

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its October 2014 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 20–21 MAY 2014 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Margaret W. Ferguson presided. The officers present were First Vice President Roland Greene, Second Vice President Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Samer M. Ali, Barbara K. Altmann, Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Donald E. Hall, María Herrera-Sobek, Margaret R. Higonnet, Lanisa Kitchiner, Lutz Koepnick, Paula M. Krebs, Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Mecca Jamilah Sullivan. Debra Ann Castillo and Alicia M. de la Torre Falzon were absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Associate Executive Director and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses. Controller Arlene Barnard was present for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below).

In the morning on 20 May, following a meeting of the council's Compensation and Benefits Committee, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. After lunch, a regular session for the full council was followed by separate meetings of the council's strategic-planning subcommittees (see item 6, below). At the end of the afternoon, the full council reconvened to hear the reports of the subcommittee chairs and to discuss a report from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (see item 10, below). On 21 May, following a meeting of the council's Audit Committee, the council first met in executive session for the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and to 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 session to continue working through its agenda. After lunch, the council held its final regular session. The council adjourned at 2:55 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 2013–14 after seven months. The committee reviewed changes in the projections for the major revenue and expense categories—some revenue projections were down slightly, and some expense categories showed small increases—and noted that the projected deficit had increased since the start of the fiscal year.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2014–15 that projected a deficit of \$603,680 in the association's unrestricted fund. The deficit was due largely to expenses associated with office infrastructure changes and the move of the MLA office scheduled for summer 2015 (see below). The committee noted that the proposed budget for 2014–15 included rate increases for library subscriptions to

PMLA and higher convention registration fees. The council decided to cancel the proposed increase in the registration fee for student members and unemployed members. After completing its review of the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2014–15, the council voted to approve it as revised.

The council received an additional report from the Finance Committee on the work the staff had done in recent years to plan for the July 2015 expiration of the association's current lease at 26 Broadway. After evaluating the association's future space needs and looking at available space in lower-rent areas of New York City, the staff had requested proposals from five landlords. The staff outlined for the council the proposals received and the range of costs involved. After discussing the report, the council authorized the staff to negotiate a fifteen- or twenty-year lease on new office space and authorized the executive director to sign the lease if it did not depart significantly from the parameters presented in the report.

Finally, the council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2013–14 accounts.

2. *Approval of the February 2014 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2014 meeting for publication in the October 2014 issue of *PMLA*.

3. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took three actions between its February and May meetings. (1) It agreed to sign on to a letter from the National Coalition against Censorship to the members of the South Carolina Senate Finance Committee that asked the senators to reject funding cuts that the South Carolina House of Representatives had voted to impose on the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina, Upstate, because House members objected to assigned readings with LGBT content. (2) It proposed two sets of constitutional amendments, one that allows the reorganization of divisions and discussion groups into forums and one that removes references in the constitution to printed matter, including a printed directory. (3) It agreed to send an open letter in support of Internet neutrality to the chair of the Federal Communications Commission and approved a related explanatory statement aimed at the MLA membership.

When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the actions on its electronic discussion list. Since the council was unanimous in its approval of the proposed actions, the council's advisory committee did not have to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these decisions.

4. *Proposal of a Constitutional Amendment.* The council proposed that article 3.D of the MLA constitution be amended to eliminate the limiting gender reference to "men and women of letters." In accordance with article 13.A of the MLA constitution, the council's proposal for an amendment to article 3.D will be forwarded to the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution for action.

5. *Dissemination of the Report from the Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature.* At its February meeting, the council had considered the dissemination of the task force report and suggested the development of a framing document that would guide discussion of the

report and of its recommendations (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 864). At the present meeting, Rosemary Feal presented to the council the materials that had been developed in response to the council's suggestion: an executive summary outlining the goals and recommendations that the task force encouraged doctoral programs to pursue and a letter from the council proposing that all stakeholders—faculty members, graduate students, staff members, graduate school administrators, deans, and provosts—discuss the report in the context of local campus structures and practices.

6. *Strategic-Planning Subcommittees.* Because the council's strategic-planning subcommittee on the activities of the divisions and discussion groups had completed its work, the president had consulted with council members before the present meeting about reconfiguring the three strategic-planning subcommittees. Council members agreed to establish a new subcommittee on the humanities workforce. Taking into account the council's previous approval, in October 2013, of an expanded charge for a continuing subcommittee (see May 2014 *PMLA* 586), the council decided that the three strategic-planning subcommittees will focus on K–16 collaborations, the MLA's reach, and the humanities workforce. New council members received their subcommittee assignments, and some continuing council members' assignments changed. The newly configured subcommittees held meetings on 20 May.

The subcommittee on K–16 collaborations (Margaret Ferguson, chair; Donald Hall; Margaret Higonnet; Paula Krebs) discussed a possible grant-funded project to establish local partnerships among colleges, community colleges, and high schools for the purpose of addressing issues related to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and college readiness. The subcommittee identified two localities where such partnerships could be established, and it planned to consider how members of the Delegate Assembly might participate. The subcommittee members also discussed collaborating with the National Council of Teachers of English on CCSS issues and with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages on projects in the schools involving foreign languages, which are not covered by the CCSS.

