

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its October 2006 meeting.]

The council met on 19–20 May 2006 at the MLA office in New York. President Marjorie Perloff presided. The officers present were First Vice President Michael Holquist, Second Vice President Gerald Graff, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were K. Anthony Appiah, Dorian F. Bell, Marilyn Gaddis Rose (19 May only), Anne Ruggles Gere, John Guillory, Mary N. Layoun, Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Paula Rabinowitz, Nicolas Shumway, Hortense J. Spillers, Guy Stern, and Priscilla Wald. Executive Council member Charles Altieri was absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Foreign Language Programs Nelly Furman, Managing Editor of MLA Publications and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Financial Operations Amilde Hadden, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of English Programs David Laurence, Director of Book Publications David G. Nicholls, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

On 19 May, the council convened in morning and afternoon regular sessions to work through the reports and action items on its agenda. During the first morning session, Michael Holquist, chair of the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning, presented a brief, informal oral report to the council on the subcommittee's 18 May meeting. He said that the subcommittee had decided to pursue two issues: the casualization of the profession and the erosion of tenure. Council members suggested collaborating with other organizations on these issues, gathering comparative information on the situation in the sciences, and focusing on the relation between these issues and the improvement of undergraduate education.

On 20 May, the council convened in executive session to review the salaries of senior staff members and to receive a report from the MLA's officers on their review of all staff salaries, carried out before the start of the council meeting. Any council member who wished to review all staff salaries had the opportunity to do so. Information from compensation surveys was also made available. Following the executive session, the council convened in regular session to continue working through its agenda and to meet with Domna C. Stanton, chair of the Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, who presented a progress report on the work of the task force (see item 10, below). After lunch, the council completed work on its agenda and adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

The listings of forthcoming meetings and conferences and of professional announcements are no longer printed in *PMLA*. They have been moved to members-only pages of the MLA Web site, where they are updated twice a month (www.mla.org/resources).

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 2005–06 after seven months. The committee continued to project a deficit in the association's restricted fund that was larger than the deficit projected in October 2005. The increased deficit was attributed to lower association revenues, especially for the *MLA Handbook*, and to unanticipated increases in expenditures on electricity and real estate taxes. Since much sales revenue for the bibliography and the *Handbook* is not recorded until the final months of the fiscal year, the committee said that it was difficult to predict whether the fiscal year would end with a deficit. Rosemary Feal explained that *Handbook* cycles were an important budget consideration: *Handbook* sales generate less revenue as an edition ages, and the release of a new edition can be expected to enhance sales revenue. Thus, the development costs associated with the forthcoming seventh edition of the *Handbook*, which contributed to the deficit, represented an acceptable investment in a future revenue source. Feal also noted that the association's cash reserve had reached its target amount (see May 2004 *PMLA* 624) and would cover any budget deficit in the current fiscal year.

The staff asked the council to reconsider the development budget it had approved in October 2005 for the electronic complement to the *MLA Handbook* and the decision to tap the MLA endowment, if necessary, to cover development costs in the current fiscal year (see May 2006 *PMLA* 876). Recent work with the consulting company engaged to assist with this project had led the staff to reconfigure the budget. The overall three-year budget had increased, and costs had shifted from the current fiscal year to the 2006–07 fiscal year. In addition, the growth of the association's cash reserve led the staff to recommend that the cash reserve, not the MLA endowment, serve as the source of the development funds needed. The council authorized the use of funds from the cash reserve to cover development costs in the 2005–06 fiscal year, which were now projected to be \$65,800. It also approved the projected development budget for the fiscal year 2006–07, totaling \$259,100, and authorized the withdrawal of monies from either the cash reserve or the endowment if the unrestricted fund cannot absorb the development expenses.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2006–07 that projected a deficit of \$380,330 in the association's unrestricted fund. The Finance Committee drew the council's attention to several items in the tentative budget, including a proposed small increase in convention registration fees for all categories of convention attendees. Council members noted that registration fees had been increased by \$5 four times in the last seven years and said that a larger increase now was justified and would obviate the need for additional small increases in the short term. The

council worked out and approved a different set of fee increases covering all categories of convention attendees except graduate students and emeritus members.

