



## MLA Convention Returns to Philadelphia

From 5 to 8 January 2017 the MLA Annual Convention returns to Philadelphia. Since 2009, the last time we met in Philadelphia, the city has been named the first World Heritage City in the United States, and the Barnes Foundation has moved downtown, joining the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Rodin Museum, and the Franklin Institute.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's presidential theme for the convention will be *Boundary Conditions*, and the hundreds of sessions and events will take place in the Pennsylvania Convention Center, which will also house the exhibit hall and registration and welcome center, and in the adjacent Philadelphia Marriott.

Information about convention hotels, travel arrangements, and preregistering at member rates will be available on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/convention](http://www.mla.org/convention)) in September. In the meantime, visit *MLA Commons* and check #mla17 on *Twitter* for discussions about the MLA convention.

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## Nominations for 2016 MLA Elections

**Second Vice President.** The 2016 Nominating Committee has selected three nominees for second vice president of the MLA: Simon E. Gikandi, Princeton Univ.; Ato Quayson, Univ. of Toronto; and Naoki Sakai, Cornell Univ. The person elected will take office on 9 January 2017 and will automatically become first vice president in 2018, serving in that office through the close of the January 2019 convention, and president of the MLA in 2019, serving in that office through the close of the January 2020 convention.

**Executive Council.** The Nominating Committee has selected seven nominees for the MLA Executive Council: Malcolm Alan Compitello, Univ. of Arizona; Eric Hayot, Penn State Univ., University Park; Mari Noda, Ohio State Univ., Columbus; Adam S. Potkay, Coll. of William and Mary; John L. Schilb, Indiana Univ., Bloomington; Evie Shockley, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick; and Dana A. Williams, Howard Univ. The three candidates elected will serve four-year terms that will begin 9 January 2017 and run through the close of the January 2021 convention.

**Delegate Assembly.** The 2016 Elections Committee has arranged contests to replace seventeen special-interest delegates and thirty-six regional delegates. The term of office of those elected will be from 9 January 2017 through the close of the January 2020 convention.

More information on the elections and candidates can be found at the MLA Web site after 15 April ([www.mla.org/nominations-2016](http://www.mla.org/nominations-2016)).

**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/About-Us/Governance/MLA-Constitution](http://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/MLA-Constitution)). Petitions must reach the executive director before 1 July.



## Ghosts in the Machine

As members know by now, Rosemary Feal, our executive director since 2002, announced in February that she will be leaving us next year. With characteristic thoughtfulness, she is giving us the time we need in the formidable task of finding a worthy successor. The Executive Council, which has the final decision, will be advised by a search committee that I will chair.

In thinking about the role that Rosemary has played over these years, I was reminded of a phrase from James Russell Lowell, a poet, teacher, and critic whose memory we celebrate annually with a prize for a book by an MLA member. “It really seemed as if we had invented a machine that would go of itself,” Lowell said of the United States Constitution. *A machine that would go of*

*itself*: the reason Michael Kammen took this fine formulation as the title for his 1986 book on American political culture was that, as Lowell sought to warn his compatriots, the metaphor was so dramatically wrong. As the debates over choosing the successor for Justice Scalia have reminded us, the Constitution, like all systems of rules, depends on the individual human beings who strive to live by it. So, too, with us. For all the institutional arrangements—the constitution, the bylaws—that govern the life of the MLA, it is, in the end, the members and the staff who make our association work. And nobody over the last decade and a half has done more than Rosemary to make our machine go.

In these first years of the new millennium, we have seen extraordinary changes, such as the dramatic growth of the academic precariat, the decline in humanities enrollments, the rise of the digital humanities, the explosion of social media. Rosemary and a distinguished succession of presidents and Executive Councils—in dialogue with members and the many committees of the association on which our members do such valuable service—have worked to respond to such challenges. In 2002, if you had looked at our Web site, you would have found no Committee on Contingent Labor, no *Professional Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members*, no *MLA Commons*, no Connected Academics, no Academic Workforce Data Center, no best practices for improving the situation for graduate students in languages and literatures, no Language Enrollment Database, no ADFL-MLA Language Consultancy Service, no map of the three hundred or so languages in daily use in our country. All these efforts, Rosemary would rightly insist, are the work of many. But we should be clear that all bear her mark. And none of these efforts are self-propelling.

