

Report from the LASA2010 Program Chairs

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In our previous column we discussed how the LASA2010 program will be somewhat downscaled: there will be fewer meeting rooms, and thus fewer acceptances than in Rio. We also mentioned some upscaling. We elaborate here on some of these improvements.

LASA2010 will be more convenient in several respects. In September, we visited our meeting facilities in Toronto and were quite impressed by their accessibility. The LASA Congress will take place at two downtown hotels, the Sheraton Centre and the Toronto Hilton, kitty-corner to each other. The meeting rooms themselves are comfortable and right on the premises. If you decide to stay in either hotel, your commute to any of the LASA sessions will be no more complicated than a quick elevator ride or a less than 3-minute walk across the street to the other hotel. In addition, plenty of shops and eateries for all budgets are located both above and under the two hotels and within walking distance. Furthermore, the LASA Secretariat negotiated free Internet wireless service both to the guestrooms and to another location that will be accessible to all LASA2010 attendees.

Of more immediate concern for those who applied to attend LASA2010 is the question of evaluations and acceptance, and here too, there have been some changes, also intended to enhance access. The evaluations for LASA2010, as always, will be handled by track chairs. However, one of the most important decisions made by the LASA Executive Council after the 2009 Rio Congress was to create a system of co-chairships for LASA2010 tracks, whenever possible. Track chairs play a vital role: they evaluate all panel and paper proposals, assign stand-alone papers to new panels, and rank travel grant applications. In many cases, track chairs evaluate 150-200 papers, all in a strictly volunteer capacity. By

moving to a system of co-chairships we hoped not only to alleviate each chair's workload, but also to maximize fairness. We are happy to report that thus far more than 67 chairs have been recruited for the 35 tracks. This means that the vast majority of tracks will have two chairs, and in some cases, three. We also are pleased that 17 track chairs are based outside the United States, mostly in Latin America, and a few in Europe. They are expected to do the bulk of the work in the first quarter of 2010.

Another successful innovation is the "panels wanted" link in the LASA website. The link served as an online bulletin board allowing people to post and obtain information on who is working on what topic. It has always proven difficult for members, especially junior colleagues, to figure out who is interested in forming panels. Given the large number of postings on the "panels wanted" site, we have reason to believe that this innovation has been very useful.

We hope that you also noticed a change in the rules for travel grant applications to make the process more open to everyone. In the past, LASA accepted only one travel grant application per panel. This year each eligible paper presenter was permitted to submit a travel grant application, regardless of how many other applicants were on the same proposed panel. LASA remains seriously committed to helping scholars resident in Latin America, as well as Latin American graduate students attending universities abroad, to attend the Congresses; removing this restriction was one more step in that direction. The downside is that competition for grants will be tougher because of an increased number of applications. However, LASA President John Coatsworth and the entire LASA Executive Committee are working hard to effect savings and obtain more sponsorships so that we can preserve—and perhaps

improve—the level of funding for travel grants.

To help us achieve these goals, a local arrangements committee of Canada-based LASA members has been organized. The committee will work hard to establish fruitful relations between LASA and local officials and sponsors—indispensable for a smooth running and cost-effective meeting.

The deadline for submitting proposals and grant applications to participate in the LASA2010 Congress has passed. The workload now shifts from you the members, who worked hard all through September trying to organize panels and complete applications, to the LASA Secretariat, which must now process all the proposals and generate a program for the Congress no later than the end of spring of 2010. We are confident that we have a spectacular team of track chairs and LASA staff to handle this workload. We want to thank all of you who submitted proposals. All that is left for you to do is to wait until April 2010, when the LASA Secretariat will announce the results of this evaluation process. We look forward to reading all your applications and, hopefully, seeing you in Toronto in October 2010. ■