Science where, in 1994, he assumed the Daniel H. Wallace Professor of Political Science Chair. In the department, Dr. Seligson managed to chair 25 doctoral dissertations (all but one of them focused on Latin America) between 1993 and 2004 (an average of over 2.25 per year!).

After 18 very successful years at Pitt (with scholarly achievements too numerous to mention here), Mitch accepted the position of Centennial Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. This past summer, he and his better half, Susan Berk-Seligson (see page 4 for more information on Dr. Berk-Seligson), moved to Tennessee. However, it is probably to safe to say that the most significant position change to affect Mitch’s and Susan’s lives recently has been their “joint appointment” as grandparents to Maya, born on February 19, 2004 to daughter Amber and son-in-law Gadi.

To reiterate the sentiments of the Center’s faculty, students, and staff as noted in CLASicos 12 upon the occasion of his leaving the directorship, “For his tireless efforts on the part of the Center, we owe Mitch a debt of gratitude.” We would like to add our best wishes for the future to Mitch and Susan.

Honors for Carmelo Mesa-Lago

Former CLAS Director Carmelo Mesa-Lago was honored in July 2004 at the 35th anniversary celebration of the Institute of Cuban Studies. He (and wife Elena) received homage for his 45 years of work on Cuba. At the celebration, Jorge Dominguez presented a paper reviewing all of Carmelo’s work on Cuba, at CLAS, in Cuban Studies, for the Latin American Studies Association, etc. Alejandro de la Fuente related how he first made contact with Professor Mesa-Lago and how their relationship grew throughout the years. Jorge Pérez-López summarized Carmelo’s work on Cuban statistics and ended with