

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

The council approved these minutes at its February 2020 meeting.

The council met on 25–26 October 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 on all days were Angelika Bammer, Eric Hayot, Ann Kalscheur Suarez, Amanda Licastro, Elizabeth Mathews Losh, Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, David Tse-chien Pan, Anjali Prabhu, Leah Richards, Ramon Saldivar, Evie Shockley, and Julie Shoults. Dana A. Williams was present on Friday. Jean Elizabeth Howard 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 and ADFL Dennis Looney, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Mary Onorato, Director of Information Systems and Chief Information Officer Thanh Trinh, 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 25 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 23–24 October to review assembly and other association business. Michelle J. Brazier, the chair of the DAOC, briefly reviewed the committee's discussion of three items that will be on the agenda of the January 2020 Delegate Assembly meeting in Seattle: the proposed constitutional amendment, which continues the changes to the motions and resolutions process that were ratified by the membership last spring; bringing the Delegate Assembly Bylaws in line with the constitution; and a motion submitted by a member.

Professor Pamela Lothspeich (who is also a member of the Delegate Assembly) submitted the following motion:

I propose that MLA investigate the availability of data on staffing in Asian and Middle Eastern language and literature programs in the United States, and report back to the

Council and the Delegate Assembly on any findings with respect to inequities in terms of gender, ethnicity/race, rank, pay, and full-time/part-time labor. Some data, like salaries at public universities, may already be publicly available. Certain data may also be readily available from professional organizations such as the Association for Asian Studies, Middle East Studies Association, American Association for Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies Association, American Institute of Indian Studies, and American Association of Teachers of Arabic.

Brazier noted two of the committee's concerns with the motion: a lack of clarity about the action that the proposer was requesting and the impact that the lack of clarity may have on the debate of the motion during the Delegate Assembly meeting. Brazier said that the committee had asked Paula Krebs to speak with the proposer about its concerns.

Paula Krebs shared that she had spoken with Lothspeich. One of the committee's suggestions had been the addition of "and Canada" to the motion to account for the association's entire membership. Lothspeich accepted this as a friendly amendment and declined to make any additional changes.

Brazier also reported that the committee had spent the majority of its meeting discussing the report from the MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education. Brazier said that the committee wants to return to the Delegate Assembly with the report and decided not to focus on any single recommendation of the nine put forward by the task force. Instead, the committee will devote the full hour of the open discussion of the meeting to a hybrid discussion of the report: After an introduction, breakout discussions will be held, and then members will be able to comment on the report in open discussion before the entire Delegate Assembly. The open session will be called "MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education: Small Group Discussion of Recommendations." Brazier concluded the committee's report by announcing that Svetlana Tyutina had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 13 January 2020 through 10 January 2021. The president thanked the members of the DAOC for their work and closed the joint meeting. In addition to the DAOC chair, the members of the committee who participated in the joint meeting were Maria Chouza-Calo, Sima N. Godfrey, and Maryse Jayasuriya. Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Daniel E. Seabold.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council convened in a regular session for discussion of and action on agenda items. On Friday afternoon, Development Officer Susan Kenny met with the council to discuss the importance of fundraising and potential ways that council members might help fundraise for the association. Following the discussion with Kenny, the council reconvened in a regular session for an hour and then met in executive session to discuss the compensation of the executive director. This executive session was followed by a brief regular session. In the morning on 26 October, the council convened in regular session for further discussion of and action on agenda items. After lunch, the council held a strategic planning discussion and then adjourned at 1:50 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 Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2018–19) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2019–20). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2018–19 fiscal year with a deficit of \$615,810 in the association’s unrestricted and restricted funds. Victor Ruiz explained that the association’s current liabilities and assets ratio, which demonstrates a company’s ability to pay off its short-term debts, is favorable. Terrence Callaghan noted that the association’s five-year projection is sound. The publication of the next edition of handbook in 2021 will make a positive difference to the association’s bottom line.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2019–20, which projected a deficit of \$666,910, a figure that is higher than the deficit projected in the tentative budget that the council approved in May.

