

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

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

THE COUNCIL MET ON 20–21 MAY 2008 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Gerald Graff presided. The officers present were First Vice President Catherine Porter, Second Vice President Sidonie Smith, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Carlos J. Alonso, Charles Altieri, Sara Scott Armengot, Dorian F. Bell, Anne Ruggles Gere, Jane Harper, Francis Abiola Irele, Mary N. Layoun, George Levine, Paula Rabinowitz, Hortense J. Spillers, and Priscilla Wald. Executive Council members Lynne Tatlock and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer were absent. 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.

On the morning of 20 May, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. Just before lunch, the council met with Laura Butzel, one of the association's attorneys, who answered council members' questions about a resolution that the 2007 Delegate Assembly had approved (see item 4, below). After lunch, the council reconvened in regular session to continue working through its agenda. On 21 May, the council convened first in executive session for the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and the working environment at the MLA headquarters office and for the annual review of the executive director. Following the executive session, the council convened in regular sessions before and after lunch to complete work on its agenda. The council adjourned at 2:40 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The Finance Committee presented a midyear report on finances with a summary of association income and expenses in the fiscal year 2007–08 after seven months. The committee projected a deficit in the association's unrestricted fund that was larger than the deficit projected in October 2007. The increased deficit was attributed to lower revenue in certain budget categories (e.g., interest income) and higher expenses in other categories (e.g., media consultants, equipment rentals at the convention). It was also noted that the two-month delay in the release of the third edition of the *MLA Style Manual* would probably result in lower sales revenue

for that item in the current fiscal year. However, since much sales revenue, especially for the bibliography, and some savings on expenses are not recorded until late in the fiscal year, the committee said that it was optimistic about trimming the deficit by the fiscal year's end.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2008–09 that projected a surplus of \$281,190 in the association's unrestricted fund. The surplus was attributed to the release, during the fiscal year, of the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook*. The projected income from the new edition of the *Handbook* allowed the committee to hold the line on most prices and fees and to build in funding for several new association projects (e.g., updating the *Guide to Doctoral Programs*, Web development). Responding to a staff proposal aimed at encouraging regular members who reside outside the United States and Canada to attend the annual convention (see also the next item), the council agreed to establish a reduced convention registration fee for these foreign members that is equivalent to the registration fee paid by unemployed members and members employed less than full-time. The final version of the 2008–09 budget will take account of this council decision. After completing its review of the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2008–09, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated Eisner LLP to audit the association's fiscal year 2007–08 accounts.

2. *Good Neighbor Fund*. At the February council meeting, Rosemary Feal proposed that the MLA's Good Neighbor Fund be used not only to assist permanent residents of soft-currency or developing nations with the payment of MLA membership dues but also to subsidize travel to the convention for members who reside abroad, and the council asked the staff to prepare an implementation plan for the council's consideration (see Oct. 2008 *PMLA* 1766; see also the previous item for a related proposal). At this meeting, the council received the implementation plan it had requested. After modifying the plan, the council approved it. Beginning in 2008, up to 150 awards of \$300 will be offered each year to eligible regular members and life members who reside outside the United States and Canada and who attend the annual convention. Applicants must be members of the association in the year in which they apply for funding and in the preceding year. An individual may receive a grant only once every three years. If there are more than 150 eligible applicants in a given year, priority will be given to those who are in the lowest dues categories and those who do not receive travel funds from their institutions. Eligible applicants not selected in one year will be given priority the following year, provided they still meet the eligibility criteria. The council will review this new grant program after two years.

3. *Approval of the February 2008 Council Minutes*. Council members offered corrections and revisions to the draft of the minutes that was circulated for review and approved for publication in the October 2008 issue of *PMLA*

the amended version of the minutes of the council's February 2008 meeting.

