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MLA Newsletter
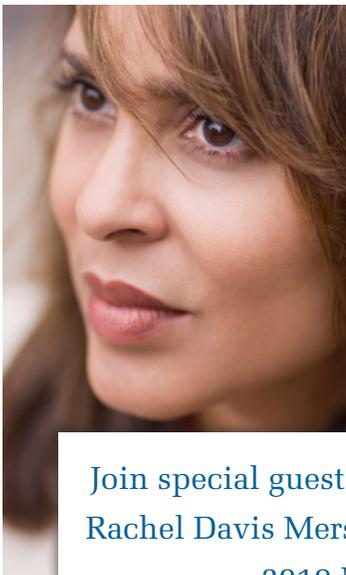
Join special guests Natasha Trethewey, Geoffrey R. Stone, and Rachel Davis Mersey and support humanities education at the 2019 MLA Benefit for the Humanities.

Learn more at <u>outreach.mla.org/benefit-2019/</u>.

IN THIS ISSUE

MLA Newsletter

How to Make a Career Fair Work for You

The MLA will hold its second **Possible Futures Career Fair** at the 2019 MLA Annual Convention in Chicago, on Friday, 4 January, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Although there was a lot of excitement and buzz at the first career fair, held at the 2018 convention in New York City, it was also clear that the employers and the job seekers weren't all speaking the same language. One question that job seekers commonly asked seemed emblematic of the problem: How would a PhD fit in at your organization?

When employers didn't know how to answer this question, job seekers were left feeling as though there was no place for them in the employers' organizations. Meanwhile, the employers were confused about what the question really meant. What does it mean to be a PhD?

To make a career fair work for you, it is up to you, the PhD, to answer this question for yourself so that you can communicate to employers the skills you have spent years developing—expertise that is both broad and deep, significant teaching and research chops, unusual intellectual stamina and self-discipline.

Answering this question requires serious thought and self-reflection, as does packaging the answer in terms that an employer will understand. Writing a résumé should—like all writing—be a process of discovery and clarification. Think about jobs you have had on and off campus that you can include. If you don't know where to start, look at job ads, *LinkedIn* profiles, and sample résumés in fields of interest to you and brainstorm how best to translate your skills. *PhD* encompasses many possible experiences and skill sets. Some of these experiences and skill sets might be better described through labels such

as teacher, researcher, linguist, administrator, adviser, writer, archivist, historian, and editor.

Whether or not you give out your résumé at the career fair, the process of creating a résumé will help you verbalize what it means to be a PhD. Before attending the career fair, develop a thirty-second pitch to convey to employers what you can bring to their organization. Yes, this exercise is likely to feel reductionist, but bear in mind that you are preparing for a career fair, where you'll have a limited amount of time to catch and hold the attention of an employer.

Another approach centers the conversation on the immediate needs of

the organization. A job opening is really an expression of organizational need. A great way to find out where you might fit in is by asking the employer, "What challenges are facing your organization right now? What problems do you need to solve?" From there, you can discuss how you might help the organization meet those challenges and solve those problems (because, of course, as a PhD, you are a quick learner, a nimble thinker, and an experienced problem solver).

While you're attending the MLA convention, we hope you will stop by the **Possible Futures Career Fair** and chat with recruiters about putting your PhD to work at their organizations.

Edward Savaria, Jr.

Acknowledging Abuses and Committing to Change

Comment on this column at
president.mla.hcommons.org.

THE PROCESS OF ACKNOWLEDGING abuses and committing to change requires confronting challenges. Now is the time to look squarely at and address systematically the power differentials in academic life. The pain and anger resulting from abuse of power by faculty members and administrators—and by those who defend them—has roiled many campuses as well as our association. It is impossible to calculate the harm done to students and contingent or junior faculty members or to those who embody various forms of difference who have been targeted by abusers or who suffer from negligence from, casual disrespect from, or exploitation by their teachers, mentors, or employers. Lost careers, mental illness, and financial jeopardy represent only some of the damage.

Perhaps most distressing is the frequency with which those who have been violated are not heard or believed because clear delineations of rights and reporting procedures don't exist, because administrators protect star faculty members, or because phalanxes of the abuser's friends create walls of protection around the abuser. These impediments compound the damage to victims and raise troubling questions about the integrity of our institutions. Why do we countenance ("That's just Chris") rather than confront abuses of power? Why does our knowledge about the complexity of literary characters not extend to recognizing that colleagues and friends known in one context may behave differently in another? Why do our theories rarely extend to interrogation of the power we wield?