Machines, after all, are invented and used by human beings. Even in the era of big data, the same holds for our scholarly work. Take the digital humanities. One of my favorite DH projects is Stanford University’s *Mapping the Republic of Letters*, which allows one to visualize and explore the networks that were, as the site puts it, “the lifelines of learning, from the age of Erasmus to the age of Franklin.” This project, led by Paula Findlen and Dan Edelstein, is itself the product of a great network of scholars in many countries. As you ponder the significance of the fact that d’Alembert’s main correspondence was with Voltaire, the Italian astronomer and mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange (né Lagrangia), and the Prussian ruler Frederick

the Great or review the overlap between the correspondence of Voltaire and Ben Franklin, you are drawn into wanting to look at some of their actual letters and drawn further into exploring their complex meanings. The digital platforms and strategies developed for this project bring together three groups of people across time and space: the humanists who created them, the humanists from the past who wrote the letters, and the humanist readers today. In the end, these digital tools are in the service of the oldest of humanistic impulses: interpretation. However digitally enabled, the study of literature is not a machine that would go of itself.

Nor, of course, are our institutions of higher education. Two traditions will, I think, need defending and revivifying in the years ahead. One is the practice of faculty governance, a tradition that goes back to the foundation of the European university. Too many of the decisions that have reshaped the work of college teachers in the humanities over the past few decades have involved too little faculty consultation. In trying to establish the right balance between our role as scholars and our role in the management of our institutions, we may find ourselves drawing on a more modern institution—one that developed in the late eighteenth century in England and took off in the nineteenth—and that is the trade union. One challenge that the MLA is well placed to take up is to help graduate students and faculty members, both on and off the tenure track, understand the pros and cons of unionization in diverse institutional environments and in states with widely varying labor laws.

In defending both our work and the conditions of our work, we are doing what the MLA, like the other learned societies, was doing long before Rosemary became our executive director, but she will leave us wonderfully well-prepared to continue this dual mission.

K. Anthony Appiah

### Works Cited

- Kammen, Michael. *A Machine That Would Go of Itself*. New York: Knopf, 1986. Print.
- Mapping the Republic of Letters*. Stanford University. Stanford U, 2013. Web. 3 Mar. 2016. <<http://republicofletters.stanford.edu>>.

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

## 2016 Ratification Ballot

At its meeting on 9 January 2016 in Austin, the Delegate Assembly approved six constitutional amendments and one resolution. The assembly's actions are not final, however, since the MLA constitution (art. 11.C.7) requires the membership to ratify the assembly's actions. 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 actions that are subject to ratification and to exercise their right to vote.

The ratification vote will be conducted at the MLA Web site and by paper ballot. All members in good standing as of 18 April will have access to the ratification ballot. Notifications will be sent by e-mail to eligible voters who have e-mail addresses on file with the MLA; all other eligible voters will be notified by letter. Members who wish to vote online will be able to do so beginning 20 April. Balloting will close at 5:00 p.m. (EDT) on 1 June. There will be a link to the ratification ballot at the bottom of the home page. Voters who prefer a paper ballot should contact the coordinator of governance to request one (MLA, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434; e-mail: [governance@mla.org](mailto:governance@mla.org); fax: 646 576-5107). The deadline for requesting a paper ballot is 16 May.



Philadelphia City Hall

## Nominating Honorary Fellows

The MLA invites members to nominate individuals for honorary fellowship. 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](http://www.mla.org/honorary-members). Details on nomination procedures can be found at [www.mla.org/nominations-hon](http://www.mla.org/nominations-hon), or you may contact Annie Reiser for additional information (646 576-5141; [awards@mla.org](mailto:awards@mla.org)). The deadline for submitting nominations is 31 January 2017. (Note: The Executive Council is not currently accepting suggestions for honorary members.)

