

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2017 meeting.]

The council met on 28–29 October 2016 at the MLA office in New York. President Kwame Anthony Appiah presided. The officers present were First Vice President Diana Taylor, Second Vice President Anne Ruggles Gere, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Emily Apter, Angelika Bammer, Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Donald E. Hall, Lenora Hanson, Margaret R. Higonnet, Paula M. Krebs, David Palumbo-Liu, David Tse-chien Pan, Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Elizabeth Schwartz Crane, Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Vicky Unruh. 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, Associate Executive Director and Director of Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, Director of Outreach Siovahn Walker, 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); Head of Convention Programs Karin L. Bagnall was present for discussions of MLA meeting–related business (see items 15 and 16, below).

In the morning on 28 October, the council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 26–27 October to review assembly and other association business. Margaret Noodin, the chair of the DAOC, began the committee's report to the council by addressing the resolutions that had been submitted for consideration by the 2017 Delegate Assembly. The subject of two of the three submitted resolutions was an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions, and the committee judged the two resolutions to be in conflict. She reported that the committee had developed a procedure for the consideration of the conflicting resolutions and that the assembly would be asked to adopt an additional set of rules governing its debate of the resolutions. She also commented on the suggestions for revision that the DAOC had agreed to pass along to the three resolutions' proposers. Because the resolution debate was expected to be lengthy, the DAOC had decided not to include an open discussion on the assembly's 2017 agenda but had identified several possible topics for future open discussions (e.g., the job search process, diversity, trigger warnings, the future of the field). Noodin also reported on the committee's plans for conducting the town hall meeting that was scheduled before the assembly meeting and that would allow MLA members to discuss whether the MLA should take a position on the boycott question raised in the resolutions. She noted that provisions had been made to allow

online participation in the town hall by MLA members who could not attend the meeting. Noodin then summarized the DAOC's other business and concluded the committee's report by announcing that Shaden M. Tageldin had been elected chair of the DAOC for the term 9 January 2017 through 7 January 2018. The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their work and their careful attention to questions of process. He also noted that Jeanette N. Williams would soon conclude her nine-year tenure as the MLA's parliamentarian, and he thanked her for her expert guidance, patience, and diligence and for using her service as an opportunity to educate him and all those she worked with about the best ways to conduct the association's business. In addition to the DAOC chair, the members of the committee who participated in the joint meeting were Cheryl Narumi Naruse, Susan Solomon, Tageldin, and Heather Willis Allen.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council convened in regular session to discuss with the association's attorney the legal aspects of endorsing or engaging in an academic boycott. The consultation with the attorney focused on the resolutions that the 2017 Delegate Assembly would consider (see item 7, below). After this consultation, still in regular session until lunch, the council began working through its agenda. After lunch, an executive session was followed by two regular sessions during which the council continued to work through its agenda. In the morning on 29 October, a brief executive session was followed by a regular session for further discussion of and action on agenda items. At the end of the morning, the four groups of council members that had met in May to develop projects in support of different strategic-plan initiatives (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 1, Jan. 2017, p. 206) once again held separate meetings to review the status of their projects. After these meetings, the council reconvened in regular session to hear reports from the four groups' chairs and to complete work on the action items on 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 staff Finance Committee reported to the council that an annual audit of the MLA's 403(b) retirement plan at TIAA is now required because the plan has more than one hundred active participants. The committee therefore presented to the council the independent auditor's report on the retirement plan for the 2015 plan year and the auditor's letter to management. The committee noted that it had addressed the two items that the auditor asked management to consider—documenting the association's review of TIAA's Service Organization Controls report and timely deposits of employees' contributions to their accounts.

