

Minutes of the Northeast Modern Language Association  
NEMLA Board of Directors' Meeting, Thursday, March 15, 2012.

Rochester: Hyatt Hotel, 8:00 a.m.

**Board members present:** Bill Waddell, St. John Fisher College, President; Simona Wright, TCNJ, Past President; Ellen Dolgin, Dominican College, Second Vice President; Laurence Roth, Susquehanna University, *Modern Language Studies* editor; Andrew Schopp, SUNY Nassau Community College, American Literature Director; Suha Kudsieh, College of Staten Island CUNY, British and Anglophone Literatures Director; Moussa Sow, TCNJ, French Language and Literatures Director; Astrid Weigert, Georgetown University, German Language and Literature Director; Giovanni Spani, College of the Holy Cross, Italian Language and Literature Director; Cristina Santos, Brock University, Spanish/Portuguese Languages and Literature Director; Margarita Vargas, SUNY Buffalo, Cultural Studies and Film Director; Sophie Lavin, SUNY-Stony Brook, Women's and Gender Studies Caucus Representative; Barry Spence, University of Massachusetts, Graduate Caucus Representative; Donavan Ramon, Rutgers University, Member at Large for Diversity.

Non-Board members present: Elizabeth Abele, Executive Director, SUNY Nassau Community College; Brandi So, Convention Associate, SUNY-Stony Brook

President Waddell calls meeting to order at 8:20 am.

**I. Adjustments and Approval of Board minutes from Saturday, November 12, 2011.**

- A. Fall Board minutes were not available; approval of minutes will be tabled until next board meeting or approved electronically.

**II. Executive Director's Report, Elizabeth Abele**

- A. Rochester Hyatt: The hotel staff has exceeded expectations.
- B. Participant Cancellations: It is possible that we have a high rate of cancellations and no shows; the post-conference data will confirm. Attrition from last minute because of last minute cancellations can cause problems with the hotels. Historically, NeMLA has intentionally visited low-cost cities, but the event with the fewest no shows was in the most expensive city – Montreal;
- C. Pre-Convention Workshops: Pre-convention workshops are still experimental, and cost about \$40 per participant to offer. Director Abele asked the board to consider if this is an appropriate service to the membership.
- D. Newberry Library Award: The Newberry library award is expanding NeMLA's association with external activities, but the awardees have not been strong NeMLA members or participants. Executive Director Abele asked the Board to consider how and if this activity might be a more positive association for NeMLA.
- E. CAITY: This year is the first year that CAITY grants were awarded via a lottery. Run by a task force rather than a CAITY group, the task force is thinking about how we are serving this portion of our membership. The taskforce will create a survey after the

convention; CAITY has bookmark to hand out in order to increase their presence at the convention.

F. Staffing: Director Abele President Waddell presented a lengthy discussion of staffing. Highlights are noted below:

- i. Backup coverage: When program expectations or needs are not met, they become Director Abele's project; several examples this year alone demonstrate that seemingly minor staffing issues serve to accumulate a large amount of work on the Executive Director position. This is both unwanted and unfeasible, as our current director is not only performing a large variety of tasks, but has lost the institutional support that has made such a commitment manageable.
- ii. Graduate Fellows: Some fellows were minimally tasked, and we are entertaining new models of fellowship support. We are considering a model where fewer fellows with more responsibility support the convention.
- iii. Short Term v. Long Term Issues: President Waddell remarked that short term issues include getting adequate support for the Executive Director so that it is a livable and doable job; while long-term concerns include recruiting a future Executive Director, Board leaders, and host institutions.
  1. Short Term: Director Abele reported that Kristin Le Veness is willing to return and increase her involvement in NeMLA; Lisa Perdigao, who was the Women's Caucus Representative on the board for three years and an active participant in NeMLA may also be willing to take on responsibilities. Ellen Dolgin remarked on Perdigao's organization and connected make her ideal for supporting special events. The board agreed to approach Lisa Perdigao for a two-year appointment to special programs position, which would work with the Board in their selection of special speakers.
  2. Long Term: The Executive Board will discuss the goals developed for recruiting quality host institutions. Host institution support has been variable and rarely accompanied by a formal agreement; SaMLA and NWSA have strong models. Simona Wright proposed that the executive board develop a best practices model and paradigm, develop a proposal, and visit institutions where we have members. Whether it is one institution or a revolving agreement is TBD; traditional models are long-term and typically associated with the affiliation of Executive Directors, but institutions change, and so a renewable agreement might allow for the changing goals of the NeMLA organization and the institution. Revenue streams play a major role in shaping the type of partnership. Other goals include being able to recognize institutions that seem poised for hosting; considering the institution's previous NeMLA involvement; emphasizing the opportunity for the students of host institutions; and selecting institutions with long term members who can be instrumental in selling the partnership. Possible hosts include SUNY Buffalo, CUNY, University of Massachusetts, and possibly Temple University. Possible Executive Director course replacement strategies can include replacement costs or buying out a faculty member's time.

