



Margaret W. Ferguson, 2014–15 MLA President

## 2014 Election Results

In the elections conducted last fall, Diana Taylor (Spanish, New York Univ.) was elected second vice president of the association.

Emily Apter (New York Univ.), David Palumbo-Liu (Stanford Univ.), and Vicky Unruh (Univ. of Kansas) were elected to at-large seats on the Executive Council for four-year terms (12 January 2015 through the close of the January 2019 convention). Elizabeth Schwartz Crane (San Joaquin Delta Coll., CA) began a two-year term on the council on 12 January. She was appointed by the council to replace a member who resigned.

Fifty-seven new representatives were elected to the Delegate Assembly. Twenty delegates were elected to represent special-interest categories in the assembly, and thirty-seven delegates were elected to represent seven geographic 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](http://www.mla.org/del_assembly_members)).

In addition, new members were elected to the convention executive committees. The listing of executive committee members at the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/convention\\_executive](http://www.mla.org/convention_executive)) has been updated to include new committee members' names.

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*Neal A. Lester, winner of the ADE Francis Andrew March Award, and Olga Kagan, winner of the ADFL Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession (Credit: Jon Benjamin Photography)*

## Winners of MLA Prizes Announced

The winners of eight annual and eight biennial awards given by the MLA were recognized at the January 2015 MLA convention in Vancouver. Roland Greene, then first vice president of the association, announced and presented the prizes at the MLA Awards Ceremony on 10 January. A complete list of this year's prizewinners appears on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/resources/awards/awards\\_winners](http://www.mla.org/resources/awards/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](http://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](mailto:awards@mla.org)).





## Telling Our Story

The theme of the 2016 convention in Austin will be Literature and Its Publics: Past, Present, and Future. I'd like to anticipate that event with a year of renewed attention to the publics we face as scholars of literature, language, and writing and to the MLA's particular public, its members. In this first column of my presidency, I reflect on how the MLA braids two identities, as a scholarly association and an advocacy organization, in support of our members' professional lives.

One of the most enjoyable things about the Vancouver convention for me was the spontaneous conversations I had with members. At one reception, I spoke for half an hour with two instructors from Central Washington University, Lila Harper and Ruthi Erdman, about how they see their

membership in the MLA. Their enjoyment of the convention was manifest, and both spoke eloquently about what they have gained. Lila later wrote to me:

I have been a member for thirty years, having joined as a graduate student. Joining back then required that I go to the library, obtain a *PMLA* to find the address, and write a letter asking to join. I had been told it was my professional organization, so I figured I had better join up. No one else in my family had ever tried doing doctoral work, so I was attempting to figure out the culture. Although I have been non-tenure-track for twenty-five years and have never been interviewed for a tenure-line job, I still believe it is my professional organization.

As I have struggled to find a place for myself in an institutional world that saw me as marginal or possibly threatening, I looked to the MLA to remind me that I belong to a profession with an ethical code, that there was more to my work than the everyday conditions of departmental life, more than answering the continually disconnected demands of my employer's bureaucracy. I need the MLA to remind me that my intellectual goals do not end with servicing the increasing classroom sizes and poorly prepared students and that the continuation of scholarship matters.

If it had not been for the MLA, I would have burned out long ago. Teachers need something for themselves, an intellectual engagement that continues beyond the latest group of students, one that will carry you through yet another set of budget cutbacks, software upgrades, and administrative turn-overs. The MLA keeps me connected. It reminds me that there is a world of ideas and conversations out there and that, no matter my status at work, I can still contribute to that world.

Few can express better than Lila what it means to belong to a scholarly association, especially to one the size and scope of ours. In an intellectual sense, our association sustains the intangible bonds of knowledge that keep not

only us as scholars and teachers but our disparate fields in conversation.

In the academy of today, however, intellectual connection is not everything we expect of the MLA. It's an organization that exists to serve the needs of its members by offering advocacy and information as well as intellectual exchange—and it must maintain both threads of this identity together.

