This retreat and a previous one held 9/17/09 were ably facilitated by Professors Rocio Quispe-Agnoli and Lindon Robison. These forums were convened through the support of a US Department of Education Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language grant to enhance Michigan State University’s undergraduate curriculum in LAC studies. These retreats and our 2009-10 LACS Seminar Series constitute a self-study process leading to an external evaluation scheduled for February 2010. Invited speakers who informed the discussions in this retreat were (in order of presentation): Korine Wawrzynski, Director, Undergraduate Research, Office of the Provost; Tony Nuñez, Associate Dean, The Graduate School; Karen McKnight Casey, Director, Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement; and Kristin Janka Millar, CLACS.

Guiding question and primary curriculum goal:

How should we incorporate multi-disciplinary problem-solving experiences that are multi-cultural into the learning programs of our students?

Provide students with research mentoring that integrates the following:

1) Service-learning (language, culture and disciplinary proficiencies) experiences that take place abroad or in local diasporas (communities).

2) Problem-solving (i.e., research; investigating one’s scholarly passions) experiences that develop disciplinary proficiencies through community support.

3) International study (language, cultural and disciplinary explorations).

Should the Center adopt a ‘most recommendable’ portfolio of exemplary courses (e.g., abroad, diasporas) with a problem-solving component or research preparation (e.g., Experience Latin America package, Peru, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Caribbean, Brazil)?

Criteria and desirable learning outcomes should be widely accessible, so other programs could be included on the list.

Two, or multiple, experiential learning courses for undergraduate/graduate specializations should be encouraged for students enrolled in the LAC specialization.

4) Language and cultural competencies.

Outcomes of Discussion Goals

Goal 1: Student research experiences: What are the opportunities for better linking degree programs and disciplines?

- The Undergraduate Research Office funded more than 400 students in 2008-09 ($588,000 total; averaging $1300 to $1500 per student/semester). Allocations are based on size of college and seed initiatives, and are overseen differently among the colleges. In light of
dwindling college/departmental budgets, cash matching for UG research projects is often the first to be eliminated.

- The University Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum provides students with an opportunity to showcase scholarship and creative activity. More than 700 students and 285 faculty mentors from 14 colleges participated in last year’s Forum (the nation’s largest one).

- Despite pockets of undergraduate (UG) student involvement in research (e.g., Honors College; McNair; SROP; NSF REUs), there is a need for more and more-diverse problem-solving opportunities for our students. Many of these experiences, including those listed in Venture databases, are focused on engineering and natural sciences (~75%), and none in LAC.

  Many faculty and students are not well informed of existing opportunities and resources available to incorporate UG students into research teams with faculty and their graduate students.

- UG students are marginally involved in research teams, and too-little in contact with graduate students. UG participation is often restricted to only one piece of the process, such as raw data recording or literature retrieval.

- Few courses incorporate the scientific method into a broader curricular framework to facilitate student engagement and understanding of the research process. Lyman Briggs College was cited as an exemplary exception.

  International research experiences, especially in developing country contexts, were acknowledged a unique opportunity for students to better conceptualize development issues and as an innovative way to reduce curricular gaps.

- Students need problem-solving experiences (earlier in their undergraduate programs) to better understand the research process and the portfolio of professorial responsibilities (roles other than teaching).

- In a fall 2009 on-line survey (see attachment) conducted by the Center, one-half of the 27 respondents (from 26 departments in 9 colleges) currently, or recently, provide undergraduate students with a research experience. The majority (¾) of respondents are agreeable to mentoring undergraduates in a research experience.

Goal 2: Brainstorm: Recruitment of and improved training of graduate students

- The university population of international students is skewed: 54% of international students come from two Asian countries; only 3% are from LAC. Sponsored students often come with government funding that varies from country to country; some lack English language skills and have low TOEFL scores; technical preparation in Math/Engineering/Computer Science is better in some countries than in others.

- Michigan State lacks visibility in LAC countries. There is need to brand and to market our programs, emphasizing product differentiation and niche strengths, and to reach students not
admitted to ivy-league institutions. For example, academic program catalogs should be readily available at embassies, Fulbright offices, and cultural attachés abroad.

- **Our financial packages** should be made more attractive. More agreements with key LAC governmental or research entities (e.g., Mexico’s CONACyT) should be brokered to better achieve the “world-grant” mission. Such agreements address the brain drain problem, foster problem-solving research in home countries, build bilateral institutional alliances, and set a precedent for long-term investment and solidified partnerships.

- There is **need to foster more effective training mechanisms** to enhance global perspectives of UG, grad students, and post-docs (like the requirements for NSF applications).

- UG professors and personal connections/relationships are **key determinants** of grad school choices of international students. Not many graduate students learn about Michigan State at recruitment fairs. Domestic and international students view similarly the positive “attractions” of Michigan State.

