

## Preparing for a Broad Career Search

Career exploration is like the assembly of a showstopper on *The Great British Baking Show*: the earlier you start, the better.

Don't fret, though: there's no five-hour time limit. And if you're already enrolled in a doctoral program (or have already finished one), your search and your career have already begun. Because although you're "in school," time spent in a PhD program should always be conceived of as *work*. Universities, especially those that offer doctoral programs, are vast, complex, mission-driven work environments. In the day-to-day execution of their research, teaching, and service, and their contributions to the institution's intellectual life and administrative functioning, graduate students navigate a dizzying array of physical and conceptual spaces within the university and engage a large and variegated swath of its stakeholders. Get used to thinking of your experience as a doctoral student in this way and to what it means for your trajectory in particular: it will prove crucial for everything from defining what matters most to you to articulating your skills on a résumé.

Let's back up a step. Whether you worked for fifteen years before starting graduate studies or enrolled in your program four months after finishing your bachelor's degree, it's always worth asking: why the PhD? Reflecting on what drove you to pursue graduate study will provide you with important insight and a concrete starting place for career exploration. *ImaginePhD*, a free, powerful tool developed by experts in the field of graduate career exploration, is one of the best ways to embark on this process of reflection and to frame your skills, interests, and values.

Beginning your search in this way will set you up for success because it will



Edward Savaria, Jr.

help you map out potential career pathways based on who you are as a person and a professional, and not on anyone else's expectations for what you should be doing. A PhD in the humanities does not necessarily have to lead immediately, directly, or even ever to a tenure-track position; even within the tenure track, positions vary widely in their nature and thus in their fit for you. Career paths are also almost always circular and iterative rather than linear and step-by-step. Rather than a strict binary of the professoriat and "everything else," keep your eyes on the (very real) continuum of exciting and fulfilling career paths available to humanities PhDs, which spans a great variety of roles within and well beyond the university.

The MLA Annual Convention provides an ideal setting for exploring this continuum. Sessions on the job search, panels on the intersection of the humanities and industry, the showcase of career diversity, and the MLA Career Fair all display

this range of possibilities. Workshops like those on résumés, networking, and *LinkedIn* will help you build the set of tools you'll need along the way. You can see an extensive list of the professional development sessions on offer at MLA 2020 at [www.mla.org/Professional-Development-2020](http://www.mla.org/Professional-Development-2020). These sessions, and the people you meet, will show you that, while other work experience can be very helpful, you're already prepared for a wide range of careers: it's just a matter of translating the skills and competencies you've developed as a doctoral student into the broader world of work.

For more suggestions on the career search, and ways departments and faculty members can help, check out the wealth of resources available from the MLA's Connected Academics project ([connect.mla.hcommons.org](http://connect.mla.hcommons.org)); the Doctoral Student Career Planning Guide is an excellent place to start. Good luck, and see you in Seattle!



## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# At the MLA Convention!

Comment on this column at [president.mla.hcommons.org](http://president.mla.hcommons.org).

**THE ARRIVAL OF THE MLA** convention Program is something I have looked forward to since I joined the organization over three decades ago. The Program has changed over the years: following the redesign of *PMLA*, its plain brown cover has given way to a light gray one with a colorful image. Although the Program is now available to the membership in electronic format, I have to confess that I'm still attached to the print issue. Going through the whole issue page by page with red or blue pencil in hand is a journey through the changing landscape of our profession, including its desires and anxieties.

In 1985, the year I attended my first MLA convention in Chicago, debates in the profession revolved around the role of theory, especially poststructuralism, in the field of literary studies. Today, as even a cursory glance at the Program for the 2020 convention in Seattle indicates, our desires and anxieties have shifted. The theories that used to generate so much heat in the mid-1980s are now so embedded in the profession that the only disputes they create are about ends rather than means. The center of our intellectual attention has certainly moved elsewhere—to questions about the human or the species, environmental survival, law and rights.

Some of these preferences have, of course, been overdetermined by the [presidential theme and its linked panels](#), but I suspect that they also reflect a collective sense of the precarious situation in which the humanities find themselves. The need to figure out how to manage the crisis in the humanities has certainly prompted the MLA to develop

programs and forums to train and prepare its members for the changing professional landscape.

But amid this concern with survival and coping in precarious times, the MLA convention also showcases the kinds of stories and conversations that enrich us all. This year's convention features, for example, panels and sessions that recognize how the humanities, even though they seem to be under siege in the university, are thriving in public.

their words of wisdom in times of cultural stress; we count on them to connect us with a reading public; and, above all, we turn to these masters of the word to help us think through the myriad issues that we face as we try to figure out what it means to be human.

For the January 2020 convention in Seattle, I have invited two distinguished writers to help us think about [what it means to be human](#): Viet Thanh Nguyen, the author of the Pulitzer

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The success of the humanities in the public sphere in the twenty-first century is evident in how communities across the country have come to embrace the mission of the national organizations charged with the protection and nurturing of the humanities, including the NEA and NEH.

