

The initial response from SEM President Timothy Cooley on the day Danielle Brown posted her Letter to the SEM-L listserv:

# [SEM-L] SEM is Changing

Inbox x



**Timothy J. Cooley** cooley@ucsb.edu via list.indiana.edu  
to sem-l

Fri, Jun 12, 3:31 PM



Dear Dr. Danielle Brown,

Thank you for your Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies. As the current President of the Society for Ethnomusicology, I am committed to using this position of power and privilege to address the very concerns about and criticisms of SEM articulated so well and helpfully in your letter. Should you return to SEM, I believe you will find it a different place.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Cooley, President

Society for Ethnomusicology

Professor, Departments of Music & Global Studies

University of California

Santa Barbara, CA 93106-6070

- 2) A “statement in Support of Dr. Brown” composed by SEM member Luis-Manuel Garcia was submitted to the SEM-L listserv two days later and was ultimately signed by approx. 500 ethnomusicologists:

[**NOTE:** This living document/letter is not meant to represent the SEM membership as a whole, which is the responsibility of SEM itself. This is a grassroots effort started by a multi-racial group of early-career and precarious scholars.]

## LINK FOR SHARING

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PIYRLQJiPP99IGzxus0W2th-0D2M4uQRHaXWug8SvKg/edit?usp=sharing>

## TWITTER STATEMENT

We're with Dr. Brown.

Dr. Brown's letter must be taken seriously: racism in ethnomusicology is real and urgent today.

We must acknowledge anti-Blackness & white supremacy in SEM, hold one another accountable, and commit to radically restructuring the field.

<https://www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter>

## EMAIL STATEMENT (6.14.20)

Subject: In Support of Dr. Brown's Open Letter

We're with Dr. Brown.

[Dr. Brown's open letter](#) (June 12, 2020) must be taken seriously: racism in our field is as real and urgent today as it has always been. SEM and ethnomusicology can only claim to represent us if racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy are acknowledged and confronted head-on. In this moment we must first look at ourselves and ask, "In what way have I contributed to this problem?" Next, we must ask, "What can I do to make things better and to be part of the solution in my family, my community, my workplace, and my research?" Then, we must end our silence and cast off apathy, move past critique, and take concrete actions to effect real change.

To this end, we emphasize Dr. Brown's critique, which is that SEM,

...whose predominantly white members by and large research people of color, is and can be nothing other than a colonialist and imperialist enterprise... No matter how hard we try to convince ourselves otherwise, until ethnomusicology as a field is dismantled or significantly restructured, so that epistemic violence against BIPOC is not normalized, Black lives do not matter.

To hear and respond meaningfully to Dr. Brown's critique requires long-term, steady work and concrete plans developed *together*.

By signing our names below, we commit to the ongoing work of dismantling white supremacy, to a radical restructuring of our field, and to be held accountable to one another when we fall short. A statement alone is not enough and no list of supporters is exhaustive, but rather provides a public commitment to doing the work and to developing tangible steps towards reform. This living document is only the beginning and will be followed by calls to action.

3) Luis-Manuel Garcia composed 2 “holding messages” to the SEM-L listserv about the response to his letter in support of Dr. Brown.



Matt Sakakeeny &lt;mattsak@gmail.com&gt;

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**[SEM-L] A Holding Message**6 messages

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**Luis-Manuel Garcia** <theluisgarcia@gmail.com>

Wed, Jun 24, 2020 at 1:18 PM

Reply-To: Luis-Manuel Garcia &lt;theluisgarcia@gmail.com&gt;

To: sem-l@list.indiana.edu

Good afternoon fellow ethnomusicologists,

I would like to send out a holding message on Dr. Danielle Brown's statement to music studies, linked here, as if anyone could forget: <https://www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter>

Let me be clear: I am deliberately and pointedly sending this out entirely on my own, without consultation with anyone. If anything here is upsetting, please contact me privately, and I will deal with it accordingly. Let's keep this channel clear and sit with our silence.

A few thoughts, from the perspective of a post-migrant, queer Latino ethnomusicologist who studies non-prestigious, non-traditional musics not tied to his ethnic identity—and who is currently digging himself out of a life-altering episode of depression and anxiety that had \*everything\* to do with the toxicity of academia, including SEM:

(apologies for the long sentence; García Márquez is a distant relative)

- Our silence as a Society is telling—including the brief outbursts of noise.
- I recognize that my Black colleagues are feeling every response to Dr. Brown's statement on SEM-L right in the chest, and we need to sit with that for more than a moment.
- I am very aware that some of the people who signed on to [the statement in support of Dr Brown](#) had absolutely no business signing their name in good faith. Furthermore, I can scarcely imagine if it's worse whether they did so obliviously, guiltily, or spitefully.
- Signing a petition or collective statement exonerates NO ONE, including myself. That is not the point of it, in any case. It sets a reference point for measuring accountability in the future, but fixes nothing in itself.
- We are working on ways to hold every signatory to that statement accountable, with specific and concrete calls to action. This will not happen tomorrow.
- Many of the most vulnerable, excluded, and precarious members of this society are working behind the scenes on ways to respond effectively to Dr. Brown's testimony and call to action. It's going to take a while, and I ask for both patience from above and continued pressure/support from below.
- During the drafting of the support statement, we initially used backchannels to better enable vulnerable and early career scholars to participate without exposing them to hostile scrutiny. As word spread, this became less effective and co-optation began to knock at the door.
- The vast majority of unsolicited messages we received taking issue with our methods came from white ethnomusicologists. Our Black peers reached out to our core team of mostly queer and non-Black POC with more care and conviviality than any other communications we received, and I recognize the deep, deep unfairness of that contrast.
- Slow and cool communication, instead of hot and fast. I learned this through my participation in queer intersectional rave communities, not academia.

In closing, I would like to make it expressly clear that I am not soliciting a public reply from anyone; nor am I submitting this to The Respectable SEM-L listserv in the spirit of white liberal "dialogue." I am laying this all out on the table for us to eat and digest. Our work is not done.

Best regards,  
LMGM



Matt Sakakeeny &lt;mattsak@gmail.com&gt;

**[SEM-L] Holding Message #0002**

3 messages

**Luis-Manuel Garcia** <theluisgarcia@gmail.com>  
 Reply-To: Luis-Manuel Garcia <theluisgarcia@gmail.com>  
 To: sem-l@list.indiana.edu

Thu, Jul 2, 2020 at 12:54 PM

Dear fellow ethnomusicologists,

**Date of submission:** Thursday, July 2, 17:32 British Standard Time

This message extends the holding message sent to the SEM-L more than a week ago, on June 24th, with regards to [Dr. Brown's open letter on racism in music studies](#), first posted June 12. As we await to see concrete action from both the SEM governing bodies and its membership, I have assembled some relevant information and analysis below.

As with the first holding message, these two caveats continue to apply:

1. I write and submit this entirely on my own, without advice or approval from other groups or SEM officers. Any responsibility for harm is mine and mine alone.
2. If you are moved to respond to any of the content below, please contact me privately, and I will deal with it accordingly. Let's keep this channel clear.

- **SEM-L Demographic Report**, June 12–July 1, 2020

- **All posts to SEM-L:** since June 12, 2020, we have seen posts to SEM-L by:

- **Race/Ethnicity:** 31 white ethnomusicologists, 6 NBPOC (non-Black people of color) ethnomusicologists, 1 Black ethnomusicologist, and 9 ethnomusicologists whose racial/ethnic identity could not be ascertained;
    - **Gender:** 14 women and 22 men—of which 0 trans ethnomusicologists—0 non-binary ethnomusicologists, and 12 whose gender was not specified and could not be ascertained while respecting privacy;
    - **Seniority & Employment:** 23 senior faculty (above the tenure line), 2 tenure-track, 8 grad students and post-docs, 8 independent scholars, 6 underemployed ethnomusicologists.

