

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2007 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 27–28 OCTOBER 2006 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Marjorie Perloff presided. The officers present were First Vice President Michael Holquist, Second Vice President Gerald Graff, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Charles Altieri, K. Anthony Appiah (28 Oct. only), Dorian F. Bell, Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Anne Ruggles Gere, John Guillory, Mary N. Layoun, Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Paula Rabinowitz, Nicolas Shumway, 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 Foreign Language Programs 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 English Programs 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 25–26 October to review assembly and association business. Michelle A. Massé, the chair of the committee, reported that the committee had discussed the proposals—two motions and two resolutions—submitted for the Delegate Assembly’s consideration and had decided simply to give the committee’s comments and suggestions for revision to the motions’ and resolutions’ proponents, who could pursue the committee’s advice as they wished. Committee members then reviewed the four proposals with the council. Massé told the council that the committee had decided once again to include a one-hour period of open discussion in the assembly’s agenda and that two topics would be addressed: outcome assessment and the relations among language studies, area studies, and international studies. The committee reviewed the means already available to it for communicating with assembly members (e.g., the orientation for new delegates, the assembly’s electronic discussion list) and discussed plans for using the Web site to provide governance information to delegates and other members. Massé concluded her report with a brief review of the committee’s annual tasks, an expression of thanks to the outgoing members of the committee, and the announcement that Luca Somigli had been elected chair of the DAOC for 2007.

The council thanked the committee for its presentation. In addition to the chair, the members of the DAOC who participated in the meeting with the council were

Joanna Brooks (San Diego State Univ.), Suzanne R. Pucci (Univ. of Kentucky), Laura J. Rosenthal (Univ. of Maryland, College Park), and Luca Somigli (Univ. of Toronto). Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Martha S. Grise.

After the joint meeting with the DAOC, the council began to review the items on its agenda and continued its work through the afternoon. On the morning of 28 October, the council first convened in executive session to discuss a matter related to staff salaries and attendance at meetings of the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning (see item 1 below). After the executive session, the council reconvened in regular session for the remainder of the morning and again after lunch and completed its review of reports and action items. At the end of its afternoon regular session, the council discussed the final report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. The council adjourned at 3:00 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 (2005–06) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2006–07). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2005–06 fiscal year with a surplus of \$285,900 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee noted that association revenue was only slightly higher than budgeted overall but that there were savings of over \$400,000 on the expense side of the budget. It was also noted that the cash reserve did not have to be tapped to cover development costs for the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook*. Rosemary Feal answered council members' questions about several budget categories.

When the council reviewed staff salaries at its May meeting, it was noted that the proposed average salary increase for the 2006–07 fiscal year was lower than the inflation rate in the New York City area. Given the potential budget deficit in the 2005–06 fiscal year, the council could not allocate additional funds for staff salaries. However, since the 2005–06 fiscal year concluded with a budget surplus, the council decided to offer to all 2005–06 staff members who were still employed by the association a special salary supplement. After adjustments were made for staff members who worked less than full time or who were not on staff for the entire year and after taxes were added, the cost of the salary supplement was \$114,628.

The council reviewed and approved the final budget for the fiscal year 2006–07, which projected a deficit of \$236,030 in the unrestricted fund. Though increases in revenue were expected, they would not fully offset anticipated increases in expenses, including those for the development of the electronic complement to the *MLA Handbook* (see Jan. 2007 *PMLA* 364).

Rosemary Feal announced that all council members had once again contributed to the MLA endowment. She thanked the council, whose involvement in fund-raising

will be an example for other members to follow. Feal explained that contributions to the association had increased in the fiscal year 2005–06 by forty-three percent over the previous year and that contributions to the Katrina Fund, established in September 2005 (see May 2006 *PMLA* 878), accounted for more than half that increase. She said that leading donors' names would be listed at the MLA Web site. She also said that the staff was pleased with the progress made thus far and was planning to expand solicitations in the current fiscal year.

In response to a council member's question about attendance at meetings of the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning, the council decided that the subcommittee's meetings would be open to any council member who wished to attend.

