

# Minutes of the MLA Executive Council

*[Note: The Executive Council voted to approve these minutes at its February 2012 meeting.]*

THE COUNCIL MET ON 28–29 OCTOBER 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, Jennifer Crewe, Dorothea Heitsch, María Herrera-Sobek, George Levine, Richard M. Ohmann, Karin C. Ryding, Lynne Tatlock, and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer (28 Oct. only). Kathleen Woodward was absent. 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 Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 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.

The council began by meeting with the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), which had convened on 26–27 October to review assembly and association business. Teresa Mangum, the chair of the DAOC, thanked committee members for their work and then called on them individually to report on various items of committee business. Sima N. Godfrey reported that the committee had reviewed the staff proposal for a membership dues increase and had endorsed it after modifying it (see item 6, below). Mangum added that the DAOC had discussed the matter of joint membership and recommended that this dues category be revisited in the future. Adelaide M. Russo told the council that the committee had chosen the restructuring of MLA divisions and discussion groups as one of two topics for the hour-long period of open discussion on the assembly's agenda. She said the committee would aim to draw out the connections between the restructuring and intellectual concerns, graduate education, and hiring. Maria Damon presented the second open-discussion topic: the future of scholarly journals. Mangum reported on the two resolutions that members had submitted for consideration by the Delegate Assembly, and Ana-Maria Medina and Michael Bérubé reviewed with the council the resolution that the DAOC had decided to propose. Mangum then gave a brief summary of the DAOC's other business and concluded the committee's report by announcing that Godfrey had been elected chair of the DAOC.

for the term 9 January 2012 through 6 January 2013. The president concluded the joint meeting of the council and the DAOC by thanking the members of the committee for their report. Also present for the joint meeting was MLA Parliamentarian Jeanette N. Williams.

After the meeting with the DAOC, the council heard reports and recommendations from the leaders of the council's four strategic-planning subgroups (see item 8, below). After lunch on 28 October, the council began to review the action items on its agenda. At the end of the day, the council met in executive session. On 29 October, the council began by holding a brief executive session and then convened in regular session to complete work on the action items on its agenda. The council adjourned at 12:20 p.m., having concluded all the business before it.

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 (2010–11) and on the final budget for the current fiscal year (2011–12). The committee projected that the association would conclude the 2010–11 fiscal year with a surplus of \$234,280 in the association's unrestricted fund. The committee attributed the surplus to significant reductions in association expenses and to *MLA International Bibliography* revenue that was slightly higher than projected.

The council reviewed the final budget for the fiscal year 2011–12, which projected a deficit of \$193,100 in the unrestricted fund. Feal explained that the deficit was much lower than the deficit projected in May (see Jan. 2012 *PMLA* 156) because the Finance Committee had made adjustments to revenue and expense projections based on the outcome of the 2010–11 fiscal year. After reviewing the final budget for the fiscal year 2011–12, the council voted to approve it.

2. *Trustee Appointment.* The council reappointed Catharine R. Stimpson, dean emerita 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 2012–14.

3. *Approval of the May 2011 Council Minutes.* The council approved the minutes of its May 2011 meeting for publication in the January 2012 issue of *PMLA*.

4. *Confirmation of Actions Taken between Council Meetings.* In late May, late August, and early October, council members were asked to sign on to letters drafted by the Coalition for International Education. The May letter was addressed to the leadership of a House committee and a House subcommittee; the letter urged that the Foreign Language Assistance Program, which is administered by the Department of Education, not be eliminated. The August letter, which was addressed to officials in the Department of Education, commented on a draft of the department's "International Education Strategy." The October letter was addressed to appropriations committees and subcommittees in the House and the Senate; it urged

that fiscal-year-2012 funding for Fulbright-Hays and Title VI programs in the Department of Education be set no lower than 2011 funding. In addition, in early September the council was asked to approve the posting of a PDF version of the *Job Information List (JIL)* at the MLA Web site, where anyone would have access to it. In each instance, the council's procedure for making decisions between meetings was implemented (see Jan. 2005 *PMLA* 278 and Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1102), and the full council was given the opportunity to discuss the matter on the council's electronic discussion list before coming to a decision. The council unanimously approved each of the proposed actions, so it was not necessary to ask the council's advisory committee to act. The council's approval of the *JIL* action was conditional on approval by the ADE and ADFL executive committees. [Note: Since both executive committees approved the action, the PDF version could be posted.] At the present meeting, the council confirmed these four decisions.