- **Responses to Dr Brown:** since June 12, 2020, we have seen responses to Dr. Brown's open letter from:

- - **Race/Ethnicity:** 23 white ethnomusicologists, 5 NBPOC (non-Black people of color) ethnomusicologists, 1 Black ethnomusicologist, and 3 ethnomusicologists whose racial/ethnic identity could not be ascertained;
    - **Gender:** 10 women and 16 men (of which 0 trans ethnomusicologists), 0 non-binary ethnomusicologists, and 6 whose gender was not specified and could not be ascertained while respecting privacy;
    - **Seniority & Employment:** 15 senior faculty (above the tenure line), 2 tenure-track, 6 grad students and post-docs, 4 independent scholars, 5 underemployed ethnomusicologists.

- **NOTE:** if you would like to support future Demographic Reports, you are cordially invited to include some or all of the above information when you sign messages to SEM-L

- **Q:** Who is doing the most "discursive work" on the SEM-L, especially in response to Dr. Brown's intervention? Who is notably absent? What conditions might be impacting the participation of non-white and non-cisgendered SEM members? These are all *Extremely Rhetorical Questions*, by the way. I leave these questions as a homework assignment, so to speak.

- **Observations on Mental Health in SEM;** since disclosing my recent and as-yet-unfinished encounter

with depression and anxiety, many SEM members have contacted me privately to express support and share their own stories (and thanks for that!). Here are some patterns that have emerged:

- It seems that every single non-white woman ethnomusicologist who has confided in me has an auto-immune inflammatory condition that stems from sustained stress and trauma.
  - If you are curious as to why that might be, I recommend googling "allostatic load."
  - Also, Porpentine's "[Hot Allostatic Load](#)" (CW: transphobia, abuse) provides helpful insight.
- For men who contacted me, depression seems to be not just "rampant" but ubiquitous. Inescapable, even.
  - It may be prudent to reflect on how cultural factors enable (some) men to express distress in forms that are more easily diagnosed and treated, while women seem to sublimate and somatize stress. This discussion is already beginning to happen in psychiatric research, for those who are curious.
  - More to the point, some of us are socialized to nurture and care for everyone else but never ourselves. Some of us are socialized to avoid expressing distress because we know how harshly we will be judged for it.
- I don't have enough responses yet from trans and non-binary members to present them safely in the aggregate, but my inbox / DMs are open...
- **NOTE:** mental health struggles are endemic to academia, which normalizes and banalizes many behaviors that could be early signs of depression, anxiety, and other disorders.
  - I encourage fellow SEM members to speak openly with their doctor, colleagues, & friends about their mental health *before* it becomes a dire problem. Unpacking these issues will contribute to detoxifying ethnomusicology as a whole.
  - The entire globe is currently going through a sort of collective mental health crisis; many people who have never experienced severe symptoms are doing so for the first time. This requires compassion and mutual aid from everyone. Nobody is disposable.
- **Suggestions;** again, these come from me only, not any collective I might be part of; I am just a light-skinned Latino who is trying to work intersectionally, but '*mi gente*' are very experienced in cleaning up messes, so ㄟ(ˉ\_ˉ)ㄟ
  - Signal-boosting is not virtue-signalling, and we need to stop using our fear of being accused of the latter as an excuse to not do the former.
    - In particular, my white colleagues need to think twice before barging into the inboxes of BIPOC ethnomusicologists with unsolicited advice about virtue-signalling.
  - So far, when white SEM-L members have stumbled in their responses to DB's open letter, it is because they could not resist the urge to append their undercooked (and underseasoned) ideas about white supremacy and colonialism in our discipline.
  - The phrase "virtue signaling" is the preferred term used by alt-right ideologues to attack antiracist activists. "Performative allyship" is more frequently used in antiracist activism, although that plays fast and loose with "performative" as a critical concept.
  - Instead of yelling "virtue signalling" or "performative allyship" at people, try this: speaking up is not enough. That doesn't mean you should stop speaking up, however.
  - When I first sketched some of these ideas on social media, I used humour, some strong language, and a more assertive tone. But, since I know SEM membership all too well, I scrubbed these all out and spent hours fine-tuning my "tone" for this audience. Do you see what I did there? We call that "affective labor" and none of us gets paid for it.

IN CLOSING: It has come to my attention that I have been characterized as "Moist" by one of the SEM's membership, and I couldn't help but clutch my pearls. How did they know? I suppose that it is indeed summer in the Northern Hemisphere, but why did they need to capitalize "moist"? I surely haven't the foggiest idea, but I cannot WAIT to have it explained to me.

With the sincerest of regards,  
LMGM

Dr. Luis-Manuel Garcia

Lecturer in Music, University of Birmingham



4) The SEM Board of Directors' first official response came on July 9 and focused on controlling the communication among SEM members on the SEM-L listserv and Facebook group, which had become very inflamed. (Note the Board is an elected group of volunteers, usually tenured mid-career and senior faculty, who serve 2-year terms.)



Matt Sakakeeny &lt;mattsak@gmail.com&gt;

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**[SEM-L] SEM Board Survey Concerning SEM-L and SEM Facebook Group**1 message

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SEM &lt;sem@indiana.edu&gt;

Thu, Jul 9, 2020 at 10:13 AM

Reply-To: SEM &lt;sem@indiana.edu&gt;

To: "sem-l@indiana.edu" &lt;sem-l@indiana.edu&gt;

Dear SEM members, SEM-L subscribers, and SEM Facebook Group members:

Over the past month, SEM has received multiple complaints regarding SEM-L. Many subscribers shared concerns about several posts that reinforced the discourse of systemic racism, were hostile toward BIPOC members, and contained a white-supremacist tone. Several BIPOC posters experienced significant delays in the moderation process. Luis-Manuel García compiled statistics showing that recent authors on SEM-L were overwhelmingly white and tenured. Furthermore, the SEM Facebook Group, which is currently unmoderated, received numerous complaints regarding a post that was demeaning toward a music genre and thereby in violation of the page policies.

The Board of Directors is listening closely to these concerns and aims to create more inclusive and accountable forums of communication. We are concerned about the imbalance of voices; both forums clearly need policy revisions to better serve SEM today. We therefore called for a hiatus on both forums (except for announcements) while we poll the membership and work out the next steps.

Last month, the Board of Directors released a Statement of Solidarity in the wake of ongoing acts of violence in the context of ongoing systemic anti-Black racism. The middle paragraph reads:

*We must commit and re-commit to anti-racist work within our scholarly society. We recognize that members of SEM who do not identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color have a particular ongoing responsibility to learn to recognize and eliminate such acts of racial discrimination and violence within our own scholarly society.*

To our BIPOC members: we are saddened to hear the ways in which SEM-L has impacted you in harmful ways.

The intervention of pausing SEM-L and the Facebook group is an opportunity for us to follow through on our Statement of Solidarity. We have an opportunity to center concerns about how systemic racism is at play in our society today and the well-being of our BIPOC members.

The goals of this poll are to identify which forums for discussion the Society should officially sponsor, who should moderate them, and what the guidelines for moderation should be. Based on the results, we expect to formulate policies regarding communications, discuss them with the Council and Publications Advisory Committee, and come to decisions. With the input of SEM members and listserv subscribers, we hope that new communication forums will emerge that better reflect the diversity, vitality, and independence of SEM members.

The survey consists of 20 questions, mostly multiple-choice, with a few free-paragraph questions. At the end, there are seven demographic and membership questions for analytical purposes. Once we have closed the survey, we will share the results with the public. At the end of the survey, you will be asked whether or not you wish to make your open-text answers, which will remain anonymous, available to the public. The link to the survey is below.

<https://forms.gle/anaDgjo6baVnamEv6>

In the interest of reaching a timely resolution, we would be grateful if you could please complete the survey by **July 19**. The Board will then need to analyze and share the results, work with the Council and PAC on formulating policies, and implement them.

Please note that during this hiatus, **SEM-L is still open for announcements**.

Thank you very much for your input. We look forward to sharing the results with you.

