

48th Annual SLAS Conference

University of Sheffield

Conference Report

Introduction

The 2012 Conference took place at the University of Sheffield from Wednesday 18th – Friday 20th April. The timing was moved a little from the pre-Easter slot it has often occupied to avoid being in close proximity to the AHGBI conference and to experiment with a conference held during the week. This was the last week of the Easter vacation in Sheffield, so availability of rooms and staff was good, but differential vacation periods meant that some institutions had returned to teaching during this week, which doubtless affected attendance in some instances.

Planning for the conference began in March 2011 with a meeting of colleagues with teaching and research interests in Latin America, based variously in the Faculties of Arts and Humanities and of Social Sciences. At this meeting we agreed that the conference would be held on campus in the Jessop quarter, the base of Arts and Humanities Departments, close to the city centre. This decision was taken largely on practical grounds: the University's conference and events team could manage preparations for the conference for us, including rooms and catering, but this would be several miles to the west of the city centre in an area of student halls of residence. Crucially, there would be only very limited accommodation available on site (the move to partnership with a private provider has led to year-long contracts for students, so no rooms to be filled during vacations) and distances from hotels in the city centre made this unattractive. The Arts and Humanities quarter, with good access on public transport, and in easy walking distance of a range of hotels, could provide a good catering space (which also hosted publishers' exhibitions) and well-equipped seminar rooms. It was agreed that we would provide evening meals as part of the conference package, and we used two nearby restaurants for these: dinner on Weds evening was a more informal, Latin-themed event, with a live band; the conference dinner on Thursday was a little more formal, but both came in at under £30/ head, including some drinks.

To enable travelling time to and from the conference, it was decided to open registration at lunchtime on Weds 18th and to close the conference after lunch on Friday 20th. We would seek to have two plenary sessions: one a more traditional lecture and the other a discussion-style format. The registration desk was manned by a team of post-graduate helpers, who provided outstanding support in preparing various aspects of the conference. Payment to these helpers was included in the budget.

Accommodation was not provided as part of the conference package, but we worked with Sheffield City Council's events team to provide a dedicated webpage to which we could link and through which a range of types of accommodation could be booked.

We set up only a minimum presence for the conference in the website of the Department of Hispanic Studies and used the SLAS website as the main platform for information about the

conference. The SLAS e-mail distribution list was also very useful as a means of communication. Christy's support in all of this was much appreciated.

Panels and papers

In an attempt to encourage a greater degree of interdisciplinary discussion, a single call for panels and papers was issued in June, with a deadline for submission at the end of October. The idea was to take panels, as has traditionally been the case, but also to add papers to those panels at this stage, as well as constitute panels from unattached papers submitted at this time. It was hoped that this would offer greater involvement to younger or less established scholars who may feel inhibited at the prospect of seeking to join pre-constituted panels. On the recommendation of members of the SLAS committee involved in previous conferences, we asked that panel convenors be SLAS members, thereby seeking to avoid more speculative panel proposals, which experience has shown are the most likely to be withdrawn.

The call for panels and papers was broad, and invited panel proposals dealing with any theme, period or country. By the end of November, a total of 140 papers had been organised into 25 panels, including 8 that had been constituted from papers submitted individually. A total of some 40 papers were not included in the programme, mostly as they did not fit into any of the panels proposed, or with other papers submitted. Some panels had capacity to receive another speaker to make up two sessions, and an invitation was circulated to this effect via panel convenors. In the end 22 panels took place involving around 110 papers: 3 panels were allocated 3 x 90-minute sessions; the remainder were allocated one or two 90-minute sessions (12 x 2, 7 x 1). We ran six/ seven parallel sessions Weds afternoon – Friday morning, with all venues within 100 metres of the Jessop West Exhibition Space, which was used for all daytime catering (tea/coffee breaks throughout and buffet lunches for Thursday and Friday were included in the conference package).

Plenary Speakers

Given the London Olympics in 2012 and Sheffield's status as City of Sport, Professor Joseph Arbena (founding figure of Latin American sports history) was invited to deliver the plenary lecture. The FCO kindly provided support for his visit, which covered his travel costs (transatlantic flights, airport taxi) and accommodation in Sheffield.

Prize-winning Peruvian author Santiago Roncagliolo, now based in Barcelona, agreed to take part in an interview and Q&A around writing and politics in Latin America. Unfortunately, an ear infection in late March meant that he was unable to travel. At short notice, a round table on 'Latin American Independence 200 Years Later' was organised with participation from four excellent conference delegates, whose flexibility and support was hugely appreciated.

Registrations

At an early stage a generic conference e-mail account was set up for sending and receiving correspondence relating to the conference (slas2012@sheffield.ac.uk). This worked well and was regularly accessed by the team of PG helpers, who were tasked with specific areas of responsibility.

