

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

The Executive Council approved these minutes at its February 2022 meeting.

The council met on 29–30 October 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, Ann Kalscheur Suarez, Lisa Karakaya, Elizabeth Losh, Anjali Prabhu, Jahan Ramazani, Leah Richards, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Ramon Saldivar, and Julie Shoults.

The meeting was held in a hybrid format through *Zoom*. Fuchs, Newfield, Ekotto, Krebs, Ali, Allen, Howard, Kalscheur Suarez, Karakaya, Richards, and Sánchez Prado convened in the MLA office in New York.

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, Interim Director of Programs Howard Tinberg, Director of Bibliographic Information Services Mary Onorato, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Leigh A. Neithardt. Controller Victor Ruiz was present for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below).

In the morning on 30 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 27 October to review assembly and other association business. Maria Chuza-Calo, the chair of the DAOC, summarized for the council the committee's deliberations and the format of the open discussion period of the Delegate Assembly, "Advocacy for the 2020s." The committee will send a survey to the delegates in early November to gather feedback about work conditions to track positive and negative trends. The committee will meet in December to discuss the results and create prompts for small-group discussion. Chuza-Calo concluded the committee's report by announcing that Feroza Jussawalla had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 10 January 2022 through 8 January 2023.

Following the meeting with the DAOC, the council convened in executive session to discuss the review of the executive director. That afternoon, it convened in regular session to

begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. It also discussed the association's strategic planning process. In the morning on 30 October, the council convened in executive session to discuss issues related to association governance. The council adjourned at 5:34 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. Administration and Finance. The council received a report from the staff of the Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2020–21) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2021–22). The council also received the independent auditor's report on the MLA's 403(b) retirement plan at TIAA for the 2020 plan year and the auditor's letters to management. Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callahan reviewed the Finance Committee's report. After the staff responded to council members' questions, the council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2021–22.

The council reauthorized Karin Bagnall, Terrence Callaghan, Anna Chang, Angela Gibson, Paula Krebs, Mary Onorato, and Thanh Trinh to sign nonpayroll checks. The council reauthorized Paula Krebs and Terrence Callaghan to sign payroll checks on behalf of the association. Two signatures are required on checks in amounts over two thousand dollars.

The council reappointed Domna C. Stanton (Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York), as trustee for the term 2022–24.

2. Approval of the May 2021 Council Minutes. The council approved the minutes of its May 2021 meeting for publication.

3. Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings. The council confirmed one decision that it took between council meetings; in June, Paula Krebs asked the council to make an appointment to a standing committee. The council did so.

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

In June, Paula Krebs asked the council to make interim appointments to two of the association's standing committees. In August, she asked the council to make an interim appointment to one of the association's standing committees; that same month she also asked the council to make a cochair appointment to one of the association's standing committees. In each of the four instances, the council approved the appointments.

Also in June, Krebs forwarded to the council the Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to

Restrict Education about Racism and American History statement coauthored by the American Association of University Professors, the American Historical Association, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and PEN America and asked the council to approve adding the association as a signatory. The statement registers the signatories' "firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities." The council approved adding the association as a signatory. The statement was published at the MLA website.

In June, Barbara Fuchs brought to the council's mailing list for a vote two proposals from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR). The first proposal was that the association have enhanced collaboration with both the American Council for Learned Societies and the American Association of University Professors. The second was a request that the council automatically approve \$500 in travel funding for all graduate students and per-course faculty members who are serving on standing committees for two conventions during their three-year term. Council members discussed both proposals and all but one responded and agreed with the decision to approve the first request and ask the MLA staff to review the feasibility of the second.

In August, Krebs forwarded a request from Scholars at Risk that the association endorse their letter to the United States government on behalf of Afghan scholars. The council approved Krebs's signing the letter on behalf of the association. The letter was published at the MLA website.

In September, the Executive Council discussed drafting a statement and call-to-action alerting members to a provision in the College for All Act requiring institutions to reach a quota of 75 percent tenure-track workforce instruction to receive federal funding. Members were urged to call Washington State Senator Patty Murray, who is the chair of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, which was writing the final version of the higher education provisions in the budget reconciliation bill, and to share their support for the provision. Council member Rebecca Colesworthy offered to write the statement. The council approved publication of the statement at the MLA website.

Also in September, Krebs told the council that the association was asked to sign a Statement on Threats to Academic Conferences, drafted by the American Historical Association.

The council approved publication of the statement at the MLA website.

4. Annual Report on Press Coverage and Annual Reports from Standing Committees. The council received the Annual Report on Press Coverage and annual reports from the editor of *PMLA* and from the following standing committees: Publications Committee; Committee on Scholarly Editions; Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*; Committee on Honors and Awards; Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities; Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada; Committee on Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Profession; Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession; Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities; and Committee on K–16 Alliances. The council accepted these reports with thanks. Some of the reports raised issues that were addressed in the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Committees (see item 8, below), and the committee will follow up.

5. Request from the Committee on Honors and Awards. The council received two requests from the Committee on Honors and Awards. The first was to appoint one selection committee to judge the Morton N. Cohen Award for a Distinguished Edition of Letters and the MLA Prize for a Scholarly Edition. The second was to appoint one selection committee for the Scaglione Publication Award for a Manuscript in Italian Literary Studies and the Howard R. Marraro Prize / Scaglione Prize for Italian Studies. The council approved both requests; they will take effect in 2022.

6. Appointment of the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Review Committee. At its May 2021 meeting, the council approved the updated charge for the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Review Committee. At this meeting, the council appointed six members to the committee and named a chair.

