

## Professional Development for Everybody

The MLA has long been known for its terrific programs supporting department chairs in English through the ADE and in other languages through the ADFL. But we've always offered other kinds of professional development, too. Job counseling sessions at the convention and online. Speed mentoring. Convention sessions on publishing, on the job search, on advocacy, and on lots of other topics. Except for the job counseling, which was run by ADE and ADFL, most of our professional development has arisen to meet a need in a given moment rather than been structured into regular offerings like the ADE and ADFL Summer Seminars for chairs.

We're making a bit of a shift.

We have seen the power of getting department chairs together to share resources, to commiserate, and occasionally to eat and drink. We heard over and over from participants how useful the workshops at the ADE and ADFL Summer Seminars were and how much the chairs valued working together. And they told us they liked being able to rely on getting that kind of support every summer at the seminars, every convention in workshops and sessions, and in between on their shared e-mail discussion list.

We have incorporated the work of ADE and ADFL into the larger structure of MLA Academic Program Services—MAPS. MAPS is the MLA's institutional membership option, and MAPS members benefit from those programs for chairs and program leaders. MAPS professional development focuses on departments and smaller programs and on issues like building enrollments, creating decent working conditions for faculty members, and negotiating with deans.



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Your department or program should be a member of MAPS—please check with the chair to see if it is.

But the expansion of professional development we are undertaking now is an expansion of programming for individual MLA members. We have been thinking about what we can learn from the ADE and ADFL support structures that can be applied beyond the community of department chairs. Last year's Summit for the Future of Doctoral Education brought together teams of participants from departments that wanted to work on changing their doctoral programs, and those teams included graduate students, staff members, and faculty members. That work was department-based, but it moved outside the structure of providing professional development to department chairs. Our MLA Teaching Institutes, which work with faculty members from access-oriented institutions and doctoral students who want to

make their careers at such institutions, took us farther down the road of providing professional development outside of department structures. Now we want to reach out to you for your ideas.

We started the conversation with our member survey, but we want to keep it going. Tell us what kind of professional-development support would most benefit you, wherever you are in your career (including between careers). What can your professional association provide that would help you with your writing, help you be the kind of teacher you want to be, or put you in touch with the people who share your interests or concerns? What kind of professional-development structures would keep you coming back to share with others, would help you make your way through tough times in a department or with your research, or would help you know what

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# A Multilingual MLA

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

**IMAGÍNESE USTEDES SI TODA ESTA** columna estuviera escrita en español. Sé que recurrimos al inglés como la lengua que nos une en la Modern Language Association y en tantos otros espacios de la academia norteamericana. Me permito este pequeño experimento para recordarnos que son muchas las lenguas de la asociación, y también de Norteamérica. De vez en cuando es útil el ejercicio retórico de nuestras posibilidades como escritores, lectores y colegas.

In truth, the MLA is less English-based than members might imagine. Any language is acceptable for convention presentations, and papers are frequently

submissions in other languages, as long as they include an English-language summary and are translated if recommended to the editorial board. English is ultimately the lingua franca of *PMLA*, to be sure, yet the board and the members of the *PMLA* Advisory Committee, as well as the hundreds of other MLA members who review submissions to the journal each year, are capable of considering submissions on the literatures and cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East with as much attention to their specificity as we have brought to those on the literatures and cultures of Europe and the United States. Half the peer-reviewed material in the 2021

It includes texts in Korean, Urdu, Turkish, and Russian, in addition to the more frequently taught Spanish, French, German, and Italian. A Spanish-language edition of the *MLA Handbook* is in development, and a Chinese translation has also been commissioned.

Those of us who work beyond English must often make key decisions as to which language we choose for our professional lives. For many years, I routinely nudged graduate students to seek the broadest possible audiences in the United States by writing and presenting in English—this seemed to me the most responsible approach for a mentor. Yet colleagues who deliberately address audiences outside the United States—if not exclusively, then at least centrally and crucially—have changed my thinking. Given the important conversations to be had on uses of the past, histories of the nation and of colonialism, and countless other topics, there are good reasons to publish also in languages legible to audiences beyond the United States and not to assume always that English will be the common denominator. Of course, this practice often requires a concomitant commitment to educate university review committees about the value of such scholarship and of the presses that publish it.

My punning emphasis in this year's presidential theme—Multilingual US—is intended to remind us of what is at stake both for the nation and for each of us, personally and professionally, in imagining a multilingual home defined by multiplicity rather than singularity. At the upcoming convention in Washington, DC, we will hear from writers and poets

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delivered in Spanish and French. Our international symposia have featured a number of languages, and this number will certainly increase as the locations for the meetings move beyond Western Europe.