As are a number of campuses, the MLA is looking at how it can do more to protect against abuses and advocate for the integrity of, among other things, Title IX and grievance processes. At their fall meetings, both the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC) and the Executive Council addressed abuses of power. The DAOC decided to devote the open discussion of the Delegate Assembly at the 2019 MLA Annual Convention to the topic of power dynamics on campus, focusing on but extending beyond graduate students, and it is creating a page on the MLA Web site where MLA members can anonymously discuss abusive mentoring practices as well as describe successful programs that prevent or address the misuse of power. This page will remain active

through the convention for those who wish to contribute.

The Executive Council launched an initiative to develop specific materials and implementable policies and practices that campuses and associations can use to understand and to prevent the abuses of power that have become engrained in academic life. The first step in moving forward will be to draw and build upon the accounts of survivors and suggestions of promising models collected by

the DAOC. Krista Ratcliffe's concept of rhetorical listening—"a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text or culture; its purpose is to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication"—offers a way to respond to survivors of abuse and develop ideas for preventing or addressing abuse in the future (25). This type of listening may help us understand more fully and address more effectively the complicated layers of power that permeate our institutions and associations.

Engaging in this process has the potential to move us beyond the status quo and toward new perceptions and allocations of power. Whether you have a story to tell or a suggestion to offer, the 2019

> "Engaging in this process has the potential to move us beyond the status quo and toward new perceptions and allocations of power."

MLA convention will provide opportunities to talk with and listen to colleagues who share a conviction that we can, and will, do better. I look forward to seeing you in Chicago!

Anne Ruggles Gere

WORK CITED

Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Southern Illinois UP, 2005.

How to Get More People Invested in Your Department

You know why the courses you teach and the research you do are valuable to your institution, but how can you convince others that they should invest both time and money in your department? These five sessions at the 2019 convention are designed to help you increase institutional and public engagement in your department and programs. Session numbers appear in parentheses. Browse the online Program to learn more (**mla19.org/**).

Fund-Raising 101: How to Raise Money for Your Programs and Events (1)

Learn how to raise money to support programs and events related to your department. Preregistration is required.
Thursday, 3 January, 8:30–11:30 a.m.
Randolph 2, Hyatt Regency

Designing Community-Engaged Research (1A)

How can you build community engagement into your scholarship? This workshop provides you with the tools to create research projects that successfully engage with the public. Preregistration is required.
Thursday, 3 January, 8:30–11:30 a.m.
Randolph 3, Hyatt Regency

Advocating for Your Department (5)

Led by the ADE and ADFL presidents, this workshop shows you how to advocate for your department. Learn how to publicize your department, recruit students, and engage in new initiatives on your campus and in your community. Preregistration is required.
Thursday, 3 January, 8:30–11:30 a.m.
Ontario, Sheraton Grand

Growing the Literature Major: Success Stories and Strategies (80)

The number of literature majors and the number of enrollments in literature courses are declining. This workshop, arranged by the MLA Executive Council, will provide you with strategies to combat these declines and engage students with your programs.
Thursday, 3 January, 3:30–4:45 p.m.
Acapulco, Hyatt Regency

The Scholar in the World: Supporting the Public-Facing Humanities in Our Departments and Colleges (319)

The work of the Whiting Public Engagement Fellows and Seed Grantees deploys the depth, nuance, and richness of humanistic methods and content to engage publics beyond the academy. In this interactive session, panelists clarify the obstacles to evaluating and rewarding engaged scholarship and seek consensus about the values, accomplishments, and forms we want to encourage under the sign of the humanities.
Friday, 4 January, 3:30–4:45 p.m.
Grand Suite 3, Hyatt Regency

Looking for more sessions for department leaders? Visit the ADE Web site (**ade.mla.org/Sessions-for-Leaders -2019**). We look forward to welcoming you to Chicago!

Jared Tennant Photography

Podcasting, Public Scholarship, and Accountability

At a moment when humanities programs are under threat, creating work that's accessible to multiple publics, that can convey the value of advanced humanities scholarship, seems like an important form of resistance. I didn't start my podcast for this reason, but my experience with podcasting has made me increasingly committed to publishing practices that are not just open-access but public-facing, that are what the digital humanities scholar Jon Bath has called "public-first."

While I started my academic career doing pretty typical scholarly work—publishing articles in journals without much concern for their open-access policies and chapters in books that cost over $100—in February 2015 my scholarly trajectory took a bit of a turn when I started making a feminist Harry Potter podcast called *Witch, Please* with my friend and collaborator Marcelle Kosman.

Witch, Please has been a revelatory experience for me because of how it challenged my understanding of what and who scholarship is for. When we started making it, we didn't really think of what we were doing as publishing or as scholarship or as open-access anything. If pressed, we might have described it as a kind of community-building project, but for a community of two. Podcasting together was part of our feminist praxis of prioritizing friendship and collaborative knowledge building. By valuing first and foremost not the thing we were making but the relationships it was facilitating—our friendship with each other, our affective responses to the Harry Potter books, and eventually the community of listeners whose presence and partic-ipation we began to build into the podcast—we positioned ourselves primarily as feminist community organizers. And, perhaps more importantly, we've emphasized throughout that being scholars and being feminist community organizers can be one and the same thing—you know, if you're doing it right.

