

## Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

*[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2009 meeting.]*

**T**HE COUNCIL MET ON 24–25 OCTOBER 2008 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Gerald Graff presided. The officers present were First Vice President Catherine Porter, Second Vice President Sidonie Smith, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Carlos J. Alonso, Charles Altieri, Sara Scott Armengot, Dorian F. Bell, Anne Ruggles Gere, Jane Harper, Francis Abiola Irele, Mary N. Layoun, George Levine, Paula Rabinowitz, Hortense J. Spillers, Lynne Tatlock, Priscilla Wald, and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan (24 Oct. only), Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Managing Editor of MLA Publications and Director of Publishing Operations Judy Goulding, Director of Financial Operations Amilde Hadden, Director of Convention Programs Maribeth T. Kraus, Director of Research and ADE David Laurence, Director of Book Publications David G. Nicholls, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

The council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 22–23 October to review assembly and association business. Laura J. Rosenthal, the chair of the committee, reported that the committee had discussed the three proposals submitted for consideration by the Delegate Assembly and had placed them on the assembly's agenda. In each case, she asked the committee member responsible for communicating the committee's comments to the proposer of record to review those comments with the council. Rosenthal then told the council that the committee had chosen two topics for the hour-long period of open discussion on the assembly's agenda, both of which had been proposed by members of the assembly: the advocacy role of the MLA as a scholarly association and contingent labor and the erosion of tenure. The DAOC also reviewed with the council its plan to present a motion to the assembly regarding a review of the association's resolutions process. Rosenthal concluded her report with the announcement that Bonnie Kime Scott had been elected chair of the DAOC for 2009.

The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their report. In addition to the DAOC chair, the members of the committee who participated in the joint meeting were Gaurav Desai (Tulane Univ.), Brian Kennelly (California Polytechnic State Univ., San Luis Obispo), Bonnie Kime Scott (San Diego State Univ.), and Cynthia Skenazi (Univ. of California, Santa Barbara).

Also present were outgoing MLA Parliamentarian Martha S. Grise and incoming parliamentarian Jeanette N. Williams.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council began to review the items on its agenda and continued its work until late afternoon. Among the items discussed were oral reports from Gerald Graff, Catherine Porter, and Sara Armengot. Graff reported on two meetings he had recently attended. These meetings served to sharpen his focus on three issues that the council had been discussing: differing views of assessment and accreditation in the academy and in the association and the search for models of good assessment, the need for collaboration between English and foreign languages in the MLA and in the profession, and building connections with K–12 educators and institutions. He urged the council to continue its work on these issues. Porter reported to the council on a leadership seminar that she and Rosemary Feal had attended. One of the topics covered at the seminar was strategic planning, and Porter asked the council to consider its role in such planning. Feal said that the council's Subcommittee on Long-Range Planning had been useful in identifying some strategic goals (e.g., membership development) but that the subcommittee's discussions did not integrate well with the council's own discussions and so had been discontinued. She therefore encouraged the council to discuss its approach to strategic planning and perhaps to adopt a planning instrument (e.g., a checklist, a questionnaire). Porter said she planned to set aside time in the council's February 2009 agenda for further discussion of strategic planning. Armengot reported on the August 2008 Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) conference that she and other MLA members attended as association representatives. She said much of the discussion was about collective bargaining, since most attendees were from unionized schools. The commonalities between adjuncts and graduate students was also a topic of discussion. Many MLA disciplines were represented at the COCAL conference, and the fact that the MLA sent representatives was well received. On 25 October, the council completed work on its agenda and adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

The council took the following actions:

1. *Administration and Finance.* The council received a report from the staff Finance Committee on the fiscal year just ended (2007–08) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2008–09). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2007–08 fiscal year with a surplus of \$170,170 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee noted that the surplus was due primarily to lower or deferred expenses. Rosemary Feal said that the surplus would be added to the cash reserve.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2008–09, which projected a deficit of \$96,950 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that revenue was projected to increase substantially, especially because of the publication of the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook*, but that the expenses associated with the development

of the new *Handbook* and with other association projects (e.g., redesign of the *MLA Newsletter*, development of an electronic version of the *Literary Research Guide*, research related to the radio program *What's the Word?*) would largely offset projected revenue. She noted that the Finance Committee had factored the current national economic recession into its projections but that it was not possible to know what the full effects of the recession would be. She added that the MLA's endowment funds had suffered losses on paper and explained that the MLA's operating budget had not been directly affected because the association does not draw on its endowment to cover operating expenses. In response to a council member's question about the expenses associated with committee meetings, Feal said that association committees that focus on professional issues and that normally hold two meetings a year at the MLA office were being asked to hold one of those meetings virtually in the current fiscal year. This meeting pattern would become the default for such committees if their experience with virtual meetings is positive. Feal also responded to questions about convention revenue, legal fees, and convention travel grants. After completing its review of the final budget for the fiscal year 2008–09, the council voted to approve the budget.

2. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Catharine R. Stimpson, dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Science at New York University and a past president of the association, as a trustee of the association's invested funds for the term 2009–11.

3. *Approval of the May 2008 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2008 meeting for publication in the January 2009 issue of *PMLA*.

4. *Report of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing.* The subcommittee that the council appointed at the May 2008 council meeting to work on three tasks relating to the ADE staffing report (see Jan. 2009 *PMLA* 302) reported to the council on its work. Subcommittee members had agreed on the points to be made in the framing document that would accompany the report when it was released to the MLA membership and the public. A letter to senior faculty members encouraging them to bring staffing issues before their departments and to make staffing issues a part of departmental reviews was also in preparation. Finally, the subcommittee noted that the council's concern to continue work on these issues was echoed in the motion on contingent labor that the Delegate Assembly would consider at its December meeting. The council asked one of its members to draft a statement for the assembly about the work of the council's subcommittee and the council's support for the motion. The council decided to postpone its discussion of next steps until the outcome of the assembly's discussion of and vote on the motion was known.

5. *Report and Recommendations from the Council Subcommittee on PMLA.* Carlos Alonso, chair of the council's subcommittee on *PMLA*, presented to the council the subcommittee's final report and recommendations. The

council charged the subcommittee with three tasks: recommending a procedure for periodic council reviews of *PMLA*'s special features, advising the council on the establishment of a review process for solicited material, and advising the council on the question of including book reviews in *PMLA* (for background, see Jan. 2009 *PMLA* 300 and May 2008 *PMLA* 826–28). The subcommittee made four recommendations: (1) that the Executive Council appoint a subcommittee every five years charged with reviewing the special features in *PMLA* and determining whether they continue to fulfill the needs of the journal; (2) that the editor review all commissioned pieces before their acceptance for publication in the journal; (3) that the feature "Conference Debates," which included commissioned material based on convention presentations, be removed from *PMLA* and that other means of disseminating convention papers be investigated; and (4) that the council take no further action on book reviews at the present time. In response to questions about the third and fourth recommendations, subcommittee members suggested that the new forums for divisions at the MLA Web site might be the appropriate venue for sharing convention-related materials and for circulating information about new publications in the field. The council concluded its discussion of the subcommittee's report and recommendations with a vote to approve the recommendations.

6. *Request from the Editor of PMLA*. Patricia Yaeger, *PMLA*'s editor, requested that the council reconsider its October 2007 decision to limit the number of special topics proposed during an editor's initial three-year term to two, with the possibility of adding one special topic if the editor's term is extended by two years (see May 2008 *PMLA*

826–28). After lengthy discussion, the council decided not to grant Yaeger's request. However, the council made an exception for Yaeger, because of the number of special topics she inherited when she began her term as editor and because the policy in place at that time set no limit on the number of special topics an editor could initiate. She will be allowed to initiate four special topics during the first four years of her five-year term. The council further clarified that the next editor will be controlled by the new policy and that the policy will be reviewed in five years.

7. *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, Committee on Information Technology, Radio Committee, Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, Committee on Community Colleges, and Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession. The council accepted these reports with thanks. Council members commented on some of the committees' activities and asked a number of questions, to which staff members responded.

8. *Committee Appointments*. The council made five additional appointments to MLA committees. The names of all new committee members will appear in the listings of MLA committee members in the September 2009 (Directory) issue of *PMLA* and at the MLA Web site.