## Contribute to an MLA Volume

The volume *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Karen Tei Yamashita*, edited by Ruth Y. Hsu and Pamela Thoma, is now in development in the MLA Approaches to Teaching series. The survey and call for essay proposals for this volume can be found at [www.mla.org/approaches](http://www.mla.org/approaches). The volumes *Teaching Beat Generation Literature*, edited by Nancy M. Grace, and *Teaching French Neoclassical Tragedy*, edited by H el ene Bilis and Ellen McClure, are now in development in the MLA Options for Teaching series. The calls for essay proposals can be found at [www.mla.org/options](http://www.mla.org/options).

**Now Online**

- 2017 Presidential Theme
- International Symposium
- News from the MLA
- MLA Bibliography Fellowships

A graphic for the MLA International Symposium registration. It features a collage of images including a modern building, a person, and a registration form with a green 'REGISTER' button. Text on the graphic includes 'MLA International Symposium', 'D usseldorf 2016', and 'BE A COLLEGE DISCUSSANT'.

## New Forum Executive Committee Members

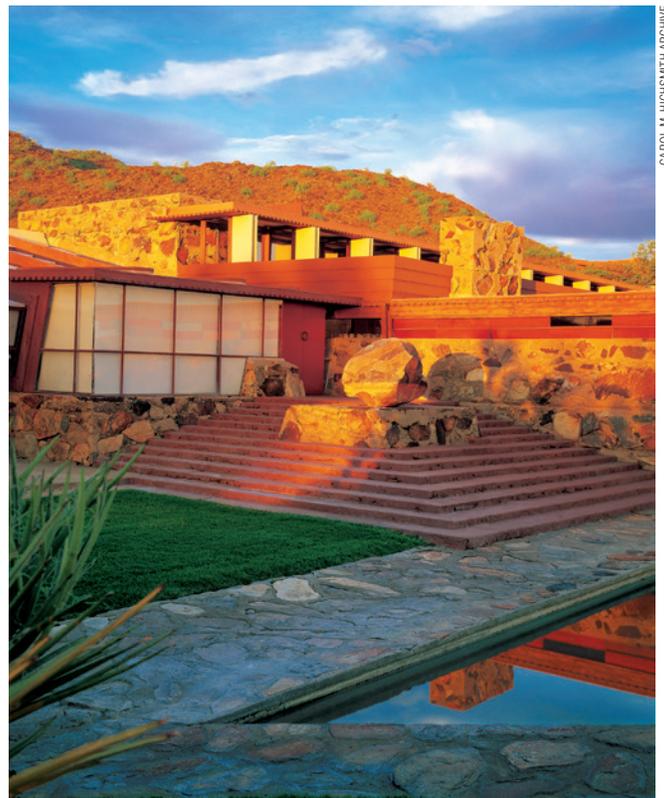
The MLA's forums—formerly divisions and discussion groups—added new members to their executive committees in the last election cycle. The list of executive committee members at the MLA Web site has been updated accordingly ([www.mla.org/forum-executive](http://www.mla.org/forum-executive)). Executive committee listings will also be published in the September 2016 issue of *PMLA*.

The *MLA Newsletter* (ISSN 0160-5720) is published four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter) by the Modern Language Association of America, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434. The *MLA Newsletter* is edited by the executive director of the association, Rosemary G. Feal. The managing editor is Anna S. A. Chang. 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. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *MLA Newsletter*, 85 Broad Street, suite 500, New York, NY 10004-2434. MLA and the MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION are trademarks owned by the Modern Language Association of America.

## ADE and ADFL Summer Seminars

Each June the Association of Departments of English and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages arrange three seminars where chairs and other leaders in ADE- and ADFL-member departments share information and discuss issues facing departments and the field. The ADE and ADFL network helps department leaders identify the broader context they need to succeed in their administrative work. Hosted in 2016 by Arizona State University, ADE Summer Seminar West takes place in Scottsdale from 2 to 5 June. Hosted by the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, ADFL Summer Seminar West takes place in Monterey from 1 to 4 June. Hosted by the departments of language and literature at New York University, ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar East takes place in New York from 16 to 19 June.

