

# Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

*[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its October 2011 meeting.]*

**T**HE COUNCIL MET ON 20–21 MAY 2011 AT THE MLA OFFICE IN NEW YORK. PRESIDENT Russell A. Berman presided. The officers present were First Vice President Michael Bérubé, Second Vice President Marianne Hirsch, and Executive Director Rosemary G. Feal. The Executive Council members present were Barbara K. Altmann, Jonathan Arac, Sara Armengot, Lawrence I. Buell, Debra Ann Castillo (21 May only), Jennifer Crewe, Dorothea Heitsch, María Herrera-Sobek, George Levine, Richard M. Ohmann, Karin C. Ryding, Lynne Tatlock, Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, and Kathleen Woodward. The MLA staff members present were Director of Operations Terrence Callaghan, Director of Bibliographic Information Services and Editor of the *MLA International Bibliography* Barbara Chen, Director of Programs and ADFL Nelly Furman, Associate Executive Director 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, and Assistant to the Executive Director and Coordinator of Governance Carol Zuses.

In late morning on 20 May, following meetings of the council's Audit Committee and Compensation and Benefits Committee, the council convened in regular session to begin working through the reports and action items on its agenda. Just before lunch, the council initiated a review of the association's division and discussion group structure (see item 3, below). After lunch, the council continued to work through its agenda during two regular sessions. Between these two sessions, the four small groups that had first met in February (see Oct. 2011 *PMLA* 1146) reconvened to continue their discussions of strategic planning. One of the group leaders reported to the full council on his group's deliberations before the end of the day.

On the morning of 21 May, the council held two executive sessions. The first was for the annual review of the policy documents that pertain to the MLA staff and the working environment at the MLA headquarters office and for the annual review of the executive director. The second was for a discussion of the new MLA Office of Scholarly Communication; Kathleen Fitzpatrick, who was scheduled to join the MLA staff on 1 July as director of the new office, attended. Between the executive sessions, the council held a brief regular session to hear reports from the remaining three small-group leaders. After lunch, the council convened in a final regular session and adjourned at 1:50 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 2010–11 after seven months. The committee projected a deficit in the association's unrestricted fund that was slightly larger than the deficit projected in October 2010. However, the committee was optimistic about trimming the deficit by the fiscal year's end for several reasons: revenue in only a few budget categories was below the projected level, much sales revenue is not recorded until the final months of the fiscal year, and savings on expenses could still be achieved.

The Finance Committee also presented to the council a tentative budget for the fiscal year 2011–12 that projected a deficit of \$356,940 in the association's unrestricted fund. The deficit was attributed to a projected decline in revenue that was not quite matched by reductions in expenses. After reviewing the tentative budget for the fiscal year 2011–12, the council voted to approve it.

Finally, the council designated EisnerAmper LLP to conduct the audit of the association's fiscal year 2010–11 accounts.

2. *Coalition for International Education.* Because of the increasing importance of the work of the Coalition for International Education (CIE) on issues related to federal funding for language programs in higher education, the staff proposed that the MLA become a member of the coalition. The council approved this proposal and authorized the staff to pursue membership in the CIE.

3. *Review of Division and Discussion Group Structure.* In recent years, as the Ad Hoc Committee on the Structure of the Annual Convention worked on the new convention arrangements that were implemented at the January 2011 convention in Los Angeles, the need for a review of the association's division and discussion group structure became increasingly apparent to both committee and council members. Given the successful transition to the new convention arrangements, the council decided to begin a reconsideration of that structure. Marianne Hirsch agreed to lead the council's discussions and to convene a small working group that would develop proposals for the council's consideration. At the current council meeting, Hirsch noted that the division structure raised questions about the definition of scholarly fields; these, in turn, were linked to other structures in the MLA (e.g., field requirements in the constitution, committee appointments) and outside the MLA (e.g., hiring, graduate education). To give her working group a starting point, she asked council members to identify problems with the present structure and to suggest possible revisions.

4. *Approval of the February 2011 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its February 2011 meeting for publication in the October 2011 issue of *PMLA*.

5. *Ratification or Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* The council took five actions between its February and May meetings. (a) It revised the

wording of the constitutional amendment that the council had reviewed in February to eliminate a logical flaw identified by a council member. (b) It issued a statement deploring an open-records request for the e-mail records of William Cronon, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and sent related letters to Biddy Martin, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, and to Anthony Grafton, president of the American Historical Association. (c) It issued a statement on the federal budget cuts approved by Congress in April and sent a letter to MLA members about how they might convey their views on the cuts to their representatives. (d) It signed on to a letter that the Coalition for International Education sent to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. (e) It approved an MLA statement on the importance of language learning, "Learning Another Language: Goals and Challenges." In each instance, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278 and Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102) was implemented, and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list before coming to a decision. In the question related to William Cronon, not all council members responded in the given time frame, so the council's advisory committee was called on to make the decision. The advisory committee approved the statement and letters unanimously, as the council's procedure required it to do before action could be taken. At the present meeting, the council ratified the advisory committee's decision. In the other four instances, the council was unanimous in its approval of the actions proposed, so it was not necessary to ask the advisory committee to act. At the present meeting, the council confirmed these four decisions. During its discussion of the statement addressed in the fifth item, the council considered several revisions suggested by the staff and approved them. [Note: The revised statement has been posted to the Web site ([www.mla.org/ec\\_language\\_learning](http://www.mla.org/ec_language_learning)).]