- Greater **networking with alumni** in the region is needed to recruit more LAC students; perhaps even coordinate with lead faculty of study abroad programs. Likewise, faculty connections at minority-serving institutions should be nurtured.

- How can the Center integrate LAC students into its programs/initiatives, as they often compete with narrowly focused research and disciplinary agendas?

  Better articulation of benefits of LAC studies participation to major professors and students would be a fruitful beginning (connecting with people from own countries/shared cultural backgrounds reduces homesickness, improves productivity, maintains better mental health, etc.)

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**Goal 3. Capitalize on experiential learning via civic engagement in the LAC diasporas. Identify outreach strategies to better reach target audiences.**

- **Active and engaged learning**—How should the Center facilitate effective citizenship abroad and in the neighborhood? How should we improve trans-cultural skills, global competencies and student leadership through problem-solving research?

- The Center should re-engage in transdisciplinary research/projects that bring together diverse units from across campus. Multidisciplinary projects could be redeveloped under the Center’s umbrella, such as documentary film-making in Mexico (involving multiple departments: English, Film Studies, Telecommunications, Spanish and Portuguese, RCAH) or Latin American/Caribbean Media projects, such as collaborative blogs and news production.

- The Center’s initiatives should be linked to the academic mission of the university. Michigan State’s portfolio is rich in engaged service-learning activities. More than 15,000 students participated in 2008-09 with about 370 community partners (one-half academic courses; one-half curricular and co-curricular activities).

- How could the Center more effectively reach traditional target audiences—including K-12 teachers and the broader community—into its core programming and initiatives abroad? Possibilities: links with extension and focus on the marketing of Michigan products.
The Center should utilize innovative technologies for new course development, streaming video of seminars and events, online repositories and outreach resources, etc.

Afterword: Institutional challenge or epitaph?

Despite the high institutional priority ascribed to the mentoring of undergraduate students in research and non-classroom scholarship, the consensus of participants was the opposite. There are apparently multiple disincentives that dissuade faculty engagement in undergraduate mentoring and advising.

Concern was expressed about reconfiguring specialization requirements if they “add” or “layer on” too many activities that would impinge on faculty priorities (e.g., to publish, to secure grant funding, conduct research). Others responded that perhaps we could better integrate activities to capture synergies to better serve the needs of students. It was noted, however, that this would require significant structural change and redefinition of faculty rewards, including revised policies and procedures.

Goal 4. Ratified actions resulting from Retreat I recommendations (September 17, 2009)

The attached document, Summary of Recommended Actions for Ratification in Faculty Retreat II, was discussed. The following ratifications resulted by acclamation.

Requirements for undergraduate specialization. Action: conditional approval by the retreat participants subject to a more detailed specification of course work.

1. Demonstrated language proficiency for individualized objectives. Language study with service-learning abroad is encouraged.
2. 15 credits of course work about or pertinent to LAC in accordance with individualized learning objectives and approved by a LAC advisor. At least one credit-earning experiential learning course (abroad, diasporic), supervised by a LAC faculty member, is required. Multiple experiences recommended. A minimum of two semesters of enrollment in the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Seminar (1 credit each).
3. An honors thesis or senior thesis supervised by a LAC faculty member is encouraged.

Study Abroad. Action: approval of the following recommendation.

The Center should establish a “most recommendable” set of study abroad courses for students in the LAC specialization (and major).

Results of 10/26 follow up meeting with Lynn Forsblom, Director of Student Affairs, College of Social Science.

- Supportive of #1, #2, #3 and Study Abroad recommendation. Strong support for 15-credit course work requirement. Approved changing seminar credit from two to one credit/semester (pass/fail) and with own course number (not special topics). Approved unique course number designations for Experience Latin America I and II courses.
- Will investigate how best to specify the thesis option.
- Invited proceeding with proposal to redefine the UG specialization with proposed listings of courses and priority study abroad options.
Requirements for graduate specialization. Action: Approved.

1. Demonstrated language proficiency for individualized objectives. Language study with service-learning abroad is encouraged.
2. The student’s graduate advisory committee must include a LAC faculty member. This LAC studies committee member is responsible for recommending appropriate course and thesis work with LAC content in accordance with student objectives.
3. The thesis or dissertation must contain at least one major section or chapter devoted to a LAC issue or topic.

Results of 10/26 follow up meeting with Lynn Forsblom, Director of Student Affairs, College of Social Science.

- Discussed proposed changes to convert the current non-transcriptable certificate to a specialization. Recommendations will be submitted shortly to the University Committee on Curriculum.

The Center continues to gather information and document feedback from clienteles with LAC interests to aid in external review, which will take place late February 2010.

Please click on the following link: [http://isp.msu.edu/clacs/retreat2.php](http://isp.msu.edu/clacs/retreat2.php) to provide additional feedback.