Best wishes,

SEM Board of Directors

5) SEM Board President Timothy Cooley (Professor, UCSB) wrote his official response as president in the SEM Newsletter, which was published online July 22. The newsletter is firewalled in a "Member's Only" area of the SEM website and I do not believe Cooley's letter has been widely read.

# Unprecedented and Meaningful Change

## Tim Cooley, SEM President

SEM must change. Now is the time. There are no quick fixes. The process will be painful, yet the social, moral, and scholarly costs of *not* changing are too great. SEM cannot claim to be an antiracist organization, and we have not yet come to terms with the colonial and imperial legacies that still shape core activities of our scholarly society as an institution. SEM as an institution and I as its current President have ignored, dismissed, suppressed, and harmed many of our members with racist acts, the reinscriptions of hegemonic power, and the active and complicit protection of the status quo and thus white supremacy. I apologize on behalf of myself and SEM. I must do better. We must do better.

I will start by thanking all of you who have privately and publicly come forward to point out the many ways that white privilege continues to be maintained within SEM. I am especially grateful to our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color members who have taken the time to advise me and the Board during this time of acute pain and anger. I am listening and we must listen.

But am I hearing? In a hasty response to Dr. Danielle Brown's "An Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies, Especially Ethnomusicology and Music Education" posted to SEM-L on 12 June 2020, I committed to using the position of power and privilege of the SEM Presidency to address the concerns that Dr. Brown brought forward. But then I overstepped when I made the aspirational claim that I believed she would find SEM a different place should she return to us, a phrase that many read as dismissive. The feedback was immediate, from many sources, and well deserved. I am humbled. I acknowledge that I do not know what it feels like to be silenced, dismissed, ignored, profiled, harmed because of my race. I acknowledge that my employment, discipline, and even position on the Board of SEM all affirm the legacy of colonialist and imperialist enterprises. I embody privilege. Who am I to presume that I know—really know—anything about the subtle insults, erasures, humiliations that Black and other SEM members experience over and over again in life, including when engaging SEM (see long-standing SEM member and current College Music Society President Eileen M. Hayes's [message to CMS](#)). I apologize for the anger and hurt I caused by my insensitive statement. I recommit to listening to our membership. I am listening and concede that SEM is not changing as fast or as effectively as is necessary. Yet we must change for many reasons but most of all because it is the right thing to do. And it is time.

While too often blind and deaf to the racism that supports my privilege, I cannot remain silent and complicit. I am listening. One repeated message of hope I have heard from Tammy Kernodle, President of the Society of American



Music, is that crises prepare our societies for change that otherwise would be much more difficult to achieve. Crises disrupt the status quo and therein lies opportunity. Three global crises present us with unprecedented opportunities for systemic changes, including for our scholarly societies. The climate crisis demands that we reimagine how we use and share resources across the board, including the carbon footprints of our research, teaching, advocating, and conferencing practices. But how to address the asymmetrical impact of the climate crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and communities around the world and in our towns?

The coronavirus pandemic forced us to make immediate changes in how we go about our activities as ethnomusicologists while our members quickly became adept at virtual researching, teaching, and learning while sheltering at home—or were forced to suspend scholarly activity while we recovered from the virus or helped family and loved ones fight for their lives. Yet here too the pain was and is most acutely felt by communities oppressed by legacies of white privilege, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Then the murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a white police officer returned the attention of the world to the Black Lives Matter movement and to centuries of white supremacy gained and retained by violence toward Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Are we listening? Is SEM finally ready to do what should have been done ~~decades~~ centuries ago? If not today, when? For example, I have cited two current Presidents of sibling music societies in this column, both of whom are Black women. What are the structural conditions within SEM that have prevented any Black member from writing this column—from serving as SEM's President? While we should have taken decisive steps to end systemic structural racism, inequality, and white supremacy within our scholarly society long ago, do we have the will to do so now? Can we turn this confluence of unprecedented challenges to the world order into opportunities for meaningful change? We must. And I, the Board, and SEM need your help.

Again, SEM must change. Change will be a process, and that process will be challenging. I am committed to change, as is the SEM Board. But the white privilege is

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## Unprecedented and Meaningful Change [\[continued from previous page\]](#)

deeply rooted, and our time on the Board is short. Will you help the Board, Council, Committees, Sections, and Special Interests Groups get started? Will you hold future Boards accountable to continuing the process? Can we collectively agree to avoid the often petty distractions from doing what we know must be done? In my communications with SEM members who are from underrepresented communities, one repeated demand is for a statement about what the leadership is doing to move SEM toward becoming an anti-racist organization; toward becoming equitable and inclusive for all; away from systemic white privilege. In response, I offer below a list of actions the Board is taking to these ends:

- Engaged the Gertrude Robinson Network, Diversity Action Committee (DAC), and individual stakeholders to listen, seek advice, and to learn.
- Appointed individuals from underrepresented groups on both the Board Nominating Committee and Council Nominating Committee.
- Appointed Mellonee V. Burnim as the new chair of the Diversity Action Committee, and added new members specifically to focus on SEM's collective engagement with or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color members.
- Actively recruited People of Color to sit on 2020 prize committees, which have the responsibility for distributing research and travel funds, prizes, and honors to our membership.
- Issued to the chairs of all 2020 prize committees a set of best-practices steps intended to help committees reduce the impact of implicit biases in their decisions.
- The Program Committee and Local Arrangement Committee for our 2021 annual meetings are both chaired by Black ethnomusicologists and contain additional members who have ties to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with whom SEM is committed to engaging at our 2021 annual meeting in Atlanta.
- The Task Force on Institutional Equity and Inclusion has been formed and charged with (1) identifying language concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion within *or absent from* the various documents that govern the official actions of SEM, and (2) defining goals for SEM for achieving institutional equity and inclusion.
- Expanded SEM's 21st Century Fellowship from one award of \$5000, to two awards of \$7500 each, one of which prioritizes students from underrepresented communities.
- Moved to offer free admission for all undergraduates and empowered the Business Office to work with the Local Arrangements Committee and the Program Committee to determine the number of free or reduced rate registrations for local community members and/or musicians from elsewhere who appear on the Annual Meeting program. The Board hopes that this will facilitate the accessibility and inclusiveness of our meetings, though this will require continued effort.
- Sponsored programmatic responses for our 2020 Annual Meeting to the harm done to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Members in our 2019 meeting in Bloomington and historically:
  - (1) President's Roundtable: organized by the DAC chair at the president's request and cosponsored by the DAC. The roundtable is called "Diversity, Equity, and

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## Unprecedented and Meaningful Change [\[continued from previous page\]](#)

Inclusion in SEM” and panelists will include representatives from the 2019 Black Ethnomusicology panel, the DAC, the Gertrude Robinson Network, and the SEM Board.

- (2) Roundtable survey of membership: President’s Roundtable panelists will respond to questions pulled from an anonymous survey sent by the DAC to the SEM membership prior to the meeting.
- (3) Roundtable co-sponsored by the SEM and Canadian Society for Traditional Music Boards titled “Disrupting White Supremacy in Music and Sound Studies” and featuring stakeholders from Black and First Nation communities.
- (4) DAC and SEM Board co-sponsored workshop on tenure for underrepresented groups.
- (5) Board sponsored Task Force on Climate Crises roundtable on climate and social justice.

Will this fix SEM? Will this end epistemic violence against Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and other aggrieved individuals and groups at our conferences, in our publications, and in our interpersonal interactions? Will these actions transform SEM into an anti-racist organization? No. But they may move us closer toward this objective. They may begin to show aggrieved members that they are vital to and welcome within SEM. Done well, it might empower individuals who have felt disempowered. But this is only the beginning of what must be an ongoing process of listening, assessment, action, change, repeat.