The executive board will take this on as a primary responsibility for the next year.

- G. Finances: Issues with the Acteva registration company have placed an unexpected pressure on the administrative fund; because of this, the budget is tight but still strong enough to cover conference expenses. Acteva is sending \$25,000 payments every two weeks rather than paying out the entire registration account. Director Abele has filed a report with the BBB and is working with Michael Cadwallader to investigate Acteva alternatives.
- H. LBGQT Position Disbanded for NeMLA 2012: Cristina Santos remarked that Spanish and Latino LBGQT support has been extremely lacking and several promising sessions, under-supported for this year's conference, would have disappeared without representation. The domino effect of poor service made it more difficult to recoup the situation than if there were no internship position in the first place. There are LBGQT spread in diverse areas, and the failed support is unfortunate. For now, this position is disbanded in the interest of improving the service to LBGQT panel sessions.
- I. Special Events: Checks will be disbursed and some will be mailed; Saturday night sessions will be brought in at 6:30, and at 7:30 there will be cheese displays according to the country and a central cash bar. Andrew Schopp remarked that room setup can have a big impact on these special events; the placement of bars can interrupt reception talks and draw away participants.
- J. NeMLA 2013: NeMLA 2013 will be in Boston again. Director Abele asked board members to help promote 2013. The higher session failure this year should be avoided in Boston, where we have had a failure rate of less than 10% in the past. Once panel proposals are in, Director Abele will send a count, and it is up to each area to decide how many are board sponsored. 50% of session proposals come in the last two days. Director Abele asked that area directors try to be aware of other areas in order to connect panels more effectively and work together better during the selection process.

### **III. Officer and Committee Reports**

- A. President's Report, Bill Waddell
  - i. President Waddell remarked that his report is primarily descriptive of the contributions of the individuals for what promises to be a great event. He encouraged Board members to attend the activities and reviewed transportation and admission details. Cornelius Eady and Jennifer Egan will present, and the keynote will be off-site at Artisan Works. There are 225 reservations for the keynote event, and 300 was the absolute maximum, so this is a good amount.
  - ii. Board Structure: President Waddell remarked that Natalie Edwards and Chris Hogarth took jobs in Australia, and weren't able to travel to NeMLA 2012. They will continue to serve but it will be complicated. In order to fill out the Board; Carine Mardorossian, an officer in the Women's Caucus, could join us on the executive board for a few years.
  - iii. Ellen Dolgin moved to appoint Carine Mardorossian to the Executive Committee; Simona Wright seconded. Motion passed.
  - iv. Board Position for Professional Development: We have a lot of activities around this issue but struggle to recruit a board member to serve; perhaps this lack of

service is a sign that we are meeting these needs. This position is currently disbanded until its relevance and need is appropriate

