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**EDITORIAL****Report from the Editor (2020)**

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This is the final report published on behalf of the current editorial team. The new team, led by Professor Carmen Martínez Novo (University of Florida), will take over the evaluation of manuscripts in January 2021, and it will select articles to be published starting in volume 57 (2022).<sup>1</sup> It has been a great honor to serve as LARR's editor in chief during an era of great transformations. Since 2016, LARR has completed the transition to open access and ended circulation by subscription; it has connected with readers through social networks and a blog; it has created a new LASA award; it has established itself as a top journal for the humanities while preserving its traditional strength in the social sciences; and it has improved its impact factor considerably. Yet important challenges lie ahead.

This report discusses recent changes in our editorial team; analyzes the flow of manuscripts received, editorial decisions made, and articles published in 2019; introduces the winner of the most recent LARR-Pitt Award; and outlines two proposals to confront the main challenges for LARR in the future.

**Editorial Team**

During 2019, the *Latin American Research Review* (LARR) continued to thrive as a top journal thanks to the work of an extraordinary editorial team. I want to thank our editorial team, our authors, and our manuscript reviewers for their unflinching support during the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. LARR has continued its operations without interruption.

At the end of 2019, our associate editors were Xóchitl Bada (sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago), Mónica Espinosa Arango (anthropology, Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia), Claudia Ferman (documentary film review editor, University of Richmond), Michel Gobat (history, University of Pittsburgh), Fabrice Lehoucq (book review editor, University of North Carolina), Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel (literature and cultural studies, University of Miami), José Molinas Vega (economics, Instituto Desarrollo, Paraguay), and Jana Morgan (politics and international relations, University of Tennessee). Our managing editor, Sara Lickey, ran the editorial process.

The past year brought a few changes to our editorial team. After serving as associate editor for politics and international relations since 2016, Flavia Freidenberg (UNAM, México) left LARR due to her demanding academic schedule. In November 2019, Jana Morgan joined as the new editor for the section. Elected as the next LASA president, Gioconda Herrera (FLACSO Ecuador) was unable to continue as associate editor for sociology. In December, Xóchitl Bada joined our editorial team. Constrained by her many duties—we must remember that all editorial positions are voluntary service—Mónica Espinosa Arango left the position as anthropology editor in July 2020. I want to thank Flavia, Gioconda, and Mónica for their strong service to LARR during the past four years.

**Manuscripts Received**

LARR received 245 manuscripts during 2019 and 63 additional manuscripts during the first quarter of 2020. The number of submissions in 2019 represented a decrease (–22%) over the total received in the previous year. This is the first time LARR has experienced a reduction in the number of submissions after

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<sup>1</sup> Carmen Martínez Novo was selected as the new LARR editor in chief for 2021–2025 at the meeting of LASA's Executive Council on May 22–23, 2020.

more than a decade of sustained expansion. It is too soon to conclude whether this part of a larger trend or just an odd year. Our review process has become increasingly demanding, which may dissuade some submissions. LARR also confronts competition from excellent journals that benefit from better editorial technology and prestigious scholarly publishers. We return to this issue in the last section of the report.

Submissions have become increasingly diverse over time. Our editorial team implemented a broad vision for the journal, encouraging submissions on any topic relevant to Latin American studies. In the past, some authors had the perception that LARR would not accept articles unless they tackled problems of “general interest” or “big topics” in the field. This perception discouraged valuable submissions addressing disciplinary debates or covering less-studied countries. Yet in an era of specialized scholarly agendas, in which readers access journal articles through targeted searches rather than by browsing journal issues, the goal of publishing a journal in which all articles appealed to all Latin Americanists seemed unrealistic. By publishing exciting and innovative research in the context of particular disciplinary agendas, we have diversified the profile of LARR.

