

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2015 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 24–25 OCTOBER 2014 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Margaret W. Ferguson presided. The officers present were First Vice President Roland Greene, Second Vice President Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Samer M. Ali, Barbara K. Altmann, Debra Ann Castillo, Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Donald E. Hall, María Herrera-Sobek, Margaret R. Higonnet, Lanisa Kitchiner, Lutz Koepnick, Paula M. Krebs, Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Mecca Jamilah Sullivan. The MLA staff members present were Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Associate Executive Director and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses. Controller Arlene Barnard was present for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below); Associate Director of Convention Programs Karin L. Bagnall was present for discussions of convention and Program Committee business (see items 15 and 16, below).

In the morning on 24 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 22–23 October to review assembly and other association business. Julie Rak, the chair of the DAOC, reported to the council that the committee had received two conflicting resolutions on the issue of academic boycotts. Since it was not possible for the assembly to adopt both resolutions and since the DAOC thought that consideration of the issue of academic boycotts should begin with a wider discussion involving the entire MLA membership, the DAOC asked the resolutions' proposers to withdraw their resolutions and pursue an alternative process comprising several elements: a discussion of academic boycotts during the open-discussion portion of the Delegate Assembly's 2015 agenda; dedicated *MLA Commons* groups that the resolutions' proposers could use to promote their views and encourage discussion; two 2016 convention sessions, both in debate format, to be organized by the resolutions' proposers; and a town hall meeting to be held before the 2017 Delegate Assembly meeting during which the assembly would consider the proposers' original or revised resolutions. The two resolutions were withdrawn when their proposers agreed to pursue the alternative process. In the light of the agreement, the DAOC asked the parliamentarian to advise the committee on how to prevent the consideration of a boycott resolution at the 2016 assembly meeting. Rak then reviewed

with the council the motion that had been submitted for consideration by the 2015 Delegate Assembly and the committee's suggestions for revision. She presented the topic that the DAOC had chosen for the open-discussion portion of the assembly's agenda, *The MLA in the World: How Should the MLA Engage with Controversial Issues?*, and the four subtopics, two of which dealt with academic boycotts. She announced that the DAOC planned to establish three Delegate Assembly subcommittees that would parallel the council's strategic-planning subcommittees along with one subcommittee that would focus on the role and functioning of the assembly itself. Delegates at the 2015 meeting would be asked to indicate their interest in serving on the subcommittees, which would do their work through *MLA Commons*. Rak then summarized the DAOC's other business and concluded the committee's report by announcing that Stephanie Louise Kirk had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 12 January 2015 through 10 January 2016. The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their report. In addition to the DAOC chair, the members of the committee who participated in the joint meeting were Stephanie Louise Kirk, Susan Solomon, and Jennifer Wicke. Also present was MLA Parliamentarian Jeanette N. Williams.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council convened in regular session and began to work through the action items on its agenda. After lunch, still in regular session, the council received an oral report on the development of an MLA archive from Liza Young, an MS candidate at the School of Library and Information Science at St. John's University, who is working as an intern at the MLA; reviewed several exhibits from the incipient archive; and continued its work on agenda items. In midafternoon, the council convened in executive session and then convened again in regular session to continue working on its agenda. On 25 October, after a regular session and an executive session, the council's three strategic-planning subcommittees held separate meetings (see item 13, below), after which the full council reconvened in regular session to hear the reports of the subcommittee chairs and to complete work on the action items on its agenda. The council adjourned at 1:20 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 (2013–14) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2014–15). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2013–14 fiscal year with a surplus of \$434,570 in the association's unrestricted fund. The main reason for the surplus was the deferral to the 2014–15 fiscal year of expenses associated with several development projects.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2014–15, which projected a deficit of \$514,520 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that the deficit

was due to the deferred project expenses and to expenses associated with the relocation of the MLA headquarters office but was lower than had been projected in May (see Jan. 2015 *PMLA* 172) because revenue projections had increased. The council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2014–15.

The council adopted a resolution authorizing Rosemary Feal, Judy Goulding, and Terrence Callaghan to execute agreements and other documents that are necessary for the conduct of the association's business with Bank of America and U.S. Trust.

