
EDITOR'S FOREWORD

THE *LARR*-LASA RELATIONSHIP AND THE MOVE TO MCGILL 2008–12

Most Latin American Studies Association members are probably unaware that the Association actually grew out of the *Latin American Research Review*, not the other way around. The year after the journal's creation in 1964, the founding members of *LARR* created the Association. And while *LARR* has always been viewed as the Association's journal, this fact may help to explain why *LARR* has always had a rather unusual and autonomous relationship with the Latin American Studies Association—quite unlike that which usually exists between a professional association and its journal(s).

Few people would argue that editorial autonomy is not essential, of course, but so, too, has *LARR*'s financial autonomy been important in allowing past editors to develop the journal in a manner relatively unfettered by the LASA secretariat, by the Executive Council, and elected leadership, the presidency of which changes every eighteen months. In Gil Merx's words (*LARR* 37, no. 1:5), this separation was "the firewall" in *LARR*'s "editorial and managerial autonomy." In my view, too, this financial, managerial, and editorial autonomy has been the key to *LARR*'s widely acknowledged status as the leading Latin American studies journal and to the success of the initiatives that we have put in place here at the University of Texas at Austin since our first issue appeared in 2003 (vol. 38, no. 1). It has ensured our total editorial control over policy and content, the appointments to the Editorial Board, internal management structure and process, production and design, advertising, electronic journal development, royalty negotiations, and the setting of institutional subscription rates. Naturally, all of these activities are regularly

reported to the elected members of the Executive Council (EC) by the editor, who serves *ex officio* on the Council, and *LARR* reports in full each year to the LASA Secretariat, which oversees and audits the accounts. LASA also approves the Editorial Board slate, and every five years oversees the bid process in order for the EC to appoint, or to reappoint, the editor and university venue. But once appointed, and outside of the regular reporting, the autonomy of the editor and university team charged with *LARR* has always been respected.

Not surprisingly, over the years this relative autonomy has sometimes been a source of tension between my predecessors and the LASA Secretariat, particularly relating to the annual subvention LASA provides towards the costs of producing and distributing the journal to LASA members. Since the LASA members comprise over 80 percent of the journal's total circulation, the lion's share of production and distribution costs are associated with circulation to the membership. Yet the LASA to *LARR* subvention runs a little under one-third of the actual production and circulation costs (the remainder comes from *LARR* institutional subscriptions and income); thus the flow of resources has been firmly one of *LARR* to LASA, rather than being a subsidy to the journal from the Association.

There have been several past attempts by the Secretariat to assume financial and production control of *LARR*, but until now those attempts have always been successfully resisted. Indeed, following John Martz,¹ in 1982 then entering editor Gil Merkx and the LASA leadership saw the desirability of drawing up the Articles of Understanding that have guided the relationship for more than twenty years (these were reprinted in *LARR* 37, no. 1 [2002]: 5–6).

Now, it is with considerable regret that I must report that those Articles of Understanding were unilaterally set aside by the LASA Secretariat and the Ways and Means Committee in drawing up the new bid requirements for the period 2007–11. Thus the *LARR*-LASA relationship is about to change irrevocably, with LASA assuming full financial and production control of the journal from 2008 (vol. 43) onwards. As editor, in 2005 I vigorously protested the lack of appropriate consultation over what amounts to a drastic recasting of the relationship at a time of considerable volatility and change in the contemporary publishing environment, particularly the drive towards electronic journal publications that threatens subscription and associated income. In my view this makes any immediate restructuring and transfer to the LASA Secretariat ill

1. See, for example, editor John Martz' Foreword in *LARR* 14, no. 3 (1979): 5, where he thanks then LASA president Richard Fagen for his support in dealing with "previously ambiguous or ill-defined issues over the *LARR*-LASA relationship [which] required resolution."

advised, and it will be essential to continue to engage the production and financial management expertise offered by a university (or commercial) press with a journals division.

But my primary purpose in writing this Foreword is to make clear that these objections were not out of a desire to continue the status quo ante. In fact, my associate editorial colleagues and I fully acknowledged and agreed to the desirability and appropriateness of vesting *LARR* more fully within *LASA*, (ideally guided by a respected academic press), not least since this would facilitate an easier and less costly transition whenever *LARR* moved to a different university location. We also felt that to move the editorship immediately to a new location, managed by an inexperienced Secretariat ill-equipped to undertake immediate production and financial control, was a recipe that would jeopardize the quality and reputation of the journal and place it at considerable risk.

It was for these reasons that, in collaboration with the University of Texas Press, the University of Texas at Austin proposal included an offer to continue to edit the journal for an additional five years, but predicated upon a transitional arrangement that sought to progressively move financial management (in 2008–09), and latterly production management, to *LASA*, thereby guaranteeing a smooth integration and the gradual buildup of experience. Thus, under our proposed plan the hand-off to *LASA* would have occurred gradually, and would have culminated with a new editorial team being appointed in 2011, with the final year's production (2010–11) vested in a new press, but under our initial direction to ensure the maintenance of the journal's quality.

Despite our appeals, however, the Ways and Means Committee of *LASA* steadfastly refused to consider this "transitional" bid, arguing that it did not conform to the bid specification, in effect leaving only one other bid on the table for consideration by the Executive Council—that of Dr. Philip Oxhorn at McGill University. Although we are disappointed at *LASA*'s intransigence and its insistence on an immediate assumption of financial and production control of the journal, on behalf of the University of Texas, the University of Texas Press and my editorial colleagues, I wish to place clearly on the record that our bid was both genuine and enthusiastic. However, we were not willing to sacrifice the quality or put the journal unnecessarily at risk by agreeing to an immediate and hurried transition while the journal was still under our watch. Regrettably, *LASA* has chosen the immediate path, and has quite clearly indicated its willingness to run that risk.

Naturally, we will do our best to ensure that the handover both to Dr. Oxhorn and to *LASA* proceeds smoothly. In the meantime, we have one more volume (year) to publish—that of 2007, volume 42. By mutual agreement, since last September Dr. Oxhorn has been receiving manuscripts and books for review. I am confident that he will seek to maintain both the

high standards, the expeditiousness of the manuscript review process, and the effective deepening of submissions and publications from authors residing in Latin America—all of which have been given the highest priority by the editors while the journal has been at the University of Texas.

Peter M. Ward
Executive Editor
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