Although most of our publications are almost entirely in English, *PMLA* accepts

volume of *PMLA* focus on literature outside the United States and Europe. The MLA’s Texts and Translations series, now numbering over seventy volumes, publishes texts in pairs, in their original language and in English translation, providing a rich opportunity for presenting lesser-known works to a wide audience.

writing across languages and from activists working through and for linguistic diversity. Their labors appear increasingly urgent as we confront reactionary calls to protect “legacy Americans”—one of the more puzzling dog whistles in a lamentable cacophony—from the supposed depredations of diversity. Indigenous languages, first and foremost, as well as the languages of the many other European empires that rivaled the English and of the religious refugees fleeing Europe—Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, German—either predate English or have their own long histories in the Americas. The amazing range of 227 sessions in dialogue with the presidential theme—from “Rendering Diversity: Multilingual Representations in Korean New Media” to “Climate Writing:

Multilingual Approaches for a Global Crisis”—demonstrates how richly MLA members have collected, interpreted, and theorized multilingual experiences.

How do we continue this key conversation beyond our DC meeting? I am signing off with an entreaty for a more international, multilingual MLA in the years to come and once again turning to our

members for ideas. If you are at the convention in person, please find me down the hallway, in the lobby, at the bar—all those spaces that we missed while on *Zoom*. If you are attending virtually, I will look for your good thoughts in the chat or Q&A. Y en el idioma que prefieran.

Barbara Fuchs

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kinds of rewards there are in nonacademic work and how to change course? The richness of a scholarly association lies in the experience and knowledge of its members, and the structures for professional development that grow at the MLA in the next few years will be those that enable our members to help one another. That’s an important part of the convening function of a scholarly association. It’s members helping members. If you identify some areas in which you or people you know could benefit from some professional development, let us know. And if you identify some areas in which you have strengths or experience and you’d like to offer help to other members, let us know that, too. The e-mail address is [outreach@mla.org](mailto:outreach@mla.org), but the “us” is the MLA, which is all of us.

Paula Krebs



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# Activism, Advocacy, and Academic Labor

From cuts to humanities education funding and attacks on academic freedom to ongoing struggles against racism, sexism, and workplace discrimination, there are many reasons to advocate for social, cultural, and political change. The sessions below address urgent issues facing higher education and the humanities from a variety of perspectives, including faculty governance, legislative action, and labor organizing.

## **61V. WHEN NORMAL IS THE PROBLEM: COLLECTIVE UNDERTAKINGS WITHIN, AGAINST, AND BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY**

*Thursday, 6 January, 1:45–3:00 p.m.*

Participants reflect on collective undertakings emerging in the last few years to consider what can be generated when challenging the normalized managing of study, knowledge, and people in the university; confronting the normalization of the academy in the United States as a global producer of knowledge; centering the constitutive role of the noncitizen in the academy in the United States; and reflecting on solidarity learning and world-making within, against, and beyond the university.

## **73A. HUMANITIES ADVOCACY AT THE STATEHOUSE AND ON THE HILL**

*Thursday, 6 January, 3:30–4:45 p.m.*

Arranged by the MLA Office of the Executive Director, this session discusses the relationship between humanities advocacy and representative government.

## **94V. PANDEMIC, ACADEMICS, GENDER, AND RACE: EFFECTS ON WOMEN AND WORK**

*Thursday, 6 January, 3:30–4:45 p.m.*

How has the pandemic affected the careers of women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ people in colleges and universities, particularly in languages, literatures, and the humanities? Panelists share findings and experiences from a variety of institutions, programs, and leadership roles and address gendered caregiving roles and the economics and practices of higher education.

## **189V. STRENGTHENING FACULTY GOVERNANCE IN THE TIME OF COVID**

*Friday, 7 January, 8:30–9:45 a.m.*

Faculty members at numerous institutions have reported that their administrations, under the color of crisis, have made unilateral decisions on a wide range of issues that, according to the American Association of University Professors, fall under the primary responsibility of the faculty. Panelists discuss how faculties can respond to such actions in the moment and how they can rebuild faculty authority and shared governance in the wake of crisis.

## **A TRIBUTE TO RICHARD OHMANN**

*Friday, 7 January, 1:45–3:00 p.m.*

Richard Ohmann was a moving force in bringing a leftist political perspective to the Modern Language Association. A founding member of the MLA Radical Caucus and of the journal *Radical Teacher*, he was elected vice president of the MLA on an anti-Vietnam War platform; he later served on the MLA Executive Council and three times as a representative of Politics and the Professor in the MLA Delegate Assembly. This roundtable honors his legacy.

