

Northeast Modern Language Association

Fall 2023 Board Meeting Minutes

Time: Saturday, November 4, 2023 (11:00am – 2:00pm)

Location: Zoom Meeting

Call to begin meeting: 11:03am

Attendees

Executive Board

President, Modhumita Roy

Second Past President, Simona Wright

Board of Directors

British and Colonial/Postcolonial Studies Director, Angela Fulk

Comparative Literature Director, Julia Titus

Creative Writing, Publishing, and Editing Director, Maria Matz

Cultural Studies and Media Studies Director, Kathleen Kasten-Mutkus

French and Francophone Studies Director, Yves Clemmen

Professionalization, Composition, and Pedagogy Director, Jina Lee

Spanish and Portuguese Studies Director, Esther Alarcon-Arana

US and Transnational/Diaspora Studies Director, Donovan Ramon

CAITY Caucus President and Representative, Maria Plochocki

Diversity Caucus President, Ann Marie Short

Graduate Student Caucus Representative, Samadrita Kuiti

Women's and Gender Studies Caucus Representative, Maria Rovito

German Studies Director, Andrea Bryant

Italian Studies Director, Guisy Di Filippo

Editor of *Modern Language Studies*, Laurence Roth

Absent

Victoria Ketz

Ann Marie Short

Non-Board Members

Executive Director, Carine Mardorossian

Community Outreach Director, Ashley Byczkowski

Graduate Assistant, Sebastian Galbo

Meeting Minutes

I. Introductions

II. Approval of Spring 2023 Board Minutes (Yves-Antoine approved, seconded by Laurence)

III. Executive Director's Report, Carine Mardorossian

- The Executive Director explained that it is an incredible expense to provide a high-quality hybrid conference and zoom is a poor substitute that disappoints members, so this was the year to remind the membership that they chose in person in the survey and that we are a fully in-person conference. Additionally,
 - Bylaws: stipulate that no papers will be read in absentia. Again, we want an in-person convention. It requires a ton of work to organize and manage a hybrid conference, and it doesn't always enhance the value of the conference. The more we allow virtual presentations, the more people won't come. Consequently, we also risk failing contractual agreements with hotels. Moreover, technology can be challenging and live streaming is too expensive.
- International participants, particularly those based in India, are experiencing extremely protracted waiting periods to secure visas.
- ED Mardorossian presented 2023 fiscal performance data, making a strong case for retaining an accountant/financial advisor to help manage NeMLA's assets. She shared the RTD Financial introduction video with the meeting participants to illustrate the scope, services, and advantages of this particular consultant and investment strategy.
 - **VP Simona Wright:** I support this important approach, as we should invest our money. Asked Carine to call a vote to take advantage of the good interest rates. MLS editor **Laurence Roth:** Will NeMLA's publications be able to participate, too? He approved and proposed to move forward. **ED** asked for the Board's approval to vote today (Laurence Roth, Julia Titus, and Modhumita Roy supported the motion to vote). French and Francophone Representative Yves Clemmen motioned to vote; all were in favor (no opposed, no abstains), the result being that NeMLA's assets will be moved to an account named Flourish and managed by RTD Financials.
- ED Mardorossian also discussed a robust fundraising mission, one more sustainable than simply relying on the "Donations" inventory item in Ballast. It's easy to raise money piecemeal, but results are different, and more substantial, when it is a capital advancement campaign that aims for a goal. Such an effort needs to be organized with care and attention without nagging members for money. Carine envisions a major capital campaign so that NeMLA has a future endowment and can enjoy self-sufficiency.
 - **VP Simona Wright:** ED Mardorossian is doing this work alone, so I propose creating a subcommittee to help advance these fundraising efforts, including the Executive Board too. CAITY representative **Maria Plochocki:** "If we have the "Donations" button, I recommend including a link to the NeMLA donations webpage in all emails so that fundraising is kept in the spotlight"; ED Mardorossian reiterated that NeMLA should also be looking for more

substantial fundraising opportunities. **President Roy:** “I agree with the proposed campaign, and we should consider revamping the “Donations” button on the inventory page”. MLS Editor **Laurence Roth:** stated that this would be an extraordinarily forward-looking move. NeMLA, he stated, would need a clear and perfectly crafted mission statement; this is important because waters in academia are fraught now. **ED Mardorossian:** recommended caution so there were no competing fundraising efforts. She asked that members of the Board email her if they want to participate in this project. Outreach Communication Director **Ashley Byczkowski** asked if this was open only to the Executive Board or all Board members? **ED Mardorossian** clarified that this opportunity is open to both. **VP Simona Wright:** advocated that the subcommittee be kept small and focused.

- **Grant Writing**

- ED Mardorossian and Outreach Communication Director Ashley Byczkowski worked with Kailey MacDonald this past summer on a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) application to include and recruit high school students to NeMLA.
- **Ashley Byczkowski:** A high school teacher herself, explained that she is working on developing a kind of humanities mentorship program which would involve pairing high school students with local community humanists to attend future NeMLA conferences. Ultimately, this would facilitate interest among young students to consider careers in the humanities and help to push back against the emphasis on STEM education.

- **Memo of Understanding/Institutional Partnership at UB**

- **President Roy:** I would like to nominate Carine for another three-year appointment (seconded by VP Simona Wright). (Non-Board members left the Zoom meeting so that the Board could deliberate confidentially)
 - The Board voted unanimously in favor of reappointing ED Mardorossian as NeMLA’s executive director for another 3-year term.