2. *Appointment to the Council Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning.* Dorian F. Bell was appointed to the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning for the term 2007–08. [Note: Through the regular rotation of the officers who serve on the subcommittee (see May 2006 *PMLA* 878), the outgoing 2006 president was due to leave the subcommittee and the incoming 2007 first vice president was due to join the subcommittee for a two-year term (2007–08).]

3. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Herbert Lindenberger, professor emeritus of comparative literature and English at Stanford University and a past president of the association, as a trustee of the association's invested funds for the term 2007–09.

4. *Appointment of a Delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS).* The council appointed Nicolas Shumway to a four-year term (2007–10) as the association's representative in the Delegate Assembly of the ACLS.

5. *Approval of the May 2006 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2006 meeting for publication in the January 2007 issue of *PMLA*.

6. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* After the May council meeting, Anne Gere raised the issue of the taxonomy to be used for the assessment of research-doctorate programs that the National Research Council (NRC) is conducting. She asked the council to request that the NRC change the category "Rhetoric, Composition, and Technical Writing" to "Rhetoric and Composition" and drafted a letter to the NRC for this purpose. The council's two-step procedure for making decisions between council meetings (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278) was implemented. The full council had the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list, and all council members approved sending the letter that Gere had drafted. Because of the council's unanimity, it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to make the decision. At the present meeting, the council confirmed the decision it made using its electronic discussion list.

7. *Teagle Foundation Grant Proposal.* The staff reported to the council that the Teagle Foundation had

requested proposals “for grants to enable disciplinary associations concerned with the liberal arts and sciences to reassess the relationship between the goals and objectives of undergraduate concentrations in their discipline and those of liberal education.” The foundation is seeking to encourage innovations in curricula and teaching that will produce graduates across all disciplines with a readiness to extend critical thinking and problem-solving skills beyond their specialized academic experience. The foundation is also interested in graduates’ civic engagement, ethical awareness, and readiness for cross-cultural exchange in a global society.

After reviewing a preliminary proposal that the staff had submitted to the foundation in August, the foundation invited the association to submit a full proposal. Since the submission deadline for the full proposal fell three weeks before the council meeting, Rosemary Feal used the council’s electronic discussion list to circulate the preliminary proposal and to ask council members if they had any concerns about the MLA’s involvement in this project. Since no concerns were expressed, the staff submitted a full proposal that called for the MLA to convene a twelve-member “working group” that would make recommendations about undergraduate study leading to degrees in language and literature. Council members had the opportunity to review the full grant proposal. They were asked to approve a set of professional categories that members of the working group would represent and to make prospective appointments to the working group, so that work on the project could begin without delay if the foundation funded the association’s proposal.

The council appointed a small subcommittee of its members (Charles Altieri, Gerald Graff, Michael Holquist, Mary Layoun, and Priscilla Wald) and charged it with reviewing the grant proposal and the categories for appointments to the working group. The subcommittee developed a charge for the group and reworked a list of potential appointees to the group that the staff had compiled. The council agreed that the subcommittee’s work would form the basis for going forward with the grant project.

8. *Request from the Ad Hoc Committee on the Structure of the Annual Convention.* The council received an interim report from the ad hoc committee, which met for the second time in mid-October. At its second meeting, the committee reviewed the results of its membership survey and pursued a number of the issues that it had already outlined for the council (see Jan. 2007 *PMLA* 368). Given the survey results, the committee developed two formal recommendations. The first was to change the dates of the annual convention so that it would begin on the first Thursday following 2 January each year. The second was to eliminate two late-evening paper-reading time slots so that convention attendees would have more free time for the kinds of informal activities that survey respondents said were important to them (e.g., networking with colleagues, enjoying the attractions of the con-

vention city). The committee explained that the second change depended on the first; that is, changing the dates of the convention would allow for scheduled sessions earlier on the first day, which would offset the loss of the two late-evening time slots. Before presenting these two recommendations to the council for formal action, the committee wished to seek the endorsement of the Delegate Assembly. The committee therefore asked the council for authorization to present the recommendations to the assembly along with a motion that the assembly endorse the recommendations. The council authorized the committee to proceed.

