

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

The Executive Council approved these minutes at its February 2023 meeting.

The council met in New York on 28–29 October 2022. President Christopher John Newfield presided. The other officers present were First Vice President Frieda Ekotto, Second Vice President Dana A. Williams, and Executive Director Paula M. Krebs. The Executive Council members present both days were Samer Mahdy Ali, Brenda Brueggemann, Rebecca Colesworthy, Erin D. Graff Zivin, Ann Kalscheur Suarez, Lisa Karakaya, Leah S. Marcus, Jahan Ramazani, and Ignacio Sánchez Prado. Ifeoma C. Kiddoe Nwankwo was present on 28 October only. Esther Allen and Julie Shoults were not present.

The council was joined in the morning of 29 October by the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee. Parliamentarian Daniel E. Seabold was present.

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 L. Gibson, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Publisher of the *MLA International Bibliography* Mary Onorato, Director of Academic Program Services and Professional Development Jason Rhody, Director of Information Systems and Chief Information Officer Thanh Trinh, and Coordinator of Governance and Assistant to the Executive Director Leigh A. Neithardt. Head of Financial Operations Leena Ragunauth was present for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below).

In the morning on 28 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 26 and 27 October to review assembly and other association business. Feroza Jussawalla, the chair of the DAOC, summarized for the council the committee's deliberations. This year the DAOC received one proposal by the 1 September submission deadline. Though the proposal was submitted as a resolution, the DAOC determined that it was in fact a motion and that it complied with requirements for submission as such. The DAOC will forward the proposal as a motion to the 2023 Delegate Assembly for its consideration.

The member's motion asks that the MLA support unionization efforts financially. The committee noted that it would not be possible to support the motion, given the constraints on the

MLA as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with an educational mission and not a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation (the category under which labor organizations operate). The Executive Council decided that the MLA could play the role of a knowledge broker and establish a page on the MLA website to share information on union organizing and empower members. Jussawalla said that discussion of the proposal led the committee to choose the open discussion topic of the 2023 Delegate Assembly, “Labor Organizing and Unions: Challenges, Strategies, and Opportunities.”

During the report of the DAOC, Newfield provided an update from the Subcommittee on Advocacy and Guidelines and said that the compendium of guidelines would be ready shortly and that delegates should be invited to submit information to help fill out the compendium’s categories and also to report on conditions on their campuses. The document, A Guide to MLA Policies and Recommendations (<https://www.mla.org/content/download/190954/file/A-Guide-to-MLA-Policies-and-Recommendations.pdf>) was published on the MLA website on 18 January 2023, and the DAOC is preparing to contact delegates.

Jussawalla concluded the committee’s report by announcing that Pamela L. Lothspeich had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 9 January 2023 through 7 January 2024.

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. The council received an update from Dana A. Williams about the work of the Strategic Planning Committee, which will provide the council with another update at its February 2023 meeting.

In the morning on 29 October, the council convened again in regular session and continued working through its agenda. The council received an update from Newfield on the work of the Subcommittee on Strategy for the Profession. He indicated that the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities wanted to draft a report on the current state of academic freedom in the United States. (The council will be considering an initial fall 2022 report from the committee at its February 2023 meeting.) Newfield said that he also wanted to draft a statement about research funding for the council to review. (The council approved the Statement on Research Funding in December 2022; it is published on the website.)

The council adjourned at 2:33 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

Actions Taken by the Council

The council took the following actions:

1. Administration and Finance. The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year that just ended (2021–22) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2022–23). The council also received the independent auditor’s report on the MLA’s 403(b) retirement plan at TIAA for the 2021 plan year and the auditor’s letters to management. Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan reviewed the Finance Committee’s report. After the staff members responded to council members’ questions, the council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2022–23, which includes a drawdown of the endowment.

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

The council appointed Ifeoma C. Kiddoe Nwankwo to the council’s seat on the board of trustees for the 2023–24 term.

In the fall of 2022, executive council member Susan Stanford Friedman (University of Wisconsin, Madison) resigned her seat on the council. The MLA constitution (article VIII.6) provides that the Executive Council “shall determine the time and manner of replacement” of an at-large council member who might “die, resign, or for any reason be unwilling or unable to carry out the responsibilities of the office.” The council appointed Ama Bemba Adwetewa-Badu (Washington University in St. Louis), who was the next-highest vote-getter from that election, to fill Friedman’s seat on the council. Adwetewa-Badu accepted the appointment; she will serve until the close of the January 2027 convention.

2. Approval of the May 2022 Council Minutes. The council approved for publication the minutes of its May 2022 meeting.

3. Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings. The council confirmed the nine decisions it made between the May and October council meetings:

In May, Executive Director Paula M. Krebs asked that the council approve the corporate resolution allowing her and Terrence Callaghan, the director of administration and finance, to transact business on behalf of the association. The council did so.