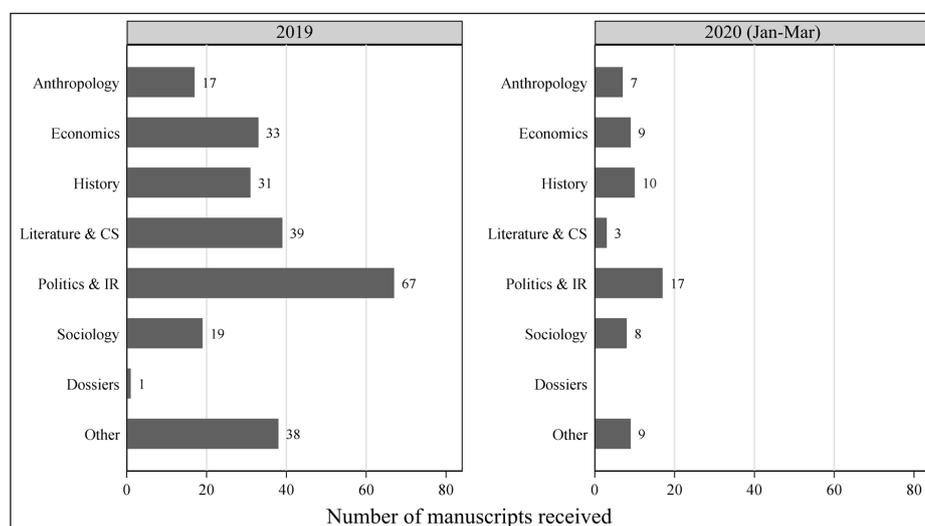
About 60 percent of all regular submissions are in the social sciences, with the remaining 40 percent in the humanities (anthropology, history, or literature and cultural studies). This figure reflects LARR’s growing reputation in the humanities—historically, only about a third of all manuscripts—and it has remained stable in the past couple of years. In 2018, SCOPUS ranked LARR among the top 90 percent of most-cited journals in the categories of Literature and Literary Theory, General Arts and Humanities, and History. The journal now receives a robust stream of submissions covering a growing range of countries, debates, subfields (e.g., Dominican studies, decolonial studies), and interdisciplinary topics in the humanities.

**Figure 1** reports on the number of manuscripts received in 2019 and during the first quarter of this year, by discipline. The most active fields in 2019 were politics and international relations (27 percent of all submissions) and literature and cultural studies (16 percent). The fields of sociology (8 percent) and anthropology (7 percent) declined in 2019 compared to previous years. Approximately 35 percent of all manuscripts received in 2019 were sent for external peer review.

## Decisions Made

The editorial team made 290 final decisions on manuscripts during 2019 (12 percent more than in the previous year) and 74 additional decisions during the first quarter of 2020. **Table 1** classifies those decisions in three groups: rejections after internal editorial review (i.e., desk rejects), rejections after external review (based on referees’ reports), and accepted papers (normally after one or two rounds of revisions). About 14 percent of all final decisions made in 2019 correspond to acceptances, with the rest being desk rejections (59 percent) and papers declined after external review (27 percent).

**Figure 2** displays the average number of days required to reach each type of decision. On average, it took 44 days to reject manuscripts after internal review, 215 days (about seven months) to reject manuscripts after peer review, and 407 days (about fourteen months) to accept articles for publication after revisions. We are aware that the review process should be much faster. Despite our efforts over the past couple of years, these figures have not improved, and we are exploring additional measures to shorten the review time.

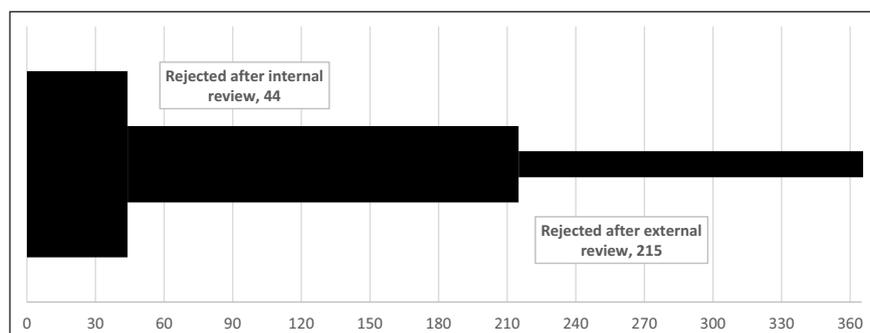


**Figure 1:** Number of submissions, by discipline.

**Table 1:** Final decisions made on manuscripts (%).

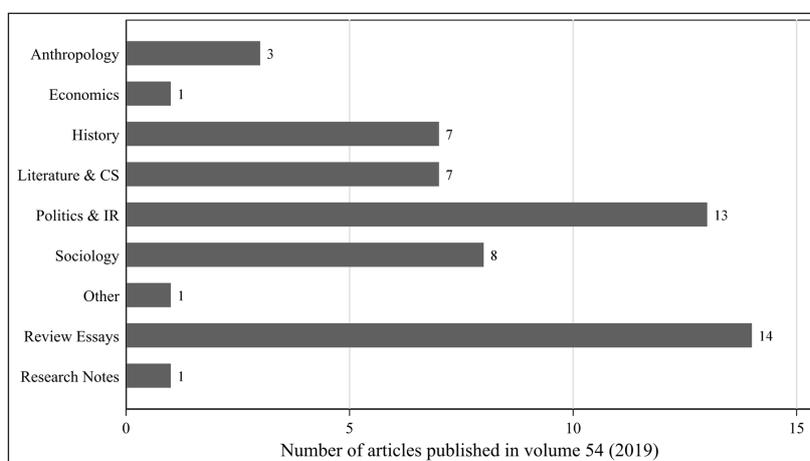
Decisions made	2019	2020*
Reject after internal review	59.0	62.2
Reject after external review	26.9	27.0
Accept	14.1	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Submissions closed	290	74

\* Preliminary figures for January–March.



