

## **Minutes of the MLA Executive Council**

*The council approved these minutes at its February 2021 meeting.*

The council met virtually on 30–31 October 2020. President Judith Butler presided. The other 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, Judith Butler, Barbara Fuchs, Eric Hayot, Jean Howard, Lisa Karakaya, Elizabeth Mathews Losh, Christopher John Newfield, Anjali Prabhu, Jahan Ramazani, Leah Richards, Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Ramon Saldivar, Evie Shockley, Julie Shoults, and Dana Williams. Ann Kalscheur Suarez 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 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.

In the morning on 30 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 28–29 October to review assembly and other association business. Svetlana Tyutina, the chair of the DAOC, summarized for the council the committee’s deliberations, noting that it focused most of its discussion on the proposed advocacy network (see item 14, below) and the format of the open discussion period of the Delegate Assembly, “Strategies for the Time of Pandemic.” She also said that the committee had briefly discussed the petition that is being circulated online that calls on the council to create a union organizing support fund, to which the association will annually contribute 1 percent of its total assets.

Tyutina concluded the committee’s report by announcing that Maria Chuza-Calo had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 11 January 2021 through 9 January 2022. The president asked if someone could review again the advocacy network. Council and DAOC member Leah Richards said that the network would employ delegates as a means of communicating the work that the MLA is doing for members and that it would provide

resources and support for members to further discuss this work on their campuses. Delegates would be given tool kits along with materials to circulate. She said that initially delegates would be asked to volunteer, but if the bylaw amendments pass, advocacy will become an expected part of their work. She said that the hope is that delegates will be mobilized to bring the MLA to every campus and make membership and working with the MLA a standard part of their work life. Barbara Fuchs said that documents can get changed as people comment about what is working on their campuses; there would be a live conversation about how the MLA's actions are impacting campuses, and delegates and members would be able to share that with colleagues.

Butler 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 Chouza-Calo, Sima N. Godfrey, Feroza Framji Jussawalla, and Supriya M. Nair. Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Daniel E. Seabold.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council convened in executive session to conduct its review of the executive director. After a break, the council held a planning discussion. Paula Krebs asked the council members whether there was information that they would like to have for strategic-planning purposes. After discussion, council members Samer Ali, Jean Howard, Lisa Karakaya, and Jahan Ramazani volunteered to work with the officers on a planning committee.

The council then convened in a regular session to begin working through its agenda. On Friday afternoon, the council also discussed the 2021 convention. Karin L. Bagnall shared that the convention sessions would take place through *Zoom*, that over seven hundred were scheduled, and that they would be recorded and available for a limited time after the convention. She shared that there will be asynchronous Q&As, which can carry the convention beyond the scheduled four days. She also said that the staff is working with exhibitors to help them engage with attendees; they will be given fifteen-minute slots in between sessions.

Council members raised questions about security and whether Zoom would be able to censor any of the sessions. Bagnall noted that our contract is with Confex—not Zoom. Thanh Trinh said that we are putting two-factor authentication in place. Bagnall noted that events would be accessible to convention attendees only, and that login credentials could not be

shared among people.

The council reconvened on Saturday morning and held a discussion on committees. Barbara Fuchs said that the council needs to think more deliberately about what it is asking the committees to do and how the council activates them. After further discussion, the council decided to return to this issue in February. It continued to work through its agenda and adjourned at 5:25 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 (2019–20) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2020–21). The 2019–20 budget approved by the council last October projected a deficit of \$689,760 in the unrestricted fund and a surplus of \$22,850 in the restricted fund. The fiscal year ended with neither a surplus nor deficit projected in either fund. While the result of operations put us in the negative during the fiscal year, this deficit was offset entirely by cost recovery, including the Paycheck Protection Program loan.

After the staff responded to council members' questions, the council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2020–21, which the committee projected will be balanced. The downturn in revenue from membership and the *MLA Job List* will be offset by sales of the ninth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, to be released this spring, and by limiting operating expenses wherever possible. The council commended the staff on its success.

The council also received the independent auditor's report on the MLA's 403(b) retirement plan at TIAA for the 2019 plan year and the auditor's letters to management. The report noted that the association had satisfactorily addressed the issue of the timely remittance of employee contributions and was in compliance with the relevant Department of Labor requirements.

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

The council reappointed William Janeway as managing trustee for the term 2021–23, and Catharine R. Stimpson, New York University Professor and Dean Emeritus of the

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, as trustee for the term 2021–23. The council also appointed Ignacio Sánchez Prado as the council trustee to a two-year term from 2021–22.

