

From the Outgoing President

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I want to thank all of you for what I hope you found to be a successful congress in Lima. The fact that we met on a university campus instead of a more anonymous hotel, and the presence among us of 1,730 local students, transformed the event into a vital space of interaction. Almost no one presented papers to an empty room. Even for those young scholars for whom this was their first congress there was an audience and an opportunity for further exchange. The fireworks of the opening ceremony (I hope Gustavo Gutiérrez stimulated you to meditate on a *diálogo de saberes* and that Susana Baca led you to feel that dialogue in your bodies) and the interdisciplinary discussions we planned for the presidential sessions were not the lifeblood of the congress. More important was the everyday work of the congress—the dialogue in the corridors, what you learned from a presenter you hadn't known about before, the mentoring opportunities, the connections you made with scholars, practitioners, and activists from other countries: that is, what you, the members of LASA, accomplished.

I'd like to use this final column to report on some of the work that the Executive Council (EC) of LASA has been up to over the year leading up to the Lima congress. We had an unusually active EC this year, involved in a series of projects not related directly to the planning of the Lima congress. Much of our work was dedicated to thinking through LASA's five-year strategic plan and establishing working priorities. In particular, we focused on three major themes: incorporating new constituencies into our organization, developing initiatives that would make LASA a more vital presence for its members in the year between congresses, and deepening the relationship between LASA sections and the association as a whole.

As you have already heard numerous times in the past few years, LASA is no longer a U.S.-based association mainly comprised of social scientists. A plurality of our members are based in Latin America—there are more Latin America-based members in LASA than U.S.-based members—and there is a growing interest in Europe and an incipient membership in Asia. We also have a growing number of student members (to which we need to add the 1,730 students who attended the Lima congress as observers, an audience we hope you will help to encourage for future congresses in Barcelona and in Boston). Over the past year, the EC fostered the creation of a Student Section, which held its own panel in Lima and hosted a jobs workshop. The Secretariat has been working to develop a web page listing positions in Latin America, as well as in the global North, so that Latin American students who choose to study in the North (or those who live in some of the smaller countries where academic employment opportunities are scarce) have the option of affiliating with Latin American institutions after they finish their graduate work. We have also been discussing the handicaps that students in Latin American universities have in finding research funding. Scholars and students from different countries face distinct financial challenges in order to continue their research. The benefit concert we held in Lima raised sufficient funds for us to begin an initiative offering five short-term research grants to doctoral students at Latin American universities. You will be hearing more in the coming months about the procedures for applying for these grants, and LASA's development committee will be working on fund-raising for this initiative. We are also revamping our membership and congress registration fees so that they more equitably reflect the heterogeneity of our membership. In addition, we are returning to cash travel



grants, instead of hotel rooms, in order to make it possible for more members to travel to Barcelona.

Many of those of my generation joined LASA during the 1980s, a period marked by conflict in Central America and worldwide solidarity with the peoples of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Like many of my colleagues, I remember LASA as one of the few professional organizations that paid attention to issues of human rights; this inspired me to join the association. But that very meaningful core of our work, a space in which we could cross academic disciplines and countries of origin, applying our scholarly expertise in the real world, has fallen through the cracks over the intervening decades. The EC has been working on a series of initiatives, ranging from the preparation of scholarly dossiers in *LARR* and less academic interventions in *LASA Forum*, in which human rights will once again become a major concern and a space for dialogue. We are planning to expand the purview of the Commission on Academic Freedom so that it serves as a committee through which LASA can emit statements regarding human rights—so that the next time someone like Honduran environmentalist and indigenous activist Bertha Cáceres is assassinated or threatened, our organization has a procedure for making public statements and for alerting our membership. We are seeking out LASA members who would be receptive to founding a human rights section, where our efforts can be both concentrated and amplified. We have also developed a relationship with the

Scholar Rescue Fund of the Institute of International Education, which places scholars at risk in institutions of higher education in other countries: many of our sections expressed great interest in serving as consultants in this initiative, both to locate scholars at risk in Latin America and to help to find academic safe havens at Latin American universities for scholars from other continents.

In addition to these initiatives, the EC and some of our sections have been pursuing other projects that expand the work of LASA beyond our annual congresses. As we announced on our website, an interdisciplinary academic delegation was sent to Brazil last year to investigate the political, social, and economic context of the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. We recently received their highly detailed and wide-ranging report, which we will be circulating to the membership. The delegation conducted scores of interviews in Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro, transcripts and recordings of which will be made available for scholars through the LASA Secretariat and at the University of Campinas, once they have been edited and catalogued. In collaboration with the Otros Saberes Section, we are taking the final steps to organize a third stage of the Otros Saberes initiative, which will fund collaborative teams of academics and grassroots researchers working on environmental justice and extractivism in Latin America. Many more ideas were generated in EC brainstorming sessions. For instance, we would like to see LASA create working groups that link the scholarly research of our members around pressing themes. We need to focus on how to develop a more inspiring and user-friendly communications program: a more effective website, better use of social media, the means to more effectively disseminate publications such as *LASA Forum* (whose

articles would make excellent additions to your syllabi for beginning undergraduate students), perhaps even LASA TV.

LASA is a membership organization. The annual congress would not be possible without the participation of the program chairs, track chairs, awards committee members, section chairs, and all of you who organize panels and present papers. The activities we have been planning over the past year also require your energies and your passion. It has been an honor to serve as your president over the past year, and I hope that you will make the effort to help build LASA as a more wide-ranging, interdisciplinary, and international association over its second half century. ■