Each seminar features a preseminar workshop for new chairs, where those about to start or just completing their first year as department chairs can gather practical advice and have questions about all aspects of chairing answered by seasoned administrators. For more experienced chairs, ADFL Summer Seminar West and ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar East present preseminar workshops on strategic planning. ADE Summer Seminar West will offer preseminar



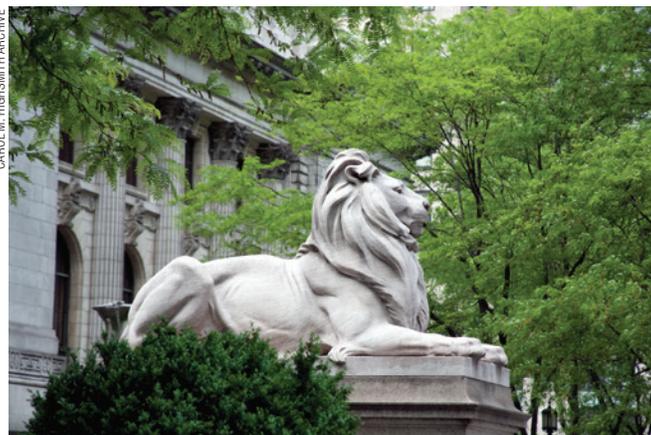
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workshops and special sessions for directors of undergraduate study and directors of graduate study. ADFL Summer Seminar West will also offer preseminar workshops on teaching language through literature and on small program management.

The seminar registration fee covers most meals. Registration is \$550 for ADE- or ADFL-member departments and \$825 for nonmember departments; online registration forms are now available. There is a \$150 charge for pre-seminar workshops, covering meals and materials. For more information on the seminars, visit the ADE or ADFL Web sites ([ade.mla.org](http://ade.mla.org) and [adfl.mla.org](http://adfl.mla.org)) or contact Roy Chustek ([rchustek@mla.org](mailto:rchustek@mla.org) or 646 576-5133).



## Learning from the Pros in the Connected Academics Proseminar

*The more of these amazing people I meet, the more I'm convinced that graduate students with a strong alt-ac plan are exactly the sorts of colleagues you want to hire in your departments. (Always assuming, of course, that a great nonprofit or library hasn't swooped them up already!)* —Beth Seltzer

Beth Seltzer, who holds a PhD in English from the University of Pennsylvania, is one of twenty PhD candidates and recent PhD recipients taking part in the inaugural year of the Connected Academics proseminar on careers in New York City. Connected Academics ([connect.commonsm्ला.org](http://connect.commonsm्ला.org)) is an

MLA initiative, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, that addresses a concern raised by both [the study of career outcomes of 2,200 language and literature PhDs](#) and the [Task Force on Doctoral Study](#): the need to prepare PhDs in language and literature for a range of careers. Proseminar fellows such as Seltzer are connecting with peers from eleven different academic institutions to learn how to apply their research and teaching credentials to articulate transferable skills, create a professional Web presence, and gain an understanding of the humanities workforce beyond the classroom. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Connected Academics is the opportunity to meet with humanities PhDs at the organizations where they work, such as the New York Public Library, Ithaca S+R, the American Council of Learned Societies, Bard High School Early College, and the Frick Collection.

Connected Academics is about encouraging language and literature PhDs to recognize the fullest expression of their abilities and to realize that the humanities workforce is not limited to teaching. Seltzer emphasizes in her blog post that she prepared for and pursued multiple career options at once, including tenure-track teaching positions at postsecondary institutions. Indeed, she felt *more* prepared for the academic job market because of her varied professional experiences. In Seltzer's case, the outcome of her job search was a full-time position at Bryn Mawr College as an educational technology specialist—a job that will draw heavily on the teaching and research skills she acquired while pursuing her PhD. Her year in the Connected Academics proseminar has made her aware of her capabilities and of the variety of organizations in which she could put them to use.