Moreover, within the concentric circles that bring together scholars of literature and supporters of the humanities inside and outside institutions, there is an important, though not always acknowledged, binding force: our community of writers. We know that writers are important to literature because they provide us with the texts that are the bread and butter of our trade; we turn to them and

Prize-winning novel *The Sympathizer*, will help us understand the meaning of lives lived across and outside borders. And Charles Johnson, the author of the acclaimed novel *Middle Passage*, will remind us, once again, about the meaning of our shared humanity. Finally, since the twenty-first century marks the return of poetry to the center of public conversations, I will be delighted to present the [Phyllis Franklin Award](#) to Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady, the founders of [Cave Canem](#), the sacred space that has taught us about the invaluable place of poetry “in the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds.”

Simon E. Gikandi

# Strength in Numbers: The Work of Associations Recognized with ADE and ADFL Awards

*This year the ADFL Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession will be presented to Jayne Abrate, executive director of the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF). The ADE Francis Andrew March Award will be given to David Laurence, former director of ADE and director of research at the MLA. We asked the recipients about the significance of their work.*

**What accomplishment are you most proud of from your time leading the AATF?**

**JA:** During my twenty-two years as executive director of the AATF, it's been my privilege to be able to advocate for languages and French studies in testimony before government bodies, in news interviews, and when speaking to United States and foreign government representatives. We have worked diligently to create a community of French educators at all levels who support one another, promote the study of French in and out of the classroom, and foster appreciation and understanding of the many cultures that use the French language as a primary or secondary vehicle for communication. None of this can be accomplished without the network of thousands of individuals—volunteers, board members, colleagues, devoted members, and friends—who have each made an invaluable contribution to the success and longevity of the AATF.

**In addition to leading the AATF, you've represented it at the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and served as a board member and as president of the Joint National Committee for Languages—National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS). What's important to you about participating in these organizations? What role do larger organizations like these serve?**

**JA:** No association need stand alone. By working with our sister associations, we have multiplied our influence in the world. As one example, alongside ACTFL and



the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese and American Association of Teachers of German, we launched the national standards project in 1995. Through its many iterations over the past twenty-five years, our work has influenced the development of state and local standards and teacher certification programs and has become the common vocabulary for teaching and assessing languages. We stand together to support the study of all languages and to defend programs when necessary.

Through my work with various international associations of French teachers, I quickly discovered that the United States is unique in our decentralized educational structure and lack of national direction for language study through an agency or ministry. Therefore, the language associations, through JNCL-NCLIS, have stepped in to fill that void. Many localities do not see the value of language study, making it one of the first areas to undergo budget cuts. We make sure our voices are heard nationally and at the state level and that we have a seat at the table when language policies are being discussed or formulated.

**What accomplishment are you most proud of from your time at the MLA?**

**DL:** I find myself thinking of “contributions” rather than “accomplishments,” but what comes to mind first is the extent to which work on data gathering and analysis I was given to do helped make the MLA an authoritative source of information about the job market; about the condition of the faculty and the changing balance of tenure-leading and contingent faculty appointments; and for discussions that draw on government data about bachelor’s degree completions, PhD production, time-to-degree for PhD recipients, and the size and culture of the field’s graduate programs. Because of that work, I had the opportunity to participate in the development of the American Academy’s Humanities Indicators project. And through the Humanities Indicators I started to think about the idea of a humanities workforce and the concept of humanistic expertise and was commissioned to write “In Progress: The

Idea of a Humanities Workforce.” That essay is the contribution I think I am most proud of from my time on staff, or at least think of with most fondness.

**What do you see as the importance of disciplinary organizations? What role do they serve?**

**DL:** Over the course of a long career on staff I came to think that one of the most

important functions of disciplinary associations like the MLA is to listen and hear what members have to say about their experience as teachers, scholars, members of departments, and employees of institutions. We offer safe spaces where members can bring their concerns forward. And we provide mechanisms for development and enunciation of community consensus about norms for good practice. Less tangible but of no less

importance are the ways the MLA and gathering points like the convention and the ADE and ADFL seminars reaffirm the membership and member departments as disciplinary communities that share intellectual values and common purposes well worth working for and defending.

The awards will be presented at the 2020 MLA Annual Convention’s awards ceremony in Seattle on 11 January.

## Using Data to Advocate for Your Department

I had just been named interim head of the Department of Modern Languages at Kansas State University when I had to make a request to the interim dean, a distinguished professor and seasoned administrator. I remain grateful for his guidance, as he wisely taught me that administrators need solid numbers to back their decisions.

