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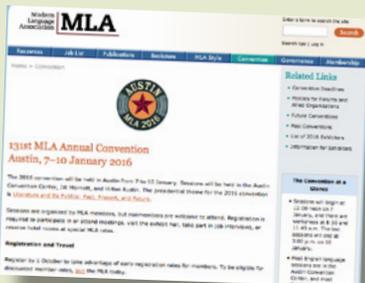
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EARL MCGEEHEE

*Austin skyline*

## What's New about the 2016 MLA Convention

**1. Austin.** This marks the first time the convention will be held in Austin and only the second time we've visited Texas (the 1980 convention was in Houston). With an average January temperature of 62 degrees, this culturally diverse city is home to the Texas state capitol, the renowned music program Austin City Limits, and the acclaimed University of Texas, Austin. Live music venues, food trucks, and BBQ will keep you going.

**2. Forums.** Encompassing the scholarly and professional concerns of the association, the newly created forums will hold sessions for the first time at the 2016 convention. Be sure to browse the session listings for the forums and join their groups on *MLA Commons* ([commons.mla.org/groups](https://commons.mla.org/groups)).

**3. Connected Academics.** What can you do with a PhD in language and literature? Almost anything! Attend one of the many sessions sponsored by this new MLA initiative, including roundtables, mock interviews, and a showcase of humanities careers. Explore the list on *MLA Commons* (<https://connect.commons.mla.org/category/convention/>).

The convention will feature nearly 850 sessions and events, many of them focusing on the presidential theme, Literature and Its Publics: Past, Present, and Future (see Roland Greene's column on page 2). Others range from a look at the 2014 documentary film *Regarding Susan Sontag* to a session on the Austin music scene to creative conversations with Colm Tóibín, Bill Bradley, Rolando Hinojosa, and Oscar Casares to a plenary on the fortieth anniversary of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's English translation of *Of Grammatology*.



## Literature and Its Publics: Past, Present, and Future

Are you ready to go public? When we convene in Austin on 7 January, we will experience all the familiar elements that make an MLA convention an intellectually rich, sometimes overwhelming event: more panels speaking to our interests than anyone could ever attend, meetings of allied organizations, and the informal encounters that can change minds or careers. But I hope you will also join us in conversations about the presidential theme, Literature and Its Publics: Past, Present, and Future. In selecting the theme, I meant to provoke reflection on one of the most salient problems in our common discipline.

What is the public life of literature—and of film, digital media, rhetoric, and other kinds of texts?

In framing this kind of question, I want to evoke both the past offices of literature within the general culture—including its reception, its political engagements, and its translation into other media—and the conditions of the present. Some of our members believe that literature's cultural force has diminished, whereas others, like me, think that its place in the general culture is continually under negotiation and that nostalgia for an imagined past has little value as we negotiate in our complicated moment. Some have no use for the term *literature* at all, seeing it as a spent institution with little relevance to a world in which everyone can produce art but few read deeply and disinterestedly.

I mean to invite conversation about the future too. When I attended my first convention in Los Angeles in 1982, there was little reason to think that our profession would be drastically different thirty-some years later, except for the concern (then as now) over a shrinking job market. Now in an era of new technologies and troubling forces in our industry, we are obliged to consider who our students will be in another ten or twenty years and how we will educate them. Who will read literary and other works as well as our analysis of them? Disciplinary custom and inertia can often mask the urgency of these questions, about which I've written elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> To me, one of the values of a big tent like the MLA convention is the exchange of views across the breadth of our common discipline and the chance to see the horizon together. We'll take stock at the Presidential Plenary on Friday morning, 8 January, featuring Bruce Holsinger, Albert Russell Ascoli, Deidre Lynch, Ato Quayson, and Marjorie Perloff, and at many more sessions throughout the convention.

From editing to translation to evaluation, MLA members enact all the roles that bring literary works to their publics. We make informed readers and teach those readers to respond in clear writing. And at every stage, we interpret. In fact, the public act of interpretation is something like a subtheme of the 2016 convention. On Friday afternoon we will hear the Irish novelist and critic Colm Tóibín discuss how his interpretation of other writers (most recently, Elizabeth Bishop) informs his fiction, and on Saturday afternoon three interpreters from other disciplines—the historian Jo Guldi, the NEH Chairman William “Bro” Adams, and the United States Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer—will consider how interpretive acts contribute to public discourse, comparing history, public humanities, and law with the interpretation of literature.