**Figure 2:** Average number of days required for final decisions on manuscripts.

*Note:* Values reflect the average number of days elapsed from the date of submission. Reduction in flow reflects the percentages in Table 1. Data corresponds to all final decisions made in 2019.



**Figure 3:** Articles in volume 54 (2019), by field.

### Articles Published

Volume 54 contained fifty-five articles (including book review essays) written by eighty-one authors. About 33 percent of the authors were women; 30 percent of the authors were located in Latin America, 7 percent in Europe, and the remaining in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and South Korea. The most frequent Latin American countries of submission were Brazil (15 percent), Argentina (5 percent), and Mexico (5 percent). Irrespective of the manuscripts’ origins, forty-five of the fifty-five published articles were submitted in English, seven in Spanish, and three in Portuguese.

LARR covers a wider range of subjects than most area studies journals. Of thirty-nine research papers published in 2019, 44 percent were in the humanities (anthropology, history, and literature and cultural studies) and 56 percent in the social sciences (economics, political science and international relations, and sociology), with political science, sociology, literature, and history being the most prominent subjects. **Figure 3** displays the number of articles published in each field. LARR also published fourteen book review essays and one research note during this period.

The content of the articles reached a broader audience through our LARR-Panoramas blog, hosted by the University of Pittsburgh. The blog features short essays by the authors of the original papers (<http://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/larr>). Media coordinator Paloma Díaz Lobos (University of Texas at Austin) disseminates LARR contents through Facebook and Twitter (@larrlasa).

The value of LARR's open-access format became evident in early 2020. Due to the crisis created by COVID-19, teachers and students engaged in new forms of distance education across the world, and free access to publications became crucial. This situation also underscored the importance of technological changes for the journal and the need to embrace new technologies—generated at an ever faster rate—in a timely manner. For instance, in March 2020, LARR published a research note with embedded sound and video for the first time in its history (“Sound and Politics: The Audio Archive of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies,” by Bryan Pitts, Yahn Wagner Pinto, and Madeleine Roberts). It is essential to keep in mind changes in the transmission of information and in research formats when choosing LARR's editorial technology, as discussed in the last section of this report.

### **The LARR-Pitt Best Article Award**

The LARR-Pitt Award is presented annually to the best research paper published by the *Latin American Research Review* in its last volume. This year, the award committee selected “Before the Thaw: The Transnational Routes of Cuban Popular Culture” (vol. 54, no. 1), by Albert Sergio Laguna (Yale University) as the best 2019 article.

The award committee was formed by Caitlin Bruce (University of Pittsburgh, USA), Matias Dewey (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Germany), and Mónica Espinosa Arango (chair, Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia). Discussing the contribution of Laguna's paper, the committee noted that “this article on Cuba and its Miami diaspora seeks to understand processes based on continuity and collaboration—focused on transnational routes of popular culture—rather than on political antagonism.... It highlights the predicaments and possibilities of diaspora studies in an interconnected world.”

The LARR-Pitt Award is supported by the University of Pittsburgh to honor its long-standing relationship with the Latin American Studies Association, and it carries a prize of US\$500. We encourage our readers and authors to nominate their favorite articles. The call for nominations remains open throughout the year. The committee that will select the best article for our current volume 55 is formed by Xóchitl Bada (University of Illinois at Chicago), Albert Sergio Laguna (Yale University), and Scott Morgenstern (chair, University of Pittsburgh).

### **Two Proposals to Secure the Future of LARR**

Founded in 1964, LARR has remained at the vanguard of Latin American studies for more than half a century. The journal's commitment to publishing in multiple languages, in a wide range of disciplines, and—more recently—in open-access format reveals a tradition of pluralism and innovation that will be crucial to preserve its position in the years to come.