5. *Contribution to the Humanities Indicators Project.* The council authorized an annual contribution of \$2,500 to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to support the Humanities Indicators ([www.humanitiesindicators.org/humanitiesData.aspx](http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/humanitiesData.aspx)), a project of the academy that the MLA has participated in for a number of years.

6. *Proposal for a Dues Increase.* The staff Finance Committee conducted the annual review of the association's dues structure, a review that was instituted in 2010 at the direction of the council and the Delegate Assembly. The committee analyzed trends in the MLA's revenue sources and studied the dues structures of other academic associations. It noted that the association has experienced a shift in revenue streams in recent years. Specifically, revenue from book sales, notably from sales of the *MLA Handbook*, has declined. Book sales represented 23.6% of association revenue in the fiscal year 2004–05, the third year of sales for the sixth edition of the *Handbook*. In 2010–11, the third year of sales for the seventh edition, book sales represented just 13.5% of total revenue, a drop of 43%. The committee also noted that while sales of the *MLA International Bibliography* provide a significant and growing percentage (over half) of the association's income, the expansion of discovery and indexing services available to university libraries has the potential to affect market conditions for the *Bibliography*. Given these circumstances, the committee concluded that other revenue streams, including dues income, have become more important to the MLA's long-term financial strength.

In looking at the dues structures of other associations (e.g., American Historical Association, American Philosophical Association, Latin American Studies Association), the Finance Committee noted that MLA dues are low in comparison, particularly for students and members at the lower income levels, where the MLA has imposed no increase in the dues amounts since 1993, eighteen years ago. Student dues at other professional societies average \$38 (MLA student dues are \$20), and the lowest amount

Dues Class	Current Dues Schedule	Proposed Dues Schedule		
		2013	2014	2015
1 Under \$15,000	\$25	\$26	\$27	\$28
2 \$15,000–\$20,000	\$40	\$42	\$44	\$46
3 \$20,000–\$30,000	\$50	\$52	\$54	\$56
4 \$30,000–\$40,000	\$70	\$73	\$76	\$79
5 \$40,000–\$50,000	\$85	\$88	\$91	\$94
6 \$50,000–\$60,000	\$100	\$104	\$108	\$112
7 \$60,000–\$70,000	\$115	\$120	\$125	\$130
8 \$70,000–\$80,000	\$130	\$135	\$140	\$145
9 \$80,000–\$100,000	\$145	\$151	\$157	\$163
R \$100,000–\$120,000	\$165	\$172	\$179	\$187
T \$120,000–\$140,000	\$185	\$193	\$201	\$210
V \$140,000–\$160,000	\$205	\$214	\$223	\$232
W \$160,000–\$180,000	\$230	\$240	\$250	\$260
X \$180,000–\$200,000	\$255	\$266	\$277	\$289
Z Over \$200,000	\$280	\$292	\$304	\$317
E Student	\$20	\$21	\$22	\$23
L Joint Secondary	\$40	\$42	\$44	\$46

paid by a nonstudent at other associations is about \$55 (the lowest nonstudent MLA dues payment is \$25).

These factors led the Finance Committee to propose a series of increases over three years, beginning in 2013, at a rate of 3.0% a year, rounded up to the next whole dollar amount, for most dues categories.

The DAOC reviewed the Finance Committee's proposal and suggested modifying it by graduating the percentage increase as one progresses through the income-based dues categories. Graduate students and members in dues categories 1 through 5 would see an increase of 3.0%, members in dues categories 6 through 9 would see an increase of 3.5%, and members in dues categories R through Z would see an increase of 4.0%. The council endorsed the DAOC's modification and voted to recommend it to the 2012 Delegate Assembly. The table above summarizes the changes to be presented to the Delegate Assembly. If approved by the assembly, the changes would go into effect for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 membership years.

