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Rolena Adorno Presented Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement

During the MLA Annual Convention's awards ceremony on 10 January 2015, the MLA's seventh Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement will be presented to Rolena Adorno, Sterling Professor of Spanish and chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale University. Adorno was selected for the award by the Executive Council at the recommendation of the Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Review Committee and the Committee on Honors and Awards.

Adorno is a premier scholar of colonial Spanish American literary and cultural history, a field that she helped bring to the forefront starting forty years ago. She is widely credited with redefining and revitalizing the field of Latin American colonial studies, which she has examined in its fundamental relation to Spanish peninsular literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the so-called Golden Age of Spanish literature) and in its foundational role in the development of the modern Latin American literary tradition. The cornerstone of her scholarship was the study of the work of an indigenous American (Andean) author at the time when many thought that "Indians did not write books." The boldness of her move gained adherents, and the study of marginal and marginalized writers (Indians, mestizos, women) in all periods of Latin American cultural history has now become canonical. Her work has influenced the expanding field of North American colonial literary studies, and it has played a key role in the development of what has been called, for New World literatures, the "hemispheric turn."

In recognition of her work, in 2009 President Barack Obama appointed her to the National Council on the Humanities, the advisory board of the National Endowment for the Humanities. She has been honored with membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and, internationally, with an honorary professorship at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

Adorno's prize-winning books include *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*, which was awarded the MLA's Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize and hailed as "a signal achievement for the colonial field and indeed for all periods of Latin American literary studies." Revealing the interdisciplinary breadth of her work, her coauthored three-volume study, *Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez*, received prizes from the American Historical Association, the Western Historical Association, and the New England Council of Latin American Studies. Designed for specialist and nonspecialist audiences alike, her reading of three hundred years of Latin American colonial writing is synthesized in her *Colonial Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction*.

Honoring the philological basis of literary study, Adorno has also been an advocate for the digital humanities. With various collaborators, she has prepared critical editions of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*, known as the *Naufragios*, and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *El primer nueva corónica*



MICHAEL MARS LAND

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y buen gobierno, the autograph manuscript of which has been enrolled in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. As scholarly consultant to the Royal Library of Denmark, Adorno has made her pioneering print edition of the *Nueva corónica* available in digital format on the Royal Library's Web site for more than a decade and has augmented it with other archival and scholarly sources.

Born and raised on an Iowa farm, Adorno came to the study of Spanish-language literature and culture at her alma mater, the University of Iowa. Her PhD is from Cornell University, and she has taught at Syracuse University, Ohio State University, the University of Michigan, and Princeton University. She joined the faculty of Yale in 1996.

Olga E. Kagan Receives ADFL Award

Since 1994, the ADFL Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession has recognized eminent scholar-teachers who serve the profession and the field of language and literature teaching. The ADFL Executive Committee presents the 2014 award to Olga E. Kagan, professor in the Department of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Kagan is a central figure in the fields of Russian language pedagogy and heritage language teaching and is director of the National Heritage Language Resource Center, the UCLA Center for World Languages, and UCLA's Russian Flagship Program. She is founding coeditor of the *Heritage Language Journal* and has written four textbooks for heritage learners of Russian and eight for students of Russian as a foreign language. She was awarded the PhD by the Pushkin Russian Language Institute in Moscow and has taught at UCLA since 1981. A session in Olga Kagan's honor, "Heritage Language Learning and Teaching Today," will be held at the 2015 MLA convention in Vancouver. The award will be presented at the convention's awards ceremony on 10 January 2015.

Neal Lester Receives ADE March Award

The ADE Executive Committee has named Neal Lester the recipient of the 2014 Francis Andrew March Award. He will receive the award at the MLA Annual Convention's awards ceremony in Vancouver on 10 January 2015. Lester is Foundation Professor of English, Director of Project Humanities, Dean's Distinguished Professor of English, Parents Association Professor of the Year, and Arizona Humanities Council Distinguished Public Scholar. Lester received his doctorate in English from Vanderbilt University. In 1997, he joined the faculty of Arizona State University (ASU), where he chaired the English department from 2004 to 2010 and founded Project Humanities, which was the inaugural recipient of Phi Beta Kappa Society's Key of Excellence Award. He has also served as associate vice president for ASU's Office of Knowledge Enterprise Development, dean of humanities, and visiting scholar at Sichuan University. Lester has published widely on African American literature and cultural studies.

