

Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its May 2018 meeting.]

THE COUNCIL MET ON 23–24 FEBRUARY 2018 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. President Anne Ruggles Gere presided. The officers present were First Vice President Simon E. Gikandi, Second Vice President Judith Butler (by telephone), and Executive Director Paula M. Krebs. The Executive Council members present were Emily Apter, Angelika Bammer, Eric Hayot, Jean Elizabeth Howard, Elizabeth Mathews Losh, David Tse-chien Pan, Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza, Leah Richards, Ramon Saldivar, Evie Shockley, Vicky Unruh, and Dana A. Williams. Amanda Licastro was absent. The MLA staff members present were Director of Administration and Finance Terrence Callaghan, Director of Scholarly Communication Angela Gibson, Director of Research David Laurence, Director of Programs and ADFL Dennis Looney, Director of Outreach Siovah 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).

On 23 February, the council first convened in executive session to review the council members' fiduciary responsibilities. Then the council convened in regular session to begin working through its agenda. After lunch, the council met in subcommittees to develop short lists for committee appointments. The Subcommittee on Administration and Finance (Anne Gere, chair; Emily Apter; Eric Hayot; Ramon Saldivar) considered appointments to six MLA committees; the Subcommittee on Projects (Simon Gikandi, chair; Angelika Bammer; David Pan; Leah Richards; Evie Shockley) was assigned six MLA committees; and the Subcommittee on Meetings and Publications (Dana Williams, chair; Jean Howard; Elizabeth Losh; Rafael Ramirez Mendoza; Vicky Unruh) worked on short lists for five MLA committees. Following the subcommittee meetings, the council reconvened in regular session to continue working through its agenda. On 24 February, the council held two morning regular sessions and adjourned at 11:30 a.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 2017, which showed that the association concluded the fiscal year with a deficit of \$358,244 in the unrestricted fund. The members of the council's Finance and Audit Committee had met with representatives of the independent auditor, EisnerAmper LLP, before the council meeting; they recommended that the council accept and approve the audit report and financial statements. The council did so.

The council also received the Finance Committee's report, which reviewed the budget for the current fiscal year using four-month projections. The committee noted that the projected deficit (\$374,980) had increased since October 2017, primarily because of the shortfall in convention revenue caused by the snowstorm that greatly hindered travel to the convention.

The Finance Committee's report also reviewed the schedule for the preparation of a budget for the fiscal year 2018–19. The council authorized the staff to prepare a balanced budget.

Finally, the council reappointed Eric Hayot and David Pan to the council's Finance and Audit Committee for 2018.

2. *Council Statement.* The council decided to draft a statement to correct misunderstandings about the status of Resolution 2017-1, which called on the MLA to "refrain from endorsing the boycott" of Israeli academic institutions promoted by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. The council worked on the statement during the meeting and completed it soon afterward using its electronic discussion list. The statement was copyedited and posted on the council's *MLA Commons* blog on 14 March. The statement appears below.

In the context of recent debates among MLA members about deeply held political convictions, the Executive Council of the MLA—the elected body charged with fiduciary and administrative responsibility for the association—reaffirms the principle that the MLA has the right and the obligation to engage in full and open debate on issues of shared public concern. In the spirit of that commitment, the council wishes to clarify that resolutions passed by the membership constitute expressions of sentiment and are nonbinding for the organization. Resolution 2017-1 calls on the MLA to refrain from endorsing a boycott, but that resolution is not a motion, which would determine policy. Resolution 2017-1 in no way precludes the possibility of a new resolution with another expressive aim and in no way limits debate or a vote on this matter in the future.

3. *Revision of the MLA Dues Schedule.* The Executive Council confirmed the action taken by the 2018 Delegate Assembly to revise the dues schedule of the association (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 3, May 2018, pp. 758). The following table shows the new dues schedule, which will go into effect in September 2018.

4. *Trustee Appointment.* The council appointed William H. Janeway, a managing director of Warburg Pincus, both as a trustee of the association's invested funds and as managing trustee for the term 2018–20.

5. *Review and Revision of Investment Policy.* The council reviewed its statement on investment policy and revised it to allow for the use of an asset management firm in the management of the endowment and to include a general statement about the use of socially responsible investment strategies.

6. *Approval of the October 2017 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its October 2017 meeting for publication in the May 2018 issue of *PMLA*.

7. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took eight actions between its October and February meetings, seven of them in December. (1) The council agreed to establish a mechanism for generating nominations of MLA members for the Whiting Foundation's public engagement fellowships program; see next item. (2) The council approved signing on to a letter circulated by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) stating the opposition of ACLS and other organizations to a US House of Representatives proposal to tax graduate school tuition waivers as income. (3) The council signed on to a letter about funding for Fulbright-Hays programs that the Coalition for International Education (CIE) was preparing to send to the House and Senate appropriations committees and their subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies. (4) The council signed on to a letter about the reauthorization of Title VI international education programs that the CIE was preparing to send to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and its subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development. (5) The council approved the adoption of a policy on the behavior of convention attendees that the staff would develop using the American Library Association's policy as a model. (6 and 7) The council responded to the resignations of two council members in accordance with the provisions of article 8.A.6 of the MLA constitution. The council left vacant the seat of the council member whose term would end in January 2019 and appointed a replacement for the council member whose term would end in January 2020. (8) In February, the council agreed to sign on to an American Historical Association statement condemning the passage of a law in Poland that criminalizes references to Polish complicity in Nazi war crimes. When these actions were proposed, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 5, Oct. 2010, p. 1102), and the full council was given

| Dues Class | Current Amount | New Amount |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| B Employed Less Than Full-Time | \$25 | \$26 |
| 1 Up to \$30,000 | \$50 | \$52 |
| 2 \$30,000–\$50,000 | \$80 | \$82 |
| 3 \$50,000–\$70,000 | \$120 | \$123 |
| 4 \$70,000–\$100,000 | \$160 | \$164 |
| 5 \$100,000–\$140,000 | \$200 | \$205 |
| 6 \$140,000–\$180,000 | \$250 | \$257 |
| 7 \$180,000–\$220,000 | \$300 | \$308 |
| 8 Over \$220,000 | \$350 | \$359 |
| L Joint Secondary | \$50 | \$52 |
| E Student | \$25 | \$26 |

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.

8. *Nomination Mechanism for Whiting Public Engagement Fellowships.* Having agreed to make nominations for the Whiting Public Engagement Fellowships (see previous item), the council considered how to solicit proposals and how to constitute the jury that would identify the association's nominees. The council decided to solicit proposals directly from the membership using an e-mail message that provides a link to sample projects from the foundation and asks members who submit proposals to identify the MLA forum most closely related to the proposal and with which they have a primary affiliation. In instances where a particular forum is associated with multiple proposals, that forum's executive committee would be asked to screen the proposals and select the best for further consideration. The selection of the association's nominees will be made by a jury composed of council members and other MLA members who have a history of public engagement work.

9. *Review of PMLA Structure.* The council subcommittee appointed in May 2017 to review the structure of the journal and recommend possible changes (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 226–28) presented its findings to the council. The subcommittee responded in the affirmative to the specific question of whether *PMLA*'s special features (e.g., Theories and Methodologies, The Changing Profession, Little-Known Documents) continued to fulfill the needs of the journal. The subcommittee found that, in general, the special features offer a sense of current and shifting academic trends, capture the contours of emergent critical discussion, provide distinctiveness to each issue, draw in diverse membership constituencies under the journal's umbrella, give *PMLA* editors a voice in the journal's directions and focus, and offer valuable mentoring tools for graduate students (Theories and Methodologies in particular). The subcommittee also noted that the journal continues to meet the council's requirement that half to two-thirds of the journal be devoted to unsolicited, peer-reviewed scholarly articles but that, on average, the ratio is fifty-fifty. It therefore recommended that *PMLA* editors remain vigilant about maintaining an appropriate balance. Another question the subcommittee considered was whether some of the journal's special features should migrate to the association's digital platforms. The subcommittee did not have enough information to develop a clear consensus on this question and recommended that the council return to it periodically, as more is learned about the costs and benefits associated with different types of digital publishing.

10. *Revision of PMLA's Statement of Editorial Policy.* Acting on a request from the *PMLA* Editorial Board, the

council increased the minimum word limit for a regular submission to *PMLA* from 2,500 words to 6,000 words.

