

# Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

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

THE COUNCIL MET ON 13–15 MAY 2015 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Roland Greene presided. The officers present were First Vice President Kwame Anthony Appiah (14–15 May only), Second Vice President Diana Taylor, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Samer M. Ali, Emily Apter (14–15 May only), Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Donald E. Hall, Margaret R. Higonnet, Lanisa Kitchiner (14–15 May only), Lutz Koepnick, Paula M. Krebs, David Palumbo-Liu, Elizabeth Schwartz Crane, Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Vicky Unruh. Mecca Jamilah Sullivan 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 Systems 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).

On 13 May, in the afternoon, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. The council's Compensation and Benefits Committee held its annual meeting at the end of the afternoon. In the morning on 14 May, the council first convened in executive session to consider a reorganization of the association's administrative structure prompted by the retirement, effective 1 September 2015, of Judy Goulding. After a break during which the council's Audit Committee met, the council convened in regular session to receive and discuss a summary report and recommendations from Shirley Ferguson Jenks and Buff Kavelman of the Jenks Group, the independent consultancy firm engaged to survey current members, former members, and nonmembers about association activities and services (see Oct. 2015 *PMLA* 1522). After lunch, meeting first in small groups and then in a regular session of the full council, the council discussed the implications of the survey results for association activities and programs and began to identify strategic-planning priorities and possible next steps (see item 4, below). On 15 May, the council reconvened in executive session to complete the previous day's discussion and to conduct the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and to the working environment at the MLA headquarters office. Following the executive session, the council convened in regular session to continue its discussion of strategic-planning priorities and to work through the remaining items on its agenda. After lunch, the council held its

final regular session. The council adjourned at 2:10 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The Finance Committee presented a midyear report on finances with a summary of association income and expenses in the fiscal year 2014–15 after seven months. The committee reviewed changes in the projections for the major revenue and expense categories and noted that the projected deficit had increased since the start of the fiscal year. Reduced revenue projections for the *MLA Handbook* and the annual convention were not completely offset by projected savings on expenses.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2015–16 that projected a deficit of \$430,050 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee projected steady income from membership and the *Bibliography* and increased revenue for the *MLA Handbook*, since a new edition was scheduled for release in spring 2016. Convention income was also projected to be higher, since Austin was expected to draw more attendees than Vancouver did. The committee also projected increases in staff costs and in travel and meeting expenses, including those associated with the new Working Group on K–16 Alliances and the international symposium to be held in Düsseldorf in June 2016. After reviewing the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2015–16, the council voted to approve it.

Pursuant to article 5.D of the MLA constitution, the council designated Kathleen Fitzpatrick to replace Judy Goulding, effective 1 September 2015, as the staff member who will assume responsibility for the administration of the association in the event of the death or the incapacity of the executive director.

Finally, the council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2014–15 accounts.

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

3. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took two actions between its February and May meetings. (1) It approved the statement condemning violence against students and teachers in Mexico that Diana Taylor had drafted at the council's request (see Oct. 2015 *PMLA* 1524). (2) It approved the statement condemning the censorship and suppression of controversial works and writers that the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities had drafted at the council's request (see Oct. 2015 *PMLA* 1524).

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.

4. *Strategic Planning for Membership Initiatives.* The council received a summary report on the survey work and follow-up telephone interviews done by the council's membership consultants and extensively discussed the findings in small groups (see second introductory paragraph, above). The discussions focused on different areas: association activities related to the job market and career development, advocacy on workforce and professional issues, membership development, the publication program, and member services. The full council, working with the small groups' reports, began to identify ways of accommodating the changing needs of members and to set priorities. The council asked the staff to develop specific goals for the council to discuss at its October 2015 meeting.

5. *Update on Connected Academics.* The council received a progress report on Connected Academics, a project, supported by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, that aims to broaden the career horizons of humanities graduate students and scholars (see May 2015 *PMLA* 898). Rosemary Feal presented the project's site on *MLA Commons*, summarized the planned activities of the three partner institutions involved in the project, and reviewed the project activities to be undertaken by the MLA, including a proseminar that will help twenty language and literature doctoral candidates and recent PhD recipients in the New York City area to explore career options at a variety of local institutions and organizations (e.g., New York Public Library, American Council of Learned Societies), sessions at the MLA convention in Austin and other conferences, and expansion of the *Commons* site. Feal said that the project coordinator would join the MLA staff over the summer and would work with the staff members who are assisting with the project.