The Francis Andrew March Award was established by the ADE Executive Committee in 1984 to honor exceptional service to the profession of English. The award is named for Francis March (1823–1911), professor of English at Lafayette College and the first professor of English in America.

New and Forthcoming MLA Titles

- *Approaches to Teaching Petrarch's Canzoniere and the Petrarchan Tradition*
- *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Mansfield Park*
- *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Primo Levi*
- *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Jack London*
- *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes's Don Quixote*, second ed.
- *Literary Research Guide*, sixth ed. (by online subscription only)
- *Teaching Early Modern Literature from the Archives*

For complete information on these and other new titles, and to place orders, please visit www.mla.org/newtitles. These MLA titles will also be available in e-book formats.

Honorary Fellows

Members are encouraged to submit suggestions for honorary fellows of the association. Honorary fellows are distinguished persons of letters of any nationality. Those recently elected include Maryse Condé, Louise Erdrich, Adrienne Kennedy, Jacques Roubaud, Albert Wendt, and Mo Yan. The current rosters of honorary members and fellows can be found at the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/honorary_members).

Members who would like to recommend honorary fellows should refer to the instructions at www.mla.org/nominations_hon. (Note: The Executive Council is not currently accepting new suggestions for honorary members.)

MLA Book Awards

Is your book eligible for an MLA book award? The MLA Committee on Honors and Awards invites authors and editors to compete for the association's publication prizes. There are eight annual and sixteen biennial MLA prizes that honor outstanding work in languages, literatures, and interdisciplinary studies and in specific genres (e.g., translation, bibliography, letters, scholarly edition). For information on the individual prizes, their deadlines, and the application process, please visit the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/award_competitions). You may also request detailed information on any MLA prize by contacting the programs office (646 576-5141; awards@mla.org).

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Tense Conversations

A few weeks ago, my twin teenage daughters gave me a lesson in how to talk to Siri, the female ghost in my new smartphone. “Ask her a question,” said Marianne. I couldn’t think what to ask, so Christina intervened: “Tell her to make a joke.” Seeing that I still didn’t get it, Christina prompted Siri, and she responded with unnerving speed: “Past, Present, and Future met in a bar. It was tense.” In this column, the last I’ll have the privilege of writing as president of the MLA, I want to think about two views of education that often coexist in traditional and virtual classrooms but that have recently come into conflict. The views offer competing perspectives on the concept of academic freedom as it is explained by the Supreme Court in a 1967 case

that overturned a McCarthy-era law prohibiting teachers from being members of “seditious” organizations. The court held that, because free discussion is essential in a democratic society, academic freedom is “a special concern of the First Amendment[,] which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom” (“Key-ishian”). I will be focusing here on college classrooms and campuses, but the two views under discussion arguably affect the conduct of education in primary and secondary schools too.

In a nation deeply concerned with homeland security, it is perhaps not surprising that a high value is placed on students feeling psychologically secure even in the learning environment of the classroom. The United States also values critical thinking over rote learning in its secular schools, a view that encourages the challenging of students’ preconceptions, which can often make students feel tense and insecure. Although these two views of education are often in tension, many teachers try to blend them and the values they encapsulate. Texts and Web sites offering advice about how to do so abound: one, from the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, states that “tension in the classroom, when it does not get out of control or explode, can prompt learning”; it also states that “safety,” while not a pedagogical goal “in itself,” is a “prerequisite for the kind of classroom climate that can result in learning” (“Creating”). Few of us would disagree with either statement presented alone. But there are difficulties in conceiving of individual students’ psychic safety as a prerequisite to learning in classroom environments. The difficulties have been dramatically exposed by recent debates about student requests that faculty members provide “trigger warnings” on syllabi.

Such warnings signal that forthcoming material could be disturbing because it may trigger a memory of a traumatic experience such as sexual assault, war violence, or racism. Advocates of trigger warnings claim that students have a right to know in advance about potentially upsetting material. Students at Oberlin College, countering objections that a new trigger-warning policy created without faculty input would harm academic freedom, argued that “[i]deally, individuals who are part of an academic institution should be challenged and forced to articulate and defend their perspectives, but in order to have a fruitful discussion about these topics, as many people as possible need to feel comfortable participating” (Flaherty). Challenge, here associated with “force,” is trumped by safety, which is as-

sociated with and implicitly defined as a precondition for “challenges” to be dealt with “fruitfully.” Reality is aligned with students’ need for comfortable learning experiences and with the selective liberal arts college’s presumed desire for democratic inclusiveness. Feminists are divided about trigger warnings, as Jack Halberstam shows, and many faculty members are voicing objections. At the University of California, Santa Barbara, where the student government has demanded a trigger-warning policy, a professor of sociology who uses images of torture in her course materials said that “any kind of blanket trigger policy is inimical to academic freedom” (Medina). And another UCSB professor argues against trigger warnings on the grounds that they give students a false sense of security, isolating disturbing events as if they could be recalled only in the course materials of humanities and other “interpretive” fields, whereas in truth “they affect and shape all of our ways of producing knowledge” (Fradenburg).

