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30 September 2021

To: Randy Smith, Vice Provost for Academic Programs

From: Dana Renga, Dean, Arts and Humanities

RE: Request to Change Name of Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Dear Randy,

I write to pledge my full support for the request to change the name of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) to the Department of Near Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (NESA). In that the department is The College of Arts and Science's academic home for South Asian Studies the name change aligns with the unit's mission. In addition to supporting strengths and areas of growth and opportunity in curriculum, scholarship, engagement, advancement, and interdisciplinary collaboration, the name change contributes to Ohio State's missions in inclusive excellence. Further, the name change, which has unanimous support by the department, will bring the department in line with peer universities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'DR', written over a faint grid background.



Dana Renga (she/her)  
Dean, Arts and Humanities  
Professor, Department of French and Italian  
Affiliated Faculty: Comparative Studies, Film Studies, and Women's, Gender & Sexuality  
Studies  
**College of Arts and Sciences**



**To:** Randy Smith, Vice Provost for Academic Programs

**From:** Scott Levi, Interim Chair, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures; Professor and Chair, Department of History

**Re:** Request to Change Name of Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC)

**Date:** November 8, 2021

Dear Randy,

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) is requesting to change its name to **Department of Near Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (NESA)**. Please see below for our rationale in requesting this change.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Scott Levi  
Interim Chair, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures  
Professor and Chair, Department of History



**Proposal:** Change the name of Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) to Department of Near Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (NESA).

1. Rationale

Changing NELC to NESA is both logical and desirable insofar as the department has for years served as the academic home to South Asian studies. NELC already houses the South Asia Studies Minor and Hindi language. A name change to NESA aligns with the department's mission. We aim to advance this part of our mission for a number of reasons. South Asia represents a major part of the world and one-fifth of the world's population lives in South Asia. Additionally, the South Asian diaspora in the United States warrants study and academic representation.

Beyond increasing the visibility of research and teaching on South Asia at OSU, a departmental home for South Asian Studies would contribute to the University's mission to be "the nation's premier leader and model for diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education and broader society" [[Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#)]. Curriculum and programming in South Asian studies would enhance ongoing efforts by the [Multicultural Center's APIDA](#) (Asian, Pacific Islander, and Desi American) student initiatives, which engage in "social, cultural and educational programming" to support the "vibrant and diverse Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi American, Asian international and Middle Eastern and North African communities at Ohio State." Enhanced visibility in South Asian Studies would also contribute to the Office of International Affairs, and especially the [Global Gateway in India's](#) efforts to facilitate academic collaboration between OSU and the South Asian region. Adding South Asia explicitly to NELC and OSU will open important avenues for outreach and development work.

We anticipate that changing NELC's name to NESA will bring the department more in-line with comparable departments at other universities, improve the department's visibility to students, increase enrollments, increase the visibility of research and teaching of South Asia Studies and Near East Studies, increase fundraising opportunities, and further the missions of both the department and OSU.

Finally, we note that the department considered taking the name Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (MESA instead of NESA). The faculty discussed this issue and decided to retain Near East in the department's name. The reason is that, within the field, Middle Eastern Studies departments exhibit a tendency to focus on contemporary politics and social science fields whereas Near Eastern departments tend to exhibit more historical depth and a stronger attachment to humanities fields. As a whole, the department feels that Near East better characterizes the strengths and mission of our department.

2. Commonly used names in top academic departments

Harvard University: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations  
Yale University: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations  
University of Chicago: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations  
Princeton University: Department of Near Eastern Studies



Columbia University: Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies

University of Virginia: Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures

University of Minnesota: Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Rutgers University: Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Cultures

Emory University: Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies

3. Programmatic changes

The proposed name change will not require any programmatic changes, although we do anticipate developing an interdisciplinary South Asian Studies major.

4. Impact of the department's name change on students, faculty, and staff in the current department

The core NELC faculty will not be impacted by this change. Neither will our current staff or students.

5. Impact that the department's name change would have on students, faculty, and staff beyond the unit

The current South Asia Studies Initiative (SASI) faculty who span over seven different departments will become affiliated faculty, a move that is already under consideration for faculty in all ASC units that align with the department. We will encourage these faculty members to cross-list courses with NESAs, which will support a new interdisciplinary South Asian Studies major to the benefit of our students.

6. Administrative changes

We anticipate no administrative changes to the department.

7. Status

Positive unanimous vote (November 1, 2021) among the on-duty faculty (8 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions).

8. Fiscal impact

Negligible. The Department will need to purchase new stationary and change other physical branding within Hagerty Hall.