



Knowledge Horizons:

Learning from Four Decades of Funding
Field Research in Latin America



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ABOUT THE TINKER FOUNDATION

The Tinker Foundation was established in 1959, with the belief that the well-being of the peoples of the Americas (North, Central and South) depended upon their mutual trust, friendship and cooperation. Tinker's mission at present is to promote the development of an equitable, sustainable and productive society in Latin America, with an emphasis on improving policy. Tinker invests in programmatic work in the areas of democratic governance, education and sustainable resource management through annual grant-making totaling approximately \$4 million.

Tinker supports the field of Latin American studies by providing funds to U.S. universities to administer the FRG Program, awarding graduate-level scholars with financial support for field research conducted in Latin America in a range of disciplines.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1979, the Tinker Foundation has funded the Field Research Grant (FRG) Program to establish linkages among researchers to promote the study of Latin America and support relationship-building between institutions and individuals in the United States and Latin America.^{1,2} Through the FRG Program, Tinker has disbursed grants to over 40 Centers for Latin American Studies totaling more than \$6.5 million; Centers have provided over \$4 million in matched funds.³ The program has supported nearly 9,000 individuals to conduct field research in Latin America, namely master's- and doctorate-level graduate students.

In 2019, in consideration of the 40th anniversary of the FRG Program, the Tinker Foundation commissioned the Institute of International Education (IIE) to conduct a strategic review of the FRG Program, measuring the extent to which the program has completed its intended goals and its relevance today.

Impact Study

IIE implemented the study from February to July 2019 with the purpose of:

1. Documenting the **history and evolution** of the FRG Program and analyzing its **effectiveness and efficiency** in completing its program goals and leveraging resources
2. Evaluating the **outcomes and impact** of the FRG Program
3. Assessing the **relevance** of the FRG Program in light of current trends and issues affecting Latin America, the needs of graduate students, and the priorities and needs of Centers for Latin American Studies and the Tinker Foundation
4. Making **recommendations** to Tinker for the future of the FRG Program

Alumni Survey

In April 2019, the FRG Alumni Survey was completed by 1,451 FRG alumni – a 61% response rate.⁴

Figure 1: Degree pursued at time of FRG Program

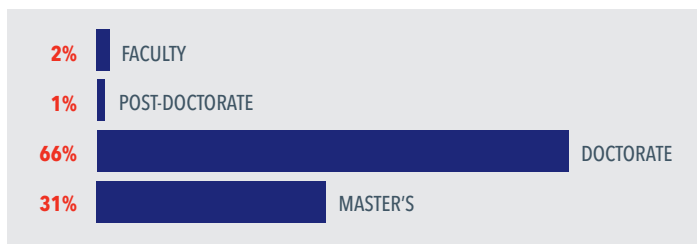
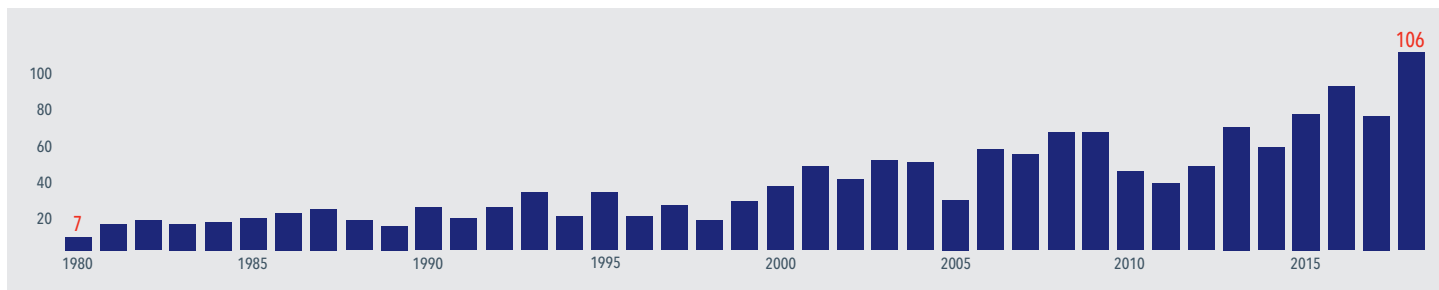


Figure 2: Top 5 fields of study at time of FRG Program



Figure 3: Year of FRG experience



¹ Tinker Foundation, Field Research Grants Program. Retrieved from <https://www.tinker.org/content/field-research-grants>

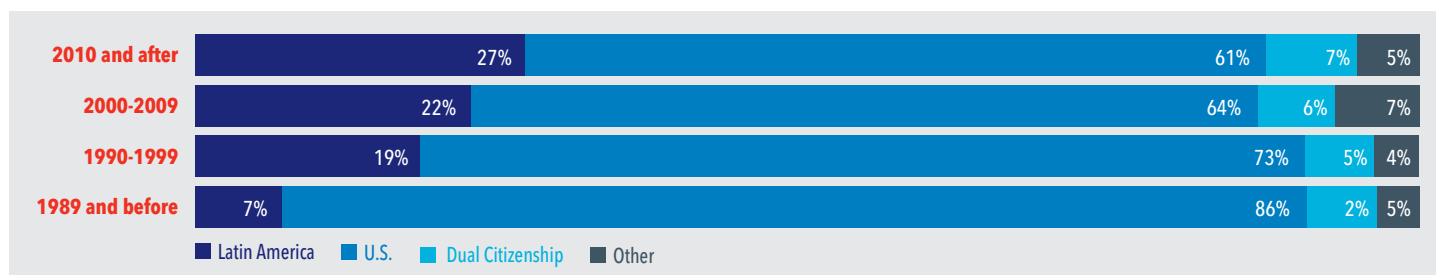
² For the purposes of this evaluation, Latin America is defined as all countries in the Western Hemisphere that have Spanish or Portuguese as their primary state language.

³ The current Tinker grants require a 100% match from recipient universities.

⁴ IIE began data collection with a database of 4,108 FRG recipients; however, the final study population was reduced to 2,389 to only include those with active email addresses.

Since 1990, an increasing proportion of respondents has come from the Latin America region.

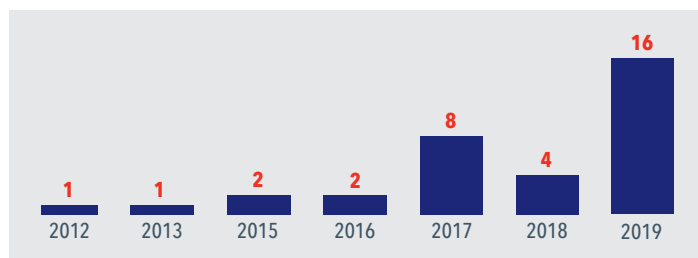
Figure 4: Citizenship at time of FRG Program



Center Survey

IIE sent the survey to 39 Centers for Latin American Studies that had administered the FRG Program since the inception of the program in 1979. IIE collected responses from 48 individuals representing 34 institutions – 87% coverage of recipient Centers. Over 88% of Center respondents currently administering the FRG completed the survey.

Figure 5: Distribution of Centers by most recent year offering FRG Program



- All respondents (100%) considered supporting field research in Latin America critical to their Center's mission.
- Respondents indicated offering programming through their Centers for Latin American Studies, with nearly all (90%) offering academic programming, including academic degrees, coursework or other services.
- Most Centers offer bachelor's or master's programs (undergraduate major, 67%; undergraduate minor, 58%; master's, 60%). A relatively smaller group (10%) offer doctorate programs.

Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to the FRG Alumni Survey and Center Survey, IIE collected qualitative data from 79 individuals. These included program stakeholders – student recipients, Center staff and faculty, a Center that had not received Tinker funding (non-recipient), external experts in higher education in Latin America (based in the United States and in Latin America), and Tinker staff and Board members. IIE visited six Centers across the United States that ranged in size and location.

