

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

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

THE COUNCIL MET ON 27–28 FEBRUARY 2015 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Roland Greene presided. The officers present were First Vice President Kwame Anthony Appiah, Second Vice President Diana Taylor, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Samer M. Ali, Emily Apter, Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Donald E. Hall, Margaret R. Higonnet, Lanisa Kitchiner, Lutz Koepnick, Paula M. Krebs, David Palumbo-Liu, Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, and Vicky Unruh. Elizabeth Schwartz Crane was absent. 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 Information Services Micki Kaufman, 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 13 and 18, below).

On 27 February, the council first convened in regular session to begin working through its agenda. In mid-morning, the council met in executive session to review the council members' fiduciary responsibilities. Then the council reconvened in regular session to continue working through its agenda. After lunch, the council met with Shirley Ferguson Jenks and Buff Kavelman of the Jenks Group, an independent consultancy firm engaged to assist the council with the membership project that grew out of the council's strategic-planning initiatives (see item 10, below). The council then met in subcommittees to develop short lists for committee appointments. The Subcommittee on Administration and Finance (Roland Greene, chair; Gaurav Desai; Paula Krebs; David Palumbo-Liu; Tracy Sharpley-Whiting; and Mecca Sullivan) considered appointments to five MLA committees; the Subcommittee on Projects (Anthony Appiah, chair; Emily Apter; Brian Croxall; and Lanisa Kitchiner) was assigned six MLA committees; and the Subcommittee on Meetings and Publications (Diana Taylor, chair; Samer Ali; Donald Hall; Margaret Higonnet; Lutz Koepnick; and Vicky Unruh) worked on short lists for six MLA committees. Following the subcommittee meetings, the council continued working through its agenda in regular session. On 28 February, in two regular sessions, the council continued working through its agenda. The council adjourned at 12:45 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received the independent auditor's report and financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2014, which showed that the association concluded the fiscal year with a surplus of \$1,301,023 in the unrestricted fund. The surplus was added to the cash reserve, which will help cover the costs associated with the upcoming move of the MLA office, and the council voted to accept and approve the audit report and financial statements.

The council also received the Finance Committee's report, which reviewed the budget for the current fiscal year using four-month projections. Rosemary Feal noted that the projected deficit (\$562,950) was higher than had been projected in October (see May 2015 *PMLA* 898) but also called attention to the association's typical budget pattern: a projected deficit in February often becomes a year-end surplus because of savings when budgeted expenses are not incurred or are postponed to the following year. Feal explained that the increase in the deficit was due to the postponement of the release of the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook* from the summer of 2015 to the spring of 2016. Because of the complexity of the changes to be incorporated into the new edition (see May 2014 *PMLA* 584), more time was needed to solicit additional feedback from consultant readers and to arrange for user testing. Feal and staff members responded to council members' questions about the current fiscal year.

The Finance Committee's report also reviewed the schedule for the preparation of a budget for the fiscal year 2015–16. The council authorized the staff to prepare a balanced budget.

The council adopted the following resolution relating to financial management. [Note: The president certified the council's action by signing the original document containing the resolution. The document was then stamped with the association's corporate seal.]

WHEREAS, article 4, section E, of the constitution of the Modern Language Association provides as follows: "The permanent fund of the association and its other endowment funds shall be administered by a board of three trustees, each appointed by the Executive Council for a three-year term, the three terms to be staggered by one year. One of the trustees shall be designated the managing trustee"; and

WHEREAS, Malcolm Smith, Domna Stanton, and Catharine Stimpson have been appointed by the Executive Council as the three trustees with authority to administer the permanent fund of the association and its other endowment funds, and Malcolm Smith has been designated the managing trustee of this committee (the "Permanent Fund Committee");

NOW, THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED, that, upon the written direction to Rosemary G. Feal as executive director, Judy Goulding as associate executive director and director of publishing

operations, and Terrence Callaghan as director of administration and finance of any member of the Permanent Fund Committee to effect the purchase, transfer, sale, or other disposition of any security or securities held in the permanent fund or any other endowment funds, the executive director, associate executive director and director of publishing operations, and director of administration and finance be and hereby are authorized and directed to take all such steps and to execute and deliver all such documents as they shall deem necessary or appropriate to effect such purchase, transfer, sale, or other disposition; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the president of the MLA be and hereby is authorized and directed to certify this resolution to any third party requiring delivery of same in order to substantiate the proper authority for the disposition of the securities of the permanent fund or any other endowment funds.

