

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

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

The council met on 19 May 2017 at the MLA office and on 20 May 2017 at the Downtown Conference Center in New York. President Diana Taylor presided. The officers present were First Vice President Anne Ruggles Gere, Second Vice President Simon E. Gikandi, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Emily Apter (20 May only), Angelika Bammer, Brian Croxall, Gaurav G. Desai, Lenora Hanson, Eric Hayot, Margaret R. Higonnet, David Palumbo-Liu, Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Evie Shockley, Vicky Unruh, and Dana A. Williams. David Tse-chien Pan and Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting were absent. The MLA staff members present on both days were Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, and Director of Outreach Siovahn Walker. The staff members present on 19 May 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, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses. Controller Arlene Barnard was present on 19 May for discussions of the MLA budget (see item 1, below).

In the morning on 19 May, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. After lunch, a regular session was followed by an executive session during which the council conducted the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and to the working environment at the MLA headquarters office. In midafternoon, the council reconvened in regular session to continue working on its agenda. At the end of the afternoon, the council once again convened in executive session. In the morning on 20 May, the council held two regular sessions and one executive session before holding breakout group meetings to pursue discussions of the projects the council had developed to support different strategic-plan initiatives (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 1, Jan. 2017, p. 206). After lunch, the council convened in regular session to hear reports from the breakout groups' chairs and to complete work on the action items on its agenda and then held a final executive session. The council adjourned at 3:00 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 2016–17 after six 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. Council members expressed concern about the possibility of running a deficit for the second year in a row. Rosemary Feal did not discount that possibility but reminded the council of the association's typical budget pattern—a projected deficit often becomes a year-end surplus, because sales revenue for the bibliography is not recorded until the final months of the fiscal year and because of potential savings on the expense side of the budget. She said that the staff would monitor all budget projections and keep the council informed of any changes over the summer.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2017–18 that projected a deficit of \$682,900 in the association's unrestricted fund. Though overall revenue was projected to increase slightly, the committee anticipated that expenses would also be higher, in part because of the investments in the association's technological infrastructure. After reviewing the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2017–18, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2016–17 accounts.

2. *Approval of the February 2017 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2017 meeting for publication in the October 2017 issue of *PMLA*.

3. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took five actions between its February and May meetings. (1) It approved a council statement on the resolution process. (2) It signed on to a letter from past presidents of the MLA to Congress that called for the restoration of full funding to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. (3) It signed on to a letter from a group of library and higher education organizations that urged the chair of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to take the group's Net Neutrality Principles into consideration during a proposed review of the FCC's 2015 Open Internet Order. (4) It signed on to an amicus brief that was prepared for a court challenge to President Trump's second executive order on immigration. (5) It approved the sending of a letter to administrators at Stony Brook University, State University of New York, expressing concern about proposed cuts to several of the university's humanities programs.

When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 4, Oct. 2010, 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, the council's advisory committee did not have to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these decisions.

4. *Executive Director Emerita.* In recognition of her tireless leadership of the association and passionate advocacy for the humanities, the council voted unanimously to give the title of executive director emerita to Rosemary G. Feal.

5. *Message Concerning Resolution 2017-1.* Council members were concerned that e-mail messages sent by MLA members to other MLA members to get out the vote on the ratification of Resolution 2017-1 (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 3, May 2017, p. 754) were being construed as coming directly from the MLA or the council itself. The council therefore drafted a message to the membership to make it clear that the council was not responsible for any of the messages that were circulating among members and that the council had taken no position on the resolution, as previously noted in the council's March 2017 statement on the resolution process (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 5, Oct. 2017, pp. 1280–82). The council's message was sent to the membership at the end of the day on 19 May.

6. *Organizing a March for the Arts and Humanities.* The council decided to explore the possibility of holding a march during the New York convention to promote the humanities and established a steering committee to work on the project.

7. *Modifications to the Strategic Plan.* The staff presented a progress report on the implementation of the strategic plan that called attention to plan initiatives that might be marked complete, revised, or set aside. A completed initiative was one where the work involved had been carried out and had become a regular part of the office workflow. Proposed revisions included consolidation of two initiatives into one, division of an initiative into different stages, redefinition, and expansion or narrowing of focus. It was suggested that one initiative be set aside because it was too costly and did not promise significant benefits for members or their departments. After reviewing the report, the council approved the adjustments requested by the staff.

8. *Report from Council Subcommittee on the Composition of the Council.* The council received a report with recommendations for constitutional changes from the subcommittee established in February to review the categories of representation on the council (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 5, Oct. 2017, p. 1274). The council's discussion of the report touched on the following topics: how a reconfiguration of the council might tie in with efforts to recruit new members; the need for the council to be more broadly representative in terms of fields of study, employment categories, types of institution, and categories like race and ethnicity; whether to pursue a proposal for a council-appointed member; how to address the need for specific types of expertise (e.g., through the use of consultants); and the continued relevance of representation for different membership categories (i.e., student members, regular members, and life members). At the conclusion of the discussion, the council asked the subcommittee to revise its recommendations on the basis of council members' comments and suggestions.