Figure 6: Qualitative data collection

	Participants
Site Visits (6):	
Center Staff/Faculty	21
Student Group Interviews	29
Tinker Staff/Board:	
Individual Interviews	4
Group Interview	3
Group Interviews (3):	
Alumni	12
Center Leadership	5
External Interviews:	
External Experts	4
Former/Non-recipient	1

Limitations of the Study

- **Study population.** The study population for the FRG Alumni Survey was limited by the availability of contact information for recipients. Tinker and IIE worked together to secure updated contact information for many FRG recipients, and the response rate for those who were reached was very high (61%).
- **Accessing stakeholders for data collection.** The evaluation team was successful in speaking to current FRG Program Centers. Comparatively, it was more difficult to arrange expert interviews with Centers that no longer received FRG funding and those that had never received the grant. Noting this, the evaluation team focused on analysis of Center Survey data, as more than half (52%) of Center respondents were not currently receiving program funding.
- **Timing of evaluation.** The study timeline overlapped with the end of the academic semester for most Centers and students. While the team was able to collect all data, it would have been preferable to stagger survey administration and site visits so as to follow up on key themes or provide clarifications regarding survey data.

FRG PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND EVOLUTION

History of the FRG Program

The FRG Program was created in 1979 to 1) promote U.S. graduate students' studies in Latin America through directly supporting their research and 2) foster contact and relationship-building between U.S. and Latin American individuals and institutions.

"The purpose of this new Tinker program is to make it possible for people of ability to work in specific regions of Latin America to acquire as profound and intimate a knowledge as possible of language, terrain and culture; to gather research data; and to develop contacts with scholars and institutions in their field."

- Kenneth Maxwell, Tinker Foundation, 1979

At its outset, the FRG Program was envisioned as a first chance for U.S. graduate students (and, in early years, faculty members) to interact directly with Latin America as they engaged in a doctoral program with a topic focusing on the region. Tinker presumed that most recipients would be U.S.-born citizens who had not traveled extensively to the region.

The FRG Program model is relatively unchanged today, though some adjustments have been made as Tinker received feedback about the program's utility and impact from recipient universities and students. As Centers for Latin American Studies increased and expanded across U.S. universities, the FRG Program has engaged with more newly established, smaller or less-experienced centers, and Tinker has created a two-tier funding approach. Centers are able to determine the level of funding most appropriate for their abilities to match at the corresponding level, with an intention of making the FRG Program more accessible to nascent Centers for Latin American Studies.

Program Category	Original	Modified
Limitations of use	Travel and limited field-related costs	Limitations removed
Eligibility	Predissertation-level doctoral students, master's students planning to pursue a Ph.D., and junior faculty	Excludes junior faculty and includes terminal master's level students
Institutional funding amount	\$15,000/year, \$5,000 match/\$7,500 match	1997 - match equal to award Additional funding layer at \$10,000
Fieldwork duration	Minimum 2 weeks to maximum 4 weeks	Open
Grant duration	3 years	No change
Timing for fieldwork	Northern Hemisphere summer	Year-round
Destinations	Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America, and Iberia	Iberia eliminated

Unique Program Components

Early Research Opportunity

The FRG Program is unique in encouraging students to explore a potential topic early in their academic program and to test hypotheses. The program also provides recipients with an opportunity to develop skills fundamental to research, such as engaging with data collection and archives directly, negotiating with local authorities or learning how to connect with field research participants.

"What is super important about the Tinker is that when you are just exploring what you are going to be working on, or [when] you have just a preliminary idea... that funding is really decisive in your being able to go to the places where you can confirm if your suspicions are right."

- Center faculty/staff, Florida International University (FIU)

Unique in its design, the program was often referred to by respondents as a “gateway grant” to access support for longer and more focused fieldwork when a student was past the stage of dissertation or thesis design. It was praised as a stepping-stone that provided a competitive edge for students in their competition for longer, more in-depth field research opportunities at later stages of their dissertations or thesis work.

Multidisciplinary Research

The FRG Program allows for field research in any discipline, distinguishing it from other programs or funding opportunities that are restricted to specific areas of study. The possibilities provided to different types of students, ranging from education and science to the arts and journalism, provide flexibility and an inclusive design that was appreciated by alumni respondents. In some instances, it has allowed students from different disciplines to meet or learn about each other’s work. Despite their different areas of study, most alumni respondents noted the collective bond of working on research in Latin America.

“When you have a Tinker program, and you have students who are getting their Tinkers, these are the future research leaders of the field. There is no question about that. It remains that way even though this program started 40 years ago.”

– Center faculty/staff, Stony Brook University

Program Efficiency

“This is a very efficient, lean and mean program. ... You give them the two weeks and subsidize their plane ticket(s), ground transportation from city to city. And then they know they have a limited time, and they have to be very efficient. ... I don’t see any better way to administer this. It’s super-efficient.”

– Center faculty/staff, FIU

The FRG Program was found to be leanly managed in several ways: As noted above, Tinker’s touch is a light one on recipient institutions. These institutions provide a great amount of focus, energy and donated time and dollars in their implementation with no labor or overhead charges charged to Tinker. Further, the university’s cost-share requirement is a cash match, not in-kind contributions such as donated staff hours, program materials, supplies or tuition waivers, which meet several other externally funded grant programs’ cost-share requirements.

Center respondents reflected on the unique nature of the FRG program in requiring matching funds and the hiatus year to institutionalize university support for the program. For many Centers, there has been support from universities to continue funding the program during hiatus years. As such, Center respondents regarded the implications to share the financial burden of the program as university buy-in.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The FRG Program is viewed by both Centers and alumni respondents to be:

- Unique in its focus on giving an early opportunity in graduate students’ coursework period to conduct field research across Latin America at a time when it can help them further define their research focus, build useful networks and gain fieldwork skills
- A flexible and open design to a wide range of disciplines, interests, and activities in Latin America
- Relatively easy to administer and valuable for Centers and alumni in its funding streams that are not necessarily available through other on-campus funding

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF THE FRG PROGRAM ON ALUMNI

The next two chapters present the outcomes and impact that the FRG Program has had on stakeholders: alumni respondents, and current and past recipient Centers for Latin American Studies who participated in the evaluation.

Alumni Respondents

The following sections present the findings from quantitative and qualitative data from almost 1,500 FRG alumni respondents. The analysis maps the trajectory of the FRG Program, starting with activities pursued while on grant, skills acquired, and outcomes related to research production and additional funding secured related to FRG research.

FRG Activities

While completing their FRG Program in Latin America, alumni respondents conducted a range of professional research-based activities. Most alumni respondents (83%) used their field research opportunity to collect data, in addition to establishing research contacts in their field research country (65% outside local universities; 61% within local universities).

Respondents who pursued their FRG experience after 2010 were more likely to have established research contacts at institutions other than universities than those receiving earlier grants, indicating that more recent grants may have a focus on local communities rather than just higher education institutions. Further, U.S. respondents were more likely to establish connections between professors or peers from their U.S. university and individuals in their field research country than those respondents who were already from the region.

Alumni respondents emphasized the importance of engaging in research activities on the ground in their Latin American field research country.

"The Tinker grant I got last summer permitted me to go to Santiago, Chile. ... And what it allowed me to do was to begin to do my primary source research on the role of... the Roman Catholic Church during the Pinochet dictatorship."

- Alumnus, Michigan State University, 2018

"I was getting the grant for field work and it was my first time to be able to really immerse... really do participant observation and immerse myself in the place where I wanted to do my work."