## **416V. USING OUR POWER: THE MLA, ADVOCACY, AND ACADEMIC LABOR**

*Saturday, 8 January, 8:30–9:45 a.m.*

Responding to the MLA's calls for advocacy efforts, panelists present varied experiences of and research on labor advocacy and address how we might use our roles as MLA members, delegates, and forum chairs to advocate for better academic labor conditions. Conversation centers on attendees' concerns, aiming to provide tactics for labor advocacy within the MLA and on campus.

## **595V. HOW TO ORGANIZE A UNION: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES**

*Saturday, 8 January, 5:15–6:30 p.m.*

For decades, humanities labor has been under structural pressures that threaten tenure, academic freedom, and basic work conditions. Led by experts—academics and organizers—this session seeks to stimulate discussion and knowledge sharing about union organizing and collective bargaining as a grass-roots response, spotlighting future-oriented practical advice for empowerment and solidarity.

## **679. CRISIS AND CREATIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

*Sunday, 9 January, 12:00–1:15 p.m.*

This roundtable examines the intersecting crises of the global pandemic, racism and violence, and continued budget shortfalls and their effects on scholars, teachers, and students in race and ethnicity studies. Panelists and participants explore how they have responded proactively, creatively, and collaboratively to these crises.

# Responding to the Pandemic: MLA Virtual Programming

In addition to the many MLA 2022 sessions that focus on higher education's response to COVID-19, we've got a library of webinars for graduate students, teachers, and administrators who are looking to reflect on what we've learned so far and where we go from here.

Visit [webinars.mla.org](https://webinars.mla.org) to access recordings of

## IS HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING FROM THE PANDEMIC?

Speakers: Cathy N. Davidson, Alondra Nelson, and Christopher Newfield

## MEDICINE, NARRATIVE, PANDEMIC, AND POWER

Speakers: Rita Charon and Aakriti Pandita

## GRADUATE EDUCATION POSTPANDEMIC

Speakers: Judith Butler, Joy Connolly, Jim Grossman, and Paula Krebs

## REMOTE TEACHING: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Speakers: Lee Skallerup Bessette, Jesse Katen, and Annemarie Perez

And log in to the ADE and ADFL websites ([ade.mla.org](https://ade.mla.org) and [adfl.mla.org](https://adfl.mla.org)) for these conversations:

- Planning in the Pandemic for Department Leaders
- Teaching in the Pandemic: Online Apps for Building Communities of Readers and Writers
- Research in the Pandemic: Strategies for Maintaining a Research Agenda in 2020–21

# Spotlight on MLA Style: Singular *They*

Did you know that the MLA publishes guidance on singular *they*? Read on for more about specific and generic uses of this pronoun.

The *MLA Handbook* advises writers to always follow the personal pronouns of specific individuals they write about. If a person's pronoun is *they*, it is correct to say, "Ari is going to the library today, so I asked them if they would drive me there." This use of singular *they* is widely accepted. In September 2019, *Merriam-Webster's* added a new definition to the entry for *they* in its online dictionary, stating that *they* can refer to a "single person whose gender identity is nonbinary" ("They," def. 3d).

Singular *they* has also gained acceptance to refer generically to people "whose gender is unknown or not relevant to the context" (*MLA Handbook* 92): for example, "Tell the winner they can pick up their prize in person or have

it delivered," "The first player places all their cards face down," and "The reviewer wrote to tell me they need another day to complete the report." It can also be used to refer to a generic subject that is grammatically singular but plural in sense: for example, "Everyone can access their individual account starting tomorrow."

To learn more about singular *they* in MLA style, see section 3.5 of the *MLA Handbook* (91–92) or visit the [MLA Style Center \("How"\)](https://mla.org/using-singular-they).

## WORKS CITED

- "How Do I Use Singular *They*?" *MLA Style Center*, Modern Language Association of America, 4 Mar. 2020, [style.mla.org/using-singular-they](https://style.mla.org/using-singular-they).
- MLA Handbook*. 9th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2021.
- "They, *Pron.*" *Merriam-Webster*, 2020, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they).



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Photo credit: Edward Savaria, Jr.

**Congratulations to all the recipients  
of the 2021 MLA publications prizes!  
View the full list of prizewinners at  
[mla.org/prizewinners](https://mla.org/prizewinners).**

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