Notable also is a recent statement by the chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, Nicholas Dirks, who contended that “civility and free speech are two sides of the same coin” (qtd. in White). Issued during the fiftieth anniversary of the free-speech movement at Berkeley, the chancellor’s message to the academic community was immediately attacked by faculty members who thought that it echoed an opportunistic use of the ethic of civility at the University of Illinois, where Steven Salaita had his offer of a tenured position in American Indian studies revoked by Chancellor Phyllis Wise on the grounds that his statements (on social media) about the Palestine-Israel conflict were “demeaning” to alternative viewpoints.¹ Dirks’s statement was criticized by several faculty groups for misunderstanding the First Amendment, which protects “uncivil” speech and unpopular opinions without any stipulation about balancing free speech with communal interests such as civility (California Scholars).

Chancellor Dirks didn’t do an about-face—unlike James Montgomery, the one trustee at the University of Illinois who changed his opinion about the Salaita case—but he did make a revision that was seen as significant by the constitutional scholar Ken White and others.² While reiterating his hope that “commitments to civility and to freedom of speech can complement each other,” Dirks acknowledged that these commitments can and do “exist in tension”; moreover, he defined free speech in a more legally rigorous way, no longer suggesting that it was opposed to

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“political advocacy” (qtd. in White). The questions Chancellor Dirks and his student and faculty critics have addressed are still undecided in the academy and beyond, and the questions are affected by wider cultural and political pressures. Perhaps they could be more fruitfully debated if we were to acknowledge that the idea of the classroom or campus as a “safe harbor” may be not only imprecise but also in some circumstances radically at odds with the idea of education as a forum for the open exchange and assessment of ideas.

Margaret W. Ferguson

Notes

1. Chancellor Wise’s statement is reproduced in Wilson. For a comprehensive discussion of the case’s many developments through 1 October 2014, see Rothberg.

2. For Montgomery’s statement about why he changed his mind, see “UIUC Trustee.”

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Making Suggestions for Committee Appointments

This year the MLA Executive Council will make appointments to seventeen standing committees of the association. The council invites members to consider suggesting themselves or other members for one of the sixty-two anticipated vacancies on the seventeen committees. Members’ suggestions will be accepted at the Web site (www.mla.org/commsugg) from mid-November through early February. The Web page for suggestions provides information on the factors relevant to this new round of committee appointments. Because these factors change from year to year, suggestions made the previous year are not brought forward for the council’s consideration. Members will therefore need to deposit new or updated suggestions after consulting the new Web listing of vacancies.

The council will be making appointments to fill these vacancies at its February 2015 meeting. Any questions about committee suggestions should be addressed to Carol Zuses at the MLA office (czuses@mla.org).

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Members are invited to comment on the president’s column at president.commonsm.la.org.

Elections Committee Seeks Candidates

The MLA Elections Committee will meet on 30 January 2015 to begin the process of identifying candidates for the special-interest and regional seats in the Delegate Assembly that will fall vacant when current delegates complete their terms. Those elected in 2015 will serve in the assembly from 11 January 2016 through the close of the January 2019 convention and must attend the meetings of the assembly in January 2017, January 2018, and January 2019.

The Elections Committee is charged not only with nominating candidates and overseeing the elections but also with ensuring that the various groups within the MLA find representation in the Delegate Assembly. Committee members are therefore interested in hearing from all MLA members who are willing to be candidates in next year’s Delegate Assembly elections. Members who would like to be considered should write to the Elections Committee, c/o Carol Zuses, at the MLA office (czuses@mla.org).



The Conference Interview: Do or Don't?

Most readers of this column began their job searches during an age when the MLA Annual Convention served as the site for college and university job interviews. Those who were “on the market” answered position announcements in the *Job Information List (JIL)*, sent dossiers, and waited for hiring departments to set up interviews at the convention. Changes in the academic system that began decades ago now make convention interviews far less likely.