11. *New Publication Model for Profession.* The council returned to the question, first raised in October 2017 (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 3, May 2018, p. 754), of a new publication model for *Profession*. The staff reported that the publication model adopted for *Profession* in February 2013 (see *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 4, Oct. 2013, pp. 1012–14) had not worked as planned. Even as an interactive e-journal, *Profession* was not able to respond quickly to current issues, mainly because of production-related constraints, and traffic to the *Profession* site was low. Since a majority of MLA members, who were surveyed in December 2014, continued to value the journal in terms of its usefulness to them professionally, the staff proposed that the journal move from a rolling-submissions model to a regularly scheduled issue model, with three issues a year. The issues would have a magazine-like format and would include unsolicited and solicited content reviewed by a staff collective, which would replace the *Profession* Editorial Collective, as well as other nonreviewed features and resources. This issue model would also allow the staff to promote the journal more effectively—by e-mailing members a virtual table of contents that gives potential readers an overview of the issue's contents and provides direct links to each article in the issue. The staff proposed to launch the new publication in September 2018. The council approved the new publication model for *Profession*.

12. *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.

13. *Recommendations from the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA).* The CHA forwarded three recommendations to the council. The first recommendation was that the council establish a separate prize for edited collections; the second was that the council create new prizes to recognize work in South Asian studies, Asian studies, and African studies; the third was that the council create a mechanism to ensure that the prize structure in place reflects the current intellectual state of the field. During the discussion of the recommendations, council members raised several questions for the committee to address. The council therefore returned the recommendations to the committee with requests for additional information.

14. *Committee Renewal and Revision of Committee Charge.* Anticipating the expiration of its current charge in June 2018, the cochairs of the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession wrote a letter to the council requesting that the council renew the committee for an additional five-year term but with a new name—Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities—and a revised charge that recognizes changing conditions in the profession. They noted that graduate student members of the MLA are enrolled in a wide range of humanities majors that extend beyond

the boundaries of language and literature and have fewer opportunities to transform their master's and doctoral degrees into long-term, sustainable careers. The council renewed the committee for five years, through June 2023, and approved the new charge that the committee proposed. The copyedited charge appears below.

The Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Humanities will consider a range of curricular, intellectual, and labor issues that affect master's and doctoral students and workers in the humanities. The committee will advocate for the well-being of graduate students in all aspects of their educational and professional lives. To this end, the committee will organize convention sessions, evaluate policy, create reports on experiences and best practices, and engage in other projects that will support students while they pursue their educations, gain work experience, seek employment, and make a transition to a wide range of workplaces. The committee will also report on issues that concern graduate students to the Executive Council, the MLA staff, and other MLA committees whose work deals with activities that affect graduate students (e.g., the MLA Career Center).

15. *Review of the Resolution Approved by the 2018 Delegate Assembly.* In accordance with article 7.B.3 of the MLA constitution, the council reviewed the resolution that the 2018 Delegate Assembly had approved (see *PMLA*, vol. 133, no. 3, May 2018, pp. 766–70) to determine whether to forward it to the membership for a ratification vote. Resolutions that (1) do not impede the council's ability to carry out its fiduciary responsibilities, (2) do not contain erroneous, tortious, or possibly libelous statements, (3) do not pose a threat to the association's continuing opera-

tion as a tax-exempt organization, and (4) are consistent with the provisions of articles 2 and 9.C.10 of the MLA constitution may be forwarded to the membership.

The council determined that the resolution, which called on the MLA to condemn a Trump administration executive order prohibiting entry into the United States by citizens of several Muslim-majority countries as well as other government efforts "to target demographic groups on the basis of religion, race, or nationality," posed no constitutional, legal, or fiduciary problems. The council therefore authorized nonsubstantive copyediting changes to the wording of the resolution and forwarded it to the membership for the required ratification vote. In addition, the council established the schedule for the resolution comment process and the date for determining members' eligibility to participate in the ratification vote.

16. *Review of the Constitutional Amendments Approved by the 2018 Delegate Assembly.* As required by the MLA constitution (art. 13.D), the council reviewed the constitutional amendments approved by the 2018 Delegate Assembly and forwarded them to the membership for the required ratification vote.

17. *Election of Council Members to the DAOC.* The council elected two of its members to the DAOC. Rafael Ramirez Mendoza was elected for a one-year term (2018–Jan. 2019); Jean Howard was elected for a two-year term (2018–Jan. 2020).

18. *Appointments to MLA Committees.* The council made sixty-one appointments to the standing committees of the association and appointed eleven committee chairs or co-chairs and six council advisers. The names of all new and continuing committee members, chairs, co-chairs, and council advisers will appear on the MLA Web site in July.