While briefly discussing the convention, council members said that many faculty members do not know that they are eligible for grants that would cover the cost of their convention registration. They asked the staff to display this information more prominently on the website.

2. *Approval of the May 2020 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2020 meeting for publication.

3. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council unanimously confirmed the twenty-two decisions it made in between its May and October meetings: (1) approval of the MLA Statement Deploing Systemic Racism; (2) approval of an update to the Statement on COVID-19 and Academic Labor; (3) authorization for Paula M. Krebs to submit an application for an Officer's Grant from the Mellon Foundation grant to support the Language Enrollment Census; (4) authorization for Krebs to submit an application for a grant from the Department of Education as additional support for the Language Enrollment Census; (5) approval of a letter to Matthew T. Albence, the deputy director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, drafted by Krebs and signed by the association and other members of the American Council of Learned Societies; (6) approval of the Statement Opposing Xenophobic Visa Regulations Imposed on International Students and Scholars; (7) approval of adding the association's endorsement to a statement drafted by the Asian Studies Association that voiced concern over recently passed security legislation in Hong Kong; (8) approval of the endorsement of a resolution by Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials in support of libraries in Latin America and the rest of the Global South; (9–12) approval of four documents prepared by the *PMLA* subgroup that laid out procedures for reviewing the editor of *PMLA*; policies regarding special features such as Theories and Methodologies; a Statement of Values for the journal; and a call for special-feature submissions; (13) approval of adding the MLA's endorsement to a statement drafted by the American Historical Association (AHA) in response to the White House Conference on American History; (14) approval of an updated charge for the Committee on Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Profession; and (15–22) approval of a total of eight appointments that resulted in one chair and five regular seats being filled on standing committees.

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.

The council was also asked to make an additional four decisions: (1) In July, the council was asked to approve an additional request, but the entire body did not vote by the set deadline. Paula M. Krebs asked that the council vote to add the association's endorsement to a white paper written by the National Association for Bilingual Education to the two presidential campaigns about issues that English language learners face, and policy initiatives that could address these issues. (2) In August, the council was asked to add the association's signature to a statement, Joint Statement on COVID-19 and the Key Role of the Humanities and Social Sciences in the United States. One council member did not vote, and the decision was brought to the advisory committee, which approved the endorsement. (3) In September, the council was asked to approve two committee appointments, a regular appointment and the appointment of a chair. One council member did not vote, and the decision was brought to the advisory committee, which approved the appointments. (4) In October, the council was asked by the AAUP to approve Judith signing a statement written by Tim Snyder, a history professor at Yale University, and Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, in support of democratic elections. Because the vote was not unanimous, the council's advisory committee was asked to vote; it approved Judith signing the statement.

4. *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 Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Profession; Committee on Information Technology; Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession; 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.

5. *Request from the Committee on Honors and Awards.* The council received a request from the Committee on Honors and Awards that asked the council to consider and recommend

a strategy for identification of new prize fields (such as feminist, gender, sexuality, and postcolonial studies) and the fundraising strategies that MLA staff members might provide leadership for. The council decided to identify members who work in those fields. The question of a council adviser for the committee was raised; Dennis Looney noted that the committee has never had one. Jahan Ramazani volunteered and the council accepted his offer.

6. *Appointment of an Editor for PMLA*. The council appointed Brent Hayes Edwards (English and comparative literature, Columbia Univ.) to succeed Wai Chee Dimock as editor of *PMLA*. Edwards's three-year term will begin in July 2021.

7. *Recommendations from the Program Committee*. The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied organizations. The council agreed to postpone for one year the review of four organizations at their request: the American Name Society, the Association for the Study of American Indian Literature, the Society for Classical Studies, and the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. The council approved the suspension of two organizations until a contact for the organizations can be determined and review materials submitted: the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing and the International Boethius Society. The council agreed that the committee should follow up with one organization that did not submit review materials: the Community College Humanities Association. The council removed from allied status one organization at its request: the Harold Pinter Society. The council approved the admission of two new allied organizations: Italian American Studies Association and Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences.

8. *Proposal for the 2037 Convention*. Karin L. Bagnall presented a proposal for the 2037 convention from the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau. (The city will also be the location of the 2024 and 2031 conventions.) The council approved selecting Philadelphia as the location for the 2037 convention.

9. *Recommendation from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR)*. Since 2002, the MLA has made recommendations for minimum per-course compensation for part-time faculty members and for minimum annual salaries for entry-level full-time faculty members. The Executive Council has charged the CAFPRR with updating the MLA salary recommendations annually. The committee sent the council a proposal of a 1.9 percent raise. After discussion, the council agreed to recommend

to the committee that these minimum salary amounts should be raised by the inflation rate every year.