- v. Workshop Enrollment: The small presses and collaborating with small presses workshops were surprisingly under-enrolled; while the career planning oriented workshops were clearly necessary and popular. President Waddell asked Board members how we might improve the relevance of workshop offerings. Ellen Dolgin remarks that a straw poll might help, a little questionnaire that you could leave at the desk; Simona Wright proposed a survey attached to emails to panel chairs that they might distribute; Barry Spence proposed integrating workshops into the convention timeline; President Waddell remarked that the model of \$500 for the organizers added to this pressure, so if we could look for a way to recruit workshop leaders who don't have to use a \$500 stipend, this would relieve the pressure on enrollment. Suha Kudseigh remarked that workshops on grant writing and article publication would likely draw in early participants, and that we could reach out to independent scholars (editors and NGOs) for workshop support. Laurence Roth remarked that enrollment totals suggest that every year should feature at least one writing workshop, and that grant application workshops would be attractive. Astrid Weigert suggested that something that would appeal to foreign language members that is not language specific, such as teaching approaches, would draw in more foreign language members. Barry Spence remarked that in order to bring in some of the larger names, like Paula Chambers of the Versatile PhD website, would require co-sponsorship. Cristina Santos proposed that branding and consistency would help; by establishing four categories of workshops for each conference, we can rotate offerings and begin to refine them based on consistent experience.
- B. First Vice President Natalie Edwards's Report: President Waddell provided Natalie Edwards's report, which include that 2013 preparations going progressing, Tufts changed provosts but the agreement has stayed on track. Keynote negotiations are underway with Michelle Cliff. The Board will send a note endorsing new plan.
- C. Second Vice President's Report, Ellen Dolgin
  - i. Summer Fellowships 2012: Ellen Dolgin thanked Astrid Weigert and Andy Schopp for extraordinary work; 28 applications resulted in ten awards. Many awardees have to leave early, and cannot attend the Sunday awards luncheon. There was a nice mix of really strong proposals. Like the Newberry Award, however, awardees often get a fellowship and then never return to NeMLA. The new application process will be online, include language that emphasizes the applicant's involvement with NeMLA, and include a prompt that asks applicants to characterize their experience with NeMLA. Lisa Perdigao was volunteered by Director Abele to develop the copy, in concert with Ellen Dolgin.
  - ii. 2014 Convention: Ellen Dolgin gave thanks to Laurence Roth for facilitating the 2014 partnership with Susquehanna University; Dean Valerie Martin gave the go-ahead, and planning and branding is underway. Susquehanna English Department Chair Drew Hubble will mobilize the entire department; Ellen Dolgin will go and visit Susquehanna.

- iii. Nominations: Ellen Dolgin asked board members to advertise the upcoming nominations for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Areas of French, and Spanish/Portuguese, (mention at your events) Mention at Sunday brunch. Dolgin remarked that active recruitment is necessary for leaders with vision and flexibility to work with people.
- D. Past President's Report, Simona Wright
- i. Book Award 2012: Past President Simona Wright reported that the committee received fourteen excellent manuscripts, with Ellen Dolgin, Margarita Vargas, Moussa Sow, Andrew Schopp, and Sarah Murphy all responded to the call for readers and reviewers. Two extremely close top contenders resulted in a first place and second place award. These are both non-Anglo-Saxon texts, and the awards will receive a recommendation to the Farleigh Dickinson Press and a cash prize. Winners will be recognized at the Sunday Brunch. Rachel Boccio filtered applications; her unfailing attention ensured a smooth process.
  - ii. NeMLA Italian Studies: Volume 35 is in process now, we received 12 – 14 article submissions and by August, the journal will be on the web.
  - iii. In Closing: Past President Wright offered her thanks for the delightful experiences as a NeMLA and her continued commitment to the organization.
- E. *Modern Language Studies* Report, Laurence Roth, editor
- i. Laurence Roth remarked that Laura Hershberger is the longest-serving NeMLA editorial assistant. She is now entering the job market in the field of publishing.
  - ii. The Special Issue included diverse and high-quality submissions. There will be extra copies in the exhibitor's area.
  - iii. Subscription issues are down; which suggests the board might consider long-term distribution strategies, website information, new interests in creative writing, etc. Maintaining membership for members in years they do not attend is another area of growth to explore.

#### **IV. Language Director & Caucus Reports**

- A. American: Andrew Schopp: While the total number of panels on American literature is down, we are more solid in some ways as an area. This will be a topic of discussion in the transfer of leadership. For the first time in three years, the numbers from the spring to the fall remained the same. Andrew Schopp reported that the Trends in the Discipline Roundtable is an attempt to offer a broad theme that connects disciplines. If it is successful, we might continue to offer this type of roundtable.
- B. British and Anglophone: Suha Kudseigh: The British and Anglophone division is doing well with 45 panels, 3 second panels, a special speaker and the Shakespeare. Programming will continue to improve in the coming years. NeMLA 2012 has a strong representation of Asian, African and other world literature panels. Suha Kudseigh reported that she will be promoting under-represented areas by recruiting more special speakers in this area and encouraging people to submit panels in those areas. Kudseigh asked board members to send her ideas about how to make the publishing panels better' she hopes to have a session on publishing into tenure and beyond; as well as tailor publishing information for people who are in other professional tracks, such as adjuncts, independent scholars, and non-academics. She would like to explore events sponsored by institutional affiliations for support.