- Alumna, Columbia University, 2018

Figure 7: Research activities conducted during FRG Program

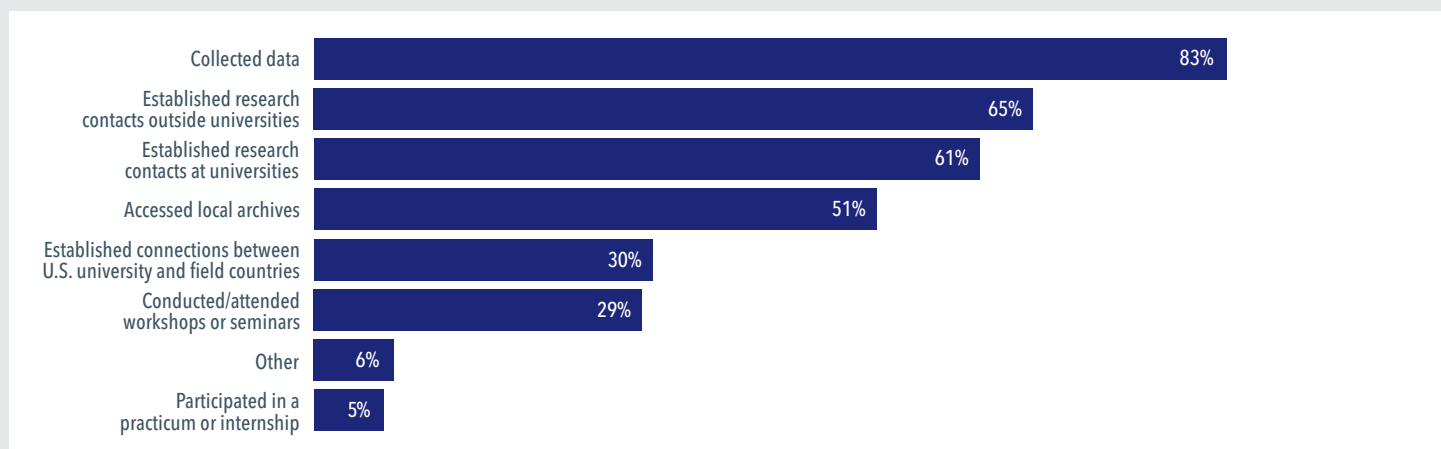
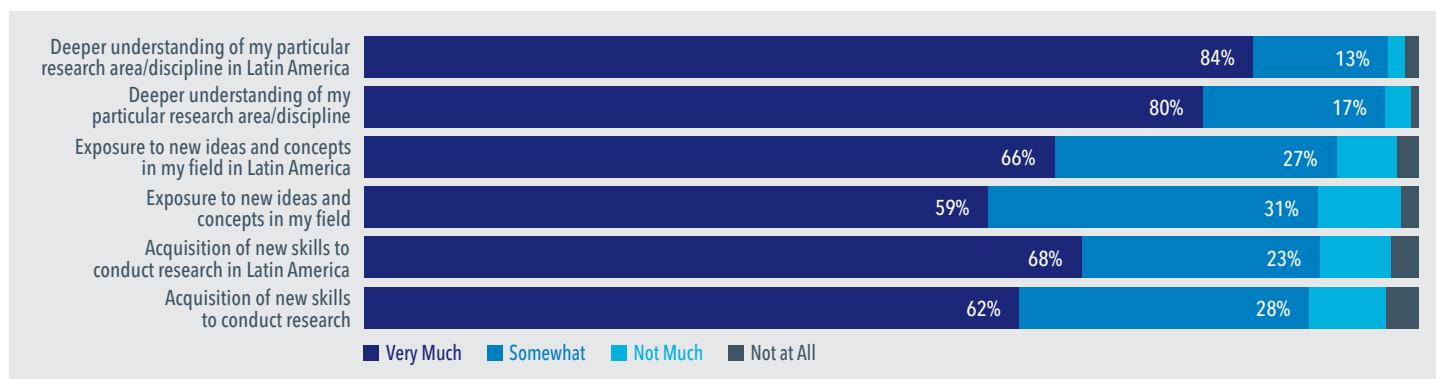


Figure 8: Skill development among alumni respondents



Skills Acquisition

Nearly all alumni respondents believed that the FRG experience provided them with exposure to new ideas, deeper understanding of their research topic and new skills to conduct research not only in their particular field or discipline but within the context of Latin America. Center respondents corroborated these findings, with 100% of respondents believing that graduate students acquired skill development in all areas, with higher rates of development in areas within the context of Latin America.

In interviews, respondents highlighted the early-career nature of the FRG experience and the professional research skills they were able to practice for the first time as a result: Fewer than one-third (28%) of recipients had conducted research in Latin America prior to their FRG. Other new activities experienced included the development of a grant proposal, the logistics of coordinating and arranging data collection activities, and ultimately assessing the viability and direction of the research itself.

Following their FRG experience, recipients reported development of discrete professional skills, such as the ability to communicate effectively (90%) and determine or affirm career goals (90%). Female respondents were more likely to report growth in effective communication than their male counterparts. Respondents from Latin America were more likely to indicate their ability to determine or affirm their career goals, as well as respondents from cohorts before 1989.

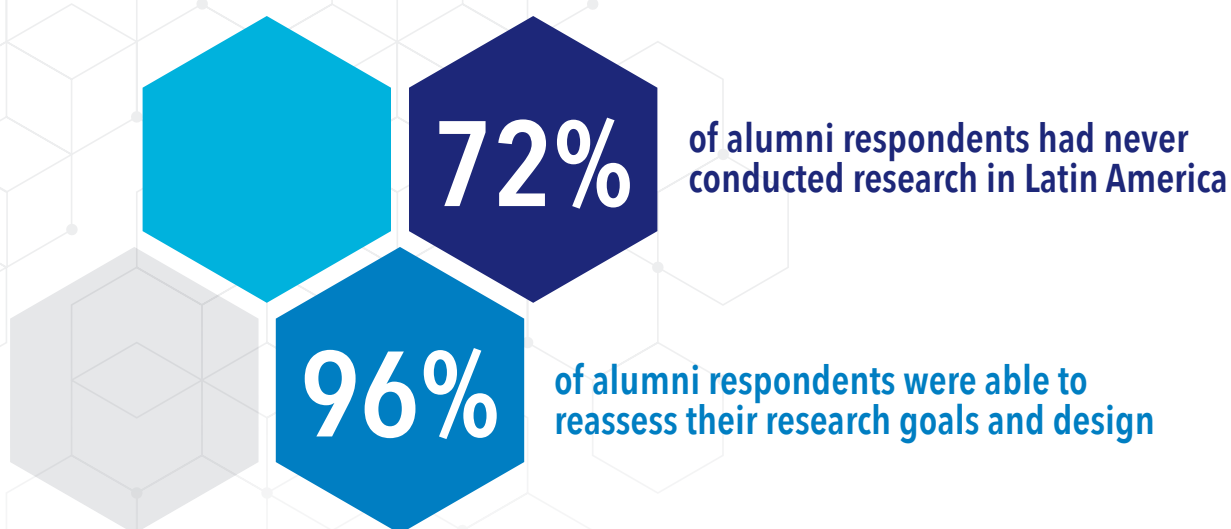
"For me, it was an opportunity that wasn't present in any other way for me to actually go to the place that I'm researching and explore what are the resources there for me and what is the viability of my research. So, that was really important just to establish and plan out the rest of my research plan thereafter."

