

## Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

*[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2008 meeting.]*

THE COUNCIL MET ON 26–27 OCTOBER 2007 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Michael Holquist presided. The officers present were First Vice President Gerald Graff, Second Vice President Catherine Porter, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Carlos J. Alonso, Charles Altieri, Dorian F. Bell, Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Anne Ruggles Gere, John Guillory, Jane Harper, Francis Abiola Irele, Mary N. Layoun, Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel, Paula Rabinowitz, Hortense J. Spillers, Guy Stern, and Priscilla Wald. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Managing Editor of MLA Publications and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Financial Operations Amilde Hadden, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Book Publications David G. Nicholls, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

The council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 24–25 October to review assembly and association business. Luca Somigli, the chair of the committee, reported that the committee had discussed the proposals—five resolutions and one motion—submitted for consideration by the Delegate Assembly and had placed three of the resolutions and the motion on the assembly’s agenda. The two resolutions that the committee set aside did not meet the requirements set forth in article 9.C.10 of the MLA constitution regarding the subject matter of resolutions. Somigli then told the council that the committee had chosen academic freedom as the topic for the hour-long period of open discussion on the assembly’s agenda, and he asked Joanna Brooks, a committee member, to explain the committee’s approach to the topic. She did so and also noted the committee’s plan to present a motion at the conclusion of the open discussion, a motion designed to translate the concerns raised during the open discussion into further action by the association. Somigli concluded his report with a brief review of the committee’s other tasks, an expression of thanks to all committee members for their hard work, and the announcement that Laura J. Rosenthal had been elected chair of the DAOC for 2008. The president thanked the committee for its presentation and then asked committee members to review in more detail the resolutions and motion that the DAOC had placed on the assembly’s

agenda. Council members also commented on the committee's plans for the open discussion of academic freedom.

The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee. In addition to the DAOC chair, the members of the committee who participated in the joint meeting were Joanna Brooks (San Diego State Univ., San Diego), Laura J. Rosenthal (Univ. of Maryland, College Park), and Bonnie Kime Scott (San Diego State Univ., San Diego). Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Martha S. Grise.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council began to review the items on its agenda and continued its work until mid-afternoon. During its final session on Friday afternoon (26 Oct.), the council discussed two essays, one about the current state of higher education and one about the status of the humanities disciplines. Council members were asked to comment on these topics because of the topics' connection to the association's work on the Teagle Foundation grant (see May 2007 *PMLA* 850–52). On 27 October, the council completed work on its agenda and adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2006–07) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2007–08). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2006–07 fiscal year with a surplus of \$713,950 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee noted that the surplus was due to higher association revenue and lower or deferred expenses. Rosemary Feal said that the surplus would be added to the cash reserve. Feal also answered council members' questions about several budget categories.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2007–08, which projected a deficit of \$152,540 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that the final budget the committee was presenting for the council's approval was significantly different from the tentative budget that the committee had presented in May mainly because the staff had decided to delay the publication of the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* until the end of the 2008–09 fiscal year. Though work on the new edition was proceeding according to plan, the staff had concluded that more time was needed for thorough review and testing of the electronic component of the new edition. Since the association was working with a new electronic vendor, there could be unforeseen delays that could not be risked at the end of the production cycle. She added that a shorter delay of two or three months was not feasible, since summer publication would come too late in the purchase cycle followed by college bookstores. The shape of the final budget was also affected by the implementation of a new option for individual access to the *Job Information List (JIL)*: MLA members who are affiliated with ADE- or ADFL-member departments will no longer have to subscribe to the *JIL* but will gain access through their MLA

membership login. After reviewing the final budget for the fiscal year 2007–08, the council voted to approve it.

2. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Malcolm B. Smith, the former vice-chairman of General American Investors, Inc., both as a trustee of the association's invested funds and as managing trustee for the term 2008–10.

3. *Approval of the May 2007 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2007 meeting for publication in the January 2008 issue of *PMLA*.

