

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

The council approved these minutes at its May 2021 meeting.

The council met virtually on 26–27 February 2021. President Barbara Fuchs presided. The other 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 Mathews Losh, Anjali Prabhu, Jahan Ramazani, Leah Richards, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Ramon Saldivar, and Julie Shoults. Ann Kalscheur Suarez was present on 27 February. 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 Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Publisher of the *MLA International Bibliography* Mary Onorato, Director of Information Systems Thanh Trinh, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Leigh A. Neithardt.

On 26 February, the council first convened in executive session to review the council members' fiduciary responsibilities. Then the council convened in regular session to begin working through its agenda. On Friday afternoon, the council had a discussion of lobbying (see item 14, below). The council ended the afternoon with subcommittee meetings to develop short lists for committee appointments. The Subcommittee on Administration and Finance (Frieda Ekotto, chair; Esther Allen; Erin D. Graff Zivin; Elizabeth Mathews Losh; Jahan Ramazani) considered appointments to six MLA committees; the Subcommittee on Projects (Christopher John Newfield, chair; Samer Mahdy Ali; Lisa Karakaya; Leah Richards; Julie Shoults) was assigned six MLA committees; and the Subcommittee on Meetings and Publications (Barbara Fuchs, chair; Rebecca Colesworthy; Jean Elizabeth Howard; Anjali Prabhu; Ramon Saldivar; Ignacio Sánchez Prado) worked on short lists for five MLA committees. On 27 February, the council convened in regular session and continued working through its agenda. Paula Krebs introduced an e-mail from a member regarding the decision of the American Physical Society (APS) to issue a policy to hold conferences only in cities that are making efforts to curb police brutality. The member asked the Executive Council to follow the example of the APS. The council discussed the APS policy and the criteria the MLA currently uses to determine convention sites and was not prepared to endorse the APS policy but agreed to return to the topic to discuss it more fully at the May meeting. The council adjourned at 5:10 p.m., having

concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received the independent auditor's report and financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2020, which showed that the association concluded the fiscal year with a deficit of \$629,336 in the unrestricted fund and a surplus in the restricted fund of \$157,978. The members of the council's Finance and Audit Committee recommended that the council accept and approve the audit report and financial statements. The council did so.

The council also received the Finance Committee's report, which reviewed the budget for the current fiscal year using four-month projections. The committee anticipates a surplus of \$1,870 in the unrestricted fund and a surplus of \$56,740 in the restricted fund, for an overall projected surplus of \$58,610.

The budget that the committee presented to the council in October 2020 projected a balanced budget. The committee wanted to bring several changes in that projection to the council's attention, including the following: More people attended the 2021 convention than had been anticipated, so the committee is now projecting convention income overall to be \$46,380 more than was projected in the original budget. The cost of the association's online convention meeting system, Confex, accounts for a large portion of an increase of \$49,000 in Software Licensing and Support. However, the association was also able to save money in several areas, resulting in a projected decrease in convention-related expenses of \$214,120 overall.

The Finance Committee's report also reviewed the schedule for the preparation of a budget for the fiscal year 2020–21. The council authorized the staff to prepare a balanced budget.

The council adopted the following resolution relating to financial management.

WHEREAS, Article IV, Section F, of the constitution of the Modern Language Association provides as follows: "The permanent fund of the association and its other endowment funds shall be administered by a board of trustees composed of the association president and four other trustees appointed by the Executive Council. One of the appointed trustees shall be a current member of the Executive Council, and another of the appointed trustees shall be designated the managing trustee."

WHEREAS, the above-described board of trustees for 2021 is composed of Barbara Fuchs (association president), Ignacio Sanchez-Prado (Executive Council member), William Janeway, Domna C. Stanton, and Catharine R. Stimpson, and William Janeway has been designated the managing trustee;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED, that, upon the direction to Paula M. Krebs as executive director and Terrence Callaghan as director of administration and finance of any member of the board of trustees to effect the purchase, transfer, sale, or other disposition of any security or securities held in the permanent fund or any other endowment funds, the executive director and director of administration and finance be and hereby are authorized and directed to take all such steps and to execute and deliver all such documents as they shall deem necessary or appropriate to effect such purchase, transfer, sale, or other disposition; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the president of the MLA be and hereby is authorized and directed to certify this resolution to any third party requiring delivery of same in order to substantiate the proper authority for the disposition of the securities of the permanent fund or any other endowment funds.

Finally, the council appointed Samer Mahdy Ali and Rebecca Colesworthy to the association's Finance and Audit Committee for 2021.

2. *Revision of the MLA Dues Schedule.* The Executive Council confirmed the action taken by the 2021 Delegate Assembly to revise the dues schedule of the association. The following table shows the new dues schedule, which will go into effect in September 2021.

