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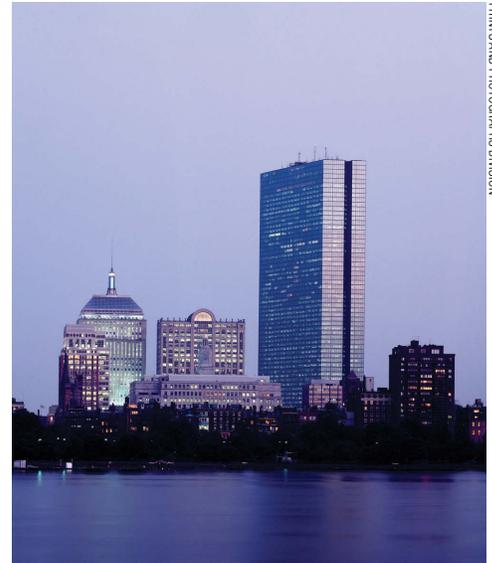
Call for Innovative Proposals

Imagine this scenario. The topic of the MLA panel you were on your way to attend sounded really engaging. You entered the room with the highest of hopes for invigorating exchange. There were four papers scheduled, but each was read in a rushed monotone. The first three papers each went over by five minutes, so the last speaker ran out of time. The panel chair took just one question, and the session ended three minutes late. The audience quickly filed out, as the next group of panelists pressed into the room. Important scholarship may have been presented, but little meaningful exchange occurred. Sound familiar?

This stereotype of the MLA convention panel need not become your reality. Innovative sessions—as well as traditional paper-presentation panels—are welcomed by the Program Committee. We hope to see more interactive, innovative, and exchange-oriented approaches proposed for future conventions. In an effort to make the proposal process as transparent as possible and to encourage greater member input, the Program Committee offers the following ideas to consider as you prepare your next MLA session proposal. Some of these session formats are already part of our convention program, while others remain as yet untried ideas. We hope you will both propose and attend sessions in the formats below, as well as submit additional ideas you have for formats that promote innovative and collegial exchange at the convention.

- **Preconvention Collaborative Workshops:** These informative workshops provide useful member services such as pedagogy training and skills or professional and employment development and support. Earlier this year the Seattle convention included a workshop on evaluating digital work for tenure and promotion.
- **Creative Conversations:** These sessions may be roundtables or special sessions that feature free-form dialogues or forums between published authors or other artists and an interviewer. This might include sessions that consider single works, classics, emerging formats, films, plays, artwork, and such.
- **Electronic Roundtables:** These digital-demonstration sessions reconfigure the familiar poster session, allowing participants to identify and exchange findings on topics such as incorporating digital media technologies into teaching, scholarship, and administration; to use digital media to explore a particular issue such as community engagement, student research, or textual editing.
- **Ignite Talks:** This session format includes brief, timed presentations, such as those in the PechaKucha style. In that format, twenty images are shown for twenty seconds each, and panelists talk along with their images. A dynamic form that originated in Tokyo in 2003, PechaKucha draws its name from the Japanese term for the sound of conversation (“chit chat”). This format is notable for its concise presentation mode, and it keeps things moving at a rapid pace. Formats with similarly compressed speaking times and goals, such as “Speed Geeking” or “Lightning Shorts,” have emerged in recent years and would be welcomed under this rubric.

(cont. on p. 2)



PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE CAROL M. HIGHSMITH ARCHIVE, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION



PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE CAROL M. HIGHSMITH ARCHIVE, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION

(cont. from p. 1)

- **Case-Study-Themed Sessions:** These sessions could be organized around any single topic ranging from workshops on members' syllabi to conversations on new approaches to organized learning.
- **Master Classes:** These sessions would center on widely held member interests and might feature accomplished scholars or teachers leading how-to sessions in different presentational styles or structures (workshops, roundtables, panels).

The Program Committee invites your ideas for making the annual conference both successful and engaging through active participation. As much as we revere time-tested traditional session formats, the MLA Program Committee is also committed to enlivening the conference experience with new approaches. We are grateful to hear your thoughts and hope that, as we move forward together, fewer MLA sessions will replay the scenario outlined above and that more innovative formats and enriched exchange will be built into the structure of our convention.

MLA Program Committee

President's Column



What We Can (and Can't) Do—and What We Have (and Haven't) Done

The MLA today is a very different organization from the one I joined twenty-five years ago; in the 1990s it was the first major scholarly association to create a committee on disability issues, and in 2011 it became the first to create an office of scholarly communication to meet the challenges of the digital age. Along the way, and as the result of a series of initiatives launched by the membership, the MLA has changed the composition and structure of its elected leadership to facilitate greater participation from graduate students, part-time faculty members, and faculty members from a wider range of institutions, including community colleges. And yet the impression persists in

some quarters that the MLA belongs to a small handful of tenured faculty members who are purportedly untouched by and unaware of the conditions under which most of their colleagues actually work.

