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Nominations for 2011 MLA Elections

Second Vice President. The 2011 Nominating Committee has selected three nominees for second vice president of the MLA: Wai Chee Dimock, Yale Univ.; Margaret W. Ferguson, Univ. of California, Davis; and Cora L. Kaplan, Southampton Univ. The person elected will take office on 9 January 2012 and will automatically become first vice president in 2013, serving in that office through the close of the January 2014 convention, and president of the MLA in 2014, serving in that office through the close of the January 2015 convention. A biographical summary for each candidate can be found at the MLA Web site after 15 April (www.mla.org/nominations2011); members will receive voting instructions in the fall.

Executive Council. The Nominating Committee has selected seven nominees for the MLA Executive Council: Beate Brunow, Penn State Univ., University Park; Bryan Cameron, Univ. of Pennsylvania; Melissa Figueroa, Cornell Univ.; Lanisa Kitchiner, Howard Univ.; Lutz Koepnick, Washington Univ. in St. Louis; Simon Richter, Univ. of Pennsylvania; and Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, Univ. of Pennsylvania. The three candidates elected will serve four-year terms that will begin 9 January 2012 and run through the close of the January 2016 convention. Background information on the election as well as candidates' biographical summaries can be found at the MLA Web site after 15 April (www.mla.org/nominations2011); members will receive voting instructions in the fall.

Delegate Assembly. The 2011 Elections Committee has arranged contests to replace the twenty special-interest delegates and the thirty-six regional delegates whose terms in the assembly will expire on 8 January 2012. The term of office of those elected will be from 9 January 2012 through the close of the January 2015 convention. The names of all Delegate Assembly candidates can be found at the MLA Web site after 15 April (www.mla.org/nominations2011).

Right to Petition. Any member of the association may initiate a petition proposing additional candidates for second vice president, for the Executive Council, and for the Delegate Assembly. Procedures for filing petitions are described in articles 6.E, 8.A.2, and 10.E of the MLA constitution (www.mla.org/mla_constitution). Petitions must reach the executive director before 1 July.



An Agenda for the Future

In today's environment we have to fight tooth and nail to defend the humanities. Defense is good, but don't forget that we need to play offense too. Let's set our goals high and define a future for the humanities that can challenge existing assumptions and reinvent the goals and conditions of language and literature study. This is no time for modest proposals, and the fight for the humanities is not for the faint of heart. Instead of caving in to the powerful social and cultural pressures to marginalize the humanities, we have a chance—and we have a duty—to fight for our place at the center of American education. This is the agenda I have publicly outlined during the first months of my presidency, and I want to share it with you here.

Language Learning

Languages mean career skills for the workforce, but they also contribute to each person's cognitive growth. Without sufficient language learning, American students will suffer from diminished educational opportunities, and we sabotage their prospects in the global economy. Building first- and second-language literacy has become a matter of national urgency.

It is time to set a *national goal of universal bilingualism*. All high school students should attain a strong ability in a second language. This will require robust language programs starting in elementary school, as is common in nearly every other industrial country. To worry about globalization without supporting a big increase in language learning is laughable. Unfortunately the current Department of Education appears to have forgotten about foreign language programs altogether.

Because second language acquisition builds first-language ability, the current dearth of language-learning opportunities helps explain the poor English literacy results for US students. Students who have studied a second language use their first language better. We language and literature scholars are well positioned to articulate a comprehensive language agenda that encompasses both "foreign" languages and English and includes a *national goal of improved first- and second-language literacy* for all students. Broad-based literacy is the democratic form of the humanities.

Graduate Education

To prepare today's graduate students for tomorrow's jobs, we should increase attention to training teachers: today's graduate students are tomorrow's faculty members, and we have to equip them with all the requisite skills for promoting student learning.

A principled focus on teacher preparation will force a rethinking of many aspects of graduate education, none

more urgently than the status of the dissertation. It is high time to ask why the presumed capstone of graduate education remains a dissertation (i.e., a draft of a book that takes several years to write), even though academic book publishing is in free fall and academic books are seldom purchased or read. There is no reason to insist that the traditional dissertation remain the exclusive goal of graduate study.

Nor should we design graduate humanities education to lead solely into academic paths. On the contrary, graduate education builds important transferable skills—the ability to interpret, to make evidence-based arguments, to work creatively across disciplinary borders, to use language well—that can also lead to nontraditional careers. Our programs should systematically equip our students to succeed in them.

