



October 2021 Newsletter

President's Corner

Dear AHEA Members and Colleagues,

Our e-Journal, *Hungarian Cultural Studies*, is owned by our scholarly community. Published annually, it provides a forum for original research in or related to Hungarian Studies, i.e., its focus is on aspects of Hungarian culture across the humanities and social science disciplines. Articles related to Hungarian diaspora communities as well as Hungarians in the neighboring states of Hungary are also of interest. It is published under the leadership of the Editor-in-Chief, Louise O. Vasvari and her capable editorial team. How fortunate we are that since its first issue in 2008, the journal has been open access under fair principles, with published articles freely available for citation. High quality scholarship is not without its costs and the editorial team is to be commended for its dedication and devotion to producing the journal largely under their freely given volunteer efforts. At our most recent AHEA Board meeting, Louise announced that both she and Ilana Rosen, HCS's book review editor, are stepping down after publication of the 15th volume of the journal (next year). We owe them both a huge debt of thanks and look forward to their help during this transition time.

Call for Abstracts: We are preparing for the 46th Annual AHEA Conference in Hamden, Connecticut (in the USA) at Quinnipiac University on April 7 – 9, 2022. Call for abstracts is available and submission is open online.

Please reach out if you have comments or suggestions pertaining to *Hungarian Cultural Studies* or suggestions on how AHEA might better support your career advancement.

With best wishes for your good health and continued success,

Klára Papp, PhD
President, AHEA klarapapp@gmail.com

Member Spotlight

AHEA is a scholarly organization connecting a diverse set of educators, researchers, professionals, independent scholars and academics who come from many walks of life. Each month we highlight the academic and professional career of a different AHEA member.

This month's featured member is **Jeffrey Pennington**



Please tell us a little bit about your career arc, particularly how you arrived in your current position as executive director of a major area studies research center.

As an undergraduate student at Georgetown University in the mid-1980s, I had the opportunity to study abroad in 1986–1987 at József Attila University (as it was known then) in Szeged. This was my first exposure to Hungary, and I immediately became captivated. I plunged headlong into learning the language and about Hungarian history and culture. I also had the chance to visit Transylvania for the first time in

March 1987, starting a “love affair” with the region that lasts to this day.

In the period 1988–1993, I pursued an MA in East European Studies at Indiana University Bloomington, where I continued with Hungarian studies under the mentorship of the late Professor Mihály Szegedy-Maszák. In 1990–1991, I spent a year as a Fulbright researcher affiliated with the Faculty of History at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, Romania. It was during this time that I first began my research on the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania](#)—the “other” Lutheran church in Transylvania, whose congregations are predominantly ethnic Hungarian, though with a couple of ethnic Slovak congregations and one ethnic Romanian one. (In comparison with the [Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania](#), i.e., the Lutheran church of the Transylvanian Saxons and other Germans in Romania.)

I returned to Hungary in 1992–1993, spending a year in Debrecen on an academic exchange between Indiana University and Kossuth Lajos University (as it was known then). During this time, I worked extensively in the university library and made frequent research trips to Budapest to work in the state archives, Széchenyi Library, and library of the Museum of Transportation on a project related to the history of the Hungarian Northeastern Railway.

Following completion of my MA in September 1993, I moved to Bucharest, Romania, where I worked for four years as the program officer at the field office of the [International Research & Exchanges Board](#). This experience was formative and allowed me to combine my aptitude for administration and management with my academic interest in East Central Europe.

After a brief interlude teaching English in Japan, I returned to academic administration in January 2000, when I took a position as the assistant director of the [Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center](#) at Indiana University. Hungary fell under the “Uralic” part of this center, so in a way, this was a “double homecoming”: back to IU and back to Hungarian studies. This was my first stint managing an area studies center at a university, which, at the same time, was also a U.S. Department of Education Title VI National Resource Center. This meant the center received a Federal grant to support language teaching and outreach programming focused on the Inner Asian and Uralic world area.

I returned to Japan in late fall 2001 on a Japanese Ministry of Education grant to pursue doctoral research at the [Kobe University Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies](#). My research project compared the interwar relations of Japan with Hungary and Romania and allowed me to conduct extensive research in the diplomatic archives of the three countries. Following the conclusion of my grant in late fall 2005, I returned to Indiana University—this time to take up the position as assistant director of IU’s then newly established European Union Center of Excellence.

The work at the EUCE was similar to that which I did at the IAUNRC, but with a different geographic and thematic focus and a different funder. Rather than the U.S. Department of Education, the EUCE was funded by the European Union, which is a completely different and no easier bureaucracy to navigate. Although I enjoyed the work and although Hungary and other countries of East Central Europe had joined the EU, the thematic focus of the center evolved towards the contemporary political economy of the EU and not on the individual states or their history, cultural, languages, etc.—precisely those topics in which I had an interest.