The council authorized the following staff members to sign nonpayroll checks: Terrence Callaghan, Barbara Chen, Rosemary Feal, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Judy Goulding, David Laurence, and Dennis Looney. Two signatures are required on checks in amounts over two thousand dollars. The council also authorized Terrence Callaghan, Rosemary Feal, and Judy Goulding to sign payroll checks.

Finally, the council appointed Brian Croxall and reappointed Donald Hall to the council's Audit Committee for 2015.

2. *MLA-Sponsored International Symposium.* Roland Greene reported on the progress made by the local-arrangements committee in Düsseldorf, headed by Susan Winnett, professor of American studies at Heinrich Heine Universität, and asked the council to appoint an advisory committee that would allow the council to play a role in the planning of the symposium. He said that Marianne Hirsch, the president of the association when the symposium began to take shape (see May 2014 *PMLA* 586), had agreed to take his place in the planning effort and to cochair the proposed advisory committee with Winnett. In addition to the cochairs, Greene suggested that the council appoint Margaret Higonnet, Lutz Koepnick, Elizabeth Schwartz Crane, and Diana Taylor to the advisory committee. The council made these appointments and appropriated sixty thousand dollars to cover some symposium expenses (e.g., rental of a facility, travel subsidy for keynote speakers). Council members understood that this funding commitment would allow the local-arrangements committee to seek grant funding to cover other symposium expenses.

3. *Establishment of Working Group on K–16 Alliances.* Because the council's strategic-planning subcommittee on K–16 collaborations had identified a number of projects that required sustained oversight (see Jan. 2015 *PMLA* 174 and May 2015 *PMLA* 900), Margaret Ferguson, the chair of the subcommittee and the immediate past president of the association, asked the council to establish an ad hoc committee, the Working Group on K–16 Alliances,

that would take up the subcommittee's agenda, which includes pursuing revisions to the conceptualizations of text complexity and college readiness in the Common Core State Standards; promoting the teaching of languages other than English and the teaching of writing in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools in the United States and Canada; and establishing needed partnerships among teachers at different educational levels. The council established the working group for a term of three years, from February 2015 through February 2018, and authorized annual funding to cover the working group's travel and meeting expenses. The council made the following appointments to the working group: Barbara L. Cambridge, Natl. Council of Teachers of English; Jason Charles Courtmanche, Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs; Stacey Lee Donohue, Central Oregon Community Coll.; Margaret W. Ferguson, Univ. of California, Davis (chair); Annemarie E. Hamlin, Central Oregon Community Coll.; Margaret R. Higonnet, Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs; Michael Holquist, Yale Univ.; Paula M. Krebs, Bridgewater State Univ.; Patricia Howell Michaelson, Univ. of Texas, Dallas; Margaret A. Noodin, Univ. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Donna L. Pasternak, Univ. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Doris Sommer, Harvard Univ.

4. *Strategic-Planning Subcommittees.* The establishment of the Working Group on K–16 Alliances (see previous item) led the council to replace its strategic-planning subcommittee on K–16 collaborations with a subcommittee that will focus on how the MLA should deal with political issues in the world. The new subcommittee will also consider the association's resolution process and how to make it more useful. Several council members indicated their interest in serving on the new subcommittee; other council members' assignments to the two continuing subcommittees—on the MLA's reach and on the humanities workforce—will need to be adjusted before the subcommittees next meet.

5. *Report of the MLA Trustees.* The council received the trustees' annual report, which showed that at the end of the calendar year 2014 the association's endowment fund and four of the six donor-restricted funds that support a number of association prizes had increased in market value. The trustees conducted their annual review of the mutual funds in which the MLA had investments. They noted that, overall, the rate of return on these investments lagged behind that of the S&P 500 stock index. They also noted that the socially responsible mutual fund in the MLA's portfolio had once again outperformed most of the other investments. Since one of the funds had underperformed for the second year in a row, the trustees decided to redeem this investment and use half of the proceeds to purchase additional shares in the socially responsible mutual fund and half to purchase shares in a new mutual fund. During their review of the five smaller donor-restricted funds, the trustees confirmed the need to minimize risk for these funds by not investing them in equities. The trustees said they would continue to moni-

tor closely the performance of the MLA's investments by consulting quarterly.

The trustees reviewed the council's investment policy (see May 2014 *PMLA* 584 and Oct. 2005 *PMLA* 1674–76) and noted that the current investment allocation between fixed-income instruments (39.9%) and equities (60.1%) fell outside the parameters specified in the council's policy, despite the trustees' 2014 decision to rebalance the MLA's portfolio (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 862). However, in this era of extremely low interest rates, the trustees were not inclined to move money from equities to fixed-income instruments. Instead, they asked the council to consider a revision to its investment policy (see next item).