Current Dues Schedule		Dues Schedule Subject to Confirmation	
Dues Class	Amount	Dues Class	Amount
B Employed Less Than Full-Time	\$28	B Employed Less Than Full-Time	\$29
1 Up to \$30,000	\$55	1 Up to \$30,000	\$56
2 \$30,000–\$50,000	\$86	2 \$30,000–\$50,000	\$88
3 \$50,000–\$70,000	\$129	3 \$50,000–\$70,000	\$132
4 \$70,000–\$100,000	\$172	4 \$70,000–\$100,000	\$177
5 \$100,000–\$140,000	\$215	5 \$100,000–\$140,000	\$221
6 \$140,000–\$180,000	\$270	6 \$140,000–\$180,000	\$277
7 \$180,000–\$220,000	\$324	7 \$180,000–\$220,000	\$332
8 Over \$220,000	\$377	8 Over \$220,000	\$387
L Joint Secondary	\$55	L Joint Secondary	\$56

E Student	\$28	E Student	\$29

3. *Report of the MLA Trustees.* The council received the trustees' annual report, which showed that at the end of the calendar year 2020 the total value of the MLA endowment increased by 6.0 percent in 2020. At their meeting, after a discussion of the history of sustainable investment by the association, the trustees instructed the staff to gather information on the availability of sustainable investment options through Commonfund for their consideration.

4. *Approval of the October 2020 Council Minutes.* The council corrected the draft minutes of its October 2018 meeting and approved the revised draft for publication in the May 2019 issue of *PMLA*.

5. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council confirmed seven decisions that it made between its October 2020 and February 2021 meeting:

In January, the council added the association's endorsement the American Council of Learned Societies' statement to the Kansas Board of Regents urging it "to withdraw its endorsement of the proposed policy to ease the path to suspending, dismissing, or terminating employees, including tenured faculty members, without undertaking the processes of formally declaring a financial emergency." That same month, Paula Krebs was invited to apply to the Teagle Foundation for a \$50,000 grant to be used for general education workshops. The council authorized Krebs to do so.

In February, the council approved updating two of its previous statements, *MLA Statement on Continuing Threats to Academic Freedom and Higher Education in Turkey* (2019) and *Statement on Violence against Students and Teachers in India* (2020), in response to recent events in both countries.

Also in February, the council approved adding the association's endorsement to a statement drafted by the American Historical Association that expresses concern over a new policy from India's Ministry of Higher Education/Department of Higher Education "requir[ing] Indian scholars and administrators to obtain prior approval from the Ministry of External Affairs if they want to convene online or virtual international conferences, seminars, or trainings."

The council also made a total of two interim appointments that, as of the council's meeting, had resulted in one regular seat being filled on a standing committee. (The second offer was accepted the following week).

The council was presented with an additional ten decisions between the October 2020 and February 2021 council meetings:

At its October 2020 meeting, the council had received a proposal from the staff of the *PMLA* advisory committee that reader categories that are not used be replaced with those where more reviewer support is needed. After discussion, the council approved adding a second reader for African American and adding a reader for Latinx.

The staff also proposed dividing the African slot into two fields. After discussion of possible divisions, council members Samer Mahdy Ali, Anjali Prabhu, and Jahan Ramazani offered to propose slots to the council. They proposed three: The Maghreb; Sub-Saharan Africa, Anglophone; and Sub-Saharan Africa, non-Anglophone. The proposed slots were sent to the council's mailing list in November, and the council approved the creation of the slots. The new slots were filled for the first time at this meeting.

In November, the council was asked by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to endorse the updated guidelines of its Seal of Biliteracy. One council member did not vote by the deadline, and the decision was brought to the advisory committee, which approved the endorsement.

In December, the council was asked to endorse the American Sociological Association's statement titled *A Call to Higher Education Administrators to Support Caregivers during COVID-19*. The council did not approve the endorsement.

In January, the council was asked to approve updates to the *Report of the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education*, which was published on the website in May 2020. The council was also asked to approve an update to its Updated Statement on COVID-19 and Academic Labor. The council approved the endorsement. The updated report and statement were published on the website.

