

## Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

*The Executive Council approved these minutes at its October 2021 meeting.*

The council met virtually on 20–21 May 2021. President Barbara Fuchs presided. The officers present were First Vice President Christopher John Newfield, Second Vice President Frieda Ekotto, and Executive Director Paula M. Krebs. The Executive Council members present were Samer Mahdy Ali, Esther Allen, Rebecca Colesworthy, Erin D. Graff Zivin, Jean Howard, Lisa Karakaya, Elizabeth Losh, Anjali Prabhu, Jahan Ramazani, Leah Richards, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Ramon Saldivar, and Julie Shoults. Ann Kalscheur Suarez was absent.

The MLA staff members present were Director of Convention and Events Karin L. Bagnall, Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Outreach Anna S. A. Chang, Director of Scholarly Communication Angela Gibson, Director of Programs Dennis Looney, Director of Bibliographic Information Services Mary Onorato, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Leigh A. Neithardt.

In the morning on 21 May, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. That afternoon, the Finance and Audit Committee met from 1:00 to 1:30 p.m. Afterward, the council discussed the report of the Finance Committee (see item 1 below) and discussed the 2021 Convention (see item 4 below). The council also received updates from the Ad Hoc Committee on Committees (see item 10 below) and the Advocacy Working Group (see item 11 below). The council concluded its afternoon session with a discussion of convention site selection (see item 9 below).

In the morning on 21 May, the council received an update from the Guidelines Working Group (see item 12 below). During the regular session that followed, the council took up the remaining items on its agenda. The council adjourned at 2:49 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. Administration and Finance. The Finance Committee presented a report of the unrestricted and restricted fund budgets for the fiscal year 2020–21. The committee

began the fiscal year projecting a balanced budget, with neither a surplus nor a deficit in either the unrestricted fund or the restricted fund. It now anticipates a deficit of \$8,960 in the unrestricted fund and a surplus of \$1,240 in the restricted fund.

The committee reported that overall revenue is now expected to be \$102,960 more than originally budgeted. Membership numbers are expected to drop by 4% this year, less than originally anticipated. Income from institutional subscriptions is now expected to be \$69,000 (or 22.7%) higher than originally projected, and subscriptions to the *MLA International Bibliography* are expected to meet the committee's original budget expectations this fiscal year.

The committee projected a spending increase of \$32,790, as well as a shortfall of \$79,130 in cost recovery, for an increase in overall expenses of \$111,920 in the unrestricted fund.

Council members asked questions about our Information Technology costs, which the committee now projected to be higher than originally anticipated. Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan explained that the increases correlate to software projects and systems that we would have had to build ourselves. By moving to the cloud, we have been able to modernize our infrastructure at a better cost.

The committee presented a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2021–22 that projects a shortfall of \$354,280 in the unrestricted fund and a deficit of \$10,130 in the restricted fund, bringing the total projected deficit to \$364,410.

After reviewing the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2021–22, the council voted to approve it.

The Finance and Audit Committee asked the staff to present for council consideration a proposal to increase the size of the annual drawdown from the MLA Endowment. Currently, that is equal to 4% of the Endowment's three-year average balance. The council was presented with a chart that assumes an investment growth rate of 8% in this and each of the next four years. In addition to showing the result of continuing the 4% drawdown each year, the chart shows the effect over time of increasing the annual drawdown percentage. The council was asked whether it wished to increase the budgeted amount of Endowment support for the operating budget from its current level of 4%? If so, to what level? The council agreed to increase the amount to 5%.

The council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the

association's fiscal year 2020–201 accounts.

2. Approval of the February 2021 Council Minutes. The council approved the minutes of its February 2021 meeting for publication on the association's website.

3. Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings. The council took seven decisions between meetings: (1) It added the association's endorsement to a letter from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) that encouraged Iowa lawmakers to vote against House File 496 and Senate File 41, which would remove the status of tenure for professors and discontinue the practice at Iowa's three public universities. (2) It added the association's endorsement to ACLS's statement condemning anti-Asian violence. (3) It cosigned ACLS's op-ed condemning two Florida senate bills: Senate Bill 86, which "reduces college to an experience solely shaped and motivated by economic concerns, dismissing any opportunity for personal growth beyond those directly related to a career," and Senate Bill 264, which "invites the state government to police political views and exchanges of speech on campus." (4) It authorized Paula Krebs to submit on behalf of the association a \$500,000 grant proposal to NEH for COVID-19 relief funds under the Humanities Organizations grant program. (5–7) It approved three recommendations by the Program Committee:

5. The following forums continue as forums with their current allotment of guaranteed sessions:

1. CLCS Classical and Modern
2. CLCS Renaissance and Early Modern
3. GS Life Writing
4. GS Poetry and Poetics
5. HEP Part-Time and Contingent Faculty Issues
6. LLC 16th- and 17th-Century Spanish and Iberian Drama
7. LLC 16th-Century English
8. LLC 20th- and 21st-Century English and Anglophone
9. LLC 20th- and 21st-Century French
10. LLC Chaucer
11. LLC Global Portuguese
12. LLC Indigenous Literatures of the United States and Canada
13. LLC Irish

14. LLC Mexican
15. LLC Shakespeare
16. LLC Southern United States
17. LLC Yiddish
18. LSL Language Change
19. MS Screen Arts and Culture
20. MS Visual Culture
21. RCWS Creative Writing
22. TC Digital Humanities
23. TC Ecocriticism and Environmental Humanities
24. TC Religion and Literature
25. TM Bibliography and Scholarly Editing
26. TM Libraries and Research

6. The LSL Global English forum be renewed for three years rather than the usual five years.
7. Two forums, LSL General Linguistics and TC Race and Ethnicity Studies, requested a postponement of their review to 2021. The committee recommends that these postponements be granted.