6. *Procedure for Making Decisions between Council Meetings.* Given the time pressure that is often involved when the council must make a decision between meetings, the council decided to revise its procedure for making such decisions (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278 and Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102). The council reduced the period of time for discussion of a proposed action on the council's electronic discussion list from one week to three business days.

7. *Revised Statement from the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession (CLIP).* Having followed the council's advice regarding the document originally submitted for the council's approval in February (see Oct. 2011 *PMLA* 1146–48), the committee submitted a revised document outlining desirable employment practices for non-tenure-track faculty members (NTTs) and presenting self-study questions intended to help departments assess their policies and practices with regard to NTTs. The council reviewed the revised document, made additional revisions, and endorsed the document as an MLA statement. It will

be added to the Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit at the MLA Web site and appear in the 2011 issue of *Profession*.

8. *Establishment of a Prize in the Field of Indigenous Literatures and Cultures.* Having received all the information it had requested at previous meetings (see Jan. 2011 *PMLA* 252, May 2011 *PMLA* 856, and Oct. 2011 *PMLA* 1148), the council established a biennial prize for an outstanding scholarly work in the field of Native American literatures, cultures, and languages. The prize selection committee is to consider works that examine and broaden understanding of the cultural expressions of first peoples or nations of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Works on Indigenous languages, literatures, and cultures in other geographic areas may also be considered if they bring fresh perspectives to the field.

A council member asked whether the prize competition would be limited to MLA members. During the discussion of this question, it was noted that the MLA does not have a uniform membership policy for MLA-established prizes. (Prizes established by donors follow the dictates of the donors.) The council decided not to restrict the new prize to MLA members but referred to the Committee on Honors and Awards (CHA) the question of establishing a uniform membership policy for the prizes that the MLA funds. The council also instructed the CHA to take the necessary steps to implement the new prize.

9. *Revision of PMLA's Statement of Editorial Policy.* At the council's request (see Oct. 2011 *PMLA* 1146), the *PMLA* Editorial Board met with two council representatives, Marianne Hirsch and Jennifer Crewe, to discuss the provision in *PMLA's* Statement of Editorial Policy that deals with previous publication: "PMLA does not publish book reviews, new works of fiction, or articles that were previously published in any language." Since this wording was crafted years ago, in an all-print era, and since material now submitted to *PMLA* often appears first in electronic formats, the board agreed that further guidelines might help contributors understand what was meant by "previously published." The board therefore proposed the following revision of the Statement of Editorial Policy:

*PMLA* does not publish book reviews, new works of fiction, or articles that were previously published in any language. An article is considered previously published if it appears in print or in an online outlet with the traits of publication, such as editorial selection of content, a formal presentation, and ongoing availability. Online contexts that typically lack these traits include personal Web pages, discussion groups, and repositories.

The council approved this revision of *PMLA's* editorial policy.

10. *MLA Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement.* The council selected Fredric Jameson, William A. Lane, Jr., Professor of Comparative Literature and professor of

Romance studies at Duke University, as the sixth recipient of the association's Award for Lifetime Scholarly Achievement. The award will be conferred during the 2012 annual convention in Seattle.

11. *Rotation of Convention Sites.* At its May 1976 meeting, the council voted to adopt a three-year rotation system for convention sites based on geographic regions (western, central, eastern) and to begin the rotation in 1979 (see Sept. 1976 *PMLA* 734). In the years since, the rotation has been disrupted several times, for reasons including member-approved resolutions that prohibited the holding of conventions in certain states and Hurricane Katrina. The staff reported that, given the pattern of recent convention locations (2011 and 2012 in western cities, 2013 in Boston), cities in the central region were under consideration for the 2014 convention. The staff requested the council's advice on whether to restart the rotation of convention locations with the 2015 convention and on what the pattern of a renewed rotation should be. The council recommended that the site of the 2015 convention be in the West and that the staff then follow a western-eastern-central rotation as much as possible but retain flexibility if circumstances dictate a deviation.

12. *Moratorium on the Consideration of Petitions for New Divisions, Discussion Groups, and Allied Organizations.* Because of the review of the division and discussion group structure initiated at the present meeting (see item 3, above), the council decided to impose a moratorium on petitions for new divisions, discussion groups, and allied organizations. Petitions already submitted for consideration by the Program Committee and the council at their meetings in the fall of 2011 would go forward, but no new petitions may be submitted until January 2014.

13. *Recommendations from the Program Committee.* The council received and acted on two recommendations from the Program Committee. The council granted allied organization status to the Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture. It did not approve a petition for a discussion group on the literatures of Austria and the Hapsburg regions.

14. *Council Meeting Schedule.* The council's three annual meetings (in February, May, and October) have been held on Friday and Saturday since October 1991. The council decided to hold its May meetings on Thursday and Friday instead. This change will take effect in 2012. Thus, the meeting dates already approved for May 2012 and May 2013 were changed (to 17–18 May and 16–17 May, respectively). The council approved a meeting schedule for 2014 that reflects this change: 21–22 February, 15–16 May, and 24–25 October.

15. *Committee Appointments.* The council made three additional committee appointments. The names of all new and continuing committee members appear at the MLA Web site.