

LASA2009 Survey Report

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In 2009, in accordance with the recommendations of LASA members who participated in a survey following LASA2007, participants in LASA2009 were polled about their assessments of the Congress in Rio de Janeiro. This time the survey was greatly expanded from five to twenty-eight questions. Of the 5,833 LASA2009 registrants contacted, 1,648 responded. This represents an overall survey response rate of 28 percent, a significant increase from the 18 percent rate in 2007. In particular, the number of non-U.S. Congress registrants surveyed increased from 2,279 in 2007 to 3,192 in 2009. This significant growth in the number of non-U.S. registrants—one of the rationales for holding Congresses outside the United States—reveals a marked increase of activity and interest in the affairs of the Association.

The survey focused on four sections: demographics, LASA2009, future Congresses, and membership. This year many of the themes gathered from the past survey's open-ended questions were incorporated into the expanded closed questions, to make sure to include members' concerns and greatly aiding in the analysis.

This year the survey allowed respondents to indicate satisfaction with many specific aspects of the Congress, such as panels, receptions, film festival, etc., separately. Although overall satisfaction dipped slightly from LASA2007 from 87 percent to 79 percent, improvements made in specific categories should boost the level of satisfaction in the future. The drop in satisfaction undoubtedly reflects the difficulties of having a Congress for the first time in South America and outside the traditional and convenient hotel venues. This more specific feedback will better serve the LASA2010 planners. The feedback gained from the section focused on future

Congresses will also assist greatly in the planning process.

The open-ended question requesting comments regarding LASA2009 Congress produced 762 unique comments from 629 respondents. Excluding a large number of positive comments, the suggestions fell into three primary areas similar to the 2007 survey: logistics, papers/panels, and cost.

Logistical concerns included registration lines, communication and Internet connectivity, facility location and transportation, scheduling, and size. Respondents expressed their concern with unusual long registration lines, problems with the use of Internet in the conference location, inconvenient scheduling, and the difficulty of networking and socializing due to the huge size of the Congress. Paper comments focused on the need for increased quality and selectivity of session papers, while panel comments focused on the large number of absent panelists or cancelled panels.

Cost was another area of concern; comments included suggestions that LASA discount or waive student fees, increase and streamline grants, and try to make Congresses less expensive to come to. The survey indicates that the total expense to attend the Congress for a majority of participants was between one and two thousand dollars. Sixty-three percent of respondents received partial or full reimbursement from a variety of sources, most notably university funds and LASA travel grants.

Finally, many respondents requested that the Gran Baile and book exhibition return to future Congresses. (Both have been included in the Toronto plans.)

This expanded survey provided important feedback, both positive and negative, that will prove crucial to future Congress preparations and successes. All respondents should know that their comments have been heard and that LASA officers will use this feedback to continue what is working and improve what is not. The most immediate effect has been the decision, pending successful negotiations, to hold LASA2012 in San Francisco, following members' preferences.

Thank you to the many participants who took time out of their busy schedules to take part in this survey. Your contributions have helped immensely.

[LASA deeply appreciates the role of Ryan Lincoln of the University of Pittsburgh in this project. Ryan analyzed the considerable amount of data from the survey and contributed to the writing of this report.] ■