In February, when it was asked to approve the interim committee appointments, the council was also asked to approve four sets of recommendations from the Program Committee:

The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of fourteen societies: American Association for Italian Studies; American Association of Teachers of German; American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese; American Boccaccio Association; American Comparative Literature Association; American Folklore Society; American Humor Studies Association; Association for Computers and the Humanities; Association for Documentary Editing; Margaret Atwood Society; Byron Society of America; John Clare Society of North America; Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing; and Radical Caucus. The council renewed for four years the allied organization status of the North American Heine Society. The council also received and approved the Program Committee's recommendations regarding forums. The following forums were renewed for five years with no change in their allocation of guaranteed sessions: CLCS 20th- and 21st-

Century, GS Prose Fiction, CLCS European Regions, TM Language Theory, LLC 18th-Century French, LLC 20th- and 21st-Century Spanish and Iberian, TC Science and Literature, LLC Luso-Brazilian, LLC African American, TC Disability Studies, TC Postcolonial Studies, LLC Arabic, TC Cognitive and Affect Studies, LLC Canadian, LLC Hebrew, LLC Italian American, LLC Literatures of the United States in Languages Other than English, MS Opera, LLC Puerto Rican, CLCS Mediterranean, LLC South Asian and South Asian Diasporic, TC Translation Studies, LLC West Asian, TM Literary and Cultural Theory.

Finally, the Program Committee recommended that the CLCS Global Anglophone be renewed for three years rather than the usual five, with no change in its allocation of guaranteed sessions. The council approved the recommendation.

6. *Consideration of the Open Discussion Held during the 2021 Delegate Assembly Meeting.* The topic of the 2021 Delegate Assembly Open Discussion was “Strategies for a Time of Pandemic.” The DAOC wanted to build on MLA advocacy initiatives addressing the challenges of the current situation and asked the delegates to identify successful practices from different types of institutions in response to the pandemic and to gather any suggestions from the Delegate Assembly on concrete steps that the MLA as an organization and its constituents, from individual faculty members and graduate students to the various other groups to which we belong (departments, divisions, institutions, unions, professional associations, etc.), can take to support members in the times of COVID-19.

DAOC member Leah Richards and Elizabeth Mathews Losh spoke about the written comments gathered during the small-group discussion portion of the Open Discussion. Losh reported that several issues were raised repeatedly during the small-group discussions, including faculty autonomy about the mode in which to teach and flexibility about deadlines. She said that the responses are a great way to help us think about what actions we might want to take next; Richards said that the council can use them for future updates to the COVID-19 statement.

Barbara Fuchs suggested that the council could create different templates for faculty members to bring to department chairs re: delaying the tenure and promotion clock or other considerations in the wake of the pandemic. Paula Krebs reported that Dennis Looney has said that members are using the association’s Updated Statement on COVID-19 and Academic Labor for that purpose. Losh and Richards volunteered to craft templates for promotion documents for different groups (for example, faculty members; rank, promotion, and tenure committee chairs and committee members; recommenders); the documents could include a template paragraph to be used if a candidate has additional factors or circumstances that need to be considered.

The council discussed the possibility of updating the updated statement and the creation of templates.

7. *Departmental Reports.* The council received annual reports submitted by the MLA department heads. One council member had a question about whether the association contacts subscribers to the *Style Center's* e-mail newsletter, *The Source*, which has over one hundred thousand subscribers. Anna Chang, the head of the office of outreach, said that the association does reach out to nonmembers with conditional messaging.

8. *Election of a Council Member to the DAOC.* During discussion, one council member offered to serve a one-year term on the DAOC, and two others said that they would review their commitments for the following two years. The council approved allowing the three members to report back which of them would be filling the council's seat on the DAOC. The week after the council meeting, Erin D. Graff Zivin reported that she would be able to serve the two-year term (2021–Jan. 2023).

9. *Selection of Two Council Members and Two Other Members to Serve on the MLA Whiting Committee.* Paula Krebs explained that the council needed to set up a committee to review proposals for the Whiting Foundation awards. Council members Rebecca Colesworthy and Elizabeth Mathews Losh will serve alongside members Reginald Wilburn and Margaret Boyle.

10. *Consideration of Petition about Money for Contingent Faculty Unionizing.* Paula Krebs summarized the petition from Feisal Mohamed (Yale Univ.), which asked that the council approve the request for the association to designate 1 percent of its total assets annually. The money would go to a subvention for which unions seeking to create a bargaining unit of non-tenure-track faculty would apply. Krebs said that the association's attorneys had reviewed the petition and noted that the manner in which the petition requests that money be given to union organizing efforts would be a violation of the association's tax status. The council did not approve the motion to create a unionization fund for contingent faculty, annually setting aside 1 percent of the association's total assets. Barbara Fuchs will respond to Mohamed.

11. *Review of Requests from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities.*

The council reviewed two proposed statements: Shared Governance and Faculty Rights in the Time of COVID–19 and Statement on Restructuring and Faculty Terminations in Response to COVID–19. The committee drafted the first statement in response to the council's request that it draft a statement that addresses the online censorship of international students. The committee also asked the council to review a proposed revision of its charge.

Council members praised the statements, suggested revisions, and wondered whether the two statements could be combined. The council did not approve the two statements as they were currently proposed, but it charged Anjali Prabhu, the committee's new executive council

adviser, with taking the statements and proposed revisions to CAFPRR.