The 328 sessions that engage with the convention theme (out of nearly 850) run across a wide spectrum of topics, methods, and, of course, languages, from “Reading Sor Juana

Inés de la Cruz and Her Publics” to “The Public Jane Austen in Austin; or, How to Keep Austen Weird” to “*Charlie Hebdo* and Its Publics,” “‘Prison Literature’ and Its Publics,” and “Disrupting the Digital Humanities: New Radical Publics.”

The intellectual work of making literature public is inseparable from the conditions of the academic workforce, in which the tenure-track professoriat is being replaced by contingent faculty members who often lack employment security, pedagogical resources, or the occasions for intellectual renewal that make for fresh interpretation. This is the most urgent public issue we face: how to bring our tenure-track and adjunct members together with our allies in the interpretive humanities, students, parents, and the public to challenge exploitative conditions, as in the MLA's [Action for Allies](#) project. Our sense of the value of literary and humanistic study will scarcely register without a corresponding strategy for resisting the hollowing of public education and the disinvestment from the public good. The MLA does this work every day, but the convention in Austin will be a site for assessing our approach to these challenges, as individual members and as a scholarly association.

Since these intellectual and professional matters are closely braided together, I hope the conversation in Austin will move fluidly between them. Not only is the public watching us—at least in the journalistic coverage that follows every MLA convention—but, as many of us know from experience, often the discoveries we make when we convene quickly become part of the public work of our teaching, research, and institutional service.

I look forward to seeing and hearing you in Austin.

Roland Greene

### Note

1. See, e.g., my blog post “The Social Role of the Critic” (<http://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/social-role-critic>), among others.

Members are invited to comment on the president's column at [president.commonsonline.org](http://president.commonsonline.org).

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## Things to Do in Austin

If you want to explore Austin during the convention, here are some suggested destinations to enjoy alone or with friends.

### Get Outside!

- *Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail.* Located in the heart of the city, this ten-mile off-road trail is Austin's crown jewel. While at the lake, you can bike, kayak, canoe, or try your luck at stand-up paddle boarding.
- *Zilker Park.* This 351-acre public park on the south side of Lady Bird Lake includes Barton Springs Pool, the Zilker Botanical Gardens, and the Umlauf Sculpture Gardens.
- *Austin by Bicycle.* B-Cycle (<https://austin.bcycle.com/>) is a bike-share program in Austin with stations throughout the city, including one on 4th Street by the Austin Convention Center and near many of the MLA hotels. Barton Springs Bike Rental ([www.bartonspringsbikerental.com/index.htm](http://www.bartonspringsbikerental.com/index.htm)) is a locally owned bike rental shop with hourly rentals, roadside assistance, and bike tours.

### The Music and Food Scene

- *Sixth Street.* This district is home to eighteen of Austin's more than 250 music venues, including the Broken Spoke, the Continental Club, and Antone's.
- *Barbecue.* Everyone in Austin has a favorite barbecue joint. Several of the big names—such as Cooper's, Iron Works, Franklin, La Barbecue, and Lamberts—are downtown. Don't miss out on the Tex-Mex and other Southwestern cuisine while you're in town.
- *Craft and DIY Food.* Nearly twenty microbreweries have opened around Austin in the last three years, and the city boasts a vibrant food-trailer scene.

### Art—and History

- *Museums.* Check out the MLA cultural excursions below or explore some of Austin's museums on your own, including the Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Contemporary Austin, the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center, the Mexic-Arte Museum, the Wally Workman Gallery, and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum.

MLA-sponsored cultural excursions (for details, go to the [www.mla.org/cultural\\_excursions](http://www.mla.org/cultural_excursions)):

- Austin City Limits Live at the Moody Theater Tour
- Blanton Museum of Art Educator Tour
- Harry Ransom Center Curatorial Tour
- Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library Excursion

For more ideas, visit [www.austintexas.org/modern-language/](http://www.austintexas.org/modern-language/).