If I do nothing else during my year as your president, I will try to correct that impression—not only by setting our critics straight but also by acknowledging where they are right.

On the one hand, the belief that the MLA is resistant to internal change is simply misinformed: there is no one in the leadership or on staff—literally, no one—who opposes the greater inclusion and involvement of a broader and more diverse body of members. On the other hand, the belief that the MLA has ignored non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty members is deeply vexing, because it speaks precisely to what we have and haven't done as an association. It reminds us that we still have much to learn about how to publicize and promote our policies.

What We've Done. In 2003, we produced a document setting out detailed standards for the ethical treatment of NTT faculty members. How detailed was it? We dealt with faculty access to office space, to phones and computers,

to professional development, to library facilities, and even to parking. (That's not a trivial matter for "freeway flyer" faculty members who commute among campuses trying to make ends meet—and trying to get to their classes on time.) That 2003 document is but one part of our Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit (available at www.mla.org), and most recently was incorporated into a more comprehensive report, *Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions*, released by the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession in June 2011. (And did I note that we are the first scholarly association to have a committee on contingent labor?)

What We Haven't Done. We didn't do enough to disseminate our work on behalf of NTT faculty members. Everyone who teaches modern languages and literatures in the United States, from the richly endowed professor to the harried freeway flyer, should know that the MLA has an admirably specific set of recommendations for the working conditions of our most vulnerable colleagues.

"Yes, well," some of our critics have told us, "you may have recommendations, and you may want to publicize them, but you have no way of enforcing them." This is true, all too true. We cannot enforce our recommendations for the working conditions of NTT faculty members, just as we cannot enforce our recommendations for salaries and benefits for tenure-track assistant professors and for NTT faculty members working on a per-course basis. For that matter, we cannot enforce the citation practices recommended in the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. We do not have, and cannot develop, the capacity to negotiate employment contracts for faculty members on a campus-by-campus basis, just as we do not

On the MLA Web Site

News from the MLA

Upcoming MLA Deadlines

2012 ADE Summer Seminars

2012 ADFL Summer Seminars



have, and cannot acquire, a team of investigators to dispatch whenever someone violates one of our recommendations. So far as I know, no disciplinary association has that capability.

But the MLA can offer—and has published—rigorous, well-researched studies of (for example) the conditions of academic employment, of the practices of peer review, of the status of women in the profession, and of the prospects for foreign language study in the still embarrassingly monolingual United States. Those studies have amassed critical data about the state of the profession. For example, our survey of departmental staffing and the surveys we conducted with other academic associations through the Coalition on the Academic Workforce represent a significant accomplishment—compiling reliable information on employment data over time, in an area where there is so much misinformation and disinformation. Information gathering may be only a first step, but it is an absolutely indispensable first step.

That information, in turn, can have real effects—if you and your colleagues bring them to bear on your own campus policies. I remember my first year on our association's Executive Council: it was 2002, the year MLA President Stephen Greenblatt released his famous letter on the crisis of the monograph. I took that letter to my dean, who informed me that (a) tenure and promotion policies would

remain the province of individual departments but that (b) the College of Liberal Arts, in response to the letter's argument that humanities research is undersponsored in research institutions, would create a start-up research fund for every newly hired faculty member.

Meanwhile, back at the MLA, Greenblatt's letter became the impetus for the Task Force on the Evaluation of Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion—a multiyear initiative that in 2007 produced a seventy-page report that was widely hailed and whose recommendations are still being debated and assimilated, campus by campus, particularly with regard to the increasing digitization of scholarly communication.

The MLA has indeed changed with the times—responding to the challenges facing its members (and our students) by working assiduously to formulate the standards that should govern our discipline. In my next column, I'll suggest some ways we can make those standards and recommendations more widely known; in the meantime, I invite your suggestions—for promoting the work we've done so far, and for new initiatives on the issues that affect us all.

Michael Bérubé

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



STEVE SCHNEIDER PHOTOGRAPHY

2011 Election Results

In the elections conducted last fall, Margaret W. Ferguson (English, Univ. of California, Davis) was elected second vice president of the association. Ferguson will serve in that office from 9 January 2012 through the close of the January 2013 convention and will automatically become first vice president in 2013, serving in that office through the close of the January 2014 convention. Her term as president will begin after the close of the January 2014 convention and will continue through the close of the January 2015 convention.