4. *Further Consideration of a Resolution Approved by the 2007 Delegate Assembly*. In February 2008, the council reviewed the three resolutions that the 2007 Delegate Assembly had approved, as required by the MLA constitution (art. 7.B.3). Council members discussed at length whether certain constitutional provisions for withholding a resolution from the membership applied to one of the resolutions, which dealt with the University of Colorado's investigation of Ward Churchill. Because the council could not resolve the questions raised, it asked Rosemary Feal to consult the association's legal counsel about them (see Oct. 2008 *PMLA* 1770). The consultation led Feal to recommend to the council that it meet with one of the association's attorneys in May to fully resolve all questions before completing its review of the resolution.

At this meeting, council members reviewed with the MLA's lawyer the applicability of the provisions of article 7.B.3 of the MLA constitution to the resolution. The council concluded that there was no constitutional basis for withholding the resolution from the membership. It therefore authorized nonsubstantive copyediting changes to the wording of the resolution and instructed the staff to submit it along with the other two resolutions to the membership for the required ratification vote.

5. *Progress Report from the Council Subcommittee on PMLA*. The council received a progress report from Carlos Alonso, chair of the council's subcommittee on *PMLA*. He reviewed the three tasks that the council had assigned to the subcommittee: recommending a procedure for periodic council reviews of *PMLA*'s special features, advising the council on the establishment of a review process for solicited material, and advising the council on the question of devoting a significant amount of space in *PMLA* to book reviews (for background, see May 2008 *PMLA* 826–28). He said that the subcommittee had reached preliminary conclusions on the first two tasks but needed further guidance from the council before it could formulate any advice about the inclusion of book reviews in *PMLA*. Council members provided the guidance requested. The subcommittee will present its final report at a future council meeting.

6. *MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement*. The council selected René Girard, Andrew B. Hammond Professor of French Language, Literature, and Civilization and emeritus professor of comparative literature at Stanford University, as the fifth recipient of the association's Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement. The award will be conferred during the 2008 annual convention in San Francisco.

7. *Nomination of an Honorary Fellow*. The council received a recommendation from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA) pertaining to the nomination of an honorary fellow. Acting on the CHA's recommendation, the council nominated Mo Yan for honorary fellowship in the association. Following the provisions of article 3.D of the MLA constitution, the election to honorary fellowship

will be conducted during the 2008 Delegate Assembly meeting in San Francisco.

8. *Report of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing.* Following up on the council's February discussion of a draft of the report of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing, the staff presented the final version of the report to the council and requested that the council endorse the report and its recommendations and authorize the posting of the report and recommendations at the MLA Web site. Council members discussed the report and recommendations at length and agreed that the ad hoc committee had addressed urgent issues that the council should also pursue in complementary ways and on an ongoing basis. Council members thought it important to place the ADE report in the context of the erosion of funding for public education, to consider relevant curricular issues, and to connect the ADE report with the recent MLA report on foreign languages. The council identified two documents that it wished to produce: a press release that would present the council's views on the ADE report to the public and a letter addressed to senior faculty members who serve as evaluators of programs and departments. It established a subcommittee to work on these documents and also to advise the council on possible next steps for the council to pursue. The members of the subcommittee are Charles Altieri, Sara Scott Armengot, Anne Ruggles Gere, Mary Layoun, Catherine Porter, Sidonie Smith, and Priscilla Wald. The council also voted to endorse the ADE ad hoc committee's report and recommendations.

9. *Report from the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP).* The council received the CSWP's report on its Associate Professor Survey, a long-term committee project that aimed to gather information about the career paths of individual MLA members and that paid particular attention to the progress and obstacles to progress experienced by women at the level of associate professor. After discussing the report, the council decided to ask the committee to make revisions to the report and to the accompanying recommendations. The council voted to endorse the report and the recommendations provided that the committee make the revisions the council requested. The council asked Paula Rabinowitz, a council member who served on the CSWP during an early phase of the project, to review the revised report. The council also authorized the staff to post the final version of the report and recommendations on the MLA Web site.