## Travel Assistance

The Executive Council has voted to allot funds to provide convention travel grants to graduate students, unemployed members, non-tenure-track faculty members, and members residing outside the United States and Canada. To learn more about these awards and application requirements, including the required statements, visit the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/grants](http://www.mla.org/grants)).

Members may apply for assistance at the Web site or by mail. Applications must reach the MLA by 1 December 2015 and should be addressed to Travel Assistance Program, MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434 (fax: 646 835-4067). Fax transmissions may be used to meet the deadline, but they must be followed by signed applications. Applications by e-mail will not be accepted. For additional information or details on how to apply, please contact Annie Reiser (646 576-5141; [areiser@mla.org](mailto:areiser@mla.org)).

## About the Job Information Center

All candidates, departmental representatives, and interviewers who wish to use the facilities of the MLA Job Information Center must be registered for the convention. The center will be located in the Governor's Ballroom in the Hilton Austin. The center will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on 7 January, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on 8 and 9 January, and from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on 10 January. The center provides several services to candidates.

**1. Information on Interview Locations.** Job candidates can find the location of their interviews by visiting the center (the information is not available by telephone).

**2. Sign-In Procedures for Departments.** Departmental administrators or representatives who plan to hold job interviews during the convention, whether in their hotel suites or in the interview area of the Job Information Center, are encouraged to sign in at [www.mla.org/jil\\_dept](http://www.mla.org/jil_dept) to ensure interviewees can find them. Alternatively, interviewers may come to the Job Information Center during the hours listed above to provide their interview locations.

**3. Counseling Service.** Experienced departmental administrators will be available to discuss individual employment problems from 10:15 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. on 8 and 9 January. Appointments can be arranged through the staff member on duty in the interview area. Each counselee should bring a cover letter and vita.

**4. Interview Area.** Tables in the interview area will be assigned to departmental representatives on a first-come, first-served basis. Staff members will be available in the area to assist interviewers and candidates.

**5. Vacancy Notices.** A list of openings will be posted on bulletin boards in the center. Departmental representatives should submit detailed descriptions of any last-minute vacancies to an MLA staff member in the center.

Sessions 2, 3, 4, 58, 80, 193, 233, 306, 308, 364, 514, 542, 587, 596, 676, and 763 may be of particular interest to job seekers and hiring committees.

## Membership Ratification Vote

The seven constitutional amendments approved by the 2015 Delegate Assembly were submitted to the membership for ratification this past spring. All 2015 members as of 7 April were eligible to vote. Of the 22,425 eligible voters, 1,626 (7.3%) returned ballots. The membership voted to ratify the seven amendments.

The first two amendments, to articles 10.A.1 and 12.C–D, were considered together; their ratification allowed the implementation of the new convention forum structure to proceed. The vote on these amendments was 1,488 yes and 81 no. The next four amendments, to articles 6.D, 8.A.1, 10.C, and 10.D, dealt with the elimination from the constitution of references to printed matter, including a printed directory. They were ratified by a vote of 1,542 yes and 50 no. The seventh and last amendment eliminated a limiting gender reference in article 3.D. It was ratified by a vote of 1,527 yes and 92 no.

All seven amendments have been incorporated into the text of the constitution at the Web site ([www.mla.org/mla\\_constitution](http://www.mla.org/mla_constitution)).

## New Home for MLA Headquarters

After fifteen years at 26 Broadway in lower Manhattan, MLA headquarters has moved. The new office, just two blocks away, is located on the fifth floor of 85 Broad Street, near historic Stone Street and the colonial-era Fraunces Tavern. The office occupies about a third less space than our location at 26 Broadway and features a more open layout and additional areas for collaboration among staff members. MLA committee members who stay at the committee hotel will now be only half a block away from headquarters. Our new mailing address is 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434; staff phone numbers remain the same.

## Deadlines for 2017 Convention in Philadelphia

Except where otherwise indicated, the deadline is the close of business on the date listed. For specific information, consult the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/conv\\_procedures](http://www.mla.org/conv_procedures)). Please address all correspondence concerning forum and committee sessions to Karin Bagnall ([kbagnall@mla.org](mailto:kbagnall@mla.org)); special sessions to Stacey Courtney ([scourtney@mla.org](mailto:scourtney@mla.org)); and allied sessions to Deirdre Henry ([dhenry@mla.org](mailto:dhenry@mla.org)).

