

## From the LASA2016 Congress Program Co-Chairs

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As we sit down to write this, with the September 8 submission deadline for those wishing to participate in the 2016 LASA Congress a few short weeks away, quite literally thousands of scholars, students, public intellectuals, and activists throughout the world with an interest in Latin America are planning their contributions to what promises to be the association's largest conference yet. By the time this issue of the *Forum* appears, this myriad of proposals will be in the hands of the 80 track co-chairs, pairs of specialists in each of the 39 thematic tracks into which the Congress is divided and which form the foundation on which the Congress program is built. These track chairs, for the most part working in teams of two, will read carefully through scores of individual and panel proposals, and by the end of October their decisions concerning the content of their respective program tracks—the panels, roundtables, and workshops falling within their thematic area—will shape the program that will fill four days in May 2016. Track chairs have also taken up our suggestion that they not only vet submitted papers and panels but also take the initiative to propose special panels of their own that bring to light the most interesting and cutting-edge thinking in their subarea of study, which will be highlighted in the conference program. They have been in touch with LASA's Sections, which in turn have been working on the organization of panels and workshops, a number of them emphasizing the “LASA at 50” theme of the Congress.

Along with the hundreds of panels that will come out of the thematic tracks, we, as program co-chairs, have been working with LASA president Gil Joseph to include a limited number of special high-profile activities: panel discussions, talks, and public conversations among those whose voices are today and have been formative

over the past 50 years of Latin America studies.

Together, these two broad categories of activities will fill the four days in May of our “LASA at 50” Congress. While still leaving room for the conference to take shape according to the interests of LASA's membership and to reflect the vast diversity of Latin American studies today, we have taken seriously our mission as program chairs in working with Gil Joseph in identifying certain strains of thought and critical approaches that we believe are especially important to emphasize in the program. We would like to highlight the emergence of new categories of knowledge, which we had in mind when redefining the thematic tracks. Where, for example, does Latin America fit in to the now ubiquitous concept of the Global South? In what ways should we rethink the organization of knowledge about Latin America in the context of new transregional interactions? What has been the evolution of thought, over the last 50 years, in the field that we call Latin American studies?

The conference program will also acknowledge and allow participants to explore emerging developments in the region, for instance the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, and will engage with debates on fundamental issues that shape hemispheric politics and societies such as democracy and immigration. We are also struck by and would like to address certain persistent challenges to the study of Latin America, particularly in the U.S. academy; the inexplicably persistent gap between Latino and Latin American studies, for instance, appears to have become even wider in contemporary academic life in the United States as ethnic studies has taken shape. We are also committed to continue the wonderful work of our colleagues

who chaired the LASA2015 Congress in San Juan, Puerto Rico, thus deepening conversations on “Otros Saberes” and the valuable goal of promoting collaboration between knowledge producers within and outside academia.

Finally, we consider New York City, the conference venue and the site of the first LASA International Congress in 1968, as a Latin American city. For us, designating New York City as part of Latin America, broadly construed, emphatically does not mean subsuming Latin America into the United States. Instead, we hope to that the conference will stimulate discussions about diasporic communities, the study of migration and immigrant communities and justice, and transnational approaches to study in the humanities and social sciences. Although for compelling logistical reasons we must concentrate the vast bulk of the conference events in a several-block radius of midtown Manhattan, we are keenly aware that New York City's Latin American / Latin@ life is spread throughout its five boroughs. Conference participants will have the opportunity take part in off-site activities connected to presentations on the actual conference site.

The intensely busy process of organizing the Congress has brought LASA's president Gil Joseph and the program co-chairs together with New York City stakeholders with an abiding interest in the study of Latin America—cultural organizations, universities and research centers, foundations, politicians, community leaders, and others. We are delighted and humbled by the extraordinary response that we have received from these groups. As you will learn soon, their ideas and contributions will add fascinating dimensions to LASA2016.

In sum, the content of LASA's 50th anniversary Congress is quickly taking shape. Thanks to the work of an immense number of individuals and especially the conference track chairs and the staff at the LASA Secretariat, ideas are becoming realities. We hope that we have whetted your curiosity. By the time of our next communication in this *Forum*, the details of LASA2016 will be very much defined. It will be an unforgettable meeting. ■

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