- **Undergraduate Forum**

- **The Board discussed the optimal size for the Forum. President Roy explained that** the ACLA has now added an undergraduate forum too. **ED Mardorossian:** We’re always glad to see other organizations emulate and learn from NeMLA!
- **Cultural studies and media Studies Representative Kathleen Kasten-Mutkus:** explained that she was recently contacted by a former NeMLA undergraduate presenter and was asked to look for a mentor who could help the student turn a poster into a publishable paper. (The student is no longer working in the academy, so this is an unusual situation.) While these circumstances are uncommon, how can we extend the same kind of publication mentoring to undergraduates that is afforded to graduate students? **ED Mardorossian:** Perhaps we could ask faculty to sign up to mentor undergraduates in academic publishing/scholarship opportunities online alongside their mentorship of graduate students. **Ashley Byczkowski:** Or we could establish a generic mentoring program and let interested faculty mentors decide whether they want to work with undergraduate or graduate students (or

both). **ED Mardorossian:** One way to open up this opportunity is to revise the publishing mentorship blurb on the NeMLA webpage and see what happens. She volunteered to make this change. (There were no objections to this proposal.)

- **Other Business**

- **VP Wright:** When can we book our hotel rooms? **ED Mardorossian** directed the Board to make their reservations and clarified that NeMLA can provide complimentary rooms for two nights.
- **ED Mardorossian:** brought to the Board's attention a potential publisher to exhibit at the 2024 conference, Anaphora Literary Press, which is a nontraditional press. The discussion lingered on the benefits to members vs. the risks for junior scholars who need to earn tenure and who seek publishing opportunities. The Board voted unanimously to decline the Press's participation as a 2024 NeMLA exhibitor (no one abstained).

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IV. Officers' Reports

President Modhumita Roy

- Receiving inquiries from Tufts graduate students regarding the 2024 Work-Exchange Program. **Ashley Byczkowski** asked that interested students contact her directly about this opportunity. **President Roy:** will solicit student interest once more, with a strict deadline, and send the names.

Vice President Victoria Ketz (absent)

Second Vice President Simona Wright

- recruited three Board members for the Fellowships Committee (Modhumita Roy, Esther Alarcon, and Giusy Di Filippo volunteered for this role) with a deadline of February 6, 2024. She also recruited Board members for the Board Elections nominating committee (President Roy, Creative Writing Director Maria Matz, Maria Plochocki and VP Wright volunteered for this committee).
- Mentioned the search for a host institution for the 2026 conference. Considered Montreal, but this option did not work out. Instead, the conference will be hosted by the University of Toronto. We still need suggestions for a keynote speaker, so please send along your ideas. **ED Mardorossian** stated that NeMLA is considering a host institution for the 2027 conference. Rochester has been very vocal about wanting NeMLA and we could approach the University of Rochester. ED Mardorossian welcomed other suggestions.

Editor of *Modern Language Studies*, Laurence Roth

- Please continue to encourage graduate students to submit their work.

British and Colonial/Postcolonial Studies Director, Angela Fulk

- Success of the area with increasing number of sessions
- Will help with the Postcolonial Essay Award

Comparative Literature Director, Julia Titus

- Slavic Area has grown! We have a good number of sessions for an area that had gone defunct at NeMLA. Ukrainian Studies will need more attention as a conference focus area in the future. We had one Ukrainian session proposed for the 2024 conference, but unfortunately it was too late to accommodate. It is also important to include more translation-focused sessions in the future.

Creative Writing, Publishing, and Editing Director, Maria Matz

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- Alberto Blanco is the Special Event Speaker
- Area is stable

Cultural Studies and Media Studies Director, Kathleen Kasten-Mutkus

- One of the most vibrant areas of the convention. Number of sessions remain consistent.
- Co-sponsoring a special event with US and Transnational Giselle Anatol

French and Francophone Studies Director, Yves-Antoine Clemmen

- Area has grown at NeMLA from 20-23 areas in the past to 30. Adlai Murdoch is the area special event speaker and with Giselle Anatol and Tiphonie Yanique (keynote), the Caribbean cluster is quite an event at NeMLA this year.

Italian Studies Director, Giusy Di Filippo

- The Italian area has fewer sessions but not fewer participants! Our Italianists this year have favored the roundtable and seminar formats that allow for interactions with more members.
- David Ward is the Special Event speaker.

Professionalization, Composition, and Pedagogy Director, Jina Lee

- Last year as Board Director so bitter sweet report but the area continues to draw a huge number of session proposals

Spanish and Portuguese Studies Director, Esther Alarcon-Arana

- Co-sponsoring Alberto Blanco with Creative Writing

US and Transnational/Diaspora Studies Director, Donovan Ramon

- Sponsoring Giselle Anatol and working with members to support underrepresented research areas

CAITY Caucus President and Representative, Maria Plochocki

- Will need to work on the question of allowing travel grants to be disbursed to those participating on roundtables and not just traditional panels. This came up and will need a vote by the CAITY membership

Diversity Caucus President, Ann Marie Short

- First year as representative and looking forward to co sponsoring the Giselle Anatol event with US/Transnational. The area is strong.

Graduate Student Caucus Representative, Christian Ylagan

- Christian is the member-at-large representative who had to step in and take over after the previous President resigned for the best of reasons: she found a job in alt ac that necessitates her full attention. Everyone wishes Samadrita the best of lucks and the Board is thankful to Christian Ylagan for stepping in to take over and organize the GSC elections.

Women's and Gender Studies Caucus Representative, Maria Rovito

- Excited to welcome Rebecca Suber as Special Event Speaker. This year the Caucus will have the business meeting followed by its Special Event on Saturday Morning.

V. Concluding Remarks

- **ED Mardorossian:** asked Board members to send suggestions/writeups for the newsletter. Also thanked the University at Buffalo, graduate assistants, and other NeMLA staff for continued support and dedication.

Motion to adjourn: Board Director Lawrence Roth motioned to adjourn and was seconded by President Roy, 1:50pm.