Digital Humanities

The future of our fields depends on our integrating new media and technologies, and our students deserve the chance to become familiar with them as part of their course of study. Not only do the digital humanities pose fundamental questions about culture; they also respond to aspects of the contemporary media environment, which define students' horizons of expectations. To engage undergraduate or graduate students today, we cannot forgo the digital dimension.

The challenge goes far beyond using technology to cover established curricula or to disseminate knowledge. As humanists we ought to be among the first to recognize how knowledge itself is changing. Our goal is to transform the core of the curriculum by incorporating engagement with technology. The contrast between a defense of the old humanities, as traditionally understood, and a vision for the humanities of the future is nowhere greater than here. This is no time for business as usual. The digital frontier is already upending conventional humanistic research and teaching and will fundamentally reinvent the study of cultures. We have an opportunity now to get in front of this revolution, to assimilate the digital turn into the humanities enterprise, and to lead the way in the transformation of the teaching and learning environment of higher education.

Academic Workforce

No educational agenda can succeed without supportive working conditions for all faculty members, including (but hardly limited to) job security. Yet the increasing reliance on non-tenure-track faculty members continues unabated.

On the MLA Web Site

News from the MLA

Online Directory

Upcoming MLA Deadlines

2011 ADE Summer Seminars

2011 ADFL Summer Seminars



This casualization of the academic workforce is devastating higher education: it undermines the continuity of instruction for students, it wears down instructors deprived of stable employment, it erodes faculty governance of educational institutions, and it discourages talented students from pursuing higher education as a vocation.

The MLA has been among the leaders in resisting this deprofessionalization. We will not back off. To pursue the comprehensive language agenda suggested above, this battle is especially important, since contingent faculty members are concentrated in the language and writing sectors. The scandal of American higher education today is that the greater the importance of teaching in one's job, the lower the level of job security. Talk about saving the humani-

ties does not mean much unless it addresses this systemic denigration of teaching. On the contrary, it is the dignity of teaching to respond to the urgency of learning and to build the literacy on which democracy depends.

These are no doubt tough times for higher education, but together we can achieve a lot to promote the study of language and literature, the core mission of the MLA. I ask for your support for this agenda, and I ask for your thoughts on how to implement and expand it. I welcome your comments and your participation.

Russell A. Berman

Members are invited to comment on the president's column at www.mla.org/fromthepres.

New Division and Discussion Group Executive Committee Members

The MLA's eighty-seven divisions and fifty discussion groups added new members to their executive committees in the last election cycle. The lists of division executive committee members and of discussion group executive committee members at the MLA Web site have been updated accordingly (www.mla.org/danddg and www.mla.org/dgroupexcomm, respectively). Executive committee listings will also be published in the November 2011 issue of *PMLA*.

Nominating Honorary Members and Fellows

The MLA invites members and division or discussion group chairs to nominate individuals for honorary membership or fellowship. Honorary membership is given to distinguished foreign scholars, and honorary fellowship is given to distinguished men and women of letters, usually creative writers, of any nationality. A list of honorary members and fellows appears online at www.mla.org/honorary_members. Details on nomination procedures can be found at www.mla.org/nominations_hon, or you may contact Annie Reiser for additional information (646 576-5141; awards@mla.org). The deadline for submitting nominations is 31 January 2012.

2011 Ratification Ballot

At its meeting on 8 January 2011 in Los Angeles, the Delegate Assembly approved a constitutional amendment and a resolution. Neither action is final, however, since the MLA constitution requires a membership ratification vote in each instance. Because the level of participation in ratification votes in recent years has been low, the Executive Council wishes to encourage all members to review the assembly's actions and to exercise their right to vote on these matters.

The ratification vote will be conducted in the members-only area of the MLA Web site. Members in good standing as of 15 April will have access to the ratification ballot. Notifications will be sent by e-mail to those members who have e-mail addresses on file with the MLA; all other members will be notified by letter. Members who wish to vote online will be able to do so beginning 20 April until 5:00 p.m. (EDT) on 1 June. There will be a link to the ratification ballot on the home page. Members who prefer a paper ballot should contact the coordinator of governance to request one (MLA, 26 Broadway, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10004-1789; e-mail: governance@mla.org; fax: 646 576-5107). The deadline for requesting a paper ballot is 9 May.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TIM THOMPSON

Convention Invitation

The invitation to the 2012 MLA Annual Convention in Seattle will be available online in early September. The invitation includes complete information about convention hotels, travel arrangements, and preregistering at member rates. Members will be able to register for the convention, reserve hotel rooms, and make travel plans quickly and efficiently through the MLA Web site (www.mla.org). Members will be notified by postcard and e-mail when online registration opens.

