



# NEWSNET

News of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies

## THE AAASS COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Bringing the Association's Communication Platforms into a New Era

### The Members of the Communications Advisory Committee

Our organization's new name and new institutional home signal the start of a new era, one that reflects changes underway in the regions that we study and in the methodologies that we use to study them. This new era offers many challenges, but it also provides us with new opportunities, not least of which is the chance to re-consider how the Association communicates with its members and how it can help members better communicate with one another. To that end, in fall 2008 the AAASS Executive Committee created a new advisory committee to make recommendations regarding the two platforms that the AAASS uses to communicate with its members: *NewsNet* and the Association's Web site.

At present, the advisory committee is focused on three sets of tasks: soliciting cover articles for *NewsNet*, assessing the relationship between *NewsNet* and the Association's Web site, and examining ways that the AAASS might re-conceptualize its on-line presence to better serve Association members.

#### NewsNet cover articles

The advisory committee is working closely with editor Jolanta Davis to maintain *NewsNet's* tradition of interesting cover articles. In the past year, *NewsNet* featured cover essays on Romanian and Bulgarian membership in the EU (by Venelin Ganey, in August 2008); the August 2008 Georgian Crisis

and geopolitics of the South Caucasus (by Richard Giragosian, in October 2008); immigration patterns and policy in contemporary Russia (by Mikhail Alexseev, in March 2009); and important data on Title VIII participant organizations (by Robert Huber, in May 2009). Each January, *NewsNet* publishes the AAASS Presidential Address from the previous fall's national conference. In the January 2009 cover essay, Beth Holmgren discussed her fascinating documentary film *Twenty Years Forward? The Contents and Discontents of Modern Russian Feminism*, screened at the 2008 AAASS conference in lieu of an address.

The *NewsNet* cover article, in other words, is a forum for brief essays on issues of current import to the Association's membership. Over the next two years, we hope to bring you essays on topics such as the state of U.S. Slavic library collections, information literacy in Slavic studies, image copyrights and permissions, electronic publishing, and the pursuit of non-academic careers. While Jolanta Davis and the advisory committee directly solicit some cover articles, *NewsNet* often features excellent essays offered by members without any such solicitation.

We heartily encourage members—including graduate students—who are interested in proposing a *NewsNet* cover article to contact Jolanta Davis

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at [newsnet@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:newsnet@fas.harvard.edu) or the advisory committee's chairperson ([mhickey@bloomu.edu](mailto:mhickey@bloomu.edu)). Again, cover articles concern contemporary issues or matters of broad professional interest. As such, they can include summary discussions of new research (for example, reports on well-attended and much-talked about sessions at the annual conference). But please keep in mind that *NewsNet* is not a venue for extensive research essays. Most cover articles run between 2,500 and 3,000 words in length (which can include endnotes), and should be submitted as files in Microsoft Word.

### **The relationship between NewsNet and the AAASS Web site**

The second issue under the advisory committee's consideration is the relationship between *NewsNet* and the AAASS Web site. Currently, each *NewsNet* features a cover article; a "Teaching Slavic Studies" column; news from the AAASS, its affiliates, and institutional members; library news; lists of recent publications; news from individual members; and a calendar of upcoming events. In addition, *NewsNet* has periodically published essays on special topics; an "Advocacy" column; listings of research in progress; information on summer language programs, grants, and student travel opportunities; listings of scholarship and award recipients; data on degree completion in field-related disciplines; a preliminary program for the annual conference; and information related to the Association's internal operations, such as committee reports, lists of Association officers and committee members, calls for officer nominations, etc. *NewsNet* also includes advertisements and, in some issues, membership and convention pre-registration forms.

This summer, the AAASS Executive Committee discussed whether some materials formerly featured in *NewsNet* should appear only on the Web site. It resolved that the preliminary annual conference programs, previously in the August *NewsNet*, will now be published on the Web site only. In addition, the advisory committee has decided that data on the number of graduates in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, the annual list-

ing of research in progress, and the annual listing of summer language programs also should be "moved" to the Web site exclusively. Besides saving the Association thousands of dollars each year in printing and shipping costs (and, of course, being "greener"), electronic posting of material that members may wish to access months after the initial publication makes more sense.

The Association is still committed to printing a paper version of *NewsNet*, but over the next several months the advisory committee will be determining what other *NewsNet* features could appear exclusively at the Web site. We then will make recommendations to the Executive Committee at the November convention. The Executive Committee also has asked the advisory committee to think more broadly about the relationship between *NewsNet* and the Web site, so as to provide information in the most effective and cost-efficient way.

