

SLAS AGM Report – 18 April 2015

A warm welcome to everyone and thank you for attending this Annual General Meeting.

As is customary, we have four reports to present to this AGM, mine as President, that of the SLAS Secretary (Sarah Bowskill), the Treasurer's report (which I will present as John Fisher was unable to stay until today), and the report of the BLAR editor, Jasmine Gideon. We promise to be brief so as to allow for questions or additional matters to be raised under AOB before the panels resume for the day.

On behalf of the Society, I would like to begin by thanking the Aberdeen committee – and Patience Schell in particular – for organising what is shaping up to be an excellent conference, and to all the helpers and other University staff who have contributed to making our stay in this lovely setting so enjoyable. The theme of 'Autonomy', chosen at a time when Scotland was leading up to the 2014 referendum, has clearly resonated with the SLAS membership – some 12 panels (several double panels) engage with the theme from a variety of perspectives, showing how central issues relating to 'autonomy' are to debates in and about Latin America today. I look forward to attending a few more panels once the AGM business is completed.

This has been my second (and therefore my last) year as SLAS President, and I am pleased to be handing over to my soon-to-be-announced successor a Society that is thriving. Those of you who were present at the last two AGMs may remember the concerns that were expressed about the potential impact of Open Access on the finances of SLAS, given that the vast majority of our income derives from a share of the profits from subscriptions to the *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, which is paid to us by Wiley. For learned societies dependent on journal subscriptions for their income, the principal issue of concern was the effect that a decline in revenue as a result of OA would have on our ability to fund our programme of grants.

While we cannot of course discount possible future impacts on the Society, I can report that for a second year OA has not affected us in any meaningful way. Wiley's annual report for 2014 shows that only one article was published in BLAR through the Online Open programme last year, that over 3,700 institutions purchased access to the latest content, and that income from subscriptions has actually increased (by 2%). The finances of the Society are therefore in a healthy state, guaranteeing that we will be able to continue to fund events and activities, the grants that we make available to Latin American scholars to attend the annual conference, and most especially the vitally important help we give to our own postgraduate community in the form of travel grants, conference grants and bursaries, and the contribution we make to support the activities of PILAS (Postgraduates in Latin American Studies).

Membership remains steady at 418. This represents a slight dip compared with last year (428), especially among student members, but an increase of 32 in total since 2012. The number of full SLAS members has increased by 20 over the past two years (by 6 in 2014). While the majority of our members are UK-based (83%), 17% of our members are from outside – primarily Europe and the US.

Crucial to the future of SLAS is the work of PILAS, which this year has been run by a group of postgraduate students from London, Cambridge, Newcastle, and Sheffield. In February they organised a successful ‘Fieldwork in Latin America’ Day, hosted by Queen Mary University, and covering a wide range of fieldwork activities in sessions led by postgraduates and academics with experience of conducting research in Latin America. Jasmine Gideon, the BLAR editor, was one of the speakers. Their annual conference will take place at Cambridge University on 23 and 24 June. The theme is ‘Latin America on the World Stage’, and the two keynote lectures will be delivered by James Dunkerley, Professor of Latin American Politics at Queen Mary, University of London, and Mónica Moreno Figueroa, who is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Downing College. We thank the members of the PILAS committee for all their work on behalf of the postgraduate community, which includes maintaining a very useful Facebook page (with over 400 members) and a Twitter feed (with over 300 followers). We wish them luck with their conference, and look forward to hearing their report in due course.

Besides the support offered to the postgraduate community, SLAS has continued to work on behalf of members in other ways as well. Web developer Christy Palmer has further developed the website, concentrating this year on the grants and prizes section (applications forms have been revised and updated). The statistics on visits to the website are impressive for a society with a membership of a little over 400: over 1,500 so far this month alone, with over 3,000 different page views (primarily grants and prizes, events, BLAR and the newsletter). Of these just over 40% were accessed from the US. Christy also produces our monthly newsletter, which is an excellent resource for either advertising or keeping up to date with funding opportunities, new research tools and online resources, publications, calls for papers, and of course events. We would encourage members to make full use of the newsletter, by contacting Christy directly.

One of my responsibilities as SLAS President is to participate in the Standing Conference, the forum for centres for Latin American Studies in the UK, and to attend the meetings of UKCASA, the coordinating committee of area studies associations, of which Sarah Bowskill is Secretary. Last year having been dominated by the REF, the REF was the subject of the latest meeting of UKCASA, which took place in London in February. Bruce Brown, Chair of Main Panel D, gave a useful presentation looking back over REF 2014 and forward to the 2020 exercise. Peter

Gatrell, Chair of Sub-panel 27 for Area Studies, also gave a presentation. While acknowledging the decline of Area Studies as reflected in submissions to the sub-panel panel (23 in 2014, compared with 53 in 2008), Peter Gatrell made a strong case for the importance of area studies – the knowledge of the language, the deep engagement with countries or regions that scholars in area studies bring to their research, have the capacity – he said – to produce work that is transformative and changes lives. UKCASA will be taking forward discussions in the near future, and we, along with other area studies associations, will participate in those.

A further task that falls to me is to line up venues for future conferences. I can announce that SLAS 2016 will take place in Liverpool as next year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the then Centre for Latin American Studies. The dates will shortly be posted on the website. We are in discussions about the 2017 conference, and hope to be able to announce the venue for that event quite soon.

This has been another successful year for SLAS. In great part this is due to the commitment of the members of the committee, who give their time to attend meetings, read application forms, and more generally ensure the efficient running of the Society. As I stand down I would like to thank all of my committee colleagues for their efforts, and for the support and advice they have given me in the two years I have served as President. On behalf of SLAS, I would also like to thank Paul Henderson, who acts as auditor of our accounts.

All that remains, then, is for me to thank you all again for coming to the AGM, and to say that I very much hope that you enjoy what's left of this excellent conference.

Caroline Williams
SLAS President, 2013-15