

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
IN THE UPPER MIDWEST:
The Growth of the North Central Council of
Latin Americanists

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The North Central Council of Latin Americanists grew out of the Wisconsin Council of Latin Americanists which was formed during the 1966–67 year by scholars from various colleges and universities in Wisconsin. A group of nine met originally on 25 March 1966 at Stevens Point, Wisconsin to determine whether there was enough interest on their campuses to warrant drafting plans for a statewide association. This group, plus other Latin Americanists from the state, met again at Wisconsin State University—Whitewater on 16 December 1966. They formed an executive committee and charged it with drafting a charter for the new organization; they also set the first general meeting for Spring 1967 at Wisconsin State University—Platteville.

The Platteville meeting on 31 March 1967 proved to be a critical step in forming the young Council. At that meeting a charter was adopted by the members that established the goal of the Council “to promote mutual understanding of the Americas.” It provided for a slate of officers, a newsletter, and outreach activities to bring academic Latin Americanists in contact with “individuals, corporations, and public bodies which have an interest in Latin America.” Membership dues were set at \$1.00 annually and kept at that rate until raised to \$2.00 in 1977.

A key decision at the Platteville meeting was the one to hold *two* meetings each year. Since 1967 the custom has been to hold the Spring meeting in the eastern zone of the North Central region and to hold the Fall meeting in the western zone. In retrospect, this proved to be a critical decision, because it later permitted the Council to expand westward without leaving its membership base in Wisconsin. By holding a Spring meeting in the eastern zone, the travel problems of the Wisconsin members were minimized; and by holding a Fall meeting in the western zone, it proved possible to attract members from Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas. Subsequent meetings have been held at Loras College (Dubuque, Iowa) in 1969, Hamline University (St. Paul, Minnesota) in 1974, St. Cloud State University (St. Cloud, Minnesota) in 1975, and Central College (Pella, Iowa) in 1978.

Because of its expansion among Latin Americanists in neighboring states,

WCLA began discussing a name change that would more accurately reflect the broadening geographic spread of the membership. In Fall 1973 the name was officially changed to the North Central Council of Latin Americanists (NCCLA) and the following year the organization held its first meeting in Minnesota.

The featured speaker at the original Platteville meeting was Edward Lieuwinn of the University of New Mexico. Following this precedent, NCCLA has continued to invite prominent Latin Americanists to be guest speakers. One of the most memorable engagements occurred at the Spring 1975 meeting at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. In commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Bartolomeo de Las Casas, NCCLA sponsored a lively and animated debate by Lewis Hanke, Benjamin Keen, and the late John Phelan on "Las Casas and the Struggle for Social Justice in Spanish Colonial America." Other notable speakers in recent years have included: Arthur P. Whitaker, Spring 1972 at Marquette University; Earl M. Aldrich, Jr., Spring 1973 at Mount Mary College; E. Bradford Burns and Margaret Crahan, Fall 1974 at Hamline University; Martin Needler, Spring 1975 at University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh; Eugene (Cotton) Mather, Fall 1975 at University of Wisconsin—River Falls; Jean Franco, Spring 1976 at University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee; John Strasma, Fall 1976 at St. Cloud State University; Paul Doughty, Spring 1977 at Ripon College; Thomas Skidmore, Fall 1977 at University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire; and Marysa Navarro, Spring 1978 at University of Wisconsin—Green Bay.

As a final, human interest comment on the original Platteville meeting, it should be noted that the banquet menu offered a choice of either a whole lobster or a sirloin steak for \$2.75.

NCCLA meetings have also attracted research papers of increasingly high quality. Revised versions of papers presented at NCCLA conferences have been appearing in published form with growing frequency in recent years: some have been published as Center Essays by the Latin American Center of the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, and several have been published as Center Discussion Papers. The Latin American Center agreed in 1974 to review for possible publication the best papers from the NCCLA meetings each year. A NCCLA essay selection committee forwards its selections to the Latin American Center, and the Center then reviews these papers along with other publication proposals. The possibility of such publication has attracted a larger number of papers each year and has encouraged scholars to present to the NCCLA papers that they might previously have saved for LASA or for the associations of their own disciplines.

While national support for Latin American studies has fallen off in recent years, NCCLA has expanded beyond the original boundaries of Wisconsin to include members from twenty states and six nations. Peak membership was achieved in 1974 at 271; since then, it has fluctuated between 209 and 243.

Each NCCLA member receives the NCCLA *Boletín*, which has been published three times a year since 1967. The *Boletín*, edited by the Communications chairperson, has become a major source of information about Latin American studies. Although each editor puts his or her own personal touch on the *Boletín*, certain features have persisted over the years: it provides news of NCCLA

conferences and executive committee meetings; items about upcoming meetings of the other Latin American studies associations; and personal news about individual members.

NCCLA members take pride in being in the forefront of cooperation with other Latin Americanists. NCCLA was the first regional association to approve the joint dues checkoff plan with LASA in 1977, which appears to be bringing into both organizations persons who had previously belonged to only one. A joint NCCLA-LASA panel was held at the LASA meeting in Madison, Wisconsin in 1973. Several NCCLA members are also active in other regional associations, and two former presidents of NCCLA have served as presidents of the Midwest Association of Latin American Studies (MALAS). NCCLA also works with other regional associations on the LASA Regional Liaison Committee.

