

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

The council approved these minutes at its October 2019 meeting.

The council met on 16–17 May 2019 at the MLA office in New York. President Simon E. Gikandi presided. The officers present were First Vice President Judith Butler, Second Vice President Barbara Fuchs, and Executive Director Paula M. Krebs. The Executive Council members present were Angelika Bammer, Jean Elizabeth Howard, Ann Kalscheur Suarez, Amanda Licastro, Elizabeth Mathews Losh (16 May only), David Tse-chien Pan, Anjali Prabhu, Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Leah Richards, Evie Shockley, Julie Shoults, and Dana A. Williams. Eric Hayot and Ramon Saldivar were absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Scholarly Communication Angela Gibson, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Publisher of the *MLA International Bibliography* Mary Onorato, Director of Outreach Siovaahn Walker, 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 16 May, following a meeting of the council's Finance and Audit Committee, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. The council also discussed the planned reconfiguration of the *Job Information List* and ways to address issues relating to academic publishing (see item 4, below). After lunch, the council held breakout group meetings on the MLA convention (see item 5, below) and then convened in regular session to continue working through the items on its agenda, including a staff report on the possibility of contracting with an outside vendor of publishing services. In the morning on 17 May, the council first convened 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. During the regular session that followed, the council took up the remaining items on its agenda. The council adjourned at 12:20 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 2018–19 after six months. The committee reviewed changes in the projections for the major revenue and expense categories and noted that the projected deficit had increased slightly since the start of the fiscal year because shortfalls in revenue from membership dues and from the convention were not completely offset by reductions in spending.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2019–20 that projected a deficit of \$298,460 in the association’s unrestricted fund. Though overall revenue was projected to increase, the committee anticipated that expenses would also be higher. Paula Krebs added that the sales model for the *MLA Handbook* had changed in recent years and that the staff was working on ways to enhance *MLA Handbook* revenue, including through the development of subscription products related to MLA style. After reviewing the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2019–20, the council voted to approve it.

The council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the association’s fiscal year 2018–19 accounts.

Finally, the council reviewed its procedure for making decisions between meetings and revised it slightly. The procedure (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 4, Oct. 2010, p. 1102) calls for council members to use the council’s electronic discussion list to discuss a proposed action and then to indicate whether the action, either as proposed or as modified during the discussion, should be taken. If the council does not reach a unanimous decision through the discussion list, then the matter is referred to the council’s advisory committee (composed of the officers and the council members who are in the last year of their terms), which is charged with making a formal decision, again by a unanimous vote. At the current meeting, the council revised its procedure to include the use of an online voting app to streamline the collection of council members’ votes. In addition, when an action is proposed for the council’s consideration, the deadline for voting will be clearly stated.

2. *Approval of the February 2019 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2019 meeting for publication in the October 2019 issue of *PMLA*.

3. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took five actions between its February and May meetings. (1) The council agreed to send a letter to the

governor of Alaska expressing concern about the governor's proposed cuts to funding for higher education. (2) The council approved sending a letter to the president of McDaniel College urging reconsideration of the elimination of a number of foreign language and humanities programs. (3) The council signed on to a draft statement calling for the release of the Tibetan language-rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk that PEN America had circulated. [Note: PEN America did not follow through on its plan to recirculate the final version of the statement before releasing it. If and when PEN America releases the statement, the council's action will allow the MLA's name to appear as a signatory.] (4) The council signed on to a statement on proposed program cuts at the University of Tulsa. (5) Following up on an item of unfinished business from its February meeting (see *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 5, Oct. 2019, p. 1176), the council selected San Francisco as the site of the January 2023 MLA convention. When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 4, Oct. 2010, p. 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matters on its electronic discussion list. Since the council was unanimous in its approval of the proposed actions, its advisory committee did not have to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these decisions.

4. *Discussion of University Presses.* Before the meeting, council members had followed news reports about Stanford University's plan to cut its subsidy to Stanford University Press. Though the university ultimately restored the subsidy, council members expressed concern about possible changes in the funding model for university presses in general and set aside time at the meeting for a discussion of ways the association might intervene. The council's discussion had two outcomes. As a first step, the council decided to revise its 2013 Statement in Support of University Presses to restate more strongly the association's commitment to university presses. Judith Butler, David Pan, and Anjali Prabhu volunteered to work on a revised statement, which would be circulated on the council's electronic discussion list for the council's consideration. [Note: A draft of the new statement was circulated to the council soon after the council meeting. The draft was revised in response to council members' suggestions and recirculated for a vote. After the council approved the new statement, it was copyedited and posted on the Executive Council Actions page at the MLA website.] As a second step, the council asked the staff to investigate the role the MLA could play in a broader intervention on the part of

disciplinary societies, perhaps through the Association of University Presses or the American Council of Learned Societies. The staff will report to the council in October.

5. *Discussion of the Convention.* During their small group meetings, council members considered questions about how the convention works for different groups of members and explored ways to attract new attendees to the convention. When the full council heard the reports from the small groups, there was agreement that the association's broad field coverage distinguished the MLA convention from field-specific conferences, that attendees were most interested in the cross-disciplinary conversations afforded by sessions outside their primary field of interest, and that offering more sessions of a broad cross-disciplinary nature would attract new attendees. There was also agreement that more should be done to promote the association's working groups, which allow groups of attendees to pursue an intensive conversation through multiple (linked) sessions on different days of the convention. Holding linked sessions at successive conventions was put forward as an idea to explore. Providing mentoring and more professional development opportunities for members at different career stages would also attract attendees. The council discussed what the establishment of local site committees might bring to the convention and the need to make the convention easier to negotiate for first-time attendees. The staff was asked to work toward implementing some of these ideas for the Seattle convention.