In January 2008, I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to join the [Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies](#) at the University of California, Berkeley as its executive director. I’ve been at the institute for almost 14 years now and I greatly enjoy the work. I’m fortunate to have had faculty directors and staff who value my intellectual input and recommendations for programming, so we always try to have talks related to Hungary at least once or twice a year. For example, in February 2021, historian Anita Kurimay of Bryn Mawr College (and a UC Berkeley undergraduate alumna) spoke to us about her recent book *Queer Budapest 1873-1961*; while in September 2021, Gábor Egrý, director of the Institute of Political History in Budapest, spoke to us about history, memory, and politics in Hungary. Lastly, I should add that my institute was a financial sponsor of the 2009 AHEA Conference, which took place at Berkeley.

How did you find out about AHEA, and what led you to join?

AHEA Conferences have been periodically held at Indiana University, and I was present for the one in 2006, on the topic *Cold War Hungary, the Revolution of 1956, and its Aftermath*. I joined AHEA at that time, and I have tried to be a dues-paying member since. I believe in supporting professional associations related to my intellectual interests. AHEA has a modest dues structure, yet it provides the field an annual conference and a journal. I know that this is the work of a dedicated group of volunteers, and they should be sincerely thanked and applauded for their tireless support of the field of Hungarian studies.

What impact has your involvement with AHEA made on your career and/or your work?

I attended the 2009 AHEA conference that was held at UC Berkeley, and there I learned that the 2010 conference would be held in Szeged, Hungary. Knowing that I would be conducting research in Hungary in summer 2010, I submitted a proposal for the conference, and once accepted, I timed my research trip to coincide with the conference in Szeged. The feedback received at that conference led me to revise my research methodology and to rethink my conclusions. I have an article based on this research forthcoming in a journal on railway history.

My research often takes me to Transylvania, and 2015 was no exception, so I was able to combine research with attending the 2015 AHEA conference in Kolozsvár. I also took part in the post-conference bus tour of Transylvania, and that was an incredible opportunity to visit places I had never been before and to share the experience with others who have an interest in the region. (Many thanks to Kálmán, who kept us well *lubricated* on the trip.)

From 2016 to 2018 I was honored to serve a term as a member-at-large on the AHEA Board; and since 2019 I have been a member of the Membership Development Committee. These have been opportunities to serve the organization and to contribute to its strength and continuing vibrancy.

Tell us, please, about your current project.

Nowadays my “day job” at the Institute doesn’t allow me a lot of time to pursue research projects. Add to this the fact that I was recently elected secretary of the [Sierra Pacific Synod](#) of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#), so there go my weekends. I guess I could say that I’m currently “between projects.” This being said, I would like to return to my earlier research on the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania](#). I was (re)inspired during the early days of the Covid pandemic, when a number of Lutheran congregations in Transylvania started to post services online led solely by their pastor in front of a tripod-mounted camera (oftentimes an smartphone), sometimes with an organist accompanying, while at other times not. This was an opportunity for the Lutheran church in Romania to highlight congregations from throughout the region—from village churches in Zselyk/Jeica and Apáca/Apața to urban congregations in Brassó/Brașov/Kronstadt and Arad to the ELCR’s largest congregation, the ethnic Slovak congregation in Nagylak/Nădlac/Nadlak.

Have a New or Upcoming Publication?

We would love to help share news of the impressive and diverse work that AHEA members are doing! If you have a recent book, article, or other scholarly/artistic work you would like your fellow members to know about, send a brief description/promotional blurb and a link to further information to aheanews@gmail.com. Requests will appear in the order in which they were received and may be edited for space.

Don't Let Your Membership Benefits Stop!

Renew your 2021 membership to ensure uninterrupted membership today to ensure access to an expanded network of scholars and academics working in multidisciplinary fields of Hungarian Studies.

AHEA's membership dues enable you to access "Members Only" section of the website, participate in the governance of AHEA through your vote on our newly revised Bylaws as well as officers and board members.

We are pleased to announce membership discounts as well as the option of a new **lifetime membership**. Visit <https://ahea.net/members/membership-information>.

Only members in good standing can vote in leadership elections. Please remember to renew yours! **Click here** to access our PayPal link, or to get information on paying by check or bank transfer.

Where Your Membership Dollar Goes

71% of your membership dues directly fund AHEA's mission of the **teaching and dissemination of Hungarian culture** through the annual conference and scholarship support programs. The other 29% helps keep our organization running.