- C. French: Moussa Sow: The French and Francophone Area remains strong as we stay above the 20-session mark, with 17 panels, 2 roundtables and 3 seminars. In addition to a diverse numbers of panels with new members being drawn to NeMLA, the French and Francophone area is sponsoring a reading on Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir by Alek Baylee Toumi from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, on Friday 17, at 1:15pm. We invite you all to join us.
- D. German: Astrid Weigert: This year's conference features twenty German sessions, down from twenty-two in 2011. Second sessions did not hold together as well; and Weigert recommended that two sessions of four papers each are needed for a second session approval. Weigert noted that NeMLA needs to connect with more Russian and Eastern European scholars; she will start reaching out in her own institution. This is an area that stands to see a lot of improvement. There will be a special events speaker and feature poet sponsored by the German area.
- E. Italian: Giovanni Spani: Giovanni Spani thanked Past President Simona Wright for her support. There are thirty-nine Italian sessions and a strong workshop. The special event on Saturday is an Italian Film director who was promoted and introduced in America by Martin Scorsese. Spani introduced a discussion on participant attrition and proposed that NeMLA communications include language about the professional commitment of presenting at NeMLA. Director Abele remarked that we could possible negotiate lower hotel rates for pre-paid participants. Spani also discussed the challenges overseas presenters face in funding, and proposed a standardized letter of acceptance for chairs to use that could address some of the questions that participants, particularly those coming from overseas, may have. Director Abele clarified a few current rules: No papers can be presented in absentia; chairs can present highlights of the paper if absolutely necessary; rooms often do not have internet, so Skype isn't feasible, nor is it appropriate for issues of fairness.
- F. Spanish and Portuguese: Cristina Santos: With one session cancelled last week because four of the five presenters were sick, Santos's area has thirty-three sessions. Topics and paper titles have been revised to more specifically reflect the languages and cultures, i.e., Portuguese. For special events, there is a Portuguese special event and a Spanish special event. The rotation of special events needs to be reconsidered; there is always a Spanish special event, but the Luciphone and Latin Americanists are excited to see more diverse offerings. Christina Santos expects an increased interest in Spanish and Portuguese events in Boston.
- G. Cultural Studies and Film: Margarita Vargas: This year features twenty-six sessions, including three sessions on vampires that were combined. The special event will welcome a young filmmaker from Mexico, who will present her film and talking about it. This event is sponsored in conjunction with the diversity program. For next year, a NeMLA member with a connection to a Sundance director/screenwriter may be able to help bring that person to Boston for a special event. Vargas will be working with Christina Santos on this project.
- H. Women's and Gender Studies Caucus: Sophie Lavin: Sophie Lavin reported twenty-nine total sessions, five of which are second sessions, was a positive and unexpected trend for Women's and Gender Studies. Ellen Dolgin will host the feminist sessions roundtable, and there is a special event film screening on Friday. The meet and greet and dinner is Thursday, and on Saturday the Caucus will host its annual speaker. The

essay prize this year had only eight submissions. Lavin reported that she would talk up the paper prize at the Caucus business meeting. Caucus officers decided to suspend the election due to low interest, and as a caucus we need to address how to get nominees and how to train attendees. For example, as a caucus we can plan a one-page fact sheet about responsibilities and timelines. There are two open positions, representative to the board and secretary; nominations go to Rachel Spear. The Shakespeare's Sister mentoring program has twelve mentor/protégé pairs. This program is still being developed, and we would like to make more formal spaces for mentoring and connecting at future conventions.

- I. Graduate Student Caucus: Barry Spence: Graduate caucus events include a meet and greet, the business meeting, and an informal reception. The travel award program received 157 applications, and fifteen submissions for the graduate student paper award. Five of these submissions were in languages other than English. Yvonne Frank won first prize for the essay award. The essay award is \$100, and the runner-up is \$75. Spence remarked that pedagogy sessions are up, while professional sessions are down, but that there has been twenty sessions in both the current and previous years. Spence also asked the board to consider ways in which he could help develop mentoring opportunities for graduate students.
  - J. Diversity: Donovan Ramon: Special events include seeing *A Raisin in the Sun*, a meet and greet, a poetry reading on Saturday. Ramon remarked that events designed to welcome people of diverse backgrounds must first consider how to attract diverse presenters to the convention itself, and concluded that this is an area he would be focusing on in the coming year. Ramon thanked Janesse for chairing the African American scholars committee and starting a tumblr website, as well as Leon Alvarado from Fordham for promoting panels and special events. Planning is underway for Boston, and Ramon intends to propose a panel on race in the digital age, and digital passing, as possible roundtable discussions.
- V. **Meeting Adjourned**
- A. Motion to adjourn made by Bill Waddell, seconded by all, meeting adjourned at 11:30 am.