6. *Review and Revision of Investment Policy.* The council reviewed its statement on investment policy pursuant to a request from the MLA's trustees (see previous item). Though the investment policy gives the trustees the freedom to alter the ratio of fixed-income to equity instruments according to market conditions, it also seems to set an upper limit on equity investments by implying that investing more than 60% of the endowment in equities would be "risky." The trustees requested that the policy be changed to remove the implied ceiling on equity investments, since investing more than 60% of the endowment in equities might be advisable in certain financial conditions. They said they would continue to inform the council of the endowment's investment ratio regularly. The council revised its investment policy in accordance with the trustees' request.

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

8. *Confirmation of an Action Taken between Council Meetings.* In December, Rosemary Feal circulated to the council for approval a letter to the governor of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, urging reconsideration of an executive order that extended to department chairs and program directors the same detailed financial disclosure requirements that apply to state employees who participate in activities such as procurement, auditing, and investment. The council's procedure for making decisions between its meetings was implemented (see Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matter on its electronic discussion list. Since the council was unanimous in its approval of the letter, the council's advisory committee did not have to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed this decision.

9. *Grant Funding to Support the Development of MLA Commons and Humanities Commons.* In an update on the status of a grant application (see May 2014 *PMLA* 586), the staff reported to the council that the MLA received a National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant that has enabled the association to partner with Columbia University's Center for Digital Research and Scholarship on the development of the *Commons Open Repository Exchange (CORE)*. *CORE* will permit *MLA Commons*

users to upload and store documents, presentations, media materials, and data sets that they wish to share, as well as to discover materials shared by other members. This repository will allow the MLA to support an extensive archive of scholarly materials that can be made open to the public (with embargoes where desired). Members can link to their contributions to *CORE* on their *Commons* profile pages, thus helping to transform those profiles into rich representations of members' professional activity. The staff also reported on a new grant application to the Mellon Foundation for a pilot project to develop *Humanities Commons*, a federation of online commons operated by scholarly societies. The project calls for the MLA to work with three other humanities organizations on the establishment of their commons. The staff requested the council's authorization to continue to pursue outside funding that would defray the costs of ongoing *MLA Commons* and *Humanities Commons* development. The council gave the requested authorization.

10. *Membership Project*. The council received an initial report on the surveys done by the consultants (see second introductory paragraph, above) who were engaged in October 2014 to work on a project that aims to identify ways of building membership interest and improving membership services. Online surveys of three groups—current members, former members, and nonmembers—had been completed, and follow-up interviews by telephone were under way. The consultants reviewed preliminary findings from the surveys and asked the council to identify the issues that the council wished them to explore in more detail, using both the telephone interviews and focus groups.

11. *MLA Action for Allies*. Rosemary Feal reported to the council on *MLA Action for Allies*, an MLA effort to call attention to the situation of adjunct faculty members that was organized in response to National Adjunct Walkout Day, which took place on 25 February. MLA members were asked to sign up as allies of contingent faculty members; to respond to a questionnaire that would allow them to evaluate the working conditions of contingent faculty members in their departments; to participate in a meeting of the members of their departments where the answers to the questionnaire would be discussed and the MLA's resources for addressing academic workforce issues would be reviewed; to report to other allies and to the MLA, through an *MLA Commons* site, what their departments learned about possible steps for improving the situation of adjuncts; and to tell the MLA how it could help departments make progress on needed changes. She asked council members to become involved in *Action for Allies* on their campuses and to contribute ideas for action on the *Commons* site. Roland Greene suggested that council members encourage two or three colleagues on other campuses to sign up for the MLA's campaign. The council decided to use its two 2016 convention sessions to further the goals of *MLA Action for Allies*.

12. *Possible Modification of Convention Travel Grant Program*. Rosemary Feal reported that she had received an inquiry from a member about convention travel grants for retired faculty members. She noted that many retirees meet the income requirement for the existing travel grants for MLA members who are non-tenure-track faculty members or unemployed, since those grants are open to applicants in the three lowest dues categories (which encompass incomes under \$30,000). She therefore suggested expanding eligibility for the existing travel grants to retirees. The council's discussion of this suggestion led to an alternative proposal: expanding eligibility for these grants to all MLA members whose income places them in one of the three lowest dues categories and renaming the grant program accordingly. A question about expanding eligibility to include members in the fourth-lowest dues category (income between \$30,000 and \$40,000) was raised. The council decided to postpone its decision on modifying the grant program until May, when the staff will present a cost analysis of the different eligibility criteria.

