

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2011 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 29–30 OCTOBER 2010 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. President Sidonie Smith presided. The officers present were First Vice President Russell A. Berman, Second Vice President Michael Bérubé, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Carlos J. Alonso, Jonathan Arac, Sara Armengot, Lawrence I. Buell, Jennifer Crewe, Jane Harper, Dorothea Heitsch, Francis Abiola Irele (29 Oct. only), Richard M. Ohmann, Karin C. Ryding, Lynne Tatlock, Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, and Kathleen Woodward. George Levine was absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Managing Editor of MLA Publications and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Financial Operations Amilde Hadden, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Book Publications David G. Nicholls, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

The council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 27–28 October to review assembly and association business. Gaurav Desai, the chair of the committee, reported that, as of the 1 October deadline for the submission of motions and resolutions, MLA members had submitted no such proposals for consideration by the 2011 Delegate Assembly. The DAOC had received an amendment to the assembly's bylaws that a delegate had proposed; the committee placed this proposed amendment on the assembly's agenda. Desai noted that the committee also discussed the constitutional amendment that the Executive Council had proposed (see Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1108). He explained how consideration of this amendment would proceed on the floor of the assembly and encouraged council members to speak to the amendment on the floor. Desai then told the council that the committee had chosen two topics for the hour-long period of open discussion on the assembly's agenda: successful strategies for strengthening language and literature departments and public advocacy for the humanities. The announcement of these topics prompted a brief discussion of outreach and media strategies that the MLA might pursue to enhance the status of the humanities in general and of language programs in particular. It was noted that the MLA's prompt response to the closing of several language programs at the University at Albany could serve as a model for future council actions. Desai concluded his report with the announcement that Teresa Mangum had

been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 10 January 2011 through 8 January 2012.

The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their work. In addition to the DAOC chair, the members of the committee who participated in the joint meeting were Sima N. Godfrey (Univ. of British Columbia), Brian Kennelly (California Polytechnic State Univ., San Luis Obispo), Teresa Mangum (Univ. of Iowa), and Adelaide M. Russo (Louisiana State Univ., Baton Rouge). Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Jeanette N. Williams.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council took up the first of two discussion items on its agenda: how to address in a sustained way the downsizing and closing of language departments and programs at colleges and universities across the country (see item 2, below). After lunch on 29 October, the council held an executive session and then, in regular session, began to review the action items on its agenda. On 30 October, the council began by taking up the second discussion item on its agenda: strategic planning (see item 3, below). Following this discussion, the council continued working through the action items on its agenda and adjourned at 2:45 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2009–10) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2010–11). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2009–10 fiscal year with a surplus of \$33,120 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee attributed the surplus to significant reductions in association expenses.

The final budget for the fiscal year 2010–11 projected a deficit of \$193,300 in the unrestricted fund. Rosemary Feal explained that revenue was projected to decrease slightly and expenses were expected to increase slightly. The council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2010–11.

2. *Discussion of Foreign Language Programs.* The increasing number of reports in 2010 about the elimination or curtailment of foreign language programs—including the early October announcement that the University at Albany would phase out its programs in classics, French, Italian, Russian, and theater over two years—prompted the council's discussion of strategies that could be used to strengthen programs and prevent their elimination. After reviewing the resources the association already makes available to departments, including recent association reports that offer important advice (e.g., *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World*), council members identified activities that the association might pursue (e.g., a consultancy service, finding grant support for new initiatives in departments, creation of a venue for disseminating information about model programs, collaboration with other foreign language and

English organizations and with national language resource centers). Council members also commented on the increasing devaluation of the humanities and of higher education as a whole and noted that a broad program of advocacy was needed.

The council asked three of its members—Russell Berman, Karin Ryding, and Lynne Tatlock—to work with Rosemary Feal on designing and setting up a consultancy service for departments that are interested in reorganizing course content and faculty structures.

3. *Strategic Planning.* Following up on a discussion of strategic planning held during the May 2009 council meeting, the president asked the council to take the first concrete steps toward the development of a strategic-planning document. The ultimate goal of strategic planning is to identify specific areas for action, the key goals to be met in each area, and strategies for achieving these goals. Over the summer, the officers had decided on a set of action rubrics that would organize the association's strategic plan. Using those rubrics, council members met in small groups to develop questions that would help the council identify its goals and priorities. After the small-group meetings, council members agreed that groups considered stakeholders in the MLA should be consulted and discussed how to proceed. The council instructed the staff to provide its input on the questions the council had generated and to set up a multistage process for consultations with stakeholders and for moving forward with strategic planning. The staff is to report to the council in February 2011.

4. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Malcolm B. Smith, the former vice-chairman of General American Investors, Inc., both as a trustee of the association's invested funds and as managing trustee for the term 2011–13.

5. *Parliamentarian Appointment.* The council reappointed Jeanette N. Williams for a second three-year term as MLA parliamentarian (2011–close of Jan. 2014 convention).

6. *Appointment of a Delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS).* The council appointed Priscilla Wald to a four-year term (2011–14) as the association's representative in the Delegate Assembly of the ACLS.

7. *Appointment of an Editor for PMLA.* The council appointed Simon E. Gikandi (English, Princeton Univ.) to succeed Patricia Yaeger as editor of *PMLA*. Gikandi's three-year term will begin in July 2011.

8. *Approval of the May 2010 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2010 meeting for publication in the January 2011 issue of *PMLA*.

9. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* In June the council was asked to approve a corporate resolution that would allow the MLA to obtain a standing letter of credit from JPMorganChase. The letter of credit is a requirement of the MLA's lease at 26 Broadway. The council's procedure for making decisions between its meetings (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278 and Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102) was implemented, and the full council was

given the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list. Since all council members approved the resolution, it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to make the decision. At the present meeting, the council confirmed the decision it made using its electronic discussion list.