- early Nov. 2015 Session organizers may begin posting calls for papers for Jan. 2017 convention
- 28 Feb. 2016 Deadline for submission of Jan. 2017 convention calls for papers. Any entity that plans to submit more than one session must submit at least one call for papers.
- 1 Apr. Program copy deadline for all convention sessions, including special sessions for Jan. 2017 convention
- 1 Apr. Deadline for receipt of requests for waiver of membership requirements for participants in Jan. 2017 convention
- 1 Apr. Deadline for Web submission of requests for audiovisual equipment for Jan. 2017 convention
- 7 Apr. Deadline by which participants in Jan. 2017 convention must be listed on the MLA membership rolls
- 15 Apr. Deadline for receipt of requests for funds for eligible speakers at Jan. 2017 convention
- early June Notification of Program Committee's decisions mailed to members who submitted proposals for special sessions and competitive sessions for Jan. 2017 convention
- mid June Notification of decisions on funding requests mailed to organizers who applied for funds for speakers
- mid July Proofs of program copy and information on date, time, and place of Jan. 2017 convention sessions sent to organizers
- late July Deadline for receipt of corrections to proofs of program copy for the Sept. 2016 (Program) issue of *PMLA* for Jan. 2017 convention
- late Aug. Information on date, time, and place of the Jan. 2017 convention sessions to be sent by organizers to panelists
- early Sept. Early registration for MLA members opens for Jan. 2017 convention
- late Sept. Fall 2016 *MLA Newsletter* (Convention Issue) mailed to members and posted online
- early Oct. Early registration rates end. Regular registration opens for members and nonmembers for Jan. 2017 convention.
- early Dec. Regular registration deadline for Jan. 2017 convention
- mid Dec. Hotel reservation deadline for Jan. 2017 convention



ANASTASIA COURTNEY



## Fast-Forward Forty Years: Launching the New Convention

"Keep Austin Weird," countless bumper stickers on cars in the city admonish. As I'm sure some MLA members know, "weird" derives from Old English "wyrð," which denotes "fate" or "destiny." So in the spirit of Austin's unique character and the MLA's efforts to support the future of the profession, it is fitting that this year's convention is on course to be a year of firsts.

It's the first time we are meeting in Austin, the state capital and home of one of the country's most distinguished public universities. It's also the first convention in more than forty years that will feature a new intellectual structure: the newly created forums. And it's an exciting moment. The previous, and rather rigid, structure of divisions and discussion groups has been trans-

formed into a network of forums that will evolve over time as members' interests shift. The [2016 convention program](#) shows such originality that it's apparent how enthusiastic people are for this change. To get a sense of how the new forums came about and what work they will do starting in 2016, I recommend you (re)read 2014 president [Margaret Ferguson's Commons article](#).

The other big change in the annual convention is the marked increase in sessions devoted to professional issues and development. The MLA's Connected Academics project (<https://connect.commonsm्ला.org>), generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, is organizing workshops and presentations focusing on careers for humanists that will permit attendees to interact with those who have found satisfying work beyond the classroom (including sessions 233, 306, and 364). Other sessions related to the project include "Articulating the Value of the Humanities to the Larger World" and "Redefining the Humanist Entrepreneur."

Other professional issues to be covered include mentoring: session 58 offers small-group mentoring on the job search, focusing on different institutional types. In addition, representatives from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State Department, the Defense Language Institute, and others will speak with attendees about grant funding and career possibilities. Those interested in academic freedom for contingent faculty members will want to attend session 41, which is devoted to learning

about how due process rights can be established. Session 518 will consider the future of tenure.

The Austin convention offers plenty of opportunities to explore new pedagogies in areas such as animal studies (24), oral proficiency in the language curriculum (25), graduate student writing (170), comics (222), service learning (253), second language acquisition (289), digital scholarship (411), public humanities (461), large-scale online teaching (506), and language teacher education (680). Administrators (chairs, writing directors, language program coordinators), editors, translators, and archivists will find a wide range of sessions designed to support their work.