The council's discussion of the tentative budget touched on the cost of committee meetings. The council recognized the value of face-to-face meetings but asked the staff to explore alternative meeting formats (e.g., videoconferencing). Council members also discussed whether the association could save money by not mailing the *Newsletter* to members who preferred to access the *Newsletter* online. The council instructed the staff to set up a system to allow members to opt out of receiving the printed *Newsletter*. After reviewing and modifying the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2006–07, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated Eisner LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2005–06 accounts. This designation was the result of the council's February discussion about changing auditing firms (see Oct. 2006 *PMLA* 1746).

2. *Approval of the February 2006 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2006 meeting for publication in the October 2006 issue of *PMLA*.

3. *Consideration of Two Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* In early March, council members learned that the United States Department of State had denied visas to all Cuban scholars planning to attend the international congress of the Latin American Studies Association, to be held in mid-March in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It was proposed that the council write a letter of protest to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice similar to the letter that was written in October 2004 to Secretary of State Colin Powell for the same reason (see May 2005 *PMLA* 948). The council's procedure for making decisions between council meetings (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278) was implemented, and, after council members had the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list, the council's advisory committee was called on to make a decision about sending the proposed letter. The advisory committee decided that the letter should be sent. Pursuant to the council's procedure, the full council was asked to ratify the action taken by its advisory committee; the council did so. (See also item 12, below.)

At the February 2005 council meeting, the council agreed to implement a 2004 Delegate Assembly motion that, in part, called on the MLA to promote a conference that the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) was planning for 2006 (see Oct. 2005 *PMLA* 1680). The council could not, however, make decisions about some aspects of the MLA's implementation plan until COCAL's conference plans were complete. When the announcement of the COCAL conference became available after the February 2006 council meeting, Rosemary Feal asked the council to consider sending three national and four local representatives to the conference and contributing \$1,000 to the conference. Feal's proposal was designed to

give the association wider and more cost-effective representation at the conference than that called for in the assembly's motion. Again, the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list, and all council members approved Feal's proposal. Because of the council's unanimity, it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to make the decision. At the present council meeting, the council confirmed the decision it had made using its electronic discussion list.

4. *Language Initiative.* The council reviewed information that the staff had prepared in response to Marjorie Perloff's proposed language initiative, aimed at encouraging faculty members to learn a new language to use in their work (see Oct. 2006 PMLA 1750). The positive membership response to her Spring 2006 *Newsletter* column on this subject led Perloff to suggest that the association work with humanities centers to encourage them to set aside internal grants for faculty members who wish to pursue language study. A small subcommittee was formed for the purpose of drafting a letter to send to humanities centers.

5. *Nomination of Honorary Fellows.* The council received a recommendation from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA) pertaining to the nomination of two honorary fellows. Acting on the CHA's recommendation, the council nominated Louise Erdrich and Jacques Roubaud for honorary fellowship in the association. Following the provisions of article 3.D of the MLA constitution, the election to honorary fellowship will be conducted during the 2006 Delegate Assembly meeting in Philadelphia.

6. *Statement of Best Practices regarding Diversity and Tolerance.* The council considered a revised version of the document that Anthony Appiah first presented to the council at its October 2005 meeting, a document outlining strategies for dealing with sensitive situations that can arise when classroom diversity is an issue (see May 2006 PMLA 880). The council made further revisions, asked the staff to have the document copyedited, and agreed to use the document to seed a Web-based interactive discussion forum once ground rules for such forums at the MLA Web site have been established.

7. *Revised Charge for the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR).* Pursuant to the recommendation of the council subcommittee that reviewed the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity and Tolerance (see Oct. 2005 PMLA 1678), the council revised the CAFPRR's charge. The revised charge reads as follows (new provision in italics):

The Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities addresses the general conditions of MLA members' professional lives as teachers and scholars, whether in universities, colleges, or schools, or as independent scholars. The committee is concerned with the rights and responsibilities of scholars and teachers in the fields of language, literature, and writing, specifically the right of academic freedom

and the responsibility of ethical conduct toward colleagues and students. The committee monitors activities connected with the recruitment and promotion of faculty members, especially the Job Information Center at the association's annual convention, and receives comments and recommends actions to ensure fairness. The committee is charged with initiating relevant projects and publications but is not empowered to hear individual grievances. In addition, the committee considers the relations among research, teaching, and professional advancement; specific professional concerns, such as the use of adjunct instructors to staff introductory writing and language courses, or the recruitment of minorities into the profession, *or the development of strategies for dealing with bigotry and prejudice on campus*; and the import of such concerns for questions of philosophy, methodology, and politics in the teaching of language, writing, and literature.