Repeated again, we have to change. The coronavirus pandemic hit hard the already fragile academic job market, and the formerly lively gig economy for musicians and the support staff that allows many musical events to exist. The USA’s responses to that pandemic were in its early days when I wrote the spring President’s Column, and now as I write this summer column, the federal government is urging the nation to return to (business as) normal as quickly as possible. Many of our members continue to teach, learn, and conduct research virtually, and indeed we have shown once again how adaptable we are. We have begun to change how we do what we do. SEM’s Board has also been active authoring and endorsing [statements](#) of support for our members and colleagues, including in some cases writing directly to our institutional deans, chancellors, and presidents as well as to the U.S. Congress. Many of these statements advocated particularly for our most vulnerable members who are facing job insecurity, and for reinvestment in humanities education and public sector arts funding as an economic engine. You, our members, have generated several exceptionally

informative and helpful threads on SEM-L offering valuable resources for research, teaching, and staying sane during the ongoing pandemic. We created a [COVID-19 Resources for Ethnomusicology](#) section on the home page of SEM’s website. The website of the [College Music Society](#) also has a wealth of information about teaching classes and ensembles/lessons online. As I detailed in my spring newsletter column, many of our chapter meetings had to be canceled, as were the regional and even national meetings of several of our sister scholarly societies. SEM now joins that group as we change our 2020 annual meeting this October to a virtual platform.

Some positive developments come out of this crisis, however. While SEM was already looking for ways to use virtual meeting platforms to reduce the carbon footprint of our society before COVID-19, the pandemic shelter-at-home orders have moved many of us to develop and refine skills for virtual teaching, learning, conferencing and presenting. While we were researching the possibility of a virtual annual meeting in 2023 for environmental reasons, we have the opportunity to accomplish that goal now. Emergency responses to a pandemic are not the ideal way to achieve beneficial social change, but we hope that we can use this crisis to adjust our conference and other SEM-related meetings and even research standards to the benefit of the environment and our members. As Aaron Allen, the chair of the SEM Climate Crises Task Force, reminded me the other day, their approach to ecology and ecomusicology is justice-oriented—similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental degradation tends to impact already vulnerable individuals and communities the most. As SEM moves toward greater virtual conference participation, our commitment is to do all we can to make sure that this improves our accessibility to those impacted members.

This is a challenging time for us as individuals and as a scholarly society. All of us are facing challenges and hardships that we would not have anticipated even a few months ago. For SEM, this is a time for self-assessment and of need for real change brought on by crises that have disrupted the status quo built on white privilege. This calls for individual and collective commitment and action, starting with the act of listening. It is time to acknowledge the many ethnomusicologists of color who have advocated for racial inclusion and equity within SEM for years. We are listening now. The process of change will require extended commitment and accountability. It is time. Let’s get working.

6) Luis-Manuel Garcia circulated an “extraordinary holding message” to signatories of his original letter in support of Dr. Brown on July 28. (The SEM-L listserv has been shut down to dialogue since the Board published a survey on revising communication protocols on July 9). The “extraordinary” part of this personal message was the revelation that the SEM Board officers held a vote of “no confidence” for their president on July 8 but the President had not submitted a resignation. Garcia reminded readers that his email was submitted “entirely on my own, without advice or approval from other groups or SEM officers.”



**From:** Luis-Manuel Garcia theluisgarcia@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Extraordinary Holding Message #0004 (URGENT)

**Date:** July 28, 2020 at 12:58 PM

**To:** Luis-Manuel Garcia theluisgarcia@gmail.com, Luis-Manuel Garcia (Department of Music) l.garcia@bham.ac.uk, sem-l@list.indiana.edu

**Bcc:** mattsak@tulane.edu

LG

External Sender. Be aware of links, attachments and requests.

Dear fellow ethnomusicologists,

**Date of submission:** Tuesday, July 28, 2020, 13:00 Eastern Standard Time

This message further extends the holding message sent to the SEM-L on June 24th, with regards to [Dr. Brown's open letter on racism in music studies](#) (which was first posted **June 12**—yes, you read that right!). As we await to see concrete action from both the SEM governing bodies and its membership, I have assembled ~~some relevant information and analysis below~~ **an urgent update**.

As with the previous holding messages, the following two caveats continue to apply:

1. I write and submit this entirely on my own, without advice or approval from other groups or SEM officers. Any responsibility for harm is mine and mine alone.
  2. If you are moved to respond to any of the content below, please contact me privately, and I will deal with it accordingly. Let's keep public channels clear.
- **QUESTION:** Why is it taking so long for SEM to respond competently to Danielle Brown's open letter, when SMT managed to respond to a racist incident in 1 business day?
    - The SEM membership (especially the BIPOC contingent) may be wondering why it has been approximately **1.5 months** since Danielle Brown's open letter on racism was posted to SEM-L and several other channels, including a call to action specifically aimed at ethnomusicology.
    - In particular, why is this ongoing delay / lack of action ostensibly necessary in SEM's case, while SMT has managed to post a concise and unified response to the JSS scandal in **1 business day**? The response can be read on Facebook here, as well as via SMT's (still operational!) listserv: <https://www.facebook.com/societymusictheory/posts/4470788236279579>
    - For a summary of the JSS scandal, as well as an analysis and rebuttal of the execrable anti-blackness and questionable 'academic publishing' practices contained therein, please see Meghan Lavengood's phenomenal (and unpaid) work: <https://meganlavengood.com/2020/07/27/journal-of-schenkerian-studies-proving-the-point/>
  - **SOME ANSWERS:**
    - The long and the short of it is this: ***the SEM President is in open and protracted conflict with the Society's first-ever majority non-white and majority non-male Board.***
    - On July 20, the SEM Board signalled this impasse and shared its concerns with the SEM Council and Ethics Committee. This included the following timeline (which I have abridged and edited for readability):
      - **June 12:** Danielle Brown's open letter is distributed to the SEM-L
      - **June 12:** SEM President Tim Cooley posts an extremely unsatisfactory, dismissive, and gaslighting response to DB's open letter (title: "SEM is changing"), without consultation from the Board.
      - **June 15:** SEM Board members write a message of concern to the President regarding his response to DB. This has no noticeable effect.
      - [Those of you following these Holding Messages can interpolate the SEM-L moderation conflict throughout.]
      - **June 22:** The Board delivers a four-page, single-spaced letter of concerns to the President (not limited to DB's letter), followed up with concrete action items to address these concerns. This has no noticeable effect.
      - **June 25:** After repeated attempts to stall and block the suspension of discussion on SEM-L and the distribution of a poll, the Board votes 7-1 to move on both items, with the President as the only opposing vote.
      - **July 8:** The Board held a vote of no-confidence, which passed 6-1 (past president G. Barz was absent from the vote). Such votes normally & normatively result in a change of leadership or governance in parliamentary procedure (see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motion\\_of\\_no\\_confidence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motion_of_no_confidence)), but no such action occurred.
      - **Since then:** The Board has formally suggested that the President resign, and offered to support this transition by co-drafting a resignation letter and statement
    - **ALL MEMBERS** of the Council and Ethics Committees have been aware of this information (and more) for at least a week now.
    - **Why the silence up until now?** The majority non-white SEM Board has been entirely occupied with managing white fragility and white anger—including white litigiousness. This is the "chilling effect" of white supremacy in action, before our very eyes. This is not limited to conflict with the President, but also interventions by other white ethnomusicologists, protecting their own.
      - I am aware that I am exposing myself to suppression-by-legal-threats for speaking up about this. There are no whistleblower protections in SEM's bylaws that I know of.