The number of academic positions relative to the number of PhD recipients is the primary change, but the timing of the academic cycle in which departments list their jobs has also changed. David Laurence, director of research at the MLA, recently completed the annual analysis of the

Job Information List (you can read a report on the 2013–14 statistics on page 7), and we can spot some interesting trends. When the *JIL* appeared in print only, departments hurried to place their announcements in the October edition. With the advent of weekly updates to the open-access electronic database, departments list positions throughout the fall semester and—here’s the real shift—well into the second half of the academic year. It’s not just that position listings are scarce: even with the switch to January dates for the convention, they’re also ill-timed for the MLA convention to be the primary vehicle to interview candidates.

There were good reasons to extract the job system from the behind-closed-doors “good old boy” networks that dominated until the late 1960s. The MLA responded to the needs of its members by helping to level the playing field and professionalize the job search, so much so that, for many people, the MLA convention became synonymous with the “job market.” It’s time for that to change. It’s time to encourage departments to think more expansively when it comes to identifying and interviewing candidates. Doing so might alleviate some of the intense pressure that job seekers endure, and it might provide departments with a chance to look closely at candidates whom they otherwise wouldn’t consider.

The MLA facilitates interviews at the convention because departments want the service. The common interview area, for instance, provides an opportunity for departments that do not reserve hotel suites to meet with candidates in a professional setting. Increasingly, though, departments and candidates communicate directly by phone and e-mail, no longer counting on the MLA Job Information Service to act as an information conduit. I am frequently asked how many interviews take place at the convention, and it is more and more difficult to answer this query. With candidates and departments communicating independently, the MLA is often out of the market, so to speak.

I imagine what some of you have been thinking since you started to read this column: why not do away with conference interviews altogether and shift to a technology-based remote interviewing system? Recent articles in the higher education press and on blogs have hotly debated this question. Some writers think the MLA has a vested interest in defending the current system, but that is simply wrong. The MLA operates under the assumption that the interests of both candidates and departments must be well served. At times, however, those interests conflict. Cost is a major obstacle for candidates when it comes to attend-

ing the MLA convention. Although the MLA has doubled the amount of travel grants in recent years (from \$200 to \$400) and although every qualified applicant has received one, the expenses involved in attending the convention can be prohibitive to the graduate student or part-time faculty member who may have one interview lined up. This is a huge burden on the candidate, and departments need to adjust their expectations. There are good ways to do so and not-so-good ways.

The approach to interviews should have as its rationale the following question: how can the interview team connect with as many candidates as possible at the least cost and inconvenience for those who apply? For many departments, a remote conferencing system may be an appropriate interview technology, and a quick perusal of recent editions of the *JIL* shows that “Skype interviews” are often specified. The MLA and its Association of Departments of English (ADE) and Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) not only support departments’ using technology for preliminary interviews, we’ve also devised guidelines for doing so (http://www.adfl.org/resources/resources_interview.htm). In these guidelines, we note that the Skype interview may be problematic, since the quality of the technology affects the quality of the interview experience; services such as Skype do not always provide stable connectivity. Ideally, departments and candidates would have access to campus-based conferencing technology so that remote interviews could be conducted with maximum professionalism.

In theory, remote interviews would allow departments to interact with more candidates for varying lengths of time. For example, interview teams might decide to arrange conversations with more candidates than in-person meetings could accommodate. Such a system would open a door to candidates who might otherwise be overlooked. I can even imagine technology-based interviews being conducted before the MLA convention, with more extensive second interviews at the convention for a small number of carefully selected candidates. However departments choose to interview, the candidates’ needs should be front and center. (The MLA, ADE, and ADFL policy statements on issues related to the academic job search and working conditions are available at www.mla.org/career_resources#infoandguide.)

Graduate programs have a responsibility to their students. To maintain a PhD program in these difficult times means committing the resources to support students in

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their nascent careers, whether in academia or beyond. Students should expect extensive assistance in preparing for the job search and in meeting the costs of attending the convention. After all, the MLA convention is much more than an event where interviews occur. It remains the largest language and literature convention in the world, and it offers nearly eight hundred sessions, professional development workshops, networking opportunities, and a host of other activities. Being on the job market is extraordinarily stressful, but there's a whole convention out there that offers intellectual and professional engagement of a very different type.