I often compare the MLA convention to an ocean liner: it hosts thousands of people, offers a variety of activities, and allows people to stay in small cabins or gather on expansive decks. Yet such a large ship doesn't tack like a sailboat, and new directions must be charted well in advance of the ship's turn. I hope you'll join us in Austin for the great turn—a new intellectual structure and an invigorated focus on our profession. The nearly 850 sessions and events at the 2016 convention promise to maintain the tradition of the humanities in its best sense: as curiosity-driven innovation.

Rosemary G. Feal

Members are invited to comment on this column at [execdirector.commonsm्ला.org](http://execdirector.commonsm्ला.org).

## Proposed Amendments to the MLA Constitution

This year, the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution received five proposals for constitutional amendments from the 2015 Delegate Assembly. Three of the proposals called for amendments to allow specific changes in the composition of the assembly; one called for an amendment to change the way in which delegates representing areas of study are elected; and one called for representation on the Executive Council for part-time faculty members. The committee formulated amendments based on the first four of these proposals but determined that it could not complete its work on the fifth proposal without additional information from the assembly. The committee will forward its request for information to the 2016 Delegate Assembly.

As required by the MLA constitution (art. 13.B), the texts of the amendments formulated by the committee have been published at the MLA Web site ([www.m्ला.org/proposed](http://www.m्ला.org/proposed)

[amendment](#)). Brief explanations of the amendments are also provided. The committee will present the amendments to the Delegate Assembly at the assembly's meeting on 9 January 2016 in Austin. If approved by the assembly, the amendments will be submitted to the members of the association in 2016 for ratification.

Members who wish to comment on the proposed amendments may do so at either the open hearing of the Delegate Assembly (8 Jan., 10:15 a.m., 401, JW Marriott) or the assembly meeting itself (9 Jan., 12:30 p.m., JW Grand Ballroom 5–6, JW Marriott). Written comments are also welcome, but they must be received at the MLA office by 18 December so that the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee may review them before its meeting at the convention. Comments can be addressed to the coordinator of governance at the MLA office or sent by fax (646 576-5107) or e-mail ([governance@m्ला.org](mailto:governance@m्ला.org)).

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## 2015 MLA Elections

The 2015 MLA elections for second vice president, Executive Council, Delegate Assembly, and forum executive committees will be conducted both online and on paper. All 2015 MLA members who have provided an e-mail address will be notified by e-mail when balloting becomes available at the Web site by the end of October. All other 2015 members will receive a letter with instructions for obtaining a paper ballot.

Online ballots must be submitted before 12:00 midnight (EST) on 10 December; paper ballots must be received at the MLA office no later than 10 December to be counted. Members who vote online do not have to complete the ballot in one session but may exit the system and return as many times as necessary to finish voting.

Online voters have easy access to candidate information within the ballot system. Members who request a paper ballot will receive a printout of the candidate information along with the ballot.

Both ballots provide a means for members to suggest candidates for the 2016 forum executive committee elections.

If you are an eligible online voter and do not receive an e-mail notification by 30 October, please check your spam folder before contacting the coordinator of governance. Requests for paper ballots must reach the coordinator of governance (Carol Zuses, MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434; telephone: 646 576-5103; fax: 646 576-5107; [governance@mla.org](mailto:governance@mla.org)) by 16 November.

## Deadlines for the 2016 Convention

- 1 Oct. Early registration deadline for Jan. 2016 convention
- 8 Dec. Regular registration deadline for Jan. 2016 convention
- 11 Dec. Hotel reservation deadline for Jan. 2016 convention
- 7–10 Jan. 2016 MLA convention held in Austin
- 8 Jan. Postmark deadline for registration refund requests for Jan. 2016 convention

## New and Forthcoming MLA Titles

- *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Henry Fielding*
- *Approaches to Teaching Sand's Indiana*
- *Teaching Human Rights in Literary and Cultural Studies*

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit [www.mla.org/newtitles](http://www.mla.org/newtitles). These MLA titles will also be available in e-book formats.