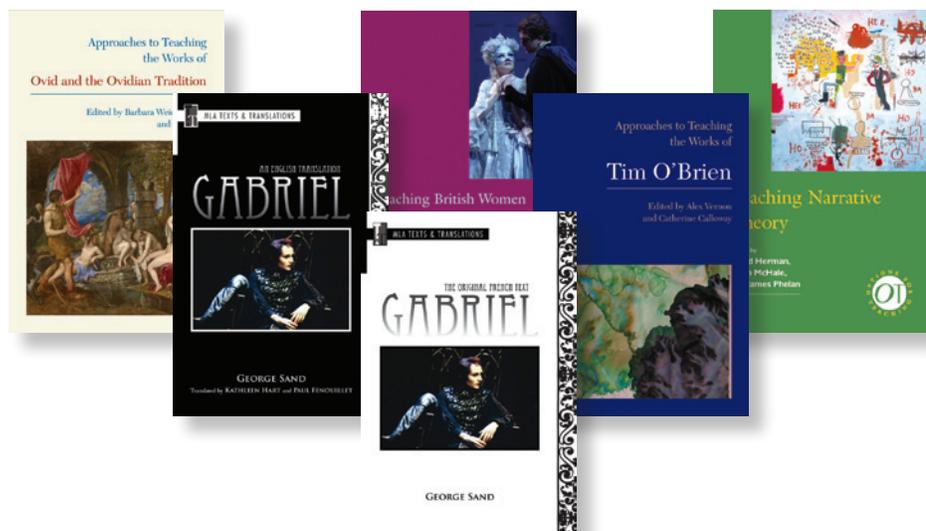
Convention Interview-Suite Arrangements

The e-mail notification about reserving hotel suites for the convention in Seattle will be sent in mid-August to the person who is listed as department chair for 2010–11 on the ADE or ADFL membership record as of 1 June 2011. Departments must be members of the ADE or the ADFL and department chairs must be MLA members by 1 June 2011 to receive the early notification. This notification is a privilege of membership in these associations, but it is not a guarantee that a suite will be available. If you will be away from your office in mid-August, please alert a staff member to look for this e-mail message. ADE- and ADFL-member department chairs who want suites for interviews are urged to make reservations immediately because the number of suites is limited. Chairs should also make certain that, if a two-bedroom suite is requested, another MLA member is listed as a second occupant and that all suite or room occupants involved in a field related to the study of language and literature are preregistered for the convention. Once registration and housing are open to the entire MLA membership (two weeks after the e-mail message is sent to ADE and ADFL members), suites will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.

Six New MLA Titles Released

- *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Tim O'Brien*
- *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Ovid and the Ovidian Tradition*
- *Gabriel: An English Translation*
- *Gabriel: The Original French Text*
- *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*
- *Teaching Narrative Theory*

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit www.mla.org/newtitles.



How to Be Included in the *MLA Bibliography*

The staff of the *MLA International Bibliography* invites you to submit information about your articles, essays, and books that appeared in 2011 and those from before 2011 that have not previously been indexed.

Bibliographic Information Services receives many of the periodicals on the Master List of Periodicals (searchable at the MLA Web site or through all our vendors). Authors of journal articles may assume that their material will be indexed if the MLA receives the journal; members should check with the journal editor to be sure it was sent to our office. Authors of monographs and articles in book collections (Festschriften, conference proceedings, books of essays, etc.) should ask the publisher to send a copy of the collection to the MLA. Authors in doubt about whether the MLA has received a journal or a book should send materials according to the guidelines found online at www.mla.org/bib_inclusion.

Address materials or questions to *MLA International Bibliography*, 26 Broadway, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10004-1789 (646 576-5053; fax: 646 458-0033; bibliography@mla.org).