Lanisa Kitchiner (Howard Univ.), Lutz Koepnick (Washington Univ. in St. Louis), and Mecca Jamilah Sullivan (Univ. of Pennsylvania) were elected to at-large seats on the Executive Council for four-year terms (9 January 2012 through the close of the January 2016 convention). Kitchiner represents a field defined as “other” by the MLA constitution (art. 8.A.5), Koepnick represents the field of German, and Sullivan represents the field of English. In terms of membership categories, Kitchiner and Sullivan are student members of the association, and Koepnick is a regular member. In addition, during the 2012 Delegate Assembly meeting in Seattle, an election was held to fill one of the assembly's seats on the council. Samer M. Ali (Univ. of Texas, Austin) was elected for the same term as the other new council members.

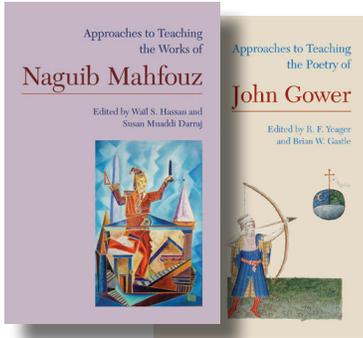
Fifty-six new representatives were elected to the Delegate Assembly. Twenty delegates were elected to represent special-interest categories in the assembly, and thirty-six delegates were elected to represent seven geographical regions in the United States and Canada. A listing of all members of the Delegate Assembly can be found at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/del_assembly_members).

In addition, new members were elected to the division and discussion group executive committees. The listings of executive committee members at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/danddg for the divisions and www.mla.org/dgroupexcomm for the discussion groups) have been updated to include new committee members' names.

Three New MLA Titles Released

- *Approaches to Teaching the Poetry of John Gower*
- *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Naguib Mahfouz*
- *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Comedy of Errors*

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



Winners of MLA Prizes Announced

The winners of twelve annual and six biennial awards given by the MLA were recognized at the January 2012 MLA convention in Seattle. Michael Bérubé, then first vice president of the association, announced and presented the prizes at the MLA Awards Ceremony on 7 January. A complete list of this year's prizewinners appears on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/awards_winners).

The MLA's prizes are awarded under the auspices of the Committee on Honors and Awards, which appoints the members of the selection committees and determines procedures, deadlines, and criteria for eligibility for all prizes. Deadlines for upcoming prizes are located at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/awards_competitions). To submit books or to obtain detailed information about any of the prizes, call or write the coordinator of book prizes at the MLA office (646 576-5141; awards@mla.org).



Electronic literature exhibit at the 2012 MLA convention

Delegate Assembly News

At its meeting on 7 January 2012 in Seattle the Delegate Assembly took the following actions.

The assembly conducted elections for the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, the Executive Council, the Nominating Committee, and the Elections Committee. The names of those elected can be found in the relevant committee listing at www.mla.org/governance/committees/comm_gov.

The assembly received the report of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), the executive director's report, the Finance Committee's report, and annual reports from the association's standing committees. Delegates had the opportunity to comment on or ask questions about all these reports.

The assembly received a proposal from the Executive Council and the DAOC regarding an increase in membership dues. Delegates voted to approve the proposal, which calls for a graduated increase in dues over the next three years.

In other business, the assembly approved two resolutions, one that was submitted by an MLA member and one that was initiated by the DAOC. The resolutions will be forwarded to the Executive Council in February for review according to the provisions of article 7.B.3 of the MLA constitution. If the resolutions do not pose any constitutional, legal, or fiduciary problems, the council will forward them to the membership for ratification later this year.

A complete report of the Delegate Assembly meeting will appear in the May 2012 issue of *PMLA*.

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We Need to Talk

As executive director of the MLA, one of my constitutional duties is to chair the MLA Program Committee, which plays an important role in shaping our annual convention. The committee has led the way in addressing members' complaints about the convention, from the dates to late-evening sessions, and has increased opportunities for members to interact. Its latest initiative, described on the front page of this issue, is to encourage more innovative types of sessions.

At the base of this initiative is a desire to make the convention more of a conversation, or rather a place to have many conversations, about our work and our ideas, our research and our classroom experiences. In my many years of attending conferences, I have heard scholars give

some spectacular papers, papers that they have delivered in a way that was engaging and even memorable. I think we all recognize the value of such presentations, and most often they are conceived not as a written document to be read and contemplated in silence but with an audience of listeners in mind—listeners who can respond in real time and help shape the presenter's project. But many scholars today are eager to take advantage of new mechanisms for sharing information. This trend may have begun with slide shows to accompany papers, but now has grown to include some very imaginative alternatives to a straightforward paper reading. Some sessions experiment with new presentation formats, such as the "lightning shorts" discussed on the front page; others stage a conversation between a scholar and an artist, author, or other creative practitioner. Electronic roundtables feature stations with computer demonstrations of each presenter's material that allow for one-on-one interactions between presenters and attendees. Some presenters are showing brief videos and then taking questions from the audience and from the *Twitter* stream; others use *PowerPoint* and *Prezi* to provide visual dimensions to their presentations (summarizing the material on their slides). New session formats might include hands-on workshops and pedagogical demonstrations.