13. *Option to Hold 2020 Convention in Vancouver*. The association's contract for the 2015 convention, in Vancouver, included an option for holding the 2020 convention there. Though 2015 convention attendees commended Vancouver as a convention location, the council decided to cancel the option for 2020 because of the low registration count in 2015, which was due primarily to costly airfares and inconvenient travel itineraries.

14. *Council Subcommittee on PMLA Editor*. Because Simon Gikandi's term as editor of *PMLA* will expire at the end of June 2016, the council established a subcommittee to oversee the process of selecting the next editor. The subcommittee will make a recommendation to the council in October 2015. Named to the subcommittee were Roland Greene, chair; Lutz Koepnick; and Vicky Unruh.

15. *Departmental Reports*. Council members had no questions on the annual reports submitted by the MLA department heads, and the council accepted the reports with thanks.

16. *Revisions to the Tool Kit on Academic Freedom*. The council received from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities the new set of revisions to the committee's *Tool Kit on Academic Freedom* that the council requested in October 2014 (see May 2015 *PMLA* 902). The council approved the revisions. [Note: The revised tool kit has been posted on the committee's page at the MLA Web site.]

17. *Request from the Committee on Information Technology (CIT)*. The CIT asked the council to approve the revised version of a committee document that the council had originally approved in October 2003. The council approved the revised document, *Statement on Electronic Publication*. [Note: The revised document has been posted on the committee's page at the MLA Web site.]

18. *Recommendation from the Program Committee*. To regularize the status of the American Literature Section (ALS) within the structure of the MLA convention,

the Program Committee recommended that the council grant allied organization status to the ALS. The council approved the committee's recommendation.

19. *Renewal of the Charge of the Committee on Community Colleges.* Anticipating that the charge of the Committee on Community Colleges would expire in June 2015, the committee's chair wrote a letter to the council outlining the committee's past work and future projects and requesting that the council renew the charge. The council approved this request and renewed the committee's charge for five years, through June 2020.

20. *Recommendation from the 2015 Delegate Assembly.* As provided by the MLA constitution (art. 7.B.2), the council considered as a recommendation one of the motions approved by the Delegate Assembly during the assembly's meeting on 10 January 2015 in Vancouver. [Note: For a full account of the Delegate Assembly meeting, including the text of the motion, see May 2015 *PMLA* 871–94.] The motion called for increasing the representation of part-time faculty members in MLA governance roles and on MLA committees. Council members agreed that they could not make decisions on the implementation of the motion until the meaning of *part-time* was clarified. The council will therefore return the motion to the 2016 Delegate Assembly with a request for clarification. In the meantime, Rosemary Feal said that the staff would look more closely at the membership data already collected to try to generate additional information on the nine percent of MLA members who teach part-time. The council asked the staff to obtain from the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession a list of part-time faculty members who might be appointed to any of the MLA's standing committees.

Because the second motion that the assembly approved initiated a constitutional amendment, it was forwarded directly from the assembly to the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution (CAC), as provided in article 13.A of the MLA constitution. The council discussed the amendment proposal—"to create a dedicated slot

on the Executive Council for a part-time faculty [member]"—and identified several issues, including the need for a definition of *part-time*. The council will share its findings with the CAC.

21. *Review of the Constitutional Amendments Approved by the 2015 Delegate Assembly.* As required by the MLA constitution (art. 13.D), the council reviewed the constitutional amendments approved by the 2015 Delegate Assembly and forwarded them to the membership for the required ratification vote. In addition, the council established the date for determining members' eligibility to participate in the ratification vote.

22. *Election of a Council Member to the DAOC.* The council elected Vicky Unruh to the DAOC for a two-year term (2015–Jan. 2017).

23. *Appointments to MLA Committees.* The council made forty-nine appointments to the standing committees of the association and appointed nine committee chairs or cochairs. The names of all new and continuing committee members will appear at the MLA Web site in July.

24. *Statement against Censorship in India.* Several MLA members requested that the council issue a statement addressing incidents of censorship in India and calling for the protection of freedom of expression. The council decided to ask the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, which had endorsed the members' request, to draft a statement for the council's consideration. The council also forwarded drafting guidelines to the committee.

25. *Statement Condemning Violence in Mexico.* Diana Taylor asked the council to consider issuing a statement condemning the violence directed against students and teachers in Mexico since September 2014. She provided background information to the council on the second day of the present meeting and responded to council members' questions. The council asked Taylor to draft a statement and to circulate it to the council through its electronic discussion list.