– Alumna, FIU, 2016

Nearly all respondents (96%) indicated that the FRG helped them develop the ability to reassess their research goals or design. Doctoral students and respondents from cohorts after 2010 had the highest rates of skill development in this area. Respondents' field of study was not significant in affecting skill growth in this area. Center respondents highlighted the "low-risk" opportunity of the FRG Program: As a small, early-career grant administered internally at the university, it allowed for better testing of research ideas and learning how to correct or redirect original research intentions, compared with large-scale, government- or direct Foundation-funded opportunities.

"I think being able to do original research is the best teacher for many of these students—having their first experience in Latin America and being fully immersed, being able to test out a research project to see if it's viable, to go through those kinds of motions and taking all of the theoretical knowledge that they've acquired here on campus and really putting that into practice for the first time."

– Center faculty/staff, Vanderbilt University



During interviews with staff from participating Centers, respondents highlighted the “professionalizing skills” that they believed students acquired through the FRG Program, echoing the value of compiling and submitting a first-time grant application for an interdisciplinary audience.

“I think sometimes this part is overlooked, but the process even of applying to the grant, I think that’s important because, in some cases, that makes them—puts them in the position to have to put together a proposal. ... And you can see how, after they do this exercise, they go on and they continue looking for more funding elsewhere.” – Center faculty/staff, FIU

Following their experience, recipients reported the highest rates of change in their knowledge pertaining to the research landscape (91%) and their field of study (91%) in their field research country. The evaluation team further looked at differences by field of study. Recipients studying history were most likely to indicate higher rates

of knowledge change in their field of study, while those studying anthropology were more likely to indicate knowledge change pertaining to the research landscape in the context of their field research country.

There were comparably lower rates of change in knowledge regarding issues such as culture and values, history and daily life in the field research country: Despite lower change at the aggregate level, recipients who pursued their FRG Program prior to 1989 were significantly more likely to indicate higher rates of knowledge change in these areas compared to later cohorts.

Personal Growth

Nearly all alumni respondents indicated that the FRG Program helped them develop their self-confidence (92%) and intercultural skills (91%). Fewer indicated development in leadership skills (73%), although female respondents were more likely to indicate development in this area than males. Respondents commented on the self-directed nature of the research experience and the independence it afforded them. This contributed to their confidence-building, validating them as researchers. Center staff also described how the FRG Program provided students with legitimacy and validation as researchers, allowing students to be seen as, and see themselves as, legitimate researchers, many for the first time.

“For me, it was the first time being completely on my own when designing my own research. ... The first time being completely autonomous and designing everything by myself was a great experience, I think. It was really, really useful for me to realize that I was... a researchers, not just... a student or undergrad student. ... It was a great experience. – Alumnus, Stony Brook University

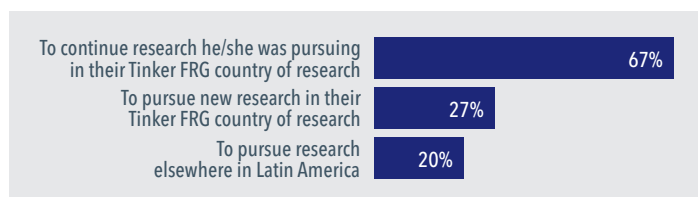
Research Products

Following their FRG experience, 97% of alumni respondents directly used the research conducted through FRG to produce a range of academic products, primarily graduate theses or dissertations (76%). Master's students were more likely than those at the doctoral level to have used their FRG research in their theses or dissertations. Many shared their research with broader audiences through presentations on their university campus (64%) or presentations/panels/posters at outside conferences (58%). More recent cohorts were most likely to have presented on their university campus or at conferences compared with respondents from early cohorts, which could speak to some recent changes in program interpretations and activities post-grant at the campus level.

Additional Funding

Almost two-thirds of alumni respondents (65%) reported using the research from their FRG experience to secure additional funding opportunities after the grant. Master's students were more likely to indicate having secured additional funding opportunities than doctoral students. Respondents emphasized that the FRG Program offered credibility and source material to inform their future grant applications.

Figure 9: Additional funding secured as a result of FRG opportunity



"From that experience, I think one of the main things was not only did it affect the way that I thought about my research and how I formulated my argument, it also made my applications for funding later on even stronger. And I think it made them successful because I was so sure of what I was talking about, had that confidence that I could complete the research and I would be successful."

– Alumna, FIU, 2016

Further funding received by respondents came from a range of funders, both internal to their universities and external, including the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) grant, various Fulbright grants (over 100 recipients indicated having received a Fulbright grant following their FRG Program), Inter-American Development Bank, Mellon Foundation, National Geographic Society, National Science Foundation and Wenner-Gren, among others. Many alumni respondents articulated using additional funding to transition their FRG research into dissertation work, many moving from a master's to a doctorate, or reassessing or redesigning their doctorate study due to their FRG experience.

"At the end of my Tinker FRG I knew that I need[ed] more sophisticated research skills and pursued a Ph.D. focusing on demographic and econometric analysis. After the Ph.D., this led me to a Rockefeller Foundation post-doc in Brazil and later a Mellon Foundation post-doc at the University of Texas, Austin."

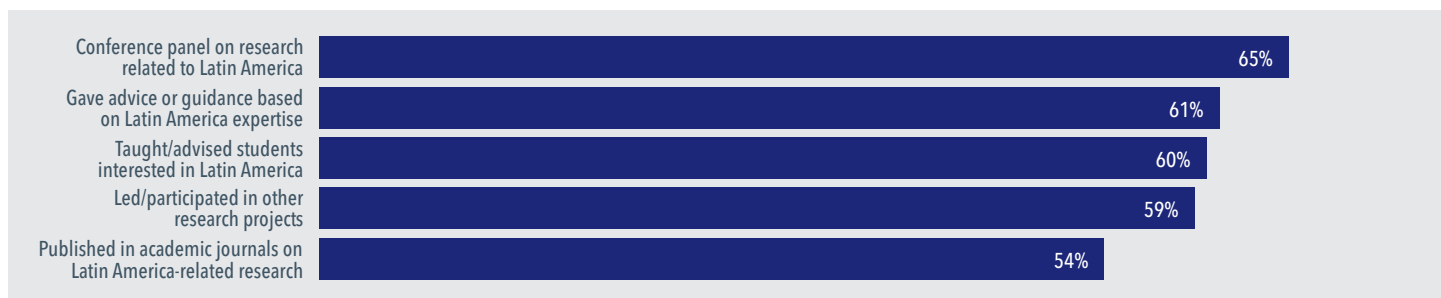
– Alumna, University of Florida, 1984

"I changed research direction during my grant period when I learned about unexplored archival materials. Having access to archival documents allowed me to prepare future funding opportunities in subsequent summers and later for a full year of dissertation research. The FRG was a crucial first step in my academic career."

– Alumna, Duke University, 2011

Beyond research grants won immediately following their FRG experience, 55% of alumni respondents have gone on to secure additional funding for research grants related to research on Latin America outside of their FRG-specific research.

Figure 10: Latin America-related research activities since FRG Program



Post-FRG Research Opportunities in Latin America

Nearly all respondents (93%) participated in research activities focused on Latin America since the FRG Program, primarily sharing the results and knowledge of their research and experience.

Respondents with Latin American citizenship, as well as respondents from pre-1989 cohorts, were the most likely to have spoken on a panel at a conference on research related to Latin America. History students were most likely to have taught or advised students interested in Latin America since their FRG. Political science students were most likely to have published in an academic journal on research related to Latin America.

Linkages with Latin America

Approximately 71% of alumni respondents have remained in touch with individuals met during the FRG Program, with university faculty/staff in Latin America (57%) and researchers in Latin America (57%) for primarily academic/research reasons, and personal/social acquaintances (57%). Respondents from Latin America and the Caribbean, respondents who completed their FRG after 2010, doctoral students at the time of their FRG and respondents who are still completing their original degree were more likely to remain in touch with individuals they met during their FRG experience than their counterparts. The duration of time spent in the field research country of their FRG Program was not a significant determinant of likelihood to stay in touch with local contacts.