**7. Proposal of a Constitutional Amendment.** The staff Finance Committee asked the council to consider proposing a constitutional amendment that would bring the dues structure for life members into line with the dues structure for regular and student members. That is, though article 3 of the MLA constitution states, "The dues structure within each [membership] category shall be determined by the Delegate Assembly subject to confirmation by the Executive Council," the same article contains specific provisions for the dues structure for life members, and they can be changed only by amendment of the con-

stitution. The council agreed to propose an amendment to the constitution that strikes the current constitutional language on the dues structure for life members and inserts a general formulation that will allow the Delegate Assembly and the council to consider the dues structure for all membership categories in the same way and to change it without having to resort to a constitutional amendment. In accordance with article 13.A of the MLA constitution, the council's proposal for an amendment to article 3 will be forwarded to the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution for action.

**8. Strategic Planning.** Following up on the small-group meetings held during the February and May council meetings (see Oct. 2011 *PMLA* 1146), the president had asked the leaders of the four groups to consult before the present meeting and prepare specific recommendations on next steps for the council's consideration.

The group charged with discussing the association's language agenda recommended that the council's language consultancy project (see May 2011 *PMLA* 854) become a joint project of the MLA and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages with a formal joint steering committee. It was noted that the project would benefit from outside funding to allow the project consultants to visit departments that request help with curricular reform, both undergraduate and graduate, and professional development. The group also recommended sharing the association's statement on language learning, "Learning Another Language: Goals and Challenges," with other organizations belonging to the American Council of Learned Societies and requesting that these organizations endorse the MLA's

statement or develop their own statements on the importance of language study for their fields. The council agreed to pursue these recommendations. During the discussion of the language agenda, council members talked about issuing a statement about language requirements; the council will return to this matter at a future meeting.

The group charged with discussing scholarly communication recommended enhancements to the Web site that would promote the association's programs and allow members to become more involved in association activities. The group also recommended ways to develop the book publication program. The staff shared information on the development of *MLA Commons*, a new Web site that will allow members to share their work with other members and integrate their scholarly activities with MLA projects and programs. The council agreed to pursue these recommendations.

The group charged with discussing academic-workforce issues recommended disseminating as widely as possible the document recently developed by the Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession (CLIP), *Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions* (e.g., to the American Council on Education, college and university presidents and provosts, the American Association of University Professors, other scholarly associations). The group could not decide, however, whether the MLA should recommend that the size of doctoral programs be reduced. It was suggested that the issue be discussed by other interested groups in the MLA (e.g., by the chairs meeting at the Seattle convention). The council agreed to pursue the group's recommendation on dissemination of the CLIP document and to pursue the issue of the size of doctoral programs.

The group charged with discussing graduate education recommended that the council establish a task force on doctoral education that would add to the council's investigation of new dissertation forms (see Jan. 2011 *PMLA* 250 and May 2011 *PMLA* 856) a study of the skills that graduate students need not only to become successful faculty members but also to pursue careers outside the academy. The group further recommended that Russell Berman be appointed to chair the task force. The council agreed to pursue these recommendations at its February 2012 meeting.

9. *Statement on Student Debt.* The council approved the following statement on student debt. [Note: The statement was copyedited and posted at the MLA Web site in November 2011.]

Public attention has been directed recently to the educational debt accumulated by students in higher education. A major contributing factor has been the rise of tuition costs, as well as lengthy times to degree. In order to reduce debt burdens in the future, we call on Congress and state legislatures to provide sufficient funding to support educational opportunities of high quality without excessive tuition increases. We also call on insti-

tutions of higher education to commit to keeping tuition increases as low as possible and to ensure that degree programs allow for completion in a timely manner.