With an awareness of the many possibilities for employment come energy, optimism, and ambition—and our proseminar fellows possess these in abundance. I invite you to read their [blog posts](#) at the Connected Academics Web site, where they have addressed a broad range of topics in a manner sure to provoke further thought. They write with the conviction that their professional training as humanists will serve them well in roles in academia, secondary education, the nonprofit sector, and even the for-profit world. Most of them do not see careers beyond the classroom as an abandonment of the ideals that led them to undertake advanced study in the humanities—quite the opposite. As another member of the current proseminar cohort, Manoah Finston, puts it, “[W]e should not think of employment off or on a tenure line as the sole determinant of success, just as we can no longer permit the distinction of in or out of the academy to decide the legitimacy of our choice of career.”

Most graduate students today, including our proseminar fellows, look to their faculty advisers, chairs, and directors of graduate studies to help guide them on a career path. It's understandable that those without experience in careers beyond the classroom have been hesitant to endorse students' desires to explore a breadth of career options, yet those of us involved with Connected Academics believe that things will begin to change as our proseminar fellows share their confidence and enthusiasm with others at their home institutions.

Our three partner institutions are exemplary in the adaptability and innovation they have shown in the face of the breadth of graduate student career ambitions. Georgetown University's [Reinvent the PhD](#) project has, as one of its central goals, the creation of a Georgetown Center for the Public Humanities and a new, interdisciplinary doctoral program in the public humanities. [Arizona State University](#) is focusing on enriching the doctoral experience through the incorporation of additional skills—digital, quantitative, and entrepreneurial. Finally, the University of California Humanities Research Institute's [Humanists@Work](#) program provides opportunities for graduate students to expand their professional experience through statewide workshops and paid summer internships.

While participating in the Connected Academics proseminar has convinced participants of the value of their wide-ranging work, it is, of course, the MLA's core belief that all labor should be fairly compensated. I want to emphasize here, as I have [elsewhere](#), that we will continue to advocate better working conditions for adjuncts and for the creation of more tenure-track positions at universities. Yet the enthusiasm generated around the Connected Academics project demonstrates that our conversations on academic labor and post-PhD humanities work must become broader. The MLA is prepared to work with departments to help graduate students prepare for an expanded range of career opportunities. We owe the next generation of humanities scholars our support for their ambitions as they apply their humanities PhDs to a broad range of satisfying careers.

Rosemary G. Feal

### Note

I thank my colleagues Stacy Hartman and Nicky Agate for their assistance with this column.

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

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Please deliver by 6 May

## MLA International Symposium

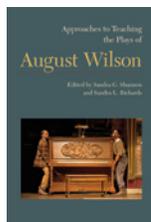
The first-ever MLA International Symposium is fast approaching. Entitled *Other Europes: Migrations, Translations, Transformations*, the conference will be held in Düsseldorf, Germany, from 23 to 25 June 2016 and is the first in a series of MLA-hosted international symposia. Organized in collaboration with Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, the symposium will bring together a diverse and distinguished group of scholars to consider Europe’s role in a changing world. Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2016 MLA president, will open the program in conversation with Susan Neiman, director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, followed by a reading and reflection by the authors Eva Hoffman, Isaac Julien, and Yoko Tawada. The program comprises nearly seventy panels, on topics ranging from medieval literature to the financial crisis, and will include presentations in English, German, and French.

To learn more about the symposium and to view the online program, visit <https://mlasymposia.commons.mla.org/>. If you plan on attending, be sure to reserve a hotel room by the 30 April hotel reservation deadline. The symposium Web site offers attendees hotel discounts at accommodations in different neighborhoods and at a range of price points.

Any questions regarding the MLA’s International Symposium may be addressed to [symposia@mla.org](mailto:symposia@mla.org). We hope to see you in Düsseldorf.



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## New and Forthcoming MLA Titles

- *MLA Handbook*, eighth edition
- *Approaches to Teaching the Plays of August Wilson*

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