The Finance Committee presented to the council four recommendations on budgeting practices, all made on the basis of two main factors: the MLA's reserve

funds amounted to nearly \$15 million, which is much more than prudent practice requires, and all expenses associated with the move of the MLA office had been taken care of. The first recommendation was to remove the contingency allowance from the budget. Rosemary Feal explained that the lack of an operating reserve had prompted the council in 1980 to add a contingency allowance to the budget and that the association's now sizable reserves obviated the need for the allowance. The council authorized the staff to remove the contingency allowance from the budget for the 2016–17 fiscal year and said it would consider the question of including a contingency allowance annually, with the tentative budget for each new fiscal year. The second recommendation was to transfer \$3.5 million from the cash reserve to the MLA endowment, where the money would earn more than it would in the cash reserve. Feal said that the trustees' conservative management practices would lead them to add investments in equities gradually and in accordance with the council's investment policy, which recognizes different potential uses for the endowment that call for different investment strategies but which encourages the trustees to be guided by market conditions when determining the percentage of the endowment fund's assets to be invested in fixed-income and equity instruments and thus the level of risk involved. The council voted to approve the transfer. The third recommendation was for an annual drawdown of 2.5% of the three-year rolling average balance of the MLA endowment beginning in 2017–18. Feal explained that money was needed for the development projects now under way and that the endowment was large enough to allow such a drawdown, especially given the addition to the endowment just approved. The council approved the annual drawdown provided that the amount in the endowment remains at or above \$4 million. The final recommendation was for the transfer of \$300,000 from the cash reserve to the unrestricted operating budget. Feal noted that this transfer would keep the projected deficit within a reasonable range and that, after the transfer, the size of the cash reserve would still be in keeping with prudent practice. The council voted to approve the transfer.

The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2015–16) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2016–17). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2015–16 fiscal year with a deficit of \$450,880 in the association's unrestricted and restricted funds. Feal explained that revenue for the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, the *Job Information List*, and membership dues fell short of budget projections and that these revenue shortfalls had not been offset by savings on expenses. She elaborated on the reasons for the shortfall in handbook revenue: slow sales of the eighth edition, due in part to changes in the way that books are now distributed, and immediate returns of the seventh edition. Since

the seventh edition cost more than the eighth, the cost of the returns outpaced the income from sales. The staff expected the balance of returns and sales to shift upon the 31 October deadline for returns of the seventh edition and an increase in the price of the eighth edition. Going forward, handbook revenue would be enhanced by the development of new MLA style products.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2016–17, which no longer included a contingency allowance, showed the \$300,000 transfer from the cash reserve, and projected a deficit of \$469,870 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that the deficit was due to the continuation of a number of development projects that serve mission-driven, revenue-producing programs, primarily a modern electronic platform for the *MLA International Bibliography*, the costs of which would not fully be offset by the projected increase in revenue. The council voted to approve the final budget for the fiscal year 2016–17.

2. *Approval of Charter Amendment.* The MLA's charter does not include language on dissolution. Without such language, the staff had been unable to register the association as a tax-exempt organization in the state of Pennsylvania for the purpose of doing business there. The staff therefore consulted with the association's attorneys about a charter amendment. The attorneys recommended incorporating into the charter the dissolution language found in article 14 of the MLA constitution and also taking the opportunity to build in language that is generally used in the charters of 501(c)(3) organizations. The council was asked to approve a resolution authorizing the amendment of the MLA's charter, to approve the amended and restated charter, and to authorize the filing of the charter amendment. The council gave the requested approvals and authorization.

3. *Approval of Guidelines for Council Discussions.* The council approved a set of guidelines designed to foster productive, thorough, and collegial discussions. They have been posted in the council's online document area.

4. *Approval of Revised PMLA Submission Guidelines.* The *PMLA* Editorial Board proposed that the journal's submission guidelines be revised to identify criteria that submissions must meet to be eligible for peer review. The board also proposed to reorganize the guidelines to make them easier to read. The board submitted to the council a document that incorporated the proposed revisions; the council approved the document.

5. *Approval of the May 2016 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2016 meeting for publication in the January 2017 issue of *PMLA*.

6. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took three actions between its May and October meetings. (1) In May, the council approved a statement on discrimination against transgender individuals (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 1, Jan. 2017, p. 210). (2) Also in May, the council approved a replacement appointment to the Publications Committee. (3) In July, the council agreed to sign on to a statement about the situation of Turkish academics and universities prepared by the Middle East Studies Association. When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 4, p. 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.

