

## **SLAS President's AGM Report**

Jens R Hentschke (Newcastle) at Liverpool University in April 2016

A very warm welcome to the AGM, during which the SLAS President, Treasurer, and Secretary, and the BLAR coordinating editor always report about key aspects of our work over the past year.

For me, this is my first report as president, and I would like to thank, once again, my predecessor, Caroline Williams, for her sterling work and continuous support.

The annual conference is the high point in SLAS's calendar. I would like to use this opportunity to thank again Patience Schell and her team at Aberdeen for making SLAS2015 such a successful and enjoyable event.

This year we have returned to the University of Liverpool, which organised several conferences in the past, always with great success, and I still remember well the 1994 meeting, which was the first I ever attended after moving to the UK as a young academic. 2016 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Liverpool's Centre for Latin American Studies, and it is therefore, as the organisers highlight, an appropriate moment to reflect on how we can reposition Area Studies in a fast-changing world and an equally dynamic UK academic landscape, but remain true to our mission of building bridges of communication and intellectual exchange. The keynote speakers have shown very impressively both the challenges to the study of Latin America in Europe and the region's agency. Several of the 33 panels and 150 papers presented at this conference very explicitly address the theme and explore, for instance, the links between global history and area studies, past and future field work, socio-cultural and environmental studies, indigenous worlds and the framing of national Law, and alternative pedagogies on both sides of the Atlantic. On behalf of SLAS, I would like to congratulate colleagues at Liverpool on their anniversary and thank the organising committee for all their hard work to make SLAS2016 such an excellent conference.

It is one of the President's responsibilities to find venues for future conferences. I can announce that next year we will meet at Glasgow, where Mo Hume and Eamon McCarthy are already well advanced in their preparations. Moreover, we have received declarations of interest from Southampton and Leicester to host the event in 2018 and 2019, respectively. SLAS would like to thank colleagues for their commitment.

One of my first tasks after taking over the presidency consisted in an update and overhaul of the web site with the help of freelance web developer Christy Palmer. We know how important the web site is for our members. In this past year, it has had 22,272 visits, of which 16,209 were new. 42.3 percent of users are based in the UK, 16.5 percent in the US and 4.4 percent in Brazil. One of the top five pages visited is the grants section, which needed to be slightly revised this year.

It was also important to list the names of grant recipients to the degree that we could trace them back in previous reports. Since 2007, SLAS has funded 59 Latin American scholars from 14 countries with almost £50,000. Their contribution to the conferences is highly appreciated. In the same period, our support of UK-based postgraduate students and postdocs with bursaries to attend the SLAS conference and with grants to

present their research at conferences overseas and carry out field work in the region amounts to approximately £150,000. 358 young researchers have benefited from this support, sometimes at a crucial point during their studies or when between jobs. If you scan the names, you will see that many grant recipients have pursued an academic career, and some are now full professors. SLAS has also funded and co-funded workshops, conferences, and series of thematically related seminars at many British universities; since 2009, we have invested ca. £30,000 in 42 events. Some workshops, like Jasmine Gideon's on 'Living with Life-Long Exile' in January this year, had real 'impact' beyond academia. Today almost one third of SLAS's annual budget is spent on the various grant schemes, and assessing the increasing number of applications has become an important part of the committee's work. We would like to congratulate this year's recipients of bursaries.

When overhauling the web site, it became clear that the Constitution and Standing Orders had not been updated since 2006. Amendments we suggest do not indicate any new direction in the work of SLAS, but acknowledge changes that have taken place during the past decade, such as shifts to e-voting and from a hardcopy newsletter to the high-quality and much visited e-newsletter, which Christy Palmer now compiles for us every month during term time. We owe a debt of gratitude to Christy.

