

Call for Papers: Forward Moving / Moving Forward

University of Maryland Graduate English Organization 18th Annual Conference

“It is a strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively. ... We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.”

— Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

The University of Maryland’s Graduate English Organization (GEO) invites proposals relating to the theme of “Forward Moving / Moving Forward” for our 18th annual graduate student conference, to be held in person on Friday, March 7, 2025.

Forward Moving / Moving Forward is concerned with critical interrogations of progress. Traditional, linear narratives of history posit a teleological movement toward enlightenment and improvement, with things inevitably getting better over time. However, is this always true? Under what circumstances is action or intervention necessary? Does forward movement always entail moving forward?

We approach our topic broadly, with “Forward Moving” addressing the physical movement of bodies through space, and “Moving Forward” evoking the evolution of ideas and ideologies. The confluence of these two ideas questions the relationship between the motions of bodies and that of ideas. When do they connect? Why do they diverge?

This interdisciplinary conference seeks papers and creative pieces engaging with and critiquing this notion of “progress.” We welcome projects working in and across the fields of English & World Literatures; Creative Writing; Pedagogy; Rhetoric; History & Art History; Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; and area studies disciplines. The myth of progress is particularly relevant for the humanities, as we grapple with developments in AI, use of digital tools and methods in our work, and questions about the relevance of our fields in the twenty-first century. Such concerns have not (and will not) resolve themselves, and we as humanists have a vital stake in interrogating “progress.”

Abstracts of **250-300 words** should be submitted to englgeo@umd.edu by **Friday, January 10, 2025**. Talks should last for approximately **15 minutes**. Potential presentation topics can focus on a wide range of issues including (but not limited to):

- Migration (forced or voluntary)
- Walking, running, physical movement of bodies and/or objects
- Transitions and transitioning
- History, historical methods, and historiography
- Futurity and/or utopias
- Current global events
- Political, ideological, and/or thought movements
- Editing and translation
- Communication and rhetoric across time and space
- Stories, poetry, creative nonfiction, and long-form journalism engaging these themes.