Some of this advocacy has been consistent over the decades: the MLA is the humanities organization that leads all the rest in carrying out research on the workforce in higher education, forging partnerships with other humanities associations and foundations, and lobbying for our interests in Washington. However much one may enjoy the warm embrace of a small conference or the easy legibility of a field-specific journal (and I do), the organizations that give us these things don't have the size or the budget to do the quotidian, often invisible work of the MLA.

In this era of tumult in higher education, the officers, Executive Council, and staff are always asking how the MLA as an advocacy organization can better reflect the profession and serve a wider range of members in ways that recognize the institutional realities they face every day. We're making the MLA more representative of the profession by reaching out to faculty members across the spectrum of institutions and employment as well as to our partners in K-12 education, our allies in other sectors such as libraries and foundations, and our counterparts abroad. There's more we can do to put the information we gather directly into members' hands and to speak explicitly to the needs of members across very different professional conditions.

Our challenge is to make the MLA's work visible in ways that touch the everyday experiences of our members, potential members, and allies. We know how to interpret others' stories, but can we tell our own story as the largest scholarly organization in the world? Despite our size, can we become nimbler, more open to new voices, and more about conversations than pronouncements? Posing and answering these questions is my first initiative as president. I intend to report on it throughout 2015 on *MLA Commons*, and I invite your comments there.

Roland Greene

Members are invited to comment on the president's column at [president.commonsm्ला.org](http://president.commonsm्ला.org).

**Now Online**

- 2016 Presidential Theme
- Language Enrollment Report
- News from the MLA
- MLA Bibliography Fellowships

## Delegate Assembly News

At its meeting on 10 January 2015 in Vancouver the Delegate Assembly took the following actions.

The assembly conducted elections for the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, 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](http://www.mla.org/governance/committees/comm_gov).

The assembly received the report of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), the report of the Executive Council on the disposition of Resolution 2014-2, 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 these reports.

The assembly also received reports that required action. The report of the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution presented seven amendments, which the assembly approved. The first two amendments allow the implementation of the new convention forum structure; the next four amendments eliminate references to printed matter from the constitution; the last amendment eliminates a limiting gender reference. The amendments will be reviewed by the Executive Council in February and will then be forwarded to the membership for a ratification vote in the spring. The report of the Elections Committee examined the effects that the new convention forum structure would have on the size of the Delegate Assembly and presented two recommendations for changes in the assembly's composition. The committee also recommended the election of forum delegates by the forums' membership and the gradual addition over a three-year period of new forum representatives. The assembly approved the committee's recommendations and agreed to propose the constitutional amendments that will allow the implementation of the recommendations. These proposed amendments, as formulated by the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution, will come back to the assembly in 2016 for a formal vote.

In other business, the assembly authorized the implementation of an additional option for the submission of signatures in support of a resolution or a petition, adopted a special rule, and approved two motions. The new option for the submission of signatures supplements those stipulated in Delegate Assembly bylaw 7; it eliminates the requirement for an original signature if a member indicates his or her support for a particular resolution or petition by sending an e-mail message from the address that is recorded in the member's MLA membership record. The special rule, which the DAOC proposed as part of the agreement the committee reached with the members who had submitted conflicting resolutions on the issue of academic boycotts, enjoins the Delegate Assembly from considering "motions or resolutions on academic or institutional boycotts of Israel or on matters related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the January 2017 meeting." The rule will be binding on the 2016 assembly unless the 2016 assembly votes to rescind or amend it. The first motion that the assembly approved calls for increasing the participation of part-time faculty members in the association in general and in MLA governance in particular. This motion will be forwarded to the Executive Council in February, and the council will consider its implementation. Through the second motion, the Delegate Assembly initiated a constitutional amendment "to create a dedicated slot on the Executive Council" for a part-time faculty member. This proposed amendment, as formulated by the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution, will come back to the assembly in 2016 for a formal vote.

A complete report of the Delegate Assembly meeting will appear in the May 2015 issue of *PMLA*.