6. *MLA Action for Allies.* Several council members reported on the actions they had undertaken or planned to undertake on their campuses in support of the goals of *MLA Action for Allies*, a project that the council had discussed at its February 2015 meeting (see Oct. 2015 *PMLA* 1522). The council reviewed a list of ideas for action compiled by the staff and identified items to be added to the list. Rosemary Feal said that a new site on *MLA Commons* was being developed so that participants in the project could report throughout the upcoming academic year on the actions they pursued on their campuses. Those who had signed up as project participants would be encouraged to select an activity from the list and report the results on the *Commons*. The items previously posted on the *Commons* (e.g., a questionnaire that allows departments to evaluate the working conditions of their contingent faculty members, a list of the resources the MLA provides for addressing academic workforce issues) would be reposted on the new site.

7. *Possible Modification of Convention Travel Grant Program.* The council received the report it requested in

February on the costs associated with expanding eligibility for the association's travel grant program for MLA members who are non-tenure-track faculty members or are unemployed (see Oct. 2015 *PMLA* 1522). The council decided to postpone action on modifying the grant program until the council has the opportunity to discuss the changes in relation to other possible changes to the convention identified through the council's strategic planning.

8. *Policy on Reporting Vote Tallies to Candidates.* In 1991, the Executive Council, acting on a recommendation from the Elections Committee, established a policy on reporting election results, including vote tallies, to candidates and other interested members (see May 1991 *PMLA* 578). The policy was devised with two-person contests for Delegate Assembly and executive committee seats in mind. Staff experience with requests for vote tallies after the 2014 elections for second vice president and the Executive Council showed that the policy does not work well for elections involving more than two candidates. The council was therefore asked to consider modifying the 1991 policy. The council discussed several options for reporting the results of the second-vice-president and council elections to candidates but postponed action on modifying the existing policy until the council's October meeting.

9. *Revision to Learning Another Language: Goals and Challenges.* The third paragraph of *Learning Another Language: Goals and Challenges*, a statement that the council approved in April 2011, contains a reference to the report on the MLA's survey of fall 2009 language enrollments. Because the report on the survey of fall 2013 language enrollments was published in February 2015, the staff asked the council to update the statement to include a reference to the new report. The council decided to substitute the following sentence for the original: "In 2015, the MLA issued a survey report on language enrollments, documenting trends in student enrollments in college language courses and testifying to strong interest in language study in the United States."

10. *Revision to MLA Social Media Guidelines.* The social media guidelines for the officers, council members, and committee members that the council adopted in February 2014 (see Oct. 2014 *PMLA* 862) include a section entitled "Tips for Community Building through *MLA Commons*." Since this section needs to be updated regularly and contains no guidelines on the use of social media, the

staff asked the council for authorization to remove the section from the guidelines and to develop it as a separate document for the use of all committees that have groups on the *Commons*. The council gave the requested authorization.

11. *Simultaneous Submissions for Prize Competitions.* In October 2014, the council requested advice from the Committee on Honors and Awards on the question of allowing a book to compete simultaneously for one of the association's major prizes—the James Russell Lowell Prize or the MLA Prize for a First Book—and one of the more specialized prizes (see May 2015 *PMLA* 900). At the present meeting, the council received the committee's recommendation, which was to allow simultaneous submissions for a trial period of two years, after which the committee would assess the effects of the new policy on the selection committees for the Lowell and first-book prizes and report to the council. The committee noted that under this policy a single book could win two prizes. The council agreed to allow simultaneous submissions for a two-year trial period but did not wish to allow a single book to win two prizes. The council therefore asked the staff to issue instructions to the selection committees for the specialized prizes to ensure that their deliberations on simultaneously submitted books reach successful conclusions.

12. *Recommendation of an Honorary Fellow.* The Committee on Honors and Awards forwarded to the council a proposal pertaining to the nomination of an honorary fellow. Because the proposal did not provide enough information, the council declined to make the proposed nomination. The council will clarify the submission requirements for proposals of honorary fellows.

13. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received two recommendations from the Program Committee: that the forum TC Science and Technology Studies be renamed TC Science and Literature and that a new forum, TC Technology Studies, be added to the list of preapproved forums. The council approved both recommendations.

14. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2018: 23–24 February, 17–18 May, and 26–27 October.

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