

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

The council approved these minutes at its May 2020 meeting.

The council met on 28–29 February 2020 at the MLA office in New York. President Judith Butler presided. The officers present were First Vice President Barbara Fuchs, Second Vice President Christopher John Newfield, and Executive Director Paula M. Krebs. The Executive Council members present were Samer Mahdy Ali, Eric Hayot, Jean Elizabeth Howard, Lisa Karakaya, Elizabeth Mathews Losh, Anjali Prabhu, Jahan Ramazani, Leah Richards, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Evie Shockley, Julie Shoults, and Dana A. Williams. Ann Kalscheur Suarez and Ramon Saldivar were 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)

On 28 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. After lunch, the council reconvened and continued working through its agenda. Later in the afternoon, the council met in subcommittees to develop short lists for committee appointments. The Subcommittee on Finance and Meetings (Judith Butler, chair; Samer Mahdy Ali; Lisa Karakaya; Anjali Prabhu; Julie Shoults) considered appointments to six MLA committees; the Subcommittee on Projects (Barbara Fuchs, chair; Jean Howard; Elizabeth Mathews Losh; Jahan Ramazani; Evie Shockley) was assigned six MLA committees; and the Subcommittee on Publications (Christopher John Newfield, chair; Eric Hayot; Leah Richards; Ignacio Sánchez Prado; Dana Williams) worked on short lists for five MLA committees.

Following the subcommittee meetings, the council reconvened in regular session to continue working through its agenda. On 29 February, the council reconvened in regular

session to continue working through its agenda. Before lunch, the council met with Joy Connolly, president of the American Council of Learned Societies. After lunch, the council held a regular session and adjourned at 2:02 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 2019, which showed that the association concluded the fiscal year with a deficit of \$741,019 in the unrestricted fund. The members of the council's Finance and Audit Committee had met with representatives of the independent auditor, EisnerAmper LLP, before the council meeting; they 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 noted that the overall projected deficit (\$566,850) is \$100,060 lower than the deficit projected in the budget presented to the council in October 2019.

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. [Note: The president certified the council's action by signing the original document containing the resolution. The document was then stamped with the association's corporate seal.]

WHEREAS, article 4, 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"; and

WHEREAS, the above-described board of trustees for 2020 is composed of Judith Butler (association president), Eric Hayot (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 Jean Howard and Leah Richards to the council's Finance and Audit Committee for 2020.

2. *Revision of the MLA Dues Schedule.* The Executive Council confirmed the action taken by the 2020 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 2020.

Dues Class	Current Amount	New Amount
B Employed Less Than Full- Time	\$27	\$28
1 Up to \$30,000	\$53	\$55
2 \$30,000–\$50,000	\$84	\$86
3 \$50,000–\$70,000	\$126	\$129
4 \$70,000–\$100,000	\$168	\$172
5 \$100,000–\$140,000	\$210	\$215
6 \$140,000–\$180,000	\$263	\$270
7 \$180,000–\$220,000	\$316	\$324
8 Over \$220,000	\$368	\$377
L Joint Secondary	\$53	\$55

E Student	\$27	\$28
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3. *Report of the MLA Trustees.* The council received the trustees' annual report, which showed that at the end of the calendar year 2019, the association's endowment fund and the seven donor-restricted funds that support a number of association prizes had increased in market value. Paula M. Krebs shared that because the association had a strong year, the trustees were recommending that the association increase the drawdown from MLA endowment from 2.5 percent to 4 percent, which would reduce the deficit. The council approved a motion increasing the drawdown to 4 percent beginning with fiscal year 2019–20, with the amount subject to council approval each year.

4. *Approval of the October 2019 Council Minutes.* The council approved the draft minutes of its October 2019 meeting and approved it for publication on the association's Website.

5. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took eight actions between its October and February meetings. (1) The council approved its Statement on the Violent Repression of Political Protest. (2) It approved a committee appointment. (3) The council approved Paula M. Krebs issuing a statement on behalf of the association in support of striking faculty members in the United Kingdom. (4) The council decided to not endorse a statement from the American Association of University Professors titled In Defense of Knowledge and Higher Education. (5) The council endorsed a statement issued by the American Anthropological Association titled Targeting Cultural Sites Is a War Crime. (6) The council approved its Statement on Violence against Students and Teachers in India. (7) The council approved signing on to a letter written by PEN America to Xi Jinping, president of the People's Republic of China, in support of Tibetan language-advocate Tashi Wangchuk. (8) The council approved signing on to a letter written by the Middle East Studies Association to the Department of Education expressing concern about the investigations of New York University and the University of California, Los Angeles, that the department's Office for Civil Rights has initiated for alleged discrimination against their Jewish students. When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 5, Oct. 2010, p. 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the actions on its electronic discussion list. The council was unanimous in its approval of the proposed actions except in its endorsement of the American Association of University

Professors' statement, and the advisory committee was asked to make a decision. It did not achieve unanimity. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these decisions.

6. *Report from the Executive Director.* Paula M. Krebs asked the council to discuss one item in her report, a request from former executive council member David Pan. Pan asked for the association's help in proposing a national program for encouraging language-learning funded by the Department of State. It would establish summer intensive language schools across the country to enable students to enter a third semester of a new language in the fall. After discussion, the council voted to decline to pursue this project.

7. *Departmental Reports.* Council members had no questions on the annual reports submitted by the MLA department heads, and the council accepted the reports with thanks.

8. *Selection of Sites for the 2031 Annual Convention.* Director of Convention and Events Karin L. Bagnall presented a proposal for the 2031 from the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau. The council selected Philadelphia as the site of the January 2031 MLA convention.

9. *Consideration of the Open Discussion Held during the 2020 Delegate Assembly Meeting and Discussion of the Report of the MLA Task Force in Graduate Education.* The council received from the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee a transcript of comments and recommendations that delegates made during the assembly's discussion of the *Report of the MLA Task Force in Graduate Education*. Attendees had small-group discussions of the recommendations in the report that they most wanted to discuss. Leah Richards, who is also a member of the Organizing Committee noted that over a quarter of the responses focused on "Provide career guidance in line with realities of job market." The Organizing Committee provided two questions to guide the conversation: "How has your institution (either current or former) attempted to implement a mechanism to enact this recommendation?" and "What can we do to further the implementation of this recommendation? MLA, students, faculty members, departments, divisions, administrators, unions, professional associations, etc." The Organizing Committee collected and reviewed the responses.

The council approved a motion accepting the task force's report. It will be cross-referenced with the 2014 report written by the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature. The staff will prepare the task force's report for

publication and dissemination. One of the council-sponsored sessions at the 2021 convention will use the report as the basis of its discussion.

10. *Discussion of Contingent Labor Concerns.* The council received an update from council member Julie Shoults about the document that she and fellow council member Ann Kalscheur Suarez shared at the October meeting. Shoults said that she and Kalscheur Suarez want to revise their document, incorporating feedback that they received from the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. Council member Lisa Karakaya offered to work with Shoults and Kalscheur Suarez.

11. *Review of the Constitutional Amendment Approved by the 2020 Delegate Assembly.* As required by the MLA constitution (art. 13.D), the council reviewed the constitutional amendment approved by the 2020 Delegate Assembly. It will be forwarded to the membership for the required ratification vote.

12. *Action on a Member Motion.* The 2020 Delegate Assembly approved the following motion, made by delegate Pamela Lothspeich:

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 Canada, 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.

After discussion, the council approved a motion authorizing Dennis Looney to investigate the availability of the data requested in the motion.

13. *Creation of an Ad Hoc Committee.* At its October 2019 meeting, the council discussed drafting a statement on teaching evaluations. The council approved motions to have a statement and then to appoint an ad hoc committee to draft a statement for the executive council's consent. After discussion, the council passed a motion directing the staff to assemble a committee of volunteers from the executive council to modify the American Historical Association's statement which could be circulated to the Committee on

Contingent Labor in the Profession, the Committee on the Status of Women, the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities for approval.