- If you have been in touch with me before this moment, you are welcome to contact me for more information and advice.
- **ACTION ITEMS:** Please come collect your own, my dear white ethnomusicologists. This is YOUR work to do.
  - By asking you all to "come collect your own," I am referencing a slogan AND tactic that circulates in Black-led activist discourse. The idea behind this is:
    - that the work of redressing racism should not be left to those who are its intended targets.
    - that everyone is more likely to heed and respect the advice of people from within their own identity-group
  - **Come collect your classmate / student:** Timothy Cooley holds a PhD in ethnomusicology from Brown University. His actions and inactions reflect on Brown University's graduate program and how it trains its students to engage with colonialism and white supremacy within our discipline. Brown University's Music Faculty can be found at this website (including email addresses): <https://www.brown.edu/academics/music/faculty>
  - NOTE:** I have removed the names of BIPOC faculty members, because this is Not Their Mess To Clean Up.
    - Emily Dolan, Department Chair
    - Dana Gooley, Professor of Music; Director of Graduate Studies, Musicology & Ethnomusicology
    - Louis Frederick Jodry, Senior Lecturer in Music; Director of Choral Activities
    - James Moses, Lecturer and Technical Director
    - Eric Nathan, David S. Josephson Assistant Professor of Music
    - Ed Osborn, Associate Professor of Visual Art and Music; Director of Graduate Studies, Music & Multimedia Composition
    - Marc Perlman, Associate Professor of Music
    - Joseph Butch Rovin, Professor of Music, Director, Brown Arts Initiative
    - Mark Steinbach, Senior Lecturer in Music; University Organist, Instrument Curator
    - Michael P. Steinberg, Professor of History and Music
    - Joshua Tucker, Associate Professor of Music
    - Todd Winkler, Professor of Music
    - ***I call on all of the Brown U faculty listed above as well as Brown U ethnomusicology alumni to reach out to our President and initiate a dialogue about accountability and active anti-racism.***
  - **Come collect your Council member:**
    - If any SEM Council member is connected to you in any way, please reach out to them and start a dialogue about what is going on and why.
    - A list of SEM Council members can be found here. Please focus your energies on white and senior/tenured members. [https://www.ethnomusicology.org/general/custom.asp?page=Gov\\_Council](https://www.ethnomusicology.org/general/custom.asp?page=Gov_Council)
  - This should go without saying, but nonetheless: be as direct and insistent as you like, but avoid violent and/or abusive language.

Please do not wait to take action on this. Justice delayed is justice denied, and SEM is failing to do justice to Danielle Brown, our Black colleagues, and the Society's other non-white membership. This time is now, and this is your work to do.

With the sincerest of regards,  
LMGM

P.S. this email will be archived as a PDF and filed in the same places as with previous Holding Messages.

Dr. Luis-Manuel Garcia

Lecturer in Music, University of Birmingham

7) On August 20, eleven past Presidents of the SEM Board sent a letter to the SEM-Listserv supporting Dr. Brown's letter. This email came from the official SEM email account ([sem@indiana.edu](mailto:sem@indiana.edu)) and appeared on the official SEM-L listserv even though the listserv was officially "on hiatus" from member communications. It preceded any formal announcement on the current Board's (at this point, rumored) "no confidence" vote of the president. The past Presidents made no mention of their handling of "Deep-seated white supremacy and colonialism shape SEM" under their leadership.

**From:** sem@indiana.edu  
**Subject:** Open Letter to the Board, the Council, and the Membership of the Society of Ethnomusicology  
**Date:** August 20, 2020 at 12:51 PM  
**To:** mattsak@tulane.edu

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S

We, the undersigned past presidents of the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), publicly support the views Dr. Danielle Brown expressed in her “Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies” and those of the marginalized scholars who have raised their voices in protest before and since that letter appeared. Deep-seated white supremacy and colonialism shape SEM, and SEM is a site in which these systems of power are produced and reproduced. This situation demands a strong and proactive response. We offer our time, energy, and commitment to the SEM Board, the SEM Council, and the SEM membership to work on initiatives that will address this reality.

Respectfully,

Gage Averill  
Harris M. Berger  
Beverley Diamond  
Charlotte Frisbie  
Ellen Koskoff  
Anne Rasmussen  
Timothy Rice  
Anthony Seeger  
Kay Kaufman Shelemay  
Ruth M. Stone  
Deborah Wong

<http://www.ethnomusicology.org/members/EmailOptPreferences.aspx?id=39059802&e=mattsak@tulane.edu&h=48b647e9cd2b667f25fb2d588b14ad31a06abc5a>

8) Four days later the SEM Board released an official statement on their vote of “no confidence” of President Timothy Cooley, who has not communicated publicly since the newsletter was published on July 22.

**From:** sem@indiana.edu  
**Subject:** Updates from Members of the SEM Board  
**Date:** August 24, 2020 at 3:45 PM  
**To:** mattsak@tulane.edu

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S

Dear SEM members, former members, and interested parties:

We hope you are doing as well as can be expected in these trying times.

The seven of us write to share an update about the current SEM Board impasse. We hope to answer some questions, although we acknowledge that not all questions can be answered, and new ones will likely be raised. The nature of the situation currently prevents us from sharing everything members would like to know, and we hear members' frustrations. We share many of them.

Following months of ongoing concerns that we communicated to Dr. Tim Cooley multiple times, both orally and in writing, we called a vote of no confidence in his presidency on July 8. The vote passed with the support of 6 out of the 7 Board members in attendance at the meeting. In the absence of Dr. Cooley's expected resignation after the vote of no confidence, six Board members wrote a letter on July 15 recommending his resignation and requesting a response by July 17. On July 24, Dr. Cooley responded that he is not planning to resign.

Anticipating Dr. Cooley's refusal to resign, six of us reached out to the Council and the Ethics Committee on July 20, asking for their advice and requesting the formation of an ad hoc committee to help resolve the impasse. Dr. Timothy Mangin, chair of the Council, has recently informed us that the composition of this ad hoc committee (which will include current Council members, past presidents of the Society, and former Board members) is nearly finalized.

The seven members signing below have seriously considered resigning *en masse* from the Board due to our difficulties in trusting and working with Dr. Cooley. While mass resignation remains a potential outcome, we would prefer to avoid this option because we fear it would be detrimental to morale in the Society at this crucial time.

Much of our work continues amidst the current challenges—particularly the preparations for our annual meeting. However, we lament the vital work we have not been able to do because of the impasse. We believe that the survival of SEM depends on openness, listening, as well as on collective, collaborative action, and we ask for your input and your help in working toward the changes SEM so desperately needs.

Many members have reached out to us individually and as representatives of various groups within SEM. We are grateful for the offers of support and calls to action we have received, and we thank you for your concern and investment in the health of the Society. We seven are doing our best to serve SEM and to help the Society and the discipline work toward becoming anti-racist and acknowledging its colonialist, imperialist past *and* present.

Sincerely,

Jean Kidula, Member-at-Large (Groups)

Alejandro L. Madrid, First Vice-President

Noriko Manabe, Treasurer

Gregory Melchor-Barz, Past President

Sarah Morelli, Member-at-Large (Prizes)

Lei X. Ouyang, Second Vice-President

Tes Slominski, Secretary

[http://www.ethnomusicology.org/members/EmailOptPreferences.aspx?](http://www.ethnomusicology.org/members/EmailOptPreferences.aspx?id=39059802&e=mattsak@tulane.edu&h=48b647e9cd2b667f25fb2d588b14ad31a06abc5a)

[id=39059802&e=mattsak@tulane.edu&h=48b647e9cd2b667f25fb2d588b14ad31a06abc5a](http://www.ethnomusicology.org/members/EmailOptPreferences.aspx?id=39059802&e=mattsak@tulane.edu&h=48b647e9cd2b667f25fb2d588b14ad31a06abc5a)

9) Two days later, the SEM Board again made an official statement, this time in support of Executive Director Stephen Stuempfle. SEM's ED is a paid position supported by Indiana University and the dues of SEM members.



**From:** sem@indiana.edu  
**Subject:** Statement from SEM Board Members on SEM Staff  
**Date:** August 26, 2020 at 3:17 PM  
**To:** mattsak@tulane.edu

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S

We, the members of the SEM Board, write this letter to affirm our support for the Business Office and the staff of the Society for Ethnomusicology, including Stephen Stuempfle, the Executive Director, and Stephanie Sturgis, the Program Specialist.

