ON LASA2017

Congress Survey Report

by Angelina Cotler, LASA Director of Membership and Development

Catalonia have expressed their resolve not to disrupt Barcelona's booming tourism economy. (On the other hand, many people in Barcelona are tired of tourists overwhelming the city, outnumbering locals in many spaces. This has led to some tourist-bashing but also some creative efforts to search for ways to improve coexistence and to guarantee that tourism benefits the broad community.)

Like all of you, we are following the news from Spain closely, but we do not believe that the recent events pose a threat to the success of the Congress. We are looking forward to the Barcelona Congress on May 23–26, 2018. It's an exciting place and certainly an exciting time. ■

Our 51st Congress in Lima, Peru, was filled with exciting panels, stimulating debates, and wonderful networking opportunities. Overall, from our perspective, it was a successful Congress. We were honored to welcome 6,620 registered participants, 1,680 local students, and 3,816 members who presented their research at the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Lima. It is significant to note that 29% of the members attending were graduate students and 68% of them non-US residents.

Regardless of all the enthusiasm around the Congress we wanted to make sure that our most important constituents, our members, agree on the success of LASA2017, and thus our yearly online survey was sent to collect demographic information, respondents' feedback, and to measure the overall experience during our time in Peru. We thank the 900 attendees who participated in this year's survey, who represent 13.5% of all of the LASA2017 registered participants.

Half of the respondents to this year's survey were Latin American residents and 40% were from the United States and Canada. Similar to previous years, the majority of respondents work primarily on research activities (56%), while 30% focus on education. About one-third of respondents were attending a LASA Congress for the first-time (30%), while 31% of respondents were seasoned attendees, having attended five or more LASA Congresses. Both groups are important to us, as you evaluate the Congress with new lenses as well as with experienced ones.

Most participants (47%) attended between four and seven sessions during the Congress.

Overall, 65% of the survey respondents were satisfied with LASA2017, 16% were neutral, and 19% were dissatisfied. This was a decrease of 12% from last year's satisfaction rate. Based on the feedback, this decrease is likely due to two major reasons: the registration process and small size rooms. We apologize to those who had to endure the wait and thank all for your patience and understanding. LASA is actively working to offer a better service. At the same time, there was an unanimous 95% positive response for having opened the Congress to local students.

We realize that many sessions occur at the same time, some of them on the same topics. Due to the high volume of sessions accepted in order to honor LASA's spirit of inclusiveness, multidisciplinarity, and diversity, this overlap is bound to happen. We hope that the multiple simultaneous sessions permit a wide range of session options in which you can participate and grow.

A recurring concern is that room size was inadequate for the number of attendees in a session. Unfortunately, it is impossible for us to predict the number of attendees for a particular session; thus this factor is not usually considered when assigning rooms. Additionally, since LASA2013, to further allow networking opportunities between colleagues in the same disciplines, we started assigning neighboring rooms by program tracks or similar themes. Sometimes this practice risks having small meeting rooms next to each other. However, we have received very positive feedback on having track-designated rooms as it has improved networking opportunities. We hope this additional networking compensates for the sometimes crowded rooms.

On a positive note, 75% of respondents were extremely satisfied with the large attendance at the Congress and the quality of panels.

The survey also sheds light on the advantages and opportunities of attending the annual LASA Congress, which varies for English speakers and Spanish speakers. As a general rule, English speakers were more likely to answer "very much" to the advantages and opportunities questions than Spanish speakers. More than 45% of the respondents considered the Congress to provide a very good opportunity to present and share ideas and/or information with other colleagues. Around 40% of respondents learned a great deal about recent work and topics of discussion in Latin American studies, and close to 60% indicated that they learned very much about recent work in other fields. This is important to note since it emphasizes the interdiciplinarity of the Congress and shows that participants attend panels that are not necesssarily in their own fields or disciplines. Fewer than 20% of participants considered that LASA offered a good opportunity to attend governance and/or business meetings. This reflects a lack of interest among members in engaging in the LASA policy-making process. Around 50% of respondents considered that the LASA Congress is a great opportunity to network and establish contacts with colleagues.

Regarding the use of technology, 70% of respondents downloaded the program app and 71% used it. However, many respondents to the survey mentioned that the app didn't show room numbers and that Wi-Fi connectivity was poor. LASA continues to work with our vendors to make our app as user-friendly as possible.

As in every Congress, LASA is very grateful to our faithful sponsors/foundations and to the Endowment Fund, which continue year after year to provide partial travel grants to our participants. We were able to sponsor over 400 participants this year to come to LASA2017 and share their research.

Finally, around 44% of the survey respondents are planning to attend LASA2018 in Barcelona. We are looking forward seeing you in Barcelona on May 23–26, 2018, for our Congress with the theme "Latin American Studies in a Globalized World."

We thank all those who took the time to complete the survey. Your feedback helps us improve by acknowledging situations that we may have not been aware of, and thus allows us to focus on our members and their needs. As always, please feel free to reach out to us with any questions or further suggestions. ■