8. *Request from Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity and Tolerance.* When the Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity and Tolerance submitted its final report to the council in October 2004, a council subcommittee was established to review the ad hoc committee's recommendations (see May 2005 PMLA 948 and Oct. 2005 PMLA 1678). The subcommittee recommended that the council pursue a number of initiatives, some of which were based on the ad hoc committee's recommendations and some of which were new, and the council accepted the subcommittee's recommendations. Because these initiatives superseded the ad hoc committee's recommendations, the latter were not published in *Profession 2005* with the ad hoc committee's report. At the present meeting, the council considered a request from four members of the ad hoc committee to publish the committee's recommendations in *Profession 2006*. Council members reviewed the steps already taken to further the work of the ad hoc committee and noted new areas to pursue (see items 6 and 7, above). The council reiterated its appreciation for the work of the ad hoc committee but decided not to modify its previous decision with respect to the committee's recommendations. It asked the staff to tell the committee members that their request was not approved.

9. *Progress Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages.* The staff members working with the ad hoc committee presented an outline of the recommendations that the committee was preparing for its final report, which would be submitted to the council in October. The council discussed the outline and asked the staff to transmit its comments and questions to the ad hoc committee.

10. *Progress Report from the Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion.* Domna Stanton, chair of the task force, met with the council to review a summary of the task force's main recommendations, which were to be submitted to the council in final form in October. Council members commented on a number of items and asked Stanton to be sure that the task force's

final report addresses the following issues: the status of advising, teaching, and service as scholarship; how to evaluate pedagogical materials; specifics about what mentoring involves; and best-practices guidelines on outside letters for chairs to follow and for all to be aware of. At the conclusion of the discussion, Stanton asked the council to take a sense-of-the-meeting vote on the task force's recommendations. The council voted to register its favorable receipt of the outline of recommendations.

11. *Statement on the Academic Bill of Rights.* At the February 2006 council meeting, when the council reviewed the Delegate Assembly resolution on the Academic and Student Bills of Rights (see Oct. 2006 *PMLA* 1750), it also considered a statement that the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR) had drafted on the subject. At the present meeting, the council decided to publish the CAFPRR's statement at the MLA Web site along with a prefatory note from the council. The council asked the staff to prepare both documents for online publication.

12. *Requests for Letters on Visa Denials.* Anticipating more frequent requests for letters such as the one sent to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (see item 3, above), the council drafted the following policy statement to serve as an introductory paragraph in letters addressing the particulars of future cases:

The Modern Language Association of America, representing over 30,000 scholars in modern languages and literatures, is committed to fostering research and instruction on a global scale. We are committed to the free exchange of scholars and students of all levels. We therefore call for the timely and professional processing of passports, visas, and, when indicated by national disciplinary needs, work permits.

13. *Progress Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on the Structure of the Annual Convention.* Rosemary Feal presented to the council an outline of the issues that the ad hoc committee had discussed at its first meeting, held in March. She said the committee talked about encouraging different kinds of sessions; providing more space for author readings; reviewing the allocation of convention space to divisions, discussion groups, and allied and affiliate organizations; using the MLA Web site as a vehicle for divisions and discussion groups to offer content; reworking or eliminating the late-night session slot; and holding a thematic miniconference on the last day of the convention. The ad hoc committee also considered the question of changing the dates of the convention. Feal noted that the committee would have the results of a membership survey on the convention dates in time for its next meeting, in October. Council members commented on changing the convention dates and the effect the change would have on the hiring calendar. The council indicated its support for some of the changes identified by the ad hoc

committee and encouraged the committee to implement these changes as soon as it was feasible to do so.

14. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied and affiliate organizations and discussion groups. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of eleven societies: American Association of Teachers of German, American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages, American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, American Boccaccio Association, American Comparative Literature Association, American Folklore Society, American Humor Studies Association, American Name Society, Association for Documentary Editing, Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures, and Byron Society of America. It renewed the allied status of the American Dialect Society for seven years, pending receipt of a copy of the society's membership application. The allied status of three other organizations—Association for Computers and the Humanities, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, and North American Heine Society—was also renewed for seven years, but the leaders of these organizations will be told of the council's concern about low attendance at their convention sessions. Four allied organizations—American Association of Teachers of Italian, American Association of Teachers of Yiddish, American Conference for Irish Studies, and Samuel Beckett Society—requested that their reviews be deferred for one year. The council granted this request but stipulated that their subsequent reviews take place after six years instead of the usual seven.

At the May 2005 council meeting, the council had authorized the Program Committee to seek additional information from the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition and from the Consortium for Computers in the Humanities in support of their applications for allied organization status (see Jan. 2006 *PMLA* 310). In the first instance, the Program Committee requested more information about the coalition's apparent exclusion of men from membership and about how the coalition's convention sessions would differ from those offered by the MLA Division on the History and Theory of Rhetoric and Composition. The committee received and reviewed the information it had requested and found that the coalition's membership was exclusionary and that its sessions would focus on networking and mentoring, not on scholarly developments that would interest the broader MLA membership. Following the committee's recommendation, the council did not approve the coalition's petition for allied status. In the second instance, the Program Committee requested clarification from the consortium on whether its members were institutional or individual—all current allied organizations have individual members—and on how the content of the consortium's sessions would differ from that of other sessions currently being offered at the convention. Again, the committee

received and reviewed the information it had requested, and it found that the consortium had not yet completed the change from institutional membership to individual membership. Following the Program Committee's recommendation, the council asked the consortium to continue proposing special sessions and to reapply for allied organization status in three years. The coalition's new petition should specify what its sessions will add to the MLA convention program.

The council renewed for seven years the affiliate organization status of three organizations: Community College Humanities Association, Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, and Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing. The council deferred its decision on another affiliate organization, the John Clare Society of North America, for one year to allow the society to provide more evidence that a large number of the society's members participate in the society's convention sessions. One organization, the Rhetoric Society of America, applied for and received affiliate organization status.

In actions relating to discussion groups, the council granted division status to the Discussion Group on Post-colonial Studies in Literature and Culture and granted permanent status to the Discussion Group on Catalan Language and Literature and the Discussion Group on Provençal Language and Literature. The council deferred a decision on permanent status for the Discussion Group on Travel Literature for three years, until 2009. At that time, the group will need to submit a revised petition for permanent status that stresses the generic definition of travel literature. The council approved a petition for a discussion group on Cuban and Cuban diaspora cultural production. The new discussion group will organize its first session for the 2007 convention. The council did not approve petitions for discussion groups on age studies and on Mediterranean studies.

During its review of the Program Committee's recommendations, the council noted that divisions and permanent discussion groups are not subject to review, as are

allied and affiliate organizations. The council therefore charged the Program Committee with defining review criteria for divisions and permanent discussion groups and with establishing a schedule for their periodic review.

15. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2009: 27–28 February, 15–16 May, and 30–31 October. In addition, because of a scheduling conflict for the executive director, the council changed the date of its May 2008 meeting from Friday and Saturday, 16–17 May, to Tuesday and Wednesday, 20–21 May. As a result of this change, the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning, which meets on the afternoon before the February and May council meetings, will meet on Monday, 19 May 2008.

16. *Committee Appointments.* The council made four additional committee appointments. The names of the new committee members appear in the listings of MLA committee members in the September 2006 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and at the MLA Web site.

17. *Request from a Member.* On behalf of the executive committee of the Division on American Indian Literatures, Frederick White submitted to the council a "Statement on Indigenous Languages of the World in the College and University Curriculum" and asked that the council adopt it as an MLA statement. The council referred the matter to the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada (CLPC), whose "Statement on Native American Languages in the College and University Curriculum" deals with similar issues. The council asked the CLPC to consider incorporating the statement on indigenous languages into the committee's statement.

18. *Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX).* One of the organizers of INMEX requested that the MLA become a member of INMEX. During the council's discussion, questions were raised about the benefits to the MLA of joining INMEX and about the association's ability, as a 501(c)(3) organization, to join a 501(c)(6) organization. The council deferred its decision on the request until May and asked Rosemary Feal to seek answers to the council's questions.