Respondents who have remained in touch with contacts in Latin America indicated that these individuals are resources on topics of professional interest (71%) or contacts to others in the field (67%). U.S. respondents, as well as those studying anthropology, history or political science, were most likely to indicate the benefit of these contacts as professional resources. The same groups, except those who had studied political science, were also most likely to report contacts having introduced them to others in the field.

Despite high rates of network development and continuity, fewer than half of the alumni respondents (41%) have collaborated with individuals in Latin America on knowledge products. The highest rates of collaboration were achieved with local researchers (57%) and university faculty (56%) in Latin America, which aligns with the groups of Latin American individuals with whom recipients were most likely to remain in touch.

"I worked with a local partner to develop focus group questions. And I think that was the most valuable thing that I did. Because she was able to take the questions I drafted, based on best practices and what I had learned in my classes, and make them more appropriate as far as language and I guess the quality of answers that we would get. And that's not something I would have known how to do myself."

– Alumna, University of Arizona, 2015

A majority of alumni respondents (74%) believed their time in their field research country benefited the local researchers with whom they interacted. Respondents from Latin America were more likely to indicate higher benefit to university faculty, local researchers and individuals at government agencies than those recipients from the United States or other countries. When asked how they benefited the local researchers, respondents indicated that they helped establish connections between their field country and their home institution (52%) and fostered connections directly to researchers in the United States (37%).

Respondents believed that the exchange of knowledge and ideas, collaboration and research they produced benefited the local communities in Latin America, some even sharing their evaluations, reports, theses or other materials directly with community members, government officials and local researchers. They also believed that they were able to introduce new topics and methods for data collection and research that brought visibility, opportunities for reflection and new perspectives.

"At the time, my approach to studying corruption and transparency issues was relatively new to the Latin American context. Few had heard of the field experimental method. Thus, in my interactions with local faculty and government officials, I introduced them to a new and effective tool for measuring causality." – Alumnus, Yale University, 2008

"Because Cuba was more closed off when I visited (2006–2007), I was able to help scholars and practitioners broaden their perspectives on contemporary theory and practice related to performance and theater."

– Alumna, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2007

Professional Trajectories

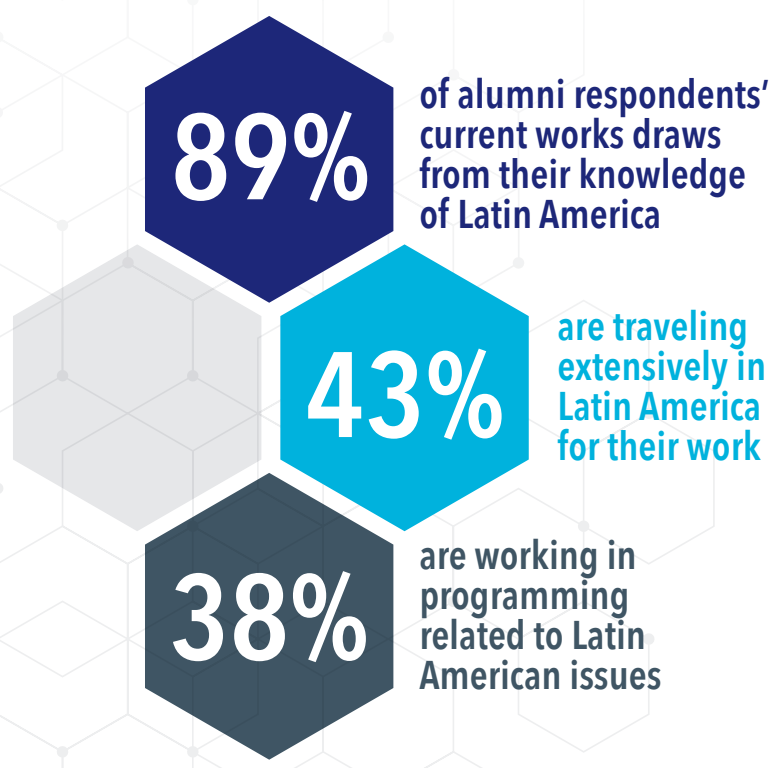
Respondents reflected on what the FRG experience meant to them professionally, and many commented on how fundamental it was in starting them on their career paths: providing thesis or dissertation material; establishing research/professional connections; building their knowledge and confidence in speaking Spanish or Portuguese; traveling in Latin America; and continuing their career in the region.

One-fifth of alumni respondents are still finishing their Tinker-funded degree (20%), and this is primarily due to the larger proportion of respondents who completed the Alumni Survey. Among alumni who have completed their degrees, the majority (59%) are employed as college/university faculty or instructors or in another full-time position (30%). A much smaller proportion (5%) are pursuing additional full-time academic study beyond the FRG-affiliated degree.

Current university faculty or instructors are primarily based in the United States (82%), with a smaller proportion based in Latin America, the Caribbean or Spain (12%). Respondents from Latin America and doctoral students are most likely to be employed as university faculty or instructors. Of those employed full time otherwise, the largest proportion (18%) are employed in higher education in non-instructor/faculty roles.

A majority of alumni respondents (89%) indicated that their current work draws from their knowledge of Latin America, with many still working with Latin American colleagues (50%), traveling extensively in Latin America for work (43%) or working in programming related to Latin American issues (38%). Respondents with Latin American citizenship were more likely to indicate that their current work draws from their knowledge of Latin America; this is also true for those who pursued their FRG after 2010. Nearly all (93%) respondents who are currently employed as faculty/instructors also indicated still drawing on their knowledge of Latin America.

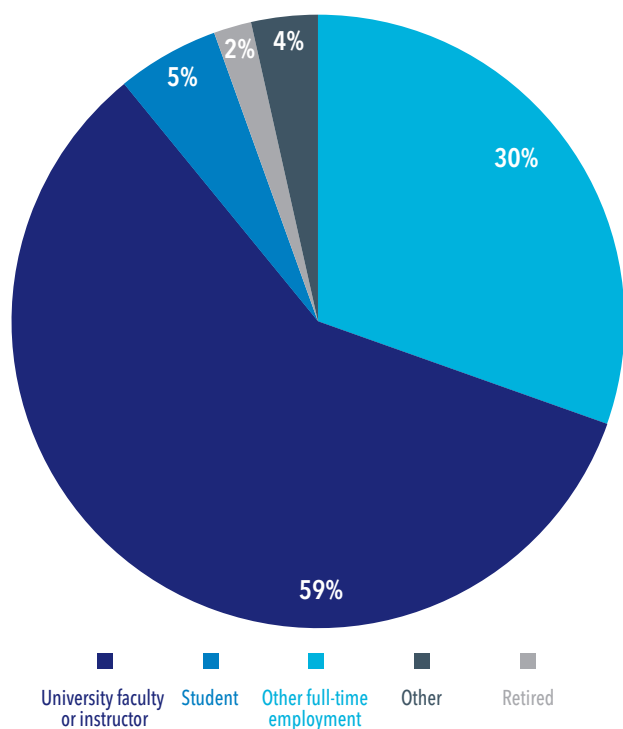
In open-ended responses, alumni respondents elaborated on their work: In the higher education environment, respondents are professors of Latin American history, language/culture or another area with an emphasis on Latin America within their expertise. Some also work as curators or librarians of Latin American collections or as administrative staff in study abroad offices or Centers. Many emphasized their continued teaching and research related to Latin America.



