In the mid-1970s, the University of Delaware established a Latin American Studies Group and a Latin American studies major. Over the next several years, the LASG, among other activities, sponsored scholarly conferences and published several monographs but eventually ran out of funds for the publication program. Although the LASG has developed several types of programs, some University of Delaware faculty felt the need to revive a publication program. About fifteen years ago, this felt need coincided with long-overdue acknowledgement that published communications between North American and (to a lesser extent?) European scholars on the one hand and Latin American scholars on the other tended to be a one-way flow. Latin American scholars read what Anglo-Western Europeans wrote, but the latter seemed to read less of what the former wrote, or if not exactly that, the former were somehow in the second pew. Moreover, too many Latin American college students and too many local Latin American colleges and universities could not afford to acquire scholarly journals published in the United States, and, presumably Canada and Western Europe. But they do have access to the “net.”

So, several Latin Americanists at the University of Delaware proposed to publish a scholarly journal to be named Delaware Review of Latin American Studies or DeRLAS. The journal would publish peer reviewed scholarly essays in English, Spanish and Portuguese, would be open access, on-line. The goal was to encourage submissions from qualified scholars from all parts of the world and most certainly from Latin American scholars who might not otherwise think of publishing their essays in a USA-based journal.

Somewhat naively, the initiators of this project -- Dr. América Martínez Cruzado, Department of Languages and Literature, Dr. Suzanne Austin, then a member of the history department and now Vice Provost at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Dr. Norman B. Schwartz, emeritus professor of anthropology – underestimated the amount of labor it takes to mount a peer-reviewed journal, even with support and encouragement from colleagues in the Latin American Studies Group. Establishing a Board of Editors, distinguished scholars all; receiving and evaluating essays and reviewers for books; mounting the journal on the web; getting DeRLAS indexed by the major international databases, and so on took a bit of time. Some financing was also needed, and it probably helped that Dr. Austin was not only a dedicated scholar but also, at the time, Director of the Latin American Studies Program.

In any case, the first issue of DeRLAS was placed on-line 15 December 1999. The first issue reflected some of the goals for the journal -- Dr. Avrum Shriar published an essay on “Resource conservation and rural neglect” in Guatemala; Licenciado Amilcar Corzo Márquez a professor at Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala published an essay on “Vida, migración, tragedia” in the northern lowlands of Guatemala; Dr. Nora Haenn published an essay on “Mexican farmers’ challenges to conservation;” and Dr. Peter G. Roe discussed “Research and teaching at the Centro de Investigaciones de Puerto Rico.” Since 1999, DeRLAS has published twice a year under the direction of Dr. America Martínez and other editors - Dr. Glady Ilarregui (Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literature, FLL); Daiane Tamanaha (Brazilian journalist); Dr. Persephone Braham (FLL); Dr. Monica Domínguez Torres (Art History); and Dr. Judy B. McInnis (FLL).

To celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of DeRLAS, its quinceañera, the editors and the Latin American Studies Group decided decided to ask distinguished scholars to publish essays on current scholarship in their discipline. They also decided to limit the celebratory issue to three essays, with the thought that in the future, the practice might continue with one state-of-the-art essay published once a year. The three authors who generously graced DeRLAS with their essays have set the standard, and it is a high one, for subsequent state-of-the-art essays. These initial essays will be published on-line in Volume 15, No.3 as of 15 July 2015.

Dr. Eduardo Becerra Grande, Associate Professor of the Department of Spanish Philology at the Universidad
Autónoma de Madrid, in an insightful essay on the state of Latin American literary criticism, assesses the most significant proposals of “un relato autoreflexivo sobre el propio quehacer crítico y su práctica latino americanista.” In broad strokes, Dr. Becerra Grande explains how narrative history, cultural criticism and other means of expression have been replacing the traditional functions and expressiveness of literature. Literature and literary criticism are confronting a profound crisis because of the loss of their presence and their once valued status within cultural discourse, and are being relegated to a secondary position with respect to other disciplines, with large and important unintended consequences.

In his examination of the development of the field of sociology in Latin America since its independence, Dr. Enrique S. Pumar, Professor of Sociology at The Catholic University of America, brilliantly demonstrates how Latin American sociologists have created a distinct identity and research tradition from those of the U.S. and Europe that, nonetheless, “takes seriously the effects of comparative historical methods and strategies”. They have not only produced a cosmopolitan sociology but have also created “major paradigm shifts in the sphere of national development”.

In his magisterial essay, Dr. Terry Rugeley, Presidential Professor in the Department of History, University of Oklahoma and past president of the Southwest Council of Latin American Studies, deals with the state and direction of modern (post-1810) Mexican history. He guides us through the literature on Mexican history and through questions about the discipline of history itself- how the stories historians write tell us something important about where we have been and, perhaps, where we might be headed now. In the act of writing history Dr. Rugeley communicates with Mexican and other historians, exemplifying without preaching the two-way flow DeRLAS strives to realize. Dr. Rugeley also speaks about the proper relations between narrative history and compelling moral issues that burn in one’s being.

In an equally strong state-of-the-art essay, Dr. James M. Taggart, Lewis Audenreid Professor Emeritus of History and Archaeology, Franklin and Marshall College, offers what amounts to a marvelous short course on anthropological and folklore studies on “Native American oral narratives in Mexico and Guatemala” from 1900 to 2015. Dr. Taggart helps us understand the various angles from which scholars have dealt with native oral narratives, that is, “ways of organizing experience in story form” as Dr. Taggart says. The experiences are transcendent as well as earth-bound. Dr. Taggart’s suggestions for future research, certainly useful for younger scholars, include ideas about “linguistic activism” – studies of oral traditions by contemporary speakers of indigenous languages – Mayan, Nahuat - with whom Dr. Taggart has spoken over the years.

But there is much more in these essays than these few lines tell. They make the fifteenth birthday of DeRLAS a genuine scholarly, intellectual and forward-looking occasion.