

## Final Report from the Program Chairs

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This was truly a “Congress of Firsts:” The first Congress in South America, the first in a very long time at a university, the first with more than 9,000 submissions, and the first with some 5,100 pre-registered participants, over half of them from Latin America. The stunning geographical setting of Rio and its fabulous musical, culinary and other cultural attractions added immensely to our enjoyment, as did the venue of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica. Despite Rio’s high prices, many Congressgoers found reasonably priced options in the local beach communities of Leblon, Ipanema and Copacabana, and the bus shuttle service functioned seamlessly. At the same time, the proximity of Rio’s *favelas* kept us mindful of the Congress theme, Inequalities.

Despite the formidable logistic challenges, which required no fewer than five organizing trips on the part of LASA’s Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas, the Congress itself went ahead beautifully. Yes, the lines for preregistered participants to pick up their badges and program books on Thursday were *very* long, but to prevent this would have required not just more staff but also more computers and printers, which in turn would have driven up Congress costs and thus registration fees. On the whole, Milagros and her committed, efficient, and cheerful staff did simply an outstanding job.

As the list of 35 tracks demonstrates, the disciplines and fields of interest represented by participants were highly diverse. The only way for us to organize such a broad-ranging program was to delegate the evaluation of submissions of panels and individual papers to track chairs with expertise in these areas. Several tracks received such high numbers of submissions that we had to recruit co-chairs. We want to thank all of the scholars who were willing to take on the job of track chair for their excellent work in evaluating each submission.

It might be of interest to LASA members, particularly those whose proposals were turned down, to read how the process worked. Track chairs received instructions and spreadsheets from the Secretariat to assign points to each proposal, with a maximum of 16 points. Given the record number of submissions, we asked for no more than 70 percent of proposals with 12 or more points, which would qualify for automatic acceptance. Even though we extended the Congress to 3 ½ days, and even though we had 70 rooms available, we were eventually forced to reject 25 percent of the proposals. Since the actual percentage of proposals that were assigned 12 or more points varied from 39 percent to 100 percent depending on the track, we as program chairs had to adjust the threshold for acceptance across tracks, in order to be fair and have a roughly equal ratio of accepted to rejected proposals in each track.

Among the proposals were over 3,000 single papers. This required that the track chairs first rank them and then form new panels with these papers or place them in appropriate accepted panels with fewer than six papers. Sometimes they were not able to find a home for papers, and it fell to us to attempt to place them in the track of their second choice. Evaluating and placing the single paper proposals was a huge job for the track chairs and for us, and the Executive Council decided to discourage single paper submissions in the future. Instead, members will be encouraged to use the LASA website to contact other scholars and form panels before the deadline for submissions. Details will be available on the LASA website.

After the entire preliminary program was assembled and the preregistration deadline had passed, some 20 percent of accepted participants either cancelled or failed to preregister. This left quite a number of panels with only one or two papers clearly not a good state of affairs. We considered

various alternatives, such as cancelling those panels and attempting to place the remaining papers on other panels, but time was getting short and we were afraid that people might have made their travel arrangements already and would be greatly inconvenienced by having the day of their panels changed. Again, the Executive Council accepted new procedures to deal with this problem in the future. These will also be explained in the next issue of the *Forum*.

Let us just comment briefly on a few highlights and in this connection thank the members of the local outreach committee: Karl Erik Schollhammer, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro; Augusto Cattoni, Prefeitura, Rio de Janeiro; Peter Fry, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro; Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro; and Maria Alice Rezende de Carvalho, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and ANPOCS President. The Opening Ceremony and Reception with the performance of the PUC’s Capoeira Group was wonderful—a feast for eyes and ears. The lecture by Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz was well attended and highly stimulating, and the Film Festival, which featured documentaries on Bolivia, the environment, and indigenous communication, and included Q & As by several Latin American directors, was impressive.

In sum, LASA2009 in Rio fully lived up to the high expectations of a Congress of Firsts. We hope that follow-up on the lessons learned will make LASA2010 in Toronto every bit as rewarding. It was a privilege for us to work with Outgoing and Incoming Presidents Eric Hershberg and Joan Coatsworth, Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas, and with Sandy Klinzing, Monica Davis, Melissa Raslevich, Israel Perlov and the rest of the wonderful LASA staff. ¡Nos vemos en Toronto! ■