CLAS integrates teaching, research, and outreach

Founded in 1947 at Vanderbilt University, the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) has received Department of Education Title VI funding for Foreign Language Area Studies training since the late 1960s. Since 2006, CLAS has been designated a Title VI National Resource Center (NRC); the most recent four-year (2018–2022) renewal grant totals $1.64 million.

As a comprehensive NRC, CLAS maintains a remarkable concentration of Latin Americanists, with special strengths in Brazil, Central America, the Andes, and the Black Atlantic, and supports programs that educate students, teachers, the private sector, and the general public about Latin America. Through its public outreach efforts, CLAS informed more than 140,000 people nationwide in 2019, promoting greater understanding of Latin America’s history, economy, and social organization.

CLAS integrates research, teaching, and outreach to further the study of Latin American languages (Portuguese, K’iche’ Mayan, Haitian Creole, and Quechua), economic development, and democracy building. It also offers educational opportunities on Latin American language and culture at the local, state, and national levels.

CLAS provides instruction for languages critical to our national need

Vanderbilt is committed to supporting less commonly taught languages, especially those deemed critical to national security and economic prosperity. CLAS provides the following language instruction to students at Vanderbilt University, partner universities, and in the broader community through virtual classrooms and other distance learning programs.

- **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.”

- **K’iche’ Mayan** is spoken today by more than 1 million people who are native to Guatemala and is of great historical importance. CLAS established the first program in the country teaching K’iche’ Mayan.

- **Haitian Creole** has been identified as an “area of national need” because of the ongoing crises in Haiti and an increasing number of speakers in the U.S.

CLAS works with governments

CLAS provides educational seminars, advice, and counsel on Latin America to governments at all levels—local, state, national, and international. CLAS has worked with the Tennessee Attorney General’s Office and Vanderbilt Law School to host workshops on international arbitration, drug trafficking, and gang networks. CLAS has also provided language and culture training for Military Foreign Area Officers from U.S. Southern Command, tailored to the region where they will be posted. CLAS works with the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to disseminate research on democracy and trust in institutions across the Americas to K-16 educators; LAPOP is widely employed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.N. Development Programme, and other organizations.

CLAS partners with local businesses

CLAS has advised more than 800 members of the business and government communities over the past five years through public and private partnerships. CLAS 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. CLAS hosts events with the Owen Graduate School of Management on conducting business in Latin America for leaders in global businesses based in Tennessee, including Nissan, Bridgestone, and Caterpillar.
K-16 instructional resources

CLAS works with K-16 educators and Vanderbilt faculty to produce curriculum resources for direct use in the classroom. All of these resources are openly accessible on the CLAS website and available for free download.

- Since 2017, CLAS has collaborated with Readworks to produce more than 80 English- and Spanish-language articles on Latin America for their reading comprehension program. Over 232,500 students and teachers from across the country have used these articles.

- CLAS 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 6,700 teachers and students in the last five years. In total, nearly 245,000 students and teachers have engaged with CLAS Instructional Resources over the past five years.

- Since 2018, CLAS has worked closely with Metro Nashville Public Schools to provide a series of professional development workshops on Central America.

- CLAS partners with Tulane University and the University of Georgia to offer an annual week-long summer institute for educators from around the country.

- CLAS also supports post-secondary educators, especially at HBCUs and other MSIs. CLAS hosted the 2020 Global Studies Symposium for Minority-Serving Institutions and Community Colleges with Florida International University, and has offered Medical Spanish and cultural content for Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and Meharry Medical College students for the last three years. Since 2018, CLAS has supported Portuguese language instruction at Tuskegee University, expanding their range of language offerings beyond Spanish and French.

- CLAS works with the Library of Congress to host the Américas Award each September.

CLAS collaborates with area schools

CLAS provides professional development workshops for teachers from across the state and the country. Recently, CLAS has been working closely with Metro Nashville Public Schools to help teachers better understand their increasingly diverse student population. CLAS collaborates with Fisk University, Tennessee State University, and Middle Tennessee State University to support their teaching on Latin America and language instruction. With these and other universities, CLAS has held educator workshops, cultural arts events, and international conferences. Over the past five years, K-16 programs have been attended by 18,000 educators and students and have impacted many more.

CLAS supports local arts institutions

CLAS collaborates with local arts institutions to introduce Tennesseans to a variety of topics related to Latin America and to the rich artistic and cultural traditions from this diverse region of the world. For example, CLAS supports city-wide cultural events including the Día de los Muertos with Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and the Celebrate Nashville Cultural Festival. CLAS has partnered with Nashville Opera to present Florencia en el Amazonas, Nashville’s first Spanish-language opera, and to host public programming for María de Buenos Aires, an Argentinian tango opera. With the Nashville Public Library, CLAS created a marionette show—The Amazing Twins: Ancient Maya Tales from the Popul Vuj.

In 2019, CLAS worked with Nashville Children’s Theatre to commission Return to Sender, which was seen by more than 3,200 students and teachers. CLAS supported the Frist Art Museum’s Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Mexican Modernism exhibit in 2019 and collaborates with the Frist’s ongoing educational events for families. CLAS regularly partners with the Global Education Center and OZ Arts Nashville to bring music and dance to Nashville; in total, CLAS-supported cultural events have been enjoyed by more than 150,000 people over the past five years.

For more information, please contact Vanderbilt’s Office of Federal Relations: Christina West (202) 216-4370 · Heather Bloemhard (202) 216-4368 federalrelations@vanderbilt.edu FY 2020