But the most important thing is to hear what members want at the sessions. To that end, the Program Committee plans to develop ways for attendees to respond to sessions they attend. We can then track how well we're doing collectively in our efforts to present material in ways that engage our audiences, for example, by having at least fifteen minutes for discussion at the end of every session (many session organizers are leading the way by communicating more with panelists before the convention and by enforc-

ing the time limits). What we do at the convention is engage in part of an ongoing conversation, and, to reflect this, presenters will also be able to share their papers before or after the convention by adding a link to the work on the online Program (this feature offers a date-stamped record of one's work that deters others from borrowing it without attribution). Since many of us have never received feedback on our delivery style, the Program Committee plans to produce materials to help participants explore new techniques for giving conference presentations. We envision a "paper makeover" that shows how to transform a dense written document into a dynamic talk that keeps listeners engaged. These materials could offer new possibilities for communicating our work in ways that extend beyond the potent but limited genre of the research paper and thus provide new ideas for training graduate students in how to think about and share their findings. Thus, as I see it, these changes give us an opportunity to think about how we will teach the next generation. This opportunity is especially important as we look to graduate work to prepare people for careers beyond the academy.

These changes also give us an opportunity to reconceptualize the ways we think about our work and present it to a public in accessible forms. How we present our work to the public is critical to our ability to effectively advance the study of languages, literatures, and cultures. Only if people understand—and are compelled by—what we have to say can we act as strong advocates for the humanities. And first we have to want to hear, and sometimes even feel inspired by, what we say to one another.

Rosemary G. Feal

Members are invited to comment on this column at www.mla.org/fromtheeditor.

Chairs' Hotel Reservations

In August 2012 the MLA convention office will e-mail chairs of departments that are paid members of ADE or ADFL by 1 June 2012 early information about making hotel room reservations for the MLA convention. These chairs will also be able to make hotel reservations online through the ADE or ADFL Web site. ADE and ADFL chairs of departments that are participating in the e-mail discussion lists will be notified. This early notification does not

guarantee that department chairs will be able to reserve a suite for interviewing job candidates at the convention, but it does give them the best opportunity to do so. Please note that suites may not be reserved through the MLA Web site. Chairs who would like membership forms or information about their departments' 2011–12 membership status should contact Roy Chustek at the MLA office (646 576-5133; rchustek@mla.org).

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**Dated Material
Please deliver by 21 February**

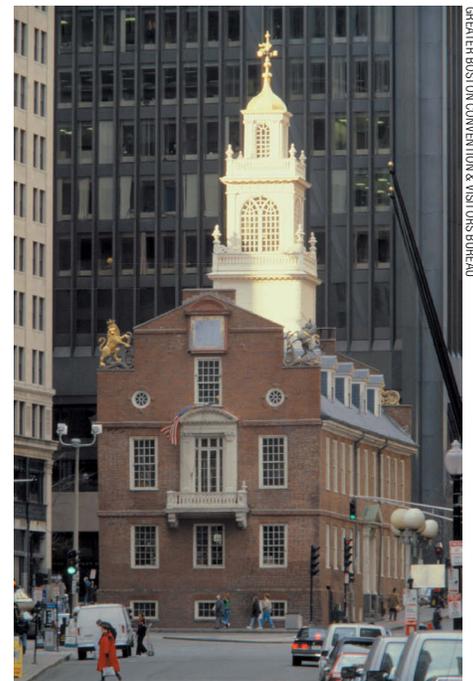
Calls for Papers for the 2013 Convention

The 2013 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Boston from 3 to 6 January. Calls for papers may be submitted until 21 February 2012 at www.mla.org/cfp_main; calls will not be edited before they appear on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/conv_papers). Members should familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the MLA convention, which appear on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/conv_procedures), before writing to the organizers listed in the calls for papers. If not provided, organizers' addresses are available in the members' directory on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/member_search). All participants in convention sessions must be MLA members by 7 April 2012. A member may participate as speaker, presider, or respondent only twice (e.g., by organizing and chairing a meeting, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker, presider, or respondent) at a convention.

Organizers are responsible for acknowledging all submissions and responding to all inquiries.

All requests for audiovisual equipment must be made on the appropriate program copy forms and must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. EDT on 1 April 2012. Because the need for audiovisual equipment is a major factor in the scheduling of meetings (and because the movement of equipment is both costly and hazardous), the deadline is firm. Participants must indicate their audiovisual needs when they respond to a call for papers and should check with the chair of the session or with the MLA convention office to be sure that the necessary equipment has been ordered by 1 April 2012.

Members without Internet access who need a printout of the calls for papers should write or call the MLA office to have a copy mailed to them (membership@mla.org; 646 576-5151).



*January 2013: first MLA convention in
Boston since 1952*