During this discussion, a council member suggested a change in two convention travel grant programs, the one for graduate students and the one for non-tenure-track faculty members and unemployed members. Because more information was needed on the costs involved, the council postponed action and asked the staff to provide a report at the October council meeting.

6. *Discussion of a New Publication.* A council member proposed the creation of a new online publication directed at the public and focused on advocacy for the humanities. It would include articles written by MLA members and might eventually include content from other disciplinary societies. Such a publication would, however, need to be different from the *MLA Newsletter*, the council's and other sites on *MLA Commons*, and *Profession*. The president concluded the council's discussion of this proposal by asking the executive director to prepare a report for the October meeting about the cost and logistics of creating this new publication.

7. *Final Report from the Working Group on the Future of the New Variorum Edition*

of Shakespeare. The working group submitted its final report and recommendations, thereby completing the work it was charged to undertake (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 1, Jan. 2018, p. 228). Its main recommendation was that the MLA pursue negotiations on relocating the variorum project to a willing host institution that the working group had identified and provide a limited amount of start-up funding to facilitate the transfer of responsibility for future variorum editions. The council accepted the working group's recommendations and instructed the staff to secure the necessary agreement with the new host institution. Once an agreement is reached, the association's standing committee on the new variorum edition of Shakespeare will be discharged.

8. *New Task Force on Graduate Education*. As had been decided at the February meeting (see *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 5, Oct. 2019, p. 1176), the council worked on the charge for and appointments to a new task force on graduate education. Simon Gikandi, who proposed to chair the task force, had drafted a charge, a work timetable, and a list of possible appointees for the council's consideration. The council determined that the draft charge needed to be revised, so a small group of council members was asked to work on the revision. The group included Angelika Bammer, Jean Howard, Rafael Ramirez Mendoza, and Dana Williams (chair). Soon after the council meeting, Williams circulated to the council the results of the group's work. After further revisions were made based on council members' comments, the council approved the following charge for the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education:

The Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education will consider the results of the survey on power differentials in graduate education gathered by the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, as well as feedback from the discussion of these issues at the January 2019 MLA Delegate Assembly meeting. Concerns raised about student/faculty relations included such issues as lack of transparency about policies and expectations, failure to respond to student work, sexual harassment, and exploitation of student labor.

The task force will prepare a set of guidelines and recommendations aimed at eradicating abuses of power and exploitation in faculty/student relations and at increasing transparency and equity in all aspects of graduate education.

The task force will also advise the Executive Council on the need to appoint a subsequent task force to update the recommendations made in the 2014 Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature in the light of changes in the profession and the job market.

The task force will begin its work in the summer and will aim to present its draft guidelines and recommendations to the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC) at the DAOC's late October 2019 meeting. Then, at their joint meeting in October, the DAOC and the council will finalize the guidelines, which will be shared with the Delegate Assembly at its January 2020 meeting. The council appointed Gikandi to chair the task force and appointed the members of the task force: Michelle J. Brazier, Raritan Valley Community Coll., NJ; Leonard Cassuto, Fordham Univ., Lincoln Center; Barbra Chin, Howard Univ.; Barbara Fuchs, Univ. of California, Los Angeles; Jean Elizabeth Howard, Columbia Univ.; Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Emory Univ.; Yinyin Xue, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison.

9. *Nomination of Honorary Fellows.* The council received recommendations from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA) pertaining to the nomination of honorary fellows. Acting on the CHA's recommendations of individuals to be honored this year, the council nominated Kamau Brathwaite, Amit Chaudhuri, Richard Flanagan, Susan Howe, M. NourbeSe Philip, Lev Rubinstein, and Luis Valdez for honorary fellowship. Following the provisions of article 3.D of the MLA constitution, the elections to honorary fellowship will be conducted during the 2020 Delegate Assembly meeting in Seattle.

10. *Requests from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA).* The CHA forwarded two requests to the council. First, the CHA requested that the policy on simultaneous submissions for book prizes, under which a book can compete simultaneously for one of the association's major prizes—the James Russell Lowell Prize or the MLA Prize for a First Book—and one of the more specialized prizes but cannot win two prizes, be adjusted to include the new prize for edited collections, such that a book submitted for the new prize also be allowed to compete simultaneously for one of the more specialized prizes (but not for the Lowell Prize or the Prize for a First Book). The council agreed to this policy

change.

Second, the CHA requested a change in the current policy governing the outcome of the deliberations of the association's prize selection committees, which allows for the naming of a winner or two cowinners and the awarding of up to two honorable mentions (see *PMLA*, vol. 129, no. 3, May 2014, p. 588). The CHA proposed that the selection committees for prizes that typically receive more than one hundred entries (currently, the Lowell Prize, the Prize for a First Book, and the Scaglione and Roth prizes for literary translations) have the option of replacing honorable mentions with a short list of up to five titles. Short-listed titles would be included in the list of prize winners on the website and in the press release announcing the prize, but short-listed authors would not receive a certificate or otherwise be honored during the MLA Awards Ceremony. The council approved this policy change.

11. *Request from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR)*. The committee asked the council to approve revisions to the recommendations relating to the submission of application materials by job candidates to search committees (e.g., writing samples, letters of recommendation) contained in section III of the *Guidelines for Search Committees and Job Seekers on Entry-Level Faculty Recruitment and Hiring*. Because the proposed revisions prompted a number of questions about the various elements of a job application and the timing of their submission, the council decided to return the proposed revisions to CAFPRR for clarification. The council also decided to maintain its long-standing practice of reviewing and approving revisions to the association's statements and recommendations related to the job search that CAFPRR regularly reviews.

12. *Council Meeting Schedule*. The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2022: 25–26 February, 19–20 May, and 28–29 October.

13. *Committee Appointments*. The council made six appointments to the standing committees of the association. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear on the MLA website.