Even once Marcelle and I began to think of *Witch, Please* as a kind of academic work and to receive attention for it from fellow academics, we remained nervous about what it meant to do our academic work in public, through a platform (the open Web, where podcasts live) that deprived us of our usual protections: the critical distance of academic writing and the institutional protection of a peer-reviewed journal. It felt scary and risky and possibly stupid. (It turns out it wasn't; it turns out my shift into pod-

casting got me a job and a research profile focusing on podcasting as scholarly communication, but I didn't know that at the time.)

Perhaps most surprising about this work is what it taught us about the large, enthusiastic audience for open and community-engaged scholarship. Many of our podcast listeners are devoted Harry Potter fans, and, as

spond to, collaborate in, or cocreate with that research. From the uneven flow of power in the classroom to the standards of double-blind peer review to the design of ethics review boards, academia seems constructed to externalize and depersonalize accountability.

Scholarship that is both open and public gives us an opportunity not to

> "Perhaps most surprising about this work is what it taught us about the large, enthusiastic audience for open and community-engaged scholarship."

a result, they fact-check the hell out of us, argue with our interpretations, and send us indignant messages with screen captures of book pages or links to correct us. And our feminist listeners—who are sometimes, but not always, Harry Potter fans—call us on instances of ableism, transphobia, and appropriation.

Much has been made of Internet call-out culture, but appeals for accountability that come from within a community are a different thing altogether. That kind of critical commentary opens up dialogue and creates new, shared vocabularies. It builds, instead of tearing down. It's the kind of response we often lack in academia, where our students are separated from us by huge gulfs of institutionalized hierarchy and our peers respond to our work through the barrier of blind peer review. Yes, getting taken to task publicly can be uncomfortable. It is also part of what it means to participate in a community and to do our pedagogy and our scholarship in public.

Increasing emphasis on open access and knowledge mobilization helps research flow outside the university, but that flow often remains unidirectional—primarily because communities beyond the university have no means through which to re-

throw out these institutionalized norms but to fundamentally reconsider the work that we're doing. Because, as we push scholarship beyond the borders of the university, as we rebuild our scholarly ecosystem around principles of community engagement and openness, we're going to need to keep asking ourselves: Who is our scholarship for? To whom is it accountable? And how radically must this accountability transform the very shapes of the work we do?

WORK CITED

Bath, Jon. "Artistic Research Creation as Open Social Scholarship." Digital Scholarship Modes and Methods. Networked Open Social Scholarship, 17 Jan. 2017, Inn at Laurel Point, Victoria.

Hannah McGregor is an assistant professor of publishing at Simon Fraser University, cohost of the podcast Witch, Please*, and host of the podcast* Secret Feminist Agenda*. She'll be speaking about her podcast at the 2019 MLA convention session Readers (and Fans) Write Back to Books. This article was adapted from a talk delivered at Simon Fraser University's Open Week in 2017. The entire talk is available at* secretfeministagenda.com/2017/11/23/bonus-episode-podcasting-public-scholarship-and-accountability/*.*

Profession Spotlight

"I picked up as many courses as was humanly possible because I thought it would give me a particular kind of street cred. Who could argue against all that classroom time, against the variety of courses I had taught, against the spectrum of students, from rural farmhands to Ecuadorian single mothers to frat boys arriving late to their 8:00 a.m.'s in their sweat socks and Nike sandals? Who wouldn't want me?

Almost everyone. Every class I taught, I still taught as an adjunct, which lessened rather than increased my credibility. And every year off the tenure track made it statistically more impossible that I would ever get on it. Which made my eventual landing there, to me, all the more incredulous, all the more proof that I was somehow special or deserving or better than the hundreds of other adjuncts I worked side by side with, every day, but whom I mostly barely knew. After all, they, too, were racing from campus to campus in their broken-down cars, which doubled as offices. They were living (mostly) in bizarre situations that seemed impossible but were more impossible to escape. Like me, they had no real space in which to gather, to get to know their colleagues. And since I was the one getting noticed and promoted, the fault must lie with them, right?"

Read more from Emily Van Duyne's "Confessions of a Prize Heifer: From Adjunct to the Tenure Track" and the complete fall 2018 Contingent Labor issue of *Profession* at **profession.mla.org**.

