**President’s Report to SLAS AGM, 2 July 2024**

Welcome to SLAS2024 and thank you all for attending the SLAS Annual General Meeting in July 2024. And thank you for reading this report if you are catching up with SLAS activities after the conference. The AGM is an important opportunity for the SLAS Committee and the Bulletin of Latin American Studies editorial team to report on our core activities over the last 12 months. It is also an important forum for SLAS members to respond with comments or questions. You can also us directly: my email address is at the bottom of this report and you can find up-to-date SLAS Committee contact details on the [SLAS website](https://www.slasuk.org/contact).

As I finish my first year as SLAS President (and my eighth year on the SLAS Committee), I would like to take a moment to mention that 2024 is SLAS’s 60th anniversary. You can find more information on the [history section of our website](https://www.slasuk.org/history), including key documents, a list of past presidents, and articles on Latin American Studies in the UK.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS) has its origins in 1962 when a group of university lecturers interested in the study of Latin American affairs decided to form The Latin American Group … [publishing] four issues of an Information Bulletin between 1962 and 1964. … In 1964, The Latin American Group became the Society for Latin American Studies and hence the Bulletin was thereafter entitled The Society for Latin American Studies Information Bulletin which ran until 1967 (Nos. 1-7) when the Society, in a move designed to insert its publication in a more serious academic format, dropped the word Information from the title of its publication, renaming it the Bulletin of the Society for Latin American Studies. This ran on until number 33, produced in 1981, when it was then succeeded by the Bulletin of Latin American Research (BLAR) that continues to be published to this day.[[2]](#footnote-2)

You will have noticed that BLAR was first published in 1981 and the journal’s 45th anniversary will be in 2026, which we will celebrate appropriately as an opportunity to reflect on the state of our field of research in the 2020s.

The SLAS archives can be found in the University of Liverpool Special Collections & Archives. I decided to consult the conference reports and AGM minutes from 1974 and 1975 to find out how SLAS had responded to the coup in Chile. At the 1974 AGM, “SLAS voted to support the work of AfC [Academics for Chile] and WUS [World University Service], and in 1975 the AGM voted with ‘an overwhelming majority’ to condemn ‘the repression of academic freedom in Chile, and its threat to the prospects for the study of Latin America’. Furthermore, the 1975 SLAS Annual Conference in Swansea hosted a meeting for Chilean academics and their supporters”.[[3]](#footnote-3) There was no mention in the president’s AGM report of the Society’s 10th anniversary but apparently SLAS was on an upwards trajectory after several years of crisis in the early 1970s. According to [Prof. Tristan Platt](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/social-anthropology/news/title-204576-en.php) (1973-1975) – who sadly died this year:

We have had a very simple policy this year – retrenchment and consolidation … We are at the very verge of bankruptcy. But I should say that the approach to bankruptcy is probably one of the best things that could have happened to the Society. What it reflected was a sudden upsurge in activity; the subscriptions had been collected, the Bulletin had not come out, and the Annual Conference was a quiet affair, quiet and peaceful, but of limited interest to the Society as a whole. All this changed some three years ago.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Fifty years after Prof. Platt’s report, SLAS is thriving and, fortunately, in a healthy financial position.

The SLAS archives provide a fascinating glimpse into the society’s history and its engagement with issues of justice and human rights in Latin America. The society's actions in the 1970s, including supporting Chilean academics and condemning the threat to academic freedom, demonstrate a longstanding commitment to social justice that resonates strongly with this year’s conference theme, “In/Justice in Latin America and the Caribbean”. As we gather to discuss the ongoing challenges of inequality, violence, and human rights violations in the region, we are reminded that these issues have deep roots and that the work of scholars and activists in our field has long been closely connected with the struggle for justice.

