

## Final Report of the LASA2006 Program Co-Chairs

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After almost two years of anticipating the (in)famous LASA 2006 Congress in San Juan, Puerto Rico, we are all back home and it is all over! For us, who have been working systematically on its academic programming, it has been a wonderful experience and we are very grateful and honored to have been chosen for this task. While at first we were concerned about the amount of work ahead of us, and the future headaches, we have to admit that it was much more pleasant, balanced, and less stressful than what we first thought. This, of course, is due to the talents, skills, and high level of organization that the new LASA staff has brought. Thanks, then, to Sonia Alvarez, our President during this term, who had faith in us and who had a new and important vision for this Congress; to Milagros Pereyra, for her friendship and for being a constant source of support and helpful information; to Sandy Klinzing, for her work in securing additional funding; and, mostly to María Cecilia Q. Dancisin, for her laudable skills in putting together such a huge conference with so many participants and still remember which panel needed a chair or discussant.

We mentioned that this Congress was (in)famous for a variety of reasons, most of which was the fact that some senior and renowned scholars did not participate due to the higher level of rejections of proposals. This, of course, was because we received an unexpectedly high number of proposals and that our meeting spaces were much more limited than in Las Vegas. But, we also hope that this Congress will be uniquely remembered for a variety of reasons. First, the beach, the sunny and beautifully warm weather, and the facilities of the Caribe Hilton Hotel all led to happy participants. However, there were a number of other significant elements that LASA will remember as unique to the Puerto Rico Conference. The Local

Organizing Committee, headed by Margarita Ostolaza, defied our basic expectations of what their responsibilities were. They not only found hosts and sponsors such as the Teacher's Association in Puerto Rico, the University of Puerto Rico, and the Tourism Office, to make possible the exciting welcoming reception, including the fireworks, the Island food, and the great musical groups, but were also responsible for setting up for the first time in our history a cybercafé with 24 computers for the use of the participants. They also made possible the unique opportunity to listen to the great salsa music of *El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico* in the *Gran Baile*. Finally, their publicity efforts led to significant coverage in newspapers and the media, making the meetings highly visible throughout the Island.

Unfortunately, this Congress also will be remembered for the denial of 51 visas to Cuban scholars as well as increasing visa denials to other Latin American scholars registered to attend the meeting. We applaud the Executive Council's decision to try to organize future conferences outside the United States as a form of economic boycott against the U.S. federal government's policy. We support the statement that LASA drafted during the Congress denouncing these practices that curtail our academic freedom and the quality of our international dialogue.

From what we saw, it looked like most, if not all panels were well attended, and that the dialogues, debates, conversations and networking were helpful to all of you. We had a total of 924 panels and 4,868 participants, a 59 percent increase over LASA 2004. We were very proud in particular to have had a significantly high number of graduate student presenters (24 percent of all panelists), as well as a good

number of presenters from outside the United States (28 percent). Additionally, 79 percent of the 196 Puerto Rican participants presented papers in the meetings. The direction that LASA is taking toward being more inclusive of Latin Americanists in Latin America, and of trying to de-center it from its U.S.-based location is very important as we try to seek to embrace new voices and *otros saberes*.

We look forward to future LASA Congresses, of course—and now with a deeper understanding of the vast amount of collective work that is largely invisible to most LASA members. We are delighted to pass on our task to two outstanding LASA scholars, Neil Harvey, from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and María Socorro Tabuenca, from El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, in Ciudad Juárez. Together with an excellent group of Track Chairs, they have already begun the arduous task of planning LASA 2007. We are also very happy to have Charles R. Hale as our incoming President. He is already bringing some new initiatives to LASA and we look forward to the next few years.

Again, all good things pass, and so did the LASA 2006 Congress in San Juan. We hope that we learned some lessons from this experience and that the meeting helped to create new friendships, discuss new ideas, and cement old relationships. Thank you for the opportunity! ■