The procedure was also carried out an additional four times between the February 2021 and May 2021 council meetings.

At its February meeting, the council had reviewed two statements prepared by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities and revisions to its charge that the committee had proposed. The council requested that the committee combine the two statements and make additional suggested revisions and also make revisions to its proposed updated charge. The committee did so and sent the revised documents to the council for its review in March. Not all council members voted by the deadline, so the decision was sent to the advisory committee, which approved the [revised charge](#) and the [Statement on Administrative Overreach, Shared Governance, and Faculty Rights in the Time of COVID-19](#).

After its February meeting, the council needed to make an appointment to one of the

association's standing committees. Not all council members voted by the deadline, so the decision was sent to the advisory committee, which approved the appointment.

In April, Anjali Prabhu, executive council adviser to CAFPRR, brought to the council's attention a reconciliation bill in Congress that would mandate tenure hiring (College for All Act). CAFPRR had asked that the council endorse the bill. Council member Lisa Karakaya drafted a statement, and council members Esther Allen and Rebecca Colesworthy suggested edits. Not all council members voted by the deadline, so the decision was sent to the advisory committee, which approved the [statement](#) for publication on the association's website.

Confirmation of two additional decisions: In December, the council authorized Paula Krebs to convene an ad hoc committee of the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution to examine the effects of the existing categories on representation within the Executive Council, to have a discussion of what kind of representation on the executive council is ideal, and to propose constitutional changes that would allow for the kind of representation that would best reflect the membership of the association. The 2020–21 Committee on Amendments to the Constitution members were joined by council members Jean Elizabeth Howard and Ramon Saldivar. Gaurav Desai, the 2020–21 chair of the committee, was asked to chair the ad hoc committee.

In January, in response to the Kansas Board of Regents' decision to adopt a policy that undermines tenure and principles of shared governance, the council asked CAFPRR to draft a statement. It approved the Statement on Administrative Overreach, Shared Governance, and Faculty Rights in the Time of COVID-19 in March.

4. Discussion of the Convention. Council members provided updates on their planned sessions: "New Humanities," "How to Organize a Union: Challenges and Strategies," and "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Literature Studies." Paula Krebs also mentioned a MAPS session, "Why Humanities Now?" Krebs said that members were excited to convene in Washington, DC, in January. Director of Convention and Events Karin L. Bagnall said that about 10% of accepted sessions were requested by their organizers to be online; the rest of the organizers had either no preference or wanted their sessions to be in person, with a slightly larger number of organizers requesting the latter. Marquee events will be available online.

Council members also discussed the possibility of holding a teaching session using MLA resources (for example, the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *MLA Handbook*,

and critical essays). Such a session would publicize these resources, and attendees could learn how to use them across courses.

5. Updating the charge for the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Review Committee. At its February meeting, the Executive Council asked an ad hoc committee to review the charge of the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Review Committee and propose an update. Anjali Prabhu, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Jahan Ramazani, and Leah Richards presented their proposal. The council approved the new charge.

6. Supplemental Appointments to Committees. The council approved two appointments to standing committees. Current committee listings can be found on the MLA website.

7. Inclusive Language Project. The current edition of the *MLA Handbook* includes a brief chapter on the principles of inclusive language that broadly summarizes the practices of peer organizations. The MLA would like to expand on this to develop recommendations for writers on specific aspects of using inclusive language for the humanities, with a pedagogical focus on helping students and writers develop judgment and decision-making.

To facilitate this project, the staff asked the council to charge the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, the Committee on Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Profession, and the Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession with advising on a survey, compiling an internal report, and working with the relevant forum executive committees in consulting with the staff on the development of inclusive language guidelines. The council approved the request.

8. Discussion of the Creation of a Formal Immediate Past President Position. The council resumed its February consideration of the creation of a formal immediate past president position. After discussion, the council passed the following motion: “The council rescinds the charge to the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution that it passed at the February meeting.” The council passed the following motion: “The council is moving to charge a subgroup of the Executive Council with putting together language for formalizing a past-president position.”

9. Discussion of Convention Site Selection. The council resumed a discussion that it began at its February meeting regarding the American Physical Society's decision to issue a policy to hold conferences only in cities that are making efforts to curb police brutality. The council charged a subgroup with exploring how the MLA might select its convention location with an eye to encouraging best practices in policing in the city.

10. Update from the Ad Hoc Committee on Committees. Leah Richards, chair of the working group, updated the council on its progress. The council discussed formalizing the role of the Executive Council adviser, which they agreed should be discussed at the February orientation session for new council members.

11. Update from the Advocacy Working Group. Christopher John Newfield updated the council on the group's progress with the new Advocacy Network initiative. Members of the Guidelines Working Group (see next item) reported that they had reviewed existing MLA statements.

12. Update from the Guidelines Working Group. Christopher John Newfield updated the council on the group's progress. He stated that the outcome of this work is the creation of guidelines that would allow MLA members to hold accountable their departments and institutions for meeting specific goals. The working group has identified three areas to be addressed by the guidelines: (1) educational programs, (2) instructional and research personnel, and (3) governance, finance, and academic freedom.

13. Council Meeting Schedule. The council approved the proposed schedule for 2024: 23–24 February, 16–17 May, and 25–26 October.