

President's Report

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We just celebrated the highly successful 2012 LASA Congress and are already in full swing planning for the next one. The 2013 Congress in Washington, DC, will be the first one on an annual schedule, so the entire planning process is based on tighter deadlines. The Secretariat has the new planning process all worked out, but we shall need everybody's cooperation in observing deadlines in order to achieve a smooth transition to the new schedule. The deadline for submitting proposals is **September 1, 2012**.

The decision to experiment with an annual instead of the traditional 18-months schedule was taken after the Congress in Rio, where we had over 5800 participants. It is extremely difficult to find that much space for a Congress, and even if the space is there (as it was in Rio), we face the problem of concurrent sessions of interest to the same participants. In Toronto we had fewer participants and conference rooms than in Rio, but San Francisco attracted a large number of submissions again that far exceeded the available space capacity. A conference day running from 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. without a lunch break left no room for increasing the number of sessions by lengthening the day. The result was that the rejection rate had to go up, to roughly one quarter of proposals, which understandably left those unhappy whose proposals were rejected.

Contrary to some interpretations, no Executive Council or Program Committee ever took a decision to make the process of acceptance to Congress participation more selective. Every Program Committee has tried to accommodate as many proposals as possible, given the time and space available. The math is simple: with the total number of available panel slots limited by space and time constraints, the rejection rate has to go up in direct relation

to the number of submissions that surpass the total number of slots available.

One potential remedy that the Executive Council decided to try is precisely the transition to an annual schedule. The assumption is that some people will decide to participate in the Congress every other year, or twice in three years, and that accordingly the number of submissions will go down. Or, if this assumption turns out to be inaccurate, at least would-be participants whose proposals get rejected will have the chance to resubmit within a year.

A second major innovation in Congress planning that has taken place in the aftermath of Rio is the explicit preference given to submissions of proposals for entire panels over proposals for individual papers. Rio saw a record of 3200 individual paper proposals and 962 panel proposals. Evaluating those 3200 individual paper proposals and grouping them into panels was a monumental task for the track chairs and program chairs. Despite their best efforts, the result was often far from satisfactory in terms of the coherence of the panels.

The balance for Toronto was much better, with 663 individual paper proposals and 744 panel proposals. It was not quite as favorable for San Francisco, with 1362 individual paper proposals and 1020 panel proposals. We would prefer to tip the balance further towards panel proposals and encourage all LASA members to make use of the LASA website to identify potential panel participants. The incentive is that panel proposals will have a higher probability of being accepted than individual paper proposals.

One issue that caused concern was the denial of visas to ten Cuban scholars who



were to participate in the San Francisco Congress. The great majority of Cuban visa requests were granted (75 granted, 10 rejected), but the arbitrary nature of the visa denials is cause for concern. Among those whose visas were denied are some of the best known Cuban scholars with extensive previous stays in the United States. In a joint venture between outgoing and incoming LASA Presidents, Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida and I wrote a letter of protest to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on behalf of the Association. This letter is posted on the LASA website. Before the next Congress, we shall contact the State Department to request visa approvals for all Cuban scholars accepted as participants.

The *Debates* section in this issue of the *Forum* links directly to the theme of the next Congress, as described in the Call for Papers. The section addresses one of the most fundamental problems faced by Latin America—the high degree of inequality—and its development over the past decade. Inequality has decreased in many countries, in some of them to a remarkable degree, in part due to economic growth and in part due to innovation in social policies. The authors are exploring the underlying causes of these changes and their implications for the well-being of the citizens of Latin American countries. At the next Congress, we want to explore whether these gains might be preserved through a new social contract, or whether they are likely to be lost in the course of economic reversals. ■