This year, we are in Amsterdam, which is the second time we hold a conference in The Netherlands (the first was in Leiden in 2004). In the aftermath of Brexit, past SLAS President David Wood (2017-2019) was very keen to position SLAS as a European subject association, which is why we asked CEDLA to host the conference in Amsterdam in 2020. The CEDLA conference team and the SLAS Committee led by past President Patience Schell (2019-2021) did a fabulous job moving the conference online at short notice.

We are very grateful that CEDLA was willing to host the conference again this year. The conference coincides with CEDLA’s 60th anniversary so we have a double anniversary. The 2024 conference is our largest ever with some 450 delegates, and close to 100 panels and roundtables across eight themes, including race and ethnicity, climate change, violence, and new methodologies. The papers showcase the diversity and disciplinary breadth of Latin American Studies, ranging from literature, cultural studies, visual culture, anthropology, politics, history, development studies, geography, and gender studies. There will also be networking meetings for early career academics and historians as well as a publishing workshop for our postgraduate members. We are delighted to welcome Rachel Sieder (CIESAS, Mexico), whose keynote lecture on the first conference day is entitled: Law’s Ambiguity: Social movements, judicialization and lawfare in Latin America. Our sincere thanks go to Barbara Hogenboom, Julienne Weegels and the rest of the SLAS2024 conference team for their excellent work!

The conference is always the high point of the SLAS calendar, and we hope you find it intellectually stimulating and a welcome opportunity to meet other Latin Americanists socially. 2023 saw our first ever SLAS conference on the island of Ireland and the first conference that was held back-to-back in the same location as the PILAS conference. Although I was unable to attend the conference, I know it was a great success and I would like to take the opportunity to thank last year’s conference organisers again, Sarah Bowskill, Tori Holmes, and Ricki O’Rawe. Future conferences are planned for Bristol (10th & 11th April 2025), Leeds (2026) and Sheffield. If you are interested in hosting the SLAS conference in the future, feel free to get in touch. You can find out more about what is involved [on our website](https://www.slasuk.org/events).

The Treasurer’s report provides a detailed account of our financial situation. Our financial position continues to be good, despite the challenges facing subject associations in the UK. SLAS, like many other subject associations, relies for most of its income on the revenues of subscriptions to BLAR. As a result of the transition to open access publishing, these revenues are declining. Our response to these challenges has been to make several changes in the way our journal is run, and we will be reviewing the SLAS budget so that our finances are sustainable. Our priority is to continue to support our members and the field of Latin American Studies with our grants and activities. Our outgoing Treasurer, Jannine Poletti-Hughes, has done an excellent job reorganising the SLAS finances and streamlining our processes. I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Jannine for her excellent work in this role, leaving SLAS in an excellent position to face the future. We also remain very grateful for the support of our members and the revenue generated by BLAR.

The Bulletin of Latin American Research continues to be a cornerstone of our Society's work. As detailed in the 2023 President’s AGM and Coordinating Editor’s reports, the journal has undergone significant changes. We are already seeing positive results in the 2023 publisher’s report: there has been an increase in submissions and article downloads as well as a faster process from submission to publication, which greatly benefits our authors. After the success of the special issue with short articles on [COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/14709856/2020/39/S1), the editors are now finalising another special issue on Latin America and the war in Ukraine. These special issues reflect the editorial team’s effort to introduce flexible article formats. We would like to thank the outgoing editor, Ed King, for all his hard work to support the journal and I would like to welcome three new editors: Agustin Diz, Rebecca Jarman and Silvia Posocco. Javier Pérez-Osorio has done an excellent job posting on behalf of BLAR on Twitter/X and LinkedIn, leading to a greater visibility of the journal and our authors. We are also very grateful to Carole Concha Bell, who has been coordinating SLAS content on social media and you’re welcome to [contact Carole](https://www.slasuk.org/contact) if you’d like to publicise publications or events via the SLAS social media accounts. These changes would not have been possible without Juan Pablo Ferrero as the journal’s Coordinating Editor. We are immensely grateful to Juan for his management of the journal during a turbulent transition and his vision. Finally, we would also like to thank our publishing partners at Wiley for their dedication and support.