## Snapshot of Austin

From 7 to 10 January 2016, the MLA Annual Convention pays its first-ever visit to Austin, Texas. The city is home to hundreds of MLA members and to the University of Texas, Austin, whose campus includes the Harry Ransom Center and the Blanton Museum of Art.

- Celebrated as the Live Music Capital of the World, Austin is home to more than 250 music venues, eighteen on Sixth Street alone.
- Don't miss out on some Tex-Mex, barbecue, and other Southwestern cuisine while you're in town.
- Nearly twenty craft breweries have opened around Austin in the last three years, and the city boasts a vibrant food-trailer movement.
- Austin's museum offerings include the Contemporary Austin, the MexicArte Museum, the Wally Workman Gallery, the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum, and a large number of boutique galleries.

If you know Austin and have ideas for cultural excursions, please write to Stacey Courtney ([scourtney@mla.org](mailto:scourtney@mla.org)) in the convention office.



## Call for Contributions to MLA Volume

The volume *Teaching the History of the English Language*, edited by Collette Moore and Chris C. Palmer, is now in development in the MLA Options for Teaching series. The call for essay proposals can be found at [www.mla.org/options](http://www.mla.org/options).

The *MLA Newsletter* (ISSN 0160-5720) is published four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter) by the Modern Language Association of America, 26 Broadway, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10004-1789. The *MLA Newsletter* is edited by the executive director of the association, Rosemary G. Feal. The managing editor is Judy Goulding. The cost of an annual subscription is \$8. The subscription price is included in the dues of all members of the association. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. All news items and letters should be sent to the *MLA Newsletter* at the above address.

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## Calls for Papers for the 2016 Convention

The 2016 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Austin from 7 to 10 January. Information regarding calls for papers for both session organizers and session participants can be found on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/conv\\_papers](http://www.mla.org/conv_papers)). Calls for papers may be submitted until 28 February 2015 at [www.mla.org/cfp\\_main](http://www.mla.org/cfp_main); calls will not be edited before they appear on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/callsforpapers](http://www.mla.org/callsforpapers)). Program copy forms will be available online by early March and must be submitted by 1 April 2015.

Please note that, in anticipation of the new forum structure (due to be implemented for the 2016 convention), divisions and discussion groups now appear as forums on the calls for papers pages. The American Literature Section is included in the list of allied organizations. An updated list of MLA forums can be found at [executivecouncil.commonsm्ला.org/list-of-mla-forums](http://executivecouncil.commonsm्ला.org/list-of-mla-forums).

Members should familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the MLA convention, which appear on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/conv\\_procedures](http://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](http://www.mla.org/member_search)). All participants in convention sessions must be MLA members by 7 April 2015. Each MLA member may be listed up to two times in a single convention program. Giving a presentation, serving as a panelist or respondent, or presiding at a session leads to a listing in the convention program. The two listings may occur in a single session (i.e., as the presider and a panelist) or in two different sessions.

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 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 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 2015.

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).

## Chairs' Hotel Reservations

In August 2015 the MLA convention office will send information about making hotel room reservations for the MLA convention to chairs of departments that are paid members of ADE or ADFL by 1 June 2015. These chairs will also be able to make hotel reservations online through the ADE or ADFL Web site. Please note that suites may not be reserved through the MLA Web site. ADE and ADFL chairs of departments will be notified by e-mail. 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. Chairs who would like membership forms or information about their departments' 2014–15 membership status should contact Roy Chustek at the MLA office (646 576-5133; [rchustek@mla.org](mailto:rchustek@mla.org)).

