
EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The academic journal is one of the most notable features of modern scholarship. Publication in refereed journals is unquestionably the primary benchmark by which scholarly accomplishment is measured and academic careers are evaluated.

It may be worth reflecting on the character and role of this particular academic journal because it is confronting a variety of challenges posed by economic and technological change. The response to these challenges will reflect in large measure judgments about *LARR's* nature and mission. Forewords in previous issues have reflected on the history of *LARR's* relationship to *LASA* and innovations in format introduced by successive editors.¹ This foreword will explore *LARR's* underlying significance from the perspective of the editor currently entrusted with its well-being.

No better characterization of *LARR* can be found than the words of the great French sociologist Emile Durkheim in his masterwork, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, describing collective representations.

Collective representations are the result of an immense cooperation, which stretches out not only into space but into time as well; to make them, a multitude of minds have associated, united, and combined their ideas and sentiments; for them, long generations have accumulated their experience and their knowledge. A special intellectual activity is therefore concentrated in them that is infinitely richer and more complex than that of the individual.²

Every *LARR* issue is the result of an "immense cooperation" stretching into time and space. This cooperation is both direct and indirect. It is perhaps more indirect with respect to the content, inasmuch as each article is situated in a context of prior theoretical and empirical contribu-

1. See in particular Gilbert W. Merkx, "Editor's Foreword," *LARR* 30, no. 3 (1995):3–6.

2. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated from the French by Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Collier, 1961), 29.

tions. The research presented in an article may extend or even contradict its received context, but in either case the new contribution reflects and builds on earlier work. In a more direct sense, the author's work also reflects the cooperation of teachers, mentors, and colleagues, and if field-work is involved, the assistance of informants and co-workers.

A more immediate form of cooperation is represented by the process through which manuscripts are evaluated, first by the editors, then by referees, then again by the editors. If resubmission is involved, this process is repeated. Once manuscripts are accepted, copyediting begins, requiring close cooperation between editors and authors.

The time and care lavished on *LARR* manuscripts by the unpaid anonymous referees is a continuing source of astonishment to the editors. It elicits our appreciation but also humbles us. The sheer depth of accumulated knowledge possessed by the collective community of scholars working on Latin American subjects puts the capacity of any individual to shame. Whether the subject is eighteenth-century religious practices in Cuzco, the role of women in Venezuelan party politics, limnological evidence about the collapse of Mayan civilization, or the impact of the latest tax reform in Chile, there are people who *know* the subject and are willing to share their knowledge with editors and authors to ensure that *LARR* publishes work of value to the community. The collective nature of this effort is the primary guarantee that *LARR* can continue to publish work that is both original and of significant interest.

LARR also manifests other functions that Durkheim attributes to collective representations. For Durkheim, collective representations are not only the product of cooperation but also the means through which communities recognize their shared identities and celebrate the commonalities that make them communities rather than mere collections of individuals. Without such representations, a community lacks a consciousness of its collective existence; through the construction of collective representations, the identity of the community is established. The word *review* in the title of *LARR* nicely captures this role: in *LARR*'s pages, the field of Latin American studies is reviewed and hence viewed. Through this envisioning, the field is given identity and character as a common endeavor.

LARR is not the only interdisciplinary journal of Latin American studies, although it was the first of its kind. The growth and consolidation of Latin American studies as a field is reflected in the proliferation of similar journals about Latin America, now found not only in the United States but also in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. This growth gives eloquent testimony to the vitality of Latin American studies.

The challenges that confront *LARR* and its sister publications stem from two sources. The first of these challenges stems from the internationalization, consolidation, and "rationalization" of the publishing in-

dustry. Commercial publishers have been actively acquiring scholarly publications. Once in control, some corporations have raised prices to unprecedented levels, squeezing out individual subscribers and creating a crisis in library budgets. While their journals may continue to maintain high standards and confer prestige on authors, such corporations are concerned with profit, not collective representation. Were it not for the competition from the remaining nonprofit journals owned by professional associations, the consequences of the commercialization of academic publishing might be even more severe. The philosophy of *LARR*'s current editors is to make *LARR* as inexpensive and as much a product of community effort as possible.

The second challenge is technological, reflecting the digitization of communication through electronic networks. The costs of scanning and transmitting information continue to drop. The protection of authors' and publishers' rights becomes concomitantly more tenuous. Legislation has yet to keep pace with the new technology. But while the costs of electronic dissemination of information are negligible, the costs of doing field research have not lessened, nor have the costs of maintaining the cooperative process through which *LARR* manuscripts are reviewed and edited. To the extent that electronic dissemination undercuts the large subscription base that supports *LARR*'s relatively low prices, the journal will be at risk. Our hope is that the pleasure and convenience of the old-fashioned analog print medium will outweigh the virtues of electronic communications. A copy of *LARR* never needs to be called up. *LARR* does not crash. Its pages do not flicker. *LARR* can be read in bed.

Judging from the manuscript submissions to *LARR* during the year running from June 1995 through May 1996, the electronic challenge has not dampened the enthusiasm of prospective authors. Submissions came close to the all-time high of the preceding year (146 manuscripts as compared with 151 for the 1994–1995 period and 114 for 1993–1994). This high level of submissions reflects the LASA congresses held in 1994 and 1995, which always stimulate submissions to *LARR*.

Twenty of these submissions were book review essays. The remaining 126 manuscripts entered the review process. By the end of May 1996, 11 of these manuscripts had been accepted for publication or accepted pending revisions, 75 had been rejected, 2 were withdrawn, and the remaining 38 were still under original review or a second review following revisions. An additional 7 manuscripts from the previous report period were also accepted after having been revised and resubmitted. The publication rate for articles and research notes that completed the review process (those accepted or rejected) was about 1 of 7 original submissions, with the proportion rising to about 1 of every 4 if resubmitted manuscripts are included in the overall totals.

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>June 1995– May 1996</i>	<i>June 1994– May 1995</i>	<i>June 1993– May 1994</i>
Political Science	36%	27%	27%
Economics	19	9	15
History	17	27	24
Sociology	11	11	11
Languages and Literature	6	9	8
Anthropology	5	7	7
Other fields	6	9	8
Totals	100%	99%	100%

The distribution by discipline reflected a sharp jump in political science manuscripts, which constituted 36 percent of all submissions. Economics manuscripts also increased, reaching second place with 19 percent of submissions. History submissions dropped to third with 17 percent of the total, and sociology remained fourth with 11 percent of the total, followed by language and literature with 6 percent and anthropology submissions with 5 percent of the total. Other fields such as agriculture, environmental studies, music, and religion accounted for the remaining 6 percent of submissions.

Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian authors or coauthors, including those living in Europe and North America, submitted 39 percent of all submissions, as compared with 27 percent from the previous year. Women authored or coauthored 27 percent of submissions, down from 33 percent from last year's manuscript report. Twenty-eight percent of the manuscripts came from outside the United States, as compared with 22 percent the previous year. Forty-nine percent of these non-U.S. manuscripts came from Latin America and the Caribbean, as compared with 55 percent in the preceding report period. Latin American and Caribbean countries represented were Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela. Other countries included Belgium, Canada, England, France, Israel, the Netherlands, Scotland, Switzerland, and Sweden.

These numbers confirm that the Latin American studies community extends across space as well as across time, discipline, language, culture, and gender. Notwithstanding the diversity, Latin American studies is more than just an interdisciplinary field defined by the geography of the region under study. It is also an intellectual community whose character is collectively represented in the pages of this journal.

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