7. *Discussion of Legal and Fiduciary Issues Posed by Resolutions.* The MLA's attorney reviewed with the council the legal implications of submitting to the membership the three resolutions that had been proposed for consideration. Discussion focused on ways to minimize any potential liability as well as the fiduciary duty of the members of the council to minimize risk and support the mission of the association.

8. *Proposals Relating to the MLA's Dues Structure.* The staff Finance Committee presented to the council three proposals relating to the association's dues structure and asked the council to forward the proposals, as presented or with modifications, to the Delegate Assembly, which is charged by the MLA constitution (art. 9.C.5) with determining the association's dues structure. The first proposal was to revise the dues categories for regular members by (1) adding a new dues category for members who are employed less than full-time; (2) replacing the three lowest dues categories in the current structure (Under \$15,000; \$15,000–\$20,000; and \$20,000–\$30,000) with a single category (Up to \$30,000); (3) reducing the remaining fourteen categories to eight, with increased income limits for the two highest income categories; and (4) increasing slightly the dues amount for joint secondary members. The proposal also included a slight increase in the dues amount for student members. The following chart summarizes the proposed revisions to the dues categories.

Current Dues Schedule		Proposed Dues Schedule	
Dues Class	Amount	Dues Class	Amount
1 Under \$15,000	\$28	B Employed Less Than Full-Time	\$25
2 \$15,000–\$20,000	\$46	1 Up to \$30,000	\$50
3 \$20,000–\$30,000	\$56	2 \$30,000–\$50,000	\$80
4 \$30,000–\$40,000	\$79	3 \$50,000–\$70,000	\$120
5 \$40,000–\$50,000	\$94	4 \$70,000–\$100,000	\$160
6 \$50,000–\$60,000	\$112	5 \$100,000–\$140,000	\$200
7 \$60,000–\$70,000	\$130	6 \$140,000–\$180,000	\$250
8 \$70,000–\$80,000	\$145	7 \$180,000–\$220,000	\$300
9 \$80,000–\$100,000	\$163	8 Over \$220,000	\$350
R \$100,000–\$120,000	\$187	L Joint Secondary	\$50
T \$120,000–\$140,000	\$210	E Student	\$25
V \$140,000–\$160,000	\$232		
W \$160,000–\$180,000	\$260		
X \$180,000–\$200,000	\$289		
Z Over \$200,000	\$317		
L Joint Secondary	\$46		
E Student	\$23		

The Finance Committee's second proposal was to establish a multiyear membership option under which regular members paying their dues for the current year would be able to pay in advance for up to two additional years. The third proposal was to institute an automatic annual increase of 2.5% in the dues amount for every membership category, rounded to the next dollar, an increase that would be subject to confirmation by the Delegate Assembly at its meeting each January.

Given the assembly's constitutional responsibility for determining the association's dues structure, the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC) had considered the proposals during its meeting (see the second introductory paragraph, above). The DAOC endorsed the three proposals and was prepared to recommend them to the 2017 assembly. The council agreed to forward the three proposals to the 2017 assembly for consideration as a joint recommendation from the council and the DAOC.

9. *Proposal for New Convention Session Formats.* The strategic plan that the council approved in October 2015 charged the Program Committee with exploring new formats for convention sessions. The committee undertook this exploration at its May 2016 meeting and forwarded to the council its proposals for the following new or revised session formats: working groups, poster sessions, roundtables, and workshops. Working groups will address specialized topics over several sessions during a single convention. They will replace the three-year seminars that were proposed as part of the reorganization of divisions and discussion into forums. MLA members, not forums or other entities, will be able to organize working groups. The steps involved include a call for participa-

tion, selection of a group of eight to twelve participants, and submission of a proposal to the Program Committee. Poster sessions will accommodate large-scale presentations of projects that may or may not be digital. They are intended to supplement electronic roundtables, which function as small-scale digital poster sessions. Individual members may submit proposals to the Program Committee for posters or project demonstrations highlighting work that may be pedagogical, institutional, or research-oriented; presenters will be available during the poster session to discuss the projects with attendees. The current roundtable format, which organizers normally use to gather many short formal presentations, will be revised to emphasize a new focus on open discussions of broad scholarly or professional questions and on sustained engagement between panelists and attendees. The current workshop format, which has provided convention attendees at various career stages with opportunities for career development, will be expanded through two new scheduling options: holding workshops during more convention time slots and offering particular workshops twice during the convention. These options will enable more attendees to participate.