[Postgraduates in Latin American Studies (PILAS)](https://www.slasuk.org/pilas), our postgraduate branch, has had another successful year under the leadership of Ana Lucía Peláez Echeverría.They have organised work-in-progress sessions, a postgraduate publishing workshop, and the PILAS day at SLAS this year. This is the second time the PILAS conference is held back-to-back with the SLAS conference. The rationale for this is that the PILAS Committee increasingly consists of postgraduate students from multiple universities, which means that organising the PILAS conference in the same location may be easier, although a separate conference continues to be an option. This year’s PILAS day on *Research on/from Latin America* has a very exciting programme with 16 panels, a round table and a keynote lecture by Amalia Campos-Delgado. I would like to thank Ana Lucía and her team for a great programme and all their fantastic work this year. I would also like to thank Catriona McAllister for her support and for acting as a point of contact on the SLAS Committee. Finally, we encourage postgraduate members to consider applying for the 2024-2025 PILAS Committee.

The humanities and social sciences are facing turbulent times across the world. SLAS actively participates in these discussions in forums such as the [British Academy’s Humanities and Social Sciences Learned Societies and Subject Associations Network](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/policy/policy-committees/) (LSSAN), [Alliance of Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics Subject Associations UK (AMLUK)](https://university-council-for-languages.org/amluk/), the [United Kingdom Council for Area Studies Associations (UKCASA)](https://www.ukcasa.ac.uk/), and the [Arts & Humanities Alliance (AHA)](https://www.artsandhumanitiesalliance.org/). Over the past year, these discussions were dominated by the ongoing threats of job losses, restructuring, and department closures in the arts and humanities. Another important topic is our response to reforms of the Research Excellent Framework (REF) and the proposals to expand open access publishing. Our participation allows us to contribute to national and international debates about the future of Latin American Studies as well as to support areas that are under threat. I want to thank members of SLAS and the [Standing Conference of Latin American Studies (SCLAS)](https://www.slasuk.org/standing-conference) for their input. I am very grateful to Thea Pitman (SLAS President, 2021-2023) for her fantastic work coordinating our responses as co-chair of the AHA and chair of the Standing Conference.

We welcome our new Committee members Yaniedys Arencibia Coloma, Geoff Maguire and Penny Miles.Cara Levey and Rebecca Ogden will be sharing the SLAS Secretary role and Karol Valderrama-Burgos and Catriona McAllister will be co-opted to take on the Treasurer role.

We would like to express our gratitude to outgoing committee member Pete Watson for his contributions to SLAS, particularly to the early career resources section on our website. I would like to thank all the committee members, officers, and volunteers for their dedication and hard work. Finally, Jannine Poletti-Hughes is stepping down as Treasurer and Eamon McCarthy as Secretary after six years in the role. It’s no exaggeration to say that we couldn’t have done this without you, and we are immensely grateful for your efforts.

I hope you have a productive and enjoyable conference!

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1. Our thanks go to past SLAS President Jens Hentschke (2015-17) for gathering this information and compiling this section of the website. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted from Nikki Craske and David Lehmann, 'Fifty Years of Research in Latin American Studies in the UK', *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, 72 (April 2002), 73-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Marieke Riethof and Richard G. Smith, ‘Researching Latin America in Liverpool: Transnational Connections of Hope and Solidarity’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 100, no. 10 (November 2023): 1082, https://doi.org/10.3828/bhs.2023.73. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Annual General Meeting for the Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS) held at the University of Southampton, 29 March 1974. D782/3/1 – Minutes of the AGMs of SLAS – 29 March 1973–9 April 1979. SLAS archives, University of Liverpool Special Collections & Archives. The SLAS archive contains eight boxes with records between the early 1960s and 2006 so there is potential for further research using this collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)