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On Teacher Blaming, Union Busting, Federal Meddling, and Other Attacks on Higher Education

Honestly, there are times when I think someone actually wrote a playbook called *How the United States Can Destroy Its Great Higher Education System in One Hundred Days*. Worse, it seems to be on everyone's reading list. It opens with a chapter called "Always Blame Teachers," proceeds to the section "How to Disempower Faculty Members," and concludes with a list of ways in which state and federal governments can subvert academic matters. The news from Wisconsin about the limits the state plans to impose on the collective bargaining rights of its workers echoes around the country as similar moves are considered in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana,

and elsewhere. Using the claim of financial exigencies, state legislators have been going after teachers (including those in the higher education system). Among recent efforts: a bill in South Carolina to require professors to spend more time in the classroom and a move in Utah to end tenure (Stripling).

The recent origins of hostility toward teachers, says Diane Ravitch, stem from No Child Left Behind and its undergirding philosophical approach to education: if students do poorly on tests, it must be because teachers and administrators are incompetent. Ravitch says what's really going on is this: "A historic strain of anti-intellectualism in American thought has merged with fiscal conservatism, producing the present campaign to dismantle the teaching profession." It has become harder and harder to convince the public and its elected representatives at the state and federal level of the importance of studying the humanities, of the value of the academic profession, and of the need for working conditions that treat *all* teachers in institutions of higher education as professionals. The push for measurable, vocationally oriented learning outcomes has never been stronger, and the attack against those trained, hired, and rewarded for combining original research with classroom teaching and campus service has also never been as vicious.

It's not a coincidence that these trends come at a time when the percentage of the contingent academic workforce keeps increasing in relation to tenured faculty members. It's easier to pick on teachers—claim they have too much negotiating power, say they aren't monitoring learning outcomes adequately, or bash them for deconstructing (read: destroying) literature—when their power to resist diminishes as their tenured ranks proportionally decline. The ultimate irony is that contingent faculty members are likely to be on the front line of the courses where students make the all-important transition from high school to college. They are also likely to know a great deal about outcomes assessment and vocational preparation for students. Because institutions have delegated so much of the teaching to contingent faculty members, colleges and universities have become more vulnerable to critiques against the tenured ranks. Those critiques often ring false, adhere to stereotypes, and further divide an already splintered faculty. Yet until institutions are willing to create "one faculty serv-

ing all students," we remain collectively weak in the face of the mounting attacks (see "MLA Issue Brief").

In this climate, the pressures will only intensify. The Department of Education has taken questionable measures aimed at protecting the integrity of federal financial aid programs. Among these: a federal definition of "credit hour," which, according to many, reverts to outdated notions that will stifle curricular innovation. Another requirement calls for every online program, whether offered by an Ivy League university or a for-profit company like the University of Phoenix, to meet the approval standards of every state in which it has students or faculty members. Pell Grants are on the chopping block: significant reduction to this program will have an effect on those least able to pay for higher education. At the state level, we are witnessing dramatic cuts to institutions of higher learning that will close campuses, cause tuition hikes, and further limit the chances of reducing the percentage of courses taught by contingent faculty members. In March, the governor of Pennsylvania called for a fifty percent funding reduction to state schools, and California and New Jersey (among others) have already experienced major cuts to higher education. Performance-based funding, measured largely by completion rates, has been introduced in states such as Louisiana and Ohio.

I have just returned from the annual meetings of the American Council on Education and the National Humanities Alliance, where many of these issues were on the table, so the MLA is very much a part of these discussions in Washington. The Executive Council has made the MLA's voice heard on issues such as the State of Wisconsin's actions ("Statement"). The MLA will continue to research and do analysis on the most pressing problems that our disciplines face. Advocacy is also at the core of our mission, and for this work we count on each MLA member to take action. If all thirty thousand of us contact our state and federal legislators to make the case for the humanities and for our institutions of higher education, we can have an immense impact. And if those of us in tenured positions use the power of our job security to demand change in the academic workforce, we can also exert significant pressure. For the first action item, please consult the excellent work that the National Humanities Alliance does (www.nhalliance.org).

(cont. on p. 6)

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**Dated Material
Please deliver by 6 May**

(cont. from p. 5)

For the second, I refer you to the MLA's Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit.

We have a lot of rebuilding to do. Grab a tool from the Advocacy Kit, take action on a federal funding priority (visit www.nhalliance.org/advocacy/funding-priorities/index.shtml), and find ways to make a difference on your campus and in your local community. Please let me know what you are doing and how the MLA can help.

Rosemary G. Feal

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Comment on this column at www.mla.org/fromtheeditor.



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