

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Open Access to *LARR* for Latin America and the Caribbean

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On behalf of *Latin American Research Review's* Editorial Committee and the Executive Committee of the Latin American Studies Association, I am pleased to announce that, beginning with this issue, anyone residing in Latin America or the Caribbean will be able to access all current and past *LARR* issues free of charge through the LASA and *LARR* Web site. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first among our peer journals to offer this service.

The impetus behind this initiative, which was developed in close collaboration with LASA Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas and the open-access consultant Enrique Mu, came from the 2009 LASA Congress in Rio de Janeiro. The *LARR*-sponsored panel "Publishing Your Research" generated a lively discussion of the value of open-access publications to promoting the free exchange of knowledge. This is particularly true for Latin America and the Caribbean, given the scarcity of resources there. For example, subsequent research showed that only 4 percent of universities in Latin America and the Caribbean had access to all *LARR* issues through their institutional membership to LASA. This very small percentage is complemented by the access that 2.4 percent of these institutions had to back issues of *LARR* through Project MUSE and the 17.7 percent that offered their students and faculty the opportunity to purchase individual articles from back issues through their participation in JSTOR. In addition, of course, the slightly more than two thousand LASA members who resided in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2009 also enjoyed access to *LARR*. Nevertheless, it is clear that the vast majority of scholars in Latin America and the Caribbean simply are excluded from using the important research published in *LARR*.

The ideal solution to this problem would be open access for all, allowing any interested person, anywhere in the world, the opportunity to download articles of interest free of charge. The problem, however, is cost: who will pay? Although *LARR* is in a unique situation compared with similar journals—as it is the flagship journal of LASA and individual and institutional LASA memberships pay for most of its subscriptions—

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open access would still be cost prohibitive. This is because LASA receives substantial revenues from royalties with Project MUSE, in particular, and JSTOR. These royalties would disappear with open access. There are other nonmonetary elements of risk as well. Open-access initiatives are still very new, and we know little about their potential implications, both positive and negative. Any such initiative by *LARR* is also risky, because *LARR* would be the first among its peer journals to do so. Restricting open access to residents of Latin America and the Caribbean should be viewed as a compromise and a strategic experiment; we are trying to address a real need at the same time that we are seeking to minimize risks and understand the larger implications of open access for possible future *LARR* initiatives. Although we have tested the feasibility of open access and have attempted to ensure that it is consistent with the various copyright and indexing agreements *LARR* currently has, we will carefully monitor this going forward.

The new open-access policy is also made possible by another new policy of the LASA Executive Committee: this issue will be the last that is automatically mailed to individuals and institutions located in Latin America and the Caribbean. For several years, we have been aware of the economic drain that mailing hard-copy issues of *LARR* to addresses in Latin America and the Caribbean entails for LASA. The average cost of printing and mailing *LARR* to that region is \$80 per member, although individual membership fees for Latin American and Caribbean residents are between \$27 and \$53, depending on one's income level. This means that LASA effectively loses between \$27 and \$53 dollars for each of the more than two thousand members in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is obviously a substantial amount of funds. The resulting savings not only will make open access feasible for all of the region but also will free up more money for the travel fund that subsidizes the participation at LASA congresses of people living in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as other potential special initiatives. Of course, members can still request that hard copies of issues be mailed to them, provided that they pay the difference between their membership fees and the actual cost of printing and mailing the journal.

Open access to scholarly literature is a dream that many people share. Although we are still far from reaching that dream, by providing open access to all of Latin America and the Caribbean, we have taken a big—and unprecedented—step in realizing it. As this first experiment unfolds, we will inform LASA's membership of its progress. We also will continue to explore new ways to take advantage of information technology to make *LARR* accessible to as large an audience as possible at the same time that we remain committed to maintaining the highest editorial standards.