"Usually, the students, because of the nature of their project and what they're engaged in, and especially because if they are in a graduate program, oftentimes their thought process is long-term academic work. So, many times, they're creating a foundation for not just the dissertation, not just graduation but also the job market and then, later on, their professional research projects."

– Center faculty/staff, Vanderbilt University

Figure 11: Current professional status



"In my 1984 Tinker FRG I gained insights into the flow of research on lowland South America and became acutely aware that most of the books that academic libraries in the U.S. were using were based in main cities such as Rio, Bogota and Lima. This obligated me to draw them out to gain coverage of the Amazon region and its print publishing outputs from both commercial and noncommercial publishing sectors."

– Alumnus, University of Florida, 1984

Outside academia, many respondents are employed in business or professional environments (15%) as well as non-governmental organizations (15%). They continue to work with Latin American populations and serve as references within their organizations.

"I am trained as a historian of Latin America, and because I was lucky enough to be hired in a university as the only Latin Americanist in the Department of History, I am in charge of every class, research, administrative endeavors that deal with Latin America."

– Alumna, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009

"[My work] has not remained focused on Latin America, but I have taken advantage of every opportunity to bring Latin America into my teaching and service/volunteer work."

– Alumna, University of Texas at Austin, 2005

"As I have been hired for my Latin American expertise for NGO work, my day-to-day work is always focused on Latin American issues, including proposal writing, program management, monitoring and evaluation, budgeting and counseling other staff members regarding Latin American cultural and professional work culture, among others."

- Alumna, University of Pittsburgh, 2002

"As I work on U.S. domestic policy issues, my insights are informed by... the research I did and my overall understanding of development issues in Latin America."

- Alumna, University of Texas at Austin, 2001

Respondents who indicated that their work is not explicitly focused on Latin America through their current research or job focus demonstrated many ways of trying to integrate their personal or academic interest in Latin America into their current roles, either by using their Spanish or Portuguese language ability or by incorporating their Latin American experience in other kinds of teaching, for example. While some do remain personally interested in Latin America, they have been unable to focus on Latin America due to their work being global, comparative or shifted to other regions.

"As the Director of Communications at the United States Botanic Garden, I share the stories of our plants from around the world through many forms, including by providing the first ever tours in Spanish and frequently with particular focus on plants and stories from Latin America."

- Alumnus, University of Florida, 2008

The majority (75%) of respondents indicated that they considered themselves experts in their field as it pertains to Latin America. Less than half (44%) considered themselves experts in the broader field of Latin American studies or affairs. Respondents who were doctoral students were more likely to indicate expertise in these areas than master's students. In addition, respondents from Latin America were more likely than their U.S. peers to indicate expertise across the board. Among those who did not consider themselves expert in the field of Latin American studies or affairs, their response was often coming from a belief that their expertise was specific to a particular country in the region (or outside the region, such as Spain) and could not be applied to the region of Latin America as a whole.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For alumni respondents, the FRG Program has been foundational. It was often a first exposure to both the region directly as well as many of the professional skills that they were able to practice on the ground for the first time. Alumni reported high rates of skill development not only in applied research areas but also professional and personal skills. Their FRG Program experience offered them direction, resulting in better ability to reassess their research goals and design, as well as their career goals and direction. The program was a platform for them that set them on a pathway: Nearly all (93%) respondents continued research-related activities pertaining to Latin America since their FRG experience, and 89% continue to draw on their knowledge of Latin America in their daily work.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF THE FRG PROGRAM ON CENTERS FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

Center respondents indicated that the purpose of the FRG Program was primarily to benefit the student recipient: for graduate students to gain “cultural capital” in Latin America and “experiential knowledge” from the field, test ideas through the early career/exploratory nature of the funding and establish connections to help them in their career.

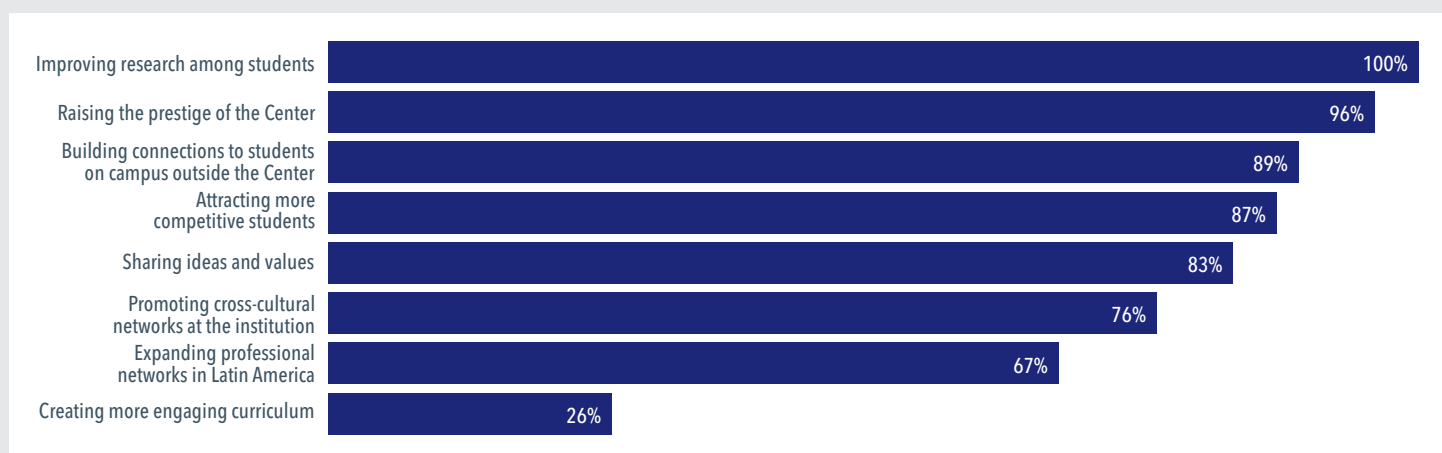
“The Tinker grants provide a unique opportunity for students and (our Center) as well as strengthening the quality of research at (our institution) and broadening the university’s international reach.” – Center faculty/staff, University of Kansas

Respondents highlighted the FRG Program as an opportunity for the Centers to exercise their commitment to supporting students as they conduct and produce research, contributing to their image and purpose of promoting scholarship of the region and sharing this research with a broader community. Relatively fewer respondents emphasized the program’s objectives of advancing understanding and expertise in Latin America or developing the skills of the future researchers in this area.

Every respondent (100%) indicated improving research among graduate students was an area in which the Center has benefited due to the FRG. Further, in articulating the purpose of the FRG Program, not a single Center respondent indicated that the purpose was related to benefits to the Center. The Centers benefit by association as well as through the direct support they offer, allowing them to fulfill core components of their missions.

“[Through] the different types of activities that we have surrounding the Tinker Field Research Grant ... it’s been really nice to see students from different disciplines start to interact with one another more. [You see] more interdisciplinary discussion[s] between students who might be working in similar countries on similar topics, but from different field perspectives. ... It has cemented good relationships between disciplines at the center which is really nice.” – Center faculty/staff, University of Chicago

Figure 12: Benefits of the FRG Program to Centers for Latin American Studies



"I mean, I chose this department and this [academic] program specifically because I wanted to work in the Caribbean and do fieldwork, and I know at other universities it was a problem. They would straight-out tell me there's no funding for this kind of travel, so, if you really want the fieldwork to be an aspect of your research, this isn't [the right academic] program for you."

– Alumna, FIU, 2016

The amount of grant funding Centers received (\$10,000 or \$15,000) was not a significant factor in the benefits Center respondents indicated receiving as a result of the FRG Program. However, whether a university was public or private did have an effect on some benefits: Public institutions were more likely to indicate attracting more competitive students as well as promoting cross-cultural networks at their institution more as benefits than private institutions.