14. *Requests from Committees, Members, and a Nonmember.* The council considered seven requests that it received from committees, members, and a nonmember: (1) At the 2020 Delegate Assembly meeting delegate Howard Horwitz asked that the Delegate Assembly to examine lowering the amounts for Dues Classes 1 and 2. After discussion, Paula M. Krebs said that staff can provide the council with more information on the dues classes for its review. (2) Delegate Grace Lavery had requested that the association issue a policy or statement on the use of pronouns. The council approved the following statement: “The MLA recognizes the pronouns that individuals use for themselves, and MLA style advises writers to always follow the personal pronouns of individuals about whom they write.” It is posted on the website and is linked to a 4 March 2020 post in *The MLA Style Center*, “How do I use the singular they?”

(3) A member of the 2020 Elections Committee asked about the possibility of the association providing a higher level of travel-grant funding to part-time contingent faculty-member delegates to enable them to attend the Delegate Assembly. In 2020 almost all of the available money was used to provide grants to people who meet the current guidelines (graduate students and contingent faculty members). The council passed a motion affirming that it was investigating ways to procure more complimentary rooms or to raise the amount of money we are able to give to these delegates.

(4) The Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession asked the executive council to consider a document, “Draft for an MLA Declaration on Foreign Nationals in Higher Education.” After discussion, the council decided that two of its members, along with two members of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, and two members from the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession would work with the staff to revise the draft.

(5) The Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities wanted the council to make a statement in support of student strikers at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Judith Butler advised that the council wait before issuing a statement because there were continuing developments over the weekend. (The following week the council would approve the Statement on the Termination of Graduate Student Strikers at the

University of California, Santa Cruz, and it was published on the website.) (6) The committee also wrote a letter to the executive council, asking for the reinstatement of its New York meeting. The council discussed a number of ideas, including inviting all committees to the office on a three-year rotating basis so that all members would be able to attend a meeting in New York. Council members asked how much it would cost to invite the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities to the office. The council agreed that the staff should further investigate the costs involved.

(7) Andrew Ross, a nonmember, had asked that the executive council endorse the Debt Collective's petition in support of College for All. The council passed a motion asking Christopher John Newfield to revise the association's 2011 Statement on Student Debt in light of the concerns of the Debt Collective and the executive council. The statement reads:

Public attention has been directed recently to the educational debt students accumulate in the course of undergraduate, as well as graduate, study. A major contributing factor has been the increasing portion of educational costs students must bear in the form of loans. To reduce debt burdens in the future, we call on Congress, state legislatures, and institutions of higher education to calibrate educational costs and student aid in ways that will keep student debt within strict limits. We also call on them to hold in check tuition increases, which often far outpace inflation, and to ensure that degree programs allow for timely completion.

15. *Renaming the MLA Seal of Approval.* While discussing the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession's "Draft for an MLA Declaration on Foreign Nationals in Higher Education," council members raised concerns that MLA's Seal of Approval, which is given to job ads on the MLA *Job List* website, might be misunderstood as the association's endorsements of those ads. Paula M. Krebs explained that the criteria for the seal are the number of weeks that applicants can respond to the job ad, and whether an ad doesn't require a response before January 31. The council passed a motion that the staff would rename the seal to make clear that it is given based only on an ad's timeline.

16. *Election of a Council Member to the DAOC.* The council elected Elizabeth Mathews Losh to the DAOC for a two-year term (2020–Jan. 2022).

17. *Renaming a Committee.* The council approved a motion renaming the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession to the Committee on Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Profession. The council will update the committee's charge in May. The council will also review the role of council advisers at its May meeting.

18. *Appointments to MLA Committees.* The council made fifty-two appointments to the standing committees of the association and appointed eleven committee chairs or cochairs and three council advisers. (After the meeting, the council would approve an additional appointment through its e-mail list.) 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.

19. *Discussion of the May Meeting.* The council discussed the possibility of holding the May meeting virtually, with members who wanted to travel to New York encouraged to do so. The council passed a motion that it would hold the May meeting through *Zoom*. Subsequently, because of the rapid spreading of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, the City of New York issued in early March public health protocols that restricted the amount of time that employees could report to work. On 10 March, Paula M. Krebs e-mailed the council to ask that they not plan on traveling to New York for the May meeting. On 11 March, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. On 20 March, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order closing all nonessential businesses in the state as of 8:00 p.m. on 22 March.