At present, the AAASS Web site is divided into two sections, one of which is accessible to the general public, and one of which can only be accessed by Association members. Pages available to the entire public at [www.aaass.org](http://www.aaass.org) include basic information about the Association's history and structure (lists of officers and committees, affiliate organizations, publications, information about individual and institutional membership, the AAASS bylaws, etc.). The public has access to some information about the annual convention and about prizes that the Association awards. The public site also includes links to information on grants and fellowships, calls for papers and prize nominations, scholarly institutions, research centers, libraries and virtual libraries. Finally, the public site has membership forms, information for those wishing to place advertisements with the AAASS, and a grossly under-used message board.

The "Members' Only" portion of the Web site ([www.aaassmembers.org](http://www.aaassmembers.org)) includes members' profiles and a membership directory, listings of research in progress, and employment listings that are not posted on the public pages. It also has pages critical to the annual conference, including online registration forms, conference panel/

paper proposal forms, and the preliminary and final conference program. And members can access digital archives for *NewsNet* (May 2007-Present) and *Slavic Review* (2006-Present).

The AAASS does not collect its own statistics on visits to the Members' site (which is operated by a contracted vendor), but it does use Google Analytics to gather information on the Web site's public areas. Currently, most visitors to the public pages appear to be seeking specific information on the Association. Between 12 May and 11 June 2009, for example, 2543 people visited the public site, with an average of 100 visitors per day. Most (59 percent) were using computers in the United States, although the site was also frequented by visitors from the United Kingdom (5 percent), Russia (4 percent), Canada (3 percent), and several European countries. On average, visitors spent about 1.5 minutes at the site and looked at two or three pages. Besides the Association's home page, the pages hit most often concerned the annual conference (14 percent of hits). Note that these visits came during a "conference pre-lull" - after the deadline for proposals had passed, but before people begin to panic because they have forgotten the day and time of their panels. Pages dealing with AAASS publications, summer language programs, and prizes or scholarships each received about 4 percent of visitors' hits. During this May-June stretch, each and every public page at the AAASS site had at least a handful of hits.

So, we know what people are looking at when they visit the public site, but we don't know what types of material they would (or would not) like to see moved from *NewsNet* to the Web site. We strongly encourage members to contact Jolanta Davis or the advisory committee with suggestions regarding those features now in *NewsNet* that might profitably appear exclusively at the AAASS Web site and those features they believe must be retained in print form.

### **Re-conceptualizing the AAASS Web site**

Were we to do no more than move some features from print to a Web-based format, then the advisory

committee's work would be relatively simple. But we believe that this would be wasting a good opportunity to rethink the Association's communications platforms, particularly the Web site. Our data show that visitors use the Web site to find information about the Association. The advisory committee would like to dramatically expand the institutional information provided there, and we would like to see the Web site provide more varieties of field-related information. For example, could the AAASS Web site serve as a gateway to information about academic programs, aiding prospective students and prospective faculty in making decisions? Could it provide researchers with an entry point for identifying trustworthy scholarly resources (both in analog and digital formats)? Could the AAASS member profiles be set up to help journalists and government officials identify and locate experts? Not only would this serve current AAASS members better; it could also attract future members. We anticipate that the next generation of scholars (and potential scholars) in our fields, prod-

ucts of the Digital Age, will expect the Web site to be a comprehensive source of information on the regions and peoples that fall under the Association's scholarly umbrella.

The advisory committee also believes the Web site can become a forum for vigorous communication and network building between AAASS members. Communications at the current Web site are essentially a one-way street. There are interactive elements, such as the pages for membership profiles and conference proposals. But as the hardly used message board attests, few people use the Web site to communicate directly with one another. We see the potential for turning it into a community-building site for scholars (and future scholars), and we believe that much more can be done to develop its interactive and networking features.

Changes to the Association's Web site will, to a large extent, depend upon members' input. As the advisory committee and the Association move towards transforming the AAASS's Web presence, we will be seeking your

feedback and urging you to engage in the rebuilding process. You can expect to hear more from us. But in the meantime, we want to hear from you. Again, we welcome your suggestions regarding the AAASS Web site and *NewsNet* and we encourage you to send these to Jolanta Davis ([newsnet@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:newsnet@fas.harvard.edu)) or the advisory committee (via [mhickey@bloomu.edu](mailto:mhickey@bloomu.edu)).

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### Application Deadline: Approximately January 16

**For more information please contact:**  
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