Registration was arranged through the University's online shop and was open from February through to mid-March, but a check of registrations against accepted speakers

after the deadline revealed that some 20 speakers were yet to register. On the whole, however, panel convenors proved to be an effective means of communicating with speakers, and to receive updates as to participants and withdrawals. Despite their willing assumption of this role, a small number of speakers withdrew after the deadline and a few delegates continued to want to register right up to the conference itself.

The online registration offered options for SLAS members and non-members, and for Full Fee and PG/ unwaged as follows:

	Full Conf. ■	18 April ■	19 April ■	20 April
SLAS member	£170	£45	£70	£45
Non-member	£195	£70	£105	£70
PG/ unwaged SLAS member	£100	£25	£40	£25
PG/ unwaged non-member	£110	£35	£50	£35

Notes: ■ = All meals & coffee breaks
 ■ = Not including evening meal

A surprising number of non-members preferred to pay the supplement rather than join SLAS.

A couple of delegates had difficulties with the online shop, but in general it worked well. Delegates were asked to pre-order their menu selection for the conference dinner, and to indicate special dietary requirements, both of which saved considerable time during the conference. Another benefit was that it automatically provided each delegate with a receipt they could print off; we had to provide a handful of receipts at registration for those who paid on the day. We did not add a late registration fee and were, after the accounts had settled to indicate a surplus, able to reimburse the very small number who withdrew at the last minute.

Delegates and Fees

We estimated our income on the basis of registrations for recent SLAS conferences and on the basis of an anticipated 55:45 ratio of full fee:PG/ unwaged. This followed an observation of Caroline Williams in the 2010 conference report, and proved to be far closer to the mark than previous norms of PGs accounting for around a third of registrations. As delegate fees represent the great majority of income (around 80%), getting this proportion right is one of the keys to a reasonably accurate budget prediction.

A good number of PGs attended the PILAS lunch that was organised in an adjacent room to the buffet lunch on Friday 20th.

Ahead of the conference, we circulated an e-mail to all delegates inviting requests for *constancias*. A fair number of non-UK delegates requested these, which were prepared in advance and included in conference packs.

Other Income

Wiley Blackwell sponsored the wine reception on the Thursday evening, which was tied in with the launch of the latest publication in their book series, and the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office funded the travel and accommodation costs of Professor Arbena. The Faculties of Arts and of Social Science sponsored the wine reception on Weds 18th, and the pro-vice chancellors from each Faculty attended, with one giving a welcome speech. In addition, income came from 14 publishers, 7 having exhibition stands at the conference, 7 with leaflets in the conference pack.

SLAS 2012 Annual Conference | The University of Sheffield, 18-20 April

PROGRAMME	
Weds 18 th April	
11.30 – 13.30	SLAS Cttee meeting
12:00 – 13.15	Registration
13.30 – 15.00	Parallel panels (7)
15.00 – 15.30	Tea / Coffee
15.30 – 17.00	Parallel panels (7)
17.15 – 18.45	AGM and University wine reception
19.15	Hot buffet at Las Iguanas (with live band)

Thurs 19 th April	
09.15 – 10.45	Parallel panels (7)
10.45 – 11.15	Tea / Coffee
11.15 – 12.45	Parallel panels (7)
12.45 – 13.30	Lunch
13.30 – 15.00	BLAR open meeting
15.00 – 15.30	Tea / Coffee
15.30 – 17.00	Plenary lecture (Prof. Joe Arbena, 'Sport in Latin America: A Funny Old Game')
17.30 – 18.30	BLAR/ Wiley Blackwell wine reception and book launch
19.00	Conference dinner at Antibo

Friday 20 th April	
09.30 – 11.00	Parallel panels (7)
11.00 – 11.30	Tea / Coffee
11.30 – 12.45	Plenary round table (Political and Cultural Independence in Latin America Two Centuries Later)
12:45 – 13.30	Lunch and PILAS lunch
	Conference closes

Conclusions

Organising a conference for this number of people is a major undertaking. Having a good team in place to share the load and responsibility is essential, and my 'grupo de apoyo' of PG helpers proved to be outstanding. In the event, everything ran very smoothly and delegates seemed to enjoy themselves, with a pleasing number of positive comments in terms of the organisation, venue and catering. One of the advantages of organising SLAS is that the great majority of delegates are pretty relaxed and reasonable: unpleasant incidents were thankfully few, and mostly related to the acceptance – or otherwise – of papers and panels. The quality (and quantity) of food undoubtedly made an important contribution to the enjoyment of the conference, both during the day and in the evening, and finding suitable venues that would enable the inclusion of evening meals in the conference package was a task that was well worth the effort.

Our two major departures from previous SLAS conferences were the mid-week timing and the single deadline for panels and papers. The former was well-received by many, but may prove problematic in terms of finding a week in which all institutions are in vacation. The latter was effective in generating new and interdisciplinary contact and in enabling panels to be put together from papers submitted 'unattached'. This generated an extra layer of effort for the conference organisers, however, and also generated several heated responses from those whose papers were not included.

Future conference organisers will decide if such initiatives are to be continued: I wish them luck!

David Wood – Conference Organiser