LARR will confront two important challenges over the next five years: access to better editorial technology and a redefined role in the context of a changing Latin American Studies Association. Those challenges are related, but they deserve distinct treatment. In this concluding section, I advance two proposals to address those issues: an open tender for publishers, and the creation of a LASA publications committee.

#### ***Open Tender for Publishers***

As part of the transition to open access in 2016, the Latin American Studies Association contracted directly with Ubiquity Press to become LARR's publisher. This arrangement seemed convenient at the time because it involved a single provider of services for the emerging Latin American Research Commons (LARC), LASA's platform offering access to publications in the field of Latin American studies. In addition to LARR, LARC hosts independent journals and publishes a book series edited by LARR's former editor in chief Philip Oxhorn (Vancouver Island University, Canada) and Florencia Garramuño (Universidad de San Andrés, Argentina). However, the attempt to bundle all services under a single provider proved to be inefficient from an editorial point of view.

LARR's manuscript management system, for example, has presented recurrent problems, including painfully slow response times, delayed e-mails to authors and reviewers, and a cumbersome interface to record and share anonymous peer reviews. Our authors, reviewers, associate editors, and managing editor have navigated the system with enormous patience. In addition, despite recurrent discussions about the need for an “early view” system, LARR has been unable to prepublish formatted manuscripts before the

formal publication date. Prepublication is now a standard practice in most academic journals. Thus technical limitations have placed LARR at a disadvantage vis-à-vis its competitors hosted by more prestigious academic publishers. The next editorial team should not confront this burden.

The solution for this problem is straightforward: because LARC hosts diverse publications, a single provider may not have all the solutions. LASA can develop a front-end gateway for LARC to direct users to specific publications, and sign agreements with different partners to publish or host specific products. This flexibility will be crucial to sustain a broad menu of open-access publications that includes a traditional venue like LARR (mostly in English), a novel collection of books in Spanish and Portuguese, and a set of journals edited by independent scholars.

In the case of LARR, an open tender for publishing services—called before the end of this year, to benefit the new editorial team—is a necessary step to correct its technological disadvantage. This tender is financially feasible. Until very recently, major academic publishers were reluctant to embrace publications that do not generate subscription revenue. However, the open-access movement is irreversible, and scholarly publishers are exploring new business models. LASA is in position to pioneer a publication agreement that will set a model for interdisciplinary, open-access scholarship for years to come.<sup>2</sup>

### ***LASA's Publications Committee***

The Latin American Studies Association has grown considerably over the years, and its governance—including its relationship with LARR—confronts dynamic challenges. As a scholarly journal, LARR is independent from, but inextricably tied to, LASA's governance structures. LASA officials have no role in editorial decisions made by the journal, but the journal relies on the association for funding, strategic direction, and administrative support. In addition, LARR's editor in chief serves as ex-officio member (with voice but no vote) in LASA's Executive Council (EC) and collaborates with particular tasks, such as selecting the Kalman Silvert Award every year. LASA and LARR have renegotiated the details of this relationship several times over the years.

The creation of the Latin American Research Commons (LARC) introduced new complexity in this relationship. The LARC label refers to two related initiatives: the novel editorial project to publish open-access books from Latin America (let us call it LARC-Books), and the online portal to access scholarly publications—including LARR, LARC-Books, and independent journals (let us call it LARC-Platform). While LARR and LARC-Books have editorial boards, LARC-Platform has no distinct governance structure. (For some practical purposes like admitting new independent journals to the platform, book editors serve double duty.) However, some important decisions made on behalf of the LARC-Platform (like the decision to contract with Ubiquity Press, discussed previously) have major consequences for the life of LARR and for the production of books.

It is crucial that LASA's Executive Council address this looming governance issue. The most transparent solution seems to be the creation of a Publications Committee, with participation of all parties involved. Such a committee could include, for example, LASA's communications director, LARR's editor in chief, the editors of LARC-Books, and a representative of LASA's Executive Council. The committee would have no jurisdiction over editorial decisions of the respective publications, but it would coordinate (rare) policies that affect all publications under the LARC platform. Most important, the committee's deliberations would bring greater transparency to LASA's editorial policies, including annual publication budgets, contracts, and agreements with external partners.<sup>3</sup> LASA's membership dues fund editorial projects that benefit students of Latin America throughout the world. Open-access editorial projects are, no doubt, one of the main reasons to be a proud member of LASA.

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<sup>2</sup> LASA's Executive Council approved an open tender for publishers at its meeting on May 22–23, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> LASA's Executive Council approved the creation of a Publications Committee including a representative of the Executive Council, a representative of LARR, and a representative of LARC, at its meeting on May 22–23, 2020.

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**LARR**

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