10. *Recommendations from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA).* The CHA forwarded four recommendations to the council. The first recommendation, which the council approved, called for increasing from \$200 to \$300 the amount of both types of convention-travel grants—one for graduate student members and one for members who are non-tenure-track faculty members or unemployed—available from the Professional Education Assistance Fund. The CHA's second recommendation had to do with increasing the pool of members eligible for the

latter type of grant. The committee proposed to allow members in the third-lowest dues category (income from \$20,000 to \$30,000) to apply, not just members in the two lowest dues categories (income under \$15,000 and income from \$15,000 to \$20,000). The council approved this recommendation as well.

The CHA's third recommendation was that the council establish a committee that would be charged with soliciting from members or generating on its own the names of candidates for the triennial MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement, with compiling candidates' dossiers, with forwarding those dossiers to the CHA every third year, and with reporting annually to the CHA. Following current procedures, the CHA would then consider the dossiers and recommend one or more candidates for the council's consideration. Like the MLA's prize-selection committees, this new committee would be appointed and overseen by the CHA and would do its work by correspondence. The council agreed to establish the new committee and authorized the CHA to determine its size and make initial appointments at the CHA's spring 2009 meeting. The council also recommended to the CHA that it keep dossiers on file for reconsideration in subsequent award years.

Finally, the council approved the CHA's recommendation to make explicit the eligibility of digital works for the MLA Prize for a Distinguished Scholarly Edition and the MLA Prize for a Distinguished Bibliography. Ongoing digital works will be eligible once every five years. The council instructed the staff to revise the language of the prize announcements accordingly.

11. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied and affiliate organizations, divisions, and discussion groups. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of eight societies: Cervantes Society of America, College Language Association, Graduate Student Caucus, Ernest Hemingway Foundation and Society, Doris Lessing Society, International James Joyce Foundation, Modern Austrian Literature and Culture Association, and Romanian Studies Association of America. In two cases, the council authorized the committee to transmit specific concerns to be addressed during the organizations' next reviews. The International James Joyce Foundation will be asked to keep a record of its membership numbers and to develop ways to increase membership. The Romanian Studies Association of America, which had successfully addressed the committee's earlier concerns about low membership numbers (see Jan. 2006 *PMLA* 310), will be asked to continue its outreach activities and pay particular attention to younger members of the profession. The American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and the Ellen Glasgow Society, whose reviews had been deferred for one year (see Jan. 2008 *PMLA* 268), were renewed for the stipulated six years.

The council renewed the allied status of the Société Rencesevals, American-Canadian Branch, for only three

years because of concerns about the association's low membership figures. It also authorized the committee to ask the officers of the society to describe more fully the relation of the branch to the main organization. The society's next review by the Program Committee is scheduled for 2011. The allied status of the American Association of Australian Literary Studies was renewed for only two years because of concerns about the association's low membership figures. The officers of the association will be asked how they handle outreach to the profession and how they plan to attract new members. The association's next review by the Program Committee is scheduled for 2010.

The council agreed to defer the review of three allied organizations—Henry James Society, Kafka Society of America, and Association for the Study of Dada and Surrealism—until the 2009 Program Committee meeting. In the first instance, the society did not provide all the materials required for the committee's review. In the second instance, the Program Committee wished to ask the

society for additional information. In the last instance, the deferral was requested by the society.

In actions relating to divisions and discussion groups, the council approved a request for a name change from the Division on Spanish Medieval Language and Literature. The division's new name is Division on Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. The council approved a petition for a discussion group on age studies. The new discussion group will organize its first session for the 2009 convention. The council did not approve a petition for a discussion group on service learning.

12. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2011: 25–26 February, 20–21 May, and 28–29 October.

13. *Committee Appointments.* The council made four additional committee appointments and appointed one committee cochair. The names of the new committee members appear in the listings of MLA committee members in the September 2008 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and at the MLA Web site.