Creating Research Linkages

Center respondents indicated that building connections to students on campus outside the Center (89%), as well as attracting more competitive students (87%), yielded greater benefits to their Centers than the potential linkages or expansion of professional networks in Latin America (67%) as a result of the FRG Program. The FRG Program provided a platform through which Centers collaborated with faculty outside their Center. Through the process of seeking matching funding and finding reviewers for the selection panel, for example, the Center built pathways for collaboration and exchange within the university.

"I went to a lot of different programs, and I got everyone to pitch in, if only a token amount. And some of them were literally like, 'We'll give you \$200 a year.' ... But we got up to the \$10,000 matching, and the benefit is now that those other departments are aware of Tinker, and because they have a certain stake in it, will push their students to apply."

– Center faculty/staff, Stony Brook University

"One of the biggest benefits for us is the way it strengthens the Latin Americanist community on campus. And so we are connected to students who are not interested in our events because they are researching butterflies, which we don't have any events on. But they'll become connected to us through this grant program."

– Center faculty/staff, University of California, Berkeley

The interdisciplinary nature of the grant aligns with the interdisciplinary nature of area studies and allows for Centers to establish and strengthen those connections at the university with other areas not traditionally associated with their work. Language, history and cultural studies departments often are natural allies for the Centers, and the FRG Program brings a range of new partners and collaborators in fields such as the hard sciences, political science or others. In turn, it provides an opportunity for these other departments on campus to gain international exposure opportunities and builds interest in Latin America as a region.



63%

of Centers have created new contacts in Latin America as a result the FRG Program. Of these...

83%

have led to institutional collaborations

69%

have hosted Latin American contacts at their Centers

"If an administrator asks why do we have this area studies thing, one of the things you emphasize is it is one of the few actual spaces where real interdisciplinary conversations and work [are] being done. And it's a platform for gaining outside money. They like that, even if it's small change."

– Center faculty/staff, Stony Brook University

In Latin America, over half (63%) of Center respondents reported either being personally connected to or knowing of colleagues connected to new contacts through FRG recipients following their experience. Nearly all these respondents (97%) were connected to university faculty/staff or nonprofit/civil society groups (90%) in Latin America. Of those who have been connected to new contacts, 83% have collaborated in some way since then, mostly through hosting Latin American contacts at their institution (69%) or professional networking (59%). Neither the grant funding level nor the public/private affiliation of the university were significant in predicting differences, meaning that these findings were equally applicable across different types of Center institutions.

Regarding networks, however, Center respondents insisted that creating Center networks was not necessarily a focus of the FRG Program for them and it was not an area that they had exerted effort to strengthen or prioritize. Rather, these respondents saw these new networks as positive by-products of the achievements of the FRG recipients.

"It has provided some initial contacts that we have explored, one of which has come to fruition. But, frankly, we don't see this is a primary benefit of the program, but a nice extra."

– Center faculty/staff, Vanderbilt University

"I wouldn't say that the FRG has contributed to collaboration in a structured manner, and it is difficult to link collaborations to the FRG specifically. The FRG figures in a more complex and organic development of social networks connecting our campus with faculty, students and institutions in the region."

- Center faculty/staff, Columbia University

Relationship with Alumni

In line with the expressed commitment to students, 85% of respondents indicated that their Centers have remained in touch with past FRG recipients for alumni engagement (41%), academic/research (31%) or other reasons. There were no differences in these outcomes by grant funding level or the public/private affiliation of the university, indicating that all Centers prioritized alumni engagement equally. Most (61%) Centers remained in touch with FRG alumni informally. When alumni returned to their universities, 100% of Center respondents encouraged recipients to share their research and experience by giving lectures or presentations on campus; further, 87% of respondents indicated that former recipients had encouraged other students to apply to the FRG Program.

"After coming back, I actually taught in the program and taught a class for master's students who were getting ready to go and do their Tinker research in-country. So it was a hybrid Portuguese and English class. And [I] have spoken in that department on occasion and maintained a relationship with scholars and professors within this department."

- Alumnus, New York University, 2009

"I used the grant halfway through my master's. So I continued working for [the Center] in various capacities, made education materials for them as well as present[ed] my research, and then I'm still in touch with them, just on a personal basis even a couple years out."

- Alumna, Vanderbilt University, 2016

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Center respondents saw the FRG Program as a chance to support their key stakeholders: their students. While respondents did not emphasize the benefit to Centers themselves by providing access to the program, they saw the outcomes through the improved research conducted by students and the careers their alumni go on to have. They recognized the benefit of improving linkages on their campuses and celebrated the FRG Program as a chance to fulfill their commitment to being a gathering place for interdisciplinary research.

RELEVANCE OF THE FRG PROGRAM TODAY

Over the past 40 years, the FRG Program has built a core of informed, emerging researchers who are committed to furthering knowledge in and about Latin America, whether through their professional work or additional efforts. The networks that have been built by FRG recipients in the United States and Latin America further Tinker's goals and provide space for like-minded individuals with a shared passion to collaborate with and leverage each other in pursuit of common goals. IIE explored the overall relevance of the FRG Program in providing opportunities for higher education field research in Latin America and on Latin American issues.

Building a Pipeline of Talented Researchers in the United States and Latin America

IIE's findings indicate that field research is one of the key components of building researcher talent in the United States and Latin America because it allows researchers to get to know topics of interest in practice and "on the ground." The opportunity that the FRG Program provides for U.S. researchers to go into the field builds their professional skills and networks that they can leverage in the future.

The FRG Program supports field research, a key component to building a talent pipeline. When alumni respondents were asked if they would have been able to pursue field research in Latin America during their graduate studies without the FRG Program, 40% responded "no." This included 232 master's, 325 doctorate, 4 post-doctorate and 9 faculty recipients.

40%

of alumni respondents would not have been able to conduct field research without FRG

"The Tinker Foundation is one of a really small handful of institutions in the United States that supports graduate school research. And it's enormously valuable. When I was doing my doctoral dissertation, I didn't have a Tinker Foundation fellowship, but I did have support from a U.S.-based foundation. That's the only way I really could have dedicated myself 100% to writing. And it just makes things possible that otherwise would not be." - External expert

Alumni respondents indicated that the FRG Program helped build their research skills in their fields or the region. Research-based activities led to longer-term impact on alumni respondents as researchers, including leadership or participation in research projects (63%), advice or guidance based on one's expertise in Latin America (64%) or mentoring other emerging researchers specializing in Latin America (47%). These skills led to effective professional trajectories that have influenced further research opportunities and commitments.

The FRG Program thus succeeds in filling this gap from the U.S. perspective in that it provides the opportunity for U.S.-based emerging researchers to conduct field research in the region and gain valuable skills pertinent to their professional and academic trajectories. This support was also important for alumni respondents from the Latin American region who received funding from the FRG Program, though their academic degree was not necessarily from a university located in Latin America.

"There [are] all these really cool projects that are collaborative projects. One of them was a project with some professors in my department and three professors from Chile. So, I just got in touch with them. And they connected me with other people."

