

# From the Incoming President

by JOHN COATSWORTH | Columbia University | jhc2125@columbia.edu

Most LASA Congresses have themes. The Rio Congress in June confronted inequality in all its dimensions. The October 2010 Congress in Toronto will look at “The Crisis: Impact, Response, and Recovery.” I hope that by the time LASA returns to the United States in the spring of 2012, our next president, Maria Hermínia de Tavares de Almeida (LASA’s first Latin American president working in Latin America) will find a world so transformed (or at least recovered) that she can choose a more cheerful theme.

At Toronto, then, there will be presidential panels focusing on the crisis. One will probably focus on the economic causes, magnitude, policy responses, duration and lasting impact of the crisis. Another will probably examine the impact of the crisis on social and political life, on social movements and support for political parties and democratic regimes. Yet a third may examine cultural expressions of the crisis in literature, the arts, theater, or film. Suggestions for specific topics and participants for these panels would be gratefully received.

Painful as the global economic crisis has proved to be, LASA should not miss an opportunity to take note of three significant anniversaries in 2010: the 40<sup>th</sup> year of our sister organization, the Canadian Association of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, whose members did so much to make us welcome in Montreal; the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mexican Revolution; and the bicentennial of the outbreak of independence movements throughout Spanish America. Again, suggestions on these panels would be most welcome.

The LASA Congress in Rio broke nearly every record for proposals, panels, and attendance. Over the past three LASA

Congresses, the number of proposals for individual papers or panels has nearly doubled, from 2,160 for the 2006 to 2,858 in 2007 and then to 4,176 for 2009 in Rio. Though rejection rates for paper and panel proposals have increased, the number of panels, meetings, and other events has risen nonetheless from 1,107 in 2006 to 1,260 in 2007 to 1,552 at Rio.

These figures pose a double dilemma for LASA. On the one hand, LASA’s membership is increasing and the members value an opportunity to present their work and participate. LASA needs to find a way to respond to this demand. On the other hand, LASA members prefer a three-day meeting without Sunday sessions that often are poorly attended. At Rio, the PUC made 70 rooms available to LASA (up from 40 in 2006), but even so many sessions had to be scheduled on Sunday morning. At Toronto, LASA will have only 52 rooms.

The LASA Executive Council discussed this dilemma when it met at Rio and made two decisions. The first decision was painful, but inevitable. LASA will have to become even more selective in accepting paper and panel proposals for the Toronto meeting. The acceptance rate for panel proposals will fall from 77.8 percent for Rio to 66.7 percent (two out of three) for Toronto, a relatively modest change.

The increased selectivity will mainly affect proposals for individual papers. At Rio, the program chairs accepted 74.2 percent of the 3,202 individual papers proposed and cobbled together a total of 401 panels for their authors, in addition to assigning a large number to panels that were already complete. For Toronto, the track chairs will accept only one out of three individual papers, create panels for all they have accepted, and will not assign any such papers to accepted panels.



To help individuals construct panel proposals by locating other scholars with related interests, LASA has created a special place on its web site where individuals may register a topic or theme and search for others to team up with. The URL for this service is: <<http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/eng/congress/paperrequests.asp>>.

While the first decision taken by Executive Council was to increase selectivity, the second was to commission a study by the LASA staff of the feasibility of changing from LASA’s current 18-month to an annual meeting, perhaps in late spring. Such a change would have the effect of increasing opportunities for participation (more sessions in any time period) without limiting LASA Congresses to logistically difficult university settings or the tiny number of cities that have convention centers large enough to accommodate 70 or more simultaneous sessions. If it is feasible, the switch to annual meetings would occur after the spring 2012 Congress.

A final note on the Toronto meeting. The dates are October 6-9, 2010, *but the deadline for paper and panel proposals for the Toronto meeting is September 15 of this year, 2009*. Since only LASA members are eligible to participate in LASA Congresses, *please be sure to renew your membership* to avoid having your proposal rejected for purely bureaucratic reasons.

Members renewing this year will be pleased to learn that the LASA Executive Council decided at its Rio meeting not to raise LASA’s dues or registration fees (with a small exception noted below). LASA has the

# Alfred C. Stepan

## *Recipient of Kalman Silvert Award for 2009*

lowest dues and fees of any U.S.-based area studies association, a distinction I am sure LASA's members approve. The next issue of the *Forum* will look at this question in detail. The Executive Council did take note, however, that the current dues structure provides a disproportionate and unintended subsidy to higher-income Latin American members and decided to create a new higher income dues category for Latin American members. ■

I begin by thanking the Kalman Silvert Award selection committee, and all of you here, for the award which I will treasure for the rest of my life. I also thank you for forgiving my sojourns in Poland, India, and Indonesia and still treating me as a Latin Americanist. In my heart, I never defected, I simply tried to carry out LASA style research, and stress LASA type values, around the world. In a short recounting of some aspects of my career, I will attempt to develop this assertion.

### **My Latin American Beginnings**

How did I start with Latin America? My real introduction to Latin America came as a "special correspondent" for *The Economist* in South America. My first degree was from Notre Dame as an English Major, and my second was a Politics, Philosophy, Economics (PPE) degree from Balliol College, Oxford. After Oxford, I did my draft military service as a Marine officer and witnessed at first hand much of the Cuban Missile crisis which revealed to me the dangerous, historically grounded gulf, between the United States and Latin America.

The Cuban experience led me to contemplate an academic career to help me gain a better understanding of Latin America. However, first things first. I managed to convince Nancy Leys to marry me. Nancy, as a British citizen who had come to the United States on a Fulbright, could not reenter the United States until September 1964. High journalism in London is dotted with PPE generalists, much the better if they went to Balliol College. Armed with this conceit I managed to talk *The Economist* into trying me out.

Incredibly, Nancy and I arrived in Rio on March 13, 1964, after I had written a story

on Ghana. Reading the newspapers on the beach that very day convinced me that something major was afoot. On the flight from Recife to Rio, a young steward and I had struck up a conversation when he noticed I was reading a book by Celso Furtado. When I told him I might write something on Brazil for *The Economist*, he said Brazil was on the brink of a popular revolution. When I left the airplane he handed me his telephone number. After finishing the newspapers on the beach I phoned him immediately. He came and collected us, bundled us with partial blindfolds into a car, and took us somewhere to meet a small group of leftwing activists that night. With my *Economist* connection, I then rapidly phoned some excellent Brazilian journalists, such as Fernando Pedreira, the political editor of *Journal do Brasil*, who quickly wrote the best early book on the coup, *Marco 31: Cívica e Militares no Processo da Crise* (1964), and was always generous to me with his sources and reflections.

Within ten days I filed a story called "Mend or End in Brazil," more or less predicting that Goulart would not win the struggle, but that the events flowing from this crisis, would *unfortunately* usher in military rule. *The Economist* did not publish it. But, after the March 31 coup a week later, *The Economist* featured it without changing a word. In the next six months I published articles for *The Economist* on Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Venezuela. In Chile I interviewed Allende over a three-day campaign tour and Frei on his campaign tour.

But the experience in Brazil structured much of my early career and important parts of my life to this day. My son, Adam, a documentary film maker, lives in Brazil, is married to a Brazilian, and I have two lovely Brazilian granddaughters.