

From the LASA2016 Congress Program Co-Chairs

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U.S. reacts to new security developments throughout the world, such as the Middle East. I would not have been able to do this job without having been in graduate school. At TCU, I learned how to write, and more than that, how to write effectively, how to use sources. These skills are essential to what I do now, and I would not have gained those skills without having done my PhD.

Stites Mor: Do you have any advice for scholars entering this area of study?

Grantham: The most important thing I learned was to be creative. Don't feel limited by the field. Maybe because I came from a professional background where I was able to be more comfortable taking risks, I felt more confident about stepping out of the bounds, experimenting. I was afraid that I might not find mentorship, since I wasn't working within one of the traditional areas, but on the contrary, I found that my professors and mentors were uniformly excited to encourage me to blaze my own trail. So, I would say, don't be fearful in that situation. But also, be realistic; find a question that can allow you to really explore a topic in depth. Specificity helps create useful boundaries to make a manageable project.

Note

David Grantham's National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) website: <http://www.ncpa.org/about/david-a-grantham#sthash.V7ml3Poh.dpuf>.

LASA's 50th anniversary Congress promises to be the biggest in the association's history. As compared to recent Congresses, the number of submissions has increased considerably. For example, while last year's Congress had 1,732 panels and 917 individual papers submitted, there were 2,307 panels and 1,341 individual papers submitted for LASA2016. Increased participation led to the decision to extend the Congress to four days.

Track chairs, who volunteer their time and expertise to evaluate submissions to each thematic track into which the Congress is divided, assumed their role with a wonderful sense of responsibility and professionalism, working hard to rank numerous submissions. The average number of sessions that each set of track chairs had to evaluate was 94. Track chairs carried out their work in the context of both this higher than usual number of submissions and the limited space in the New York City venue. To evaluate the submissions, they applied such criteria as significance and appeal for the field, coherence, and clarity. The LASA Secretariat, for its part, calculated the percentage of submissions that could be accepted to the Congress based on the number of available slots, and then established the cut-off for each track based on a common acceptance rate. Anyone has access to the full list of selection criteria that track chairs were advised to apply, and a detailed description of the several steps of the selection process and criteria, which is available here: <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/eng/congress/selectionpaper.asp>.

A quick look at the nature of the submissions reveals their diversity and some current trends in the interests of LASA's membership. Consider, for instance, the five thematic tracks that received the largest number of submissions (including

individual submissions and papers that are part of panels): Genders, Feminisms and Sexualities; Literary Studies; Contemporary; Migration, Borders and Diasporas; Political Institutions and Processes; and Mass Media and Popular Culture. The appeal of these themes suggests that LASA continues to be a highly diverse association in terms of disciplinary interests and one that responds to contemporary issues and emerging fields of inquiry even while it continues to honor classical fields of study. The social sciences and humanities are equally represented in the research interests of members. It is also clear that LASA's membership is deeply and meaningfully engaged in interdisciplinary work. In this regard, the Program Committee is particularly pleased with the way in which this Congress is shaping up.

It is also gratifying to see that more than 60 percent of all proposals for LASA2016 came from Latin America and other non-U.S. regions. Roughly the same percentage of accepted papers, a little over 60 percent, are from outside the United States. This reaffirms the trend that LASA is a truly international organization with a strong presence throughout Latin America.

LASA Sections have done a terrific job of organizing first-rate panels and workshops. Track chairs took to heart the task to propose special panels that bring to light the most interesting and cutting-edge thinking in their subarea of study. Particularly interesting has been the excitement about the "LASA at 50" theme. We expect a wide range of conversations highlighting some of the most important trends, debates, and controversies that have marked Latin American studies in the last five decades. The proposed sessions not only take account of the past but also reflect upon the future of our field of study.

The Congress in New York City will feature some unique gems as well. A conversation between Noam Chomsky and Greg Grandin will celebrate the 50th anniversary of LASA and NACLA and the 30th anniversary of Chomsky's Managua Lectures. Top diplomats and policy makers from Cuba and the United States who are presiding over normalization of relations between the two countries will discuss this historic process. A panel of leading scholars will reflect upon 50 years of intellectual transformation in the study of Latin America and the Caribbean. Prestigious journalists will examine how their profession has contributed to shaping our understanding of political, social, cultural, and economic issues in the hemisphere. Two former presidents will consider the past and present state of democracy in the region, and a sitting president will talk about his country's international insertion in a changing global landscape. These are only a few examples of the high-profile panel discussions, talks, and public conversations that will add a distinctive touch to the upcoming Congress.

In organizing the Congress, much attention has been paid to New York City as the Congress site, a city that is inexorably connected with—and indeed arguably part of—Latin America through migrations, politics, cultural exchanges, and shared histories. Many especially interesting features of the LASA2016 program will be the result of collaborations between the association and local universities, cultural organizations, artists, consulates, NGOs, and foundations. The Congress will feature an art installation and accompanying panel that explicitly links midcentury New York City with Latin America, and a rich variety of offerings on Latino New York, among other sessions and events.

It is important to mention that the combination of a large number of submissions and space limitations in the New York City venues posed an unusually difficult situation for the LASA Secretariat. Nearly a quarter of submissions could not be accommodated in the program. Whereas space limitations dictated how many submissions could be included in the program, the final decision was the result of a rigorous selection process conducted by experts in each subfield who generously gave their time to conduct such a complex task. While LASA strives for inclusiveness, the harsh reality of a popular Congress and limited space led to a situation in which a number of submissions could not be included in the program. As program co-chairs, we are deeply thankful to our colleagues, who read carefully through scores of individual and panel proposals and evaluated them with an eye toward producing a conference of the highest quality. We are also thankful to the thousands of members who either collaborated on wonderful, creative panels or who sent in their individual paper proposals, which will form the basis for four days of intellectual inquiry, artistic expression, political debate, and collegial exchange.

Plurality, diversity, interdisciplinary strength, critical approaches, hot contemporary issues, and evolution of thought are the key elements defining the "LASA at 50" Congress. We will continue working on this one-of-a-kind conference and will get back in touch with you soon with more updates. ■