It's time for us to reconsider how and where we interview and to look to the convention as a renewable source of intellectual energy, created by and for MLA members. Now that the [new forum structure](#) is reshaping the way we organize our fields both at the convention and on *MLA Commons*, we should turn our attention to the convention as a whole. Contrary to what I've heard being said, the MLA does not count on the convention as a major source of association revenue, unlike other scholarly associations. Our fees are among the lowest, while we provide more services than most. It's an exciting, rich occasion for intellectual, pedagogical, and professional exchange. The convention exists to serve members, and as long as the structures that undergird it are supporting that mission, they should remain. The MLA has no interest in forcing an interview model on the profession if it no longer works. Quite the opposite: the MLA has every interest in documenting and promoting best practices, recognizing that there are many. What if departments always offered candidates the option of a remote interview and treated candidates equally whether or not they planned to attend the MLA convention? Some departments have already adopted this practice, and it sounds wise to me. I very much enjoy seeing graduate students at the convention, hearing their presentations, and meeting them informally. It would be in all of our best interests to make the convention a less tense and burdensome experience for the next generation of the humanities workforce.

Rosemary G. Feal

Members are invited to comment on this column at execdirector.commonsm्ला.org.

2015 MLA Delegate Assembly Meeting

MLA members are invited to attend the meeting of the 2015 Delegate Assembly during the convention in Vancouver. Members may speak to any of the items on the assembly's agenda. These items include regular staff and committee reports on association activities, a special report from the Elections Committee on the composition of the Delegate Assembly, proposed constitutional amendments, and new proposals submitted by members for the assembly's consideration. Any new proposals received will be posted at the MLA Web site in early December (see www.mla.org/dameeting_agenda) and will be printed in the first issue of the *Convention Daily*, available online before the convention and on-site in Vancouver.

The assembly meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, 10 January, in Ballroom AB of the Vancouver Convention Centre. Because the assembly meeting is open-ended, even latecomers will have a chance to join in important discussions of association policies.

Call for Contributions to MLA Volume

The volume *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Lu Xun*, edited by Christopher Lupke and Alexa Huang, is now in development in the MLA Approaches to Teaching World Literature series. The survey and call for essay proposals for this volume can be found at www.mla.org/approaches.

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Rosemary G. Feal, Executive Director



Exhibit Hall and MLA PubCentral

This year, the exhibit hall (Ballroom AB, level 1, VCC West) will be conveniently located near the MLA registration and welcome center and convention sessions. Visit your favorite exhibitors and discover new ones during exhibit hall hours (9 and 10 January, 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.; 11 January, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.). The Exhibit Hall Theater features presentations scheduled during the breaks between convention sessions and includes demonstrations and introductions to digital tools for professional editing, research, and publishing, as well as a book signing by the author Sara Paretsky. A complete schedule appears in the Program, and updates will be listed online and in the *Convention Guide*. The *Convention Daily* provides updates to all exhibit hall events, including receptions, book signings, and the coffee stand schedule.

The MLA exhibit booth is now located outside the exhibit hall entrance, in the new MLA PubCentral, and will be open on 8 January and during the exhibit hall hours. Shop for MLA products and receive a 30% discount on all MLA titles ordered at the booth. Join us on 9 January for the reception celebrating new titles released by the MLA in 2014, and take home a free gift. Please check the *Convention Daily* and the MLA Annual Convention *Twitter* feed for up-to-date information.