Deans and provosts understand the importance of languages and the humanities, but they need help from department chairs and program directors, who must provide data that support their value to the university as a whole. At every moment, chairs must know how many graduate students, majors and minors, and general education students are taught by their departments. How many sections are open? What needs do they cover? Which classes are full and which still have openings? Should changes be made to the line schedule to accommodate nontraditional students? What about online classes? Chairs and language directors must also know how many students they graduate each academic year, in which languages, and if particular targets have been met. Often, the university’s office of institutional research can assist in identifying specific needs—for example, by comparing the number of credit hours taught in particular areas of study. Chairs should also track faculty workloads, including variables regarding gender and underrep-

resented communities. I recommend keeping updated, visually attractive graphs on hand to show colleagues, donors, and senior administrators. Data are an important tool, whether you are playing offense or defense.

Department chairs need to understand the resources available to them, where they originate, and what entrepreneurial opportunities are feasible. Self-generated resources can be used to develop new programs, opening up new areas for teaching and research; alternatively, such funds may be vital in defending particular programs during times of restructuring.

Whenever I am asked to speak about the future of languages, I ask the faculty members present to consider the data, particularly data about faculty openings at the tenure-track level. Ask questions: should we be hiring in a different language or area of expertise? If faculty members have access to the right information, they will make educated decisions that will ensure that the department survives and thrives.

I take pride in being called a “bean counter.” It means that I’m doing my job—and after all, garbanzos are a staple of Spanish literature.

*Salvador A. Oropesa is professor of Spanish literature and the chair of the Department of Languages at Clemson University.*

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Paula M. Krebs, Executive Director

# Integrating the Humanities and Technology

Whether you're experienced in approaches to integrating humanities and tech or just starting out, these eight sessions at the 2020 convention will give you tools and get you thinking. Session numbers appear in parentheses. Browse the online program to learn more ([mla20.org](http://mla20.org)).

## **Transformative Archives-Based Humanities Pedagogy (068)**

Thanks to advancements in technology, digitized archives are now more accessible in the classroom. Discover how to engage undergraduate students in building digital archives through two case studies: using playlists as a conceptual model to rethink the literary canon and asking students to build their own indexing system for a digital library.

9 January, 1:45–3:00 p.m., 303, WSCC

## **Data and Justice (127)**

Data can be integral to storytelling by making a narrative more concrete. But what happens if no data exist on a subject, or if the data show only part of the story? This session, organized by the forum TC Digital Humanities, examines how data analysis and visualization can illuminate hidden voices and uncover injustice.

9 January, 5:15–6:30 p.m., 4C-3, WSCC

## **Integrated Learning Experiences in the Humanities and Art with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine (180)**

What does an integrative humanities and STEM education look like? Inspired by a 2018 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, this session invites educators to talk about the purposes of integrative learning and

to address reciprocal engagement with the humanities.

9 January, 7:00–8:15 p.m., 4C-3, WSCC

## **Data and Ethics in Digital Literary Studies (199)**

Data, databases, and digital archives have become more accessible for research and classroom use. However, the same technological advancements that facilitate data access also bring up questions of ethics and representation. In this session, speakers consider the ethics of doing digital scholarship, from collecting data to using educational technology such as Turnitin.com to preserving privacy in research.

10 January, 8:30–9:45 a.m., 611, WSCC

## **Databases and Print Culture Studies (264)**

Learn about how mass-digitized archives of newspapers and books have revolutionized print culture studies. Participants in this session discuss data-rich collections and their impact on knowledge production and methods, including the use of data science and artificial intelligence.

10 January, 10:15–11:30 a.m., 303, WSCC

## **Being Human, Seeming Human (388)**

How can the humanities help guide the ethical questions that data and technology inspire? With the increased sophistication of artificial intelligence tools that simulate human characteristics, Microsoft and other tech companies run into tough ethical questions. Explore the implications of this work during a discussion between Microsoft researchers and digital humanities scholars.

10 January, 5:15–6:30 p.m., Metropolitan A, Sheraton



Steve Schneider Photography

## **Digital Humanities and Media Studies: Reading at Scale (432)**

Digital media tools have changed reading practices for people and machines. These new methods provide new possibilities for textual analysis across disciplines, but they can also introduce issues in the political, social, and ethical realms. Delve into what “reading” means for us today across diverse approaches of inquiry.

11 January, 8:30–9:45 a.m., 401, WSCC

## **Digital Humanities and Computational Media: At the Interface (719)**

Have you considered how humanities disciplines are relevant to user experience or technology interfaces? In this session, panelists explore what it means to be human as both the subject/agent and object of computational design through critical approaches to the digital humanities, corporate UX design, literary analysis, and computational media art.

12 January, 12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Skagit 4, WSCC

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Support humanities education at the 2020 MLA Benefit for the Humanities, featuring readings by Toi Derricotte, Cornelius Eady, and Viet Thanh Nguyen.

**Find out more at [outreach.mla.org/benefit-2020](https://outreach.mla.org/benefit-2020).**

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