2. *Grant to Support Careers Project.* Rosemary Feal announced that the MLA had received a grant from the Mellon Foundation to support the second phase of a project that aims to broaden the career horizons of humanities graduate students and scholars (see May 2014 *PMLA* 586). During the five-year project, called *Connected Academics*, three partner institutions will implement recommendations from the MLA's Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature on curricular change and programmatic support for career diversity. In addition to supporting the work of its partners, the MLA will help PhD programs in the New York City area work toward implementing change and will provide stipends to three cohorts of graduate students and recent PhDs to enable them to participate in a proseminar to be held in New York. The MLA will also extend its research into PhD career pathways, expand mentoring activities at the MLA convention, and generally advocate for career diversity for language and literature PhDs.

3. *Termination of MLA-Sponsored Group Insurance Program.* Since at least 1971, the MLA has had a sponsorship arrangement with an insurance company whereby members received a discounted rate on insurance products and the MLA received a small royalty for each member who purchased a policy. The MLA's agreement with the administrator of the group insurance program, Marsh, lapsed in 2012. Since then, Marsh has been unwilling to negotiate a new agreement. The staff therefore asked that the council dissolve the sponsorship arrangement with Marsh. The council did so and authorized the staff to remove from MLA membership materials all references to discounted insurance products and to instruct Marsh to stop using the MLA's name and logo.

4. *Resignation of a Council Member.* The council received the resignation of a council member, Alicia de la Torre Falzon, and accepted it with regret. The council thanked de la Torre Falzon for her service on the council. Council members then considered the constitutional provisions (arts. 8.A.6 and 8.A.5) governing the replacement of a council member. The council decided to replace de la Torre Falzon for the rest of her term and appointed Elizabeth Schwartz Crane (San Joaquin Delta Coll., CA) to her seat.

5. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Catharine R. Stimpson, dean emerita of the Graduate School of Arts and Science at New York University and a

past president of the association, as a trustee of the association's invested funds for the term 2015–17.

6. *Appointment of a Delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS).* The council appointed Barbara K. Altmann to a four-year term (2015–18) as the association's representative in the Delegate Assembly of the ACLS.

7. *Approval of the May 2014 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2014 meeting for publication in the January 2015 issue of *PMLA*.

8. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took four actions between its May and October meetings. (1) In June, the council agreed to sign on to a National Coalition against Censorship (NCAC) statement condemning a budget provision adopted by the South Carolina legislature and signed by Governor Nikki Haley that penalized the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina, Upstate, for assigning books with LGBT themes. This action was in keeping with the council's earlier decision to sign the NCAC's March letter calling on South Carolina legislators to reject the budget provision (see Jan. 2015 *PMLA* 174). (2) In August, the council approved sending a letter to Phyllis Wise, chancellor of the University of Illinois, Urbana, urging her to reconsider her decision to revoke the appointment of Steven Salaita. (3) In September, the council approved a revision to the MLA's 2009 *Statement on Academic Freedom*. (4) Also in September, the council approved and sent to the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC) a statement on freedom of expression that had been drafted in response to a request from the DAOC.

When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the actions on its electronic discussion list. Since the council was unanimous in its approval of the proposed actions, its advisory committee did not have to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these decisions.

9. *MLA Mission Statement.* At its May 2014 meeting, the council briefly discussed the draft of a mission statement that was intended to provide an overview of the association's purpose and activities for the membership and the public. Since the council did not have time to make revisions during the meeting, it undertook them afterward, using its electronic discussion list. A revised draft of the mission statement was completed in July. It was circulated to council members, who suggested no further revisions. The statement was copyedited and posted at the MLA Web site soon after. At the present meeting, the council formally approved the mission statement and agreed that the strategic-priorities document previously approved by the council (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 860) would be used to orient new council members to the council's work.

10. *Membership Requirement for Book Authors and Editors.* Noting that membership is required for *PMLA* authors and convention participants, the staff asked the council to establish a membership requirement for book

authors and editors. The membership status of authors and editors would be verified at specific stages of the vetting process, and the executive director would be able to grant waivers of the requirement for nonscholars and for scholars who work in disciplines not represented by the MLA. The council approved the staff request.