9. *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages.* The council received the final report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, which presented an overview of the association’s past efforts with respect to both the public policy issues surrounding foreign language education and the university structures serving it. The report also analyzed the current need to transform foreign language programs so that they meet the demand for speakers of other languages with translingual and transcultural competence. The report included an extensive set of recommendations for MLA initiatives aimed at transforming curriculum and governance in college and university language and literature departments and making connections across different levels of schools and among the public and private organizations that serve the language community. After a lengthy discussion, council members agreed that more time was needed for a full consideration of the report and its recommendations. The council therefore charged a subcommittee with working through the report and with making recommendations to the full council in February on the implementation of the ad hoc committee’s recommendations. Appointed to the subcommittee were Michael Holquist, chair; Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel; Nicolas Shumway; and Guy Stern.

10. *Final Report of the Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion.* The council received the final report of the Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, which provided the full background and context for the recommendations that the council had reviewed with the task force chair, Domna C. Stanton, at the May council meeting (see Jan. 2007 *PMLA* 366–68). John Guillory, a council member who also served on the task force, presented the report and responded to council members’ questions. The council accepted the report but identified revisions that it wished to make, including the addition of an executive summary. The council asked Guillory and Rosemary Feal to make these revisions, and it authorized the release of the report to the public once the revision process was complete.

11. *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 Status of Women in the Profession, Committee on Information Technology, Radio Committee, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, and Committee on Community Colleges. The council accepted these reports with thanks. Council members commented on some of the committees' activities and asked a number of questions, to which staff members responded. In conjunction with the report from the editor of *PMLA*, the council held a broader discussion of the journal that touched on the number of submissions received annually, the author-anonymous submission policy, the review process for different types of material published in the journal, and the council's oversight role. Council members agreed that no changes to *PMLA* policies or procedures were needed, but they were asked for suggestions about how to signal that the journal is open to all fields and approaches and about new material that might be included in the journal.

12. *Reports on the 2006 Conference of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL)*. The council received written reports from the four MLA members who represented the association at the COCAL conference held in August 2006 in Vancouver, BC (see Oct. 2005 *PMLA* 1680 and Jan. 2007 *PMLA* 364–66). Paula Rabinowitz, a council member, also represented the MLA at the conference and presented an oral report to the council. She provided an overview of the serious problems created by the current overreliance on contingent labor in higher education (e.g., the creation of conflicts between different tiers of faculty members, the deskilling of academic labor, the segmentation of the academic workload, the possibility that adjuncts will be deprived of academic freedom) and the ways that conference attendees proposed to deal with the problems (e.g., unionization, regularization of employment conditions). She remarked that there was no consensus on recommendations from the conference

because conference attendees had very different backgrounds and interests. During the council's discussion of the reports, it was noted that a conference was not the most effective vehicle for addressing the issues that are of most concern to the MLA. Rosemary Feal said that the Delegate Assembly would receive the written reports on the conference. She added that the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning was looking into the issues, so the association's long-standing involvement in the issues surrounding contingent labor would continue.

13. *Request from the Committee on Scholarly Editions (CSE)*. The CSE told the council that the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) had issued new guidelines for its Scholarly Editions Program, which provides grants to scholars working on critical and documentary editions of texts. Long involved with the NEH program, the CSE was concerned that developers of editions would find it difficult to comply with some of the new guidelines—for example, a requirement for “online publication of all critical and documentary editions” and a preference for projects that “include TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) conformant transcription and offer free online access”—and would therefore be at a disadvantage in seeking NEH support. The committee wished to join the organizations that had expressed their concerns about the guidelines to the NEH and therefore asked the council to authorize the MLA staff to communicate the committee's concerns to the NEH. The council gave the requested authorization.

14. *Committee Appointments*. The council made three additional appointments to MLA committees. The names of all new committee members will appear in the listings of MLA committee members in the September 2007 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and on the MLA Web site.

15. *Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX)*. The council received the information it requested in February (see Jan. 2007 *PMLA* 370). The council decided to subscribe to INMEX after discussing the potential benefits and problems associated with this subscription.