

Associate Editor's Report

by ARTURO ARIAS | University of Redlands | Arturo_Arias@redlands.edu

In this edition of the *Forum* we feature two issues of major importance for LASA. The articles in the *Debates* section explore the role of Latin Americans in the United States. They problematize how transnational and transregional foci characterize research and curricular interests in Latin America at present. The *On the Profession* section explores the present-day role of political science within the framework of interdisciplinarity and the transformation of knowledge that has taken place in academia in the last ten or so years.

Both debates coincide with the vision of the future of the profession as expressed by centers such as the Reinvention Center, a national entity focusing on education at research universities. The juxtaposition of contrary discourses in this issue might imply both a questioning, and a defense, of the boundaries of traditional disciplines, their premises and methods, their knowledge system, and their values. We assume that all disciplines have to rethink their roles in the context of the fluid transformations of the early 21st century, reposition themselves regarding the many complex issues they are facing, and become more flexible and far-reaching at a moment when dramatic changes in the world reposition flows of knowledge.

The first essay in the *Debates* section is "Don't Panic, We Are Hispanic!": Migración y resistencia social," by José Manuel Valenzuela Arce. In this article, Professor Valenzuela Arce argues that the enormous number of Latinos already living in the United States and transforming themselves into a virtual majority by mid-century, calls for an accentuation of transnational processes: "Los desplazamientos al norte junto con la ofensiva antimigratoria, están definiendo inéditas expresiones protagonizadas por los migrantes, cuya manifestación más contundente la

observamos durante la primera mitad del año pasado." In his understanding, these factors require a general rethinking of social movements in the United States, analyzed from the perspective and characteristics of Latin American social movements. He sees transnational migrant struggles as the new defining aspect of globalization. Professor Valenzuela Arce, a social anthropologist, is Senior Researcher at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Mexico.

The second article, "Crossing-back Methodologies: Transnational Feminist Research on Incest in Mexico," by Gloria González-López, is the personal reflection of a Mexican citizen who migrated to the United States and became an academic there. She returned to Mexico to do research on incest among Mexican families. She notes: "In the fall 2005, I left for Mexico with a romanticized image of transnational feminist research; a series of disappointments, dilemmas, and unexpected positive experiences gradually emerged as soon as I immersed myself in the field." Professor González-López goes on to chronicle how her professional and cultural legitimacy were tested by both professionals and potential interviewees as she had to cope with identity issues, leading her to explore and promote creative forms of intellectual and activist solidarity with community-based agencies. Professor González-López is in the Department of Sociology, University of Texas at Austin.

"Why the Immigrant Rights Struggle Compels Us to Reconceptualize both Latin American and Latino/a Studies," by William I. Robinson, closes this section. Professor Robinson argues that if Latin America is to have any relevance in this new century, it must refer to all those peoples who have become inextricably bound up over the past 515 years within that matrix. This includes the 40 million people of Latin American

descent in the United States. In his eyes, the historical, socioeconomic, political, and cultural forces shaping the reality of Latinos/as in the United States are the same ones shaping the lives of the 500 million people living south of the border. Thus, to consider inquiry into the reality of U.S.-based Latino/a populations as "Latino/a Studies" and inquiry into that reality south of the Rio Bravo as "Latin American Studies" seems patently absurd to him. He concludes by stating that as the peoples of Latin America on both sides of the border transnationalize their collective struggles, we need a parallel intellectual and epistemological transnationalization within the academy. Professor Robinson is in the Department of Sociology of the University of California-Santa Barbara.

The *On the Profession* section begins with Evelyn Huber's "What LASA Can Do for Political Scientists." Professor Huber maintains that LASA Congresses are more exciting than those of APSA because one can find out "what has happened lately in politics and the economy in Latin American countries, and what social scientists familiar with these countries think about the latest developments." She then proceeds to list what LASA can do to enhance these functions of the Congresses. She makes a variety of recommendations, such as more roundtables, the introduction of cross-regional perspectives, additional resources to provide seed funds for collaborative research projects in the region, and a greater effort to facilitate networking among scholars. She also warns us of pitfalls such as confusing area studies with cultural studies. Professor Huber is Morehead Alumni Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

The contribution of Professor Raúl Madrid to the *On the Profession* section is entitled "A Survey of Political Scientists' Views on

LASA.” Madrid argues that “there is a significant amount of disenchantment among political scientists with LASA, particularly regarding what is viewed as efforts by the leadership of LASA to politicize the association and marginalize social scientists.” While “it is not possible to know to what extent the survey accurately reflects the distribution of views among the association’s political scientists,” Professor Madrid finds significant meaning in the reactions of the respondents. For example, “half of the respondents...complained that literature and cultural studies scholars dominated the association.” Nevertheless, most respondents enjoy the Congresses, and were impressed with the interdisciplinary nature of LASA’s programs, the heterogeneous composition of the membership, and the higher number of participants from Latin America in recent years. Professor Madrid is Associate Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin.

Ariel C. Armony’s “El incierto rumbo de LASA” argues that since the approval of the Strategic Plan, LASA has become more politicized and has drifted “away from its founding principles and historical roots as a *professional* association to one moving increasingly toward partisanship and methodological narrowness,” because it has generated “a recent tendency to steer the association closer to a pressure group that advances partisan causes beyond those that deal directly with scholarship, academic freedom, and the right of inquiry.” Professor Armony recognizes that this frustration comes primarily from political scientists, but he fears that some of them might withdraw from LASA after belonging for many years. Professor Ariel C. Armony is Katz Distinguished Associate Professor of Government and Director of Latin American Studies at Colby College.

In the final article of this section, “What Might LASA Do to Best Meet the Needs and Serve the Interests of Those in the Political Sciences?,” Susan Stokes argues that, whereas the tensions between political scientists and LASA are real, they are also “(potentially) productive rather than organizationally divisive.” Professor Stokes touches on three sources of tension: “the ‘politicization’ of the association, tensions between the academic cultures in which we participate, and differences over modes of political participation of individual scholars.” Regarding the first, she believes that the real problem is an insufficient participation within LASA structures by a subset of members. Professor Stokes believes that LASA should strive to make this subset more engaged with the Association. As to a second source of tension, Stokes argues that the tensions between academic cultures “reflect academic-cultural and linguistic divisions.” She also points out the difference between mainstream political scientists’ understanding of reality and that of language-centered scholars, for whom “truth” is subjective and relative. Finally, Professor Stokes states that LASA’s membership covers the entire spectrum, from the intensely political to the apolitical, and that many political scientists prefer to maintain a critical distance from their subjects of study. However, this does not mean a non-willingness to participate. She cites William LeoGrande’s example as a mode of political participation for political scientists. Professor Susan Stokes is John S. Saden Professor of Political Science and director of the Yale Program on Democracy at Yale University.

The contribution to the *Political Commentary* section is Salomón Nahmad’s “Situación social y política de México y de Oaxaca al final del gobierno de Vicente Fox y principios del gobierno de Felipe Calderón.” Professor Nahmad believes that

Mexico is on the eve of a new social confrontation of serious proportions that could gravely impact the international community. He draws parallels between what happened in 1907 and what has happened in 2006-7. He sees the Oaxaca conflict with the Asamblea Popular de Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO) as just the tip of the iceberg, a problem that reflects both the conservative forces within the PAN beginning to hegemonize that party and attempting to crush the PRD, at the same time as surviving PRI forces fight among themselves in a vicious struggle to reposition themselves as viable alternatives to the PAN, in the wake of the destruction of the PRD. Professor Nahmad is Investigador Titular of the CIESAS Pacifico Sur in Oaxaca. ■