10. *Renewal of the Charge of the Committee on Community Colleges.* Paula Krebs told the council that the committee sees itself as focusing on job preparation and dispelling myths about community colleges. She said that there are ways that the council could commission it to do more advocacy work. Barbara Fuchs suggested an initiative connecting PhD-granting institutions and community colleges. Krebs and Leah Richards will bring this idea to the committee and ask it to gather information. The council renewed the charge of the Committee on Community Colleges for five years, through June 2025.

11. *Review of Mandate for the Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award Committee.* The council discussed potential options for updating the mandate of the Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award Committee, which will next be appointed in February 2021, with the award to be given in January 2024. Council members raised the possibility of giving the award more often, of creating multiple awards, and of awarding multiple scholars working together. Judith Butler asked whether anyone wanted to create a proposal for the council to consider at its February meeting. Council members Anjali Prabhu, Jahan Ramazani, Leah Richards, and Ignacio Sánchez Prado volunteered to bring a proposal to the February council meeting. The council passed a motion that it will confer and make a decision later.

12. *Formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to Address Issues of Racial Justice.* The council had asked the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada (CLPC) to consider its potential role in the council's deliberations regarding antiracism in the academy. The committee sent an e-mail to the council expressing its support for this work and suggested that an ad hoc committee be formed.

The council considered various configurations of such a committee (perhaps including members from other standing committees, members of the council, and the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee). The committee would be tasked with applying itself to racial justice in the profession. Its focus would be to understand the different ways that the MLA throughout its structure and operations might be engaged with antiracism. The council also decided that the association's updated strategic plan could include questions about racial justice, and the council would ask the standing committees to think about what contributions they could make to racial justice. Barbara Fuchs, Elizabeth Mathews Losh,

Christopher John Newfield, Leah Richards, and Julie Shoults agreed to work with Paula Krebs on this project. (Krebs later brought to this group a proposal from MLA staff members that they look to former members of standing committees to serve on this new committee to both provide a new opportunity for engagement, which they agreed to.)

The council also approved the following motion: “The Executive Council reaffirms and supports the work of the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United states and Canada.” The council asked the staff to take back to the committee the following two questions: Are you content with your name? And, what further actions can we take to help underscore the literature of people of color?

13. *Updates to Two Committees’ Function Statements.* The council approved changes to the language of the function statements of the Committee on Scholarly Editions and the *MLA International Bibliography*:

The Committee on Scholarly Editions serves as a clearinghouse for information about scholarly editing and editorial projects; offers advice and consultation to editors on request; **advocates for greater diversity in all aspects of editorial practice**; honors excellence in editing by awarding emblems to qualified editions; promotes dissemination of reliable texts for classroom use and among general readers.

The Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography* examines and assesses the direction and philosophy of the *Bibliography* and *Directory of Periodicals*, advises the staff on policies and procedures for compiling and producing the Bibliography **and on changes in its scope, methods, technology, or form**, and aids in identifying and recruiting bibliographers from the academy.

14. *Following Up on the Report of the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education.* Council member Leah Richards reviewed with the council the DAOC’s plans for the format of the Delegate Assembly open discussion in January. It will transition to a discussion of the proposed revisions to the Delegate Assembly bylaws, which would enable the creation of what the council and DAOC are envisioning as an advocacy network. The change to the bylaws would require that delegates serve as advocates for the MLA on their campuses; circulate MLA policy documents and statements with colleagues, graduate students, and

administrators; and bring their constituents' concerns to the MLA. Barbara Fuchs said that there is more work that needs to be done, and that more help from the council would be welcomed, and noted that a toolkit was being developed for the delegates, which she wanted to be circulated to the council.

One of the documents that the delegates can share is the *Report of the Task Force on Ethical Conduct in Graduate Education*. Elizabeth Mathews Losh asked if it would be possible to offer case studies and examples that highlight the complexity of the recommendations in the report and acknowledge the challenges to implementing them.

15. *New Statement on Student Debt*. Christopher John Newfield circulated his update of the 2011 Statement on Student Debt, for which he requested feedback. Council members were enthusiastic about his draft and offered suggestions. Judith Butler suggested a core statement and then documents generated for specific audiences. Newfield said he would revise his statement.

16. *Request Concerning Categories for Appointments to the PMLA Advisory Committee*. Angela L. Gibson said that the staff proposed replacing categories that are not used with those where more reviewer support is needed. After dissension, 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, Samer 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 council approved those by voting on its mailing list.)