

# From the President

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LASA2013, our 31st International Congress, is about to take place in Washington, DC. We are looking forward to an intellectually exciting event—and to seeing lots of old friends and making new ones. LASA Congresses have always served the dual function of promoting scholarly exchange and nurturing social networks. Our Congress will start with an opening ceremony that includes official recognition of winners of LASA awards, followed by a welcoming reception, both at Georgetown University. We greatly appreciate Georgetown's hospitality. Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza, will honor us with his presence and offer opening remarks. For more information on planned activities before and during the Congress, please see the Report from the Program Chairs in this issue.

Our excitement about the Congress has been affected by an acute concern about visas for our Cuban colleagues who are invited to attend. In early April we heard that a number of visas had been denied by the United States Interest Section in Havana. In a collective effort, present and former LASA presidents wrote an open letter to Secretary of State John Kerry urging him to ensure that visas will be granted to Cuban scholars headed for LASA. The letter is posted on our website, and a short article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* gave wider exposure to the problem and our efforts to deal with it (see <http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/academic-group-calls-on-state-dept-to-grant-visas-to-cuban-scholars/58067>).

As we informed in an earlier issue of the *Forum*, in response to petitions from the membership, the Secretariat solicited several bids from childcare providers for an

on site childcare option. Based on the least expensive bid, an enrollment of at least 25 children would have been necessary to make the operation financially viable. Accepted Congress participants were offered the option to sign up and prepay for on-site childcare. Since fewer than 25 children were signed up, the plans for on-site childcare had to be cancelled; instead, the old LASA policy of subsidizing childcare expenses for Congress participants is in effect again. Details about the policy can be found at the LASA website at <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/eng/congress/childcare.asp>.

In response to an incident at the San Francisco Congress, where aggressive media representatives disrupted a panel, the following rules will be in effect: All members of the media must wear a badge of identification (available at the LASA registration desk). Filming and recording by media representatives are permitted only with the prior written permission of LASA. Members of the media must hold their questions until the end of the formal presentations and avoid any disruption of the proceedings. Session organizers may call hotel security and have any disruptive spectators removed. Let me stress that LASA welcomes media interest in its International Congress sessions and events. The Association also welcomes the opportunity to share information and to have media presence in particular at special venues. The above rules have been developed with the sole purpose of protecting scholarly presentations and debates from undue interruptions.

In the Winter issue of the *Forum* we published a call for bequests to the LASA endowment. The Kalman Silvert Society, composed of members making a bequest of



at least \$10,000 to the LASA endowment, will be officially inaugurated at the Washington Congress. The endowment fund is crucial for LASA's operations as it constitutes the main source of travel grants to LASA Congresses. It also supports many special projects undertaken by LASA. We need donors to the endowment in order to ensure LASA's capacity to support scholarship on Latin America by future generations. For further information and to join the Kalman Silvert Society, please contact Cynthia McClintock <[mcclin@gwu.edu](mailto:mcclin@gwu.edu)> or Kevin Middlebrook <[kevinmiddlebrook@aol.com](mailto:kevinmiddlebrook@aol.com)> or Sandy Klinzing at the LASA Secretariat <[sklinz@pitt.edu](mailto:sklinz@pitt.edu)>.

The *Debates* section in this issue of the *Forum* takes up a topic that is at the heart of the Congress theme: *Towards a New Social Contract?* Education is a key determinant of individual and societal success in the information age. The distribution of educational attainment is highly correlated with the distribution of income; in other words, societies with high average levels of education and in particular a high floor of skills have lower income inequality. By the same token, societies with a highly skilled labor force are better able to compete in world markets in the information age. As the articles point out, educational enrollment in Latin America has expanded greatly over the recent decades, which is an important positive development. However, differential quality of education between public and private primary and secondary

DEBATES

## Education in Latin America: Advances and Challenges

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schools along with differential access to postsecondary education remain serious issues to be addressed. Financial resources for private and public education of course play a key role for access and quality at all levels. The contributors to our *Debates* section take up these issues, outlining problems and sketching some proposals for solutions. They provide an excellent entry into related debates that will be pursued at the Congress about more and less promising avenues towards new social contracts. ■

In recent decades educational enrollment in Latin America has increased greatly, especially among women and the poor. At the primary level it is now close to universal. Since education has long been viewed as a tool for achieving social mobility, national integration, and economic progress, this is undoubtedly a positive development. Nevertheless, rather than allaying concerns about education, increased enrollment has only served to focus them on a number of unresolved issues. Do existing educational practices adequately serve an increasingly diverse student population? How can learning outcomes be improved in order to bring students closer to international standards? Should universities base their admissions decisions purely on merit, or should they favor disadvantaged groups? Should public universities charge tuition, or should the state guarantee a free college education to all who are admitted?

The articles featured in this *Debates* section address these and other questions. Néstor López examines the evolution of Latin America's primary and secondary schools over the past 20 years. He stresses the rapid gains in enrollment in the 1990s and the subsequent slowdown in the last decade. López argues that poverty poses a key obstacle to the achievement of universal education, but he points out that school practices that "deny the identity" of an increasingly diverse student body also impede retention, especially at the secondary level. Christian Daude's contribution examines intergenerational educational mobility, or the extent to which people tend to surpass the educational level achieved by their parents. He paints a relatively somber picture, presenting evidence that Latin America lags behind other regions on this variable. At the same time he offers suggestions for increasing mobility, including early childhood

interventions in health, nutrition, and education.

The article by Edward Telles and Marcelo Paixão explores one of the more surprising trends in tertiary education in recent years: the rapid rise of affirmative action in Brazilian university admissions. Since 2001, a society that once resolutely denied the existence of racial discrimination has seen the majority of its federal and state universities adopt quota systems aimed at increasing the number of poorer and darker-skinned students. María del Carmen Feijóo examines how educational systems have treated another group that has traditionally faced discrimination, women. While acknowledging the importance of the major increase in female educational enrollment in Latin America in recent decades, Feijóo stresses the persistence of a wide array of formal and informal practices that hold women back from pursuing the most prestigious and remunerative career tracks.

Finally, José Joaquín Brunner delves into the increasingly contentious question of how to finance public universities. He surveys the different approaches in the region, ranging from the entirely public formula in Cuba to the predominantly private one in Chile, where tuition payments have contributed to massive students protests. In the coming years, he says, rising university enrollments will only intensify the dilemma faced by policy makers, forcing them to make the difficult choice between increasing the financial burden on students and their families and seeking new sources of revenue. ■