11. *Establishment of the Matei Calinescu Prize.* The council received a request that the MLA establish and administer a prize in honor of Matei Calinescu, a Romanian poet and scholar who taught at Indiana University, Bloomington. The prize would recognize a distinguished work of scholarship in twentieth- or twenty-first-century literature and thought published in the previous year. Preference would be given to an author's first or second book. Support for the prize would be provided by the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York and an endowment to be created by a donor. The council agreed to establish the prize. The Committee on Honors and Awards will be asked to implement the council's decision and to consider a question that arose during the discussion of the new prize (see next item).

12. *Feasibility of Simultaneous Submissions for Prize Competitions.* At present, a book can be submitted for only one MLA prize competition. This restriction forces authors and their publishers to choose between one of the MLA's two major prizes—the James Russell Lowell Prize and the MLA Prize for a First Book—and the relevant specialized prize. Though the question of simultaneous submissions has arisen before, the addition of another specialized prize (see previous item) makes the question more pressing. The council noted that allowing simultaneous submissions might increase the workload of the selection committees for the Lowell prize and the first-book prize and might allow a single book to win two prizes. The council decided to refer the question of simultaneous submissions to the Committee on Honors and Awards, which is expected to forward its advice to the council in May 2015.

13. *Strategic-Planning Subcommittees.* The council's three strategic-planning subcommittees (see Jan. 2015 *PMLA* 174–76) held meetings on 25 October. The subcommittee on K–16 collaborations (Margaret Ferguson, chair; Debra Castillo; Donald Hall; Margaret Higonnet; Paula Krebs) discussed the need to establish better connections among different levels of education, how to bring foreign languages into the Common Core framework, incorporating a more robust humanities component into service learning opportunities, opposing the use of placement tests (including AP tests) to allow exemptions from instruction instead of continuation of instruction at an appropriate level, and establishing partnerships with teachers in public and private high schools to work on college readiness. The subcommittee on the MLA's reach (Roland Greene, chair; Samer Ali; Gaurav Desai; María Herrera-Sobek; Lanisa Kitchiner; Lutz Koepnick) focused on plans for a membership survey that would provide information about the association activities and services that members most value. The subcommittee on the humanities work-

force (Anthony Appiah, chair; Barbara Altmann; Brian Coxall; Tracy Sharpley-Whiting; Mecca Sullivan) considered how to disseminate information on alternative careers to graduate students and directors of graduate studies and discussed a number of issues related to contingent faculty members (e.g., treatment standards, getting tenure-track and tenured faculty members involved in the issues).

14. *Update on MLA-Sponsored International Symposium.* Roland Greene provided an update on the planning undertaken by the local-arrangements committee in Düsseldorf, which he said would also function as a program committee. He asked the council to consider establishing a United States–based advisory committee as a complement to the European program committee.

15. *Selection of a Site for the 2017 Annual Convention.* The council selected Philadelphia as the site of the January 2017 convention.

16. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on the Program Committee's recommendations regarding allied organizations and the establishment of new convention forums. The council renewed for seven years the allied organization status of twenty societies: American Association of Teachers of Italian, American Conference for Irish Studies, Association des Amis d'André Gide, Association of Writers and Writing Programs, Children's Literature Association, College English Association, Conference on Christianity and Literature, Council of Editors of Learned Journals, Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, Dante Society of America, Dickens Society, Feministas Unidas, George Sand Association, GL/Q Caucus for the Modern Languages, Goethe Society of North America, Joseph Conrad Society of America, Nathaniel Hawthorne Society, Rhetoric Society of America, Robert Frost Society, and Samuel Beckett Society. The council renewed for three years the allied organization status of the Margaret Fuller Society and the Paul Claudel Society and authorized the Program Committee to transmit concerns about the societies' declining memberships and to suggest ways to reverse this trend.

The council also received the Program Committee's recommendations on petitions to establish new convention forums. The council approved the establishment of twelve forums: Global Arab and Arab American, Global Hispanophone, Global South, and Hemispheric American in the category Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies; Galician, Korean, and Latina and Latino in the category Languages, Literatures, and Cultures; Literacy Studies in the category Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies; Literary and Cultural Theory in the category Theory and Method; and Ecocriticism and Environmental Humanities, Medical Humanities and Health Studies, and Memory Studies in the category Transdisciplinary Connections. The new forums will organize their first sessions for the 2016 convention. The council did not approve petitions for new forums on creative writing and on history and literature and asked the petitioners to submit revised proposals in 2015.

