

From Rio to Toronto: What to Expect for LASA2010

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Months before the Rio Congress took place in June 2009, the LASA Secretariat was already busy preparing for the next Congress, scheduled for October 2010 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. LASA Congresses have become such a massive operation that it takes almost two years of full-time planning to ensure the success of those few days we meet. As program co-chairs for the LASA2010 congress, we would like to offer a preview of what to expect. While the program for LASA2010 remains a long way from being finalized, it is already clear that some things will change, while many others will stay the same.

In terms of changes, the meeting in Toronto will undergo some slight downscaling, but also some significant upscaling. If you can forgive the cliché, LASA is becoming the victim of its own success. The number of paper proposals for LASA has expanded dramatically, from 1,406 in 2004 to a record number 4,184 in 2009. Nothing speaks more about the resounding success of our organization than this expansion of interest in presenting papers at our meetings. But this growth poses challenges. The actual time devoted for the conference cannot exceed much beyond the three-to-four days we typically meet. In Toronto in particular, we will have 52 rooms per day, which is more than in years past, but far less than the 70 plus rooms per day we enjoyed in Rio. These time and space constraints will require some inevitable downscaling: unless the number of proposals drops sharply, it will simply be impossible to repeat the acceptance rate of the past.

Downscaling the acceptance rate will be a difficult challenge for the Association. LASA has been known for its commitment to a policy of opening doors to as many academic papers and artistic productions as possible even if that meant paying less attention to each paper's stage of

development. For 2010, even if we add an extra day to our meeting, structural factors together with expanded demand will simply not allow as many acceptances as in the past.

To help us navigate through this lower acceptance rate, we are introducing some changes that we hope will ensure fairness and clarity.

- 1) Most tracks will now have two and sometimes three co-chairs. Track chairs play a vital role. They are volunteer scholars responsible for ranking paper and panel proposals. They also make travel grant recommendations. We hope that the co-chair system will ensure more diversity in the ranking of proposals. By September, we hope to have the complete list of track co-chairs.
- 2) In recruiting chairs, we have adhered to the philosophy of our predecessors, Evelyne Huber and Cynthia Steele, to choose not just reputable scholars but also open-minded, non-dogmatic thinkers who embrace LASA's spirit of multidisciplinary and plurality of methods.
- 3) We will also increase the number of tracks (a new track on Technology and Pedagogy has already been approved) and consolidate some of the tracks that in the past attracted less interest. This change should lessen the problem of double submissions.
- 4) Clearer guidelines will be posted to help presenters write better proposals.
- 5) A page on the LASA website will be created to allow authors of "orphan" papers to find other authors working on similar subjects. We hope that this new page, inspired on the already existing

Roommates-Wanted list, will help authors find potential panels to form, and even discover co-authorship opportunities.

In short, acceptance downscaling will be accompanied by an upscaling of the fairness and clarity of the application process. And yet, the list of planned upscales extends beyond the review process. Under the stewardship of LASA's new president, John Coatsworth, the LASA Secretariat hopes to replicate the success achieved by our outgoing president, Eric Hershsberg, in raising outside funding for our Congress. Our hope is to increase substantially the monies available to subsidize student travel (a very distinctive LASA feature), to finance the ever-richer LASA film festival (one of LASA's most successful outreach activities), and to invite world-class speakers to our presidential panels. If successful, this fundraising effort will allow us to deliver a more enhanced program of activities while preserving LASA's commitment to offering some of the most affordable registration fees among peer conferences.

We are also committed to restoring two old-time LASA favorites that were missing in Rio: the *Gran Baile* and the Book Exhibit. For all kinds of complicated logistical reasons, LASA2009 was unable to deliver these delights. We don't expect those logistical challenges to exist at our Toronto site.

The 2010 Congress already has a theme: "Crisis, Response, and Recovery." Having themes for meetings has proven to help prospective panel organizers consider new angles as they put their sessions together, as well as guide program chairs and LASA officers in the formation of presidential panels, plenaries, and special sessions. A solid and attractive theme can also help with fundraising. The 2010 theme appears timely

and appropriate as well as suitable for the kind of multidisciplinary debates that are the hallmark of every LASA meeting.

We may have one main theme, but LASA2010 will also focus on two academic themes of wide interest as well. In 2010 we will be commemorating the bicentennial of Latin America's independence movements and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution. The Toronto Congress will offer an array of opportunities for both the scholar and the curious to learn more about these momentous events in the history of the Americas.

In short, LASA2010 will have its share of downscaling, upscaling, and restorations. But more importantly, we will have plenty of continuities. LASA2010 will remain committed to providing an affordable meeting place to see colleagues, exchange ideas, and learn from each other. While we won't be able to replicate Rio's beaches and vegetation, we hope nonetheless to make LASA's XXIX International Congress equally worth our time. ■

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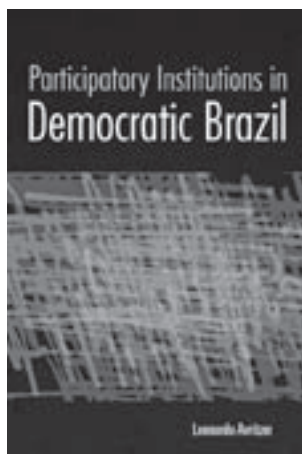
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