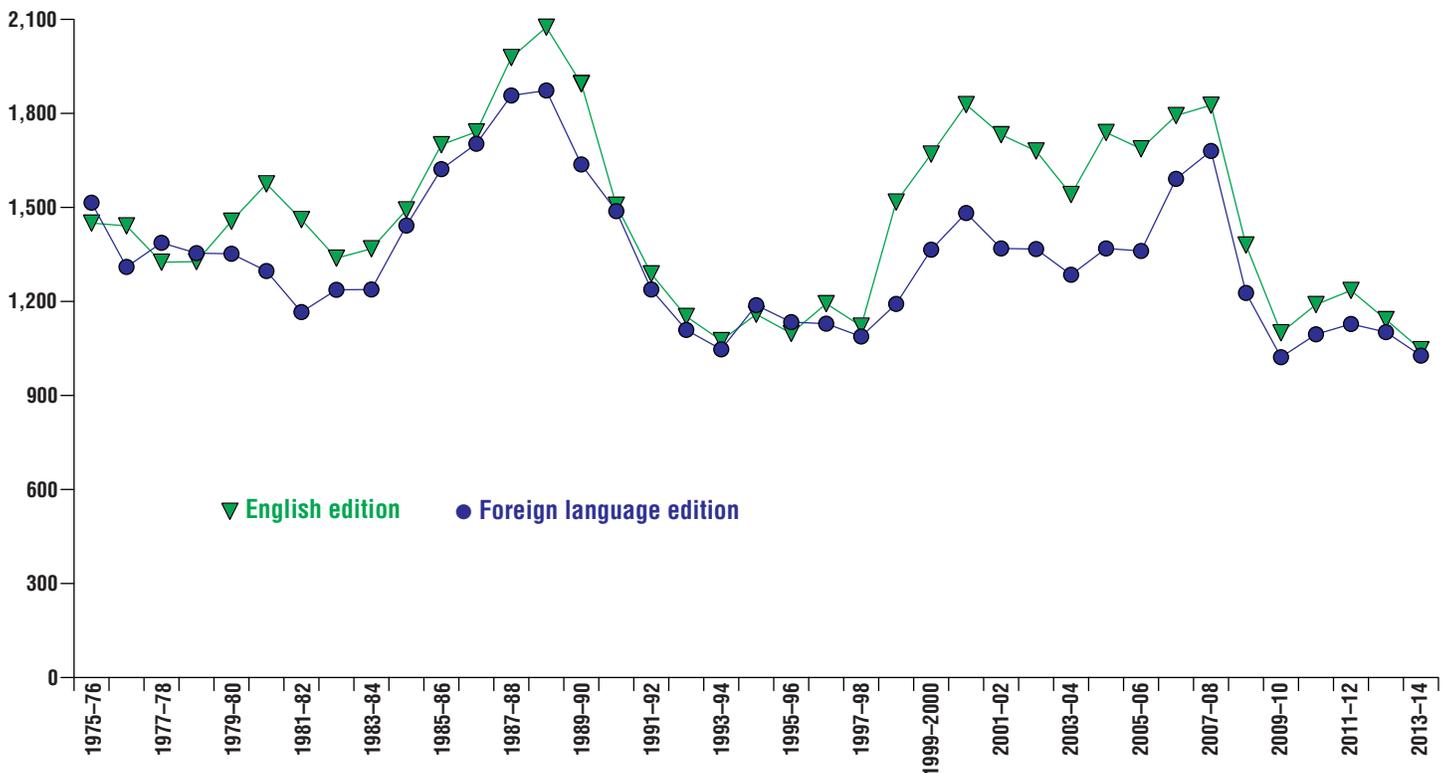
Report on the MLA Job Information List

In 2013–14 the number of jobs advertised in the MLA *Job Information List (JIL)* fell for the second year in a row, returning the total to the low point reached in 2009–10. The *JIL*'s English edition announced 1,046 jobs, 96 (8.4%) fewer than in 2012–13; the foreign language edition announced 1,027 jobs, 75 (6.8%) fewer than in 2012–13. The decreases of the past two years follow two years of modest increases after the severe drop over the two years 2008–09 and 2009–10, when the number of jobs advertised declined by 726 (39.8%) in English and by 658 (39.2%) in foreign languages. The figure below shows the trend lines for the number of jobs advertised from 1975–76 to 2013–14. The 1,046 jobs

in the English edition for 2013–14 are 54 (4.9%) below the 1,100 advertised in 2009–10, the previous low point. The 1,027 jobs in the foreign language edition are just 5 (0.5%) above the 1,022 advertised in 2009–10. This past year marks the fifth consecutive year the number of jobs advertised in the *JIL* has remained at a trough level just above 1,000 jobs in each edition, matching the trough of the mid-1990s in both depth and duration. The 2013–14 totals are 780 (42.7%) below and 653 (38.9%) below the 2007–08 prerecession peaks of 1,826 jobs for the English edition and 1,680 jobs for the foreign language edition, respectively.

A complete report will be available on the MLA Web site.

Number of Jobs Advertised in the MLA *Job Information List*, 1975–76 to 2013–14



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Please deliver by 14 November

Calls for Papers for the 2016 Convention

The 2016 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Austin from 7 to 10 January. Calls for papers may be submitted through the MLA Web site (www.mla.org/cfp_main) from 12 January to 28 February 2015. Organizers are responsible for responding to all inquiries.

Calls for papers may be viewed online at www.mla.org/conv_papers from 12 January through 31 March 2015. 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. All participants in convention sessions must be MLA members by 7 April

2015. A member may participate (e.g., by facilitating a workshop, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker, presider, or respondent) only twice at a convention.

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 2015. 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 1 April deadline is firm.

Members without Internet access who need a print-out 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).



Texas State Capitol, Austin