Our postgraduate community runs its own association, PILAS, which is supported by the Society. It currently has 409 members, and we have encouraged them to also join SLAS. This year, PILAS has an enthusiastic Newcastle-based committee that is headed by Laura Sariego-Kluge and Diana Morales Arcila and has already organised a visit to the British Library and participated in a workshop at the Institute for Latin American Studies in London. The 2016 PILAS Conference will take place at Newcastle on 29 and 30 June on the theme 'Transformations'. The two keynotes will be delivered by Sarah Radcliff from Cambridge and Nina Laurie from St Andrews. 71 students from the UK, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, representing 15 disciplines, will present papers in 20 panels, but there will also be a photo exhibition, a panel on publishing in *BLAR*, and a discussion on the relationship between policy and academia. Laura will have benefitted from attending a meeting of the Parliamentary Outreach Committee that focused on the spending of the international development budget. I will represent SLAS at the conference and am looking forward to it. It should also be said that PILAS is ahead of the Society in the use of social media: its Facebook community has increased from 400 to 560 members since last year, and its Twitter feed from ca. 300 to 395. At this year's Liverpool conference, we also have, for the first time, a 'PILAS at SLAS' panel on 'Breaking Down Conflict: Understanding and Reframing the Latin American Experience'.

SLAS has a very productive relationship with Wiley Blackwell, which manages subscriptions to the *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, i.e., the membership fee, and our share of profits from the sale of *BLAR* constitutes most of the Society's income. Some of you will remember our profound concerns about the government's Open Access agenda. A shift to funding the production of journals through author-processing fees, rather than subscriptions, would have undermined the financial viability of learned societies. These threats could be avoided; no article was published under Online Open in 2015. Therefore, our finances remain healthy and have even increased. Currently SLAS has 411 members, of which 332 are based in the UK, but of different nationalities, 36 in Europe, and 27 in North America. 47 percent of our

members are students. 4,135 institutions had paid access to BLAR, and another 5,416 institutions in the developing world received free or low-cost access. We also posted an advert to join SLAS on the newsletters of the European subject associations. SLAS and BLAR editors have also agreed to award an annual prize of £200 for the best article published in the journal every year, similar to *The Americas* and *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. We are very pleased that Gemma Johnson from Wiley Blackwell has been able to come to Liverpool, and after this AGM we will discuss how we can further develop our constructive partnership.

SLAS is very keen to foster further research collaboration with sister associations in continental Europe and beyond. The panel at SLAS's golden jubilee conference in London that brought together representatives of the Dutch NALACS, the French IHEAL, and the German ADLAF showed that we face similar challenges but employ different means to meet them. We can therefore learn from each other and should also engage in joint projects. ADLAF returned our invitation and invited me to a podium discussion in Berlin to mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June 2015. I have also been appointed to the Advisory Board of the Ibero-American Institute. We are delighted to welcome to this year's conference the Norwegian NorLANet and its chair, Benedicte Bull. I can also report that SLAS has applied for partner status in CLACSO, and we hope for a positive reply within the next weeks.

As President I also represent SLAS at the Standing Conference of Centres of Latin American Studies, which is currently hosted by the Institute of the Americas at UCL, but is looking for a new Chair. SLAS suggested rotating the office with the past president. John Fisher attended the last meeting of UKCASA, the coordinating committee of area studies, and it seems that its new Chair plays a much more active role in representing the entire academic community. I have also corresponded with Peter Mandler, the coordinator of the Arts and Humanities Alliance, an association of learned societies, which originated in the reaction against the EU's misjudged journal ranking and has since addressed issues, such as Open Access, research council priorities, trends in undergraduate recruitment, and REF criteria. SLAS signed the AHA's responses to the government's Green Paper on the TEF and Stern Review of the REF. A problem we will need to tackle collectively is the decreasing visibility of Area Studies in a research landscape that is geared towards the systematic disciplines. SLAS also remains an associate member of the University Council of Modern Languages, and we are currently working with this Council, the Institute for Modern Languages Research, and the AHGBI to support colleagues at several universities who are affected by restructuring plans.

To sum up: this has been another good year for SLAS, and I would like to thank my fellow officers and members of the committee for their support and advice. I have always appreciated the collegiality and good spirit of SLAS colleagues. On behalf of the Society, I would like to thank warmly Cara Levey and James Scorer, who will leave the committee, and Paul Henderson who steps down as auditor of our accounts. We are very pleased to have Tony Kapcia as the new auditor.

Thank you for coming to the AGM and enjoy the rest of the programme.

Jens R Hentschke