As the Executive Director, Dr. Stuempfle's role is to execute policies made by the Board. He does not make policies; the Board makes them. The Executive Director attends Board meetings and provides helpful suggestions, particularly as they relate to feasibility. However, he does *not* have a vote. Complaints about SEM policies should thus be directed to the Board and President, not the Executive Director.

Dr. Stuempfle keeps SEM running, managing day-to-day finances, keeping track of cash flow, maintaining memberships, overseeing the logistics for the conference, and managing outreach initiatives, among many other tasks. He recently won a [CARES grant for SEM from the National Endowment for the Humanities](#), which is providing jobs to ethnomusicologists. Many of us Board members have held leadership positions in other societies, and we believe that Dr. Stuempfle is among the best in the business of running academic societies. He is responsible, conscientious, efficient, accessible, hard-working, and financially prudent.

Like many academic societies in the humanities and social sciences, SEM is currently going through uncertain times. Academic precarity, already a widespread issue before COVID-19, has been exacerbated by the pandemic. We have also been forced to move our conference online. Dr. Stuempfle, together with Ms. Sturgis, is doing a remarkable job in keeping SEM going through these external crises, which have been compounded by the internal impasse.

As an employee of the Society who reports to the President but still must support the initiatives of the 7 Board members and other SEM constituents, Dr. Stuempfle has been put into an awkward position for reasons that are not of his own making. We thank Dr. Stuempfle and Ms. Sturgis for their excellent service to the Society in these difficult times.

Jean Kidula, Member-at-Large (Groups)  
Alejandro L. Madrid, First Vice President  
Noriko Manabe, Treasurer  
Gregory Melchor-Barz, Past President  
Sarah Morelli, Member at Large (Prizes)  
Lei X Ouyang, Second Vice President  
Tes Slominski, Secretary

<http://www.ethnomusicology.org/members/EmailOptPreferences.aspx?id=39059802&e=mattsak@tulane.edu&h=48b647e9cd2b667f25fb2d588b14ad31a06abc5a>

10) Finally, one day later, SEM made an official announcement of an *ad hoc* committee “to address the recent impasse between the SEM President and other Board Members.”

**From:** sem@indiana.edu  
**Subject:** SEM Council Ad-Hoc Committee on SEM Board  
**Date:** August 27, 2020 at 5:44 PM  
**To:** mattsak@tulane.edu

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S

To SEM Members and Colleagues:

Events at recent SEM annual meetings and political actions in response to highly public instances of racism and police brutality against Black people in the United States have led to a critical moment where our general membership and leadership have begun to tackle issues of race, diversity and inclusion, positionality, institutional racism, white supremacy, and decolonization of our discipline. In the wake of these highly charged and difficult events, an impasse has arisen between the SEM President and other Board members.

We write today to share with you that, per a request made by the SEM Board to the SEM Council, an *ad hoc* Committee has been created to address the recent impasse between the SEM President and other Board Members. The SEM President is supportive of this endeavor.

The charge of this *ad hoc* Committee is as follows: to listen to the concerns of the President and the other Board members; to consider potential paths forward through the impasse and potential mechanisms for resolution; and then to advise the President and Board members of the same.

The *ad hoc* Committee includes these colleagues.

Susan Asai, past Council member  
Harris Berger, past President  
Michael Birenbaum Quintero, past Council member  
Elizabeth Clendinning, Council member  
Bev Diamond, past President  
Eileen M. Hayes, past Board member  
Travis A. Jackson, past Board member  
Junko Oba, Council member  
Deborah Wong, past President

On August 25th, the *ad hoc* Committee convened for the first time. They anticipate their process (reviewing documents, meetings with the SEM President and other Board members via Zoom, and recommending potential ways forward) to take a few weeks. Please join me and other members of the SEM Council in thanking the *ad hoc* Committee members for their service to our Society in this initiative - and in wishing well and supporting the Committee members as well as all of our elected leadership as they begin their work.

With our very kindest regards,

Timothy Mangin, Chair

On behalf of the SEM Council

11) The most recent official communication from the SEM Board announced the results of the SEM survey about the SEM-L listserv and a revision of the moderators' roles and nomination process.



Matt Sakakeeny &lt;mattsak@gmail.com&gt;

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**[SEM-L] SEM Listserv: Call for Nominations for Moderators**1 message

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**SEMEXEC** <semexec@indiana.edu>

Fri, Sep 4, 2020 at 2:03 PM

Reply-To: SEMEXEC &lt;semexec@indiana.edu&gt;

To: "sem-l@indiana.edu" &lt;sem-l@indiana.edu&gt;

Dear SEM members and listserv subscribers,

Many thanks for your patience as we worked through the survey and possible policy implications. In the process, we consulted with and received recommendations on policies from the Publication Awards Committee, the Council, the Ethics Committee, and Scare Quotes.

Among many other issues, the survey responses and the advising committees emphasized the need for a team of moderators, ideally three, with representation of diverse ethnic, racial, generational, and occupational identities. In the future, we foresee either elected moderators or a mix of elected and appointed moderators. In the interest of opening the listserv soon, we are implementing an accelerated process until the next election cycle, wherein we ask the membership for nominations and consult with the Publications Advisory Committee and BIPOC constituency groups about them.

We are now seeking nominations, including self-nominations, from the membership for interim moderators. The [description of the position can be found in the News area](#) of the SEM website. To nominate yourself or someone else, [please fill out an online form](#). We ask for a commitment to serve through November 2021.

Many thanks for your support of SEM.

Sincerely,

Noriko Manabe, Treasurer

# **SEM Listserv: Call for Nominations for Moderators**

**Friday, September 4, 2020**

Posted by: Stephen Stuempfle

SEM is seeking nominations, including self-nominations, from the membership for interim moderators of its discussion and announcement listservs. A commitment to serve through November 2021 is expected.

## **Description**

The moderator will work in a team of three moderators to review submissions, identify whether they should be posted to announcement or discussion listservs, ask submitters for revisions if necessary, and publish them promptly. Moderators will be expected to consult with each other as appropriate, and with an oversight committee as necessary if questions arise. Given the special labor involved in restarting the listserv and discussion forum, we are planning to compensate the initial moderators in the form of free membership and conference registration.

## **Set-up tasks**

- Develop moderation criteria in conversation with SEM Board, committees, and member constituencies. (A list of proposed moderation criteria from the survey and several membership constituents will be shared with the moderators.)
- Publish the moderation criteria on the SEM website
- Prepare and publish 3-4 initial posts to announce the listserv, introduce themselves as moderators, and set the tone/model behavior on the listserv
- Become familiar with Indiana University's listserv system
- Periodic communication with Listserv community reminding them of norms and expectations

## **Ongoing tasks**

- Review submissions to SEM-announce and SEM-discussion
- Separate announcements from discussions per published criteria and publish submissions in the appropriate listserv
- Moderators will be asked to submit semiannual reports counting the number of submissions received, published, and rejected, as well as descriptions of what is working or not working.
- In the future, discussions may be moved to a forum on the SEM website. If this move occurs, moderators would need to learn this new system.

## **Criteria for selection**

- Demonstrated facility in identifying and discussing discrimination by race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexuality, ableism, age, occupation, academic rank, etc., or entitlement according to the moderation criteria
- Able to return submissions for editing as necessary in a diplomatic, nondiscriminatory manner
- Committed to applying moderation criteria equitably
- Comfortable with learning new computer systems, such as listserv systems or new websites
- Prompt in responding to submissions
- Able to work as part of a team of moderators

Interested members are invited to nominate a member, including themselves, on this form:  
<https://forms.gle/Df1c34dmuu7xeJKL8>

12) On September 21 the SEM Board send an email to members announcing the release of the *ad hoc* committee's report and the resignation of President Timothy Cooley.