– Alumnus, University of California, Berkeley

Creating Research Linkages between the United States and Latin America

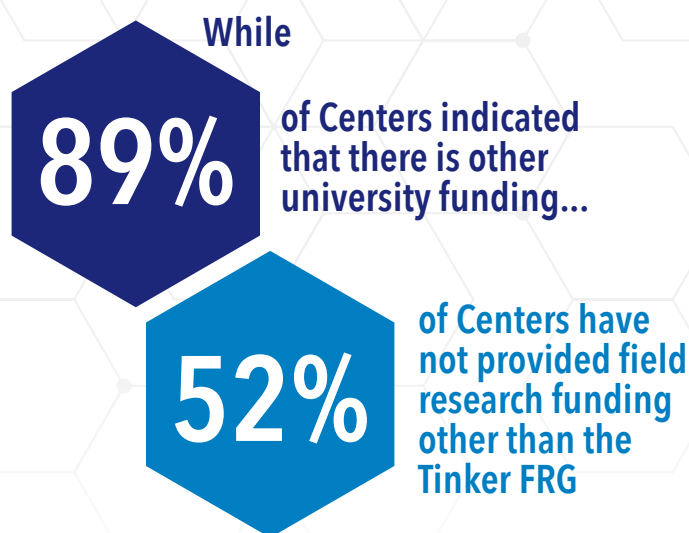
The second topic of interest relates to Tinker's goal to create viable linkages in research between academics and practitioners in the United States and Latin America. Emerging U.S. researchers' field experiences and travel to the region are key components of the FRG Program, as is the potential to meet with local researchers and academics conducting research on similar topics in and about the region.

The FRG Program provides opportunities for emerging U.S.-based researchers to travel to Latin America to meet with research counterparts. To enhance the quality and talent of researchers, the FRG Program could invest in and facilitate further comparative and long-term research. In addition to supporting researchers' travel to places in Latin America, respondents indicated that the program could support different Centers that have faculty with direct and ongoing academic and professional relationships with Latin America.

Availability of Funding for Graduate Research

Among Center respondents, 89% indicated that there is other university-level funding for graduate-level research. However, over half (52%) indicated that their Center has not provided other field research funding other than the Tinker grant. This speaks to the finding that, while funding is available, it is not structured in the same way to provide the same opportunities as the FRG Program. As such, the FRG Program is highly relevant to these Centers in that it provides funding that directly speaks to the Centers' missions of promoting research in and about Latin America.

In discussions with Center staff, faculty and alumni respondents, the evaluation team learned that funding opportunities on university campuses are often reserved for students at a later stage in their research (i.e., dissertation research after the proposal approval stage). Respondents also noted that the funding is often restricted to certain fields or areas of study. Finally, if funding is available, it is often not sufficient to fund the entirety of the research. As such, many alumni respondents noted that they seek and group funding opportunities together (such as the FRG and FLAS grants) to combine funding streams.



In considering alternative funding streams, respondents from Centers for Latin American Studies also shared the evolution of Latin American Studies in general at U.S. universities and how this has contributed to funding challenges:

- Reduced internal funding for graduate student (and even faculty) travel support
- In some cases, redirection of university resources away from the social sciences and language and literature in favor of science and technology, especially in public institutions focusing public-source funding on educational priorities at the K-12 level
- An emerging loss of critical mass in some universities' area studies centers due to the growing presence of non-regionally focused global studies programs

Finally, as part of its study, IIE did a comparative review of the FRG Program and 34 other programs that offer graduate research opportunities to and about Latin America and worldwide. Of all the programs analyzed, none had the regional delimitation to fund research in Latin America with the amount of funding that Tinker awards annually, and that worked with a diversity of universities. While funding was available across Centers for Latin American Studies in different universities in the United States and the United Kingdom, some grants were very specific in terms of research areas, limited to a geographic area or country, and even confined to a career or discipline. As such, most respondents agreed that the size and scope of FRG Program funding was highly relevant due to the needs of graduate students in Centers for Latin American Studies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our evaluation and the findings outlined in this report have shown that the FRG Program has succeeded in providing opportunities for graduate students to pursue field research opportunities in and about Latin America. We also found that the program has been successful for the Centers for Latin American Studies, allowing them to support their mission and leverage their presence among students and faculty in their universities. The following recommendations were collected from FRG alumni, Center staff and affiliated faculty, and the Tinker Foundation.

Recommendations for Tinker's Engagement with Centers

- **Digitize all program administration components, engaging partner campuses and their FRG applicants/recipients.** The Tinker Foundation's digitization of campus applications and recipients was noted and appreciated. Further movement toward an integrated, digital approach for the Centers, however, was requested and should be considered. This would suggest all-online, "one-step" formats for applying, reporting and disbursement of funds to Centers for Latin American Studies.
- **Simplify the application process for Centers.** Some respondents noted that the application requirements included significant documentation that was judged to be onerous given the level of support available. Simplifying the intake process may encourage a greater number of smaller or less-developed institutions to apply.
- **Revisit program implementation and guidelines.** Tinker should more clearly delineate the implementation particulars to which it wants all Center grantees to comply. As noted earlier, there is some lack of clarity or conformance with the FRG Program's expectations of Centers and their students concerning allowable use of funds, allowable timing, etc. An effective approach may be to have a set of web pages accessible only by FRG implementers that would include these expected implementation parameters.
- **Reconsider the length and timing of gap requirement between institutional awards.** If the original expectation for inserting the "hiatus period" between three-year awards was that campuses would commit to giving their own support equal to Tinker, that has not been borne out in our exploration of current campuses' policies. Campuses visited reported that, at best, they could maintain their own cost-share level, which effectively halved the opportunities to student applicants during those two years. The timing of the FRG campus application/award process may need to be resynched in consideration of university budget projections and approvals so that the university can book the income awarded and keep the gap at one year.
- **Build further collaboration/consultation across recipient campuses.** Other than occasional gatherings convened by Tinker, there is little formal networking of Center staff or FRG students across recipient campuses. Consider holding a workshop for Center staff, to exchange experiences, best practices, good program designs for students or recruitment/selection ideas. At the same time, such a gathering could offer Tinker staff an excellent opportunity for face-to-face engagement and feedback from recipients. It likewise could offer new campuses an opportunity to learn the ins and outs of administering the program in a context where the universities are expected to handle almost all of the program administration.

Recommendation for Engagement with FRG Recipients and Alumni

- **Connect current and former grantees.** There is a great potential for creating an active, engaged network of Tinker scholars across campuses to boost networks, collaborations, lessons learned and best practices in the field. This could be a virtual network, giving alumni contacts by country/field of research boosted by face-to-face engagement, either regionally or at a national gathering like LASA.
- **Have FRG recipients share their research experience.** There is great potential for FRG recipients to share their field experience and insights on campus; however, according to the data collected, this was currently done by only a subset of campuses. It could be a reasonable expectation to include such activity/output as a required component of the grant award.
- **Create a Tinker alumni network.** Consider creating an alumni page on social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) or the Tinker website, or support a gathering at LASA to attract Tinker alumni. Engage alumni on fundraising on behalf of current students needing that "extra boost" to supplement their grant award. This line of thinking could involve Tinker-supported faculty as well as FRG alumni, or it could be combined with other initiatives.

Recommendations for Tinker's Administration of the FRG Program

- **Track and measure impact of the program on a regular basis.** Best practices for ongoing tracer evaluations in educational programs suggest repeat impact studies every three to five years. Foundation staff themselves should be able to develop this capacity online or include it in recipient campuses' scopes of work when they are awarded a grant. Putting systems in place for tracking alumni (email addresses, professional affiliation, career track) would allow Tinker to come back to alumni to measure impact over periods of time.
- **Highlight Tinker's visibility in program.** There is variable but generally limited visibility of Tinker's commitment and support on recipient campuses due to lack of a branding policy or expectation from recipients. This should be a straightforward requirement, and the provision of simple branding guidelines (e.g., graphics for online use, standard wording required for the public description of FRG) would ease and ensure its implementation.

The outcomes of the research not only inform the FRG Program but can be important lessons learned for other stakeholders who wish to invest in emerging researchers and field research more broadly, as well as build research pathways to and in Latin America. We hope that this research can inform such discussions and contribute to the importance of investing in individuals and initiatives promoting research that benefits the region and potentially leads to future development.