The subcommittee on the MLA's reach (Roland Greene, chair; Samer Ali; Gaurav Desai; María Herrera-Sobek; Lanisa Kitchiner; Lutz Koepnick) began by discussing plans for the MLA's first international conference (see next item). Turning to other aspects of the MLA's reach, the subcommittee members considered expanding contacts with master's institutions and community colleges. Greene explained that he and Margaret Ferguson were planning to visit these kinds of institutions in northern California to gather information that will allow the council to develop specific outreach projects. There was also discussion of possible outreach to high school teachers.

The new subcommittee on the humanities workforce (Kwame Anthony Appiah, chair; Barbara Altmann; Brian Croxall; Tracy Sharpley-Whiting; Mecca Sullivan) focused on the preparation of graduate students for academic and nonacademic careers and on the working conditions of adjuncts and considered strategies for and constraints on association action. Also discussed was the importance of local action, which could be guided by the best practices that several departments and institutions have developed.

The subcommittee planned to explore ways to disseminate these best practices (e.g., through a consultancy service).

7. *Report on Planning for the First MLA-Sponsored International Symposium.* The council received a progress report on planning for the international symposium to be held in Düsseldorf in June 2016 (see May 2014 *PMLA* 586). The members of the local-arrangements committee in Düsseldorf are working to generate interest in the conference and are addressing issues such as simultaneous translation, innovative session formats, and the balance between European and American participants. The composition of panels will be based on responses to a broad call for papers. To draw attention to the symposium, the council planned to hold sessions at the MLA conventions in Vancouver and Austin on demographic changes in Europe and on the relation of geopolitical changes to the study of language and literature.

8. *Review of the Executive Council's Report to the 2015 Delegate Assembly.* At its February meeting, following the provisions of article 7.B.3 of the MLA constitution, the Executive Council had reviewed the resolutions that the Delegate Assembly had approved in January 2014 and determined that it could not forward one of them to the membership for ratification (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 864). When the council does not forward to the membership a resolution that the Delegate Assembly approved, the constitution requires the council to report to the assembly the reasons for its action. At the present meeting, the council reviewed and approved a draft of its report to the assembly.

9. *Report from the Working Group on the Future of the Print Record.* The council received an update on the work of the group established by the council in May 2013 to revise the 1995 MLA Statement on the Significance of Primary Records in the light of new publishing technologies and the deaccessioning of print collections by libraries (see Jan. 2014 *PMLA* 130). The members of the group met in January 2014 to begin their work and decided to draft a public statement outlining the issues they would address (e.g., space for storage of printed materials, budget constraints, the increasing importance of digital resources) and setting out their plan of action. The council reviewed the statement and identified an additional issue for discussion: the ecological impact of and the costs associated with transporting books to and from storage locations. The council approved the statement, authorized its publication, and gave permission for the MLA's name to be used in connection with the activities of the working group.

10. *Report from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR).* At its February meeting, the council had discussed making a statement on the academic-freedom issues raised in the aftermath of the approval by the American Studies Association of a resolution calling for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. The council's discussion prompted a request to CAFPRR that it update its *Tool Kit on Academic Freedom* to take account of these issues (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 864). On the first day of the present meeting, the council received CAFPRR's response to this request, which presented two texts for the council's consideration.

The first text was a proposed revision to the 2009 *MLA Statement on Academic Freedom*. The council could

not reach consensus on the revision and planned to ask CAFPRR for assistance. The second text was a draft statement on the academic-freedom issues that the council had discussed in February. Discussion of this text allowed the council to identify more precisely the issues it wished to address and prompted the council to ask one of its members to draft an alternative paragraph that would serve the council's needs. On the second day of the meeting, the council reviewed the alternative paragraph and decided that the issues addressed required contextualization. The paragraph could not be revised during the meeting, so the president proposed to supervise the necessary work and present the result to the council in October.

11. *MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement.* The council selected Rolena Adorno, Sterling Professor of Spanish at Yale University, as the seventh recipient of the association's Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement. The award will be conferred during the 2015 annual convention in Vancouver.

12. *Moratorium on the Nomination of Honorary Members.* The council received recommendations from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA) pertaining to the nomination of honorary members. When it was noted that one of the scholars recommended for honorary membership had been a regular MLA member as recently as 2009, the council discussed the category of honorary membership and the nature of the honor involved. Because of the questions raised during this discussion, the council declined to nominate the scholars recommended by the CHA, decided to discuss the status of the category at a future meeting, and imposed a moratorium on the nomination of honorary members until the status of the category is resolved.

13. *List of Potential Appointees to the Profession Editorial Collective.* At its October 2013 meeting, the council had approved a list of potential appointees to the *Profession Editorial Collective* that did not provide full coverage of the field (see May 2014 *PMLA* 588). At the present meeting, the council approved a supplemental list of potential appointees that filled in many of the lacunae in the original list.

14. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2017: 24–25 February, 18–19 May, and 27–28 October.

15. *Committee Appointments.* The council made two committee appointments. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear at the MLA Web site.

16. *Request from a Member.* The council received a request from a member that included eight proposals for improving access to the convention for non-tenure-track faculty members and graduate students. The council discussed the request at length and noted that the proposals had implications not only for the association's budget but also for the interests and goals of the membership as a whole. Council members elaborated on how some of the proposals might be pursued, suggested additional ways to assist adjuncts, and discussed how to call attention to the obligations of departments and universities to support their students and teachers. The council asked the staff to prepare a report for the October council meeting that outlines the budget implications of the proposals put forward in the request and that takes into account the broader agenda articulated during the council's discussion of the request.