The most elaborate cooperative venture initiated by NCCLA was the extraordinary meeting at Cuernavaca, Mexico in January 1978 on the theme of "Change and Continuity in Latin America." After setting the site and date, NCCLA sought the cooperation of other regional associations in order to broaden the possible attendance at the meeting. MALAS responded positively and nominated a program cochairperson to work with the NCCLA program chairperson; the result was a very lively, successful conference. The featured guest speaker was Rodolfo Stavenhagen of the Colegio de México. The American Embassy provided a reception for the participants at the Benjamin Franklin Library. So successful was this conference that NCCLA members are now exploring other cooperative ventures in Latin America.

NCCLA also attempts to reach out to nonuniversity Latin Americanists. A recurring feature at the meeting is student panels and panels for high school teachers. NCCLA members feel strongly that the viability of Latin American studies on their campuses depends on the existence of an audience outside the university—especially in the high schools—that can appreciate the work of Latin Americanists in higher education. The most extensive outreach activities are the annual awards. In Fall 1974 NCCLA established an annual award of \$200 to defray travel costs to Latin America for a high school teacher whose discipline or responsibilities were related to Latin America. In 1976 a second \$200 award was established for special projects dealing with Latin America. Although there has been some disappointment that they have not attracted a greater number and variety of proposals from high school teachers, the awards have proven beneficial to the recipients. Since their establishment, three awards totaling \$600 have actually been made and their projects carried out. The Council is currently assessing these awards to determine whether they should be continued or modified.

Several key elements have enabled NCCLA to make its contributions to Latin American studies. First, and most important, it has been blessed with a stable and supportive membership. Members not only pay their dues and attend meetings regularly, but there has always been a substantial body of people willing to present papers, chair sessions, work on committees, and perform the many other tasks that are crucial to the success of any organization. Second has been the minimal amount of personal friction among the officers of the Council.

Cooperation between the officers and the membership has made it possible to do many things, such as the annual awards and the Mexico meeting, that otherwise might have been impossible.

Finally, the Council's achievements have in great measure been facilitated by its close ties to the Latin American Center—Milwaukee. The Center's own outreach efforts with the regional Latin American studies associations are a model that other Latin American centers might want to emulate. The Center has performed many services not only for NCCLA but also for the Conference of Latin American Historians and MALAS. NCCLA houses its secretariat at the Center, which not only provides invaluable secretarial and postage help, but a central location to store NCCLA records, without which the historical continuity of the Council would be impossible. The Center also benefits from its close ties with NCCLA, which broadens the scholarly base available to contribute to Center-sponsored activities. This can be seen in the publications agreement between 1974 and 1978, which provided regional scholars an additional outlet for their work and increased the supply of research that the Center could draw on for its own publication plans. The net result has been greater scholarly productivity in the North Central region. When the Latin American Center began organizing a bank of videotape materials, it drew heavily on NCCLA members to organize the effort and to contribute some of the videotape presentations. Without such close ties, this source of talent would have remained unknown to the Center.

In sum, by the completion of its first dozen years, NCCLA has become a productive, dynamic organization that has contributed significantly to an understanding of the Americas in the North Central region. While the main effort has focused on its own scholarly conferences, NCCLA has cooperated extensively with other Latin American studies associations, with the Latin American Center at Milwaukee, and with individuals and organizations at the secondary and nonuniversity level. The members look forward to future years of continued opportunity to grow and contribute.

APPENDIX A PRESIDENTS

- 1967–68 Daniel DiPiazza, Wisconsin State University—Whitewater
- 1968–69 Robert Knowlton, Wisconsin State University—Stevens Point
- 1969–70 Edward Schuster, Loras College
- 1970–71 Kenneth Grieb, Wisconsin State University—Oshkosh
- 1971–72 Gerard Flynn, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee
- 1972–73 Alexander Hooker, Ripon College
- 1973–74 Armando Alonso, Viterbo College
- 1974–75 G. Michael Riley, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee
- 1975–76 Virgil Holder, University of Wisconsin—La Crosse
- 1976–77 Clarence Zuvekas, Moorhead State University
- 1977–78 John Harrigan, Hamline University
- 1978–79 John Fishel, University of Wisconsin—La Crosse

APPENDIX B MEETING SITES

(Listed in order, Spring and Fall of each year. WSU = Wisconsin State University, UW = University of Wisconsin.)

Initial Meeting: 16 December 1966, WSU—Whitewater

1967 WSU—Platteville (organizational meeting)
Lawrence University

1968 UW—Milwaukee
Viterbo College

1969 Beloit College
Loras College

1970 Ripon College
WSU—Platteville

1971 WSU—Stevens Point
WSU—Eau Claire

1972 Marquette University
UW—La Crosse

1973 Mount Mary College
Viterbo College

1974 UW—Stevens Point
Hamline University

1975 UW—Oshkosh
UW—River Falls

1976 UW—Milwaukee
St. Cloud State University

1977 Ripon College
UW—Eau Claire

1978 UW—Green Bay
Central College