Dear members of the Society for Ethnomusicology, former members, and interested parties:

We 7 write with a brief update to share several announcements. Our plan is to write soon with a more detailed message outlining the Board's work recently and in the near future, including information about the relaunching of SEM-L and information regarding Board programming at the 2020 Annual Meeting. In the meantime, we expect you all will appreciate an update about the recent Board impasse.

1. At the recommendation of the SEM Council Ad Hoc Advisory Committee (SCAAC), Dr. Tim Cooley submitted his resignation as President of SEM on September 17, 2020. The remaining 7 Board members have accepted his letter of resignation, which can be found in the Members' Area on the SEM website.
2. The seated 7 Board members have decided to serve collaboratively as co-Presidents *pro tem* until the end of the 2020 General Membership Meeting on October 24. We believe this departure from standard practice is in the spirit of the SCAAC's recommendation that the Board appoint a President *pro tem* to serve until the incoming Board members have taken office in October 2020. We also believe that it maintains and formalizes the collaborative and consensus-based approach we 7 Board members have taken in the past few months.
3. We also share the SCAAC's report to inform the membership of the ad hoc committee's recommendations. That report also can be found in the Members' Area on the SEM website.

Jean Kidula, President *pro tem* ( and Member-at-Large, Groups).  
Alejandro L. Madrid, President *pro tem* (and 1st Vice-President)  
Noriko Manabe, President *pro tem* (and Treasurer)  
Gregory Melchor-Barz, President *pro tem* (and Past President)  
Sarah Morelli, President *pro tem* (and Member-at-Large, Prizes)  
Lei X. Ouyang, President *pro tem* (and 2nd Vice-President)  
Tes Slominski, President *pro tem* (and Secretary)



TO: Timothy Mangin, Chair, SEM Council  
FROM: SEM Council Ad Hoc Advisory Committee  
DATE: 12 September 2020  
RE: The Committee's Work and Recommendations

### **Formation and Charge**

On 30 July 2020, the SEM Council (hereafter, the Council) met and voted to form the SEM Council Ad Hoc Advisory Committee (SCAAC). The Council took that action, as Council Chair Timothy Mangin and four other Council members explained in a 23 August email message to the committee's members, "in response to a request made by six members of the Board to the Council to work through an impasse in the SEM leadership." The message included the observation that that impasse, which was described in a 24 August email to the SEM membership (see Appendix 1), "has hindered the Society's healthy operation in recent months" and that both President Tim Cooley and the Board supported the formation of the committee. Following that vote, over the first three weeks of August, Mangin contacted several members of the Society—former presidents, former Board members, and former Council members—to serve on SCAAC together with two current Council members. Once constituted, the committee of nine received its charge from the Council Chair in the 23 August email mentioned previously.

Specifically, SCAAC was asked: (1) "to meet with President Cooley and other Board members via Zoom, listen to their concerns, and help identify points of discord as well as agreement"; (2) "to brainstorm potential pathways forward, or suggest options for successful resolution of the issues within current SEM by-laws"; (3) to "share [its] findings with President Cooley and the Board"; and (4) to "convey a general account of process and results to the Council, including suggestions for next steps and potential actions for the Council to take." To facilitate SCAAC's work, the Council shared with the committee several documents and correspondence provided to it by President Cooley, the rest of the members of the Board, and the SEM Ethics Committee, as well as the Constitution, By-Laws, and most recent SEM strategic plan. At our meeting with him, Council Chair Mangin stated that this report would be shared with the SEM membership, and we operated with the understanding and the hope that it would.

### **Meetings and Process**

Shortly thereafter, on 25 August, Council Chair Mangin and Secretary Sarah Snyder Hopkins met with SCAAC and responded to our questions about the documents we had

freshly reviewed and about the timetable for our work. Determined to work quickly but not hastily, SCAAC met subsequently on 1, 2, 7, 9 and 11 September, devoting the three middle meetings to conversations, respectively, with President Cooley, the rest of the Board members, and SEM Executive Director Stephen Stuempfle. In preparation for those conversations, SCAAC devised two lists of questions (see Appendixes 2 and 3).

In keeping with our charge, our aim in those meetings was to listen to our colleagues and to understand their actions, experiences and positions better. Those were not easy conversations, and they very quickly highlighted a departure from what, at least for the last couple of decades, has been the *de facto* style of SEM Board operation. It has been standard practice that, their individual portfolios notwithstanding, Board members accomplish their work via extensive consultation and consensus-building rather than through individual or unilateral action. (This standard practice also has a foundation in SEM's Constitution and By-Laws, which, in Article V, Paragraph 2, state that "The Board shall determine the general policy of the Society.") That shift, itself neither requested nor welcomed by all of its members, hindered the Board's ability to respond in a timely and considered way to address the SEM membership's concerns about events stretching back at least to November 2019, including: the reaction to and questions regarding the 2019 Charles Seeger lecture; the challenges posed to the Society and its membership by the COVID-19 pandemic; and the long-standing issues raised in Dr. Danielle Brown's 12 June 2020 "Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies," which was posted on the SEM listserv, as well as in other locations.

Following our charge, we looked to SEM's Constitution and By-Laws as we considered a number of possible resolutions. Among them were recommending professional or intra-Society mediation; recommending that Tim Cooley remain as president; and recommending President Cooley's resignation. For each alternative, we weighed the information before us to determine which would provide the least disruption to the Society's functioning at an already uncertain time and put it on the firmest possible ground to address myriad challenges, including a crisis of confidence in the Society on the part of many members, ongoing questions about racial equity in ethnomusicology, and the pressures of increasing precarity for non-tenured workers in the US academy. And, of course, we considered a range of other questions: what further actions and decisions might each suggestion entail? What guidance did the Constitution and By-Laws provide?

## Recommendations

We will begin by observing that SCAAC was impressed with the work of the Board and Stephen Stuempfle in keeping the Society functioning during the impasse. Based on our analysis of all the materials before us and our interviews, SCAAC unanimously decided to make the following recommendations to the Council, with the understanding that the governing structures of SEM leave the adoption or implementation of these recommendations squarely with the Board.

1) **Resignation of Tim Cooley.** Our first recommendation is that President Tim Cooley tender his resignation as soon as possible. We recognize his dedication to and efforts on behalf of the Society over the years. We appreciate, as well, the candor and willingness to address systemic issues he has displayed both publicly, in the Summer 2020 issue of the *SEM Newsletter*, and privately, in our conversation with him. Although he is by no means responsible for all the challenges the Society and its membership face, we find that his actions have not only inhibited the ability of the other members of the Board to act on those challenges in a timely and considered manner, they have frequently exacerbated the challenges faced by the Society and alienated other Board members. A number of unilateral actions by the President were ill-advised and did not reflect the consensus of the Board. We acknowledge, via Cooley's "President's Column" in the Summer 2020 *SEM Newsletter*, his growing awareness of the ways in which "SEM as an institution and I as its current President have ignored, dismissed, suppressed, and harmed many of our members with racist acts, the reinscriptions of hegemonic power [sic], and the active and complicit protection of the status quo and thus white supremacy." At a time when the Society, like many others, has to address those issues, we need a leader who can work collaboratively with the Board and draw upon the varied strengths and experiences of the Board members.

We are painfully aware of the gravity of our recommendation. We did not come to it lightly. We regard these circumstances as a strong sign that the SEM has work to do, collectively.

2) **Board Officer adjustments.** Should President Cooley resign, the Board would have to address the question of succession and fill the consequent vacancies. In the Society's By-Laws, amending Article VI, "Elected Officers," of the constitution, Paragraph 9 reads "Vacancies in any office (other than that of Honorary President), succession to which is not provided in the Constitution or By-Laws, shall be filled by the Board until the next

Annual Meeting.” Given the imminent approach of the 2020 Annual Meeting, we recommend that, should President Cooley resign, the remaining members of the Board meet as quickly as possible to appoint a President *pro tem* who will serve in accordance with Paragraph 9. Although the choice of an appointee is the Board’s alone, we suggest that a current member of the Board, as someone already elected by the membership, would be the most logical candidate. We suggest as well that, because of his institutional knowledge and long experience working on behalf of the Society, Stephen Stuempfle be invited to contribute to the Board’s discussion.