Rosemary G. Feal Receives ADFL Award

Rosemary G. Feal, the executive director of the Modern Language Association from 2002 to 2017, cemented the MLA's reputation as a dynamic association for students and teachers of all languages. She helped the association expand beyond its historical Western and Eurocentric cultural focus and embrace scholars from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic traditions. Under her leadership the MLA created new forums that explore comparative literary and cultural studies in areas such as Caribbean, global Arab and Arab American, hemispheric American, and Southeast Asian and Southeast Asian diasporic. Feal presided over the establishment of three new forums for Chinese language, literature, and culture; two for Japanese; one for Korean; and one for Galician. In 2007 she oversaw the MLA ad hoc committee report "New Structures for a Changed World: Foreign Languages in Higher Education," which

continues to inspire faculty members in language departments as they engage in curricular innovation. Her editor's columns for the *MLA Newsletter*, especially her "survival" series, reflect her keen spirit for writing and the importance she places on thinking across languages and

cultures. Professor emerita of Spanish at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, where she also chaired the department, and currently the Wilbur Marvin Visiting Scholar at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University, Feal has pursued a career path that has placed her in dialogue with the highest echelons of government, foundations, and education. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences's Commission on Language Learning, she coauthored the influential 2017 report *America's Languages: Investing in Language Education for the Twenty-First Century*. Feal has been a passionate advocate for the contingent faculty members who make up the majority of the humanities workforce. Feal will receive the ADFL Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession at the 2019 MLA Annual Convention's awards ceremony in Chicago on 5 January.

Valerie Lee Receives ADE March Award

The ADE Executive Committee has named Valerie Lee the recipient of the twenty-seventh annual Francis Andrew March Award. Rooted in the values of the liberation movements of the late twentieth century, Lee's lifework of pathbreaking scholarship, administrative genius, and powerful teaching offers a blueprint for bringing the movements' energy, creativity, and inclusivity into our classrooms and up to the highest levels of the university. Her long list of publications indicates both the breadth of her career—which has continued unabated in her official retirement from Ohio State University (OSU) in 2015—and also her advocacy of scholarship in a variety of forms, including two monographs, a handbook for administrating women's studies programs, and the first comprehensive anthology of African American women's literature ever published. At home in a variety of genres and forms, she championed the flowering of digital scholarship at OSU as chair

of the English department. Her administrative service in English, women's studies, and African American and African studies and at the vice presidential level at OSU is legendary: she made people's lives easier and showed a determination to bring in people from underserved communities and then empower them.

Lee was a member of the ADE's Executive Committee from 2005 to 2007 and was the 2007 president of the ADE. Her tireless advocacy work for inclusion and diversity while on the ADE Executive Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of African American Faculty Members in English directly led to a Mellon-funded Summer Institute for Literary and Cultural Studies that helped create a pipeline for people of color from undergraduate to graduate study and into faculty positions. And she did all this while occupying the exhilarating but often lonely position of "first": first African American woman tenured and promoted to full professor at Denison University; first African American woman to chair OSU's Department of Women's Studies; first African American and first woman to chair OSU's Department of English. Lee will receive the award at the 2019 MLA Annual Convention's awards ceremony in Chicago on 5 January.

MLA Expands Outreach to High School Teachers in First Community Conversation

On 9 October 2018, the MLA organized a special workshop and networking event designed to improve outreach to secondary school educators and strengthen community among humanities advocates at all levels. The three-hour event, New Visions for Humanities Teaching, included a powerful keynote address by William D. Adams, senior fellow at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as two rounds of stimulating breakout sessions on the interdisciplinary topics technology and change, citizenship and civil society, and developing career and interpersonal skills.

According to the MLA's director of outreach, Siovahn Walker, the immediate purpose of the event was to "identify programs and initiatives that cultivate student interest and improve the teaching of the humanities." To that end, excited participants brainstormed about how the MLA and its partners could encourage innovation in teaching and greater social support for humanities study. The proposals (which are now being explored and evaluated) included developing humanities career labs in partnership with local colleges and universities,

sponsoring grants, creating teaching tool kits, developing collaborative teaching resources, and sponsoring symposia that expose students to the many facets of storytelling, from data journalism to oral historiography.

Hosted by the Chapin School, an independent school for young women in Manhattan, New Visions for Humanities Teaching brought together over seventy-five secondary school administrators and educators from around the New York City area. The event was a significant step in the MLA's ongoing efforts to strengthen interdisciplinary networks of K–16 humanities educators and the first in a new MLA events series, Community Conversations, which aims to engage communities involved in the humanities.

Community Conversations is the counterpart to the MLA's Public Conversations series, which includes events designed to reach beyond humanities fields and communities. The first event in the Public Conversations series, Augmented Reality in Humanities Teaching, was held on 25 October 2018. It looked at the use of virtual and augmented reality in the humanities classroom and raised $1,900 for the MLA's Paving the Way campaign.