

Latin American Studies Alumni Profile

The Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) at Vanderbilt University conducted an electronic survey of approximately 250 Latin American Studies (LAS) program alumni between June and July 2017. A total of **86 alumni**, (64% undergraduate and 36% graduate) responded and this report summarizes their feedback.

The Vanderbilt University Latin American Studies alumni survey generated a significant amount of data that revealed three main patterns:

- 1) When asked if they used Latin American languages (Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish) in their current job, the majority (66%) responded “yes”, indicating that the foreign language skills provided to students through Latin American Studies are the most enduring and highly utilized part of their education. Many also stated that their experiences studying abroad in Latin America were pivotal in establishing their fluency.
- 2) The career path of the majority of LAS alumni (74% overall) reflect federal priority areas for funding international area studies programs:
 - a. **48% Private Sector**
 - b. **18% Education**
 - c. **8% Government**
- 3) The comments provided by survey participants repeatedly express the broad and surprising ways in which their intellectual grounding in Latin America has positively affected their career opportunities. Many initially pursued traditional academic paths before turning to the private sector, where their depth of knowledge in the region was recognized as a unique asset that facilitated professional advancement. Alumni responses about the perceived usefulness of their Latin American Studies education were overwhelmingly favorable:
 - a. **50% Very useful**
 - b. **43% Somewhat useful**
 - c. **7% Not very useful**
 - d. **0% Not useful at all**

Comments Section Highlights

- “I currently trade Latin American currencies at Citi Bank in New York. The LAS major and my travel experience in Latin America gave me a significant edge in utilizing my language skills and provided a high level understanding of the economic, historical and cultural foundations of the respective countries that I focus on.”
- “My career as a world language educator (both secondary and post-secondary) has been greatly influenced by my experiences as a LAS student. For the past 14 years, I have been able to connect and communicate to my students the importance of second language acquisition; as well as the integral historical components of Latin America that have impacted history.”
- “I came to Vanderbilt as an active duty U.S. Army officer to pursue an M.A. in LAS. Upon graduation, I spent two years working in the Defense Attaché Office in the embassy in Argentina. Afterwards, I went to El Salvador for 18 months to work as an aviation advisor to the El Salvador air force. My education was critical to my success in those positions.”