## MLA Launches Career Preparation Project

The MLA has received generous support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to undertake a major project, Connected Academics: Preparing Doctoral Students of Language and Literature for a Variety of Careers. The project, which will run through August 2019, will support initiatives aimed at demonstrating how doctoral education in the humanities can prepare students for a wide range of professional situations. Building on the recommendations of the MLA's Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature, the project's components include supporting university pilot programs that foster career diversity for language and literature doctoral students and graduates; organizing annual, yearlong proseminars in New York City for doctoral students, recent graduates, and PhD-holding adjuncts in the area; compiling data and reports on the career paths of graduates with doctorates in language and literature; expanding mentoring and networking activities; and offering workshops for directors of graduate studies and placement officers. For more information about Connected Academics, visit [www.mla.org/connected\\_academics](http://www.mla.org/connected_academics) or write to [ConnectedAcademics@mla.org](mailto:ConnectedAcademics@mla.org).



*MLA Annual Convention in Vancouver Convention Centre*

JON BENJAMIN PHOTOGRAPHY

DANIEL ROOT



## Back on Track: Connecting with Former Graduate Students

*This column was written in collaboration with David Laurence, Director of Research and ADE. Discussion continues on MLA Commons in The Trend: The Blog of the MLA Office of Research.*

Academic departments understand the need to track PhDs who pursue careers in tenure-track positions—indeed, jobs on the tenure track are often considered the gold standard of a department's success. Yet today this task isn't as easy as it once was: PhDs typically go through several years of searches before securing a tenure-track position or choosing other kinds of employment. Departments often start to lose track of former students who take contingent positions in the academy, whereas those who venture beyond the classroom may find them-

selves disconnected completely from the programs that launched them.

What motivation does a department have to track its students over decades of shifting career paths, some of which seem distant from the scholarly training the university offers? Doing this work allows departments to tell their own story rather than be limited by the narrative that says the only good placement is a tenure-track job. When graduates go on to a variety of careers, they demonstrate the value that their specialized degrees have for careers both inside and outside academe. Departments can take pride in diverse outcomes and attract prospective students who may feel inspired by the success of the institution. Tracking career paths also can help departments shape their mission. If, for example, a substantial number of those graduating from a program take positions in government and not-for-profit organizations, the department might ask how what it is doing produces this result. Faculty and staff members could then orient the curriculum and overall learning environment accordingly.

With support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the MLA made an effort to determine the positions held in 2013–14 by a random sample of 2,590 graduates who received their PhDs from institutions in the United States or Canada between 1996 and 2011 and who have *Dissertation Abstracts*

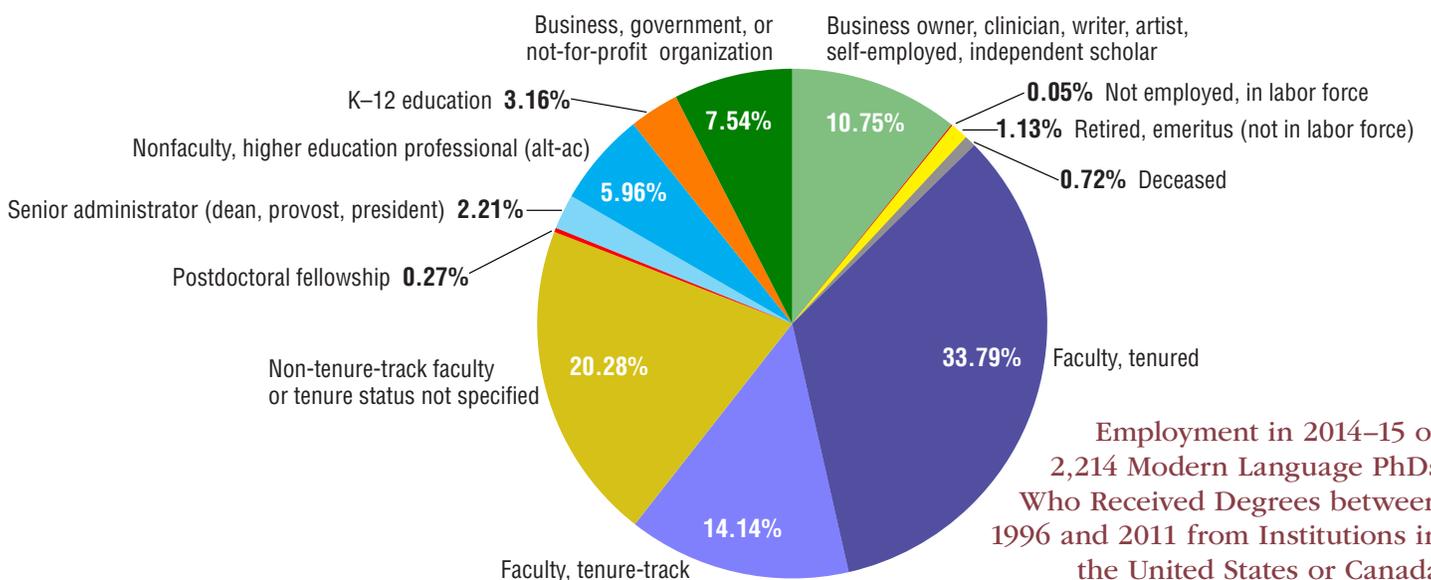
*International* records in the *MLA International Bibliography*. Of the 2,590 PhD recipients, we succeeded in locating 2,286. In the end, we excluded from the analysis records of 72 individuals whose degrees are in engineering or computer science (these dissertations are covered in the bibliography because they reflect work on speech recognition or similar kinds of language-related computer science and engineering projects), giving us a sample of 2,214 PhD recipients.

