During 2008–09, the Regional Office continued to expand its support for Harvard students by facilitating study, internship and research opportunities through programs in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. It also worked with faculty from across the University in areas ranging from education and health to environmental policy and the promotion of philanthropy.

A major collaborative initiative of the Regional Office, the Fundación Educacional Oportunidad and the Chilean Ministry of Education, the interdisciplinary early education project Un Buen Comienzo (UBC) is a powerful intervention to improve the quality of early childhood education programs in Chile through rigorous evaluation of the impact of those programs. The initiative, which is consolidated at Fundación Educacional Oportunidad, involves the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), the Harvard Medical School (HMS) and the Center on the Developing Child. It focuses on teacher development, including equipping teachers with specific skills to improve language acquisition, while addressing health problems that affect children’s learning. The UBC project covers three field sites, works with 35 schools and continues to build capacity through various institutional partnerships, including Universidad Diego Portales, a local evaluation partner. A highlight of the project’s development in 2009 was a meeting between HMS Professor Judith Palfrey, leader of the UBC health component and Chile’s President, Michelle Bachelet, to discuss children’s health issues both in Chile and worldwide.

Events organized by the Office included a major conference in Valdivia on environmental policy titled Conservation Capital in the Americas. The event convened 120 senior conservationists, specialists and students. Additionally, two seminars on family philanthropy were organized for a group of 50 Chilean business, religious and university leaders who shared practical experiences in the management of family foundations.

For the sixth consecutive year, the Regional Office supported a winter term course with the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH), introducing 15 HSPH students to key actors and issues in the Chilean health system. The Harvard Medical School Exchange Clerkship program enabled 10 medical students from Universidad de Chile and 12 from Universidad Católica to participate in clinical rotations at HMS and its affiliated hospitals. DRCLAS in Latin America Four HMS students traveled to Chile for rural clinical rotations.
The Harvard College Summer Internship Program (SIP) is now the largest structured internship program at Harvard College with over 50 students in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru. SIP is a two-month internship experience, including home stays with local families, a week-long orientation program, professional workshops, cultural activities and ongoing support during the internship period. Students are placed in carefully selected internship sites according to their professional and academic interests. The Regional Office launched two new summer programs, for credit, for Harvard College students: the Spanish & Service Learning Program, in collaboration with Universidad Católica in Santiago, and the Spanish & Community Service Program, in conjunction with Universidad del Pacífico in Lima.

The success of initiatives led by the Regional Office has been and continues to be made possible by the deep commitment and financial support from Andrónico Luksic Craig. That success, in turn, enables the Office to continue to play an increasingly important role engaging the University with Latin America.