

## The LASA2022 Congress will be held virtually

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### Announcement by the President of LASA

Over the past few months, all of us on the LASA Executive Council (EC) have been keeping a close eye on the evolution of the pandemic. Among other things, we had to decide whether to move forward with the plan to have our LASA2022 conference in San Francisco in a hybrid form, both in person and, simultaneously, virtually.

At the last Ways and Means Committee meeting (president, past president, vice president, treasurer and executive director), each committee member expressed their opinions, some with great ambivalence. We decided to share these thoughts with the EC so that the EC could make a decision on whether to continue with the hybrid congress plan or make it exclusively virtual. In order for our decision to be understood, I will reproduce the considerations in making the decision. To take the mystery out of the way at the outset, I will tell you that unfortunately we have made the decision to cancel the face-to-face portion of the 2022 congress and will instead stick to a fully virtual event.

Considerations against making the congress hybrid, and in favor of limiting it to the virtual modality:

- Many people from Latin America may be vaccinated with vaccine brands not approved for entry into the United States (US). So, the face-to-face part of the congress would be primarily for people from that country, Canada, and perhaps a few from Europe.
- The cost of Covid tests is very high and now it is necessary to have such a valid test 24 hours before travel to and from the USA. In the event of a positive test prior to return, one would have to spend on lodging and food for a period of 14 days.
- The State of California requires that for mass events all persons participating must present their vaccination record.
- The cost of making the congress hybrid – joining the face-to-face and the virtual – is higher than making it only virtual. With the latter modality, registration fees could be reduced.
- If we make the decision to switch from the hybrid to the virtual modality, we will avoid the need for members to buy tickets and make hotel reservations.

Given these considerations, the majority of the Executive Council voted to change the modality of the LASA2022 congress to virtual. Needless to say, this was a difficult and even painful decision. But the reality is that among the positives that were considered for going ahead with the hybrid mode, some of them were purely speculative – we have no way of anticipating whether things will be better in May 2022 or not. For now, things are bad and getting worse: we are seeing hospital overcrowding in many cities and countries. Therefore, we believe that holding a virtual congress is the most responsible decision.

Since we have already had significant experience with virtual events, through our teaching and learning, with the two previous congresses, etc., our LASA2022 congress can be as successful as the two previous ones have been. My personal experience at LASA2021 was more than satisfactory. I think I attended more panels than I had attended at previous in-person conferences. Of course, I am trying to highlight the positive aspects of the experience, because we have no other choice: "always look for silver linings." We must try to make the best of a difficult situation. For LASA2022 we will have fewer expenses by not having to travel and we will be able to participate in all the panels that interest us from the comfort of our homes or offices. And we look forward to seeing friends and colleagues at LASA2023.

Best wishes for a 2022 with health, hope and joy.

**Gerardo Otero, President of LASA**

*Simon Fraser University*

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**LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION**

4338 Bigelow Blvd  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
[lasa@lasaweb.org](mailto:lasa@lasaweb.org)  
Tel: 412-648-7929  
Fax: 610-429-2791