17. *Proposed Revisions to the Tool Kit on Academic Freedom.* Responding to a request from the council (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 864), the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR) submitted revisions to its *Tool Kit on Academic Freedom* for the council's consideration. The council accepted some of the revisions, decided to ask CAFPRR for clarification of or further revisions to two revised paragraphs, and made revisions of its own. The council instructed the staff to inform the committee of the outcome of the council's review and to ask the committee to submit a newly revised tool kit to the council in February 2015.

18. *Final Report from the Steering Committee on New Structures for Languages in Higher Education (SCNSL).* In its final report, the SCNSL reviewed its work over two years to establish a Language Consultancy Service that provides advice to language departments on curriculum design and governance and to develop a repository of resources for consultants and departments. The operation of the service will be overseen by the ADFL Executive Committee. The council expressed gratitude for the report and commended the committee on its work.

19. *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 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, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, Committee on Community Colleges, Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession (CSGSP), and Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks and asked two committees to undertake new work assignments (see next item). The council also asked the staff to look into the CSGSP's suggestion that the MLA's hotel-cancellation policy be made more flexible for graduate students who attend the MLA convention and to encourage committees to transmit their requests to the council at any time, not just in their annual reports.

20. *New Committee Work Assignments.* In its annual report, the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR) mentioned two issues that it had discussed—required biometric examinations to comply with new insurance requirements and institutional claims of ownership of syllabi—and said it was willing to research these issues and offer its opinion on positions that the Executive Council might take. The council asked CAFPRR to undertake this work. CAFPRR also suggested revising the MLA Statement on Academic Freedom to specify part-time faculty members' rights to academic freedom. The council asked CAFPRR to consult

with the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession on a possible revision for the council's consideration.

At a council member's request, the council asked the Committee on Information Technology (CIT) to investigate the issue of open access and dissertations in consultation with the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, other relevant committees (e.g., Publications Committee, CAFRR), and other affected constituencies and to advise the council on making a statement. The council also asked the CIT, in consultation with the staff, to develop guidelines on or a proposal for the use of MLA data by campus researchers.

21. *Committee Appointments.* The council made one committee appointment. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear at the MLA Web site.

22. *Further Consideration of a Member's Proposals.* The council received the staff report it had requested on a member's proposals for improving access to the convention for non-tenure-track faculty members and graduate students (see Jan. 2015 *PMLA* 176). It was also briefed on

a major membership project that grew out of the council's strategic-planning initiatives and that aims to identify ways of building the membership base and improving membership services. Because the member's proposals provide information about the needs and priorities of a segment of the membership, the council decided to consider them in the context of the membership project. The council asked the staff to draft a letter telling the member of the council's action; the letter will also note the council's intention to forward membership proposals to the 2016 Delegate Assembly for discussion.

23. *Letter from the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages.* The council received a letter from the president of the Radical Caucus that presented a critique of the report from the Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature. The council also received the draft of a response that the staff had prepared. After asking the staff to make one revision to the draft, the council authorized the staff to send the response to the president of the Radical Caucus.

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The Center will offer a limited number of research fellowships for one or two semesters, running from September to January and from February to June. Early career scholars must have their doctoral degrees in hand at the time of the application. Fellows are expected to live in Princeton in order to take an active part in the intellectual interchange with other members of the Seminar. Funds are limited, and candidates are, therefore, strongly urged to apply to other grant-giving institutions as well as the Center if they wish to come for a full year.

To apply please link to: <http://jobs.princeton.edu>, requisition #1500396. The deadline for receipt of applications and letters of recommendation for fellowships for 2016/2017 is December 1, 2015. Please note that we will not accept faxed applications. Applicants must apply online and submit a CV, cover letter, research proposal, abstract of proposal, and contact information for three references. For further information about the Davis Center, please go to <http://www.princeton.edu/dav>. Princeton University is an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Angela N. H. Creager
Director, 2016–2020