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A Best Book

The Brazil Section of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) has awarded UC Santa Barbara anthropologist Jeffrey Hoelle top honors for his book “Rainforest Cowboys: The Rise of Ranching and Cattle Culture in Western Amazonia” (University of Texas Press, 2015).

The award, for the best book written in 2015 focusing on Brazilian studies, was announced at LASA’s annual conference earlier this week in New York.

In “Rainforest Cowboys,” Hoelle, an assistant professor of anthropology, examines the intricate social and cultural forces driving the expansion of cattle raising in the Amazon. Through research featuring a complex and contradictory host of characters he describes as “carnivorous” environmentalists, vilified ranchers and urban caubois (cowboys) with no land or cattle, he illustrates the growing influence of cattle raising and cattle culture in Amazonia.

The awards committee commended the book for its “innovative and richly documented analysis of an understudied region and culture with great importance for Brazil and multiple fields of Brazilian studies.” Describing it as “significant for social scientists, humanists, environmentalists and policymakers,” committee members praised its theoretical and practical implications for considering how state-backed economic programs and environmental policies impact the changing landscape of extractivist industries.

The book also was noted as “an important piece of scholarship for understanding, more generally, the lives of working people in Brazil.”

“Through its book award to Professor Hoelle, the Brazil section of the Latin American Studies Association has acknowledged his significant contribution to the growing scholarship on that important South American nation,” said Stuart Tyson Smith, professor and chair of anthropology at UCSB. “Through this compelling research, Professor Hoelle exemplifies the Department of Anthropology’s excellent faculty, diverse interests, and high international visibility.”

Hoelle’s research focuses on the cultural beliefs and practices associated with activities that produce deforestation and environmental degradation in the Amazon, including cattle raising, gold mining and large-scale agriculture. He blends ethnographic description with quantitative methods with the goal of communicating the importance of cultural factors in environmental issues across disciplines, as well as to policymakers and the general public.

With more than 12,000 members — 60 percent of who live outside the United States — LASA is the largest professional association in the world for scholars and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America. It serves to foster intellectual discussion, research and teaching on Latin America, the Caribbean and its people throughout the Americas, as well as to promote interest.

A more in-depth discussion of “Rainforest Cowboys,” including comments from Hoelle, can be found at http://www.news.ucsb.edu/2015/015820/rainforest-cowboys.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.