Should President Cooley resign, the Board-named President *pro tem* would serve until the end of the 2020 General Membership meeting. The Board would then have to name an Interim President for the period between the 2020 and 2021 Annual Meetings. We suggest three alternatives to serve as Interim President in order of preference (although again we emphasize that the choice rests with the Board):

- the president-elect
- a recent president of the Society
- the President *pro tem* chosen following President Cooley’s resignation

It would be important that the title for that time period be “Interim President,” that the Interim President’s term be just one year, and that elections remain on cycle after that time.

Finally, for the period between the 2021 and 2022 Annual Meetings, the Board would have to determine who would fulfill the role of Past President. Again, we suggest that, for the sake of continuity, a recent (and actual) past president would be the most logical choice. Barring further vacancies, all issues with the composition of the Board would be resolved by the 2022 Annual Meeting, when all Board members will again be elected.

3) **Constitution and By-Laws.** As the Board, the Council and the SEM Ethics Committee are all aware, the fact that SCAAC had to be formed points to the inadequacy of the Society’s current Constitution and By-Laws to address crises in leadership and matters of governance under such circumstances. That is, although the Board clearly has the ability to appoint replacements until the following General Membership meeting, the By-Laws are not clear about what is to happen beyond that point, particularly when a vacancy will continue, for example, past the next Annual Meeting and precede the next election. We

recommend that the By-Laws be amended to provide clear language for addressing a range of contingencies including but not limited to the resignation of anyone elected to a position in the Society and the inability of anyone so elected to serve, for any reason. And, though we hope this situation never arises, there need to be unambiguous and transparent procedures for removing and/or replacing an elected officer.

4) **New Board Officers.** We urge the Board to involve the in-coming Officers (the President-Elect, 2nd Vice President, Treasurer, and Member-At-Large) as soon as possible, e.g., by including them in all communications and inviting them to attend all meetings as observers before they rotate onto the Board at the General Membership meeting in October 2020.

5) **Communication with the SEM Membership.** Transparency and timely communication is essential. We urge the Board to reopen SEM-L and all SEM social media platforms as soon as possible. The membership needs its town squares, especially now.

6) **Decolonizing SEM.** This is beyond the scope of SCAAC and was not a part of the original charge to the Committee. This crucial work must be shared across the SEM membership and leadership. Nonetheless, by moving forward to resolve the impasse in the functioning of the Society's leadership, we hope that we have cleared the path for addressing these complex issues. The members of SCAAC are ready to help with that important work.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan M. Asai, former Council member

Harris M. Berger, former President

Michael Birenbaum Quintero, former Council member

Elizabeth A. Clendinning, Council member

Beverly Diamond, former President

Eileen M. Hayes, former Board member

Travis A. Jackson, former Board member

Junko Oba, Council member

Deborah Wong, former President

## **Appendix 1:**

### **“Updates from Members of the Board,” 24 August 2020 email to SEM Membership**

Dear SEM members, former members, and interested parties:

We hope you are doing as well as can be expected in these trying times.

The seven of us write to share an update about the current SEM Board impasse. We hope to answer some questions, although we acknowledge that not all questions can be answered, and new ones will likely be raised. The nature of the situation currently prevents us from sharing everything members would like to know, and we hear members' frustrations. We share many of them.

Following months of ongoing concerns that we communicated to Dr. Tim Cooley multiple times, both orally and in writing, we called a vote of no confidence in his presidency on July 8. The vote passed with the support of 6 out of the 7 Board members in attendance at the meeting. In the absence of Dr. Cooley's expected resignation after the vote of no confidence, six Board members wrote a letter on July 15 recommending his resignation and requesting a response by July 17. On July 24, Dr. Cooley responded that he is not planning to resign.

Anticipating Dr. Cooley's refusal to resign, six of us reached out to the Council and the Ethics Committee on July 20, asking for their advice and requesting the formation of an ad hoc committee to help resolve the impasse. Dr. Timothy Mangin, chair of the Council, has recently informed us that the composition of this ad hoc committee (which will include current Council members, past presidents of the Society, and former Board members) is nearly finalized.

The seven members signing below have seriously considered resigning *en masse* from the Board due to our difficulties in trusting and working with Dr. Cooley. While mass resignation remains a potential outcome, we would prefer to avoid this option because we fear it would be detrimental to morale in the Society at this crucial time.

Much of our work continues amidst the current challenges—particularly the preparations for our annual meeting. However, we lament the vital work we have not been able to do because of the impasse. We believe that the survival of SEM depends on openness,

listening, as well as on collective, collaborative action, and we ask for your input and your help in working toward the changes SEM so desperately needs.

Many members have reached out to us individually and as representatives of various groups within SEM. We are grateful for the offers of support and calls to action we have received, and we thank you for your concern and investment in the health of the Society. We seven are doing our best to serve SEM and to help the Society and the discipline work toward becoming anti-racist and acknowledging its colonialist, imperialist past *and* present.

Sincerely,

Jean Kidula, Member-at-Large (Groups)  
Alejandro L. Madrid, First Vice-President  
Noriko Manabe, Treasurer  
Gregory Melchor-Barz, Past President  
Sarah Morelli, Member-at-Large (Prizes)  
Lei X. Ouyang, Second Vice-President  
Tes Slominski, Secretary



## **Appendix 2:**

### **Questions for President Cooley and the Rest of the Board Members**

1. What would you like to say that is not included in the documents we've already seen (Board correspondence, edited timeline, etc.)?
2. What is the outcome you would like to see from these discussions?
3. How would you characterize your aims as President/a Board Member? What kind of vision and what aims did you have when you started in that role, and how have they changed in the time since?
4. Noting that your work as President/a Board member is positioned on a continuum between unilateral and consensus-based decision-making and action, how do you see the SEM Board working ideally?
5. What went wrong?
6. How, in ways not already disclosed, did you try to remedy the working relationship? (Follow-ups might focus on issues raised in documents, if necessary.)
7. If you could do anything differently, what would you change and how?
8. How do you imagine we might move forward, and where might you feel compromise is possible, if at all? (As we near the end of this conversation, can you share how you might feel about a process of mediation, professional or otherwise?)
9. Are there any questions you have for us? Is there anything else you'd like to add?

### **Appendix 3:**

#### **Questions for SEM Executive Director Stephen Stuempfle**

1. How has your work, including financial planning, been affected by all the events since last November? How many members have cancelled their membership in response to the current conflicts, e.g., since the 2019 SEM meeting?
2. What do you think that the SEM leadership needs to do to regain the trust of the membership, prevent members from leaving the Society, and even attract new members? (Possible follow-up: What actions do you think the Society should take regarding decolonizing the field and combating racism in the SEM?)
3. We have drawn up a list of suggestions for succession in the event of Tim Cooley's resignation. What potential issues or problems do you see with our suggestions? What else, based on your experience, do you think we should consider or address before making recommendations to the Council?
4. We are, as you might have guessed, going to recommend changes in the By-Laws to address situations in which a President or any Board member cannot complete a term, whether because of resignation, illness or something else. What other changes might you recommend to provide clarity or guidance in the future?
5. Do you know or would you feel comfortable recommending contacts at the ACLS or elsewhere who might provide us perspective on how to address the situation we are facing?
6. Are there any other things you'd like to say to us?

17 September 2020

Dear Members of SEM:

With this letter I offer my resignation from the position of President of the Board of Directors of the Society for Ethnomusicology. As a member of SEM for over thirty years, opportunities to serve in appointed and elected roles have been a privilege and honor. I leave now knowing that in each of these roles I served the society and its members with dedication, integrity, and malice toward no one. Whether or not the current Board impasse was ever necessary, now it is time for SEM to refocus its attention and energy on the difficult but positive work of transforming SEM into a truly anti-racist scholarly society.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Cooley