The council also received the independent auditor’s report on the MLA’s 403(b) retirement plan at TIAA for the 2018 plan year and the auditor’s letters to management.

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

2. *Approval of the May 2019 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its

May 2019 meeting for publication.

3. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took four actions between its May and October meetings. (1) It approved revisions by Judith Butler, David Pan, and Anjali Prabhu to the council's 2013 Statement on University Presses. (2) It approved a statement circulated by Judith Butler and Jean Howard that condemned the Turkish government's persecution of Turkish academics who had signed a petition for peace calling on the Turkish government to resume diplomatic negotiations with the Kurds. (3) The council authorized Simon Gikandi to sign a letter to the Turkish Constitutional Court that the American Historical Association and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) were circulating. (4) It approved signing on to a letter that MESA had drafted to express concern about the Department of Education's assessment that the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies had used Title VI funding for unauthorized activities. 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 actions 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.

The council then revisited two decisions that were not made through the e-mail list. In July, council member Elizabeth Mathews Losh had circulated a statement that she had drafted about the importance of diversity in scholarly society. Because council members were interested in taking action, the council decided to ask Losh to rewrite her statement so that it could vote on it later in the meeting. The council approved the following statement:

The MLA Executive Council supports structural changes to ensure more inclusive and equitable policies in its own and other professional associations.

The Modern Language Association affirms its strong commitment to diversity in its own processes for determining membership, leadership, and scholarly recognition, including in the selecting of awards and bestowing distinctions. Furthermore it acknowledges continued obstacles to achieving this goal faced by the MLA and other professional organizations that have historically favored white male

heterosexual nondisabled scholars based in North America or Europe and marginalized many deserving potential participants as a result.

In addition to other documents available on the MLA Web site, we refer members to the Final Report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity and Tolerance which was charged with “working to establish a climate in which all students, faculty, and other college employees, no matter what their religion, race, ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability status, can work, learn, and develop together in harmony.”

The second decision that was not made through the e-mail list was to sign onto MESA’s letter asking Israeli authorities to clarify the lawful procedures for issuing entry visas and work permits for international academics working at Palestinian universities. At the October meeting, the council voted to endorse the MESA statement and publish it on the website.

4. *Report from the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education.* The council received the report from the MLA Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education. The task force was appointed in response to new and long-term problems faced by graduate students and was tasked with considering these issues and recommending guidelines aimed at eradicating abuses of power and exploitation. The report will go to the 2020 Delegate Assembly for discussion and feedback.

5. *Report on the 2016 and 2019 International Symposia.* The council received a report on the 2016 and 2019 International Symposia. The MLA held its first-ever international symposium, *Other Europes: Migrations, Translations, Transformation*, in Düsseldorf, Germany, from 23 to 25 June 2016, in partnership with the Heinrich Heine Universität. The second international symposium, *Remembering Voices Lost*, was held in Lisbon, Portugal, from 23 to 25 July 2019, in partnership with the faculty of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

At its October 2017 meeting, the Executive Council authorized the selection of Glasgow, Scotland, for the next symposium in partnership with the University of Glasgow. The event will take place 17–19 June 2021 at the Scottish Exhibition Centre (SEC) and the

University of Glasgow campus. The symposium theme will be “Being Hospitable: Welcoming the Other across Languages.” The council approved a motion authorizing the staff to solicit proposals for future symposia.

6. *Annual Reports from Standing Committees.* 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 the Status of Women in the Profession, Committee on Information Technology, Committee on Community Colleges, Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities, Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession, and Committee on K–16 Alliances. The council accepted these reports with thanks and decided to schedule a discussion of the workings of the committees for its February meeting.

The council discussed two requests from the Committee on K–16 Alliances to provide travel funding for members who teach in K–12 settings and partial funding for non-MLA colleagues in order to attract them as members. The council agreed that the association would need to undertake a fundraising effort to support such grants.

7. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee’s recommendations regarding allied organizations. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of ten societies: Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, International Dostoevsky Society, Mark Twain Circle of America, Paul Claudel Society, Renaissance English Text Society, Simone de Beauvoir Society, Society for German Renaissance and Baroque Literature, Society for Textual Scholarship, William Carlos Williams Society, and Women in French.

The council agreed to postpone for one year the review of the allied organization status of the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages because it did not provide a constitution or bylaws to the association. The council agreed to postpone for one year the review of three organizations at their request: American Association for Italian Studies, Margaret Atwood Society, and the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

The council approved the admission of one new allied organization:

Association of University Presses

The council also received and approved the Program Committee's recommendations regarding forums, fifteen of which were reviewed for the first time. The following forums were renewed for five years with no change in their allocation of guaranteed sessions: CLCS 20th- and 21st-Century, CLCS European Regions, CLCS Global Anglophone, CLCS Mediterranean, GS Prose Fiction, LLC 18th-Century French, LLC 20th- and 21st-Century Spanish and Iberian, LLC African American, LLC Arabic, LLC Canadian, LLC Hebrew, LLC Italian American, LLC Literatures of the United States in Languages Other than English, LLC Luso-Brazilian, LLC Puerto Rican, LLC South Asian and South Asian Diasporic, LLC West Asian, MS Opera, TC Cognitive and Affect Studies, TC Disability Studies, TC Postcolonial Studies, TC Science and Literature, TC Translation Studies, TM Language Theory, TM Literary and Cultural Theory. Review of the forum LSL Language and Society was postponed because of an incomplete submission

The council voted to approve two new forums: CLCS Gothic Studies and TC Adaptation Studies.

8. *Documents from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities.* The council received two documents authored by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities: "Advice to Prospective Graduate Students" and "Building Your Graduate School Career." They are revisions and expansions of a 2012 statement: Advice to Graduate Students: From Application to Career. The council agreed that the two documents needed to be consistent with the *Report of the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education*. Dennis Looney will reconcile the three documents and include cross-references for the council's review in February.

9. *Committee Appointments.* The council made two committee appointments. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear on the MLA website.

10. *Request from a Member.* The council received and discussed a letter from retired member Donald G. Marshall. Paula Krebs agreed to follow up with Marshall.

11. *Discussion of Postdoctoral Application Fees.* Judith Butler shared with the rest of the council her concern about postdoctoral applications require fees. The council unanimously approved a motion directing Judith Butler and the staff to draft a statement and coordinate with other organizations.

12. *Drafting an MLA Statement on Domestic Terrorism and Bigotry.* Paula Krebs had sent to the EXEC-L list in August the American Historical Association's Statement on Domestic Terrorism, Bigotry, and History. She suggested that the council consider crafting an MLA statement on the topic. After discussion, member Leah Richards volunteered to draft a statement.

13. *Discussion of Student Evaluations of Teaching.* One additional item that was discussed on the council's e-mail list was a statement from the American Sociological Association on the use of teaching evaluations. Paula Krebs circulated the statement in August and asked the council to consider the issues it raised and decide whether to address them in an MLA statement. During discussion at the meeting, the council decided that it would be useful to bring together volunteers from the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, and the Executive Council and to charge them with drafting a statement. The statement would then be forwarded for the Executive Council's consent. The council approved a motion to appoint an ad hoc committee to draft a statement.

14. *Discussion of Contingent Labor and Adjunct Concerns.* The council received a document from members Julie Shoults and Ann Kalscheur Suarez that highlights the challenges faced by contingent faculty members. Shoults and Kalscheur Suarez led a discussion of the document.

15. *Public Comment on NLRB Proposed Ruling on Graduate Students.* Paula Krebs told the council that the Service Employees International Union asked professional organizations to weigh in on supporting graduate students. She asked whether the association wanted to make a comment. The council unanimously approved motions to make a public comment and for Krebs to make a comment.

16. *Discussion of Virtual Meeting.* Simon Gikandi asked Judith Butler to share with the council her request that the members consider holding the May meeting virtually. The council decided to revisit the issue at its February meeting.