7. Recommendations from the Program Committee. The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied organizations. It granted postponements of the seven-year reviews of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, the Conference on Christianity and Literature, and the Rhetoric Society of America. The council granted postponements of the six-year reviews of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literature and the Society for Classical Studies.

Because the Program Committee did not receive responses from the Association of

Teachers of Technical Writing, the International Boethius Society, and the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages regarding their reviews, the committee recommended that the organizations be suspended until such a time as viable contacts for the organizations can be determined and review materials submitted. The council approved these recommendations.

The Program Committee received petitions for allied organization status from the Asociación Internacional de Literatura y Cine Españoles Siglo XXI / International Association of XXI Century Spanish Literature and Film and the Association for Literary Urban Studies. The committee recommended that the Asociación Internacional de Literatura y Cine Españoles Siglo XXI / International Association of XXI Century Spanish Literature and Film be approved for allied organization status. The committee recommended that the Association for Literary Urban Studies be encouraged to resubmit its application for allied status in a few years given that it has only two years of MLA engagement and primarily has ties to Finland. The council approved both recommendations.

The council approved the Program Committee's recommendation that the allied organization status of the following organizations be continued for another seven years:

Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture
 American Association of Teachers of Italian
 American Conference for Irish Studies
 American Name Society
 Children's Literature Association
 College English Association
 Community College Humanities Association
 Council of Editors of Learned Journals
 Dante Society of America
 Dickens Society
 Feministas Unidas
 George Sand Association
 GL/Q Caucus for the Modern Languages
 Goethe Society of North America

Nathaniel Hawthorne Society
 Robert Frost Society
 Samuel Beckett Society
 Society for the Study of Midwestern

Finally, the Program Committee recommended that the Association des Amis d'André Gide, the Joseph Conrad Society of America, and the Société Rencesvals, American-Canadian Branch, be asked to revise and resubmit their seven-year review materials. Upon successful submission in 2022, each organization would be eligible to be renewed for six years. The council approved the Program Committee's recommendations.

8. Updates from Ad Hoc Committee on Committees and Working Groups. The council received updates from the Ad Hoc Committee on Committees, the Advocacy Working Group, the Guidelines Working Group, the Convention Site Selection Working Group, and the Working Group on the Position of the Immediate Past President.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Committees made several recommendations, including a proposed formal description of the role of Executive Council Adviser to professional-issues committees. The council approved the language, and it will be added to the committee notebook.

Samer Mahdy Ali reported that the Convention Site Selection Working Group had met briefly. He is interested in contacting Campaign Zero, an organization that advocates for basic policy changes that have proven results in reducing fatalities and confrontations with police. Ali will speak with Karin Bagnall about this and also contact Campaign Zero to see if someone on their staff might be able to assist the association.

Jean Elizabeth Howard shared two recommendations of the Working Group on the Position of the Immediate Past President, made after consultations with Barbara Fuchs, Christopher John Newfield, Paula M. Krebs, and the MLA's parliamentarian Daniel E. Seabold and interviews with council members.

The council approved the first recommendation:

No formal Past President position be established that would require a constitutional amendment or an elaboration of specific duties, voting rights, and attendance requirements for such a position. Instead, we recommend that the Executive

Council adopt a standing rule stating that the outgoing president be known as the “Immediate Past President” and that in accordance with past practice and the practice of other learned societies the Immediate Past President may be asked, or may volunteer, to serve on committees, offer advice on ongoing projects, or facilitate the onboarding of new officers. While such requests may be made by the Executive Council, the officers, and/or the Executive Director, such service would be entirely voluntary.

The council approved the second recommendation:

We recommend the establishment of a task force with a six-month mandate to give fresh consideration to certain practical matters of governance that would make it possible for the MLA to respond in a more effective and collaborative fashion to the multiple challenges it faces: the falling prestige of the humanities, the erosion of tenure-track jobs, and the skyrocketing increase in adjunct labor, as well as the decline in MLA membership and the precarity of the organization’s financial well-being.

We suggest that this task force’s purview include but not be limited to a reconsideration of the duties of the Second Vice President and the process for onboarding new officers and Executive Council (EC) members, including a fuller understanding of fiduciary responsibilities; establishing guidelines for encouraging collaboration among all the officers during each year of their terms in defining projects to be pursued in collaboration with the staff, the executive director, and the EC; making suggestions for improving cooperation between the officers, the executive director, and the EC in setting meeting agendas and in establishing long-term goals for the organization; and establishing protocols for encouraging communication between, and more effectively engaging the expertise of the staff members, the executive director, the officers, the Executive Council, and the Delegate Assembly on key initiatives.

9. Establishment of an Internationalization Task Force. The council established a task force that will think about growing membership in other countries. The group will offer a preliminary report at the February 2022 council meeting. It will consider the effects of a growing membership on all aspects of the MLA (including the locations of the MLA International Symposium, publications, the *MLA Handbook*, prizes, access to the *MLA International*

Bibliography). Frieda Ekotto, Erin D. Graff Zivin, and Anjali Prabhu will work with Karin Bagnall and Angela Gibson on this project.

10. Updates to Website. Director of Outreach Anna Chang shared with the council a report on MLA.org website usage. The council has been interested in publicizing more of its advocacy work, and Chang suggested that the best way to publicize council actions is through the banner on the site. She also suggested moving the council's statements to the advocacy section of the website. The council agreed. A group of council members will explore strategies to best present our work and take full advantage of social media.

11. Creation of a Running Agenda. Barbara Fuchs suggested the council create a running agenda of tasks that the council can work on and that will carry over from the October to February meetings. Tasks on the agenda include the formation of the above-mentioned governance and internationalization task forces.