10. *Establishment of a Membership Requirement for Profession.* The staff asked the council to establish a membership requirement for those who submit their work for publication in *Profession* that is similar to the membership requirement for those who present papers at the MLA Annual Convention. The council agreed to do so and approved the addition of the following paragraph to *Profession's* editorial-policy statement:

Only members of the association may submit material to *Profession*. At the discretion of the editor, waivers of the membership requirement may be granted for non-scholars and for scholars who work in disciplines other than language and literature. Waiver requests should be addressed to the managing editor.

11. *Profession as an E-Journal.* The council approved the transition of *Profession* to e-journal status. The 2013 issue will be the first to be published online and not automatically sent in print to members. After the transition, members will be able to purchase a print copy of the journal.

12. *Selection of a Site for the 2014 Annual Convention.* The council selected Chicago as the site of the January 2014 convention.

13. *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 seventeen societies: Association for Business Communication; Council of Writing Program Administrators; Edith Wharton Society; Eugene O'Neill Society; International Society for the Study of Narrative; Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages; Société Rencesvals, American-Canadian Branch; Society for Critical Exchange; Society for German Renaissance and Baroque Literature; Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship; Society for the Study of Southern Literature; South Asian Literary Association; Thoreau Society; Wallace Stevens Society; Women in German; Women's Caucus for the Modern Languages; and Wordsworth-Coleridge Association.

The council agreed to postpone for one year the review of four allied organizations: Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, John Donne Society, National Communication Association, and Renaissance English Text Society.

The council granted allied organization status to two organizations, Reception Study Society and T. S. Eliot Society.

The Kafka Society of America appealed its 2009 suspension as an allied organization. The society was suspended because it did not give the Program Committee enough information to demonstrate the openness of the

organization; in addition, the society's decreasing membership numbers raised doubts about its viability. In its appeal, the society acknowledged that it was still working to develop a new constitution and to locate a new institutional home. The council denied the society's appeal and suggested that the society reapply for allied organization status once its new constitution is in place.

The council also received the Program Committee's recommendation on a petition for division status from the Discussion Group on Cognitive Approaches to Literature. The council approved the petition; the discussion group will begin to function as a division after the 2012 convention.

14. *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 Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada (CLPC), Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, 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. It also addressed the CLPC's complaint about the recent reduction in the size of the committee. The committee expressed concern that it had not been consulted about the reduction, which meant a contraction of possibilities with respect to representation. Though the recent change in the committee's charge, which removed a reference to five ethnic groups (see Oct. 2010 *PMLA* 1108), had made the committee's representational categories more flexible, the reduction in size of the CLPC and other commit-

tees was based on two other factors: reducing costs and increasing efficiency. The council decided to write a letter to the CLPC to explain the reduction in committee size and to let the committee members know that they may request a restoration of seats.

15. *Committee Appointments.* The council made two additional appointments to MLA committees. The names of all new committee members appear in the listings of MLA committee members at the MLA Web site.

16. *Proposal to Give MLA Members Access to Scholarly Reviews in Choice.* The council authorized the staff to pursue a partnership with *Choice*, a publishing unit of the Association of College and Research Libraries. The partnership will provide MLA members with free access for one year to *Choice Reviews Online*, a large collection of scholarly reviews; members will be able to tailor this access to their interests.

17. *Enhancement of the Job Information List.* The council authorized the staff to develop a proposal for enhancing the *Job Information List* through an agreement with Interfolio, the leading provider of dossier services to job seekers in higher education. The staff will present the proposal at the council's February 2012 meeting.

18. *Request from the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability (NLA).* David Paris, executive director of the NLA, asked the council to endorse the alliance's "Guidelines for Assuring Quality and Accounting for Learning," which deals with outcomes assessment. The council discussed the guidelines at length and decided not to endorse them. Council members were concerned that the guidelines did not address the role of faculty members in establishing standards and mechanisms for assessment. The council instructed the executive director to transmit the council's concerns to Paris and to find out how other organizations that are members of the American Council of Learned Societies are helping their members deal with assessment.