9. *Review of PMLA Structure.* A council subcommittee that had, in 2007–08, taken up several questions relating to *PMLA* (see *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 3, May 2008, pp. 826–28, and *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 3, May 2009, pp. 998–1000) had

recommended that the council periodically initiate a review of the journal's structure that addressed the question of whether the journal's special features continued to fulfill their purpose. Given rising printing and mailing costs and the richness of the association's digital platforms, the staff suggested that it would be appropriate to establish a new council subcommittee to revisit the questions explored in 2007–08 and to consider whether changes in the journal's structure might be advisable. The council established the subcommittee and appointed its members (Simon Gikandi, chair; Eric Hayot; Evie Shockley; Vicky Unruh).

10. *Possible Sites for Future International Symposia.* Pursuant to the council's October 2016 decision to hold a second international symposium in 2019 (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 3, May 2017, p. 745), the staff posted on *MLA Commons* a call for letters of interest from potential hosts. The staff reviewed the responses received on the basis of the following criteria: potential interest in the location, including the cultural opportunities and quality of intellectual collaboration; transportation, taking into account costs (both to the city and within the city) and frequency of flights; visa requirements and safety; and the cost and availability of appropriate space, audiovisual equipment, and Internet access in possible meeting venues. This review produced a list of six possible host cities. The staff proposed to do more research on these cities and to ask the potential hosts about their willingness to be considered for a 2021 symposium in addition to the 2019 symposium. The council also asked the staff for information on the cost of certain services (e.g., translation). All the data gathered will be presented to the council in October, at which time the council plans to select sites for the two symposia.

11. *Review of Standing Committees.* The council received the information it had requested in February on the association's standing committees (see *PMLA*, vol. 132, no. 5, Oct. 2017, p. 1276). In addition, the council received a staff report, with recommendations, on the committees that deal with the association's publications (see next item). Council members met in three groups to consider the information on different sets of professional-issues committees. Reports from the three groups were given when the full council reconvened, and the subsequent discussion focused on ways to maximize the committees' effectiveness and bring down meeting costs. Council members explored the following topics: the advantages and disadvantages of holding committee meetings at the MLA office in New York and during the annual convention, the need to identify projects for committees to pursue, holding only project-based committee meetings, the viability of an ad hoc committee model, revising committee charges to clarify the work that is expected, strengthening the role of council advisers, and the need for feedback from the council on annual committee reports. At the conclusion of the discussion, the council decided to change the schedule for committee reports. Starting in 2018, committees will be asked to submit their reports in April for review by the council at its May meeting. The committees

would then be able to consider the council's comments in the fall, at the start of the following committee year. Though council members agreed that the Committee on Scholarly Editions could carry out its charge if it met at the convention, as had been suggested in the staff report on the publications committees, questions remained about the logic and advisability of making this change for only one committee. These questions and the other ideas that the council discussed were referred back to the council's subcommittee (Anne Gere, chair; Angelika Bammer; Brian Croxall; David Palumbo-Liu), which was asked to submit specific proposals and options to the council in October.

12. *Working Group on the Future of the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare.* In the report on the association's publications committees, the staff, responding to concerns that the council had expressed about the sustainability of the variorum project, noted that the Committee on the New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare would benefit from an independent study of a number of pressing problems affecting the edition. The staff therefore recommended the creation of a working group charged with helping to ensure the future of the variorum project by establishing partnerships and collaborations and finding funding sources, by identifying new uses of data and appropriate editorial environments, and by revising the *Shakespeare Variorum Handbook* in the light of current technologies. The council established a four-member working group (Matt Cohen, Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln; Julia H. Flanders, Northeastern Univ.; Alan Galey, Univ. of Toronto; Valerie Wayne, Univ. of Hawai'i, Mānoa) for the term 2017–19.

13. *MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement.* The council selected Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, University Professor and a founding member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University, as the eighth recipient of the association's Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement. The award will be conferred during the 2018 annual convention in New York.

14. *Request from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA).* After considering a question from the CHA about the committee's role in the selection process for the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement, the council decided to change the process it had established at the May 2008 council meeting (see *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 1, Jan. 2009, p. 302). Going forward, the council will appoint the members of the MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Review Committee. The council also charged the review committee with soliciting from members or generating on its own the names of award candidates, developing dossiers for three to five candidates, and submitting the dossiers, either ranked or unranked, to the council for consideration every third year.

15. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council approved the following dates for its meetings in 2020: 28–29 February, 14–15 May, and 30–31 October.

16. *Committee Appointments.* The council made two committee appointments. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear on the MLA Web site.