The council reviewed the changes to the proposed charge. The council passed a motion stating that it “approves the charge contingent on revisions in the language to ‘charge language,’ which Paula Krebs, Dennis Looney, and Anna Chang will bring to the committee.”

12. *Review of Proposed Revisions to Criteria for the Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award.* Council member Jahan Ramazani summarized the recommended revisions to the committee’s charge that he, Anjali Prabhu, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, and Leah Richards prepared for the council’s consideration. Ramazani said that they would also like to speak with the staff members who work with the committee.

Barbara Fuchs said that the council would therefore ask the working group to take its proposal and work it into a charge document. The council would consider the charge in May and can thereafter appoint the award committee unless it decides to rethink the composition of the Committee on Honors and Awards so that it might make the appointments.

13. *Discussion of a Proposal to Create the Position of Immediate Past President.* The council discussed a proposal to create the position of immediate past president. Several council members noted that other organizations have this position on their board and that the creation of this position would allow for continuity between presidents’ terms.

Barbara Fuchs asked whether the council should charge the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution to draft an amendment.

The council passed the following motion:

The Committee on Amendments to the Constitution shall draft an amendment to create a position of immediate past president who will serve as a regular member of the executive council for one additional year thereby bringing the member’s term into parity with the term of executive council members.

Following additional discussion, Fuchs said that the council can charge the committee with researching how this is done in other organizations, how it relates to the overall governance structures of the MLA, and other issues that they wish to bring to the council’s attention. She said that the council can continue discussing this issue at its May meeting.

Discussion of Taking the 501(h) Election and the Formation of an Ad Hoc Lobbying Committee. Barbara Fuchs asked Samer Mahdy Ali to share with the council research that he had done on nonprofit organizations’ ability to lobby. Ali explained that there are new lobbying rules that nonprofits may follow, but they are not widely known. Nonprofit organizations to take a 501(h) election. Were the association to take this election, it could build on advocacy

efforts and do focused lobbying within well-defined boundaries. The amount of money that the association could spend on lobbying efforts would be based on a percentage of its annual exempt purpose expenditures. There is no limit to “insubstantial” expenses or on lobbying activities that don’t require expenses (e.g., building websites, having volunteers provide assistance). The council approved the following action: The MLA takes the 501h election.

On Saturday, Ali asked whether the council could commission an ad hoc committee made of members who have certain expertises to think about and focus on what are the most systematic structural problems that exist in members’ fields and prioritize and create action items. The committee could think about which tools to use for each (e.g., lobbying, statements, coalitions, advocacy network) and consult with the MLA staff to figure out next steps. The council charged Ali and Christopher John Newfield to assemble a list of names of people to serve on the ad hoc committee to bring back to the council for its approval.

14. *Creation of Two Ad Hoc Committees.* The council authorized the creation of two ad hoc committees, one of which grew out of the consideration of feedback from MLA 2021 convention session 197, “Reimagining the MLA of Tomorrow: Needs and New Directions.”

Samer Mahdy Ali, Christopher John Newfield, and Ignacio Sánchez Prado summarized feedback from the town hall session at the convention. Attendees were asked four questions:

1. What do you imagine as the future role of the MLA in the job market?
2. How can the MLA support the research agendas of community college faculty?
3. What are best practices for bridging English and non-English fields?
4. How does the MLA transition from prestige-granting to inclusive organization?

They found the discussion to be positive and fruitful and said that members would like to see the association engage in more advocacy, and in more diverse career preparation beyond academia. Fuchs asked for volunteers to work on guidelines that would address institutional practices. These council members will first review the association’s existing documents and then consider the potential next steps of the process. Fuchs, Ali, Erin D. Graff Zivin, Lisa Karakaya, Elizabeth Mathews Losh, Newfield, Anjali Prabhu, Leah Richards, and Sánchez Prado will work on the documents. They will be joined by staff members Paula Krebs and Dennis Looney. Barbara Fuchs reminded the council that one of its constitutional powers is to create and charge committees. She wanted to create a second ad hoc committee to review the charges of the association’s nine professional-issues committees and decide whether (and if so, how) to update the committees’ charges. Esther Allen, Frieda Ekotto, Jean Elizabeth Howard, Elizabeth Mathews Losh, Leah Richards, and Julie Shoults volunteered to be members of the working group. They will be joined by staff members Terrence Callaghan and Leigh A. Neithardt.

15. *Appointments to MLA Committees.* The council made fifty-nine appointments to the

standing committees of the association and appointed twelve committee chairs or cochairs and five council advisers. The names of all new and continuing committee members, chairs, cochairs, and council advisers will appear on the MLA website at the start of their terms.