In June, Krebs asked the council to vote on CAFPRR's endorsement of the AAUP's statement, *Legislative Threats to Academic Freedom: Redefinitions of Antisemitism and Racism*. The council voted to approve the endorsement and both the endorsement and statement were published on the association's website

(<https://www.mla.org/Resources/Advocacy/Executive-Council-Actions/2022/Statement-Endorsing-the-AAUP-s-Statement-Legislative-Threats-to-Academic-Freedom-Redefinitions-of-Antisemitism-and-Racism>).

Also in June, Krebs asked the council to vote on an updated charge for the Committee on Information Technology, which incorporated feedback on suggested changes from the committee that the council had considered at its May meeting. The council approved the charge, and it was published on the committee's web page on the MLA website

(<https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Professional-Issues/Committee-on-Information-Technology>).

In July, Krebs asked the council to approve a revision to the association's charter so that the association could register as a nonprofit organization in New Jersey. The council did so.

In August, Krebs shared with the council for its approval a new report, *Guidelines for Evaluating Publicly Engaged Humanities Scholarship in Language and Literature Programs*, written by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Valuing the Public Humanities. The council approved the guidelines, and they were published on the MLA website

(<https://www.mla.org/Resources/Guidelines-and-Data/Reports-and-Professional-Guidelines/Publishing-and-Scholarship/Guidelines-for-Evaluating-Publicly-Engaged-Humanities-Scholarship-in-Language-and-Literature-Programs>).

Finally, in June and July, the council was asked to make a cochair appointment, two regular committee appointments, and one interim committee appointment. It approved the four appointments. The listing of current committee members can be found on the MLA website.

4. Annual Reports from Standing Committees and Committee Appointments. The council received 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; Committee on K–16 Alliances; and the Executive Committees of ADE and ALD (formerly ADFL). The council accepted these reports with thanks.

While discussing the report of the Committee on Information Technology, Christopher Newfield said that he and Krebs have been in touch with a member who has asked the MLA to address the question of GPT3 and other forms of AI writing and how they will affect the teaching of writing and composition. Krebs said that the association is organizing a joint task force with the Conference on College Composition and Communication CCCC to examine this issue.

In September, Samer Mahdy Ali volunteered to assume the role of Executive Council adviser for the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities because Anjali Prabhu would be finishing her Executive Council term in January 2023. Ali had been the Executive Council adviser to the Committee on Community Colleges; at this meeting, Lisa Karakaya volunteered to take on that position.

The council named three appointees and six alternates to serve on the Honorary Fellows Review Committee. As no suggestions for honorary fellowship had been received by the 31 January 2023 deadline, the committee will begin its work next fall.

5. Following Up on Phyllis Franklin Award. The council discussed choosing an honoree for the Phyllis Franklin Award. If selected, an honoree would receive the award at the 2024 MLA Annual Convention. After discussion, the council voted on a list of suggested recipients.

6. 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 North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, the College Language Association, the International James Joyce Foundation, the Romanian Studies Association of America, and the Association for the Study of Dada and Surrealism.

The Association of Writers and Writing Programs did not respond to a request for review materials; the council approved the Program Committee's recommendation that Paula Krebs follow up directly with the association.

The council approved the committee's recommendation that the requests of GEMELA: Grupo de Estudios sobre la Mujer en España y las Américas (pre-1800) and the Rhetoric Society of America to be made inactive while they reorganize and reestablish a leadership structure be granted. The Program Committee also recommended that MLA staff members check in with the organizations yearly to receive an update on their status and invite them to submit seven-year reviews when they are able to do so. The council approved this recommendation.

The Graduate Student Caucus asked to be made inactive while they reorganize and reestablish a leadership structure. The Program Committee recommended that Paula Krebs follow up directly with the organization to discuss their association with the MLA. The council approved this recommendation.

The council approved the Program Committee's recommendation that the Robert Graves Society be approved for allied organization status.

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

- 1) American Portuguese Studies Association
- 2) American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
- 3) Association of Departments and Programs of Comparative Literature
- 4) Austrian Studies Association
- 5) Cervantes Society of America
- 6) Doris Lessing Society
- 7) Ernest Hemingway Foundation and Society
- 8) Henry James Society
- 9) Modernist Studies Association
- 10) Société Rencesvals, American-Canadian Branch

The Conference on Christianity and Literature did not provide full information for its review. The Program Committee recommended that the organization be contacted and given an opportunity to provide the missing information. The committee further recommended that the organization be allowed to hold convention sessions for 2024 in anticipation of the missing information being provided. The council approved both recommendations.

7. Report on International Symposia. The council had requested that, following the third

international symposia, the staff prepare a report to assist the council in considering the future of the initiative. The three symposia have been held in Düsseldorf, Germany (2016); Lisbon, Portugal (2019); and Glasgow, Scotland (2022). Following discussion with the staff, the council approved a motion to authorize the MLA staff to hold discussions with the internationalization subcommittee about the future of the international symposium.