

From Toronto to San Francisco Looking Ahead to LASA2012

by GABRIELA NOUZEILLES, Program Co-Chair | Princeton University | gnouzeil@princeton.edu
and TIMOTHY J. POWER, Program Co-Chair | University of Oxford | timothy.power@lac.ox.ac.uk

Some six months before the hugely successful LASA2010 meeting in Toronto, the LASA Secretariat was already laying the groundwork for a conference to be held more than two years later. LASA will next convene in San Francisco May 23-26, 2012. This will be the Association's landmark 30th International Congress. It will also be the first Congress to be held in the continental United States since Las Vegas some eight years earlier, and it will be the first LASA meeting in California since Los Angeles in 1992. The Congress theme, apropos of the decade that is now beginning, is "Toward a Third Decade of Independence in Latin America."

As the newly appointed Program Co-Chairs for LASA2012, we are honored to be working with LASA president Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida and Executive Director Milagros Pereyra on the organization of this major event. We are also grateful for the strong support and wise insights of our two predecessors for the Toronto Congress, Javier Corrales and Nina Gerassi-Navarro, who organized such a marvelous conference in Ontario. Javier and Nina will prove a tough act to follow, but we intend to show them that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

We have been preparing the LASA2012 program since last summer, and we are pleased to report that our work has so far run smoothly. Our first task was to identify the co-chairs for the 34 thematic tracks approved for San Francisco. Following recent LASA practice, we recruited not one but two colleagues for every track, and we divided the outreach efforts between the two of us. In general terms, Gabriela was in charge of identifying and contacting scholars who were more linked to the humanities, while Tim focused on scholars closer to the social sciences. Although the criteria used in the selection were varied, we made an effort

to find people who have strong reputations and whose research represented, in our view, the most interesting and/or innovative trends in their fields. We also sought to achieve a good mix of senior and junior faculty, as well as representatives of U.S. and foreign academic institutions, including Latin American, Canadian, European, and Australasian universities.

The selected track chairs were subsequently approved by LASA and were invited to a very useful organizational meeting (chaired by Javier) at the LASA Congress in Toronto. Fortunately, we were able to round out the full Program Committee two months before the Toronto meeting, so that a full Call for Papers—including the names and institutions of all 68 of our selfless co-organizers—was printed in the program book at LASA 2010. You can also download the 2012 CFP from the LASA website.

The initial meeting of the Program Committee (held on October 8th, 2010, in Toronto) proved both instructive and productive. The track co-chairs will play a crucial role in assembling the final program for San Francisco 2012. During this meeting, we considered some rather pressing issues of demand and selectivity as we shaped a strategy for program development. As is well known throughout the Association, the last decade saw a massive increase in paper proposals submitted to LASA conferences—the aggregate number increased from 1,406 in 2004 to 4,184 in 2009. As the situation became increasingly unsustainable, individual paper proposals had to be discouraged in favor of pre-assembled panels. Because LASA has been successful in making these changes known to the membership, the number of *individual* paper proposals (i.e. not submitted as part of a panel) fell sharply from 3202 in 2009 (Rio de Janeiro) to only 651 in 2010 (Toronto), while self-assembled panels were far more

stable at 962 and 741, respectively. In addition to driving notable gains in selectivity and quality, the massive decline in individual submissions has simplified the work of the track chairs, who no longer have to assemble large numbers of panels from disparate abstracts. When panels are self-initiated by groups of like-minded colleagues ahead of time, the result is a much more coherent conference program.

LASA's new system overwhelmingly favors submissions of complete panels rather than individual paper proposals, and the feedback from the Toronto meeting was very positive. For 2012, the practice will once again favor pre-formed panels, and we expect demand to be very high due to the attractiveness of San Francisco as a conference site. Therefore, we strongly urge colleagues to begin their discussions and networking now, so that whole panels can begin to take shape well in advance of formal application to LASA. That being said, there is a finite number of panels that can be accommodated in three days, so we expect selectivity to continue to rise for the San Francisco meeting.

Although it was challenging at times to undertake the necessary downscaling of the acceptance rate for Toronto, Javier and Nina did a terrific job of rationalizing the programming process, and we aim to build on their example. We view the high demand for Congress participation not as a problem, but as a sign of LASA's energy and dynamism—in fact we have lost track of the number of times that colleagues have told us that LASA is their favorite conference to attend! Holding the next Congress in the spectacular surroundings of the Bay Area is sure to add to the attractiveness of LASA 2012. Along with the President, the Executive Council, and the Secretariat, we look forward to working with the Program Committee to produce a memorable 30th International Congress. ■