Overall, about half of the sample currently hold tenured or tenure-track positions or are deans, provosts, or presidents. Those who hold positions in upper administration generally hold tenure even if they are not currently active as teaching faculty members.

The findings are divided into three temporal groups of roughly equal size: those who received degrees between 1996 and 1999, those who received degrees between 2000 and 2004, and those who received degrees between 2005 and 2011. Looking at the three groups, we see how the percentage in non-tenure-track positions drops as people move forward in their careers. (The non-tenure-track group includes people whose tenure status we were not able to ascertain.)

The percentage of the sample we could positively identify as holding a tenured or tenure-track faculty position in

*(cont. on p. 6)*



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**Dated Material  
Please deliver by 6 March***(cont. from p. 5)*

2013–14 is 46.2% for the most recent graduates. It increases to 51.1% for those who received their PhDs between 2000 and 2004 and decreases back to 46.1% for those who received their PhDs between 1996 and 1999. Much of the drop in the 1996–99 group apparently reflects movement from tenured faculty positions into senior administration or retirement.

Slightly over 20% of the people in our sample are working outside higher education altogether. If one in five PhDs in the language and literature fields has found a job outside academe, surely we must want to keep careful records of the kinds of work they are doing. What is more, in failing to track them we lose a great opportunity to connect in meaningful ways with those who work in positions seemingly unrelated to academe. Shouldn't we wish to tap their expertise as we help new generations see the possibilities that await them? And shouldn't we offer intellectual engagement with this group of alumni and (potential) scholarly association members?

With generous support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the MLA, in collaboration with partners such as the University of California Humanities Research Institute, has launched the multiyear project Connected Academics ([\[mla.org/connected\\\_academics\]\(http://mla.org/connected\_academics\)\). As part of the project, we will continue to compile data and reports on the career paths of people with doctorates in language and literature, including individual narratives of those who have found employment in diverse settings. We will also expand mentoring and networking activities at the MLA Annual Convention and at regional MLA meetings, where job seekers can meet with mentors in a variety of occupations. Doctoral students, directors of graduate studies, placement officers, and curricular reform committees need resources to understand expanded career opportunities, something the MLA, with our partners, now has the capacity to develop.](http://www</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Some departments already keep good track of their PhD alumni (and not just for the purpose of fund-raising) and offer models to emulate. To those who do not, the MLA will soon be able to offer assistance in developing, maintaining, and analyzing placement data over time. So many PhD recipients have already found their way into satisfying careers outside academe. We feel a sense of excitement as we put ourselves back on track to connect with them and embark on our new project.

**Rosemary G. Feal**

Members are invited to comment on this column at [execdirector.commonsm्ला.org](http://execdirector.commonsm्ला.org).