



ELAG – 10 Successful Years

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Few initiatives in Latin America last 10 years, and when they do, we should not only celebrate but also try to understand why and how the initiative survived.

Since he attended the 1991 the European School of Genetic Medicine in Italy, Roberto Giugliani had the desire to create a Latin American School of Genetics, an initiative that was inspired by the annual Bar Harbor Course in “Mammalian Genetics” in Maine, USA.

To bring his idea to life, he enthusiastically sent many of his collaborators to take the same course over the years. When we first met in 1994, as an undergraduate student and supervisor, he had “Latin American School of Medical Genetics” on a note entitled “ideas for the future” that was posted on the front of his desk.

When the Latin American Network of Human Genetics (RELAGH) was created in 2001, the Latin American School of Genetics was proposed as an initiative of RELAGH, with strong support from Jose Maria Cantú, the first President of RELAGH. When Roberto Giugliani became RELAGH President in 2003, he prioritized the organization of the Latin American School.

In 2004, ten years after the “ideas for the future” note, we organized the first Latin American School of Human and Medical Genetics. The school initially dropped “Medical” from its acronym to be known as LASHG (English) or ELAGH (Spanish/Portuguese) and then later dropped “Human” to finally become ELAG, as it is known today all over Latin America.

The original idea of bringing high-profile scientists in the fields of human and medical genetics together to spend a week with selected students from all over the continent in a friendly environment to foster communication, discussion, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences was

never lost. This successful formula was common to both courses that inspired ELAG and has captivated a group of faculty members who contribute to the event every year.

We should note that in 2004 we did have to take some risks, as we hoped to have enough applicants and financial resources to support the first edition of the school, scheduled to take place in May 2005. At that point, as it has been throughout the years, support from the scientific committee (composed of outstanding Latin American scientists and good friends) was decisive and set forth the initiative. To this day, the original scientific committee (Eduardo Castilla, Francisco Salzano, Victor Penchaszadeh, and the authors) remains almost unchanged, with the exceptions of Sergio Pena and Gerardo Jimenez-Sanchez, who stepped down due to other commitments, and the early loss of José Maria Cantu, who was replaced by Augusto-Rojas Martinez.

Additionally, support from both national and international public funding agencies and from private companies (mainly of the biotechnology field) was instrumental in providing selected students with fellowships covering most of the costs of the course. Such support has allowed the participation of young scientists and health professionals even when economic conditions have been unfavorable.

Now, ten years later, we are proud that the school has been held without interruption year after year, providing a unique educational experience to over 700 students from almost all of the Latin American countries.

To celebrate this achievement, ELAG is sponsoring this special edition of Genetics and Molecular Biology that includes contributions from ELAG faculty members who have held distinguished roles during the school’s many editions.

Here, the reader will find a wide range of papers that record some important chapters of genetics in Latin America and provide a wide range of reviews on selected topics, reflecting the comprehensive nature of ELAG’s program,

including human evolution, medical population genetics, molecular biology, genetics of birth defects, molecular cytogenetics, cancer genetics, genetic counseling, and gene therapy.

The joyful and nostalgic feelings experienced at the school's conclusion each year reflects the success of this experience and provides us with the energy to organize ten more courses!

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