4. *Update from the Ad Hoc Committee on the Structure of the Annual Convention.* Rosemary Feal gave the council an update on the ad hoc committee's plans for presenting its two new proposals, one on reapportioning sessions and one on introducing two new session types, to the 2007 Delegate Assembly (see Jan. 2008 *PMLA* 264–66). She said that the ad hoc committee planned to use the MLA Web site to solicit members' comments on the proposals before the Delegate Assembly's discussion and that a summary of the comments would be distributed to assembly members before their meeting. Feal also explored with the council the ad hoc committee's idea of facilitating year-round convention activities on the Web, including the creation of online forums at the MLA Web site for each division and discussion group. Such forums would allow members to discuss developments in their fields and how those developments might be addressed in convention sessions.

5. *Draft of a Document Addressing Teaching and Learning in the Humanities.* On Friday morning, Gerald Graff, the chair of the council subcommittee charged with developing a document that would elucidate the values of a humanities education and the criteria that inform teaching in the humanities (see Jan. 2008 *PMLA* 262), presented a draft for the council's consideration. After council members commented on the draft, Graff proposed to work over lunch with the members of the subcommittee on revising the draft. On Saturday, the members of the subcommittee outlined for the council the kinds of revisions they planned to pursue. Jane Harper, who had joined the subcommittee for its lunch discussion, was appointed to the subcommittee. John Guillory, a subcommittee member whose council term was coming to an end, was invited to continue participating in the subcommittee's deliberations.

6. *Report from the Council Subcommittee on PMLA.* The council received the report of the subcommittee it had charged in May 2007 with considering a number of issues related to *PMLA*, including the increased cost and size of the journal and the proliferation of special features in it (see Jan. 2008 *PMLA* 266). After considering the current state of the journal, the subcommittee applauded the changes in editorial policy, composition, and format that have taken place in *PMLA* over the past ten or so years. The subcommittee further found that the journal's current profile is optimal and made several recommendations aimed at maintaining that profile. After discussing the recommendations, the council took the following actions. (1) It agreed

to provide the increased resources necessary to maintain the current size of the journal. (2) It acknowledged the breadth and vitality brought by special features but also reaffirmed the centrality of the unsolicited scholarly article to the journal and recommended that editors follow a guideline under which one-half to two-thirds of the scholarly material in the journal over a volume year would consist of unsolicited scholarly articles, the remainder being commissioned pieces. (3) It asked the subcommittee to flesh out two of its recommendations, one regarding the establishment of a process for periodic council reviews of special features and one calling for consideration of a review process for solicited material. (4) It asked the subcommittee to look into the question of devoting a significant amount of space in *PMLA* to book reviews. (5) It voted to limit the number of special topics proposed during an editor's initial three-year term to two, with the possibility of one additional special topic if the editor's term is extended by two years. (6) It agreed that from time to time the council would consider inviting the editor to meet with the council or with a council subcommittee. The subcommittee will report to the council in May 2008.

The subcommittee also considered the question of whether to discontinue the printed list of members that appears in the September (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and to make *Profession* the central feature of a redesigned September issue. A number of factors, including member

responses when the question was posed in the *Newsletter* and the availability of *Profession* in JSTOR, led the subcommittee to recommend that the council not pursue the migration of *Profession* into the Directory issue at this time. The council endorsed this recommendation.

7. *Annual Reports from Standing Committees.* The council received annual reports from the editor of *PMLA* and from the following standing committees: Publications Committee, Committee on Scholarly Editions, Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*, Committee on Honors and Awards, Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, Committee on Information Technology, Radio Committee, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, Committee on Community Colleges, and Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks. Council members commented on some of the committees' activities and asked questions, to which staff members responded.

8. *Committee Appointments.* The council made four additional appointments to MLA committees. The names of all new committee members will appear in the listings of MLA committee members in the September 2008 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and on the MLA Web site.