10. *Working Group on the Dissertation and Doctoral Education.* Sidonie Smith reported to the council on the meeting of the working group that the council had authorized her to convene (see Jan. 2011 *PMLA* 250). The group, which met the day before the council meeting, focused its attention on new forms of the dissertation. Smith said the group would meet again during the MLA convention in Los Angeles, would draft a document fleshing out a definition of the new dissertation, and would do research on existing models for alternative dissertations and on chairs' experience with them. She asked for and received the council's authorization for the working group to continue its consultations for a year, until October 2011.

11. *Further Consideration of Online Book Reviews.* Michael Bérubé reported to the council on the deliberations of the subcommittee that the council had charged in May with investigating the feasibility of an online book review project (see Jan. 2011 *PMLA* 252). Bérubé explained that the subcommittee had identified three options: establishing an online book review based on the model outlined in the proposal that the council had received, having the MLA aggregate the many reviews done elsewhere, and having the MLA issue guidelines for online reviews and then host review sites that are field-initiated and field-run. The council discussed these options and concluded that an MLA project was neither necessary, because of the many reviews that are already published online, nor feasible, because of the expense involved. It was also noted that the council's strategic planning would provide an appropriate context for a renewed discussion of this sort of project. The council suggested that division and discussion group executive committees be asked about using the forums that had been set up at the MLA Web site to post information about scholarship in their fields.

12. *Establishment of a Prize in the Field of Indigenous Literatures and Cultures.* The council considered the draft prize description that it had not had time to review at its May meeting (see Jan. 2011 *PMLA* 252) along with advice on the definition of the field to be covered by the prize that the staff had solicited from a scholar in the field. During their discussion, council members raised questions about the scope of the prize, the numbers of books that might compete for the prize each year, and whether authors are members of the MLA. Because of these questions, the council postponed its decision and instructed the staff to provide answers at the February council meeting.

13. *Advertising in PMLA.* When *PMLA* was redesigned in the late 1990s, the advertisements from outside publishers that had appeared on the back cover of the scholarly issues were eliminated and replaced with

announcements of forthcoming material in the journal. Because the back cover is a prominent spot for an ad and because the staff wished to promote sales of the *MLA Handbook* and other association publications, Rosemary Feal sought and received the officers' approval to include house ads along with the listing of forthcoming material on the back covers of the May and October 2010 issues of *PMLA*. Feal asked for and received the council's approval to continue this practice. She noted that ads from outside publishers might appear in the future.

14. *Revision of Profession's Statement of Editorial Policy.* The staff asked the council to approve a revision of *Profession's* editorial policy statement. The revised statement aims to give members a better idea of the kinds of articles published in the journal. The council approved the revised statement, which reads as follows:

Profession carries articles that focus on the fields of modern languages and literatures as a profession. Accordingly, the editor invites essays of 1,800 to 5,000 words on current intellectual, curricular, and institutional trends and issues and on relevant public-policy debates, essays that can be read with interest and profit by many, if not all, MLA members. The editor seeks articles covering a range of topics and giving a voice to MLA members working in diverse subject areas and situations. Letters to the editor and short comments on articles in the previous year's *Profession* will also be considered for publication. Such letters and comments will not normally exceed 800 words. *Profession* does not carry articles by the same author two years in a row.

15. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied organizations. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of seven societies: American Theatre and Drama Society, Langston Hughes Society, Ezra Pound Society, International Boethius Society, International Spenser Society, International Virginia Woolf Society, and Pirandello Society of America. In two cases, the council authorized the Program Committee to transmit concerns to be addressed during the organizations' next reviews. The International Boethius Society will be asked to supply evidence of a broadening of membership participation in the society's sessions. The Pirandello Society of America will be asked to work toward increasing its membership. The council also authorized the committee to acknowledge the work done by two other societies to address concerns that the committee had raised. The International Spenser Society had increased its membership and the level of members' participation in the society's sessions. The International Virginia Woolf Society had also increased its membership and had collaborated with the International James Joyce Foundation on a 2011 MLA convention session.

Three allied organizations—the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the National

Council of Teachers of English, and the Poe Studies Association—whose reviews had been deferred for one year (see May 2010 *PMLA* 866) were renewed for the stipulated six years. The council renewed the allied status of the American Philological Association for two conventions, 2012 and 2013, at which the association, which has never held sessions at the MLA convention, must arrange sessions. Because the completion of the 2004 review of the Society of German Renaissance and Baroque Literature was delayed until this year, the society's allied status was renewed for one year. The society will be asked to submit full review materials for its next regularly scheduled review, in September 2011.

Four organizations applied for allied organization status. The International Dostoevsky Society and the Conseil International d'Études Francophones were granted allied status. The American Translators Association was granted allied status but will be urged to develop sessions that focus more on literary and cultural analysis. A decision on the application of the Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture was postponed. The council authorized the Program Committee to ask the alliance to submit additional information by 1 March 2011. The com-

mittee planned to forward its recommendation on the alliance's application to the council in May 2011.

16. *Annual Reports from Standing Committees.* The council received annual reports from the editor of *PMLA* and from the following standing committees: Publications Committee, Committee on Scholarly Editions, Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography*, Committee on Honors and Awards, Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, Committee on Information Technology, Radio Committee, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, Committee on Community Colleges, Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, and Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks.

17. *Committee Appointments.* The council made six additional appointments to MLA committees. The names of all new committee members appear in the listings of MLA committee members at the MLA Web site.