The council made no changes to the committee's proposals and agreed to forward them to the 2017 Delegate Assembly for comment. The council also approved the session formats for implementation immediately after the assembly meeting, provided that the assembly saw no problems. [Note: No concerns were raised during the assembly's consideration of the committee's proposals (see p. 764 in this issue), so the new and revised session formats were introduced for the January 2018 convention.]

10. *Ad Hoc Committee on Advocacy Policies and Procedures.* As called for in the association's strategic plan, the council established an ad hoc committee on advocacy policies and procedures, whose task is to clarify and refine the procedures through which the association speaks out publicly on issues, reviewing current practices, including the resolution process, and making recommendations for change in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness. The ad hoc committee will study the procedures that other scholarly organizations use and also consult with the association's communications adviser in developing best practices for public advocacy. The committee is expected to report to the council in October 2018. The president outlined for the council the kinds of representation that were needed for the committee to accomplish its task and presented a list of potential committee appointees. The council gave the president the authority to appoint a seven-member committee. The committee members are Samer Mahdy Ali, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Michael Bérubé, Penn State Univ., University Park (chair); Debra Ann Castillo, Cornell Univ.; Gaurav G. Desai, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Teresa Mangum, Univ. of Iowa; Deborah McDowell, Univ. of Virginia; and Margaret A. Noodin, Univ. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

11. *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 (CSWP), 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, and Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks. The report from the Advisory Committee on the *MLA International Bibliography* prompted a council member to ask whether the committee considered business matters in the context of its charge to examine and assess the bibliography's direction and philosophy. Barbara Chen will prepare a report on business matters to the council in February 2017. The council adviser to the CSWP commented on that committee's discussion of how to assess its ongoing mission in the context of its upcoming fiftieth anniversary; she noted that there is cause for celebration but that sobering gender issues remain.

12. *Appointment of Council Advisers to Two Professional-Issues Committees.* The council made two appointments to complete the roster of council advisers initiated at the previous council meeting (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 1, Jan. 2017, p. 210). In February each year, the council will name a new adviser for each committee whose current adviser has rotated off the council.

13. *Review of Standing Committees.* At its previous meeting, the council decided to undertake a review of the association's standing committees. To help the council plan for the committee review, the staff presented for the council's consideration a document that outlined possible goals for the review and options for change. After discussing the document, the council decided that its next step was to work up a proposal for a review process and to identify the information needed for the review. Anne Gere, Elizabeth Schwartz Crane, and Brian Croxall volunteered to work on this next step.

14. *Requests from the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR).* CAFPRR requested that the council approve a revision to section V.1 of its Guidelines for Search Committees and Job Seekers on Entry-Level Faculty Recruitment and Hiring. The council approved the revision; the section now reads: "Screening interviews may take place either through videoconferencing or at professional meetings such as the MLA convention, and all candidates for a position should have the same conditions for the screening interview (see Suggestions for Interviews Using Videoconferencing and the Telephone). Candidates who interview remotely must not be held at a disadvantage." CAFPRR also requested that the council approve two revisions to the committee's charge; the council did so. The council also approved a regularization of the verb tenses in the charge, which the staff proposed in anticipation of posting the full charge on the committee's Web page. The committee's revised charge reads as follows:

The Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities will address the general conditions of MLA members' professional lives as teachers and scholars, whether in universities, colleges, or schools, or as independent scholars. The committee is concerned with the rights and responsibilities of scholars and teachers in all MLA fields, specifically the right of academic freedom and the responsibility of ethical conduct toward colleagues, students, and institutions. This includes the right and responsibility to understand and participate in institutional governance, planning, budgeting, and resource oversight. The committee will monitor activities connected with the recruitment and promotion of faculty members, especially the Job Information Center at the association's annual convention, and receives comments and recommends actions to ensure fairness. In addition, the committee will consider the relations among research, teaching, service, and professional advancement. Specific professional concerns include transparency in the funding of research and teaching, the use and abuse of adjunct instructors, and the recruitment of minorities into the profession. The committee will develop strategies for dealing with bigotry and prejudice on campus and with inappropriate invocations of academic freedom whose effect is restrictive or retaliatory. These concerns engage questions of philosophy, methodology, and politics in the teaching of all fields encompassed by

the MLA. The committee is charged with initiating relevant projects and publications but is not empowered to hear individual grievances.

15. *Proposal for International Symposium Series.* The staff presented a report on the association's first international symposium—Other Europes: Migrations, Translations, Transformation—held in Düsseldorf on 23–25 June 2016. The symposium featured a wide variety of sessions that examined how European identities have been conceived in the past and present, how European literature has been produced and circulated over time, and how large-scale immigration to and mobility within Europe (as well as the post-1989 redrawing of the European map) have changed these practices. It attracted 314 registered attendees from 36 countries; 47% of attendees came from the United States and Canada, and 44% from Europe. The program included 68 sessions with approximately 227 participants from over 185 universities and colleges. The symposium exceeded the organizers' targets for registrants, sessions, and income and was very well received by attendees. The staff recommended that the council initiate a series of international symposiums that would be held every two years beginning in 2019 and that would be organized on a slightly larger scale than the Düsseldorf symposium. The council decided that it was too soon to commit to a biennial series but did agree to hold a second international symposium in 2019.

16. *Selection of a Site for the 2021 Annual Convention.* The council selected Toronto as the site of the January 2021 MLA convention.

17. *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 twenty-five societies: American Association of Australian Literary Studies, American Association of University Supervisors and Coordinators, Conference on College Composition and Communication, D. H. Lawrence Society of North America, Emily Dickinson International Society, G. E. Lessing Society, International Association of Galdós Scholars, International Brecht Society, International Courtly Literature Society, International Vladimir Nabokov Society, Keats-Shelley Association of America, Lyrica Society for Word-Music Relations, Marlowe Society of America, Marxist Literary Group, Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society, MELUS: The Society for the Study of

the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, Melville Society, Milton Society of America, Modern Greek Studies Association, National Council of Teachers of English, Poe Studies Association, Society for the Study of Early Modern Women, Western Literature Association, William Faulkner Society, and William Morris Society. The council agreed to postpone for one year the review of the Harold Pinter Society. The council did not approve a petition for allied organization status submitted by organizers of the Blake Association of America. The association is not eligible for allied status because it has not yet been officially founded.

The council also received and approved the Program Committee's recommendation to establish a new convention forum—Caribbean in the category Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies. The new forum will organize its first session for the 2018 convention.

Finally, the Program Committee recommended updating association policies relating to the waiver of the MLA membership requirement for participation in the annual convention and to the funding available to waived nonmembers. The updates would specify the eligibility criteria for membership waivers and funding and establish firm deadlines for the following: waiver requests from session organizers, travel funding requests from waived nonmembers, and the payment of the convention registration fee by waived nonmembers. The council approved the committee's recommendations; the updated policies will take effect for the 2018 convention.

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

19. *Membership in the American Council on Education (ACE).* Noting that the interests of the MLA and the ACE have diverged in recent years, the council decided to withdraw from membership in the ACE.

20. *Cosponsorship of the 2018 Community College Language Forum.* The staff reported that the MLA and the ADFL had been invited by the Center for Integrated Language Communities (CILC) and the City University of New York (CUNY) to cosponsor the 2018 Community College Language Forum, a national conference to be held at CUNY's Borough of Manhattan Community College. To cosponsor the forum, the MLA was asked to grant permission to the CILC and CUNY to use the MLA logo in their publicity for the forum. The council agreed to cosponsor the forum on this basis.