

President's Report to SLAS AGM, Winchester, 23rd March 2018

I'd like to start by extending to you all a very warm welcome to our AGM. The AGM marks an important opportunity for the Society's officers and the BLAR editorial team to provide an account of the Society's activities over the last 12 months, as well as a forum for questions arising therefrom.

Having been elected last year, I am pleased to offer my first report as President, and begin by acknowledging my considerable debt to my predecessor, Jens Hentschke of Newcastle University, whose tireless work on behalf of the Society ensured that I have found myself representing an organisation in good health.

The annual conference is always the high point in SLAS's calendar, providing an event that is as stimulating intellectually as it is rewarding socially. Memories of last year's conference in Glasgow remain vivid on both fronts, and I take this opportunity to thank again Mo Hume, Eamon McCarthy, Karen Siegel, Beth Pearson and their team for a hugely successful event.

It is a pleasure to be here in Winchester, as the SLAS conference returns to the University of Southampton for the first time since 1992. This year's conference is well under way and brings together an impressive array of over 180 speakers from four continents organised into 43 panels that span sociology, literary and visual culture studies, economics, politics, history, geography, international relations, development studies and digital media. Others take a national focus to concentrate on single countries, including Brazil, Ecuador and Chile, while others explore the nature of Latin American Studies itself. Still others provide interdisciplinary, international approaches, such as the panels exploring the extractive industries and sport. We are delighted to welcome Professor Carmen Diana Deere as our keynote speaker: her broad experience of teaching, researching and publishing in the US, Latin America and beyond, as well as her position as a Past President of LASA, make her presence a perfect fit with the conference theme and with the Society's desire to build on its international collaborations. The plenary roundtable sessions that will close the conference also promise much on this front. Of course, none of this happens on its own, and we are all indebted to the efforts of Ana Margheritis and her helpers for bringing everything – and all of us – together. This is also an opportunity to acknowledge the institutional support provided by the University of Southampton and the School of Advanced Study's LAGlobal project, as well as the long-standing support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Wiley. Thank you all.

I am pleased to announce that next year's conference will be held at the University of Leicester, to which we will return following previous SLAS conferences there in 1969 and 1976. I suspect things there have changed somewhat since then: we look forward to finding out under the guidance of Clara Garavelli and Emma Staniland. If you would be interested in exploring the possibility of hosting the SLAS conference in the future, do make contact

with any of the current committee, and we will be pleased to discuss how we can support you.

Most of you will have used the SLAS website before coming to Winchester; indeed the conference page on the website was visited over 3000 times in the last few months. The website had a total of 8400 users in the last year, dominated by users from the UK (42%) and US (17%), although Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Spain and Colombia provided the next greatest numbers of visitors, each constituting 2-5% of total visitors. Interestingly, Russia – which had almost equalled the US for visits last year – dropped off the chart, but it is encouraging to note that India is now a presence in our top 10 sources of visitors. After the homepage and the conference page, the grants pages, BLAR and the joining page were the most visited, each with around 1000 visits during the year. We have started discussions and plans to develop the website to make it more of a focus for rolling and regular news.

As many of you will know, we have a very productive relationship with Wiley, who publish BLAR and manage our memberships. As the Treasurer's report shows, this relationship with Wiley makes a major contribution to the Society's financial wellbeing, especially in the last 12 months, which have delivered a 'golden handshake' as part of our decision to renew our agreement with them. Our liaison team at Wiley, ably led by Lizzie Brophy, has been busy developing campaigns to boost the profile of BLAR, and joined us to discuss such matters at our June committee meeting. BLAR has moved this year from 4 to 5 issues, increased its impact factor to 0.958 and has risen to 14 (of 69) in the Area Studies journal ranking, and to second among journals focusing on Latin America. A BLAR app is almost ready for launching and will make access to articles easier across a range of interfaces. Thanks to Jasmine Gideon for her ongoing work as BLAR coordinating editor, to the indefatigable Ken LeStrange and to the rest of the BLAR editorial team. Membership of SLAS stood at 347 by the end of 2017, a drop of 1 since Dec 2016, and we hope those who are not current members will be spurred to join and receive the considerable benefits of membership. Work is ongoing with Wiley to ensure that our use of members' personal data complies with the new EU General Data Protection Regulation that will come into force in May.

What do we do with all that income from Wiley and memberships? The Treasurer's report will provide the details for the past year, but over the last decade we have made awards totalling £54k to 57 Latin American scholars from 12 countries and have been delighted to welcome them to the conference to exchange understandings and perspectives. During that period we have also supported post-graduate students through bursaries to attend the SLAS conference and overseas conferences, as well as to undertake fieldwork in Latin America, to the tune of some £150k. The final thread of major financial support that SLAS offers is its seminar and conference programme, which has provided some £40k over the last 10 years to fund almost 50 one-and two-day research events across the UK. We have agreed that in future membership will be a pre-requisite for access to the various SLAS funding opportunities. And we must not forget the annual Blakemore Prize for the best

essay by a post-graduate student, which this year is awarded to Juan del Nido for his excellent study "Uber in Buenos Aires: The Populist Persuasion of Algorithmic Management".

SLAS is also proud of its association with PILAS, our post-graduate wing, which we support in financial and logistical terms, with the President of PILAS a full member of the SLAS committee. The 2017 PILAS conference in Leeds over two days in June was a great success in terms of quantity and quality of speakers, and was fitting testament to the superb efforts of Lourdes, Jesús, Valentina and Pete as the outgoing PILAS committee. The current committee has followed their multi-institution model, bringing together PhD students from Liverpool and Manchester. Richard, Jo and their team held an event in Manchester earlier this month (March 2018) exploring Latin American archives and collections in conjunction with the British Library, have a PILAS lunch here in Winchester devoted to getting published, while what is shaping up to be an exciting 2018 PILAS conference will take place in June at the University of Liverpool. PILAS has proved adept at using social media: their excellent twitter feed has over 1,000 followers and they have almost 300 Facebook followers. We congratulate PILAS on its ongoing success and look forward to the 2018 conference.

As President of SLAS I have represented us in the context of national organisations and associations, notably the UK Conference of Area Studies Associations and the Arts and Humanities Alliance. I am also pleased to welcome Professor Claire Taylor, president-elect of the AHGBI, to our conference, and look forward to working with her over the year ahead. On behalf of SLAS I have made nominations for membership to four REF sub-panels and supported the applications of two Chairs of REF sub-panels, both of which were successful. I have also written letters of support for projects related to the region and in cases where posts are under threat as a result of restructuring. A significant development has been SLAS take over the running of the Standing Conference of Latin American Studies in the UK. We are grateful to Jens Hentschke and Caroline Williams, as past Presidents of SLAS, for leading on this and to Jens for chairing the first meeting of this body in November. Further afield, I represented SLAS at a meeting in Angers of presidents of European societies for the study of Latin America with a view to the creation of a European research network.

I will close by thanking my colleagues on the SLAS committee, whose commitment over the last year has ensured the smooth running of the Society and its activities. I would especially like to mark our gratitude to Sarah Bowskill, who is standing down as SLAS Secretary after a sterling stint of 6 years, and to Marieke Riethof, who is stepping down from the committee. And thanks finally to Tony Karcia for his work as the Independent Examiner of the Society's finances.

Thank you all for attending the AGM and for your attention. Enjoy the rest of the conference.